Governor’s Island: Designing the Present through the Past

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Fig. 1: The old and the new: Governors Island
Governor's Island:  
Designing the Present through the Past  
by Victoria Parson

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History and memory, along with relics, are our tools to retrieve the past. How can they also be the tools to create the present? This thesis explores how history and memory can be integral in the establishment of a new program for a site and inform the architecture of that site. This thesis challenges the history of a complex site while preserving its memories.

Governor's Island, located on the southern tip of Manhattan has had a military history for 200 years. Having been recently vacated, it is on the list of the 10 most endangered historic sites in the U.S.A. My goal is to provide the island with a program which responds to its past: an International Center for Peace; to provide an experience which unfolds history and memory: intersecting and diverging paths and places which take to visitors through the island; and to provide architecture which reveals the island's memory: transparent materials and a siting which relates to New York and military architecture.

At these different scales, the past will be used to derive a new place from an old place.

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Fig. 2: The constant presence of New York
In vain, great-hearted Kublai, shall I attempt to describe Zaira, city of high bastions. I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades’ curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper’s swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen’s nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn; the tilt of a guttering and a cat’s progress along it as he slips into the same wind; the firing range of a gunboat which has suddenly appeared beyond the cape and the bomb that destroys the guttering; the rips in the fish net and the three old men seated on the dock mending nets and telling each other for the hundredth time the story of the gunboat of the usurper, who some say was the queen’s illegitimate son, abandoned in his swaddling clothes there on the dock.

As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira’s past. The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities
Fig. 3: The Holocaust Memorial Museum
an example of using the past in architecture
This thesis explores how the past can be used to create new architecture at an historic site. While a site is always changing, it is also the conglomerations of everything that has been and will be. Since the future is completely inaccessible, it is essential that we do not turn our backs on the past particularly when it is of cultural importance. Can, at some level, can we tap into this past to inform the architectural decision making process? This may in turn create a more meaningful place which is sympathetic to the evolution of a place through time. In David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country*, the components of the past are listed as history, memory and relics. I will look at the past from these three aspects and the different types of pasts: conceptual, typological and specific.

My first step is to define the meanings of history and memory and relics is a broad sense. After this first look, I will explore these components and how they are related to each other vis a vis David Lowenthal. Once I develop my own definitions of the aforementioned
Definitions

Fig. 4: The Meaning of the Past
Memory

1. The power, act, or process of remembering. 2. The total of what one remembers. 3. A person, thing, happening or act remembered. 4. The length of time over which remembering extends. 5. Commemoration or remembrance. 6. Fame are death; posthumous reputation.

Indoeuropean - "men" (think)>
Latin - "memor" (mindful)>
English - "memory" (process of coming to mind again)
(Remember: 1. To have (an event, thing, person) come to mind again.)

1. Definitions are from Webster Unabridged Dictionary, 25th Ed.
Etymologies are from The Roots of English,
History
1. An account of what has happened; narrative; story; tale. 2 (a) What has happened in the life or development of a people, country, institution, etc. (b) A systematic account of this, usually with an analysis and explanation. 3. All recorded events of the past. 4. The branch of knowledge that deals systematically with the past; a recording analysis, coordinating & explaining of the past events. 5. A know or recorded past. 6. Something that belongs to the past. 7. Something important enough to be recorded.

Indoeuropean - “wit” (know, see)>

Greek - “histor” (learned man)>

Latin -“historia (knowledge obtained by enquiry)>

English - “history” (fictional narrative, account of actual events)
Relic

1a: an object esteemed and venerated because of association with a saint or martyr
1b: SOUVENIR, MEMENTO pl 2: REMAINS, CORPSE 3: something left behind after decay, disintegration, or disappearance 4: a trace of some past or outmoded practice, custom, or belief: VESTIGE

Latin - “reliquae” (leave behind)
All past events are more remote from our senses than the starts of the remotest galaxies whose own light at least still reaches the telescopes.

George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*
Although most of David Lowenthal’s book, The Past is a Foreign Country is dedicated to a full exploration of the meaning of the past, he takes the time to describe history, memory and relics as our three tools which when used together begin to piece together the elusive past.¹

He discusses memory first, describing its personal characteristics as “inviolable” and as unshareable as a physical feeling, something which does not always conform to chronological order.

