

THE PLACES OF MEMORY

Museo de la Shoah¹

Buenos Aires Holocaust Museum

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This project seeks to constitute and construct a framework for three somewhat disparate forms of memory, remembrance and experience –historical narratives, collections, and dialogues. Time has constructed for us a gap that leaves the identity of experience on one side, and a desire to share these events on another. Hence, we find history's vision in narrative, the residue of reality in things to be collected, and the possibility of change in dialogue. Thus the inhabitation of the Museo de la Shoah brings forth an experience which will attempt bridging the gaps constructed by history and time, while setting in motion a quite real dialogue between space and memory; with hopes that such will set forth a further and more powerful dialogue - that between man and man. Face to Face.

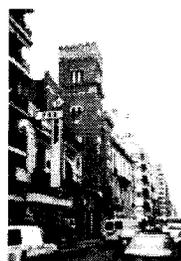
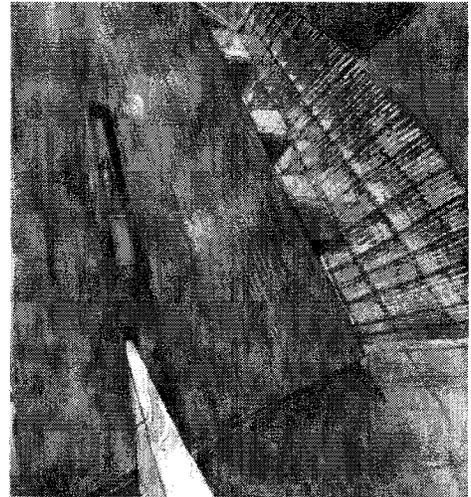
SHOAH

The Holocaust changed the basis for the continuity of life within history. It represents an irreversible rupture, during which the deep layer of solidarity among all that wears a human face was touched. For new generations far removed from the events, the Holocaust is a mediated experience –a received history in a "post-memory" condition, increasingly dependent on its intellectual re-presentation². For, it is the generation of the survivors, saturated with memory, that bear personal witness to the events. When the passing of this generation, the ensuing void will begin to haunt the imagination of future generations facing the inaccessible fact of a Holocaust not experienced.

After an enormous eruption of Holocaust related art, museums and memorials based on figural and/or abstract representations of death, despair, destruction, pain and horror, new attitudes may be possible. Attitudes that, while acknowledging the impossibility of representing the Holocaust experience, the limitations of our practices and our inability to propose meaningful answers to an absent meaning, may sustain the dilemmas of representation, the uncertainties and the resistance for closure. Neither art, nor architecture, can compensate mass murder.

STORYTELLING / DISLOCATION

As a storytelling Museum, this Museum –both in design and exhibition– is driven by the story of the Holocaust within the contextualized narrative of the pre-War reality and integrated into the ethos of contemporary society. It is on the basis of the story that artifacts, photographs, diverse media such as film, video, narrative tale, text, will be selected.



The geographical/temporal dislocation presents a challenge for the design of the Shoah Museum in Buenos Aires that differs from those located at historical sites –those sites tainted by destruction.

How can an industrial structure constructed to house transformers for a former electrical company (Italo-Argentina de Electricidad), and never

intended to 'house' a subject like the Holocaust, be transformed into a Holocaust Site? This radical transformation requires an act of 'landing' and 'grounding' memories 'foreign' to the site, in order to rethematize and transform the existing historical context in downtown Buenos Aires Buenos Aires. Still in but removed from Buenos Aires, this Industrial Palazzo becomes an estranged palazzo –a 'subject' and a 'host', haunted from without, with new stories, new displacements, new exiles, and also with new hopes. A Host taken Hostage by new Ghosts.

DESIGN PROPOSAL

The project entails the creation of spaces in which to encounter this tragic story and its unrepresentable horror –an uncanny memory around which we should never feel comfortable. As no single mode of representation can encompass the Holocaust story, our approach to design hopes to suggest the value of the coexistence, interplay and integration of various modes of re-presentation. The project encompasses Historical narratives, Testimonies, and Archival Modes. Narratives and storytelling mediated by the voice of the Historian. Objects in the Archives, removed from their contexts, have been classified and rendered part of a new system: A collection after the Holocaust. Testimonies not only portray first hand, but as a transactive process and dialogic relationship between testifier and listener, in which the voice and subjectivity of the individual are reestablished, they may bridge a gap in time reintegrating the witness in the present. Layers of memory -deep and common- may continue to coexist as unresolved trauma.

ELEMENTS

The elements within this preliminar proposal could then be defined as: a **Memory Box** at the center of the space -a vessel for testimonies, film, videos and dialogue- surrounded by **Historical Narratives** -mediated storytelling- and **"the Memory Wall"** -an 'archive' of various collected materials, objects, and images.

Memory Box

A massive volumetric intrusion –a non-representational "Vessel/Monster" – inside the existing space. It transforms the monumental unity of the vertical space and includes "Rooms" for testimonies, audiovisuals and films, while evoking Absalon's Tomb –a found object inside a found space. The terrace of dialogue and testimony at its top can hold projections, dialogues and art installations.

Memory Wall

An "Archival Wall". Objects in search for encounter, telling stories and calling out an "already no-more into a still-here". This "collect-

ing surface" attempts as well to suggest that all there is here is not at all, all there is to see. An incomplete collection referring indexically to other incomplete archives and to void left behind by destruction (The index claims no presence, it just shows). Reflections occur in space: of viewers themselves and of others, of the memory box and of the preexisting building. On the way out, this vertical glass landscape reminds the visitor, of his/her experience: the building becomes a gigantic ghost, inhabiting the courtyard with echoes of its own past, no longer there.

Historical Narratives

Simply described, Historical Narratives encompass the Pre-war Jewish life, the Shoah and Post-war periods, in 3 levels, are constructed as neutral spaces. Archival modes are present in the Memory Wall, and Testimonies and dialogue occur in the Memory Box.

This Museum hopes to become a place which both informs, and suggests as well working-through on the level where knowledge is not "out there" to be fed to passive consumers, but "felt" anew every time again by the participants of a culture that must keep in touch with the Holocaust, in order to learn from it.

CREDITS

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NOTES

¹This project was finalist in the International Competition for the Museo de la Shoah in Buenos Aires.

²I have discussed in papers and through projects issues about Holocaust Memory and problems for its representation and architecture. In this particular project we had to contend with some complexities such as: Temporal and Geographical Distance; Differences between Audiences (Survivors, Bystanders, New Generations, Latin American Public); and the paradoxical condition found in the impossibility of and the necessity for representing the Holocaust in the Public Sphere. See On Pain and Memory: Holocaust Memorials, in ACSA National Meeting Proceedings, Minneapolis, 1999 and The Center for Holocaust Studies at Clark University, in ACSA National Meeting Proceedings, Baltimore, 2001 (Faculty Design Awards)