- Intro

- 1/3 concepts

- 2/3 aspects of architecture

- 3/3 concepts relating to aspects of architecture

-conclusion

Expand on the introduction to the concept List key features of the concept (A,B, C)

Explain a key feature of the concept

A A key quote An example of how A works Explain a key feature

B A key quote An example of how B works Explain a key feature

C. A key quote An example of how C works

The essay will be a piece of writing that constitutes a philosophical architectural experimentation/critique centered on two key elements:

an *assigned* philosophical concept. The concepts are drawn from the content of the lecture series.

a *selected* piece of architecture (a building, a detail, an idea, an installation, a city, or a space). The piece of architecture should be selected in consultation with your tutor and should excite you.

I‘m writing an essay focused upon the relation between a concept and an architecture.

The concept is “Other spaces” also known as “Heterotopia” by Michel Foucault

And the architecture is Jewish Museum Berlin by architect Daniel Libeskind

The relationship between architecture and philosophical concepts often transcends the boundaries of physical structures, providing a lens through which the built environment can be interpreted as a reflection of human experience. One such profound connection exists between Michel Foucault’s concept of "Other Spaces," or heterotopia, and the Jewish Museum Berlin, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind. Foucault’s heterotopia is a framework for understanding spaces that are 'other,' existing in a state of contradiction or opposition to conventional spaces. These are spaces that challenge norms, revealing hidden meanings or experiences through their spatial configurations and the events they hold within. Foucault's ideas explore how such places operate in society, mediating between the real and the imagined, the ordered and the chaotic, or the sacred and the mundane. These heterotopian spaces allow for an alternative perception of reality, often existing on the margins of society.

Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, completed in 2001, is a striking example of how architecture can embody and materialize heterotopian ideas. The museum, which memorializes the history of Jewish life in Germany and the horrors of the Holocaust, is itself an 'other space.' It is a physical and emotional journey through history, memory, and loss. Libeskind's design rejects traditional museum layouts in favor of a fragmented, disjointed experience that evokes feelings of dislocation and disruption—an architectural expression that mirrors the fractured history it commemorates. Through its jagged form, slashing lines, and voids, the building creates a space that unsettles and provokes. Visitors are made to feel a profound sense of absence and silence, while simultaneously navigating a labyrinthine interior that reflects the complex and often painful Jewish experience in Germany.

In many ways, the Jewish Museum Berlin functions as a heterotopia in Foucault's sense. It is a space set apart from the everyday, yet deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts. It defies traditional notions of what a museum should be, blending elements of memorial, museum, and public space. The disorienting architectural design, characterized by sharp angles, stark contrasts, and 'voids'—empty spaces within the structure—creates a physical manifestation of rupture and dislocation. These voids are especially critical as they symbolize both the absence left by the Holocaust and the cultural gaps created by the destruction of Jewish communities. In this sense, the museum exists as a place where the trauma and memory of the past coexist with the present, offering visitors a space of reflection and contemplation.

Moreover, the museum disrupts the conventional narrative flow associated with museum experiences. Rather than a linear or chronological presentation of history, Libeskind’s design forces visitors to engage with history in a fragmented and non-hierarchical way, echoing Foucault's description of heterotopian spaces as those that juxtapose multiple incompatible spaces simultaneously. Visitors to the museum are not merely passive observers; they become active participants in navigating a complex emotional and spatial terrain, thus deepening their engagement with both the architecture and the history it represents.

In examining the Jewish Museum Berlin through the lens of Foucault’s heterotopia, this essay seeks to uncover how Libeskind’s architecture embodies the concept of 'other spaces' by challenging conventional museum typologies, creating a space for memory and reflection, and evoking a profound emotional response in those who enter.

\*\*Introduction\*\*

In the realm of architectural theory, Michel Foucault's concept of "Other Spaces" or "Heterotopia" provides a powerful lens through which to examine certain spaces that simultaneously reflect and contest the societal structures around them. Defined as real places that exist outside of normative social orders, heterotopias are sites of ambiguity and contradiction, where multiple layers of meaning and experience intersect (Foucault, 1986). They are spaces of "otherness" that disrupt our conventional understanding of space, functioning both within and outside society's physical and symbolic structures. This essay explores the relationship between Foucault's theory of heterotopia and Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, a monumental example of architecture that embodies the complexities of memory, trauma, and identity.

