Culture/Conflict/Colors: An Architecture of Incarceration
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Dedicated to Mom, Dad, Heather, and Wendy, with love.

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Abstract

Cameron's [Missouri] prison, its second, will open in February, tucked out of sight, just off the main road to town, near a Wal-Mart. With its cluster of rambling, green roofed buildings, it resembles a junior college more than the maximum-security prison that it is. Gone are the traditional fortress-like stone walls and guard towers. In their place will be a lethal electric fence and motion detectors.

-The Boston Sunday Globe
October 13, 1996

Crime-fighting has become one of the fastest growing industries in the United States. Consequently, the construction of facilities which serve as the end-product of that fight, prisons, has become one of the nation's fastest growing industries as well. The architecture of those facilities, which logically would fall somewhere in the middle, has yet to catch up.

The intention of this project is to begin to explore the possibility for architecture within the context of the prison. It investigates ideas of space-making within a building which combines programmatic complexity with a requirement for security and control. It addresses notions of individual versus collective within the culture of the prison. It questions the relationship of the public to the imprisoned, of outside to inside.

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thesis advisor: Fernando Domeyko, senior lecturer of architecture
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Author's note

The real value in any project lies in the path or paths one took in arriving at some product. It is only by immersing oneself in the process of creating, of making, that one remains open to the latent possibilities and the real opportunities that transformed through the mind, become architecture. For this reason, the project is presented with significant reference to all elements of the study, however seemingly tangential they may be.

Although the thesis of this project is outlined in the abstract, there are several preoccupations and concerns which lurked behind each model or drawing, and which truly drove the investigation by means of the project itself. From the outset, there was an interest in using the thesis as an opportunity to select a topic of some un Familiarity, something not studied in a studio, which carried with it issues not encountered in many studio projects. The cultural conflict that exists within the walls of the prison, which pits the guard against the inmate in close quarters, and the architectural significance of this relationship, offered that opportunity. The resolution of a complex program was also important, not simply as an exercise in making a building work programmatically, but as an interest in the attitude that one develops toward the program which allows the building to evolve. The prison also provided the arena for studying the meaningful creation of repetitive, cellular space on a large scale, within some greater spatial strategy, which avoids the laying out of office-building style spaces that simply fulfill a programmatic requirement. Lastly, a preoccupation with the wall, its possibilities and implications, found itself in this project, something unavoidable in a discussion of the prison.
The project is situated in Boston, Massachusetts at the confluence of the Longfellow Bridge, Cambridge Street, Charles Street, and Storrow Memorial Drive, at the end of the northern side of Cambridge Street.

-site plan courtesy City of Boston, Massachusetts.
The site, measuring approximately 500’ in the east-west direction and 400’ in the north-south direction, is nestled into the complex that is Massachusetts General Hospital. Its southern edge is formed by Cambridge Street, which wraps up to the western edge becoming Charles Street along the Esplanade. These two sides of the site are highly active with vehicular traffic, and the chamfered southwest corner of the site directly faces the Charles MGH “T” station. A significant amount of pedestrian traffic moves from this station to both the east and north towards various locations in the hospital complex. The northern and eastern edges, by contrast, are activated by a distinctively lower scale of movement, comprised primarily of pedestrian and small vehicle traffic. The northeast corner of the site points toward one of the main receiving plazas of the hospital. Currently the old Charles Street Jail occupies the site, which for the purposes of this project was erased. Less than one mile north along the river is the location of the recently constructed Suffolk County Jail, the replacement facility for the Charles Street Jail.
Program

1. Inmate Housing:
   - (200) cells
   - common spaces
   - showers
   - housing offices
   - multi-use spaces
   - segregated/difficult
   - inmate housing

2. Dining Service:
   - kitchen
   - dining space
   - storage

3. Medical Facilities
   - administration
   - diagnostic
   - pharmacy
   - outpatient
   - dental
   - storage
   - inpatient care
   - mental health

4. Education
   - classrooms
   - library
   - workshops

5. Recreation
   - outdoor recreation
   - indoor recreation
   - canteen
   - storage

6. Visitation
   - common visitation
   - private visitation

7. Administration
   - offices
   - conference room
   - hearing room
   - control center

8. Chapel
This project is best understood as the gathering up of several strands of thought concerning the manner in which one designs an architecture for the incarceration of the human body. Although the tack one takes in approaching such a design problem can vary widely, it serves to reason that regardless of one's method of approach, a fundamental understanding of the nature of the confined body and the cultural development which springs up around it is crucial. It is from here that this project started, with a desire to explore the cultural phenomena which arise within the building type, to begin to search for the "in-roads" to the design of the prison.