“The prime function of memory, then, is not preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present. Far from simply holding on to previous experiences, memory helps us to understand them. Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize, and classify the world around us. And recollections remote from present frameworks of though, such as early childhood’s vivid sensory experiences, or of no current consequence, such as obsolete school lessons, are truly lost beyond recall.

None the less we remember far more than we need simply to cope with ongoing life. Memory, which steals “fire/From the fountains of the past/To glorify the present”, enables us not merely to follow but to build on previous efforts, not just to survive in today’s world but to elaborate our moments and days with a densely woven skein of the mind that makes the mortal mind seem all but imperishable.²

Lowenthal does not really distinguish between personal memory and collective memory. He sees that personal memory is made more vibrant if the memory is shared by a greater number of people. Personal memory is often altered to mesh with that more collective mem-

1. Lowenthal, The Past is A Foreign Country, Chapter 5

2. Lowenthal, The Past is A Foreign Country, pp.210
ory. The memories that I will use will be the memories of persons actually associated with a site in addition to a collective memory about the site and larger, cultural aspects of the site.

Fig. 7: Historical View of Governor's Island
When he switches his discussion to history, he establishes the relationship between history and memory. This is an important relationship as history is basically composed of memories collected and explained in a certain way. Another point about history is it’s bridging capabilities between the past and the present. While it can not explain every detail about the past, it also starts to discover certain patterns and trends seen in relationship to other pasts and the present. I think an important issue he brings up is the attitude towards history as it is defined now and its definition as a narrative. Today historians concentrate on similar events and constructs, often ignoring issues of time.

Historical intelligibility requires not merely past events occurring at particular times, but a coherent story in which many events are skipped, others are coalesced and temporal sequence is often subordinated to explanation and interpretation...Understanding the past demands some awareness of the temporal location of people and things; a chronological framework clarifies, places things in context, underscores the essential uniqueness of past events...The pearls of history take their value not merely from being many and lustrous, but from being arranged in a causal narrative sequence; the narrative lends the necklace meaning as well as beauty.¹

This is a very important distinction in my thesis, so I will recognize both narrative history and the concept of history. The narrative history will follow the chronological events which occurred on the site, while the concept of history will become an important element of the structure of path and place.

The third component of the past are its relics. This category includes buildings archaeological records and documents and geologic information. Relics can not in most circumstances be pure indicators of a single time. They are a result of changes over time which adds new layers of meaning to them.

Because artifacts are at once past and present, their historical and modern roles interact. A flavor of antiquity permeates a row of houses famed for architects and residents of various epochs, their different longevities adding character to the present-day ensemble. Landscapes commingling old with new reinforce feeling of temporal coexistence.²

¹Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, pp. 223
²Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, pp. 248
Fig. 8: New York from Governor's Island, 1816
The relics on a site that need to be dealt with are the buildings. Buildings over time have seen different uses and have had additions and subtractions made to them. My attitude is that these buildings begin to give a holistic impression of the continuous history. It is important to maintain this continuity.

How does this become architecture? In relationship to architecture I first recognized the three different scales of architecture: urban, site, building. These scales mean respectively to me the relationship of a building to the context, the program and the material. It would be quite easy to correlate these directly with a component of the past, e.g. memory to urban (since it can be collective and personal); history to site (drawing from what happened there); and relics to the building itself. While this provides a reasonable structure, it becomes important to recognize the significance of the components at all scales.

The importance of the past in architecture is a sensitivity to the continuity of a place. A sense of being is important for a building or a site. Looking at buildings which paid no heed to a previous state are always example of disjointedness.

I would postulate that it is essential for the architect to become the “historian” of a built form. As defined earlier, history is an arrangement of other people’s memory onto a framework defined by an historian. By building a framework on which to place other histories, memories and the existing structures, an architect becomes the historian.
Fig. 9: Designing with Memory-sketch model for Castle Williams
Fig. 10: Designing with History-sketch model for Fort Jay
Fig. 11: Design Framework
The design framework I developed is a multi-layered structure which goes from the conceptual idea of the past to the idea of scale in architecture. The initial stage consists of three scales of the past: the concept of the past, the past of a topic or type and the past of a specific location. While at each scale the past consists of history, memory and relic, my framework suggests that each of these constructs can have a greater relationship with one of the scales, but all are factors in the consideration of the past.

