The Intensive Topography of Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

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There is an old Israeli joke of a Jewish mother, who immigrated to Israel from Germany during the war. She is taking the bus through Jerusalem with her son Itzhak. She speaks animatedly to him in Yiddish and yet he keeps answering her in Hebrew. The mother insists he speak in Yiddish – 'No, no, no. Answer me in Yiddish mein sun'. Finally, an impatient Israeli leans over to her and exclaims: 'Lady, why on earth do you keep insisting that the boy speak Yiddish and not Hebrew?' To which the mother retorts with indignation and surprise: 'Why, I don't want him to forget he's a Jew of course!'

What this joke pokes fun at is the way the past is revered as a primary signifier of identity. This paper intends to examine the problem of how memorialization might create a connection to the past without reinstating the Oedipal shadow of an original trauma. In order to argue this I will propose the past is not so much a tangible terrain, a demarcated space or a monumental time that acts as a warning or reminder both in the present and for future generations, but an admixture of times that affirm the present and future.

When expressing grief over a violent event, a community often memorializes the area where the incident happened, paying tribute to the victims of violence. Certainly molding the landscape in order to respond to a shared loss is one way of re-empowering a community. At what point though does this turn into a melancholic exercise in mourning? How might a violent event individuate a community instead of defining it both now and in the future? As the heirs of a traumatic history left behind by its Nazi forefathers, Germany is a good example of this situation. It would seem imprecise to claim that any sense of shame the current generation may feel is eclipsed by the atrocities their parents and grandparents committed in the lead-up to and during WW2. Similarly, it would be a gross distortion to accuse young Germans of being guilty for the crimes of previous generations. However, since the latter part of the twentieth century the German landscape has been radically altered as the horrors of the concentration camps entered national consciousness and Germans tried to confront the difficult legacy their parents and grandparents dumped on them. One of the great challenges Germany has encountered since WW2 is how to face the violence of the not so distant past in a nuanced and mature way.[1]

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Holocaust memorials and other sites of remembrance for Nazi atrocities began to proliferate throughout Germany. In fact, one could say that the topography of the German landscape has been shaped by the following didactic indictment: 'You will not forget!' But defining the land too rigidly along the lines of remembrance can close it off to other possibilities especially if the unforgiving cry tensioning the terrain tenuously positions it between the urge to optimistically confront the future and an unforgiving glare back to the past. Berlin for instance, was once the headquarters for the Third Reich and it was here where a largely assimilated Jewish population was almost completely eradicated. Walking the streets of Berlin today one cannot help but shudder at the thought of what took

place during the late 1930s and early 40s. Astonishingly, whilst the Holocaust may have produced a series of fissures throughout Berlin life this has produced an intensive topography; one that affirms new urban possibilities through which memory can express itself beyond the containment of a nostalgic turn to the past or even the incarceration of guilt, the specifics of which will become clearer once we explore Deleuze's concept of intensity.

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze writes: 'The expression "difference of intensity" is a tautology.'[2] He goes on to explain that difference in itself is in fact intensity. This is because every intensity is differential, by itself a difference.'[3] Adding to this he points out everything that appears in the world is comprised of this differential. Taking this idea of 'intensity as difference' how does it help us consider the manner in which events correlate with a milieu of trauma? If memory can distribute, unstitch and transform by its very movement – this being the deterritorializing capacity of memory – or inversely, memory reterritorializes once it is plugged into a filiative and linear system of relations, conjugating the open transversal process of deterritorialization through libidinal investment, then how does memory invoke either its deterritorializing or reterritorializing tendencies? We are unable to objectively calculate the difference between the two simply because they are not neatly opposed to one another. What we are speaking of here are tendencies that inform each other, or more broadly how a milieu is produced and the functions it carries out.

