

Zigzag: Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin

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In *The Meaning of Asymmetry in Jewish Art*, Avigdor Poseq notes a historical tendency in Jewish art to depict Temple-related ritual objects asymmetrically, symbolizing their dislocation after the Temple's destruction and the continued wait for the Messiah. Symmetry represents divine order and perfection, while asymmetry implies disruption and impermanence. This idea underpins Daniel Libeskind's design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin (2000), with its fractured, zigzag structure evoking an incomplete process and broken continuity. The building becomes a metaphor for messianic hope, covenant renewal, and *tikkun olam* – the restoration of the world – interpreted through the lens of the Jewish Kabbalah.

KEYWORDS: Daniel Libeskind, Jewish Museum Berlin, Jewish studies, Berlin, architecture, Kabbalah, deconstruction, Tikkun Olam

Architecture and the Kabbalah

The Jewish Museum in Berlin was built between 1989 and 2000 to a design by Daniel Libeskind. Located in Lindenstrasse in Kreuzberg, the building conceived by the latter won in a competition for a facility that would both “commemorate” the Holocaust as well as draw on the “2,000 years of German-Jewish history.”^[1] In his project, Libeskind divided the entire site into two parts, involving adaptation of the existing baroque Kollegienhaus palace, dating to the rule of Friedrich Wilhelm I (1713–1740), and the construction of a new, separate structure immediately nearby (Fig. 1). The external form of the new structure is a dynamic, expressive composition of irregular, cubic, angular solids clad in shiny zinc sheeting which – depending on the weather and the time of day – shimmers with shades of green, blue or grey. In its walls, Libeskind placed narrow, elongated windows, which occasionally run diagonally in different directions across the entire face of the wall, spanning several storeys. This so-called “Jewish section” (also known as Abteilung, or extension) was built on a “zigzag” plan reminiscent of a crawling snake or lightning bolt. Consequently, it assumes the shape of an irregular, repeatedly ruptured line, forming a kind of puzzling diagram (Fig. 2). The interior is divided into four storeys – indiscernible from the outside – on which the architect designed asymmetrical

[1] Bernard Schneider, Daniel Libeskind, *Jewish Museum of Berlin: Between the Lines*, Prestel, Munich 1999 (4th ed., Daniel Libeskind: *Jewish Museum Berlin*, Munich 2005), pp. 48–58. See also: Elke Dorner, Daniel Libeskind, *Jüdisches Museum*, Mann (gebr.),

Berlin 1999; Daniel Libeskind, *Trauma*, [in:] *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, eds. Shelley Horstein, Florence Jacobowitz, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2003, pp. 43–58.

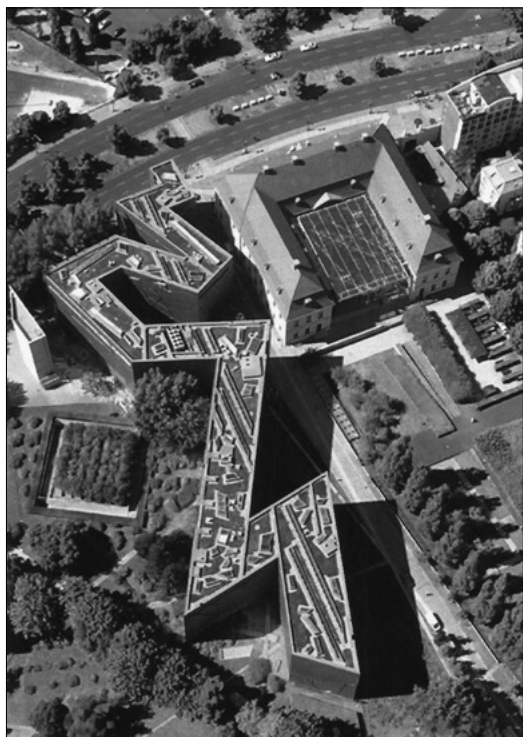


Fig. 1. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, bird's-eye view

Source: http://www.e-architecture.co.uk/images/jpgs/berlin/juedisches_museum_cguenterschneider_3.jpg

spaces. Moreover, the “interior” of this zigzag design was “cut” by Libeskind with a straight line, 150 m long and 4.5 m wide, to create an empty space stretching from the ground floor to the roof; also, it is markedly separated from the rest of the structure. In effect, the reception of the building poses a difficulty, yet it has received considerable attention in studies to date and continues to draw fair amount of interest. Its “strangeness” and unorthodox nature invariably provoke new debates among architecture theorists, art historians or philosophers.[2]

In the analyses, descriptions and discussions, this elongated, crooked form is repeatedly referred to as “zig(-)zag” (or *Zickzack* in German). The term is employed on the official website of the Museum,[3] but it was also suggested by the architect himself.[4]

Zigzag is also used in modern Hebrew and, according to Ernest Klein, derives from the German *Zickzack*, formed by re-duplication of the stem of *Zacke* (tooth, fang) to denote crenellation or the zigzag layout of defensive walls.

The word was used for the first time during the siege of Landau in 1703. In Hebrew, Klein claims, *zigzag* also means “to make transparent”, which is extremely telling given the following analysis.[5]

In general, a zigzag is a type of meander or serpentine, i.e. a combination of diagonal lines (at fixed or different angles) that make up a symmetrical or asymmetrical graphic sequence plotted on a hori-

[2] This study represents a continuation of research into Libeskind's project and its interpretations. Earlier analyses and findings were communicated by this author in a monograph entitled *Muzeum Libeskinda w Berlinie: Żydowski kontekst architektury*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2015 (in Polish).

[3] *Der Libeskind-Bau: Architekturerzählt deutsch-jüdische Geschichte*, Jüdische Museum Berlin, n.d., <http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/04-About-The-Museum/01-Architecture/01-libeskind-Building.php> (accessed: 17.10.2011): “Zig-zag best describes the form of the Jewish Museum's New Building”. See also: *The Jewish Museum Berlin Celebrates Its 10th Anniversary*, Studio Libeskind, 17.10.2011, <http://daniel-libeskind.com/news/jewish-museum-berlin-celebrates-its-10th-anniversary> (accessed: 17.10.2011): “Daniel Libeskind's striking zig-zag building”. See also: Lili Eylon, *Libeskind Zigzags in Berlin*, “Architecture Week”, 7.11.2011, no. 74, p. D1.1, [http://www.](http://www.architectureweek.com/2001/1107/)

[architectureweek.com/2001/1107/](http://www.architectureweek.com/2001/1107/) (accessed: 7.11.2011); Jackie Craven, *The Jewish Museum in Berlin, Germany*, <http://architecture.about.com/od/greatbuildings/ig/Museum-Architecture/The-Jewish-Museum.htm> (accessed: 10.07.2014).

[4] Daniel Libeskind, *Between the Lines: Opening Speech*. Berlin. 1999; idem, *Between the Lines: Jewish Museum*. Berlin. 1988–99. Both texts are included in: Daniel Libeskind, *Daniel Libeskind: The Space of Encounter* (preface by Jeffrey Kipnis, afterword by Anthony Vidler), Thames and Hudson, London 2001, pp. 25–26. See also: Daniel Libeskind, *Between the Lines: The Berlin Museum with the Jewish Museum*, [in:]: Daniel Libeskind, *Radix-Matrix: Architecture and Writings* [hereinafter as *Radix-Matrix...* – A.K.], eds. Daniel Libeskind, Andrea P.A. Belloli, Prestel, Munich and New York 1997, p. 34.

