

ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGY IN URBAN SECURITY- AND TERRORISM

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT IN PROJECTS DEALING WITH URBAN SECURITY AND
TERRORISM.

Introduction

Going to work in Manhattan is not what it used to be. A revolution has taken place in streets, lobbies and public buildings. Better yet said, a devolution has taken place. Upon approaching the office tower, one has to walk passed various police officers stationed at the corners of intersections. They hawkishly peer through the endless straights of the grid, looking for suspicious behavior. A perimeter of bollards and jersey barriers surrounds the entrance to the building. In some cases, concrete planters are adorned with colorful bouquets of flowers for the sake of atmosphere. Upon entry, of the building, you might have to open up your backpack, briefcase or satchel and surrender it temporarily for an x-ray. While at the same time, you will have to pass through, and pass, a metal detector test. All of this happens under the wary eyes of high-tech cameras and armed security guards¹. They are a constant reminder of the last terrorist attack and the imminence of the next. What happened that made New York paranoidly secure? In order to give a less straight-forward answer, and visualize the geopolitics that in part shape these kinds of streetscapes, a look has to be taken at the previous century in which the United States established its hegemony. On the 20th of August, 1998, the American president Bill Clinton informed the world he had authorized the launch of 88 cruise missiles against camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. The attack was executed on retaliatory grounds following the bombing of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar as-Salaam nearly two weeks earlier. In response to these missile attacks, two years later, the USS Cole, a guided-missile destroyer, was the target of a suicide bombing in the harbor of Aden in Yemen. This in return invited a retaliation from the United States, giving room to the tit-for-tat-(for-tit) exchange of fire and the spiral that is the war on transnational terror we find ourselves in to this day². Part of this war, before it was even declared by George W. Bush, were the terrorist attacks, in which several hijacked airliners were turned into kerosene-fueled missiles, and the events that unfolded from it on the 11th of September 2001^{3 4}. The war on terror not only gave legitimacy to misguided retaliatory wars in the Middle-East⁵. In New York the attitude towards employing preventive tactics changed. The reason these events are interesting from an architectural perspective is the fact that repercussions of these geopolitical battles, have been of great influence on Western urban spatial

¹ Sorkin, M. (2008). *Indefensible Space: The Architecture of the National Insecurity State*. New York: Routledge.

² Elden, S. (2009). *Terror and Territory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

³ Marcuse, P. (2007). The threat of terrorism and existential insecurity: Urban policy responses. *Architectures of Fear. Terrorism and the Future of Urbanism in the West*. Barcelona.

⁴ Enders, W., & Sandler, T. (2005). After 9/11: Is it all Different Now? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

⁵ Marcuse, P. (2007). The threat of terrorism and existential insecurity: Urban policy responses. *Architectures of Fear. Terrorism and the Future of Urbanism in the West*. Barcelona.

policy. Ad hoc security measures were hastily installed to thwart further terrorist attacks⁶ ⁷. Its echoes ushered in similar changes all through the world, giving rise to the modern security revolution of Western society. This in return has transformed the framework within architects are supposed to design public space, and public buildings. A new range of public buildings with reassuring characteristics through bunker-like qualities are built and pre-existing ones have been scrutinized. Cities seem to be under siege, through the constant threat we are reminded off⁸. Architects however, are faced with a moral dilemma between fortifying the city and ignoring the issue, possibly endangering civilians.

I. Critical mean

The themes of security, safety, surveillance and urban fortification have enjoyed a steady increase in popularity of the last few decades. Ever since the rise of the conflict between hegemony and globalization in the 70s arose, researchers have been involved in the topic⁹. One of the newly arisen problems is the virtualization of the security means. All a computer needs is a terminal, and the internet is not bound by locality. From an architectural point of view, this creates issues¹⁰. There seems to be little consensus of the role of the architect in this larger matter. One could be inclined to fully go with the flowerpot trend and design new hip ways in which security measures can be camouflaged. On the other hand, one could theoretically also design against security in protest, perhaps designing a terrorist hideout in a city like New York. Without going too much into these examples, which were grabbed from thin air, these ideas are both too simplistic and conformative, or create more problems than they tend to solve. Through restraint, one can be of better help if one wishes to be part of a counter revolt¹¹. By writing this thesis, and performing a deeper theoretical research, a more composed answer can be given to the question: What is the role of the architectural project in this discussion on modern security revolution? This essay provides an answer to the moral dilemma by visiting the framework in which this transformation has taken place, the role architects have previously partaken in the design of public space and –buildings and theoretically dissecting ways in which the architectural project can provide new answers through the perspectives offered in literature.