When using memories, the past of a type, or the memories of that type, can be explored. This construct is valid because of the commonality of collective memories associated with certain topics. The application of this relationship can be at the site scale. This scale includes some programming aspects but also configuration and orientation of buildings and open spaces.

Finally relics can be used to explain the past of a place since most relics are entirely associated with one place. This holds true at the building/person scale.

This analysis lead me to the design of a matrix through which aspects of the past can be explored. It allows scale to be juxtaposed with history, memory and relics to be used as a design tool. For instance, a memory of a person from a place, could inform the arrangement of a building or a relic, giving a clue to the relationship of a building to its context. The framework provides an understanding of relationships which can be correlated throughout the matrix. Although the matrix presents each of the elements on a one to one association, they can also connect in more complex ways.
Fig. 12: Aerial View of Governors Island
Governor's Island is located at the southern tip of Manhattan. In 1996 it was vacated by the Coast Guard which had a base there for 30 years. Previous to that it had been an army fort and base since the 18thC. The island has been designated an historic landmark and is on the top ten list of endangered historic sites in the U.S.A. What is to be done with this place? Many political battles are raging and the possibility range from a casino to a university campus to a center for non-profit organizations. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the use of the past in determining this answer. As the architect it is important for me to determine the framework for design. Through my multi-layered framework, I will look at the conceptual structure of history and memory as well as the actual past of the island. The past that I will use for my history of the island, or my new configuration for it, will be derived from personal memories of people with whom I talked, memories written down by people of this and previous centuries and histories written about the Island in addition to images and records.
1600 The Island changed hands from the native Americans who had lived in harmony with it to the Europeans who began a history of addition and alteration. The Dutch used the island originally as a cow pasture, saw mill, and tobacco plantation. During this period the size of the island decreased. It is not clear if this is from rising water or from the removal of silt.

1624 First buildings erected by settlers from the Dutch West India Company on Nooten Island. The native name was Pagganack. Both names reflect the groves of nut trees found on the island.

1637 Wouter Van Twiller, Dutch Governor of the New Netherlands, acquires the island from the Manahatas Indians for two axe heads, a string of beads, and a few nails. This agreement was annulled in 1652.
1664 British take possession of the island from the Dutch under the terms of the Treaty of Westminster.

The British use for the island was as "for the benefit and accommodation of His Majesties Governors for the time being", thus the anglo name of Governors Island.

1700

The governors from New York used the island for mostly recreational purposes. One stocked the island with game for hunting. At mid-century the island commenced its 250 year military history due to its favorable location in New York Harbor.

1702

Using money designated for the erection of a fort, Lord Cornbury built the first structure that may still be in existence: the Governor's House. This is debated and uncertain.
England's Queen Anne quarantines plague-infested Palatine refugees on the island.

The "Royal Americans," a colonial regiment, become the first troops to be stationed on the island. 1776: September 15: British troops occupy New York, including the island, during the War for Independence.

American forces reoccupy the island.

1800: Three forts were built, increasing the massive defensibility of New York Harbor. It was during this period that the island experienced much of its growth.

The first version of Fort Jay was built using the help of students from Columbia College. It was an earthen structure with batteries on three sides of the island.
February 15: New York State cedes the island to the United States. After a stint as a hotel and race track, the threat of war from France required that the building of the now existing permanent Fort Jay (then Fort Columbus) would commence. Castle Williams is started and becomes one of the main defenders of the Harbor, with its sister forts: Castle Clinton and Castle Gansevoort.

As a formidable defence system, the English were kept out of New York Harbor.

Governors Island is designated as one of the signal stations being established to announce the arrival of incoming ships to New York.

April-July: Ulysses S. Grant resides at the officer’s quarters known as the Block House.
Civil War  Governors Island serves as the central Army recruiting station for the eastern seaboard, and as a prison camp for captured Confederate officers.

1886  France presents the 152-foot copper Statue of Liberty to the United States to commemorate the alliance of the two nations during the American Revolution.

1900  At the turn of the century land which had eroded over time was replaced with the infill from the New York City Subway. The island was the headquarters for important Army garrisons.

