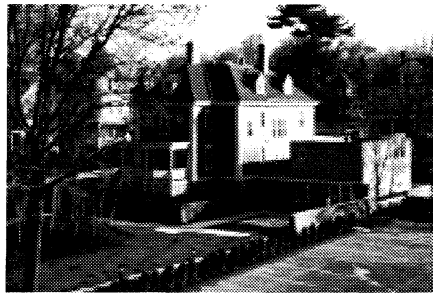


A House For Uninhabitable Memory

The Center for Holocaust Studies, Clark University, Worcester, MA

2000-2001 ACSA Faculty Design Award

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The Holocaust changed the basis for the continuity of life within history. The so-called 'Final Solution', exceptionally resistant to any redemptive perspective of humanity or life, threatens to remain an open wound, a breach in modern thinking. In its vastness, and horror, it appears to be ungraspable, an irreversible rupture, an absent meaning, and it presents only questions. Therefore, the task of designing and building the Center for Holocaust Studies, raised issues and questions which were not merely architectural, but indeed moral, ethical and philosophical.

This project involved working in a particular site that plays a pivotal role between Clark University's Main Campus and the Woodland Street Neighborhood -listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The site included an existing Colonial Revival structure, to be adapted, built in 1899 by the firm Frost, Briggs & Cham-

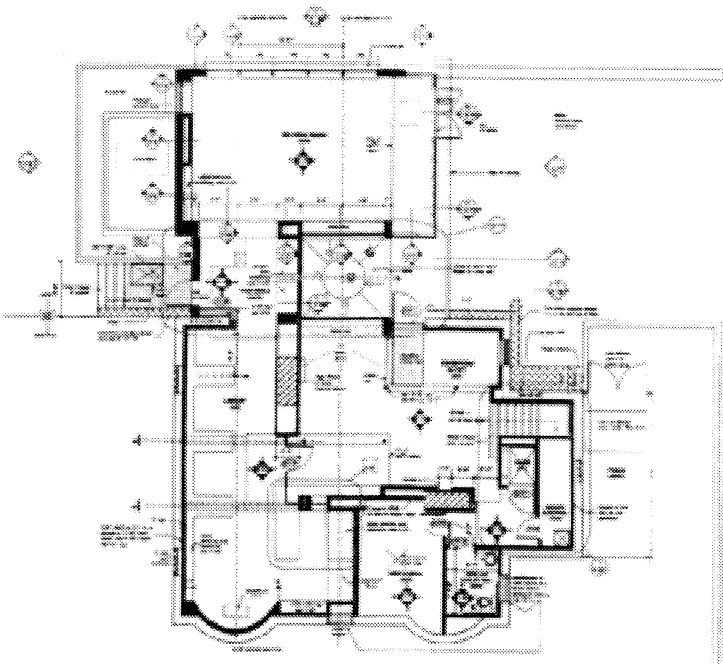
berlain. The unprecedented program in Holocaust Studies required offices for faculty, graduate students, and staff; meeting and seminar rooms; exhibition area; a Holocaust library-reading room, and a small memorial garden. The project comprised an extensive renovation of the preexisting structure -including its dark basement in derelict condition.

The scheme proposes the integration of the old and the new beyond appearances, establishing a connection between the historical and the aesthetical filtered through multiple levels of intense ethical-architectural dialogue. The different components of Lasry house - the preexisting structure, the Library addition and the Forested Mound in the garden- are to be seen as composing a new integral whole, while at the same time exposing an horizon of disconnections and absences.

Thoughts about the study of the Holocaust and concepts such as, difference, hierarchy reversal, iteration, displacement and dialogism were utilized as design techniques in order to:

- expose both historic continuities as well as ruptures;
- transform the derelict basement, the ground plane and the movement through the site;
- construct a precise relation between the addition -Memory Box- and the house through the use materials, contrasts, textures, composition, proportions and details;
- introduce 'memory catalysts', such as the Forested Mound, the courtyard tree, the Skylight cuts, the wall of books, the book sculpture and other elements.





The project's ultimate task is to make room for echoes of an uncanny past to be heard in a humane environment created for reflection, study and dialogue, presenting a strong, yet quiet estrangement expressive of a daunting historical uniqueness. It proposes ethical questions and a mode of being in space in sharp contrast with the story to be studied, while deferring, silencing any kind of attempt to represent -through intense spatial dramatization and gestures - the Holocaust experience, for no matter how dark, vast or complex spaces may be, the Holocaust doesn't fit in any space.

CREDITS

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