[5] Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English*,

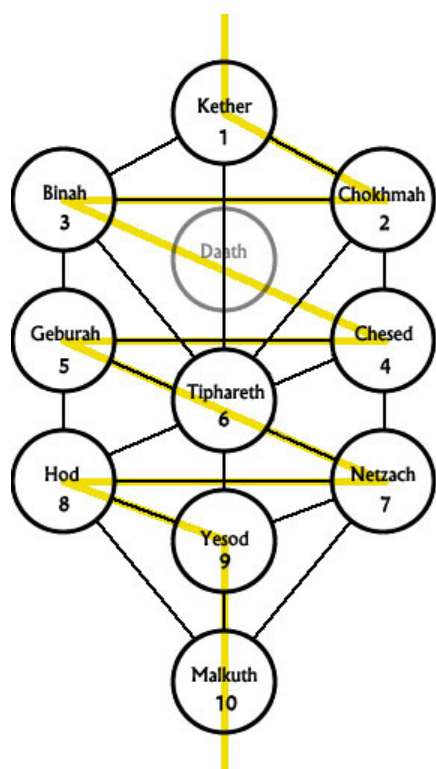


Fig. 3. The Sefirotic Tree

Source: Zev ben Shimon Ha-levi, *Kabala: Tradycja wiedzy tajemnej*, trans. Bohdan Kos, Ljubljana 1994, p. 7.

and exaggerate it deliberately. Moreover, those are signs/images that possess an evocative mythical content. Here, the mystical and magical component arises on a plane outside the realm of rational concepts and therefore, as Scholem writes, “can be expressed [...] only with the help of paradox,”[8] which in that reflection essentially leads to the inner logic of pictorial symbols. The Kabbalah, then, may also be approached as a specific modality for the interpretation of architecture, being a source of aesthetic and intellectual experience at the same time. As a discursive and analytical background, it may therefore be a starting point for reflection on the building that, after all, constitutes a system of signs which function both as an object and a message. One such sign/symbol emerging from the Berlin project is none other than the Sefirotic Tree (Fig. 4).

The term *sefirah* originates from the Book of Creation (Sefer Yetzirah) and simply means numbers (*safar* – to count),[9] which make up ten conventional levels of the so-called emanations of the godhead, “produced” as the world was revealed and created. The Sefirot denote the fundamental forces of all being, which could be construed as mystical “spheres” or “domains”, but the Hebrew *sefirah* is in no way linked to the Greek *sphaira*. [10] In the Book of Creation, they are the ten proto-numbers on which the created world was founded and, subsequently (in medieval Kabbalistic writings), they came to signify divine attributes, potencies and emanations, i.e. “the many stages of the divine Being, and divine manifestation of His hidden life.”[11] Thus, Scholem observes, they are the powers in which the living deity is constituted, and in which – to use the language of the Kabbalah – it obtains its face.[12] They are given various names of a symbolic nature, corresponding to the particular aspects arising at each level of emanation. This creative act of the godhead (or within the godhead) is a phenomenon impossible to conceive of without adopting certain pictorial structures, which is why – leaving the description

[8] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends...*, pp. 4–5, 216.

[9] Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Tajemnice Kabaly*, trans. Krystyna Pruska, Krzysztof Pruski, Wydawnictwo Cyklady, Warszawa 2006, (Ch. 4: *Dziesięć Sefirot*), pp. 187–265; Mosheldel, *Kabala: Nowe Perspektywy*, trans. Mikołaj Krawczyk, Zakład Wydawniczy “Nomos”, Kraków 2006, pp. 254–288; Rachel Elior, *Mistyczne źródła chasydyzmu*, trans. Maciej Tomal, Wydawnictwo Austeria, Kraków 2009, pp. 60–63.

[10] Gershom Scholem, *Mistycyzm żydowski...*, p. 258; idem, *Kabala i jej symbolika*, trans. Ryszard Wojnakowski, Znak, Kraków 1996, p. 111.

[11] Idem, *Major Trends...*, p. 208; idem, *O mistycznej postaci bóstwa: Z badań nad podstawowymi pojęciami kabaly*, trans. Agnieszka K. Haas, Wydawnictwo Aletheia, Warszawa 2010, p. 35; idem, *Mistycyzm żydowski...*, pp. 258–260; idem, *Judaizm: Parę głównych pojęć*, trans. Juliusz Zychowicz, preface by Michał Galas, Inter Esse, Kraków 1991, pp. 26–27.

[12] Idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, Schocken Books, New York 1997, p. 39.

of a particular individual Sefirot aside – it may be worthwhile to note the zigzag pattern of the sign adopted in the Kabbalah. Importantly, this is not an image of God Himself, but of His action, which assumes a certain conventional and mystical form, the shape of a graphic trace or diagram. Thus, the revelation (or manifestation of the deity) is tantamount to the idea of the world being created by God, and it is only that creative act or gesture that may be expressed through a particular “image” (as opposed to God Himself).^[13]

With the symmetrical zigzag arrangement of ten connections, the Kabbalistic diagram unfolds its order and succession from top to bottom, emanating, as it were, through the individual Sefirot. Although the latter are abstract concepts, they are given definite “places”, designated by the zigzagging movement of a flash of light. This yields the form of a lightning bolt that consists of ten connected sections of the ray, resulting in the ten separate nodes known as the Sefirot.

In fact, the Sefirotic Tree is a conventional term, describing a characteristic configuration in which all the Sefirot become interconnected into one networked system (see Fig. 4). The zigzag motif, on the other hand, is merely the primary connection of the Sefirot by a single line from 1 to 10. Thus, at each vertex along such a line (and at the two points where the line does not bend), a particular Sefirot is “placed”. Since the very origins of the Kabbalah, Scholem notes, nearly all of the mystical speculation has drawn on those levels of divine emanations – the Sefirot – a common trait for all Jewish mystics.^[14] Consequently, the Sefirotic Tree is the most important aspect in mystical doctrines, without which it is impossible to speak of the concept of the Kabbalah. Also, it is the fundamental, most crucial and simultaneously the most complex symbol found in Jewish mysticism. That zigzag arrangement is, Scholem asserts, the earliest form of symbolism, in which cosmological, moral, as well as intellectual and psychological^[15] biblical imagery serve to describe the ten “Words of Creation” or the *logoi* of God, His mystical qualities or His *aeons*.^[16] The Sefirot are described using various names and terms which, albeit symbolic, correspond to their particular aspects, determined by the level of emanation. It is therefore necessary to show how the Sefirot are arranged in a diagram, while the following description

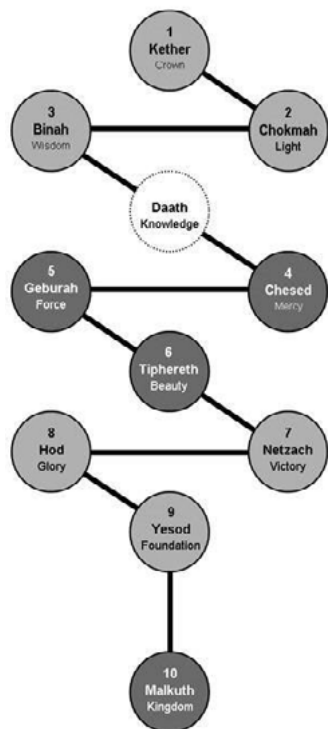


Fig. 4. The Sefirot

Source: Zev ben Shimon Ha-levi, *Kabala: Tradycja wiedzy tajemnej*, trans. Bohdan Kos, Ljubljana 1994, p. 40.

[13] God does not reveal His essence, as He has no form and transcends all notions, imagery, and even names. Only the acting God may assume a certain conventional and mystical form, i.e. His action has a form that manifests itself in names, symbols and likenesses. In this case, this is the zigzagging structure of the emanations of individual Sefirot. Gershom Scholem, *O mistycznej postaci...*, p. 33; idem, *Mistycyzm żydowski...*, p. 273. See also: idem, *O mistycznej postaci...*, p. 35.

