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Weaving Memories into the Urban Fabric of Everyday Berlin

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Fragmented Memorial
Weaving Memories into the Urban Fabric of Everyday Berlin

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ABSTRACT

The connection between memory and structure has been examined countless times in a staggering amount of built spaces. However, despite the near ubiquity of memorials in modern cities, the typography of memorial lacks a fundamental connection to the everyday nature of cities and the lives of their inhabitants. A new form of memorial is needed. This thesis examines the philosophical understandings of group memory as related to memorial design and theory. The classification of memory is used as a backdrop to explore the shortcomings of memorialization within architectural design. A solution to the problems of memorialization is proposed as an extension of current typologies, a Fragmented Memorial.

This thesis locates an initial site for Fragmented Memorialization in Berlin, Germany. Berlin has a complex and anguished history, largely layered and essentially hidden to residents of the city. Although Berlin has hundreds of memorials, few engage the average resident of the city. A Fragmented Memorial has the ability to exist for the city residents as a primary audience and act as part of the city itself. The specific design and location of this thesis’ Fragmented Memorial interacts with the existing landscape of downtown Berlin in the heart of the city center as an interstitial space for memory to organically unfold alongside new generations of Berliners.
Design Note to the Reader: This thesis delves into the construction of memory and how memories may be experienced. Thus, each layer may be read and experienced individually and in any order. The Table of Contents suggests a linear approach, however like memory itself, the layered structure remains open to later reorganization and interpretation.
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“Memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstruction. Its new vocation is to record: delegating to the lieu de memorie the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, as a snake sheds its skin” - Pierre Nora (Nora, 13)

The connection between memory and responsibility has lessened in the modern world. The work of memory increasingly involves the creation of a built structure dedicated to the act of remembering, the construction of memorials. Philosophical justification for the design and building of these structures inserts the structures between the remembering individual and the memories. Pierre Nora persuasively argues that such memorials delegate the work of memory to buildings and ironically result in a kind of purposeful forgetting where memories are contained and left behind in memorials. Thus, some memorials allow their audiences to leave memories on the site and experience them at the convenience of the audience- a process completely divorced from an organic or personal experience of memory.

The purpose of any memorial is commemoration. But, both the philosophy of memory creation and the structures, the memorials themselves, have fallen short of incorporating audiences within the physicality of memory work. By exploring the fault lines between so-called collective and collected memories, the need for a more inclusive approach becomes clear. Architecture provides a route forward by allowing memorialization to build on pre-existing memories through physical structures that evolve with the communities they inhabit. Materialization of memory is thus uniquely possible through architectural design.
Conceputalizing Memory: Collective vs Collected Memories Within Groups and History

Collective Memory took theoretical shape in the 1980s with Maurice Halbwachs. Although the main ideas of collective memory have existed since the beginning of time, it really became a popular theory as a result of the nation state. Halbwachs argues that the ability to remember was not an internal process, but created by external stimuli. He emphasizes that there is a partial and incomplete nature to memories, and that we need groups to reawaken a series of memories. Within the group, we immerse ourselves and identify with the thoughts and concerns that are common within it. The group, a young generation of Berliners, creates a framework for collective memory. Halbwachs says that this ‘framework’ is essential to Collective Memory. He argues that remembrances, events and experiences that are of concern to the greatest number of members are fore-grounded, while those that concern less fade into the background. “Although it reflects and is refracted through the lives and personalities of individual group members, the Collective Memory represents the groups most stable and permanent element”. His theory is based on the idea that within these groups, people have different expertise or understanding of a particular memory and when put together, they find a commonality and complete memory. Collective Memory is based on small, scattered and indistinct bits of the past and it is an activity of reconstruction in the present rather than a resurrection of the past. Another important notion that Halbwachs establishes is the idea that eventually groups get older, and when this happens, their memories begin to erode and disappear, which allows him to conclude that memories really only last one hundred years, and then they become history. By providing a framework for this younger generational group that has not had firsthand experience with the memories that are attached to this particular site, there is the possibility of not only reconstruction, but also erosion and new collective memory that could become woven into the multitude of layers that already exist.

An element that Halbwachs does not touch on in depth, but is extremely important to this contemporary younger generation group, is how memory gathering has evolved; how it is collected and passed on in present day. Memory is no longer just a written story or an oral tradition, it is a constant and consistent overexposed to an overwhelming collection of mass media and multitude of mediums starting at a very young age. There are images, movies, narratives, audio recordings, and globalization in general that directly affects how this young group accumulates and exchanges memories. James E. Young calls it Collected Memory. It is sympathetic to Halbwachs fragmented idea of memory, but as the group comes together, Young argues that the memories will always be scattered fragments, whereas Halbwachs imagines that the fragments come together to create a single collective memory. Collective Memory appears to lean more on a direct experience (cross cueing or transactive) with the past for the purpose of memory reconstruction, and on this site only a few leftover ruins make the origin of these memories visibly accessible. It’s possible the younger generation could experience both, collective memory and collected memory on this site for two reasons. The first being that the types of memory that exist within the site are of such a wide range from cultural, political, educational, and environmental. They have different degrees of scale, severity, and even a variant in the period of absence and of presence. The second reason is the basic rationale that the nature of the proposed design is to move people through the site. Allowing them to travel continuously, to linger, or to pause for different durations of time, but still to situate the site itself as a transitional place where multiple memories reside, relate, and collide.

