CECI N'EST PAS UNE PLACE:
RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF THE THIRD REICH
AND A PARK, BERLIN

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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Rene Magritte's painting, "Ceci n'est pas une pomme" depicts an apple, and the "reality" of it. But the realities at the Research Center for the History of the Third Reich are both part of the History of a City and the History of Man.

I have tried to deal in my solution with all of the symbolic and pragmatic issues of the project. It is the final exercise of my architectural ideas to the graduate level. Clear attention, however, was given to follow the brief given by the 1985 NIAE International Design Competition. In this manner, the meaning of History and Tragedy are explored through the use of architectural manifestations, that is, the materialization of a "reality".

My scheme is one more exploration of my concerns, and also an extension to the search for an architectural attitude. Even though I believe at this time that language in architecture is a conscious decision of the designer, my preoccupation dealt with architectural issues such as building and city, elements and typologies, Platonic forms and spatial relationships, as well as drawings as a tool to express architectural intentions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents and brothers, for their unconditional love, support and understanding.

To , for showing me Berlin.

To and , for their friendship and assistance during the past year.

To , for their friendship and encouragement.

To , for the priceless exchange of architectural thoughts.

My special gratitude to the Organization of American States for awarding me a 1984-85 Fellowship, and to the Leo S. Rowe Fund for its assistance in the production of this Thesis.
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"Design is reading. Design is rewriting existent architecture. Design is transforming existent types; both architectural and place types. Design implies a dialectic between the new in relation to the memory of the old. But design is also a production of meaning, the transformation of the old into the new; the mutation of the known into the unknown. Design is also amnesia; the loss of memory as a possibility for invention."

From Idea as Model by Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas.
INTRODUCTION

Aldo Rossi says that to be rational is to work under the limitations of reality. In dealing with reality, I set specific parameters that went beyond the brief. After visiting East and West Berlin, and having done preliminary research about the events, the city and the typology of the building, I was primarily concerned with the following issues:

. The re-integration of the site into the "Formas Urbis" of Berlin.
. The re-establishment of the site characteristics up to 1945.
. The accommodation of the programmatic needs in such a way that they achieved "meaning" beyond functional aspects.

The architectural tools to further develop these ideas are based on what Emil Kaufmann calls, in his book, Architecture in the Age of Reason, the principal patterns in designs of the revolutionary architects in France, or the so-called Generation of 1760:

1. Repetition, which may be
   a) Replication, or the repetition of a motif without any alteration in shape or size.
   b) Juxtaposition, or the undifferentiated array of equivalent elements.
   c) Reverberation, or the presentation of one and the same motif in different sizes.

2. Antithesis, which can be expressed by
   a) Contrasts in texture.
   b) Opposition of different sizes, different shapes, or both.
   c) Tension between distanced elements.
   d) Compensation between elements of different weight.
   e) Interpenetration, which under the revolutionary (individualistic) system means that one feature seems to intrude into another, or even to tear it apart. (The term "interpenetration" has often been used to indicate the intermingling or coalescing of features in the Baroque, and has also been applied where one part seemed to grow out from another, like a protuberance.) The pattern of interpenetration (in the revolutionary sense) can be visualized either by the crossing of masses, or by volume (space) intruding into mass. Interpenetration was almost exclusively a spatial pattern. It played an important part in the nineteenth century, and like the other patterns of antithesis, it plays a still greater role in our time.
   f) Reverberation. Obviously the pattern of reverberation has an element of antithesis. The patterns of tension and differentiated texture can be found chiefly on surfaces.

3. Multiple response, which uses patterns of repetition, or antithesis, or both together. Here the motifs composing the pattern respond to each other and thus become "themes". In addition, different subpatterns may enter the conversation, by means of adequate spacing, sizing, or numerical variegation.
GENERAL STATEMENT

For almost forty years, an important and historically significant site in the City of Berlin, once graced by the Prinz Albrecht Palais, a baroque palace remodeled by Karl Friedrich-Schinkel, a palace garden by Peter Joseph Lenne and a famous museum building by Martin Gropius, has not been rebuilt. The reason is not simply its proximity to the Berlin Wall but the terrible chapter of history associated with the site. From 1933 to 1945 it was the center of the National Socialist terror regime. This competition proposes the creation of a national center for German history on this site, to be situated in a new public, urban garden.

This project is not an ordinary problem, because the site is not an ordinary piece of property. History cannot be removed from this site. Here a national memorial has special meaning. However, instead of a single monument, it is felt that those who were oppressed and those who died would be memorialized most meaningfully by a special place dedicated to the preservation of human rights. This would be a place which would foster free discussion, debate and research in the service of humanity, at a location which would be a constant reminder of a terrible period of human history.