[14] Gershom Scholem, *Kabala i jej...*, p. 45; idem, *Mistycyzm żydowski...*, p. 39.

[15] See, e.g.: Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, State University of New York Press, New York 1995, pp. 227–238; idem: *Kabala...* (Ch. 8: *Teurgia kabalistyczna*), pp. 322–367.

[16] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape...*, p. 27.

must inevitably be accompanied by reference to the accompanying illustrations. (Figs. 3, 4).

As already noted, the ten connections of the Kabbalistic diagram are ordered and succeed each other from top to bottom.^[17] It follows a broken line of radiant light originating from the central position known as Keter (or Keter Elyon), meaning the Divine/Supreme Crown, which is identified with His Primal Will. This line runs towards the right to reveal the next Sefirah—Hokhmah, meaning Wisdom or God's primordial thought. At this point, the ray turns aside, heading towards the left and crossing the vertical axis of the diagram, surmounted by the Sefirah of the Will. At the end of the ray, on the left-hand side of the diagram, the third Sefirah called Binah is manifested, which Scholem refers to as the "unfolding Intelligence of God,"^[18] and which is also translated as Understanding (or Discernment). Subsequently, the line turns at an angle again, heading diagonally downwards towards the right. Halfway along, on the aforementioned vertical axis, i.e. below the Keter Sefirah, the ray passes the location of the so-called pseudo-Sefirah Da'at (below the three discussed so far). This is the location of the *ruach ha-kodesh* (Spirit of God) one identifies with Knowing (as well as with seeing, [perception]). Although it participates in the process of Revelation, it is considered to remain unrevealed. For this reason, it is omitted in many diagrams showing the structure of the Tree, being reintroduced when, in order to preserve the 10 Sefirot, Keter is excluded as Ajin (as discussed below). The ray in question runs further down to the right and, just below Hokhmah, it reveals the Sefirah Hesed, or Love or Grace. From then on, the ray takes another turn, going horizontally towards the left to reach the Sefirah found below Binah, namely Din (Judgement or Justice); the latter is also called Gevurah (Divine Power). Going diagonally downwards, it reveals Tif'eret in the middle of the central axis, which signifies Harmony and Beauty, and may be encountered as an alternative Sefirah called Rahamim, meaning God's Love.^[19] Further along that trajectory, the Sefirah revealed on the right (just below Hesed) is Netzach – Perseverance or Constancy of God, also translated as Eternity or Victory. Heading again horizontally to the left, the ray reveals Hod—Reflection or Reverberation – that may also mean the Glory and Majesty of God. Another Sefirah node is found on the diagonal path going down to the right, on the central axis (just below Tif'eret). This is Yesod, i.e. the Foundation, the underpinning of God's active and creative powers. From there, the ray traces a fiery vertical line downwards, to reveal the final Sefirah, known as called Malkuth, i.e. the Kingdom. This diagram, according to Scholem, constitutes "the ten spheres of divine manifestation in which God emerges from His

[17] The designations of the Sefirot in the Polish version cited after: Gershom Scholem, *Mistycyzm żydowski...*, pp. 265–267; idem, *O mistycznej postaci...*, p. 38; Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Tajemnice Kabali...*, pp. 215–258; Zev ben Shimon Halevi, *Kabala:*

Tradycja wiedzy tajemnej, trans. Bohdan Kos, Artes, Ljubljana 1994, pp. 5–6.

[18] Gershom Scholem, *Mistycyzm żydowski...*, p. 265.

[19] Idem, *Mistycyzm żydowski...*, p. 266.

hidden abode. Together they form the 'unified universe' of God's life, the 'world of union' *alma de-yihuda*)." [20]

In this arrangement, the abstract notions behind the Sefirot are designated their specific places by the zigzagging motion of the flash of light, which may be regarded as the essential sign or trace of emanation. However, when that trace (of lightning) is blotted out, we are left with 10 (or 11 with Da'at) symmetrically placed nodes or circles that may then be linked by 22 lines (bringing the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet to mind) into a different system or systems. The most widespread of those is precisely the Sefirotic Tree, in which such 22 paths make up the distinctive sign (Fig. 4). [21]

In the Jewish tradition, that conventional, primordial pattern or trace has been an extremely capacious and open-ended schema or matrix, which would be superimposed on a broad range of other signs and symbols, such as the triad of columns, the menorah, the face, the letter Aleph, the human figure, the serpent, the ladder, etc., all of which fitted into what could be called an imaginary structure where they became interwoven not so much in pictorial terms, but on the plane of meaning, semantics, or substance. [22] In his 1996 book *The Sacred Portal: A Primary Symbol in Ancient Judaic Art*, Bernard Goldman aptly notes: "the significances of menorah and tree are so closely related, that the latter can be substituted for the former. The tree form degenerates on the ossuaries into a simple columnar shape, but on some chests, the design is picked out by a zigzag line that describes a form intermediate between menorah, tree, and column." [23]

One should not overlook the fact that the zigzagging layout of the Berlin museum is a continuation of an earlier project that Libeskind created on commission for Geneva's Centre d'Art Contemporain in 1988

Line of Fire

[20] Idem, *Major Trends...*, p. 213. The Sefirot are not the image of God, but convey His action or revelation.

[21] Numerous Jewish artists have engaged on multiple occasions with the so-called Sefirotic Tree, including Mordecai Ardon, Michael Sgan-Cohen, David Rakia, Michail Grobman and others. *The Divine Image: Depicting God in Jewish and Israeli Art*, exhibition catalogue, curators and authors: Ronit Sorek, Sharon Weiser-Ferguson, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem 2006; *Chagal to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art*, exhibition catalogue, curator and author: Avram Kampf, Barbican Art Gallery, London 1990, pp. 155–162.

[22] Methodological approaches employed in this study rely primarily on Charles S. Peirce's semiotics, intertextuality by Norman Bryson and preposterous interpretation by Mieke Bal. See e.g.: *Semiotics and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Lady Victoria Welby*, ed. Charles Hardwick,

Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1977; Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1983; idem, *Semiology and Visual Interpretation*, [in:] *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael A. Holly, Keith Moxey, Polity, Cambridge 1991, pp. 61–73; idem, *Art in Context*, [in:] *Studies in Historical Change*, ed. Ralph Cohen, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville 1992, pp. 18–42; Mieke Bal, *On Meaning-Making: Essays in Semiotics*, Polebridge Press, Sonoma 1994; idem, *Looking In: The Art of Viewing*, preface by Norman Bryson, G+B Arts International, Amsterdam 2001; Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson, *Semiotics and Art History*, "The Art Bulletin" 1991, no. 73(2).

[23] Bernard Goldman, *The Sacred Portal: A Primary Symbol in Ancient Judaic Art*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1966, p. 119.

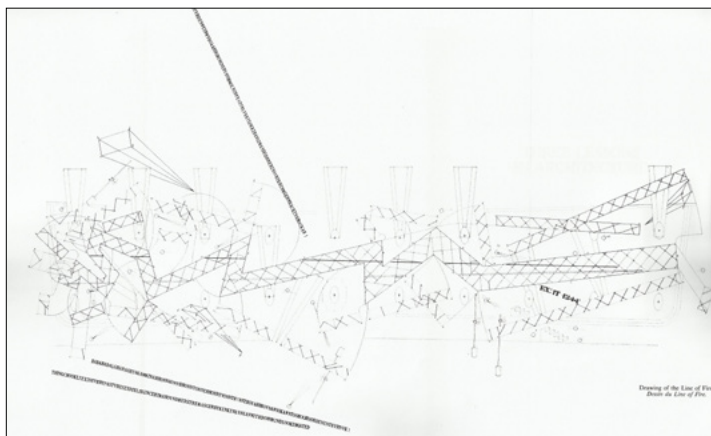


Fig. 5. Daniel Libeskind, diagram for the project *Line of Fire*, created for Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, 1988

Source: Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire*, vol. 3, International Labour Organization and Electa Spa, Geneva and Milan 1988, p. 19.