La Memoire Collective Maurice Halbwachs analyzes how collective memory can be shared, passed on and even constructed by groups. James Young investigates the idea of collected memory, and how a younger generation’s constant exposure to multimedia and images has changed how memories are understood and digested compared to the traditionally oral and written awareness. By questioning the role of the traditional memorial and their traditional sites, a methodology is constructed for uncovering the concealed urban narratives of a historical city. A methodology that uses the knowledge of a city’s many layers, collective and collected memory to reveal the materialization of lost traces and spaces. It is through a culmination of different types of memory theory that a cohesive architectural theory can begin to organize and determine thoughtful design potentials.
Fig. 5 Diagram/Study by Author
Philosophical Precedents

A-Classification of ‘Other’ Spaces and Everyday Life / Foucault

“A mirror is a utopia since it is the placeless place. In the mirror I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface... place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” - Michael Foucault

Heterotopia was defined by Michel Foucault in the 1960s as ‘other spaces’. It is a rich concept in urban design that describes a world off-center with respect to normal or everyday spaces, one that possesses multiple, fragmented, or even incompatible meanings. The theory of ‘other spaces’ for this was used by Foucault to explain his five principles of heterotopia. For the purposes of architecture and memorialization, Foucault's Principles Three, Four, and Five are important links between philosophy and the evolution of cities. His conceptualization of the ‘mirror’ as the ‘in between’ of utopias and heterotopias sets up a series of relationships between space and memory.

Foucault's writing on ‘other space’ and its place in the context of an evolving city states that all individuals live inside a set of relations that delineate sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another”. Foucault's theorization of space memory and relationships allow for a design process that showcases sets of relations according to particular memories from the site's past, and (rather then superimposing them), reveals their overlaps to create new interpretations.

Foucault’s Third Principle explains that the ‘other spaces’ are capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces. One location may thus have several ‘sites’ that are in themselves incompatible as a whole series of ‘other places’ that are also foreign to one another. This principle as applied to architectural design opens a physical space to dialogue between and within different memory juxtapositions that occur on a single physical location. These events in history can be juxtaposed against each other, and by thematically doing this the site can reveal many aspects that have been concealed.

Foucault’s Fourth Principle is that ‘other spaces’ are most often linked to slices in time. These slices are fragments at the core of the interventions that can occur on a site. In his fourth principle, Foucault touches on the problem of archiving. He theorizes that museums and libraries have become ‘other spaces’ in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit”.

The Fifth Principle is that contemporary ‘other spaces’ always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them at times, but also makes them accessible and penetrable. Foucault suggests that generalized ‘other spaces’ are not freely accessible, that an ‘other space’, a space in which the visitor is a guest in transit to the location. This thesis aims to reawaken spaces where inclusion is illusory. The history of the proposed site creates a reason for people to visit, while simultaneously acts as a temporary thoroughfare for city residents. Interventions into the site are more specifically determined when Foucault’s concept of ‘other spaces’ is considered within the cultural theory of ‘everyday life’. While Foucault focuses on physical spaces within an evolving city such as Berlin, ‘everyday life’ is about real life and the way individual choices and spontaneous interactions happen.
Fig. 5 Diagram/Study by Author on Other Spaces
The Investigation of Possibilities by Individuals/Certeau and Lefebvre

In contrast to Foucault, Certeau and Lefebvre “not only analyze the tyranny and controls that have imposed themselves on ‘everyday life’, but also explore the freedoms, joys and diversity” . Investigating the possibilities of ‘everyday life’ is essential to the design for this site. Certeau argues that ‘everyday life’ is about an individual’s appropriation of space. It is a combination of the everyday normative activities, but also understanding that there are activities that could occur that are part of the “here and now”. By thinking of the site as a series of thread-like catalysts, connecting points in the city fabric, walking or biking becomes the fundamental framework of experience. These “intertwined paths give shape to the space, and weave modern places into the strata of old places. Pedestrian movements form one of these real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city” . It is not enough to trace the operations of movement, a human’s paths and trajectories, because these surveys miss what was: the act itself of passing by. The everyday exemplifies ways in which the urban dweller carves out their individual existence, accounting for such actions already happening or wanting to occur on this site, and therefore this becomes a way to program the site without aggressively transforming it into something prescribed and foreign.

By layering different opacities of sliced memory on these already everyday paths, they can be woven into the younger generation group's daily experience and understanding of the site. As Certeau states, “demonstratives indicate the invisible identities of the visible: it is the very definition of a place, in fact, that it is composed by these series of displacements and effects among the fragmented strata that form it, and that it plays on these moving layers. It needs to be realized by people that the places they live in are the presences of diverse absences. Both heterotopias/other spaces' and everyday life together encourage for new forms of space located within a city.
Habitual Memory/ Nora

Nora's argues that our contemporary society is obsessed with the never-ending archive, so in trying to prevent this, the architectural design needs to archive itself; it creates a place that cannot be “itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages [...] an immobile place”, rather, a place where the archived items and memories and coexist with younger generation group experience. Since the design is focused on the site being a series of transitional places, there is a need to recognize memory theory as it relates to the experiential. The site will be used as a place for the younger generation group to move through the urban fabric of Berlin on a daily basis. Henri Bergson calls this Habit Memory. It’s the idea that memory accumulates in the body so that the past comes to be relived or re-enacted in the present. It doesn’t mean the experience is identical to the past, but it’s essentially a repetitive behavior, a posture, a gesture, a ritual, a recurring bodily movement or performance. Paul Connerton concurs with Bergson by stating that this is one way collective memories can be passed on within a group from one generation to the next. It is a reliance on the body that he calls “Embodied Memory” and there are two types. Inscribing, which includes all activities, which are helpful for storing and retrieving information such as photographing, writing, taping etc. The second is Incorporating, which implies skilled performances of physical activity, like the spoken word or a handshake. The performances have an unconscious style to them, and seem more authentic than things that are inscribed. Even though this authenticity may be true, for the younger generation group of Berlin, inscription is a key necessity, because for them, as Pierre Nora points out, the memory is no longer experienced from within; it is therefore reliant upon an external support or a tangible reminder. Inscription becomes particularly important in the next discussion, which is archiving.