At mid century, the Army ceded the island to the Coast Guard. For the remainder of the century the island was the largest Coast Guard base in the world, and was host to many important international summits and agreements. At the close of the century the future use of the island remains unknown.
1901 A seawall is constructed and back-filled with 4,787,000 cubic yards of fill dirt from dredged channels and excavations for New York’s Lexington Avenue Subway to create the current island, increasing its size from 90 to 173 acres.

1909 September 29: Wilbur Wright departs on his first flight from Governors Island, circling the Statue of Liberty before returning to land on the island.
World War I  22nd Infantry from Governors Island seized all the German ships IN Hoboken. Island Designated embarkation point.

1937/1938  Comedians Tommy and Dick Smothers are born at the base hospital while their father, Major Thomas Bolyn Smothers, is stationed on the island.

World War II  Maintained a high level of war service mainly including inducting draftees

1966  Rear Admiral I.J. Stephens accepts jurisdiction over Governors Island on behalf of the U.S. Coast Guard.

1976  Governors Island hosts 20,000 visitors and residents for the Parade of Tall Ships and fireworks display commemorating America’s bicentennial.
1986 President Ronald Reagan relights the torch on the newly refurbished Statue of Liberty from a point on the southwestern tip of the island.

1988 Diplomatic meetings are held at the Admiral’s Quarters between President Ronald Reagan & Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev.

1993 United nations peace talks between deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Lt. General Raoul Cedras which help restore democracy to Haiti are held at the South Battery.

1995 The U.S. Coast Guard announces the closing of its base on Governors Island.

1996 Coast Guard residential personnel are relocated off the island, leaving the Island uninhabited.
Fig. 13: Governor's Island with New York beyond
The Following quotes are memories of Governors Island

"beauty and security"
"the old rock"
"at quiet moments you could detect the ‘hum’ or ‘heartbeat’ of the city"
"safely of GIT begins in the Ferry terminal"
"going to NY"

"...When the War came on, the War between the States, Dr. English brought to Tallahassee a wounded Virginia soldier, a young boy, who hoped to have his health restored in our mild climate. He was Capt. John H. Beall. One night Dr. English came to play chess with Colonel William, and brought Captain Beall along. Soon the other men became so absorbed in their game they did not miss the young people, and Captain Beall persuaded another guest of the home, Miss Marth O’Bryan, to stroll through the gardens with him. They fell in love that night and had planned to be married, when Captain Beall was taken by the Yankee and handed on Governor’s Island, New York”2

"The boat ride was great as you watched Manhattan disappear."
"the aroma of grass"
"On the ferry back, it’s incredible to see the skyscrapers grow right in front of you”
"It was always a challenge to get home too, you’d never know if the ferry was going to break down or not.”
"It was an oasis, less than suburban.”
"a really peaceful place”
"There was a campus like atmosphere that seemed like anything but New York and then you caught a glimpse of New York and its apparent how close it really is.”
"protected”3

1. Memories of Governor’s Island, Coast Guard

2. Evelyn Whitfield Henry, “Old Homes in Tallahassee”
3. Interviews by Victoria Parson
Fig. 14: Historic Map of New York
Summarizing the time line, Governors Island was purchased from the native americans by the dutch. It took until the end of the British rule in America for the strategic qualities of the island to be noticed. After that, the evolution of the military presence followed the historic pattern of American seacoast fortifications and military bases. The first fortification built was an earthen structure, similar to the first Fort system of the new world.¹ A permanent fort was built with extending batteries of which only one still stands as most were earthen. After the War of 1812, Governor’s Island saw a decline in its need as a defensive site and was transformed into a training facility and prison. Through world War II until Operation Desert Storm, many soldiers found themselves passing through Governors Island. By the time the island was transferred to the Coast Guard it was showing the sprawling characteristics of any military base. The most intriguing development in the past 30 years has been the island’s use as a location for summits and peace talks.

¹ Lewis, Seacoast fortifications of the United States
Fig. 15: Fort Jay

Fig. 16: Castle Williams
The most important relics on the island are two forts built around 1800. In addition to these are a number of buildings which were built successively afterwards.

Fort Jay:
With a very strategic location the fort was originally a star-shaped earthen fort built by students from Columbia University. It evolved from there into a masonry structure, designed using Vauban’s principles for fort construction. It has expanded twice, once out in 1800 with the construction of a new structure and up in the 1830s.

