Explore lab
2012-2013

body condition – “innocent until proven guilty”

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1# Theoretical issue.

*The only important elements in any society are the artistic and the criminal because they alone by questioning the society values can force it to change.*

*Samuel. R. Delany*

Why prison?

Most of the places are or can be easily visited and analyzed from the outside contour lines and structural knots till the relationships in between interior spaces and actions of the daily users or visitors. Prison and its content in this case has different settings and relationships with public sector and inside structure. The fence of 5 meters height creates a shield of ignorance and fear at the same time. Manipulative pictures can be created by political powers, mass media and most of the times the negativity is over exaggerated which gives the influence for architectural expression and its positioning in the context of city.

The prison as a black spot of city was standing in the back of my mind with which I came to start my theses. The starting point was to create an apparatus which in a way brings back the “public punishment” and creates an open relationship between private life of prisoner and public life of passenger/ viewer. It came together with the conflicting opinion towards the perpetual question in the ethics of architecture where violence is the main tool and the form to restrict and incarcerate the body and at the same time to create shameful lesson for those who are in the presence of freedom.

 Freedoms and obstructions.

It is not a secret that prison facility is a part of society which is abandoned and excluded from the normal social environment and activities. The institution usually takes a place in the outskirts of the city which complicates its functioning, communication, the purpose of rehabilitation apparatus and mental image. During the history the ways of treating the once who live in between the walls were changing. The research part made with A. Radman, was clearing out the changing methods of controlling the society and stagnating architectural image of the apparatus with the essence of control. The changes from M. Foucault “Disciplinary societies” to G. Deleuze “societies of control” where the spatial unit is a data base and spatial segmentation of the society is not a wall anymore. He brought this attention to the body through the words of Guattari.

“Felix Guattari has imagined a city where one would be able to leave one’s apartment, one’s street, one’s neighborhood, thanks to one’s (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person’s position-licit or illicit -and effects a universal modulation.”

Not so long time ago the body politics were demonstrated in the acts or torture and cruel public lessons. According to political layers, it was the right way to warn the society.

The small changes started in England when the first modern penal institution London’s Bredewell was created in the Edward VI private palace 16th century. Later at the beginning of enlightenment in 18th century The England and France became a cradle of new philosophical forms for human liberty, human
time and nature. It was changing radically from the set of tools used as a main punishment to the body politics while using the walls and certain discipline. It have been changing location from the main city square to the habitat of outcast.
Now we have the processing of personal data with the aim to care (or control) individuals, it reached the turn where a new methods appears.

2# Territorial issue.

Usually prison is an image of the site somewhere in the outskirts of the city. This condition was the consequence of intense development of publicly useful functions by segregating those with “defection”. In this way it makes more distance not only in physical way, it creates alienation between society and segregated part of the society, more over it puts a tension for inmates and their families. If to take those rare examples when the prison is in the reasonable place according to the core of the city the other negativity comes up. No doubt the fence or the plain brick wall creates a void of the urban texture. It becomes a negative interference and makes dark and lonely shadows in the streets around.

“The walls of the prison, on the other hand are therefore the sole purpose of frustrating certain kinds of action. They are not in themselves meant to provide any positive interference – any expansion of the possible action – whatsoever.” R. Evans

While the recent actions start to look towards the social aspects inside the system of the prisons by introducing voluntarily programs, more flexible daily routine or accessibility to everyday goods. The outer skin of the detention facility remains the same from the times when the prison came out of dungeons in France.
Many of the inner-city local prisons were built in the 19th century (for example Liverpool was built in 1855 and many local prisons in London were built in the Victorian period), and have undergone extensive refurbishment through the years. However, both their architecture and the confined area they occupy (often within densely populated urban areas) limit the scope for modernization and expansion. As a result, residential units in local prisons are among some of the most difficult to maintain in the prison estate, and security may be compromised because of large populations and poor sightlines for staff to observe prisoners.

3# Policy issue.

“Prisons are public demonstrations of what the state thinks of its offenders and how it believes they should be treated”.

There were no requirements regarding my master theses. Everything started from the fascination over the prison facility where the architectural line has a crucial effect on that certain group for which that line was created and where so many ethical issues lies behind.
During the design research with my tutor S. Lee it evolved into a more concentrated and narrowed subtheme.
Looking into the numbers of prison statistics in Europe UK was among the countries with high rates in almost all categories regarding prison population, occupancy level, poor living conditions, repeating crime after release and etc.

Target group

More over the system starts to struggle from the very beginning of its powers and responsibilities. My target group of designing a facility became people who are held on remand. This is one of first elements in the chain or imprisonment system. Prisoners on remand are those who are without charges and are held there until court proceeds the trial action against. After that follows conviction or release procedure. The theoretical status states “innocent until proven guilty.”