Since the design investigation is focused on the site being a series of transitional places, there is a need to recognize memory theory as it relates to experience. The site will be used as a place for the younger generation group to move through the urban fabric of Berlin on a daily basis. Henri Bergson has a theory relating to this called Habit Memory, the idea that memory accumulates in the body so that the past comes to be relived or re-enacted in the present. It’s essentially a repetitive behavior, a position, a gesture, a ritual, a cyclical bodily movement or performance. Paul Connerton concurs with Bergson by stating that this is one way collective memories can be passed on within a group from one generation to the next.

Pierre Nora distinction between memory and history is similar to the distinction between incorporation and inscription. He says there is “true memory”, which is the unselfconscious memory practices, similar to incorporating. Then in contrast, there is “modern memory”. It is transformed by its route through history, is associated with writing. It is this “external prop or tangible reminder, and this is why archiving has become a contemporary obsession, which has proliferated beyond our control”. It is true, society today archives every little thing, and everything that is brought to a memorial is documented. “We attempt to preserve not only all of the past but all of the present as well”, and “we refrain from destroying anything and put everything in archives instead”. It creates what Nora calls a “hypertrophy of memory” which is an association of archiving with forgetting not remembering. He states, “in depositing material in the archive, we are also delegating the responsibility for remembering. Discarding our memories as a snake deposits its shed skin”. The design for this site is to bring to an end the notion that “instead of dwelling among our memories, we now consecrate sites to them, displaying a deliberate will to remember”. The objective is to cut out the middleman, to let the site archive itself through new technologies. If archiving is a modern obsession and a complex organization, let modern technology take this burden away from the site representatives, and let it be embedded within the design as to not distract or take the position of remembering for the young generation group of Berlin.
A Brief History of Built Memories

The premise of this proposed thesis is that people will always have a need to memorialize. Memorializing has been done since the beginning of time, and will continue into the future. The way societies have memorialized has changed and evolved overtime. By breaking down these distinctive types of memorials, this design investigation can situate itself as a new typology of memorial.
trope

George Hersey defines trope as “a word or phrase used in a sense other than that which is proper to it” (The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture). A trophy, which comes from the word trope, was originally erected at the point on the battlefield where the tide turned (Lost (Meaning of Classical Architecture, Hersey). Their deaths were thus, “turned”, “troped”, from murders into sacrifices (Hersey). Tropes are objects of permanence, and defining a group of people. They have a singular meaning and are for the collective group. An example is the Brandenburg Gate that is just a few blocks north of the site of investigation. It was built in the late 18th century as a trope in the form of a gate. It represented peace after the thirty-year war.

absent memorial/counter-monument

These types of memorials are contemporary. They are “brazen, self-conscious memorial spaces are conceived to challenge the very premises of their being” (Young). The counter-monument tries to create forms that push back against conventional ideas of memorials. There design is focused on void, unlike the trope, which is about object. The emphasis is void but to have that void there are some elements of object to illustrate the absence. These memorials are for a singular event and permanent, similar to the tropes, but the approach is that the counter-monument itself is more flexible for individual interpretation. These memorials are about a redefinition of a group, but through the experience of an individual. The most famous example of this type of memorial is Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial. It was designed to be a cut or a scar in the earth. Aschrott's Fountain in Kassel, Germany, is another example of an absent memorial. It is an actual negative form monument, a literal counter-monument. The original fountain was built in the style of neo-gothic pyramid. Hoheisel had the idea to sink the pyramidal shape down into the square, so that it was physically not very visible, and the visitor became the monument standing above it, looking down into the earth to see the memorial. It is quite literally a counter-monument. Just one block north of the proposed thesis site is another important example of an absent memorial. It is Peter Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. It is a 19,000 square meter (about 4.6 acres) site covered with 2,711 concrete slabs (Eisenman). These slabs are arranged in a grid pattern and on a sloping site. The slabs are 7' 10" long and 3' 1" wide and their heights range from 8" to 15' 9" (Eisenman.). According to the texts Eisenman wrote about the project, the site is suppose to create an uneasy and confusing atmosphere (Eisenman). It is a memorial of absence, but creates this by an object and void relationship. From primary observation there are many types of experiences that can occur: some people spend time walking through the rows, some become deeply emotional, others walk the peripheral, kids run through chasing each other, and others just walk right by it.
non-constructed memorial
The non-constructed memorial is something that has always been part of society. It is not a contemporary invention, rather a type that has existed parallel to the more dominant memorials types of tropes and counter-monuments. Non-constructed memorials are recurring. They are received, accumulated, and accidental. They tend to be more focused on singular events that affect a smaller group. These memorials are what Halbwachs would describe as “background”, because they typically do not affect the majority of a group and are therefore not a fore-grounded collective memory. Instead of being a node in the urban fabric of a city, like tropes and counter-monuments, a non-constructed memorial requires a map. An example of a non-constructed memorial is one that is maybe placed by an individual for instance the crosses that are placed next to the freeway. Another example is what happened to the front of Apple Stores across the world on the day Steve Jobs died. Large, unplanned, non-constructed memorials of post-its and apples covered the entire facades of these stores. This memorial type is still a relevant and important type of memorial it is just not commissioned like most of the ‘trope memorials’ and ‘absent memorials’.