Within the prison there exists a mesh of urban and complex relationships among the principal inhabitants of the facility. The inmate culture that exists within prisons is something that has been scrutinized by researchers since about 1940, but nearly has been in existence as long as men and women have been incarcerated in large groups in a common facility. The origins of the contemporary situation lie in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The trends leading up to the
fig. 15b: cell model
The origins of punishment and the eventual acceptance and evolution of the prison have been examined in depth by Sir Robin Evans in *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture 1750-1840*, Michael Ignatieff in *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, and by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. These texts outline the origins of punishment and trace the eventual acceptance and evolution of the prison. Foucault describes the shift in punishment away from control and punishment of the body to the control and punishment of the mind. He relates this to the introduction beginning in 1791 of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, both as a model for the ideal prison as well as a concept more deeply rooted in a control and surveillance society. As Foucault sees it, these events set the stage for the steady development of the institution of the prison through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As methods of incarceration became refined during this period, so too was shaped the nature of the culture within.

Although researchers felt that up through very recently a prison culture was identifiable and indeed
fig. 17b: study model
necessary to the operation of such an
institution, the contemporary condi-
tion has cast doubts over this nature of
the prison culture. Younger and
considerably more violent offenders
have disrupted the sanctity of this
culture and questioned its respect of
the senior generation of offenders,
creating at once an “every man for
himself” condition, and fostering the
growth of prison gangs. It is unclear
whether these prison gangs have their
origins in the street gangs so prevalent
in major North American cities or in
the cultural and racial divisions within
the prison itself. What seems clear is
that the transition from one more or
less “unified” culture of the prison to
one of segregated and confrontational
prison gangs has changed the face of
prison life considerably, forcing those
involved with the creation and
operation of the prison to reevaluate
the methods and standards by which
we incarcerate offenders (Hunt, 1993).

The issue of culture extends
itself beyond simply the inmate culture
of the prison, to include the role of the
prison official as part of prison culture
as a whole. Because, as Sykes and
Messinger point out, “the conditions of
fig. 19d: study models
custody involve profound attacks on the prisoner's self-image or sense of personal worth," the desire or need to recapture one's sense of self-worth has led in the past to adherence to the inmate social system, in which the roles played by the participants in this system allow for partial fulfillment of one's sense of personal worth (Sykes, 1960, p13). Sykes and Messinger write that "as a population of prisoners moves in the direction of solidarity, as demanded by the inmate code, the pains of imprisonment become less severe... A cohesive inmate society provides the prisoner with a meaningful group with which he can identify himself and which will support him in his struggles against his condemners." (Sykes, 1960, p 16). Inmate culture during the middle part of this century was singularly opposed to the establishment of the prison officials. Any prisoner who refused to participate in this opposition to the establishment found him/herself banished entirely from the culture of his/her fellow inmates, and consequently from the opportunity to be reinvested with a sense of worth. Despite the opposition of the inmate culture to the establish-
fig. 21a: study model

fig. 21b
fig. 21c
fig. 21d: study models
ment of officials in the prison, it was this unification of the prisoners within this culture which led to relative stability within the prison. By avoiding overt conflict with the officials of the prison the prisoners were able to secure a certain degree of normalcy to their lives. Maintenance of this status quo through adherence to the inmate culture was the means of achieving this (Sykes, 1960).

Currently it would seem that the emergence of prison gangs in the 1980's and 1990's challenges the unity of the inmates. Instead, they are placed in conflict with one another, placing the establishment as a tertiary element in the overall scheme that is reduced to officiating the escalating violence among the various gangs. Compounding this situation is the frequency of intra-gang violence resulting from disobedience or disloyalty, real or perceived. Not only has loyalty to the inmate culture disappeared, but absolute loyalty within the gangs themselves is not at all guaranteed. Although opinion remains divided as to what this new incarnation of prison culture means to the operation of these institutions, it seems clear that it has led
fig. 23a: final model

view of public entry from east end of open space "inside" the prison
to increased violence and deep-seeded uncertainty among both prisoners and prison officials alike. The widely held view is that an end to the presence of gangs in prisons is the solution, but many officials feel that the presence of these groups in conflict with one another actually makes it easier to operate the facility. They maintain that prisoners who fight with one another are easier to control because they don’t have time to fight with the guards (Hunt, 1993).

