

Within the Border studio the general approach was laid out in advance. Focusing on the Border region surrounding the US-Mexican divide we would start with analysis in groups. This was followed by identifying and focusing on areas of interest, ultimately leading to a personal subject or fascination, a chosen site and the start of the individual design process.

As a direct consequence of not only visiting the region, but also through thoroughly mapping it and understanding its underlying system, I've chosen to focus on Maquiladoras. On a macro level a maquiladora is a region-specific construct; brought into life through the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), these assembly plants operate on the border of legality to maximize profit through exploiting Mexican laborers. Because of these maquiladoras are located only in Mexico in self-declared Special Economic Zones, they lie outside of the jurisdiction of the Mexican government on such things as labor and environmental laws. Owned by big multinational (mostly American) firms, the maquiladoras are forced to import all parts from the US, and export the finished products back. In so doing losing any linkage to the Mexican economy other than providing jobs, and leaving a labor reserve for foreign capital.

To further understanding in how these kinds of assembly plants operate on a micro level, and in staying with the need to understand the underlying structure, my research focused on Institutions. Here we're talking about those kinds of Institutions which Erving Goffman (1961) described in his book *Asylums* as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life."

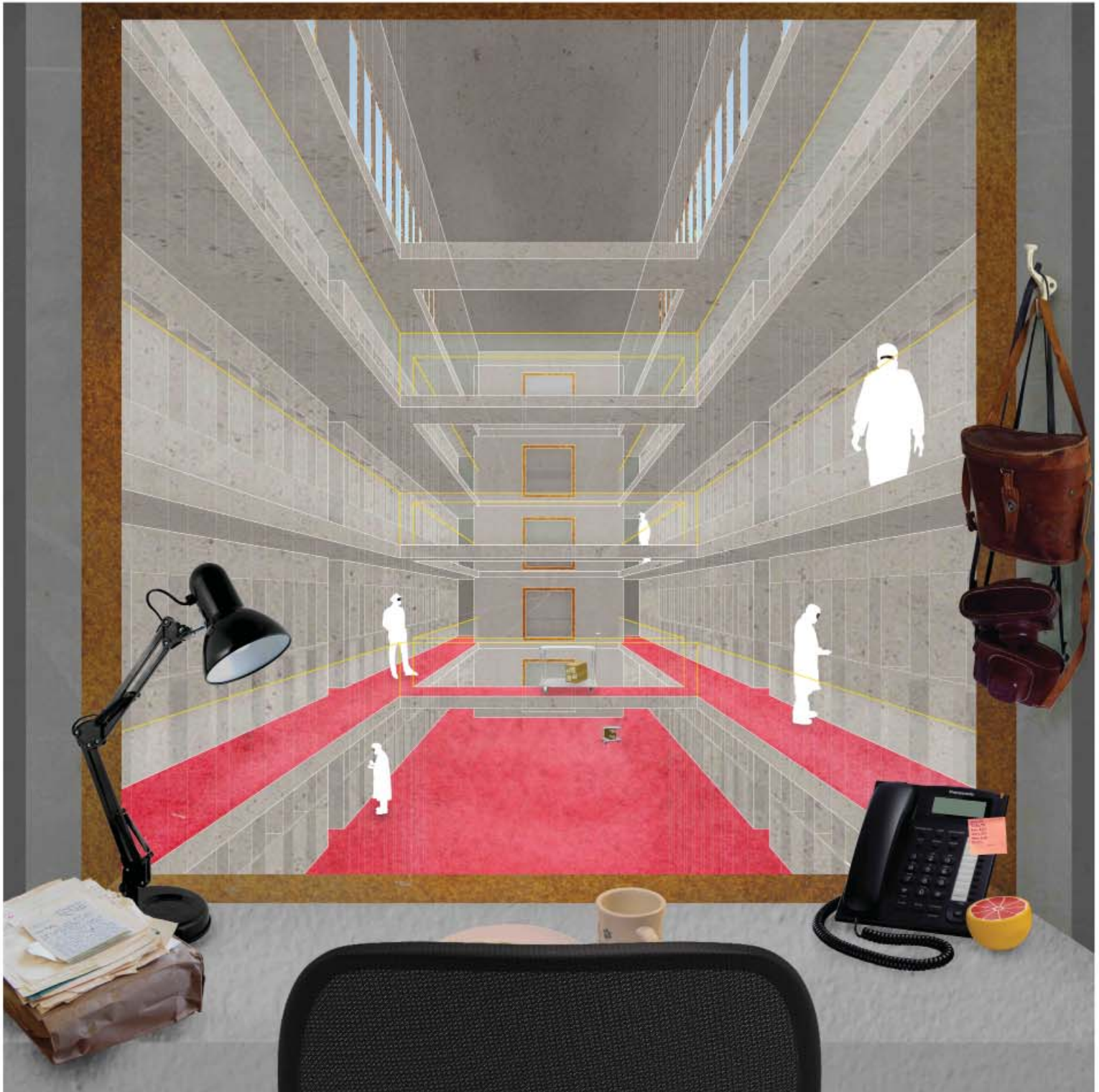
The maquiladora takes precarious work to an extreme, only allowing young women – as they are more docile, delicate with their fingers and work longer hours, is the reasoning – to perform simple, repetitive tasks. If any of these laborers fails to produce enough in a certain time, disobeys the higher-ups or in any other way falls out of the norm she is simply replaced and work on the assembly line continues.

