

## Crematorium Baumschulenweg

*Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank*

“People die and they are not happy”—architecture can’t change that. A place of rest, a space for silence: that is something it still manages to provide, despite the fact that not even stones are as heavy as they were in more solid epochs with a firmer belief in the eternal, as in Saqqara, as in Giza, for example.

The dull disconsolate air of the place as we discovered it five years ago, sent a shudder down the spine. A loveless aura warned the visitor: “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.” The heart of this Campo Santo-turned-wilderness needed replacing; here where the dead receive their final blessing—with all the requisite sad routine which is the framework and foundation of it: the laying out, the trimmings, the provision of music and oration, the supply processing and disposal—gatherings of mourners need to collect themselves and relieve one another of burdens: here at the centre of it all a place is needed which weighs the ephemeral against the final, which expresses the heaviness and permits relief.

Our final road is uncertain. Neither church nor temple of the dead offer a model for the path to nothingness or angelhood. In lending shape to freedom and necessity, the intensity, the texture of a Maghreb mosque comes closest to meeting the task: a piazza coperta, a place in the middle of this cenotaph, where many can assemble



*Photo Werner Huthmacher*

and yet the individual is shielded; a reactor for all our feelings. In this room—500 years ago—the columns with their capitals of light establish the only reference left to us under the shroud of theocracy—be it that of Moses, Paul or Mohammed: a cosmological contrast between populated stacks of clay and the sun with its light. “The sun is God”: William Turner is right. And this architecture wants nothing more than to marry Old Fa-

ther Stone, the spirit of heaviness, to Lucifer, Angel of Light.

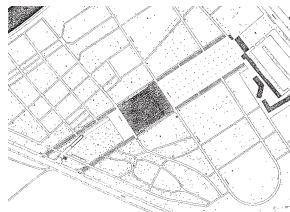
The Great Walls with their ancient “doors” recall those many ages when the After-Life reserved a stronger presence. To the modern-day bereaved they murmur “Fare thee well” and “Great was God—within us”; and in the middle of this room the water mirror and the egg above it pose a question which the poet asked:

*All everlasting springs  
spring inexhaustible hence.  
And God? Did he begin?  
Did God ever commence?*

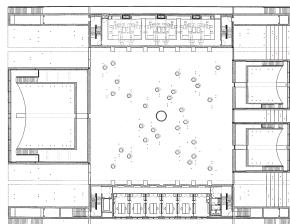
The ceremonial halls—two for fifty, one for two hundred and fifty people—are simply boxes of split stone, set open-fronted into a second, slat-steered casing of glass; the departed soul, the coffin, the urn has gone before already, into the realm of light,

is at one now with the heavens, the clouds, the trees.

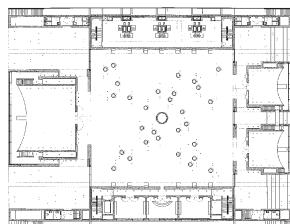
Like no other building—the Museum in Bonn and the Chancellery in Berlin are no exceptions—this one reflects the unbroken will of the architects. A hollowed, jointless block fifty by seventy meters, ten meters deep in the earth, ten meters above it, one stone, one gravestone, insisting on the material consistency of its several spaces. And if there were a word of truth in Ludwig Wittgenstein's claim that architecture "compels and glorifies; that where there is nothing to glorify there can be no architecture," then this structure glorifies the quintessence of architecture, celebrates space, the silence of walls in light. And architecture can do no more than that: "Pitying the insatiable, it is provocation to the eyes, soup to the world, a star to the rat," to venture and illicit and fairy-tale image.



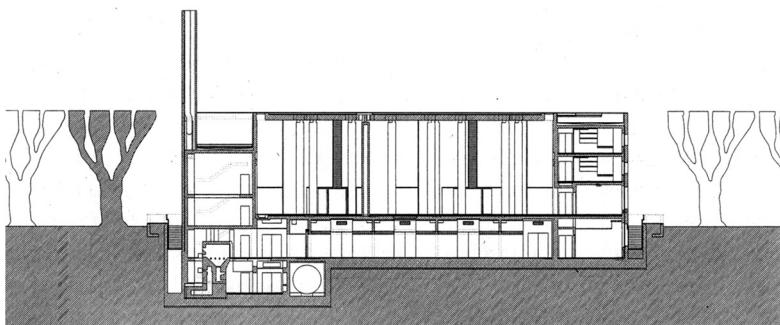
*Site plan*



*Basement plan*



*Entry plan*



*Transverse section*



*Condolence hall Photo Werner Huthmacher*