II. Actual Territorium

The airport for example, or as Paul Virilio describes it; the last gateway to the State, was transformed into the modern iteration of a fortress¹². The revolution of affordable flying has blurred the borders between countries and continents and make them more porous¹³. The security revolution however, created a new barrier or necessary bureaucratic regulation, unrivaled by other countries in its

⁶ Graham, S. (2007). Architectures of fear: Terrorism and the future of urbanism in the West. *Architectures of fear: Terrorism and the future of urbanism in the West*. Barcelona.

⁷ Petroski, H. (2004). Technology and architecture in an age of terrorism. *Technology in Society*, 161-167.

⁸ Graham, S. (2010). *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*. New York: Verso.

⁹ Primoratz, I. (2007, 1 29). A Philosopher Looks At Contemporary Terrorism. *Cardozo Law Review*, pp. 33-51.

¹⁰ Vidler, A. (1999, October). Robots in the House; Surveillance and the Domestic Land-scape. *Daidalos*, pp. 78-85.

¹¹ Camus, A. (1951). *The Rebel*. Los Angeles: Penguin.

¹² Virilio, P. (1986). Overexposed city. *The Paul Virilio Reader*, 14-31.

¹³ Sorkin, M. (2008). *Indefensible Space: The Architecture of the National Insecurity State*. New York: Routledge.

thoroughness. The technology that was developed to securitize airports is equal to that used in prisons¹⁴. These developments had been going on ever since the 70s, when it was decided that space surrounding the gates should be sterilized and devoid of anyone who had no reason to be there but to fly. This development was also on par with the rise and increase in globalization, which as mentioned, diminished the role of previously established physical borders¹⁵. Territory is the consequence of the ability to enforce jurisdiction, and security in a place and its encompassing borders. In order to understand territory, one has to both understand terror. Both words find their origins in the same Greek word *terrarium*: a place where people are frightened off¹⁶. Terror itself, first emerged as a tactic when Robespierre suggested that the difference between operations of liberty and those of tyranny were differentiated by their purpose, not their means¹⁷. The aforementioned cruise-missile attack can just as much be considered terror as the reprisal actions were in the light of a broader understanding of terror. The combination of virtue and terror, Robespierre explains, is essential. Terror is powerless without virtue, whilst virtue without terror is disastrous. Terror is the prompt, severe inflexible execution of justice. This also means that it is not entirely possible to make a moral statement based on an act of terror without understanding its accompanying virtues. The area of influence of an entity over other entities is territory. Territory in the context of national borders and urban seclusions becomes a manifestation of power relations in geography. In order to secure the freedom of everyone in a territory, terror has to be implemented as a security tool in order to dissuade anyone from causing harm. The aforementioned spiral however, ensures that whenever an attack happens on one side, the other side will see itself forced to retaliate in order to secure sovereignty over its territory. Through globalization and foreign wars, puppetry of states and the sovereignty the United States subsequently negated in other states where key to its hegemony and the emergence of the tit-for-tat spiral¹⁸. But that same globalization, and the economic and symbolic powerhouses that that same hegemony spawned in cities such as New York, created more porous borders and targets for those it had angered to react against¹⁹. This provides an answer to the question of the underlying causes of this war on terror and its encompassing events. What is interesting is how the imaginative geography of the Western city and that Arab ones have come closer to one another²⁰. The ease of movement, instant visual journalism and the internet played their part in this. The engineering of the homeland space, on the grounds of supposed imperatives of national security, have merged these spaces into one big battle space within the minds of the public. What happens in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan has consequences in the architectural detail of the streets of New York. This means that a bomb dropped on a factory in Syria, as part of geopolitical actions, is in relationship with the concrete jersey barriers and bollards that adorn the pedestrianized areas of Times Square. The smallest object and its architectural detail is

¹⁴ Petroski, H. (2004). Technology and architecture in an age of terrorism. *Technology in Society*, 161-167.