Castle Williams:
Designed by its namesake Colonel Jonathan Williams, Castle Williams was built as part of the New York defence system, working with castle Clinton in Battery Park and Castle Gansevoort. It was a formidable system which kept the British out of New York Harbor during the war of 1812. During the civil war it was converted into a prison and was used as and altered for this capacity up until 1966. The coast guard used the facility as a youth center and storage.
Fig. 17: South Battery:

Fig. 18: Colonel's Row

Fig. 19: Regimental Row
Fig. 20: Governor’s House

Fig. 21: Chapel of St. Cornelius

Fig. 22: Arsenal
Fig. 23: Aerial View in 1950
Fig. 24: Aerial View in 1990’s
Fig. 25: View of New York From GI
The first step I took in using the past was to develop a new use for the island. My intention is that the use and the design solution is generated from the past. The past which would be applied to develop a use was of course the programmatic element of military base. As I have stated the program mostly corresponds with the historic component of the past. Through this, the new program should relate back to the military history of GI. Continuing with my process, it is necessary to relate memory and relic to the programmatic scale. The program I selected was an International Center for Peace.

This program challenges the history. Once it was a military base, used to defend and protect from hostility, now it becomes a place where hostility can be abated before hand, where peace can be “made” or negotiated by discussion not through war. Though I am challenging history, I have opted to consider its memories sympathetically. Most of the memories shared about the island are about its peacefulness, its sanctuaries-like qualities. A Center for Peace is congruous with this aspect of Governors Island’s past. The relics which are on the island will be suitable for this program. The buildings (relics) were the objects of which the military base consisted. By using the existing buildings for the new program in a similar way to their use in the past, the existing buildings are brought to the present.

There are three parts to the program: an education center for students from everywhere to learn about each other, a center for the discussion of international peace issues and a museum.
Fig. 26: Plan of GI in 1904
There are a number of issues involved with both the site and the program which begin to take shape. The most important ones I have identified as: the Island and the City (the island situation raises issues as does the proximity to New York), Public space vs. Private space (the issue of separating the Delegates from the Public, an important security consideration while at the same time creating awareness of the private section), and the Re-Use of Military Architecture (a building constructed for military purposes, particularly those built before 1900, are going to be of very strong form, created for a very specific purpose). These issues will be the elements in the framework on which I the architect/historian will place the memories and historic facts, the buildings giving the framework additional substance. Everything about the past will not be a factor in each issue, but the most important components will be used. First I will go more in-depth into the issues, outlining the design criteria. After describing this I will show how I met those criteria using element from the past.
Fig. 26: New York Harbor
The most noticeable characteristic of Governor’s Island (GI) is that it is an island near and visible from New York City (NY). This issue emphasizes the relationship between the two islands. During the 17th Century, as NY was slowly becoming an important port due to its location (a natural harbor inland therefore protected) GI stayed rural or at least bucolic. GI was a retreat for the English governor’s and it became secluded as a military base. In looking at the physical relationship as well as the more conceptual relationship between the two, I have focused on two of the more apparent connections. The first is the physical growth differential. At the beginning of the 17thC, the two islands were both generally uninhabited by the Europeans and used respectfully by the American Indians as was their culture. Since then Manhattan has grown at an incredible rate compared to GI. This is illustrated best in section. The flow of people between the islands, began about at early as there were inhabitants. For the first two centuries, the flow was from NY to GI, as GI was more idyllic than Manhattan. After the military became established on the island, the flow reverse and was from GI to NY by the men stationed there. In both ways, NY was the focal point: to leave or to go to NY. Even when the men were going from GI to NY, it is interesting to note that they always welcomed the safety they felt upon their return to GI. Another important aspect is that the presence of NY is always felt on GI while on the other hand you have no awareness of GI while on Manhattan.

Design Considerations
To respond to NY’s growth differential on GI
To establish a continuous flow between GI and NY.
To maintain the feeling of security on GI
To establish key views to NY
Fig. 27: Preliminary Idea on division of spaces
The issue of the separation of public functions and private functions is critical for the design of Governor's Island. The museum is a public facility, to be open to the people of the world regardless of the inhabitation of the rest of the Island. There are two places which will be private in relation to the public museum: the southern half of the island will be open to development and could be used for residential purposes; part of my proposed design will include an area for delegates. Security will be of extreme importance for this section. On one hand, when the delegates are not meeting on the island, the public should have access to their area but when they are in session, they should be afforded the most security. It raises the question of how to give the visitor differing experiences depending on their access to the island, and through this make the public aware of the very private function occurring.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the military is at once a very public institution but operates as a private organization with its own rules.