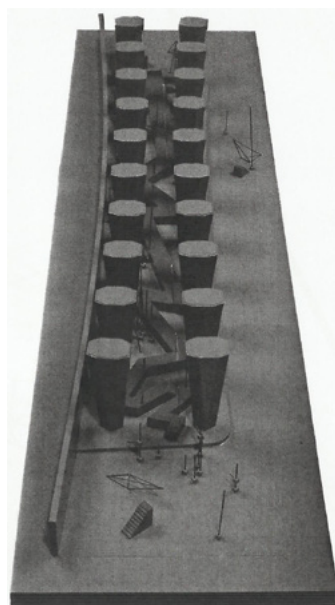


Fig. 6. Daniel Libeskind, mock-up for *Line of Fire*, a project created for Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, 1988

Source Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire*, vol. 3, International Labour Organization and Electa Spa, Geneva and Milan 1988, p. 18.

(Figs. 5, 6, 7). Entitled *Line of Fire*, it was also interchangeably referred to as *Colonnade*. The project consisted of a temporary light installation situated between two rows of columns (10 on each side) in front of the International Labour Organisation building in Geneva. In the author's vision, "just as lighting discharges energy to opposite poles, the Line of Fire projected across the 'Colonnade' of the I.L.O. building in Geneva, instigate a new approach to the reading of both art and architecture."^[24] By way of a pictorial play, the project implies a dialogue with the architectural medium, its new reading; at the same time, it asks questions about the possibilities of depiction, representation and its polysemous reception.^[25] For the purposes of the installation and following the suggestion of the curators, Libeskind also produced a series of sketches and diagrams, as well as a spatial mock-up showing how that architectural-artistic structure was envisioned to function. Both the diagrams and the model show the project to be an elongated zigzag, whose outline is replicated in the later layout of the Berlin museum. However, while the arrangement developed for Geneva consists of more than a dozen sections, the Berlin design comprises exactly ten sections of diagonally connected lines.^[26]

[24] Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire*, vol. 1 and 2, International Labour Organization and Electa Spa, Geneva and Milan 1988, [p. 3].

[25] See also: idem, *The Pilgrimage of Absolute Architecture*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, pp. 138–139. See also: idem, *Symbol and interpretation*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, p. 154.

[26] The design is described by Libeskind in the final chapter of *Line of Fire*, i.e. *Three Lessons in Architecture*. See also: *On the Making of the Lost Biennale Machines of Daniel Libeskind*, greg.org, n.d., http://greg.org/archive/2010/09/20/on_the_making_of_the_lost_biennale_machines_of_daniel_libeskind.html (accessed: 10.11.2011); Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire...*,

Nevertheless, in the *Dedication* section of the book *Line of Fire*, Libeskind mentions that the zigzag pattern of both projects, i.e. in Geneva and Berlin, was spontaneously and intuitively drawn during a conversation with Aldo Rossi about the Jewish Kabbalah. The Kabbalah as a religious issue and as a certain “unresolvable tension” became the inspiration and impetus that fuelled the entire project.[27]

It may also be noted that, on the tenth anniversary of the institution, the “Journal of Jewish Museum Berlin” (JMB) featured an article by Andreas Kilcher, entitled *The Ten Sefirot* (*Die zehn Sefirot*) and a reprint of the 1821 diagram of the Sefirotic Tree by Sasson ben Mordechai.[28] The inclusion of Kilcher’s text – which describes the ten Sefirot and the names of God associated with each – cannot be treated as coincidence, especially in this context. The article concludes that the Sefirot (unrepresentable, symbolic spheres) constitute ten archetypal and fundamental forms, which is why they should only be understood as a divine sub-text that may be “read” in our earthly world. Clearly, this is additional confirmation that the Berlin project draws on the essential Kabbalistic paradigm[29] – the Tree of Life, consisting of ten Sefirot arranged in a lightning bolt, or zigzag pattern. After all, *Book of Creation* says: “The ten Sefirot without matter: Their visage is like the look of a flash of lightning.”[30] At this point, one should also cite one of the more interesting interpreters of Libeskind’s work, Mark C. Taylor, according to whom the elongated layout of the Berlin project, which follows a zigzagging, “straying line”, may be perceived as a sign identical to the letter “Z” and its negative (in conjunction). This particular arrangement, the author claims, is akin to something that cannot be actually represented, namely the “trace” of the Kabbalistic ray in the process of *tzimtzum* (withdrawal/emanation).[31] This twofold or multiplied “Z” is referred to by Taylor

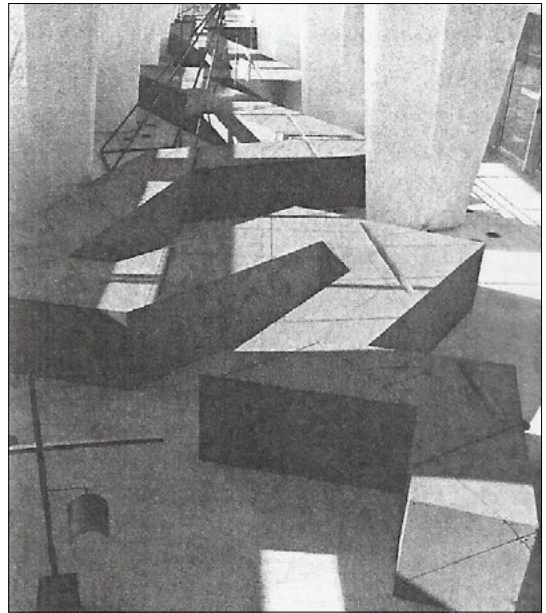


Fig. 7. Daniel Libeskind, mock-up for *Line of Fire*, a project created for Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, 1988

Source: Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire*, vol. 3, International Labour Organization and Electa Spa, Geneva and Milan 1988, p. 18.

[p. 4]; Kirsten Wagner, *Combinatory Machines: Reading Architecture, Remembering Architecture, Writing Architecture*, [in:] *The Hidden Trace. Jewish Path through Modernity*, catalogue, curatorship and edited by Martin Roman Deppner, Felix-Nussbaum-Haus, Osnabrück, Osnabrück 2008, pp. 54–58.

[27] Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire*..., [pp. 4, 17].

[28] Andreas Kilcher, *The Ten Sefirot* (*Die zehn Sefirot*), “Journal of Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB)” 2011, no. 5, pp. 74–77.

[29] See also: Alexander Gorlin, *Kabbalah and Architecture*, “Faith and Form. The Interfaith Journal on Religion, Art and Architecture” 2008, no. 41(2). See

also idem: *Kabbalah in Art and Architecture*, Pointed Leaf Press, New York 2013, pp. 70–71.

[30] *Sefer Yetzirah*, 1:6, after: Rachel Elior, op. cit., p. 61. See also: *Księga Jecirah: Klucz kabaly*, translation from Old Hebrew, introduction and commentary by Mariusz Prokopowicz, Pico, Warszawa 1994; *Sefer Jecira, czyli Księga stworzenia*, trans. Wojciech Brojer, Jan Doktor, Bohdan Kos, Tikkun, Warszawa 1995.