While the rebuilt Martin Gropius Building will become a center for German history before 1933, the new building envisioned by this program will be specifically designed for information and research about the Third Reich. It is hoped that this building, together with the park, will memorialize the victims of the National Socialist regime, and at the same time return the site to the city as an active part of its cultural life.

The site is located in Friedrichstadt, which in 1688, under Duke Friedrich I, became the southwest extension of the medieval core of the center of Berlin. During the 1730's, under King Friedrich Wilhelm I, Philipp Gerlach, planning director to the king, designed the Rondel as termination of both the Friedrichstrasse and Lindestrasse. Gerlach, at the same time, introduced the Wilhelmstrasse as a new street and as an additional street leading into the rondel and designed the Hallesche Tor to provide a major entrance and customs gate for the city. After the victory over Napoleon in 1815, the rondel was named Bell Alliance Platz.

The grid of southern Friedrichstadt is established by the major ceremonial axis of Berlin, the Avenue "Unter den Linden". Friedrichstrasse provides one of the principal cross axes, connecting Unter den Linden with the Belle Alliance Platz, now named Mehring Platz. Prinz Albrecht Street, the Berlin Wall and the Martin Gropius Building relate to the grid and run parallel to Unter den Linden.

Around 1830, Karl Friedrich Schinkel received the commission from Prinz Albrecht to remodel the baroque Palais Vernezobre on the west side of Wilhelm Street. Aside from minor adjustments in the plan, the main part of the building remained intact. The major changes occurred in the facades. Schinkel built a new street facade and introduced a large colonnade between two wings of the building, framing a view into the entrance court. Schinkel also added stables and other utilitarian buildings, as well as a gothic style riding hall. At the same time, Prinz Albrecht acquired additional, adjacent properties on the competition site and commissioned Phillip Joseph Lenne, the landscape architect of the King, to redesign the garden. Not a single trace of the Schinkel building and Lenne's garden remain today.

The Kunstgewerbermuseum (The Arts and Crafts Museum), designed by Martin Gropius and now known as the Martin Gropius Building, was built between 1877 and 1881. A Voelkerkundemuseum (Anthropology Museum), designed by H. Ende and Boeckman, was built between 1880 and 1886 on the site directly to the west of the Martin Gropius Building, at the corner of Prinz Albrecht Street and Stresemann Street. In 1903, the construction of the Kunstgewerbeschule, an arts and crafts school, was begun on the site directly east of the Martin Gropius Building, at #8 Prinz Albrecht Street. This building became, in 1933, the Gestapo headquarters with teh infamous torture cells. The Deutschland Haus, designed by R. Bielenberg and J. Moser, was added to the site in 1926, and the Europa Haus, designed by O. Fierzle, in 1928. Only those two buildings and the Martin Gropius Building exist today.
The buildings existing on the site must remain. The Europa Haus and Deutschland Haus have been fully restored. The Europa Haus contains a local post office and offices. The Deutschland Haus contains small commercial spaces and the Gesamtedeutsche Institut (All-German Institute) with a library of approximately 12,000 volumes. The Martin Gropius Building, the former Arts and Crafts Museum, has been restored and the plans were changed to accommodate a new entrance from the south. Because the building lacks a suitable scaled south entrance elevation, the original north entrance facade will be replicated on the south side.

Automobile traffic through the site is not permitted. Though parking is a serious problem in the area, it is not part of the design program. The access to the underground parking garage of the Europa Haus and Deutschland Haus and the service alley on the north side of the Martin Gropius Building must be maintained. No vehicular traffic through the site is permitted and service access to any new buildings must be dead-ends.

The site of the former Anhalter Bahnhof will soon become a public sports field. The remains of the original building have been removed, except for a classical portico which will be preserved and which is clearly visible from the project site.

Very few buildings remain on the surrounding streets in West Berlin. The I.B.A Berlin 1987 (International Bau Ausstellung) has held several competitions for the design of the adjacent sites, but to date none of the projects have been built. The project primarily involve housing of six stories in height, fronting the streets across from the site. Since not enough information about the final designs is available at this time, competitors must assume continuous street facades of 20 m (66 ft) height.

The site is basically flat, with an average level +34.5 m. The highest recorded level of ground water was +32.5 m. The soil consists of sand and gravel, but also includes fill from the war ruins. All existing vegetation, except for the area west of the Martin Gropius Building, is spontaneous growth and of little value.