Design Considerations:
To create two different experiences when the one site is occupied and the other is not.
To create a barrier between the two parts that contrasts the existing military architecture which can be permeable as necessary.
Fig. 28: The States of Military Architecture from medieval times to the renaissance
Since Governor's Island has two impressive relics of American military architecture, it is important to discuss how it affects the island and its architectural configuration. The forts on GI follow the long line of military structures by being wall-like and by being made of masonry. Both these characteristics date back to 7000BCE in Jericho and probably earlier. Fort Jay, more than Castle Williams are representative of the first major change of this system which was necessitated by the invention of the cannon. Interestingly, the early american forts, of which there was one on GI, were earthen structures which were actually more resilient to cannon attacks, but the renaissance italians were insistent on using masonry ergo maintaining the historical status quo and image of “progress” and civilization. By the 19 C. when the forts on GI were build, cities were no longer fortified but were protected by systems of forts. Fort Jay and Castle Williams are examples of this stage of the development of military architecture as part of the New York Harbor Defensive System which displayed its effectiveness by keeping England from attacking New York during the war of 1812.

Design Considerations:

To exemplify the ineffectiveness and outdatedness of masonry and permanent land structures as contemporary defence systems.

To highlight the collective memory of this archaic system.

Fig. 29: Sketch model showing use of bastions

1. de la Croix, Military Considerations in City Planning
Fig. 30: Initial Design Concept
When designing using the past, I took three avenues: through the actual past of the island, through the past of the program of the island and through the general concept of the past. Where I saw a larger organization system need I used the general concept of past. Where I saw a programmatic need I drew from the past of the program of the island and where I saw a physical need I drew from the actual past. This way I tried to maintain a consistency of scale of need to solution.

I have chosen the northern half for my exploration. This is the site of the original island before landfill. It is also designated a landmark as most of building display some historic significance. The past of the southern half is minimal and still growing. There are not many “past” factors to respond to.

In addition to the program and siting, I have chosen to explore two main design ideas. The first is to develop a path. As circulation, it can become an excellent tool for the exploration of the past; it can be a framework or a timeline. The second is to build underground instead of above. This is responding to the sectional relationship to New York. It is also sympathetic with the collective memory of military architecture which thinks of forts in terms of passages and protection.

**Education Center:**
- Housing for 200 students at one time.
- Housing for 20 teachers.
- Classrooms
- Dining Facilities
- Library

**Peace Center**
- Housing for 15 Delegates
- Conference Center for up to 125 persons (6500sf)
- Housing for Entourages
- Helipad
- Press Center
- Dinner Hall

**Museum**
- Exhibit Halls- History Museum- 2 @ 10,000sf
- Art Museum-total of 40,000sf
- Governors Island Museum-2000sf
- Museum for Peace Center-2000sf
- Restaurant/Cafe -
- Library - 5000 sf
- Historian Center-10,000 sf
Fig. 31: Site Plan with New York
In order to differentiate between the northern International Center of Peace from the southern half of the island, I drew from the physical history of the island. It has been shrinking and expanding for centuries. From this I developed the idea of an island within an island.

The island, instead of growing or shrinking on the parameter now changes from the interior. This first division of the island is designating the Peace Center’s area from the rest of the area, the Center falling entirely on the original part of the island. With this, the original importance Fort Jay played in the organization of the island is reinstated and its new role as the heart of the Center is emphasized. The place where the cut occurs is as close to the original shore line. There will be two operable bridges spanning the newly created channel. Besides being derived from the original shoreline, the division stays along the lines of the growth and expansion the island has experience. Both these are from the narrative history of the island.
Fig. 32: Use distribution
The site is divided into two programmatic sections: the Diplomatic Peace Center and the public half which contain the museum and the educational center. Fort Jay, as the heart of the Center, contains elements of both sides in addition to office space for historian and the press.