[31] Mark C. Taylor, *Point of No Return*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix*..., p. 131. Here, one should also mention the Hebrew word *zuz* (Zain Vav Zain), the stem in the verb “shift” or “move”; it may be read literally as “z”, “i”, “z”.

aszim zum, a name which readily aligns with the building's layout; even so, *zigzag* is just as fitting a term to describe that mirrored "Z". Following this line of thought, it may also be recalled that, during a conversation with Libeskind, Jacques Derrida suggested reading a work by the French art historian Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, entitled, precisely, *Zigzag*.^[32]

With-Drawing

The Sefirotic Tree is generally conveyed through a characteristic, vertical diagram, which in itself is an object of reflection and meditation. However, in the context of Libeskind's work, Taylor maintains that the building represents a "drawing" (i.e. the "drawing" is represented by the building),^[33] which only becomes evident when one acknowledges the analogy with the Sefirotic Tree, construed as a specific diagram equated with the notion of "drawing".

Given that analogy, it may be worthwhile to quote a fairly significant and telling fragment of a dialogue from Bergman, which Libeskind included in the aforementioned *Line of Fire*. A character named Eve asks: "is the thing imagined as drawn?" Her interlocutor, Jan, answers thus: "The drawing as imagined and the thing imagined as drawn are imagined as one." Eve: "By whom?" Jan: By their maker."^[34] This excerpt, deliberately cited by the architect, is an allusion to the already mentioned (Kabbalistic) "unresolvable tension" between the potency of a particular sign and the divergence of its meanings.^[35]

This aspect of the Berlin project – as an enigmatic form that is unlike anything else – is also discussed by Bernhard Schneider. In the text entitled *The Building on Paper is not a Museum*, the author raises the question: "Does the Extension of the Berlin Museum have a zigzag form?", to which he rather perversely – apparently – answers with one word: no.^[36] Contrary to numerous commentaries, descriptions and explanations (which assert the building is a zigzag or a lightning bolt), the museum does not follow the zigzag pattern as a building. Such a configuration, Schneider emphatically underlines, does exist as a sign and demonstrably so, but only in the two-dimensional, graphic form of the design on paper, resulting from the representation of the characteristic architectural feature. Thus, the zigzag – as a certain graphic sign (albeit an eloquent one) – appears in relation to the blueprint on paper and any two-dimensional representation of the project, since the building itself is, after all, three-dimensional, spatial. A building can be represented in a drawing, but doing the reverse is more complicated.^[37] Schneider observes: "Anyone who experiences the building in its own right will not see a zigzag and anyone who has retained this image in

[32] Jacques Derrida, *Response to Daniel Libeskind*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, p. 110.

[33] Mark C. Taylor, *Point of...*, p. 129. In this case, the Sefirotic Tree is the "drawing".

[34] Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire...*, [p. 11]. The author does not specify the source, aside from mentioning that the excerpt was borrowed from I. Bergman.

[35] See also: Mark C. Taylor, *Point of...*, p. 129.

[36] Bernhard Schneider, *Daniel Libeskind's Architecture in the Context of Urban Space*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, p. 120.

[37] Ibidem, pp. 120–121.

his or her mind from prior knowledge of the drawings and models will seek it in vain in the actual building. On the other hand, the visitor will find a great deal which is unexpected: things which were implied by the drawings, but which were never directly depictable.”[38]

This means that the zigzag (as a sign or a diagram) is something outside the represented (or depictable) reality, it envisions an imaginary, mental structure that cannot be found in nature as an image, but rather as a symbol of an image or a sign of a sign. In his analysis, Schneider compares Libeskind's work to Rene Magritte's famous *This is Not a Pipe*, concluding succinctly: “This is not a building.”[39]

In a text entitled *Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala* [*Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah*], Scholem states in Satz 7 that emanation is a “phenomenon” one cannot imagine without the aid of certain pictorial structures.[40] In his opinion, since the Kabbalistic teachings had assumed a form of (pictorial) theosophical topography in the writings, their actual substance remained inaccessible. Hence the unresolvable tension between “their most essential intentions and their incapacity to have them purely expressed.”[41] Elsewhere, the author states that this inarticulacy as well as general indeterminacy pose the most serious obstacle in the process of (mystical) experience, which “cannot be simply and totally translated into sharp images or concepts.”[42]

With this “unresolvable tension” in mind, it is worth recalling Libeskind's own suggestion, who – asserting architectural nature and mystical-experiential dimension of the Geneva projection – writes that its viewers become witnesses to its absence of form. The architect further describes it as: “after-image, non-forms, sunlight of forms” or “Undecided Flesh of Architecture.”[43] With regard to the Berlin project, Libeskind uses the word *Blitz* (Ger. flash of light/lightning bolt etc.) next to zigzag, arguing that “form” is visible only to angels.[44]

This parallel, understood as a tangent between the architectural layout developed by Libeskind and the conventional images of the Sefirot (i.e. of their trace), also operates at the level of intention or design as that “unresolvable tension”. Here, the necessary structural form amounts to architectural “enslavement”[45] in Libeskind's eyes, and the project may also be seen as an elaborate metaphor referring to aspects that cannot really be captured in any specific form.

In all existing metaphors of the Sefirotic Tree, its diagram is symmetrical. The Tree of Life is a flawless array of the divine attributes, His emanations, while all the laws which that world (of emanations)

The Asymmetric Model

[38] Ibidem, p. 120.

[39] Ibidem, p. 121.

[40] Here, I draw on D. Biale, *Gershom Scholem's Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah: Text and Commentary*, “Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience” 1985, no. 5(1), pp. 67–94.

[41] Ibidem, p. 83.

[42] Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its...*, p. 10.

[43] Daniel Libeskind, *Line of Fire...*, [p. 8].

[44] Idem, *Between the Lines...*, pp. 25–26.

[45] Idem, *Line of Fire...*, [p. 8]; idem, *Notes for a Lecture: „Nouvelles Impressions d'Architecture”*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, p. 148.

encompasses form a perfect whole. In this perfect image known from the Bahir and from the Zohar, all elements of the organic form remain in its proper place as the building blocks of a certain superior form, whose diagram is symmetrically traced from top to bottom by the zigzagging line of “revelation.”[46]

However, the plan of the Berlin building is asymmetrical, skewed and disproportionate. Its characteristic lightning bolt line begins its course differently than in the classic Tree structure; instead of running to the right, it veers off to the left, as in a mirror image. Moreover, the ten nodes of the Tree are specific “places” at the inflection points in the Kabbalistic diagram, whereas Libeskind’s building comprises ten sections of the plan, which gives – considering the locations of the Sefirot at the inflections – nine nodes. If nodes were placed at the ends of the sections in Libeskind’s plan, there would be eleven. The inclusion of the Sefirot in the so-called space of the five Voids, marked on the plan by a vertical dotted line, complicates the diagram even further. Thus, the two matrices, i.e. the Kabbalistic Sefirotic Tree and the layout of the Berlin Museum, are seemingly mutually exclusive, but nevertheless identical. This apparent inconsistency may be accounted for through reference to the pictorial tradition in Jewish culture, which draws on the idea of destruction (of the Temple), as it assumes a particular guise through analogy to the messianic hope of restitution.

In the article entitled *The Meaning of Asymmetry in Jewish Art*, Avigdor Poseq notes that since the rabbinic times, Jewish art demonstrated a tendency towards asymmetrical depiction of the items that the tradition associated with the rituals in the Temple.[47] Previously, those objects, such as the two Tables of the Decalogue, the golden cherubim, the Jachin and Boaz pillars (in front of the entrance to the Temple) or the golden menorah, had usually been represented and described in their antithetical, symmetrical relationship.[48] From the rabbinic period onwards, the artefacts would be portrayed in visual arts began in what only seemed heraldic compositions, while their alignment with respect to the axis was often disrupted in some way. Examples which best illustrate such practices include the late-antique synagogue mosaics in Beit Alfa (dating to early 6th century CE), Sepphoris (5th cent. CE), Beit She’an (6th cent. CE) and Hammat Tiberias (4th cent. CE). Themosaics in question feature ritual paraphernalia—the lulav, etrog and shofar—scattered on either side of the pictorial field whose centre is occupied by the image of the Holy Ark. In both two parts of the painting, the arrangement or presentation of its various elements shows

[46] Gershom Scholem, *O mistycznej postaci...*, p. 38.