Body condition - “innocent until proven guilty”

The law keeps a requirement that a person on remand has a status which restricts some of his freedoms but it is not allowed to treat him or to keep him in the same conditions as a prisoner. The old system of facilities, the problem of overcrowded prisons and growing number of prisoners contradicts the law. A detention of a suspect usually takes place in B category prisons. Just in some of them they have a separate living wing and separate cell most of the time a person is held in the same cell together with prisoners and getting the same or sometime even more restricted life conditions.

The average lived on remand is around 90 days and sometimes it is more than the sentence itself. More over the Crown Court can prolong the time of detention 3 times and the period can reach 12 month which is more than minimal sentence (minimal sentence is less or equal of 6 month.)

This status creates a rhetorical condition - “in-between.” It is “suspended” time in-between closed space and freedom, in-between striated space of the punishment apparatus and nomadic space of public.

All these settings helped to choose the building site and the way of designing.

4# Design.

Site

The site for the detention facility was chosen in the metropolitan hear of UK – London. The river Thames which is dividing two sides of the city becomes an intermediate layer. It has its own rules, its own rhythm. The public life mostly goes in the perimeter of the river and people can look into it but they cannot step into that layer. Here comes assimilation with my target group, just they are in that river and they are not allowed to go into the site of the freedom and they are not sentenced to go into the opposite side of segregation.

Silver town is a new growing part of the London where new communities, living areas and cultural centers are planned to be in less than 20 years. This gives an opportunity to infuse the detention facility among the other functions and gradually accustom it as a normal neighborhood.
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The research for the design started from the theoretical point of view. Deleuze and Guattari pointed out two kinds of spaces; smooth and striated/nomadic and sedentary. Despite they are opposites hey cannot exist without one another. Because of technological leap and new possibilities there is no need to build fences or brick walls, the building itself, or even a spatial and unmarked territory can be a controlling threshold. A controlling apparatus can be created in a smooth space by using certain points for events and other intensities. The starting point to look for architectural interpretation was into the changing shape of the liquid. It has no shape from itself the shape depends from intensities of the container or intensities on the surface of the water.

2D – even if the water stands still the surface creates a pattern. The purpose was to catch a moment of instantly changing media and look into it as a script for possibilities where functions can occur and events can take a place. Japanese marble paper was a chosen technic to inscribe a certain moment on a certain time. Lines and shadows on the surface of paper had a characteristics of sea or desert which Deleuze was talking about.

Experimentation had to go into the phase of 3D, to get a spatial qualities. The process of index model creation was given again into the hands of the accident in the certain moment. Cold water and hot wax was a second attempt to create and to capture a smooth space. Two shapeless liquids were reacting according their physical and chemical properties and reflecting intensities of the mechanical action (pouring height, time and strength).

Number of other indexing models were following the same thematic idea and even though the way of working was non-linear until certain point, but the stage of experimenting brought different insights, qualities of spaces or opened new ways of looking into certain issues.

Design

The first set of clear influence towards the design was made by coming back to the 2D ink drawings and making them in to the rule for proportions and the lines of the building. Layers with different intensities were created by changing the threshold of one chosen drawing. Thresholds showed stronger characteristics and I was able to draw the line which later with its proportions became a power element – the wall.

“Violence of the line; this line on the map which materializes into a wall and splits two milieus. The wall as the paradigmatic architectural component illustrates the hurtful power contained by architecture” Lambert

In this way was created the rigid part of the building (living block + educational and sport center block). From smooth surfaces I have got the lines for striated structure. The lines informed the container and at the same time the lines got the volume according to the content.
One of the main tasks was to create a detention facility without a noticeable boundary and to melt the public space like one of the functions which belongs to the structure and constructions of the building. In this part the design process came up side down that the first part. A striated structure was applied to contain a certain facilities of the building with the contour of the public space. The skin – an intermediate layer was formed like a mountain which hides the functioning parts of the prison like organs inside the body and lets for public events to occur on top of it.

I think eventually the method of the design came out in a merge with theoretical insights, local urban settings and index inscriptions. There were few challenges while going towards the end product but one of the biggest was to find the method how to fade the separating line or architecture and to make those powers to work in multidirectional way.

5# Conclusion.

Since the change of paradigm at the end of 18th century, pointed out by Michel Foucault in his book “Discipline and Punishment”, new forms of incarceration does not include the old purposes of body politics anymore. They set the state of mind based on inevitable surveillance. While prisoner as a body and society as a crowd have changed their ontological dispositions the wall of the prison stayed the same.

The new design proposes to reject a negative interference of punitive architecture and to create a different intensities in the inside and outside perimeter of the fence. By resisting diagrammatic process the assemblage is produced in non-generic way by expressing the importance of the target group, adopting surroundings and including public space.