In my research book I give a much more detailed account of the Maquiladora and all its facets, here I merely hope to establish the link between these factories and the Institutions.

As a direct response to the existence and even growth of the Maquiladora industry my project seeks to take the current situation and extrapolate it to its logical extreme. In doing so I hope to make apparent the absurdity, cruelty and violence of the Maquiladora.

To extrapolate I needed to create an imaginary client in the form of a capitalistic US collective seeking only profit, and cutting corners wherever possible. So it became possible for me to imagine the Maquiladora as an ultimately efficient machine for exploiting Mexican labor. I called the Maquilapolis.

Where now the laborers live in makeshift informal housing, the Maquilapolis will provide each with a permanent and proper apartment (=cell). Food on the table is a worry of the past, all the money you're left with is free to be spent at your leisure! The only things that is required to live in the Maquilapolis is to work.



VIEW FROM GUARD'S ROOM

Cells are organized according to the flow of material; in from one side, assembled in the cell and placed outside on the right as finished products. The cell is a machine, part of the assembly line like all the others. Raw material gets placed in the cell by personnel at a given time, every time. If you don't work hard enough, the raw material will end up stacking inside your cell, slowly blocking access to its functions. First the exercise bike, then the shower, ultimately the bed and even ventilation are blocked off. The only things that is required to live in the Maquilapolis is to work.

The studio's approach, which I will grossly oversimplify here as mapping, analysis and design would (by itself) have left me with a rather predictable project. Though I agree with the intent and overall idea of that approach, I do not agree with it – its products are not of interest to me. I would say they are rather simple, by-the-book, form-follows-function, OMA-inspired arrangements, passed off as relevant in an imagined social context.

My approach is rather more theoretical, but by no means more fruitful. Choosing to gain thorough understanding of any soft context requires the use of many sources, and a different form of expression than is strictly architectural. In taking a more literally approach to understand something that is quite outside the scope of architecture directly, though necessary for me and the project, I've found a surprising amount of resistance.

Throughout the course of the graduation I've realised my interests in architecture would have been better expressed in a different studio. Yet, even though the approach of the studio and that of myself were not identical, I've always felt they were complimentary. The combination of both allowed for a much richer experience, allowing me to broaden and deepen. Not staying too theoretical and not producing any Architecture, not too practical and only producing without thinking about its meaning and consequence. If there's is something to take away from all this it must be that the challenges I've faced in the framework of the Complex Projects studio allowed a stronger project to come out in the end. It became also extremely important to learn how to adapt and communicate the project.



VIEW OF LABORER'S ROOM