

An aerial photograph of Berlin, Germany, showing a dense urban landscape with a grid of streets and various buildings. The Spree River is visible winding through the city. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## II. Introduction: Berlin, Germany

Modern Berlin is a rudimentary labyrinth of experiences in search of an identity. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the city overnight acquired the advantage to rediscover itself. Communist governments fell throughout Eastern Europe, and Berlin found itself in a unique position, straddling the border of two distinct but no longer separate realms. Suddenly, it became a gateway: the gateway between East and West. Yet contemporaneously, its two halves were forced to merge, constituting a complex, decentralized metropolis. Clearly, the duty of joining together the twin cities is confirming to be an arduous one. High unemployment rates, sky rocketing rents, and Berlin's notorious regard as a permanent construction site have conspired contrary to the Berliner's excitement of reestablishing their city as one of the continents most distinguished cultural and political centers.

While Berlin no longer maintains the apocalyptic intensity thrust upon it by the immediate danger of the Cold War, it nevertheless continues to thrive off its omnipresent and chaotic uncertainty toward the future. The threat of nuclear holocaust taught Berliners to live like there was no tomorrow, and this inclination for short sighted excess continues to reveal itself in all aspects of the city's existence, from its ridiculously grandiose buildings to the party till dawn atmosphere that predominates in its smoky nightclubs.

Berlin is not pleasing to the eye; it has neither the architectural glory of Paris nor the densely packed buildings of New York. For now, Berlin is an intricate jumble of GDR apartment blocks and designer boutiques, decaying prewar buildings pock marked with bullet holes and gleaming, yet empty, office complexes. But the occasional melancholy of the city's tumultuous past is counteracted by the exhilaration of being on the cutting edge. In short, Berlin is a city of contradictions.

## III. Orientation: Consolidated Berlin

Berlin is a vast aggregation of two once separate cities: the former East, accommodating most of Berlin's landmarks, historic sites and concrete socialist architectural monstrosities, and the former West, which had the role for decades as a secluded allied protectorate. Western Berlin continues to be the commercial center of consolidated Berlin, however this is transforming zealously as companies and embassies move their headquarters to Potsdamer Platz and Mitte.

Western Berlin's commercial district lies at one end of the huge Tiergarten Park, centering on Bahnhof Zoo and Kurfurstendamm, and marked by the bombed out Kaiser Wilhelm Gedachtniskirche next to the box like tower of the Europa Center. The grand tree lined strasse des 17 Juni runs west to east through the Tiergarten and ends at the triumphant Brandenburger Tor opening onto Pariser Platz, a site of landmark public addresses. Heading south from the Brandenburg Gate and nearby Reichstag, Ebertstrasse runs haphazardly through the construction sites to Potsdamer Platz. Toward the East the gate opens onto Unter den Linden, Berlin's most famous boulevard, which in turn empties into socialist realist Alexanderplatz, center of the East's growing commercial district and the home of Berlin's most visible landmark, the fernseturm. Southeast of Mitte lies the eclectic Kruezberg district, a newly central former fringe neighborhood. The Spree River snakes its way from west to east through the center of Berlin, forming the northern border of the Tiergarten and splitting just east of Unter den Linden to close off the Museumsinsel; Eastern Berlin's cultural epicenter.



#### **IV. Situation: Former Friedrichstrasse Passage, Scheunenviertel District**

The site is in the former East, North of the old spine of Berlin, Unter den Linden and is an example of this ever prevalent contradiction. Northwest of Alexanderplatz, lies the Scheunenviertel, once the center of Berlin's Orthodox Jewish Community. Prior to WWII, Berlin never had any ghettos. Jews lived throughout the city, though during the war they were deported to ghettos in Poland. Wealthier and more assimilated Jews tended to live in Western Berlin while more Orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe settled in the Scheunenviertel. Today Oranienburger Strasse and the Scheunenviertel are better known for their outdoor cafes and punk clubs than for their historical significance as Berlin's Jewish Center. This leads directly to the site which is the adjacent courtyard of the Tacheles. In 1990, young artists occupied the ruin of the old department store, then facing demolition, and founded the Kunsthaus Tacheles a cultural center. The former "Friedrichstrasse Passage" built in 1909, linked Friedrichstrasse with Oranienburger Strasse and was one of the most important shopping arcades in Berlin, along with the Kaisergallery. The destruction of Berlin's thriving Jewish Community by the Nazi's left a great void in the cultural and commercial life of the city. The heart of this community was around Oranienburger Strasse and the Scheunenviertel District.

#### **V. Intervention: A Theater**

"...to create order out of the hopeless confusion of our days."

From Mies van der Rohe's inaugural lecture at the Armour Institute of Technology, Chicago, in 1938, when he presents the "path from material through purpose to creative work," and calls for an "organic principle of order," a synthesis between the idealistic and the mechanistic.

My intervention was to offer a historical shrine, or a monumental theater, modeled after the New National Gallery designed by Mies van der Rohe, in honor of my site's sensitive history. The program is an open pavilion made of steel and glass on a podium enclosing a theater inside. The building type consists of a deep roof supported by no more than two columns per side. The footprint of the building is rectangular, and a flat slab supports the structure, covering a basement. The wide expanse of the cultural center is reflected in the plinth of the building, raised only a few steps above adjacent Friedrichstrasse and at the back of the building there is a sculpture garden. Inside on the upper level, there is a masonry constructed theater that is enveloped with a fully transparent suspended glass system. The theater is intimate in size and houses 300 people in orchestral and balcony seating and employs a fly and a lift on a thrust stage. The placement of staff offices and storage, mechanical, and service spaces, under stage working area, and the cafe gives the appearance that the public spaces on the lower level have been carved from a solid subterranean mass. The deliberate choreography of these spaces contrasts with the undetermined movement privileged in the open lobby above.