With a large slice that goes along the island through Fort Jay, another island within an island is created: the diplomatic Peace Center on one island and the public facilities on the other. The division runs through the historic northern section, dividing Fort Jay, creating two types of spaces with its walls: a public space for a museum and a conference hall for the delegates. Dividing right through Fort Jay is symbolic of how obsolete a masonry fort is. When the delegates are not in session, there is no a problem with security, the public has use of the whole Center. But when they are present what should be done? The first question was whether I should divide the island completely and have the museum independent of the delegates. This did not seem appropriate. I wanted to give the visitors different experiences when the delegates were there versus when they were absent. The issue is raised as to where is the threshold that can be closed and how do the paths reflect the difference. As it developed the division went right through the courtyard of the fort.

The physical division that was created by water outside the fort becomes a glass wall, with operable section to allow for permeation when the island is all open to the public. The wall is bullet-proof glass. The contrast between the masonry walls of the fort which was a reasonable defence in the past, is now obsolete and a clear, glass, becomes more effective. The transparent glass also is set up like an exhibition barrier. While the delegates they are in session, they become a part of history, a part of the exhibit. To bring the delegates back to the public, one of the courtyard panels can become translucent and project the current session back to the public.

The forts will be the main interest point for the public. This is why they become the most appropriate place to put the Museums. There will two museums, one will use the concept of narrative history and while the other, the concept of memory.

Castle Williams is designated the Museum of Memory. A place where personal expressions of the need for peace or the horror of war can be viewed. The circular form, though a cyclical pattern, also radiates out in all directions, not confined to a linear progression. Fort Jay on the other hand, seemed to be the right spot for a Museum of History, one which at the same time describes a narrative of how peace has occurred, but also looking at different concepts which can be explored individually and in depth.
Fig. 33: Model of Peace Center.

Fig. 34: Site Plan (opposite)
West-East Section through the Island

Site Section
Fig. 35: Paths and Public buildings
There are two paths emphasized in my plan. The main circulation path is the path to take to go to the museums. It is a straightforward route to the important public sites on the island. The path is a crisp path made of thin stone slabs. Throughout the island all the paths which I create contain a small element of this material.

The secondary path is a path of history. It is structured like my concept of history, providing a framework for a narrative history in chronological order in which moments of memory occur. The paths are non-linear in a spatial manner, but follow a historical sequence by leading one from building to building in the order the buildings were constructed. Along the way are places of memory which may not explain what actually happened there, but create a space where a visitor could stop and think, thinking as we have seen being the key component to memory. The path itself occurs on paths which exist, have existed or which were planned to exist. They layer that I added to these paths was the ground plane. Not only do I create the places of memory but the ground material of the “history” path is new. The ground plane graduates over time beginning with a primitive material such as dirt and ending with a modern material like rubber. The physical organization of the paths are drawn from the existing network of paths, adding the new material to the paths which are part of the new system, but keeping the rest in their existing condition. My new layer is a thin layer which does not necessarily cover the whole island. The layer is keeping the surface change to a minimal. While it is not exclusively hidden within the buildings, it reveals itself in limited spots, for example, along the path.
Fig. 36: Paths on whole Island

Fix 37: Paths on Public Half
Fig. 39: Plan and Section of Path
Figs. 40-46: Path Sequence from New York, to South Dock, through
Figs. 47-52: Continued Path Sequence from Fort Jay to Castle Williams back to
Fig. 53: View up path to Fort Jay
Fig. 54: Sketch of Path
Fig. 55: Sketch of Interior of Museum showing diverging paths

Fig. 56: Roof Plan of Museum (Overleaf, Left)

Fig. 57: Floor Plan of Museum (Overleaf, Right)
I am proposing two major museums on this site: the Museum of the History of Peace and the Museum of the Memory of Peace. My design focuses on the former. The general scheme of the two museums is drawn from a consideration of the types of pasts: the conceptual, typological and specific.

The circulation of the history museum in particular is a continuation of the main path and the path of history. The circulation is an extension of the end of the latter path. Since it is a history museum, the path continues the chronological narrative, narrating the history of the establishment of peace through the history of civilization. At places along the corridor, certain events and ideas of this history are explained in depth in the exhibition spaces.

The museum is sited in relationship to NY. The relationship occurs in the fact that the building is underground and by a view established from inside the museum towards the City.

