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“The day the Wall came down we were working in my studio on the initial drawing for the Berlin Jewish Museum. We had been living Berlin since July. When we heard the news, we spontaneously left the studio and joined the thousands of people walking down toward the Brandenburg Gate.”

Thank you very much. What does architecture have to offer? This is a distinguished audience; how proud I am to be amongst you. But, what is about breaking the walls: what are the new horizons that the language of architecture can address in a new society? Certainly the fall of the Berlin Wall was something that I thought could bring a new sense of architecture in the sense that architecture is not just a matter of bricks, glass, and materials; it is about the spirit, about the human spirit. We don’t often associate architecture with a spiritualised art, but that is what I thought about when I first entered the competition for the Jewish Museum.

You will see that line that moves, that white line, which was the Berlin Wall. But when I did the competition in 1989, before the Wall fell, I thought that the Wall had absolutely nothing to do with what happened in Berlin, with Germany across the divide, the Holocaust, the extermination, about Germany itself, about Berlin as a capital. I thought: to overcome that that star should shine in a way that is not obvious, because we are the carriers; we are the spiritual carriers of that history. They are really in oblivion. I started really with the names, the names of the thousands and thousands, and hundred thousands of Berliners—never the mind the millions of Jewish names that have disappeared out of history. I thought about many things, which were not about architecture; which were about memory, which was about music that could not be heard—voices, which could not be heard, thoughts which were no longer there. I thought of Schoenberg’s Moses and Aaron composed here in Berlin and yet cut off suddenly: Aaron became Arnold and Arnold became Aaron. I thought of the Einbahnstrasse, that great guide book to Berlin by Walter Benjamin. How do you open that street again from a completely unexpected vantage point? I thought of Paul Celan, his poem, *Oranienstrasse 1,* right next to the Jewish Museum, talks about material and light.
I created a museum that is not quite just about architecture. It is about movement. It is about inaccessibility. It is about light that stabs one in the heart, because there is nothing to say in that void. And it is about the exile—that it is not only the Berliners that have been exiled from Berlin, but Berlin has been exiled from itself as well. And, of course, the continuity: there could be no spiritual sense of a building if it did not give hope for the future. And a great city Berlin is: the future with its own light, with its own mystery of connecting across the abyss, connecting back to a history and across that memory, connecting to something which is positive, something which shines with a new light, with a new public. So, I was able to create the glass court subsequently.

After finishing the Jewish Museum, there was a need for people to come, to converse, to enjoy life. Just recently, in two weeks, there will be opening, just across the street from the Jewish Museum, The Academy of the Jewish Museum, which is in the old Blumenhalle, the old flower market. You see these volumes, with the Alef-Bet, treading their way into this flower garden, now just used for a centre of education, lectures, archives, and more knowledge. By the way, I created a special work on the surface. You see that writing that Moses Maimonides, one of the great Jewish thinkers, writing in Arabic, Judea Arabic: Hear the truth, whoever tells it. That is kind of the sense of what the possibility of a great city like Berlin, and across the Abyss to create something that really connects us—not just to the past, which is irreversible, but the future, which is bright and better. Of course, I am also a great believer that buildings should be about dialogue, because without dialogue there is really no architecture.

I had a chance to work in the beautiful city of Dresden, which you know was completely devastated in the allied bombings of 1945. If you have ever read, I Bear Witness, by Victor Klemperer, the horrors of living under Nazi rule, the horrors of being there, the horrors of what was happening in daily life. So, I created a building; it is the largest museum in Germany: The Military History Museum in Germany. It is part of The Great Armoury, which was always a museum of military history—already at the end of the 19th century, then it became a German museum, a Sachsen museum, a Nazi museum, a Soviet museum, an East German museum. After the unification, there was a competition: what do we do? How do we bring back? How do we discuss military history in Germany?
I created this form, this wedge-like form, which penetrates the building from the opacity in the back of the wings and gives itself, through the building to the outside, pointing in two directions, giving the view to the rebuilt city of Dresden today, but also pointing to the triangulation from which the city itself was destroyed in the bombing. So, it is a story; it is a dialogue of history. You have the old armoury, horizontal, a chronology from the 13th century till today, till Afghanistan—German soldiers are here—and yet how important it is to interrupt that history, and it is interrupted really between 1914 and 1945, exactly to see what is the human moment: why do people follow dictators? Why do people participate in organised violence? How can we feature military in a democracy, not hide it behind it behind dark walls, in back-up armouries, but say, citizens are really responsible for their armies; citizens in a democracy are responsible for what happens in the world.

So, there is the building, the armoury, which I restored; it was quite ruined when it was an East German Museum, restored with etc, and that slot of space, of course it penetrates the building. It has a completely different space from the rigid orthogonal space within the armoury. Then new space is created for new kind of exhibits. Here is the dialogue, the column, and those diagonal walls, and, of course, exhibitions about: you know, animals at war. I had no idea that even bees were employed in wars—never mind dogs, monkeys, lions, and other animals. So, suffering has been brought through human violence, and, of course, the helicopters themselves named after nature; and, of course, everything, which falls from the sky, towards humanity is also part of human idea.

Then when you emerge to the top, you see that cities have been destroyed from Germany, and you emerge out into the open space. You are in front of the museum in the wind of Dresden. You see the resurrected city of Dresden, but you also see, you point to that point from which the city was destroyed and bombed, and devastated. It has been resurrected with a new sense of participatory democracy.