I. MEMORIAL PLACE AND PUBLIC PARK

The project involves not just the design of a building, but also the design of a public park with the implicit program requirement that a memorial to the victims of the Third Reich be created. It is the challenge of this design problem to integrate the park and buildings into an architectural solution, which is responsive to the historical meaning of the place and sensitive to the contextual pressures and visual aspects of the site. The park should also be an amenity for the citizens of Berlin and the many visitors to the site.

II. INFORMATION CENTER

The building program has two major programmatic components: the Information Center for the history of the Third Reich and the complementary Research Center. The Information Center must not be understood only as a museum for the history of the Third Reich, but also as the place for information and debate on human affairs, and as such, as a symbol for human rights. Only a relatively small part of the program is specifically designated for a permanent exhibition about the National Socialist era. The changing exhibition areas are conceived as being concerned not only with exhibitions about the events and history of the particular time, but with subjects related to human rights, past and present, related art exhibitions, etc. Exhibitions will frequently be part of symposia, lectures, conferences and commemorative events. It is the intention of the program to unite in a lively architectural solution the various activities such as exhibitions, lectures, concerts, theater and films. The particular interpretation of the interrelationships of the different program areas becomes an important aspect of the project.
III. RESEARCH CENTER

The research component of the program consists of a series of libraries. The new restricted library will focus on a special collection of books and documents on the subject of the National Socialist era published since 1943. A microfilm library will contain copies of all existing documents, journals, newspapers, etc. of the time. This would become the only place in the world where this material is available for research in a single place. In addition to the microfilm library, a film, slide and photo library will provide access to copies of contemporary national and international films such as newsreels, documentary films, movies, propaganda films, slides and photographs. An audio library will contain copies of speeches, lectures, newscasts, etc., from Hitler's Germany as well as from other nations. The library material is intended for serious research, for purposes of public information and special educational projects, and not available for general use. Independent access to the libraries must be provided.

The Research Center includes office space for various organizations and institutions involved with specific research, such as the office for "Exil Forschung", and organization involved with the collection of information on the fate of German scholars and artists in exile. The building includes a large work and preparation section for classifying material, producing exhibitions, films, tapes, etc. The center also serves as a distribution agency for information to institutions and scholars around the world.
I. MEMORIAL PLACE AND PUBLIC PARK

II. INFORMATION CENTER
   A. Entrance Lobby and Vestibule
   B. Coffee Shop, Bookstore
   C. Permanent Exhibition (The History of the Third Reich)
   D. Changing Exhibition
   E. Exhibition Support Areas
   F. Design Production Work Area
   G. Film Theater
   H. Auditorium
   I. Auditorium Support Areas
   J. Lecture Rooms
   K. Forum

III. RESEARCH CENTER
   A. Entrance Lobby and Vestibule
   B. Library (Restricted)
   C. Microfilm Library
   D. Film, Slide and Photo Library
   E. Audio Library
   F. Library Conference Rooms
   G. Administration
   H. Flexible Office Space
   I. Employee Cafeteria
   J. Mechanical, Service and Loading Areas

1 Taken from 1985 NAE Design Competition brief by Werner Seligmann.
"As a result of the Prussia Exhibition, which was held in the Martin Gropius Building in the southern part of Friedrichstadt, near the edge of the old city of Berlin, a large part of a completely devastated city block suddenly became the center of attention; a site which, during the '30s and '40s, controlled the fate of many millions of people. On this site, which is only approximately 300 by 500 meters, bordered to the north by the Berlin Wall at the former Prinz Albrecht Street, to the east by Wilhelm Street, to the south by Anhalter Street and to the west by Stresemann Street, were located, in addition to the Arts and Crafts Museum (The Martin Gropius Building), the central headquarters of the SS and the Gestapo. It was here that the plans for the building of the death camps were devised and where thousands of resistance fighters were incarcerated in their death cells. This historical location is thus most appropriate to become a national memorial site for the victims of this inhumanity. Except for the double building of the Europa Haus and Deutschlandhaus at the Askanischer Platz, nothing is left of this site except the reconstructed Martin Gropius Building. The green area on the completely destroyed part at the corner of Wilhelm Street is the site of the former baroque Prinz Albrecht Palais, later remodeled by Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Heydrich and Himmler operated from here. Today it is an autodrome. Only a few overgrown remains of the walls of the former palace are still visible.

"The traces of the Third Reich have disappeared, and so has the classical colonnade by Schinkel at the end of Koch Street. The northern part of Wilhelm Street, along the Berlin Wall, is a very short distance from Checkpoint Charlie. On the west side of Wilhelm Street, before 1945, were Berlin's principal governmental and administrative buildings. Only a few places within the city are as depressing, or evoke so vivid a picture of the destruction of the former capital of the country, as this part of the city. Almost everything has been completely destroyed or removed.