Architecturally, the project is about the way in which one goes about constructing space which organizes the prison culture. This implies understanding the interaction of the internal cultures as well as the space of the individual, and how this in turn impacts the expression of the building in terms of redefining traditionally embedded ideas about the architecture of the prison. It quickly became clear that there are essentially two strategies operating within the project. The first
1. recreation
2. workshop/machine shop
3. workshop/storage
4. laundry/storage
5. vehicle sally port
6. public lobby
7. open space
8. administration
9. education
10. chapel support spaces
11. service entrance

fig. 25a: ground level plan
fig. 27a: transverse building section
strategy began with the study of the cell, at the scale of the individual as well as of several individual cells grouped together. The way in which one constructs a space of solitude and extended isolation by taking advantage of spatial opportunities drove these studies, largely in model. This led to exploration of the way in which the cells begin to become spatially related as cell blocks, implying some spatial strategy.

The second strategy involves the notion of the wall as the element which traditionally has served not only as the physical barrier to escape from within, but simultaneously has become the psychological layer which separates inside from outside. It is recognized by the inmate as that which holds him apart from society; and understood by society as that which securely contains its castoffs and undesirables. This is forcefully emphasized with the construction of massive stone walls many feet thick, at once expanding the thickness of that layer, giving to the structure a tremendous weight, and lending to the institution a sense of permanence. My models of the wall as it related to this project were always
17. counseling rooms
18. common visitation
19. medical facilities/pharmacy
20. long-term property storage
21. prisoner intake
22. warden's apartment
23. classrooms

11. private visitation
12. open to below
13. guard changing area
14. guard dining and lounge
15. administration
16. education

fig. 29b: third level plan

fig. 29a: second level plan
interested in the wall as something very free in its ability to wrap the building, yet suggest that the condition of being “inside” or “outside” is not so much a condition of interior or exterior but a matter of which side of the wall you are on.

The critical point of the project is the meeting ground of these two strategies. In the project’s ultimate version, cells are organized into blocks around three sides of a rectangular space, served by collective spaces on the fourth side. The spatial interplay of adjacent cell blocks begins to suggest a larger spatial strategy informing the organization of the building. The meeting ground between the internal spatial strategy and the boundary condition of the building is crucial if one is to understand the prison as a type of utopian proposition, implicit in the building’s almost city-like organization, that is absolutely contained within the wall.

The element which conceptually mediates between these two strategies becomes the circulation of the building. The traditionally centralized position of the guards is
24. kitchen
25. double bunk cells
26. dining hall
27. chapel
28. roof garden
29. library

fig. 33a: fourth level plan
here moved to the perimeter of the building, literally inverting the Panoptic ideal. It wraps the collection of cell blocks, and the central zone of the building becomes solely for movement of prisoners through the various levels of the building. The outermost layer of secure circulation exerts specific control throughout the building by means of smaller fingers of circulation which move from the outer layer into the heart of the building. The placement of the cell blocks sets up the greater pattern of circulation around the exterior as well as movement between cell blocks. This in turn liberates the exterior wall of the building from responsibility as a physical barrier, allowing it to define inside and outside as a function of its outer layer and its inner layer. The wall freely wraps the building. As one moves from Cambridge Street toward the main open space, one experiences the flexibility of the wall as it turns back on itself to enclose the library. The inside layer of the wall is exposed once in the “interior” open space, where one is literally within the prison wall.

The intention of the facades
30. single bunk cells
31. open to chapel below
32. open to library below
33. upper library facilities

fig. 35a: fifth level plan
of the building is to suggest this liberation of the prison wall by articulating its lightness and allowing a reading of the more dense interior of the building. The wall is literally hung from the edges of the concrete slabs and held slightly above the ground. Large cuts into this surface are made freely with the intention of reducing the wall to a minimum of surface area, while retaining the definition of the outer limit of the building. It investigates the various possibilities of moving along either side of the wall and of transgressing that layer in questioning the state of being “inside” or “outside” of the prison.

The structure of the various cell blocks is organized on two levels in section and in plan in two rows of four cell blocks. Two of these blocks are removed to establish the open space which exposes the inside of the building and connects the southern edge of the site with the receiving plaza of the hospital to the northeast. The cell structure is lifted above the ground to establish the upper datum of the building and to create space below for the other programmatic elements of the building. The cells are located at
fig. 37b: final model

view into public lobby from "model" open space
the uppermost layer of the building, each with a window to the sky and organized around the large spaces which penetrate through the building. These create the true “façade” of building, relating it primarily to the sky. The cell structure becomes a layer mediating between sky and ground, allowing prisoners to be connected at once to both while at the same time detached in an independent floating “city.”