¹⁵ Enders, W., & Sandler, T. (2005). After 9/11: Is it all Different Now? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

¹⁶ Elden, S. (2009). *Terror and Territory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁷ Kamal, M. (2008). The Meaning of Terrorism: A Philosophical Inquiry. *NCEIS Research Papers*, 1-11.

¹⁸ Elden, S. (2009). *Terror and Territory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁹ Marcuse, P. (2007). The threat of terrorism and existential insecurity: Urban policy responses. *Architectures of Fear. Terrorism and the Future of Urbanism in the West*. Barcelona.

²⁰ Graham, S. (2006, 2 30). Cities and the 'War on Terror'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, pp. 255-276.

designed around the effects American hegemony has had on the world. Furthermore, these designed security measures, and their larger systems exist in a second spiral that is fueled by asymmetrical warfare and the ways in which terrorists are forced to be evermore create in setting up new attacks. Furthermore, security issues surrounding public space have been politicized by local and national governments and have arguably, put us into a spiral of literal self-reinforcement. Security and Homeland Security constantly has to be updated in order to adapt to new challenges posed by new forms or variations of attacks Western cities have not yet adapted to. What attacks have set in motion, is that people from multiple fields have been forced by their governments to become counter-terrorism experts. They design and inform policy which utilizes existential insecurity as a strategy^{21 22}. An example of this are the officers patrolling the street. They are not placed there to protect from an imminent threat. They are supposed to make the people aware of the possible risk. One questions himself whether the same way goes for the streets and public buildings that have new and added layers of security ranging from concrete blocks and setbacks, to the incorporation of intricate biometric security systems. Before the vehicular attack, jersey barriers were barely present in cities. Before the first knife attacks, metal detectors were not deemed necessarily. As terrorists adapt, and find new ways of defamiliarizing everyday objects such as cars, trucks, box-cutters and airplanes, new layers of security are added on top of previously designed ones. This in return has transformed the city into a palimpsest of security measures, retro-active protecting citizens from memories of attacks²³. Symbols of economic and hegemonic prowess in American cities, put those cities and its citizens at risk to a degree. The citadelization of cities and public space therefore will never be complete as long as people are given motivation to attacks these symbols^{24 25}. Another factor that is of great influence, and should thoroughly be considered in the answer on the moral dilemma of security and architecture, is the role of the military industrial complex²⁶. There is a capitalist incentive for both companies that produce weapons and those that develop new defense measures. In some cases, both these departments are housed within the same company. In any case, they are the involved in the same unions for security, defense, weapons, and aerospace technology. The influence their subsequent lobby groups have on the policy development of the government and the strategy of the US command means that they will prevent the spiral from being broken too easily. All in all, it is uncomfortable to get a grasp on the behemoth size and influence of this system.

²¹ Primoratz, I. (2007, 1 29). A Philosopher Looks At Contemporary Terrorism. *Cardozo Law Review*, pp. 33-51.

²² Marcuse, P. (2007). The threat of terrorism and existential insecurity: Urban policy responses. *Architectures of Fear. Terrorism and the Future of Urbanism in the West*. Barcelona.

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²⁴ Coaffee, J. (2008). Resilient design for community safety and terror-resistant cities. *ICE: Municipal Engineer* (pp. 103-110). Loughborough: Institution of Civil Engineers.