Ultimately, Deleuze's concepts of intensity and the event cancel out the standard topographical calculation that presupposes extensive qualities sufficiently define their intensive condition. Classically, topography denotes a physical quality or extensive quantity. In the context of architectural practices topography entails a detailed physical description and calculation of a given site. It is commonly investigated as part of the research leading up to the design and building phases of architectural projects. Topography provides a grid of the physical contours of a site, following the peaks and abysses as they define the key features and patterns of a surface. The standard architectural use of topography is: either a building mimics the topographical form of its context, or it conquers it, or it independently floats above it. An example of the first would be the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater* (1935) that neatly integrates with its waterfall context as the cantilevered layers of the house copy the pattern of the waterfall's rocky shelves. An example of the second is Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine* (1922), an urban plan for Paris designed for three million inhabitants whose starting point was razing the city to ground zero and erecting in its place a rationalized collection of commercial buildings, streets, parks, housing and transportation, the centerpiece being a collection of sixty-story buildings where the wealthy would live and work. An example of the third would be Mies van der Rohe's modernist *Farnsworth House* (1951) situated in a rural setting alongside the Fox River. Elevated 5'3" above the ground the house does not interrupt its topographical context. Underscoring all these responses we have one fundamental dichotomy at work: natural versus artificial, whereby 'artificial' refers to man-made constructions (buildings, towns, cities, suburbs, parks). Here spatial organization, as Tschumi notes, is used to synthesize perception and in this manner it can be said to be extensive, leaving us with an objective view of a geographical area, producing a unified space that can be measured and whose qualities can be listed. Topography can be said to synthesize a *spatium* (the groundless space as pure intuition) when it inhibits the expression of pure percept and affect, rendering the landscape passive by imposing equality onto what is ultimately divisible. Whilst we have difference – peaks and abysses – these are mapped across the terrain in a manner that assumes the differences in question are only differences by degree (proportion, location and measurement). As Deleuze describes it we perceive space by passively synthesizing the *spatium*. What we therefore perceive is *extensio*, a homogenous and measurable space, not the *spatium*. In this regard, a topographical mapping in architecture not only produces a hierarchical spatial organization (what Deleuze and Guattari define as 'striated space' in *A Thousand Plateaus*) but also an a priori model that governs how a landscape is put to work.[4] The linear principle underpinning the organization of space produces a particular kind of perception of the landscape as an area to be conquered and according to Deleuze and Guattari one counts in order to occupy such

space-times as opposed to occupying that space-time without counting.[5]

Attempting to combine the Deleuzian concept of 'intensity' with topography might at first glance seem like a gross distortion, given that 'intensity' in the way Deleuze intends it is anything but a form or extended magnitude. A Deleuzian intensity substitutes sensation for form. Rather than attending to the extensive it invites us to consider affective magnitudes. It is all a matter of how to allow an intensive trait to start working for itself, 'a hallucinatory perception, synesthesia, perverse mutation, or play of images' that together shake loose and challenge the 'hegemony of the signifier.'[6] Although intensities are virtual this is not the same as saying they are not real; for Deleuze we 'sense' intensities. That being, intensities constitute states of affairs but they are not ontologically distinct from the actualities they generate. They are affective magnitudes in that they are entirely pre-personal. Intensities are not to be mistaken for a quality such as tall, soft or dark in the sense that they are transtemporal: becoming-tall, becoming-soft, or becoming-dark. Memory is a field of intensity as is imagination. Separating himself from Bergson on this point, Deleuze notes that intensity is neither extensity nor quality, because even qualities subscribe to the law of representation. He announces Bergson may have 'wanted to free quality from the superficial movement which ties it to contrariety or contradiction' explaining this is why 'he opposed duration to becoming', however the problem is that Bergson achieves this opposition by 'attributing to quality a depth which is precisely that of intensive quantity.'[7] Deleuze outlines that intensity 'creates the extensities and the qualities in which it is explicated; these extensities and qualities are differenciated.'[8] What defines Deleuze's concept of intensity is therefore an internal difference, in so far as difference is neither a quality nor extensity simply because it *is* intensity. Unlike an extended magnitude, if we divide an intensity it changes in nature. The flow of the virtual being the differentiated and the actualization of this is what Deleuze describes as differenciation, bearing in mind what is differenciated is not a representation of the virtual realm, rather differenciation is implicitly creative in that it produces something new as it actualizes.[9] The intensity and its actualization are non-identical. Put differently, if *extensio* is the critical condition of a metastable state – *spatium* – then *extensio* is best understood as the space we perceive. Hence, according to Deleuze *extensio* is the spatial perception of a stable state. Yet, if intensities happen outside of the space we perceive, how is it possible to begin considering an intensive topography as an alternative landscape of memorialization?