The experience starts from the courtyard, down a sets of stairs into the museum. The location for this entrance is chosen from the layout of the “relic” of Fort Jay where the existing entrances into the courtyard of the Fort are aligned east-west. Each is used by the new paths for entering into the Fort, depending on the presence of the delegates. A third sallyport faces north, heading down to what used to be the magazine which is now the cafe. Opposite this existing tunnel is the new entrance into the museum from the court, a steel staircase descending into the museum. The new materials, like the glass of the wall, contrasts with the stone and brick of the existing fort.

The organization of the interior of the museum recalls the collective memory of “Fort” with tunnels and openings at the corner bastions. Two of the corners have a staircase to bring one out to the top of the bastion, perhaps reminiscent of lookout towers. Each of the two exhibition spaces on the west side are configured with a dark space in the center supporting and edge of light, recalling “island” while providing two types of conditions for exhibits.

The cafe is located in the bastion to the north. The area within the bastion is completely open which is taken from an early 19th plan when it had been open with a well in the center. The southeast bastion contains the conference center. Moveable panels in the glass wall allow for visitors to visit the center as part of their tour when the delegates are not in session. When they are in session, an image of the delegates is projected into the courtyard. The glass wall goes through the northeast bastion. Where the glass wall intersects the fort wall, it has been demolished to create a view of NY. The glass wall also divides the fort wall and some of the housing on the south side as well. An elevator is built in this space.
Fig. 58: East-West Section through Museum
Fig. 59: North-South Section through Museum
Fig. 60: Detail Section Through Wall

Fig. 61: Detail Section Through Corridor in Museum
Fig. 63-66: Views of Museum in Site Model
Fig. 67: Sketch of View to New York from interior of Museum

Fig. 68: Sketch Model of Exhibition Space
Fig. 69: Sketch of Museum with New York in Background
Figs. 70-73: Views of Section Model of Museum
This thesis attempted to cover a very broad and complex subject area. The past is a multifaceted issue with many different trajectories. This thesis took one of those trajectories: how the past is able to inform architectural decisions. The past which may also be interpreted and constructed in different ways also added to the complexity of the task at hand.

By examining the different scales of the past and architecture I discovered that not all issues are dealt with at the same level of complexity. For instance, memory is elusive and either personal or collective. It becomes challenging to know which memories to use and how to use them, particularly when the set of people spans over three centuries, thus I did not attain the depth of exploration a less broad subject might have offered and I was not able to develop parts of the project as much as I had hoped I would.

I did attain a general sense of the issues and their relationships. At times it was difficult to depart from my pre-existing concepts and attitudes towards old buildings. This had a tendency to subvert my quest for an objective methodology for designing the present through the past.

I spite of these shortcomings I believer that I was able to keep my thesis ideas in mind when developing the project at all scales, from that of the island use and plan to those of the buildings and details of the interior spaces. The struggle to understand and develop an attitude to design in such instances was in the end a valuable one and one which may provide a lesson for others.

Governors Island is a beautiful place and after looking at it so closely, I hope that the City of New York designates a future use for it which befits its past.
Figure 27: USGS Topographic Map
Figure 28: de la Croix, Military Considerations in City Planning, figs 36, 63 and 85

all other images by the author.

Figure 3: http://www.ushmm.org/visit/visit.html
Figure 7: Smith, Governors Island: Its Military History under three Flags. pp 23.
Figure 8: Ibid. pp. 86.
Figure 12: USGS Aerial Photo
Figure 13: http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/GI/Images/P/b4003.jpg
Figure 14: Homberger, The Historical Atlas of New York City, pp 36
Figure 15: http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/GI/Images/P/jay10.jpg
Figure 16: http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/GI/Images/P/wilam3.jpg
Figure 17: Azoy, Three Centuries Under Three Flags, pp.39.
Figure 18: http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/GI/Images/P/gicol.jpg
Figure 19: http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/GI/Images/P/wilam35.jpg
Figure 20: Azoy, Three Centuries Under Three Flags, pp.4.
Figure 21: http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/GI/Images/P/chlp42.jpg
Figure 24: http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/GI/Images/Brochure/32-97.jpg
Figure 26: National Archives
**Memory**


**Military Architecture**


**Adaptive Reuse**


**Governor's Island**


*Historic American Building Surveys*: NY-5715-1A/B/C/D and 1; NY-5715-2; NY-54-6
http://www.gsa.gov/pbs/pr/govisland.htm: GSA

*Museums*

*New York*