[47] Avigdor W.G. Poseq, *The Meaning of Asymmetry in Jewish Art*, “Jewish Culture and History” 2006, no. 8(1), p. 13. The author advanced similar concepts in another paper, i.e. *Toward a Semiotic Approach to Jewish Art*, “Ars Judaica. The Bar-Ilan Journal of Jewish Art” 2005, vol. 1, pp. 27–50.

[48] See also: Exodus 25:31–36 and 37:17–22. Avigdor W.G. Poseq, *The Meaning of...*, p. 20. On the concept of iconic bilateral symmetry see also: Jean Chavaler, Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles: Mythes, Rêves, Coutumes, Gestes, Formes, Figures, Couleurs, Nombres*, Robert Laffont/Jupiter, Paris 1969 (entry for *Symetrie*).

slight differences. Sometimes it is only a minor detail, such as the work on the base of the menorah or the shape of the lulav bundles, which constitutes a departure from the seemingly symmetrical arrangement of the composition. Poseq also applies his “asymmetry concept” to medieval (Perpignan Hebrew Bible from 1299, Spanish Hebrew Bible from the latter half of the fourteenth century) and modern objects (relief panel from the door of the Aron ha-Kodesh in Krakow from the first half of the 17th century)[49] in which the menorah is represented. Usually, flames may be seen only over one side of the candelabrum; elsewhere, distinct ornamentation is found on either side.[50] Naturally, one should remember that the menorah is the symbolic and iconic equivalent of the Temple and the Sefirotic Tree of Life alike.[51]

Unlike symmetry, which denotes staticity and order, the asymmetrical pattern is presumed to signify inconstancy, discontinuity, randomness, mere temporality and potentially changeable situation. Since, on top of that, it was capable of epitomizing disorder or even chaos, asymmetry was generally avoided in non-Jewish religious art as an undesirable trait.[52] When such an imbalance is introduced, the resulting shape appears frozen at the wrong moment of formation, evoking a sense of an infinite gesture or act in the viewer, demanding from them – or rather entreating them – to be realized, completed.

This “absent” symmetry, the non-perfect and flawed arrangement, the disproportion of the figures and the lack of spatial illusion is a major deviation from the classical aesthetic criteria.[53] As Poseq observes, any deformed iconographic elements in Jewish art have very often been misinterpreted in the literature due to ignorance of the artistic convention, according to which absence of symmetry was a correct and intentional choice.[54] An asymmetrical pattern constitutes a “symbolic form” which, like all visual symbols (symmetry included), denotes something that differs essentially from what we actually see. This aesthetic criterion is a crucial element in Jewish representations, whose deliberate asymmetry serves a dual purpose. First and foremost, it invokes the messianic notion which envisages the renewal of the covenant, the restoration of the erstwhile glory and the rebuilding of the Temple.[55] However, this is construed in universalist terms, with the

[49] See also: Andreina Contessa, *An Uncommon Representation of the Temple Implements in a Fifteenth-century Hebrew Sephardi Bible*, “Ars Judaica. The Bar-Ilan Journal of Jewish Art” 2009, vol. 5, pp. 37–58.

[50] Avigdor W.G. Poseq, *The Meaning of...*, p. 22.

[51] See: Moshe Idel, *Binah, The Eighth Sefirah: The Menorah in Kabbalah*, [in:] *In the Light of the Menorah. Story of a Symbol*, ed. Yael Israeli, Jewish Publication Society, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 143–146; Leon Yarden, *The Tree of Light: A Study of the Menorah; The Seven-Branded Lampstand*, Cornell University Press, London 1971.

[52] Avigdor W.G. Poseq, *The Meaning of...*, pp. 19–20.

[53] Herbert Read, *Origins of Form in Art*, Horizon Press, New York 1965, pp. 87–96; See also: Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, and London 2004; idem, *Visual Thinking*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, and London 1969; Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Phaidon Press, London 1968.

[54] Avigdor W.G. Poseq, *The Meaning of...*, pp. 13, 21.

[55] Ibidem, pp. 13, 22.

underlying belief in the betterment of the world as such; it is a utopian, messianic hope for universal renewal or *tikkun olam*, a concept discussed in the following section. Second, the asymmetrical arrangement is a reminder of the non-sacred, secular nature of the representation in question, drawing on the Second Commandment. Nevertheless, in his article, Poseq clearly emphasizes the first purpose.^[56]

Tikkun Olam

To proceed further, it is necessary to outline the nature of *tikkun olam*. In Hebrew, the phrase literally means “repair”, or “restitution of the world”, deriving from the Kabbalah, more specifically from the myth of the original catastrophe during the creation of the world, following which the human task is to effect restitution (*tikkun*) of this world, also through self-improvement.^[57] “[T]o bring about the *tikkun*,” Scholem writes, “is precisely the aim of redemption. In redemption everything is restored to its place by the secret magic of human acts, things are freed from their mixture and consequently, in the realms both of man and of nature, from their servitude to the demonic powers, which, once the light is removed from them, are reduced to deathly passivity.”^[58] All human activity, therefore, is working towards restitution, while *tikkun olam* is also understood more broadly as a general social process spanning historical, political and cultural issues, including art and architecture as instruments of such an interpretation.^[59] In effect, architecture – being experienced and provoking reflection – becomes a means in the process of repair which, with respect to the complex Jewish-German relations, should result in aspiring for reconciliation and symbiosis.^[60]

It may also be noted that the term *tikkun olam* was introduced into contemporary *philosophy after Auschwitz* in 1968 by David Weiss Halivni, who asserted that the principal task of post-Holocaust Judaism is *tikkun*, which involves rereading and reinterpretation of classical religious texts, including the Torah.^[61] Shoah, therefore, is also referred

[56] Ibidem, pp. 19, 22.

[57] See e.g. Eliot N. Dorff, *The Way into Tikkun Olam*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock 2005; *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, eds. David Schatz, Chaim I. Waxman, Nathan J. Dramert, Bloomsbury Publishing, Northvale 1997.

[58] Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its...*, pp. 116–117.

[59] See e.g. Matthew Baigell, *Social Concern and 'Tikkun Olam' in Jewish American Art*, “Ars Judaica. The Bar-Ilan Journal of Jewish Art” 2012, vol. 8, pp. 55–80; idem, *Jewish-American Artists and the Holocaust*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London 1997 (Ch. 4, *Tikkun Olam*), pp. 51–58. See also: Robert S. Wistrich, *Fateful Trap: The German-Jewish Symbiosis*, “Tikkun” 1990, no. 5.2,

pp. 34–38; Peter Chametzky, *Rebuilding the Nation: Norman Foster's 'Reichstag' Renovation and Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin*, “Centropa. A Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts” 2001, no. 1(3), pp. 250, 263, note 23; Kurt W. Forster, *Monstrum Mirabile et Audax*, [in:] *Extension to...*, pp. 22–23.

[60] The outcome is immaterial, since *tikkun olam* is inherently utopian and messianic; instead, it is all about the process and “striving for”.

[61] David Weiss Halivni, *Mekorot U'mesorot [Sources and Traditions: A Source Critical Commentary on the Talmud]*, Devir, Tel Aviv 1968 (Jerusalem 1975, 1982 [Hebr.]); idem, *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and the Critical Responses*, Avalon Publishing, Boulder 1997.

to using the word *hurban*[62], meaning a catastrophe (in universalist terms) that the contemporary philosophy approaches as *an event* “outside the framework of history”, which endows it with a messianic component.

