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Honors Thesis

Berlin: Border Control

My thesis explores the issues of border and control with regards to the movement of people. More specifically, I am focusing my research at one of the original border crossings of the Berlin Wall. The design project proposes a post-wall landscape that reunifies the divided train station through an architectural intervention.

Historically, division in Berlin has occurred as a means of control. The early customs wall was a way of demarcating the edge of the city and determining who was responsible for paying taxes. Much later, the Berlin Wall was constructed to prevent illegal movement between East and West Berlin. Typologically, the wall is the most standard form of division, but it can be modified to become a cage or a trench. These instruments of division can be breached by gates, doorways, and bridges.

This project is sited at Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof, an 1870's railway station in central Berlin that was the only one of the eight border crossings of the Berlin Wall that did not physically exist at the location of the wall. Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof was completely within East Berlin, however continued to mitigate both East and West German transit. Through the construction of a physical wall between the sheds, this station became a microcosm of the division experienced in greater Berlin and Germany.

By an act of trenching, the proposal cuts out a huge section of the station between the two sheds at the site of original division. This trenching allows visual connections between the multiple levels of transit and for daylight to permeate the entirety of the station. Also, this zone becomes the "life strip" in direct opposition to the inhabitable "death strip" of the Berlin Wall. The space more centrally handles the circulation for the entire station, vertically and horizontally. The various instruments of permissivity and division are implemented, which creates a level of complexity within this intervention. Passengers and commuters move through the circulation in an act of discovery that has differing levels of transparency. As a counterpoint to the transience and rapidity of the station, the design encourages observation. It asks the occupants to stop and look and see those who they are brought in contact with.

This project succeeds in a rail station because it is a moment where the borders are blurred. Stations accommodate thousands of people each day from different social classes, ethnicities, and ages. Additionally, Germany has recently sought to open up their political borders to allow Syrian refugees to seek asylum. In this new age of openness, Germany needs to consider carefully how they create where social interaction occurs. This project is one such imagination of a unified post-wall Berlin.