non-permanent memorial
The non-permanent memorial is changeable. It begins to question the idea of contribution. It is unknown exactly if these are designed for the group or individual, and also if it is about the object or the void. It is evident that the non-permanent memorial provides fewer answers. An example of a memorial that could potentially be considered a non-permanent memorial is the Monument Against Fascism in Hamburg by Esther and Jochen Gerz. It is twelve-meter tall soft lead column set in a pedestrian shopping mall. The idea was to interact with the visitors so they are able to add their names and draw on the soft lead. The column lowered over a five-year period, and eventually disappeared completely into the ground. This disappearance it would in effect return the burden of memory to visitors, it even says at the base: “in the end it is only we ourselves that can rise up against injustice”(Young).
The Fragmented Memorial: A New Typology

The modern theory of memory is the Fragmented Memorial. The Fragmented Memorial is a hybrid form of memory because it is both collective and collected. The Fragmented Memorial is the next comprehensive step in the evolution of memorial design. The ‘trope memorial’ evolved into the ‘absent memorial’ (counter-monument), and now the ‘absent memorial’ will evolve into a new type that will be identified as the Fragmented Memorial. The Fragmented Memorial not only addresses the weaknesses of tropes and counter-monuments, but it provides an entirely new approach for how a younger generation group can comprehend the memories of its country's past.

The first objective is to address what is being memorialized. Instead of being a memorial to a single event or for a single group, the Fragmented Memorial memorializes multiple events that have a multiplicity of readings. The Fragmented Memorial plunges into the jumbled and untidy layers of memory with the ambition of uncovering the true realities of a single site.

The trope is the one-liner of memorials. It informs and appoints the individual and groups exactly what to think. The counter-monument is so open-ended for interpretation that it has the potential to put all the drudgery on the individual, which creates an entire, and sometimes unnecessary, spectrum of results. Therefore the second objective to this new typology is to design a memorial that balances between these two extremes. By allowing the design of this Fragmented Memorial to have a mixture of tropes and counter-monuments stability is realized; a framework that generates the opportunity for even non-permanent and non-constructed memorials to transpire or materialize on the same site.

The third objective is that the Fragmented Memorial will not be experienced like ‘trope memorials’ and ‘absent memorials’. These types of already existing memorials engaged with people and the urban fabric in certain established ways. With both these types, there is typically a clear threshold that is being crossed. The visitor noticeably goes from common ground to sacred ground. This threshold comes in many different forms, but it is undeniable that the treatment while approaching these tropes or counter-monuments does make you aware. These are places that people go to visit once or go to as part of a ritual. They are often awe-inspiring and are visibly permanent. The Fragmented Memorial pulls away from these previous models. To evolve, it coexists with the ‘everyday life’. The objective is to blur the edges of the memorial site into the already existing urban fabric. It works with Foucault’s idea of providing the spectator (visitor) the ability to be mobile rather than having a singular normative experience. The weaving of the memorial into the ‘everyday life’ of the younger generation, can then give new and innovative sets of relations to the visitor experiencing the site. It becomes a memorial that exists in the ‘here and now’, rather than a memorial that rips the visitor out of the life world, shares a particular memory, and then spits them back out onto the streets of the city.

The last objective for the Fragmented Memorial is to fix the archiving dilemma most memorials have currently. ‘Trope memorials’, ‘absent memorials’, non-constructed and non-permanent memorials all have issues with archiving. Using a variety of systems, they document all the items that are left on site like flowers, cards, and stuffed animals. Many of them also have some sort of book that you sign as you enter or leave to record who has been there. The problem with archiving all of this is that it becomes an additional layer to the memorial that is not always anticipated. It requires a ton of time to document every single item that is left at these places. For example Maya Lin’s Vietnam memorial has an entire archive building dedicated just to all the items that have been left there and they are organized by name and year. The Fragmented Memorial will make this process more efficient with technology. It does this by documenting the visitor through interactive real-time ways, and creating places that embrace and accept the items the visitor wants to leave there. The Fragmented Memorial makes itself a quiet archivist as well as an opportunity for the younger generation to reflect and interpret how and why we are a society obsessed with archiving.
LAYER II- EVOKING CITY MEMORY: THE FRAGMENTED MEMORIAL WITHIN THE FRAGMENTED CITY

Introduction

The site of investigation is located in downtown Berlin. Currently, it exists as a memorial entitled “Topography of Terror”. Complexity and interaction are the ghosts of all cities, but Berlin is unique. It has a heightened sense of recent traumatic history and memory that is still part of the consciousness of the current generation. This particular site is charged with a very rich and complex history of memories. To design this Fragmented Memorial, three sets of specific memories will be brought into focus-threshold, void, and structure.

Layers

A - Void: Lost Memories

The site of investigation was where the Gestapo headquarters, the Nazi Security Service, and the Reich Security main office were located from 1933 until 1945. The Nazis took over the buildings that already existed on the site. The Gestapo moved into the School of Industrial Arts and Crafts. The Security Service moved into the Hotel Prinz-Albrecht. The Reich Security main office moved into the Prinz-Albrecht Palais. This layer is being revealed for its international recognition and historic importance. There are many memories that were associated with this site at that time during World War II. It was said that this was the most feared address in all of Europe. It was where the Nazi regime gave its orders for the concentration camps and the final solution. It was where political prisoners were tortured and killed in the basement prison cells. These powerhouses of the Nazi Regime represented complete rule, complete control, and what they believed was lawfulness.