Consequently, the asymmetry of the Berlin building becomes a reference to the belief in restitution, reconstruction and the hope for (messianic) renewal. The diagram of the museum's layout may be seen as a desacralized image, whose character owes to the destruction on the human level (with humanist values and human lives obliterated) and the ensuing rift between the human and the godhead (destruction, desacralization, deformation of the Sefirotic Tree).

In the European tradition, symmetry – the antithesis to asymmetry – represents one of the most original (and important) intellectual concepts of classical philosophy, science and art. In the geometry and mathematics of Pythagoras, commensurability was an abstract quality or value that nurtured a sense of order from which “sublime perfection” arose. In the context of art, symmetry also translates into appropriateness, a satisfying relationship between the representation and the represented, though the term may also denote a formal pattern where the components arranged on either side of the central axis were duplicated.[63] The word *symmetry*, Poseq writes, is not to be found in Jewish writings or in the Talmud (which contains numerous Greek words in any case), whose authors were familiar with Greek culture. In his argument, the Israeli art historian stresses that in contrast to the non-Jewish literary tradition (symmetry), there is a grammatical form in Hebrew to convey duality of things, i.e. the dual number in addition to singular and plural, such as legs (*raglain*), eyes (*ajinain*) etc. (understood as two together in Hebrew). Nevertheless, the closest term to symmetry is *shalem*, i.e. “perfect, ideal” – an antonym to *shavur*, meaning “deformed, crooked”, which in conjunction with objects of worship implies desacralization.[64] Thus, absence of symmetry is a symbolic form and, like other symbols, denotes something different from what our eye sees or would like to see.[65] Asymmetry, the author underlines, represents a belief in rebuilding the Jewish community after a time of destruction.

The skewed matrix of the Berlin project is an explicit iconic substitute, embodying the belief in repair and restitution. The zigzagging, asymmetrical, broken and displaced, and therefore desacralized diagram of the layout is an image of the Sefirotic Tree destroyed by Shoah. As already noted, the overall arrangement of the Sefirot features a discernible motif of a triad of evencolumns, which simultaneously constitute a clear architectural metaphor (Fig. 8). To the right, there is the active column of Mercy, while the passive column of Severity (or

[62] Also spelled *khurb(a)n* or *churban*; in contemporary Hebrew the word means “ruin”. See: Ernest Klein, op. cit., p. 230.

[63] Avigdor W.G. Poseq, *The Meaning of...*, p. 19.

[64] Ibidem, p. 23.

[65] The author also cites Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Yale University Press, New Haven 1974. Avigdor W.G. Poseq, *The Meaning of...*, p. 26.

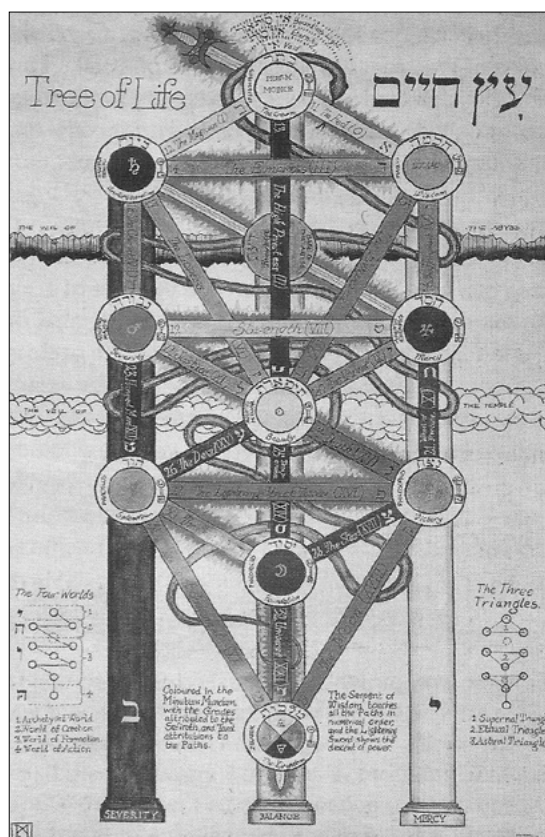


Fig. 8. The Sefirot with three columns and the climbing serpent

Source: Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism: History, Belief and Practice*, Routledge, London 2003, p. 195.

Judgment) if found on the left; the one in the centre is the column of Tif'eret – or Beauty or Balance – which in Libeskind's structure is epitomized by the five spaces of the Void (Fig. 2). Here, the two columns of Mercy and Judgment are broken, battered and crooked. The symmetrical pattern of the Sefirot remains only some remembered trace of past glory (*kawod*) and perfection (*shalem*), which, through superimposition of the two matrices, must elicit a sense of a jolt, disorientation and confusion, and ultimately stoke the utopian faith in a "return to its place". This dovetails with Mark Taylor's suggestion that Libeskind's ten-node diagram introduces more perplexity than direction and harmony into our reception. Libeskind's architectural designs appear to "have lost their moorings and float freely in a way which subverts every classical economy of representation."^[66] After Eleonora Jedlińska, it may be added that "the desperate, eternal search for order in chaos is present most acutely [precisely] in a work of art,"^[67] which is what Libeskind's project should be regarded as.

Besides, the arrangement of the Sefirot includes another motif which stirs up confusion and dissonance: the serpent (Hebr. *nahash*), whose equivalent may also be found in the depictions of Sefirotic Tree (Fig. 8). Thus, the structure of Libeskind's museum is repeatedly compared in the literature to a slithering snake, while Kurt Forster explicitly calls it "snake skin" in his analysis, seeing a parallel in Paul Klee's *Die biblische Schlange kurz nach dem Fluch* [*The Biblical Snake Shortly After Condemnation*] from 1940.^[68] Both Genesis and Job identify the reptile with Satan, who represents the forces of evil. To Gershom Scholem, the name combines from Saeland the letter Mem – which suggests death (*mawet*) – yielding the word Samael (the name of the angel of Death).^[69] Interestingly, however, Satan or the serpent in the Bahir had been attached to the Tree of Life in such a form since the outset, lying there as if dormant in perfect symbiosis with the Sefirot. Drawing on Josef Karo, Scholem observes: "And know that from the beginning of his creation, the serpent served an important and necessary purpose for the harmony of Creation, so long as he remained in his place. [...]"

[66] Mark C. Taylor, *Point of...*, p. 129.

[67] Eleonora Jedlińska, *Sztuka po Holocaustie*, "Tygiel Kultury", Łódź 2001, p. 18.

[68] Kurt W. Forster, op. cit., pp. 19–20, 22.

[69] Gershom Scholem, *O mistycznej postaci...*, p. 77. See also: Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, op. cit., p. 28.

For he had a suitable place in all the worlds, and constituted something extremely important for the harmony of all levels, each in its place.”[70] It was only the pride and sin of man which “awoke” the serpent, whose movement upset the original arrangement. In the illustrations of the Tree of Life, the serpent motif is inversed with respect to the emanation of the Sefirot, entwining the triad of columns and heading “outwards”, as it were. The asymmetrical arrangement of the Berlin zigzag may thus be seen as a form created after the original tree has been penetrated by evil, which ushered in disorder and distortion (*Shoah/hurban*).