Each cell block contains 18 cells per level, on three sides of an exterior well which brings light, air, and space into the building. These light wells penetrate through the entire section of the building, allowing the deepest regions of the building to be both lit from above, and connected to ground and sky. On the fourth side of the open space are the collective activities, which consists of a double height day room, exercise facilities, and showers. Cells on the lower level of the cell block are double bunk units, and are four feet greater in length than those above. This allows for the placement of a window at the end of the cell, bringing in light and creating a view to the sky. Upper level cells are
Fig. 39a: Final model

View from library to public lobby across open space.
smaller, single bunk units also with an opening at the top of the cell. Circulation within the cell block is maintained around the layer of space between the cells and the light well, cloister style. In this way, prisoners live in constant connection to both ground and sky, with a constant awareness to their relationship to both. The intense perforation of the horizontal layers of the building begins to diminish the ponderous weight of the traditional prison, suggesting instead an environment where the confined body is not necessarily equated with the confined mind.

Facilities for cooking and dining take up the lower level of the two cell blocks at the west end of the building. These are located in close proximity to the cells to facilitate staffing by members of the general prisoner population as well as to facilitate circulation of the entire population there at least three times per day. Vertical circulation to these and other facilities within the building is by means of large ramps that link all five levels of the building, and ensure the secure movement of groups of prisoners by a limited number of guards.
fig. 41a: final model view from north-east corner of the sound chapel
Additionally, two banks of elevators located at either end of the central zone of circulation allow for transportation of disabled or difficult inmates. Beneath the levels of the cells are the medical bay and counseling centers for the prisoners, which include offices, examination rooms, inpatient cells, and pharmaceutical storage and distribution. There is a secure area consisting of group visitation rooms which is accessed by the visitors from below via a ramp connecting the entry lobby with the two levels of visitation spaces above. The east end of this level is the prisoner intake area, in which newly arrived prisoners are brought up via elevator from the vehicle sally port directly below and processed for stay at the prison. Various stations in the admitting process are located here including identification and booking, video booking, and search rooms. A large facility for long term storage of personal items taken from inmates upon admission is adjacent to the intake area.

The next level down is more of a mezzanine level, occupying only the two eastern bays of the building's northern half. This part houses the
fig. 43a: final model

view from administration toward "inside" open space and chapel
private facilities for the guards including changing and showering areas, dining and kitchen facilities. This area is accessed via private elevators entered at ground level along the northern edge of the building. Private visitation rooms and non-contact visitation cubicles are located on this level. The main portion of the ground level is given over to the large recreational areas and machine shops for the inmates. The two twenty-five foot tall western bays are multi-use interior recreational spaces, capable of supporting various sports or group activities. The adjacent bay is a flexible space supporting industrial machinery and workshops. A surveillance gallery wraps each of these three spaces for observation of inmate activities. Additional storage facilities and the vehicle sally port also occupy this level. At the west end of the exterior space is the main public entry and lobby space, with supporting administrative spaces dividing it from the prisoner recreation area.

The other aspects of the program including the chapel and its support spaces, and the library and its supporting educational facilities begin
to move outside of the main body of the building to occupy the prominent Cambridge Street part of the site. They allow the exterior wall to fold back on itself, and frame, along with the warden's residence/administrative facility, the entry into the building's main open space at the heart of the site. These elements begin spatially to establish a relationship to the northern side of Cambridge Street, suggesting at once points where the street edge is built and points where spatial cuts into the site exist. Prisoners also begin to occupy the site in a different way, remaining inside of the wall while moving outside of the heart of the building.

The conclusions of this thesis as represented in the final presentation are a reconciliation of ideas which were foundational to the project, as well as those which arose during the process of working through the project. The complexity of the program, the elusiveness of the site, and issues related to the political and ethical nature of the prison itself seemed to drive the project at various points in time. However, the establishment of the cells as the most
fig. 47a: final model

view from Cambridge Street toward administration and public lobby
important element of the program coupled with a concern for their spatiality was the point of departure for the project and the most consistent aspect throughout. What seems crucial in a project such as this is the development of an attitude towards the handling of the program (not only “solving” the program) coupled with an attachment to the space which contains that program. An approach which remains open to these aspects of the buildings creates the opportunities for the architecture to appear.
Bibliography