The second memory related to void is that of Harry Toste’s Autodrom. From 1965 until 1980, this site was completely overgrown. The leaseholder, Harry Toste, was a local celebrity transvestite. He fenced the entire property in, and then created a few amateur tracks through the overgrowth. The tracks were made so that young German children who didn’t have their driver’s license yet, could have an opportunity to drive. It was a local attraction and functioning space for 15 years. Part of the site still has the original driving paths. It was a site of lawlessness.

B- Threshold

The third memory is the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Berlin Wall was built along the entire northern edge of the site. This memory could is still be considered a fresh wound in the eyes of a younger generation in Berlin. It was the division of a modern city, and a wound that will perhaps never be completely covered up. This site went from being at the heart of Berlin and a significant location in the urban fabric, to the most outside edge of West Berlin. It existed as a vacant site with squatters and construction material gathered. In 1980, the citizens of West Berlin rediscovered the site as not only a site of the Nazi perpetrators, but also a site of German resistance. In 1987, West Berliners decided to put up a temporary exhibit on the site for the 750th anniversary of Berlin. It was then that they discovered the basement prison cells from the Gestapo headquarters, and uncovered them. Two years later, Germany was unified, and the site was swallowed back into the belly of the city.
The Temporary Exhibit that started when Berlin was still divided is the fourth memory. The exhibit was in place from 1987 until 2002. Fifteen years is quite an extensive time to have a temporary exhibit. This clearly speaks to the contamination of the site, and how significant the design of the permanent memorial and exhibit were to the city. It also addresses the fact that after World War II ended in 1945; forty-two years had gone by before the first steps were taken to memorialize the perpetrators.

The fifth memory is the design competition held in 1992 for the design of a memorial consisting of documentation center, and open-air museum. The competition winner was Peter Zumthor. In 1994 they constructed the buildings shear walls. These were left there until 2004. In 2004, the shear walls were taken down due to the financial costs that the building design was amounting to. In 2006 there was another competition for the site and Architect Ursula Wilms and landscape architect Heinz Hallman won.

The sixth memory is vacancy. For extended amounts of time this site has been left vacant. It is a memory that is recurring due to the complex nature and contamination that exists within the site. The vacancy is as vital as the other five memories, but in an atypical way. It is a reflection of what German society during those time periods thought about memory.

C- Structure: Built History

One issue is the location of where the program will be on the site. It is important to analyze the structural and built history of the site juxtaposing the paths that the younger generation could use across the site in their everyday lives. By analyzing the old building styles, materials, and footprints they create a potential palette to the inscription of the new ‘fragmented memorial’.

The first building that existed on the site was Prince Albrecht Palais. It was a Rococo palace built in 1739 by Frederick William I of Prussia (Britannica). It was to serve as a residence for the French Baron at the time. It was built on the boggy grounds in southern Freidrichstadt (now known as Berlin). In 1830, it was acquired by Prince Albert of Prussia (Britannica). He had the palace remodeled as his residence by Karl Friedrich Schinkel. He also had Peter Joseph Lenne design a surrounding park, including a riding stable and an ice rink open to the public. In 1926 the large Europahaus was built butting up against the gardens. This building currently exists on the block. The palace was rented by the German government and used as a guesthouse for international political visitors. In 1933 it was taken over by the Nazi Regime, heavily bombed in 1945, and eventually the ruins were completely ruined in 1955.

The Gestapo headquarters took over the School of Industrial Arts and Crafts in 1933. The school was originally the extension of the Museum of Decorative Arts built in 1905. There are not many photographs of the interior, but from the exterior it is clear that it was built in a neoclassical style in brick. This building was adjacent to the Martin-Gropius-Bau, which still exists. It is the historic museum of applied arts. The Martin-Gropius-Bau Museum was erected in 1877 by Martin Gropius (the great uncle of Walter Gropius) and Heino Schmieden. It was designed in the neo-renaissance style (Britannica). The building has a quadratic footprint with an atrium in the center decorated in mosaics and the coats of arm of the German states by sculptor Otto Lessing. After World War II, these buildings were in ruins. They were just skeletons of what previously existed. They eventually knocked down the buildings and left piles of remains.

The Berlin Wall is not technically a building, but it was a structure that held the north edge of the proposed site. It was 11’6” tall, and made in concrete segments of 4 feet (Britannica). A piece of the wall still runs the north edge of the site, although it is not the piece that actually existed on the site. It is the second longest piece left of the Berlin Wall.

The Temporary Exhibit that was on the site for twenty years was a wooden structure. In incorporated some trees that existed on the site already, but it was a structure that overtime start to deteriorate because it was exposed to the environmental elements. Thus, the Temporary Exhibit created an experience of the built site decaying into the earth.
D- A Note on Discarded Architectural Memory: Peter Zumthor’s Competition Design

“My first reaction, when I saw the place for the first time, was that it was actually such a terrible thing that had happened there that I couldn’t do a building there.” (A+U).

It is important to note that the most comprehensive modern study of the Berlin site was never implemented. Peter Zumthor competition design has become a discarded memory of location. Despite the designs clear connection to the site, only the barest trace of the projects exterior walls ever came to fruition. Pete won the competition in 1992. His design was never erected due to the cost of construction. The only elements that were built were the shear walls, which they were left untouched on the site for ten years.

Zumthor said, “eventually he came to the conclusion that it was okay that the Germans wanted a building there, that this building was actually very important. “I think it’s really good that on this place, right there where it happened- it was the most terrible address in Europe at that time, Prinz-Albrecht Strasse 9, Gestapo headquarters, that in this place there will be shown something, the remnant, so that this doesn’t get forgotten.” (A+U). He decided that he would have to invent a new typology that “would resist all existing typologies” (A+U). It would be “a building which would be close to the ground, close to the earth, a building which would be almost a little bit uncomfortable” (A+U).