Counterpoint is something I also believe. The life is contrapuntal. And I had a chance to build a building in my own country; I was born in Poland under a dark communist regime, anti-Semitism, and so on. I was able to build a tower right in front of the gift of Stalin to oppress the Polish people. It is the largest, actually the tallest, residential building in Europe. It is about 65 stories high. It is a kind of wing that ascends—it is almost completed, but I thought: Yes, it is important to create something of everyday
life in the city, something that isn’t just an extruded tower, but a kind of sculptural form, which opens itself like the eagle’s wing to the change, and to the positive change, and, of course, creates really a new sense that the centre is not for symbolic and emblematic architecture; it is for people to live, to be in the centre of Warsaw, that beautiful city.

I also think that is very important to take risks, and architecture is risky, should be risky; everything is risky. When I was able to build this fantastic programmatic sense of Museum of Nature and Culture in Toronto, Canada, the Royal Ontario Museum, embedded in the wings of the old museum, creating new space for new collections, but also changing the attitude to the museum—a museum, which is no longer just a rigid sense of procession for the elite, but a place to explore the complexity—not just of dinosaurs but of culture in general. And, of course, it is a space that I also embedded and renovated the old buildings of the museum, created new social spaces, new spaces of circulation—of course, new art spaces, which are also part of the new sense of a museum, and, of course, these gigantic vitrines, which show some of the oldest beings in the world, the dinosaurs. Of course, it is risky, because Toronto was, at least when I started, a pretty conservative city. But, the museum also changed it, was part of the change. It is a place of many people from around the world coming, and it has a growing number of visitors. It is the most popular museum in Canada.

So, risk is important, as is diversity. I had a chance to design a city, an entire city, not in the outskirts of some metropolitan centre, but at the centre of Seoul in Korea. This is a large 64 acres site. You see the railway lands, the old military base; the building is built in the 60s, blocking the waterfront. A competition: how do you design a city for hundreds of thousands of people in a 600, 700 year old city? It is right in the centre of the Han River with the Nam Mountains in the back. So, it is a city, which will, from the very beginning to be sustainable, have high density. It has more than 30 of the world’s tallest skyscrapers. And I thought of the crown of Silla: the dynasty that brought literacy, music, and culture to Korea. How do you create a sense of neighbourhood and a sense based on the human scale, not only on the height of the building?

Perhaps you cannot see it here very well, but I called it “Archipelago”. How do you break that area and give an identity to neighbourhoods, to the business district, to the
dwellings, to the cultural area? Connect it with pedestrian life and cultural life. That is indeed what I have done, what we have done with physical models. Of course, it is a very different city from the city that was just a bunch of streets with taller and taller buildings, which started in Chicago, and buildings just got taller. When you design for sustainable city with transport, with public life, with green space to connect the Archipelago, really you are designing something that has really never existed in the world, because it is not just the repetition of a 19th or 20th century city. Of course, this is a grand project that has architects from around the world working on it. I am one of the architects of the skyscrapers, a new kind of office with a new kind of nature in sight.

You saw those blocks of buildings; those are social housing. I was able to, for the same amount of money—this is not for the rich—it is social housing to create towers, which have high density, but of a character of giving views, giving dignity to people people who live, and, of course, open the waterfront, so it becomes accessible to people of the entire city and of the country—a new gateway. There it is. In a few years there will be a completely new city in the centre of a historical city. That is part of the notion of diversity of architecture.

Of course, we would not be here, if we were not all believers in a democracy. Democracy is something really fantastic. I am often asked: where was I on September 11, 2001. How strange, that was the day when the Jewish Museum opened its doors, after working on it for 12 years. I went to my studio, and I said, “You know this is the first day I don’t have to think about Jewish history, because people can enter the museum.” And just about 2:30 in the afternoon, the Jewish Museum closed its doors to the public for the next three days. There was such an uncertainty. So history is never something you can say: it will take care of itself. It is ongoing.

When I won the competition to be the master planner of Ground Zero, I thought: What do you bring to this site? It is not just more building. How do create a new social space, a new sense of community, and a sense that it is based on the symbols, great symbols of America? The Statue of Liberty: freedom. At the same time, how do you now build on the site where people perished? There is, on the left, my first rendering. The last rendering, on the right, pretty close, because what is it about? It is about seeking consensus among so many diverse parties. And, of
course, it is a large site. We all saw that foundation, that slurry wall, which should have never seen. I incorporated it into the museum, which will open next year—as really something that is dramatically important to understand—at the bedrock, the catastrophe at the bedrock, but also the bedrock as reassertion of life in New York. Of course the memorial had opened with its footprints, where the building stood. Again, it is: how do you create a large public space? This is a project that has millions of square feet of office density space, and yet I thought: Give the people of New York space, public space; that is what people need around Wall Street. I live there; I work there. It is not just more buildings: a light.

Also screen the sound, bring nature, bring water, and, of course, the memorial has opened. It is a very moving one. I created an extra space, the wedge of light from Broadway. You don’t see it yet, but you will see it soon. It is a grand piazza defined by the two times of the attack: 8:46 am, the first tower was struck, and 10:28, when the second tower collapsed, which is now the central line of the PATH terminal of Calatrava, that will be another emblematic and symbolic space. So, democracy: this is what is important. Of course, there were many fights. There are political fights, emotional fights. I think the lawyers made more money than anybody else on this project. But the fact is that democracy is not easy, but it is a system of participation that I believe in, and, when you come to New York, you see. You see many things: the memorial is open. The Freedom Tower, Tower Number One will be finished next year. Tower Number Four is highly visible. The Visitor Center will open next year. The museum will open next year. Of course, it is a work in progress, and it is vast work to bring life, assertion of life, the victory of life, over the catastrophic events that befell New York and all places at the same time.

I end here, where I started my project. I was an immigrant to New York. I lived under a totalitarian regime. I never took it for granted what New York is; New York is about freedom. It is about liberty. That skyline, as difficult as it is to achieve anything in New York, as complex as it is, the ambitions, the dreams, it is about the values, which we all cherish, which is the truth of democracy. Thank you.