Terrain Vague

Cemetery and Public Park
Between Presence and Absence, Landscape and Building

Valerie Saavedra Lux, P5 Presentation - 31.01.2012- EXPLORELAB
- Research
- Design
- Building Technology
- Modelmaking Process
Terrain vagues are “empty, abandoned spaces in which a series of occurrences have taken place[...] They are external places, strange places left outside the city’s effective circuits of productive structures [...] Places where the city is ‘no longer.”

(Ignasi de Sola Morales)
Focus of Investigations: «Terrain Vague» - spaces in the city which are empty and unoccupied such as abandoned buildings, left-over spaces, wastelands and degraded post-industrial sites.

Field trip to Ruhr area, former largest coal-mining region of Europe - now scattered with so called «terrain vagues» in order to understand those spaces.
Locations of Investigations

Essen
Gelsenkirchen
Bochum
QUALITIES

Merging of object and landscape

Through years of dereliction, nature has taken over...
Merging of building and landscape
“Ruins evoke an aesthetics of disorder, surprise and sensuality, offering ghostly glimpses into the past and a tactile encounter with space and materiality.”
Water finding its way...
The memory of the past seems to predominate over the present...
**Conclusions from Research**

- Perceived as empty, terrain vagues are often architecture and urban design’s desire for productivity, control and order and therefore are often turned into spaces of consumption.

> this view disregards the richness and special atmosphere of the terrain vague.

- Spaces where people can still access a strange slowness away from the pace of the contemporary city.

**Aim**

Design a programme keeping the intrinsic characteristics of the terrain vague and with minimal intrusion on the landscape.
Programme

Cemetery + Public Park

‘Absence/Past’ + ‘Presence’
The CEMETERY throughout history...

Originally, cemeteries were the centers of the cities and societies they served.

Until 17th century cemeteries were used as spaces of recreation.

During 18th century - cemeteries were evicted from the city due to fear of disease.

View of death changed: out of mind, out of sight - Taboo.

Today cemeteries are forgotten places, spatially and functionally excluded from the city fabric.

Proposal

- Bring cemetery back as a place of recreation.
Site - abandoned and disused coal mine in Gelsenkirchen, Germany

- previous railway tracks for transportation of coal
- existing hills which have been colonised by wild vegetation
Existing Site Plan

Railway tracks
retaining as memory of the past
‘Designing in abandoned sites is a very delicate thing because such wildness is so fragile and can all too easily be destroyed...The key is to do ‘almost nothing’ as Mies said once.’

Florian Beigel
Programme placed inbetween hills following topography and embedded in the ground, making it invisible on the horizon.
Programme nearly invisible in the landscape, ‘hiding’ in between the hills.
Proposed Masterplan

1. ARRIVAL (reception/waiting area)
2. FUNERAL (funeral hall)
3. BURIAL SERVICE (Crypt Walls)
4. LUNCHEON (café)
Funeral Hall

lines following topography
as starting point for design
Form studies
“Take care, find right measure and envision the placement of the proposed building in the landscape over and over again to see whether the landscape accepts it. [...] Through inner appreciation, not through theoretical argumentation.”

Peter Zumthor
“Instead of constantly reassuring itself and us of its presence, architecture can dive into the depths of perception and exist without really being there…”

Architecture embedded in the ground- architecture ‘disappears’ underground
ARCHITECTURE becomes ‘ABSENT’ on the horizon
building emerges naturally from the landscape leaving only subtle traces on the territory
Funeral Hall placed underground
- seating for 150 people
- ancillary spaces
SEQUENCE - access- funeral hall-exit
Approach - building invisible in the horizon- subtle suggestion that there may be something underneath
Entering - path becomes darker (grief) - due to curvature of path it is not evident where it ends
Long pathways in order to slow things down and promote a sense of duration and being in another place where time seems less pressing.
natural light entering through skylights created by previous railtracks show the passage of time
Water canal reflects light and guides you into the building
Impression of continuity/flow of water into building
Skylights directing you towards the exit, but it not visible.
exit - see sky - reconciliation - path opens up
SEQUENCE ‘B’
Building merges with the landscape
- Building embedded in the landscape - architecture 'disappears in the landscape' and hence becomes absent from outside
- planted walkable roof
- rooflights create subtle traces in the landscape and let light penetrate into the space
- stepped slopes give opportunity for light and air to enter from the sides
Detailed Cross-Section
Inspiration for Materiality of Funeral Hall

based on interpretation of images

uncertainty through materiality, light, shadow and reflection
Detailing and Materialization of Funeral Hall

- Optical light film: 99% reflectance
- Polished concrete floors
- Timetech self-cleaning glass
- Water: will reflect, refract and transform the rays of light
Ephemerality..dematerialization of architecture....
....as allegory to the dematerialization of the bodies inside the tombs...
Through reflection, refraction and diffusion, light can achieve an effect in our sight that is uncertain, indistinct, imperfect, incomplete....
Exterior Materialization
inspired by materials found on Terrain Vague

Ruin aesthetic, strong, rough textures, wild vegetation growing, exposed steel...aspect of decay.
Materialization
- in situ concrete, rough finish (for walls)
- precast concrete plates (burials)

rough concrete texture casting
its own shadow

passage of time will be visible over the years
Burial Wall Detail

Concealed wall pannelling system
passage of time visible over the years
Treatment of landscape - subtle blending of softscape and hardscape

keep wild vegetation which colonised terrain during many years of dereliction
retain atmosphere of abandoned industrial territory
using materials found on landscape...keeping character of the terrain
**Materialization - Ground**

- Wild vegetation/ Gravel
- Gravel
- Concrete with gravel finish
- Polished concrete

*subtle blending of materials from landscape to building*
Ventilation Strategy

Natural Ventilation
**Heating and Cooling Strategy**

- area surrounding building filled with old mining pits
- to preserve them against flooding they are usually pumped dry
- the mining water with temp of 29°C is normally drained off by closeby river, but also lots of free energy is wasted
- above ground level a heat pump exchanges heat from the mining water into water that heats the building
- water distributed through the building by a narrow tube system installed in façades and floors
- system used for heating and cooling
- building partly underground + high thermal mass, so can keep cool in summer and warm in winter.

**Geothermal/Mining Energy**
**Construction**

- in situ cast concrete loadbearing walls
- counterfort retaining walls
- pre-tensioned concrete beams for longer spans with less beam height
- piled raft foundation to resist differential settlement

wall formwork for in-situ cast concrete
Modelmaking Process related to construction process of building
Concrete Samples

different textures and degree of roughness
Model Impressions
Thank you