From the drawings this building looks very stark, cold and tough, but Zumthor continued to imagine that it would actually be a soft building (A+U). “The light will make it soft and it will have really nice calm soft spaces […] it should be meditative for the most part.” (A+U). He felt strongly that the building “should not reflect cruelty and terror. This doesn’t work for me. The actual place and the documents the building houses will do that instead […] it will bring it all into balance” (A+U).

This balance is most visible in the construction of the building. Zumthor wanted “ a building that would be pure construction, only construction; a building which would be as abstract as possible to resist being typed and all this normalcy” (A+U). The way the building touches the ground can be described as a big fence. And within this, which defines a long rectangular shape, within this fence is another fence that houses the excavation. Since this building is pure structure, there is no way to subtract a single post. Zumthor states, “we fight with the engineer sometimes to take a post out somewhere, but he needs them all. You cannot take anything away. This allows for the building surface to be made up of 50% glass (A+U). These structural “fences” are made of concrete. Zumthor says, “I think of concrete as artificial stone. It was always concrete. No tree is large enough, and steel would make it begin to look like a factory” (A+U). The structure serves as a framework and then he add layers – floor, glass and so on, but always clearly added and open (A+U). The ground is made up of hardened gravel, and that gravel moves inside from the exterior area around the building. It becomes the actual flooring. This construction noticeably affects the climate and environment of the space. The building is “transparent and you will see the life inside the building. Probably not only at night, certainly at night, but also at day you somehow will feel it” (A+U).

Zumthor said “the two layers of light filters, this double fence, will I think do this. Imagine it as a long perspective, with no view outside, except for the immediate view where you are standing” (A+U). “When your gaze goes off obliquely you don’t see out anymore. So you always have this one specific kind of view as you go through the 130 meter length of it” (A+U). Zumthor also talks about light and shadow being created by the “hills, these mounds, moments from the war which will create shadows in there” (A+U) Unfortunately, these mounds and hills of ruin that Zumthor discusses no longer exist on the site. It was completely flattened in 2004. There would not have been heat in the exhibition. Zumthor stated that there will be heat for the people that work on the upper floor, but visitors on the ground level will not receive climate control, to allow for the building to vary with the current weather. The ground level will most likely profit from waste heat. “The windowpanes are just ordinary glass, just one 19 mm thick glass so that you don’t have condensation. The whole energy system allows for completely exposed superstructure, inside and outside. There won’t be any cladding or anything. The glass fills the gaps between the concrete structures.” (A+U).
As for the documentation display within the structure, Zumthor emphasizes an unmediated experience. He argues that a document doesn't need to be reduced or blown up, with a gold frame around it. He says, “I want to deal with reality and not with something didactically prepared. This is the place, the place is reality, and I want to see the documents one to one” (A+U) He fought against historians that wanted to give the documents an order, by saying “if you are lazy and want everything prepared for you in this way, you might find out that you never experienced reality” (A+U). His idea for the document display was to place every single one in an enclosed horizontal table that touches the ground. The idea was that you don’t have to go and look at all of them. Maybe you go down one aisle or a few, but it is really more important that you look 80 meters deep in space and with a lot of tables and documents, and this overview of how many there are, that gives you a consciousness of what they did there.

Zumthor wants the building to start abstract, and “the closer you come the more it turns into architecture, the most transparent it gets until finally you are in … body contact with the building” (A+U). The visitor will see the construction, they will see the floors and they will always see in. He says,” It has these small irregularities, where you read floors and voids. Suddenly you see this […] And then a few details some from the glass which fills in between the gaps.” (A+U). These details create the architecture. Nothing hangs from the ceiling, nothing connects to the tables, which are on the ground, and this makes it evident that this double-fence-like building is something carefully placed over these documents, a protective structure (A+U). Zumthor doesn’t want visitors to be reminded of any other buildings they have seen before, and if it does this successfully, “it will become so empty of pre-existing typological models and forms, it will become a symbol” (A+U).

From Terre to Terror: A Site Built on Controversy

The current building on the site is the Documentation Center and the open-air museum. The open-air museum is exactly where the previous temporary exhibit was, running along the north part of the site, but now the construction is of steel and glass. A field of large grey rocks surrounds the documentation building. In the center of the building there is an atrium with a low water feature. The building is made up of small gray steel vertical louvers. The documentation center is a perfect square that is 800 square meters. It has two floors, but it one story high from ground level. The floor at ground level is dedicated to temporary exhibits. It has a small café and a 200-person auditorium in the back. The floor below this is where the archive is located. It has a library currently holds 29,000 volumes, 120 current periodicals, and 100 complete periodicals. The collection focuses on subjects generally related to the SS, Gestapo, and police during National Socialism. Other subjects include the state and society under National Socialism, the persecution and murder of the European Jews and other victim groups, the Second World War, judicial prosecution of Nazi Crimes, commemoration and memorialization.