"The former Prinz Albrecht Street, a Prussian conception, which between 1933 and 1945 was the world's symbol of horror, is now a 500 meter long part of a "death strip" belonging to East Germany (D.D.R.), which runs through the middle of the old city. It is studded with guard towers, closed in by an electric fence and bolstered by a second wall barrier on the east side, and at night it is brightly lit. This is the reality of today. This is a place of history, not only of the past, but also of the political present.

"The buildings in the style of the Third Reich on the other side of the wall were the buildings of the various ministries. Formerly the enormous complex to the north was part of the Reich's Air Ministry of Hermann Goering. Perhaps these buildings are only standing today because the Soviets needed them for their central administration. The same is also true for the late classical building of the former Prussian parliament. This palace-like building is situated directly across from the wall, opposite the Martin Gropius Building. The sites on both sides of the wall, in the Prinz Albrecht Street were the zones of horror. All criminal plans which led to the Holocaust and to the enslavement of European nations were born here. On the east side of the Martin Gropius Building, #5 Prinz Albrecht, was the headquarters of the Gestapo, the SS and SD. Both institutions which existed for the persecution of all forces of opposition in Germany and other countries, were later combined into the Reichssicherheitshauptamt. Under this heap of rubble, where parts of the facade were still visible until 1975, were 400 torture chambers of the Gestapo. Many parts of the cells were too small for the prisoners to stand, and prisoners were bound to walls by iron collars. At the end of the war the cells, approximately 3 meters long and 1 meter wide, were each occupied by 15 or 20 candidates condemned for execution.

"No one knows how many persons died in these cells or later in concentration camps. Even in April of 1945, this building, after being heavily defended in the Battle of Berlin, became a place of mass murder. Three hundred corpses were found in a mass grave nearby, most of them killed by a shot in the neck. Here and nowhere else is Germany's Wailing Wall."
DESIGN STATEMENT

It is the intention of my solution to translate into an architectural "reality" the traces of history on the site and city of Berlin, as well as to integrate the programmatic requirements into a solution that incorporates the visual, contextual, and symbolic issues. This is done by understanding that Berlin is a network that cannot be separated by a WALL.

The primary intention is to reintegrate the site into Berlin's urban fabric by extending the axis of Kochstrasse, and terminating it with a design device that takes its clues from the former Belle Alliance Platz, and Leipziger Platz. The conceptual infill pretends to re-establish the site's "U" shape up the 1943 with dense construction and landscaping.

The new building takes a linear scheme that avoids construction on the sites of the Kunstege-werbeschule and the Prinz Albrecht-Palais. A pathway on the East Berlin side is continued from the north to locate the building and divide the site into front/street - back/park. Axial shift at the intersection of Kochstrasse and Wilhelmstrasse is reinforced by reinterpreting, in a rational manner, Schinkel's colonnade/portico to the Palais, thus framing the view. The former Gestapo torture cells (Kunstgewarteschule) and the Palais' "footprints" are brought back as symbolic reminders of the tragic past. They are today's INACCESSIBLE PLACES - non-places - places to meditate, and go through, because these are moments of history that we must not forget, but never "return" to. Water, low walls, and planting are the elements that try to erase these tragic memories, but are also the elements of reality. Major materials are concrete structural frame with block infill, stucco, brick, stone and glass cladding. Gypsum board is used for non-bearing interior walls.

Schinkel's plan for the Acropolis, Glienicke Palace, Museum Island, the more recent "kultur-forum" of Mies' New State Gallery, and Philharmonic Hall are the models for the building's parti. Each main part of the Center is seen as a "fragment". Each has its own identity. The interior of the facility is a series of spatial sequences, within a rational framework, that can also be seen as a continuous system of architectural elements, and types, in which hierarchies and relationships are emphasized.

The park is a partial re-interpretation of J.P. Lenne's garden, becoming a historical layer under a grid of trees, in order to remove all the romantic connections, because this is not a romantic place.

A trellised pathway joins all the components on the site culminated by the Plaza of the Divided City, as a gesture to the present separation. The detached punch-wall of the West facade acts not only as a shading device, but also to reinforce the non-architectural meaning of the East Berlin wall.

The forum at the top of the conical node is the symbolic "window" of today's reality, and the new point of urban reference.
AREA MAP OF BERLIN TODAY
SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA
AS IT EXISTED BETWEEN 1933 - 1945

Deutschland Haus

Scale 1:5000
LOBBY: Information Center

LOBBY: Research Center

LOBBY: Auditorium
Attention Patron:

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