Why combine intensities with topography? Simply because the connection helps us grasp landscape not as given or neutral but as a becoming-milieu, an unpredictable depth constituted not just over time but *in* time, through the movement of differences in kind that present affects. In this regard, the milieu in question does not provide us with a preconceived form or meaning. In abbreviated form, that is: designing not with individually distinct elements or bringing each element into relationship with another, but using the principle of individuating connections whereby elements such as popular values and tastes, local identities, market forces, growth and settlement patterns, the physical features of a site, building orientation, ventilation flows, and so forth undergo change as they combine with one another. Here the unified perception of topographical identity is dismantled, setting the fully coherent plan or design that organizes the world out to pasture. The implication being memorialization does not judge the landscape because these don't unify it. This is because the memorial no longer conquers the affects and intensities of a milieu or brings it under the control of a fully coherent territory. Intensive topographies are not a reactionary enterprise because topography no longer codifies the flows of intensity to create an image representative of a structure, subjugating its multiplicity. Intensive topographies can be likened to being more of a schizoid investment; they create deterritorializing lines of escape, decoding and producing nonfigurative directions that, in turn, create new paths and flows. This is the antithesis of a fascistic investment that regulates as it codifies the landscape. An intensive topography is not considered as the result of events shaping the land over time, or a landscape whose characteristics can be measured in relationship to how they have evolved over time; rather it is a topography that engages the complexity of pure time and such an approach to topography looks to nonstructural functions in the way that

Eisenman does in his *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005).[10]

The *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* derives from an intensive topography as Eisenman infuses life back into the lifeless order of the grid by introducing into *extensio* a sense of *spatium*. What this means is that the minimalist expressionism Eisenman uses, which Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982) was a catalyst for, critically engages the memorial typology of a vertical structure set against the horizontal ground plane that work together to produce a homogenous entity. This typology is used self-reflexively to release a feeling of groundlessness and vertigo. The limits of phenomenologically engaging with the 19,000 square meter site, by relying too much on personal perception simply strips its intensive topography bare, for here there are a variety of intensities and affects commingling with one another. There is the stiff push from the weight of 2,711 falling columns, the pull of an undulating series of narrow paths and a ground plane that sinks below street level, the dizziness of shifting angles, the increasing pressure of moving amidst a mass of slender concrete stelae as they thicken the landscape, the dilution of this heaviness on the outskirts of the piazza as the sun warms the site. The uniform grid pattern that the columns create slightly disperses along the fringes of the site producing varying degrees of enclosure and openness, at its edges sun and concrete combine inviting visitors to bathe in the sun or pause to chat. Depending on how it is used the site eludes rigid definition; it has the solemnity of a memorial, the joy of a city park and the flurry of a piazza. Children play hide and seek, others light Jahrzeit candles to honor the dead, and some use it as a meeting spot. The deeper in you go the quieter it becomes, the buoyancy of street sounds slow to a murmur as a gray narrow silence infuses the belly of the site. Through the language of abstraction, Eisenman drags the full weight of those anonymous bodies of history up from below the depths of the earth, enticing the visitor to take the place of those selfsame bodies by descending to where they were once buried. Those who criticize the project for reinforcing the stigma of the Holocaust throughout the German landscape miss the point because in effect the Holocaust-as-stigma is dislodged by Eisenman's intensive use of topography and as Žižek might describe it, the reality we experience is never fully complete 'not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it.'[11]

Ultimately the relationship between landscape and memory is fundamentally one of how the landscape is used; in this regard, the connection to the past as it transforms or creates blockages invites us to consider a more expanded definition of topography, to move beyond the verticals and horizontals and think about the thickening and thinning of diagonal movements, or the speed with which people move, and the blending of sense. Then there are other considerations that have to do with the way connections mutate and new directions come to the fore, like formal connections to Libeskind's ETA Hoffman Garden in his Berlin Jewish Museum that consists of forty-nine concrete columns set in a grid formation of seven by seven, forty-eight are filled with the soil of Berlin (a symbolic connection to the founding of the State of Israel in 1948) and one with soil from Jerusalem representing Berlin. Or, there is another connection formed with the trench consisting of the provisional memorial and exhibition titled *Topography of Terror* – to which Eisenman's memorial is a peripheral element – taking visitors to the site of the former headquarters of the SS and Gestapo and the ruins of the National Socialist prison where torture took place. Here the directed lines of Holocaust memory begin to disperse once other events are activated. The site meets with areas marking the rise and fall of the ninety-six mile long Berlin wall (1969-1989) that left the city divided in two between East and West and where the longest stretch of the wall has been left in tact. An alternative topography of terror is tapped into, one that emits the violence of the Cold War era as independent stalls crop up opposite the Eisenman memorial displaying images of spontaneous memorials that once defined the now imperceptible no-man's land prior to German reunification in 1990.[12]