The Topography of Terror is the quintessential example of a site that requires the question: How do you document evil without building a monument to it? “Ursula Wilms with Heinle, Wischer and Partners have designed an anti-monument of sorts. A box ensconced in a gunmetal gray skin, it crouches low to the earth, ghost-like, practically fading into the Berlin landscape.” (Fast Company Mag.) It’s located where the Gestapo was held, where Heinrich Himmler gave the go ahead to kill millions of Jews.
1918
World War I ends

1737
Prinz Albrecht Palais built for King Frederick William I of Prussia

1919
School of Industrial Arts and Crafts is established

1933
Gestapo headquarters moves into School of Industrial Arts and Crafts

1934
Security Service (SD) of the SS and SS Leadership moved into the Hotel Prinz Albrecht

1914
1939
Reich Security Main Office moves into Prinz Albercht Palais

1945
Entire site bombed to ruins by allied forces. World War II

1949
Authorities begin to demolish the war bombed buildings

1956
Finish demolition the war bombed buildings

1961
North edge of site completely bordered by Berlin Wall. Site has squatters until it is fenced in
1965
Site used as an Autodrome. The leaseholder of the site is Harry Toste, a local celebrated transvestite. The whole site is fenced in, and left overgrown. He creates a few amateur tracks through this overgrowth to provide an opportunity for people without a licence to drive.

1980
Left-wing citizens group rediscover the site, not only as a place where the perpetrators planned the Holocaust but also as a site of the German resistance.

1987
Temporary exhibit put in place for the 750th anniversary of Berlin. Displays the cellar of the Gestapo headquarters, where many political prisoners were tortured and
1990
Reunification of Germany

1992
Peter Zumthor wins competition for memorial/museum design

2004
Took down the shear walls and discontinued Peter Zumthor’s design construction due to cost

2006
Ursula Wilms and Heinz Hallman win competition

2010
New building and site open to the public
LAYEIII - TRACES

Introduction

To trace an object is an act by nature, malleable, changeable. However trace also has the secondary meaning and connotation of a pathway. Thus a trace can link two spaces. The term traces has also come to signify what is left behind. In the city center of Berlin, Germany there is a site where layer upon layer of urban memory has controversially lain fallow formed the site of construction and most recently become the site of memorial. Uniquely, this site is also situated as a natural threshold for current residents of the city Traces

Architectural Precedents

Neue Wache (New GuardHouse) building was built in 1816 by Karl Frederich Shinkel, and the reason this building is controversial is because in its history it was used as a memorial many times in its lifetime. It started as a building for the Palace Guards, but from 1870-1914 it had only ceremonial use and WWI mobilization order, In 1933, it was renamed Reichsehrenmal (WWII) and was used by the Nazis for fallen generals. In 1962 the GDR rededicated it “To the Victims of Fascism and Militarism”. In 1945 it had a statue of Wilhelm I with the goddess of victory on top, but US troops shot it off and it was rebuilt in 1993. It is now a memorial for victims, but the timeline of the building brings up interesting questions of how important reconciling with the history of the place is? This precise building has, in its history, given its dedication both sides.

Aschrott's Fountain in Kassel, Germany is an actual negative form monument, a literal counter monument. The original fountain was known as "Jew's Fountain" and was demolished by the Nazis in World War II. The memorial was designed by the artist Horst Hoheisel in 1987. The original fountain was built in the style of neo-gothic pyramid. Hoheisel had the idea to sink the pyramidal shape down into the square, so that it was physically not very visible, and the visitor became the monument standing above it, looking down into the earth to see the memorial. It is quite literally a counter-monument.
“The Monument Against Fascism and War” by the artist couple Jochen Gerz and Esther Shaley-Gerz is another important architectural precedent. At first glance, this monument looks like a traditional monument in its column-like character, however it is not. The artists invite all visitors and passer-bys to write anything they want on it. Every year it is lowered another foot (12 meters tall) into the ground until it completely vanishes. This project is appealing because it changes over time and is interactive. It explores the idea of the temporarily visible structures, a monument that physically does not last forever like most buildings, a “disappearing monument”.

Studying these precedents and the earlier mentioned written works will lead to a better understanding and an ability to investigate the idea of the counter-monument, and identify potential ways to care for controversial sites in Berlin, Germany.

In order to understand the design, movement and psychology of the counter-monument I will study specific monuments that might “qualify” as counter-monuments. I will be able to implement a strategic approach that perhaps will lead to a language that could be applied to controversial memorials of many circumstances. I want to create a way of suggesting that perhaps the reasons there are counter-monuments is due to: 1. the artist or architect not being primarily effected by the event that occurred, 2. A controversial site cannot be addressed in the same way that a traditional one-sided site is, and 3. That it is a result of the way people deal with memories and remembering divisive situations.

The artist or architect may be from generations after the actual event occurred, so potentially the counter-monument is the result of a disengagement, a less visual monument then before, almost so self-conscious as to blend in with the landscape. A controversial site cannot be addressed with an obelisk or a statue,
Site Context
Design/ Paths of Revealing

Providing the younger generation with places of temporary relaxation as they pass through the site. Using these moments to reveal memorial elements. A program that is in constant dialogue with the site. Taking into account the cultural, social, physical, memorial and historical forces all at once. The new building provides the Topography of Terror Foundation with the opportunity to intensify its research and seminar activity. An auditorium seating 200 and several lecture rooms offer space for conferences and workshops. The specialized library with 27,000 media items is finally housed in appropriate premises with optimally equipped workstations. There is also room for temporary exhibitions; one of the first ones will deal with the Litzmannstadt ghetto in Łódź, Poland.

The outdoor area will also be used as an exhibition again, with a covered space along the Gestapo cellars providing information on the history of Berlin during the Nazi era. One focus is on how the Nazi regime brought massive changes to the cityscape. Another is the impact of Gestapo and SS terror on freedom of action in everyday life. Examples show that besides denunciation and betrayal, there was also civil courage and humanity.