In the article *Out of Line, Berlin*, Libeskind refers to a distinctive echo of a “contortion” resonating in architecture today, manifesting – he continues – in a crooked angelic figure (the names of angels are often used as alternatives to the names of individual Sefirot).[71] That contortion, the architect notes, “is as real as those of all the other deported archangels: Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin, Primo Levi, Osip Mendelstam, Paul Celan (and others). The ten thunderbolts of absolute absence are deployed to alter the physical image of Berlin and to open joyous channels of communication, re-membling the future,”[72] (which should be interpreted as a reference to the term *tikkun olam*). In another essay, *Symbol and Interpretation*, Libeskind writes that the question of architectural order “is not merely a formal problem but one which is linked to a moral and ethical view of society...”[73] seeing an inherent link between architecture and contemporary humanist thought concerning memory and representation. According to the author, the goal of architecture is to explore a more profound order rooted not only in visible forms, but in the invisible and hidden sources that nurture culture itself. In a commentary on *Symbol and...*, Mitchell Schwartz follows in that vein:

the belief in the *symbolic* potential of architecture led Libeskind to banish customary geometries from his drawings. Rectilinear (or right-angled) shapes and spaces might meet most programmatic functions. They rarely shake people's souls, and he was after such stirrings. By contrast, a building with slicing, intersecting planes and volumes could potentially open the concrete world of the here and now to the abstract, spiritual dimension. Striking outside of the box with his projects for the Jewish Museum Berlin, Libeskind hoped to transform architecture into the mythic realms of human existence.[74]

When building, one constructs and symmetrically arranges elements so that they may perform a specific function, an approach informed by the Enlightenment primacy of reason, the available tech-

Deconstruction

[70] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape...*, p. 79. See also: R. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic*, Oxford University Press, London 1962, p. 32.

[71] Daniel Libeskind, *Out of Line...*, p. 26.

[72] Ibidem.

[73] Idem, *Symbol and Interpretation*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, p. 152.

[74] Mitchell Schwartz, *Toward a California Judaism*, [in:] *Daniel Libeskind and the Contemporary Jewish Museum: New Jewish Architecture from Berlin to San Francisco*, ed. Connie Wolf, Contemporary Jewish Museum, Rizzoli and Skira, Italy, San Francisco, New York and Milan 2008, p. 40.

nology etc. Inevitably and overtly, the design of the Berlin museum sets out to confront the problem of “Enlightenment dialectic,”[75] but the scope, degree and extent of this functionality – as Alois Martin Müller suggests in a question asked during his interview with Libeskind – is not determined in line with some objective scale (of reason).[76] Much of that architecture, Müller continues, does not conform to the established rigour of reason, having the ability to elude its bondage by venturing towards myth (seen as a symbolic and mystical category). In this context, Müller invokes Jacques Derrida, according to whom deconstruction (postmodernism) in architecture represent a triumph over the dictate of modernist regime, authority, orderliness, etc. If modernism is perceived in the light of its craving for absolute ascendancy (and, one could add, symmetry), deconstruction (postmodernism) may be perceived as the awareness of experiencing (its) end; the end of any plans of domination,[77] which is why it gravitates towards asymmetry.

Since this raises questions about deconstruction in architecture, it is necessary to cite such architectural theorists as Bruno Zevi, Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, James E. Young and Anthony Vidler, who spoke of a particular predisposition of contemporary Jewish architects to create “deconstructivist” designs. According to Rosenfeld, the idea of deconstruction is associated with the notion of a historical “jolt” or “rupture” caused within the Western civilization by the Holocaust and the subsequent sense of crisis and unbelief.[78] This is a reflection of the reality of the postmodern, post-humanist and post-Holocaust world, which becomes embodied in architecture that exploits fragmentation, decentralization and formulas of breakdown.[79] According to Young, such an architectural paradigm stems from the collective experience of history and the so-called “Jewish” experience of its practitioners.[80] Here, historical trauma marked “the generation of post-Holocaust architects,” who sought to articulate the “memory of a catastrophe” in their work.[81] In the wake of the Holocaust, artists and architects grappling with unimaginable loss, with a broken and shattered world, had to find a new language that would be capable of expressing that

[75] See: Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Herder and Herder, New York 1972 [1947]. See also: Daniel Libeskind, *Breaking Ground: An Immigrant's Journey from Poland to Ground Zero*, Riverhead Books, New York 2005, p. 66.

[76] Alois Martin Müller, *Daniel Libeskind's Muses*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, pp. 111, 116–117.

[77] Jacques Derrida, “Archi?Texture und Labirynth”, [in:] *Das Abenteuer der Ideen*, Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin, Berlin 1984, p. 97. After: A.M. Müller, *Daniel Libeskind's...*, p. 119, note 19.

[78] Gavriel Rosenfeld, *Ground Zero as a Lab for New Art*, “Forward”, 21.02.2003. See also: Mark C. Taylor,

Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, and Religion, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, pp. 2–16, 231.

[79] See also: Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Building after Auschwitz: Jewish Architecture and the Memory of the Holocaust*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2011, pp. 45–51, 157–217.

[80] James E. Young, *Daniel Libeskind's New Jewish Architecture*, [in:] *Daniel Libeskind and the Contemporary Jewish Museum*, p. 46.

[81] Young also cites Nathaniel Popper, *Transforming Tragedies into Memorable Memorials* [interview with the author], “Forward”, 16.01.2004. See also: Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1992.

rupture in civilization, though without repairing it.[82] According to Bruno Zevi, the fact that Jewish architects opted to forgo symmetry, conformity, harmony, beauty and touches of repressive monumentalism challenges the "classical fetishism of dogmas" and brings prophetic qualities – equated with the messianic message – into the play.[83]

The above suggestions are of course consistent with the interpretation of the term *tikkun olam*, which presupposes a mystical and utopian belief in the possibility of repair and restitution. Also, the aforementioned serpent, in its irregular, zigzag form, has an evident messianic element to it, as the numerical value of the word serpent (*na-hash*) is exactly the same (358) as in the word Messiah (*Mashiach*).[84] The characteristic lack of order, staticity and balance in Libeskind's project does not result from doubt in the possible renewal, nor is it a mere expression of the civilizational, historical and cultural "rupture". The design is a patent manifestation of nostalgia for the mythical times of harmony, rhythm and order. The messianic restitution, which the architect speaks of using the word "hope", [85] emerges as a camouflaged image of longing for order and symbiosis, while architecture – as an object of specific experience and reflection – is an essential tool in the complex process of *tikkun olam*. According to Gershom Scholem, "everything that is done by the individual or the community in the mundane sphere is magically reflected in the upper region, i.e. the higher reality which shines through the acts of man." [86] After all, one of the favourite statements in the Zohar affirms: " 'The impulse from below (*itharuta dil-tata*) calls forth that from above.' The earthly reality mysteriously reacts upon the heavenly, for everything, including human activity, has its 'upperroots' in the realm of the Sefiroth." [87]

Arnheim Rudolf, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, and London 2004.

Arnheim Rudolf, *Visual Thinking*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, and London 1969.

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[82] James E. Young, *Daniel Libeskind's New...*, p. 47. See idem, *At Memory's Edge. After-Image of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2000, p. 182.

[83] Bruno Zevi, *Ebraismo e Architettura*, Editrice La Giuntina, Florence 1993, p. 83. After: James E. Young, *Daniel Libeskind's New...*, p. 46. See also: Thorsten Rodiek, *Daniel Libeskind – Museum ohne Ausgang: Das Felix-Nussbaum-Haus des Kulturgeschichtlichen Museums Osnabrück*, Wasmuth, Tübingen and Berlin 1998, p. 68.

[84] After: Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota, *Znalazłam wczorajszy dzień: Moja osobista tradycja żydowska*,

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[85] See e.g.: Daniel Libeskind, *Trauma...*, p. 25; idem, *Between the Lines, Opening Speech...*, p. 24; idem, *The Aleph Before the Beit. Jewish Community Center and Synagogue, Duisburg*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, p. 98; idem, *Mourning Sachsenhausen, Oranienburg*, [in:] *Radix-Matrix...*, p. 102. See also: Mark C. Taylor, *Point of...*, pp. 134–135.

[86] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends...*, p. 233.

[87] Zohar I, 164a. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends...*, p. 233; idem, *O mistycznej postaci...*, pp. 91–156. See also Moshe Idel, *Kabala...*, pp. 272, 318.

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