We are left with the following questions: Is the connection between the landscape and past events simply one where past ghosts endure within the present, defining the topography of the land according to the voids those selfsame ghosts left behind? Or does the act of memorial topography function as a mass grave into which the more unresolved aspects of past

events are thrown? What is being proposed here is that the traumatic past not be taken as the subject through which Berlin topography is surveyed, produced or lived because the trauma of the Holocaust can function as a topographical crack. In a nutshell, rather than define a landscape as tainted with guilt, Berliner life can be revitalized through the fault lines of Jewish life as Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* attests to. Topographically connecting the present to the past does not need to turn the landscape into a monument to the dead. It can be an optimistic move into the future that allows for the production of a future different to the past. A landscape can be conceived of as producing intensities as much as it is produced by them. In this regard, landscape is never neutral, which is not tantamount to claiming it is ideological. The connection between landscape and memory is implicitly ethical, insofar as it addresses the problem of what memory can do. More specifically though, there is the question of how landscape is not just scarred by an event but rather how it opens up to its own outside. In this way, landscape involves a becoming-other, an indeterminable experimentation with memory to the point where it becomes through intensity so that the designer doesn't use the land to interpret the past, turning it into a primary signifier of trauma. Instead with a look toward the future the designer exposes the implicated durations of the land, affirming and celebrating the movement of the past in the present. This is not the same as demanding we celebrate the Holocaust – an abhorrent claim – but we do need to put the past to work so as to optimistically embrace the future, to celebrate life over and above that of death. Here the quotation Deleuze and Guattari provide from Henry Miller's *Sexus* summarizes the problem with frankness: 'The phantasmal world is the world which has not been fully conquered over. It is the world of the past, never of the future. To move forward clinging to the past is like dragging a ball and chain…We are all guilty of crime, the great crime of not living life to the full.'[13]

Endnotes

[1] With meticulous commitment Germany has integrated the history of the Holocaust by introducing it into the school curriculum, through the building of memorials and museums that document the mechanisms of Fascist Germany, and in the work of artists such as Anselm Kiefer, Hans Haacker and Gerhard Richter (to name a few). We must not forget the efforts of intellectuals and in particular the heated 1986 *Historikerstreit* (Historians Debate) between professional historians such as Jürgen Habermas, Ernst Nolte and Eberhard Jäckel. These efforts all reveal the shared aspiration of a majority of Germans to fully take on the liability of their own history with maturity. Translations of the *Historikerstreit* arguments have been made by James Knowlton and Truett Cates, *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1993). See also *New German Critique 44: Special Issue of the Historikerstreit* (Spring/Summer 1988). James Young has provided a detailed study of the Holocaust memorials shaping the German landscape. See Young, James. E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993).

[2] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, 222.

[3] Ibid.

[4] See Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 474-500.

[5] Here Deleuze and Guattari lean upon the composer Pierre Boulez to articulate this distinction. Ibid., 477.

[6] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*,15.

[7] Ibid., 239.

[8] Ibid., 254.

[9] See Parr, Adrian. 'Differentiation/ Differenciation' in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, edited by Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 75-76.

[10] It needs to be noted that the winning competition entry was originally the result of a collaboration between Peter Eisenman and artist, Richard Serra.

[11] Žižek, Slavoj. *The Parallax View (Short Circuits)* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2006), 17

[12] A fascinating study on Berlin rebuilding programs as part of the process of German reunification from the perspective of film and one that includes an interview with the filmmaker Hubertus Siegert is Stern, Ralph. 'Berlin, Film and the Representation of Urban Reconstruction Since the Fall of the Wall' in *Out of Ground Zero: Case Studies in Urban Reinvention*, ed. Joan Ockman (New York: Prestel, 2002), 117-131.

[13] Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 334.