Except for the few historical traces, the walkways and some benches, the outdoor area is kept uncluttered with a simple gray stone field - in line with the unpretentious architecture of the pavilion. According to Nachama, this form of design was appropriate for the site. After 23 years, he believes the project has come to a successful conclusion, something he says he had long stopped expecting. In the 1990s, construction work for the documentation center had started based on the ambitious design of Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. Due to financial and technical problems, however, its construction was suspended and the parts already built were demolished in 2004.

In recent years the Topography of Terror site has attracted more than 500,000 visitors annually. Presumably this number will rise with the opening of the new building. The city’s “open wound” is no longer a gaping symbol of suppression and forgetting. Instead, the Prinz-Albrecht site has developed into a place of remembering and coming to terms with the past, a place that can help to heal old wounds.
Path A - B – The Gestapo Basement Cells and Farmer’s Market

The third juxtaposition is the site being at the center of the city, and then also being at the edge. This juxtaposition is a relationship among the construction of the Berlin Wall, and then it’s demolition. The site was really at the heart of Berlin during World War II. At the end of World War II it was heavily bombed because it was covered with the main government buildings of the Nazi Regime. While the site was still in ruins, and lay vacant, the Russians decided to build the Berlin Wall. The site was quickly transformed from a focus in the middle of a large metropolis, to a fringe squatter site. The treatment to the site became so different, it no longer had hundreds of people on it a day. It no longer had an address that caused fear. It became no place. It became a slum site. It even had to be rediscovered because it has changed so much.

The north edge of the site is already the temporary now permanent exhibit space and it runs along the Berlin Wall reminisce. This pathway is supposed to take you along the open-air exhibit and mirroring it on the other side the program of a farmer’s market with equivalent sized stalls to the prison cell walls from the Gestapo headquarters. This is supposed to no longer be a place that a visitor comes once, but comes on a weekly basis, a center for the city. The comparison of getting your fruits or flowers and turning around and being confronted with the prison cells of the Gestapo headquarters. A place that is habitually visited but also reflects the past.
Path C-D Documentation Center/Library and Outdoor Seating, Cafe

The second juxtaposition is the natural, untamed, overgrown Autodrom and the “object in a landscape” design that exist on the site now. Harry Toste did not provide any upkeep for the site when it was an Autodrom. The site returned to a state of being that was completely engulfed by nature. There were all types of plants, trees, and wildlife. Juxtapose that with Ursula Wilms and Hallman’s design. The entire site is covered in grey rock. The documentation center sits within an enormous field of grey rocks. The landscape has become entirely tamed and requires upkeep. The landscape is unnatural, and the building sits like an object in the landscape. You are allowed to walk across this landscape, but no visitors ever do. It seem so unnatural and in some ways too pristine to touch.

This pathway leads you directly into the documentation center library, which is on the lower floor of the Documentation Center. It slowly cuts into the grey rock that surrounds the site, and emerss the person in the stark landscape. When the visitor gets close to the building they can continue through or pause and have a coffee, or explore the library and some outdoor spaces to sit and read.
Path G-H Car Pathway and Political Prison Cells

The first juxtaposition is lawfulness and lawlessness. Lawfulness relates to the Nazi Regime. They created a very strict set of rules that everyone in society had to live by. These rules were never to be broken, and if they were the punishment was most likely death. The Nazi regime is the quintessential example of a dictatorship. Adolf Hitler had complete control of this site. They believed their law to be true and the only option. Juxtapose this regime with Harry Toste’s Autodrom. The Autodrom was designed for breaking the law. Underage kids with no licenses were set free on the same site where the Gestapo headquarters once was, to cruise the overgrown manmade roads. Harry Toste was in charge of the site, and he was as free and lawless as it. He was a blond transvestite club owner that barely took care of this site he was leasing on the outskirts of the alternative neighborhood of Kreuzberg (the Berlin Wall was still up). The premise of the Autodrom he created was all about liberty and lawlessness.

There would be a large benefit in bringing cars across this site, mainly for city traffic reasons. This path would cut under the site, and below the prison cell walls that exist on the back side of the site. This area would have to be reinforced underneath and viewed from above, but when cars went through the light coming through the original walls should allow for an element of curiosity and discover of what is above. It is bringing the memory into the habits of the younger generation in Berlin and overtime this lighting, that changed during the day could slowly reveal itself for what it really is, which are political prisoner cells from World War II.
Main Path - E-F – 100 years of TRACES

The fourth is the juxtaposition of the competitions and the Temporary Exhibit. The competitions were very time consuming. Like many of the memorial sites in Berlin, there are extensive panels, consultants, principals, and philosophies on how they should be done. This site was actually a little behind the times compared to the other sites near it that were of similar scale, like Peter Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. What is unique about this particular site investigation is that the Temporary Exhibit existed on the site for fifteen years. Fifteen years really can seem almost permanent. It is interesting that the Temporary Exhibit actually lasted longer than Peter Zumthor’s design.

This particular path has been developed into a string of steps and paths that correlate directly with the amount of years on the site where there were time periods of stagnation and when there were times of temporary and permanent exhibits. This path represents the most controversial elements of the site, the mixing of layers and the issue of contamination and not knowing what to do with the memories that lie there. This path is treated chronologically in years, but the actually activities and pause areas and mixed and matched, just like the layers of the site. They do not reveal themselves in direct coordination with the physical path, but instead are related to a time and place on the site, but as strata you would stumble upon. The site is being used by the younger generations, therefore it is important to reveal these layers of the sites over time, and not through direct plaques or signs saying what happened where, but with more subtle moves through earthworks and related program.


Yoshida, Nobuyuki. A+U Extra Edition: Peter Zumthor