Foucault's concept of heterotopia is not limited to a single form or function but is rather defined by several principles that distinguish these spaces from ordinary ones. Heterotopias, he suggests, are capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, sites that are in themselves incompatible (Foucault, 1986). These spaces often serve a social or cultural function, responding to deep-seated societal needs or anxieties. The Jewish Museum Berlin, designed by Libeskind, can be interpreted as such a heterotopia. It serves as both a museum and a memorial, dedicated to preserving Jewish history while also confronting the trauma of the Holocaust. Libeskind's design, with its sharp angles, voids, and disorienting spaces, embodies the contradictions and tensions of modern Jewish identity in Germany and can be understood as a physical manifestation of the heterotopic principles Foucault describes.

The Jewish Museum Berlin challenges conventional museum typology through its fragmented and disjointed form, a representation of the ruptures in Jewish history. The building's zigzagging structure, often referred to as "Between the Lines," evokes a sense of loss, displacement, and the fracturing of identity, which parallels Foucault's notion of heterotopias as spaces of crisis or deviation (Libeskind, 1999). The museum's voids—empty spaces that cut through the building—are particularly striking in their representation of absence, symbolizing the millions of Jewish lives lost during the Holocaust. These voids serve as powerful reminders of historical trauma, transforming the museum into a space where visitors confront both presence and absence, memory and forgetting. This duality aligns with Foucault's assertion that heterotopias are sites where time is both accumulated and suspended, where history is simultaneously preserved and erased (Foucault, 1986).

In this essay, I will argue that Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin functions as a heterotopia by not only embodying the trauma and memory of the Holocaust but also by challenging and reshaping the visitor’s understanding of space, history, and identity. Through the exploration of architectural design, historical symbolism, and spatial experience, the museum creates a heterotopic space that allows for the coexistence of multiple realities, both past and present. In doing so, it opens a dialogue between architecture and theory, illustrating how Foucault's concept of heterotopia can be physically and symbolically realized within the built environment.

\*References\*

Foucault, M. (1986). \*Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.\* Translated by Jay Miskowiec. \*Diacritics,\* 16(1), 22-27.

Libeskind, D. (1999). \*Between the Lines: Extension to the Berlin Museum, with the Jewish Museum.\*

Concept: Other Spaces (Heterotopia)

The concept “Other Spaces” also known as “Heterotopias” which is first introduced by French philosopher Michel Foucault in his lecture “Of Other Spaces” in 1967. Heterotopias, as Foucault described, are “places outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” [1], referring to real places that exist within society but set apart and distinct from the everyday spaces, real places that operate outside traditional spatial hierarchies. This general idea of heterotopias encompasses various type of spaces, they each characterized by its own unique principle, they juxtapose, reflect, contrast, or disrupt the ordinary. For example, cemeteries that gather and preserve the essence of the past; libraries that collect information from different times; prisons confine individuals for specific purposes, etc. all creating a distinct space with its own set of rules and purposes. These spaces all serve as a sort of “counter-site”, all the sites within the social context are “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” [2] by these heterotopias. It challenges or reflect the norms and the structures of the society which they are part of. Essentially, Heterotopia is places that are different [3]. Foucault's work seeks to reshape our understanding of how spaces interact with concepts of time, culture, and human behavior, providing a deep insight between various heterotopias and the concepts that both influence and are influenced by them. Following Foucault's framework, six principles of heterotopias are outlined in his work, three of them that have more potential relevance to architectural and social context will be further analyzed and discussed in detail. From the ability of heterotopias to juxtapose incompatible spaces, to their role in the temporal regulation of society, ultimately to the paradox they present in terms of accessibility. In addition to outlining the key characteristics, the essay also features an annotated bibliography that situates Foucault’s ideas within a broader context. The key sources from other scholars will be critically assessed, providing a concise summary of their insights into how they have interpreted and expanded upon Foucault’s original concept specifically in terms of spatial, temporal, societal and urban perspective. The annotated bibliography aims to provide a framework for further research on heterotopias, potentially in the fields of architecture, urban planning, and social cultural studies.