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III. Virtual Topia's

What position should the (informed) architect therefore take on this topic? It seems, there is very little room for architects to take an opposing position. For one, building regulations, written by governments are informed by experts, employed by industrial behemoths. Taking position against the system would also constitute a moral position against the development of security in cities. It would answer the question, but does not satisfy the project by providing it with a new self-reinforcing development similar to the escalation of the development of fortification versus its counterpart; terrorist tactics. Understanding the dead-end nature of the two aforementioned, intertwined spirals sheds light on the problem of architect's moral dilemma in dealing the issue at hand. Within actuality, we have to choose between either cooperation in the larger system, or disavowing the system and victimizing oneself and others in the ensuing consequences²⁷. Albert Camus in a series of essays offers an answer to the posed moral dilemma²⁸. One should refuse to take either side in the moral dilemma. Outside of actuality, within the realms of utopia and dystopia, architects can find the space to define and shape the problem. This does not mean that an answer is provided, on the contrary, it is not the role of the architect to provide all the answers. One can far better employ him- or herself to provide the setting in which a public debate is formed on the topic. Either by adopting the problem and turning it into something desirable, or undesirable. Architects however have a plethora of tools at their disposal which, besides designing buildings in actuality, can visualize scenarios and provide a possibility to open up public debate and discussion. Rem Koolhaas' Exodus for example, was intended as both a fictional and factual scenario for the contemporary metropolis. Koolhaas, having previous experience as a journalist and screenwriter employed his skills to design a new urban culture. This subsequently creates architectural innovation and political subversion. When the architectural project no longer has to be set in actuality, it provides all the freedom the architect could need to design the possibility of utopia and dystopia. The development of aforementioned tools such as scenario writing, visualization and imagination is of great importance to the role of the architect in denouncing and, or extrapolation of the actual-, previous- and future status-quo. The way in which fictitious and factitious meet is of great importance. A great example literary work in which this balance is well kept can be found in Mike Davis' books^{29 30}. One only has to take a critical look at movies such a Bladerunner to understand the extrapolations of current trends in pollution and policing that are made to create a world that is not only fiction, but a possible future. Within the choice for which trends to extrapolate always resides a moral choice, but by achieving a certain level of complexity, through totality of the whole that exists of a great number of parts, the project can be elevated beyond a mere simulacrum³¹. Through maps and visualizations the architect can create instantaneous knowledge, inscripted with power relations³².

²⁷ Altheide, D. L. (2006). Terrorism and the Politics of Fear. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*.

²⁸ Camus, A. (1944-1947). Neither Victims nor Executioners. In A. Camus, *at Combat* (pp. 255-276). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁹ Davis, M. (1990). *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. New York: Verso.

³⁰ Davis, M. (1998). *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

³¹ Lecomte, J. (2013). Beyond indefinite extension: about Bruno Latour and Urban Space. *Social Anthropology*, 462-478.

³² McDonough, T. (2005, Spring). Delirious Paris: Mapping as a Paranoiac-Critical Activity. *Grey Room*(19), pp. 6-21.

IV. Conclusions

The role of the architectural project should be to provide a scenario which provides ample fuel for debate and discussion amongst the general public. By staging a project outside of actuality, the architect can free himself from the constraints that create a set-up to dilemmas and dead-ends. Through the self-reinforcing rhythm in which the geopolitical realm and urban space spiral and escalate, we can begin to understand the special relationship certain elements in a streetscape or building design have with geopolitical events. The geopolitical realm, on the largest imaginable scale is in almost direct contact through causality with the architectural detail of the streetscape in cities like New York. This in return creates a window of opportunity for architecture to operate within. The role of the architect should be to try and be as morally unbiased as possible, as explained in Albert Camus' work³³. By taking factitious information and extrapolating it through scenario-writing, the architect can provide a strong basis for the aforementioned debate. Architecture in itself is also a great tool to portray the underlying relations geopolitics and hegemony at play in this theme. It's interesting to follow in the footsteps of previous architects that used these techniques and explore the topic to its fullest potential. Architects have the potential to do more than solely design in actuality, especially in an academic setting. When a project does not necessarily have to be set in actuality, it produces a window for the architect to shape a utopia or dystopia.

V. Bibliography

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