**Juxtaposition of Incompatible Spaces**

One of the most distinctive features of heterotopias is their capacity to juxtapose several spaces that are in themselves incompatible [1] or contradictory as Foucault explained in the Third principle. This quality allows heterotopias to bring together elements that would otherwise remain separate or distinct, creating a space where different realities coexist. The oldest example, the traditional garden of the Persians, which Foucault identifies as a heterotopia that has superimposed meanings[2], it’s a sacred space can bring together vegetation from different parts of the world, creating a microcosm that is both real and utopian in nature, it’s the “smallest parcel of the world but also the totality of the world” [3]. This juxtaposition challenges the conventional boundaries between different spaces, offering a unique perspective on how space can be organized and experienced.

**Accumulating and transitory**

Heterotopias are also defined by their unique relationship to time. Foucault argues in the Forth principle that these spaces are often “linked to slices of time” [4] that either accumulate indefinitely or are flowing, transitory and precarious, he refers to this characteristic as “heterochronies” [5], because heterotopias often reach their full potential when individuals arrive at absolute break with their traditional time [6]. Indigenous Museums, for instance, are forms of archive that accumulate heritage artifacts and knowledge from the past as well as what are emerging, the process of accumulation will never stop and topping its own summit, serving as spaces where time is simultaneously building up and preserved. On the other hand, festivals such as WugulOra Morning Ceremony are heterotopias that exist in a transient time, it honors the rich culture of the Gadigal people in a specific date, momentarily disrupting the flow of everyday life. This connection to time gives heterotopias a temporal dimension that further distinguishes them from other spaces.

**Isolation and Penetrability**

Another key characteristic of heterotopias is their paradoxical nature of entry and exit that simultaneously separates them from the outside world while allowing access to them. Foucault explains in the fifth principle that heterotopias are often spaces that are not freely accessible like a public place [7], are places that set apart from ordinary social spaces, either through physical barriers or through rituals that control entry and exit. These spaces are not entirely closed off; they are penetrable under certain conditions, often requiring a form of compulsory entry, a permission entry or a specific ritual to access them. For example, a Mosque might be considered a heterotopia, where entry is restricted based on certain religious practices in this case which is exclusive to Islamic society and culture. At other times, these spaces present simple and straightforward openings, but hide curious exclusions [8]*.* However, this type of places has practically disappeared from our civilizations. This duality of isolation and access reinforces the idea that heterotopias are spaces of difference, existing on the margins of society yet remaining connected to it.

The Jewish Museum Berlin is designed by Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, which is completed in 1999 and opened to public in 2001, and has become a landmark in contemporary architecture, historical reflection and cultural representation. Libeskind’s design, which he refers to as *Between the Lines*, was chosen through a competition that asked architects to design an extension to the original Berlin Museum to house the Jewish Museum collection. This proposal did not only offer a new space for exhibits but an entirely new way of experiencing and engaging with the history of Jewish people in Germany.

The location of this project is set in Berlin, where the architect pointed out that it’s not only a physical place, but also serve as “a spiritual reality that makes itself immediately comprehensible to everyone in the world; everyone who has witnessed the Holocaust.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Indeed, a place like this has the power to evoke emotional resonance, not just for the people of Berlin, but for everyone all around the world. That’s what makes everyone is a Berliner, and a survivor, as the architect concluded.

**It is not merely a museum; it is a monument, a space for reflection, and a powerful architectural narrative that addresses the complex history of Jewish life in Germany, particularly the devastating impact of the Holocaust.**

In Libeskind’s point of view, the best works of the contemporary spirit come from the irrational.[[2]](#endnote-2)

This is exactly how he began designing this building—by creating something out of nothing, start somewhere out of nowhere. The architect begins the project by approaching the design through three distinct dimensions: the architectural dimension, the musical dimension, and the textual dimension.[[3]](#endnote-3) The architectural dimension is the irrational set of lines which create a nexus that connecting invisible places that are not patterned on the cityscape, also connecting the unreal places and real people[[4]](#endnote-4). With its zigzagging form, sharp angles, and disorienting spaces, embodies the rupture and fragmentation that defines Jewish history in Berlin, particularly in relation to the Holocaust. The musical dimension is unfinished act III of Schônberg's opera, which is a conversation between Moses and Aaron religious debate, ending it is basically erasing the possibility of continuing in the operatic mode.[[5]](#endnote-5) The textual dimension: is a piece of text, also a list that contains nothing but names of all the Jewish people who were deported from Berlin, names of millions of Jewish people murdered by Germans.[[6]](#endnote-6)

“a museum should not simulate a culture, but should distance or involve the public, in order to make them decide how, where, and what to do in a museum.”

A prominent feature of the museum is the "voids" that cut through the building.

“emblem where the not visible has made itself apparent as a void, an invisible”[[7]](#endnote-7)

These voids are empty spaces that run vertically through the museum, dividing the exhibition areas. Libeskind designed these voids as a representation of the absence left by the Holocaust—the lives lost, the communities destroyed, and the cultural heritage erased.

The voids are inaccessible to visitors, reinforcing their symbolic meaning as spaces of absence that can never be filled or fully comprehended.

The largest of these voids, the *Holocaust Void*, is particularly striking, a tall, cold, and empty space made of concrete, with light entering through a small slit at the top. This void serves as a stark and visceral reminder of the Holocaust, and the emotional impact of standing within this void is a defining part of the museum experience.

Another key element of the museum is the "Memory Void," which houses an installation by artist Menashe Kadishman titled *Shalekhet* (Fallen Leaves). This installation consists of over 10,000 faces cut from iron plates, scattered across the floor of the void. Visitors are invited to walk over the faces, which creates a powerful auditory and sensory experience as the metal clinks and shifts beneath their feet. The faces, with their hollow eyes and open mouths, evoke the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust. The interaction between the visitor and the installation, combined with the haunting atmosphere of the void, creates a sense of collective memory and mourning.

In addition to the voids, Libeskind’s design includes three distinct axes that run through the building: the Axis of Continuity, the Axis of Emigration, and the Axis of the Holocaust. Each axis represents a different path in Jewish history and experience. The Axis of Continuity is the main route through the museum, symbolizing the continuation of Jewish life and culture in Germany despite the ruptures of history. The Axis of Emigration leads to the *Garden of Exile*, an outdoor space that disorients visitors with its tilted concrete pillars and uneven ground. This space represents the disorienting experience of exile and the disconnection felt by those who were forced to flee their homes. Finally, the Axis of the Holocaust leads to a dead end at the Holocaust Tower, a cold, empty, and silent space that serves as a stark monument to the victims of the Holocaust.

The *Garden of Exile* is a particularly important feature of the museum, designed to disorient visitors as they navigate the uneven ground and towering pillars. The garden consists of 49 concrete pillars arranged in a grid pattern, with one pillar in the center standing taller than the rest. Olive trees grow from the tops of the pillars, symbolizing hope and renewal, but the tilted ground makes it difficult to walk through the space, evoking a sense of instability and disorientation. This space is meant to reflect the experience of exile, of being uprooted and displaced from one’s home. The physical discomfort of walking through the garden reinforces the emotional and psychological dislocation experienced by Jews who were forced into exile.

The Jewish Museum Berlin is not just a repository for objects and artifacts but an experiential space that challenges visitors to confront difficult historical realities. Libeskind’s use of architectural forms to evoke memory, trauma, and the passage of time is a key aspect of the museum’s design. The building itself is an exhibit, with each space and each element contributing to the overall narrative. The disorienting and fragmented nature of the architecture mirrors the disorienting and fragmented history it seeks to represent.

In conclusion, Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin is a profound example of architecture’s ability to engage with history, memory, and identity. Through its innovative design, the museum creates a space for reflection and contemplation, challenging visitors to confront the painful history of Jewish life in Germany while also offering a space for hope and renewal. The voids, the axes, and the *Garden of Exile* all work together to create a powerful architectural narrative that is both a monument to the past and a reminder of the importance of memory in shaping the future.

**References**

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Libeskind, D. (2008). *Breaking Ground: Adventures in Life and Architecture.* Riverhead Books.

Zvi, G. (2001). *The Jewish Museum Berlin: The Architecture of Memory.*

1. 1 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 3 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 3 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. 4 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. 1 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. 1 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)