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The American city: Center, edge and the transformation of form

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THE AMERICAN CITY: CENTER, EDGE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF FORM

by

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ABSTRACT

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The American City: Center, Edge and
The Transformation of Form

The creation of public space in the modern American city has been a persistent problem. This thesis is a revival of the problem of defining and creating public space. My choice of site is an abandoned urban parcel of land which housed the State of Ohio's Penitentiary for 150 years. The characteristics of the site which are of particular interest are its intrinsic definition of public realm, its existing order, and its proximity to the rapidly growing city of Columbus, Ohio. The use of this site, in combination with these features, will provide a novel approach for the making of public space.
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THE AMERICAN CITY: CENTER, EDGE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF FORM:

The essence of form depends upon the definition of its center and the relationship of that center to its edges. Form relates either functionally or symbolically to its identifying context, and becomes altered over time by events and how those events in turn are remembered. By this definition, form is evolutionary. It was natural therefore that American cities would depart from the classical arrangement of the ideal city from of Europe. The development of the relationship between center and edge in the United States was influenced in three ways: the use, rejection, or overlay of European ideals; the idealistic and physical impact of the American frontier; and the development of democratic ideals. The transformation of the city's form has evolved in relation to a corresponding center. Ideally this center is a collective and democratic voice that can find expression in the selection and construction of public spaces. The perspective of the individual has re-defined and replaced the classical definition of the center through daily movement, activities, occupations, concerns, goals, standards, and values. Ultimately a new edge, embodied by openness, and a new center, defined by the individual, have led to the transformation of the classical city form. The result is the modern city form which confronts us today.

A center is the organizing power within a structure; it is an origin which orients, balances, and organizes in relationship to the form's edges. The form is dependent on its center and without it loses balance. "By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form."\(^1\) If a center is destroyed adjustments must be made

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within to re-establish the form. These adjustments provide opportunity for an adaptive re-use of a form.

An edge serves as a separation or an enclosure of people, places and their ideals. A structure that separates takes on a figurative quality, whereas an enclosing one becomes a self-contained form. An edge that divides, a wall for example, without having the unifying force of an enclosure destroys the function of the center. Hadrian’s Wall, the Great Wall of China and the Berlin Wall are examples of this ability to separate. These political structures separated large tracts of land which were otherwise naturally whole and complete. The walls become figurative extrusions of datum which marked the integrity of the landscape.

A wall that so separates cannot only destroy shared values of a region’s center, but destroy the psychic center of an individual as well. The Berlin Wall created such a spiritual Wahnsinn; a feeling of dislocation caused by the impact of the wall in relation to the city and the resultant dividing of the self.

Peter Eisenman, an American architect, who was asked to design within the context of this separating device, commented on the need to search for center. "Modern architecture, Eisenman feels, did not move far enough in reflecting the 20th Century condition of alienation, did not achieve a ‘dislocation’ in architecture, as he puts it. It would not relinquish the chimera of a Utopia attainable through science (‘science’ in this century falsely and briefly replacing ‘man’, who in the 15th Century had replaced ‘God’, as the conceptual center of man’s universe) but clung to the traditional references to the human form-human scale references, for example, or the body as column."2

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2 Susan Doubilet, "The Divided Self," Progressive Architecture, March 1987, p. 82.
An edge which encloses, instead of one which separates, creates a form which is defined by the relationship between its edge and its center. The ideal ancient city had a literal center and was enclosed by a wall that was a perfect circle or a square; the center was equidistant from all edges. (An example of this idealization was the referral in ancient cities to the perfection of the Garden of Paradise). This type of enclosure served two purposes: the wall was a means of grouping the forms which defined the city and a means of arresting its physical growth and the resultant destruction of its ideal form.

The form of a city at any given time is the result of continual changes in the relationship between center, edge, and patterns of movement. These relationships are on an individual and collective scale and involve history, memory, and ideals. The creation of urban form is enhanced through the study of old forms, the adaptive re-use of these forms, and the relationships between them.

The significance of extant urban forms was illustrated in the archaeological drawings of Rome by Giovanni Piranesi, an Italian architect in the 18th Century. Piranesi looked to ancient buildings as a source and "was guided by a sometimes irrational but always incandescent faith in the value and significance of ancient buildings and objects... He studied remains now gone and structures that had not yet been restored or prettied up, not yet isolated from the buildings and debris in which they had become partially embedded."\(^3\) The vocabulary created through the study of ancient forms was given context and meaning in the etchings Piranesi created to document Rome. The etchings were factual but also an illustration of Piranesi's personal projections on to the city.

A form evolves in a city because of its function and relationship to other forms. According to Aldo Rossi, another Italian architect, the richness and form of a city are dependent on the placement of each building and the multiplicity of functions assigned to any single building over time. When the history of a building's form becomes neglected and there is discontinuity in the building's role in the city, memory becomes crucial to meet any desire for the structure's renewal. The result is an adaptive re-use of the form and its further evolution in the functioning of the city. Mr. Rossi states, "When form and function are severed, and only form remains vital, history shifts into the realm of memory. When history ends, memory begins...History comes to be known through the relationship between a collective memory of events, the singularity of place (locus solus), and the sign of the place as expressed in form."^4

This relationship of forms to each other creates a structure and a need for new forms. According to Michel Foucault, a contemporary philosopher, the form of our cities is based on the theory of heterotopia, i.e. the creation of form based on a relationship of two concepts which exist in constant opposition. An example is the pairing of a real space and an effective space such as Utopia. Our era finds the quintessence of its mythological resources in the creation and understanding of space. Foucault states, "We are in the stage of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered. A period in which, in my view, the world is putting itself to the test, not so much as a great way of life destined to grow in time but as a net that links points together and creates its own muddle. It might be said that certain conflicts which underlie the controversies

of our day take place between pious descendants of time and tenacious inhabitants of space.\textsuperscript{5}

The edge being no longer an enclosure, gives a sense of expansion, inspiration and embodies the ideals provided by the frontier. The new relationship of center to edge occurred on virgin land where there were no existing patterns. The transformation between the frontier and the development of American form were the result of a combination of people's various methods of starting their lives over, the mixing of cultures and ideals, and the necessary adaptation and modification of their very beings within the new circumstances presented by the frontier. "The frontier influence tended, everywhere and at all times, to produce novelty in the form of new men, new institutions and new ideas - again with the further effect of modifying the men and institutions left behind on the sea-coast and in the countries of origin."\textsuperscript{6}

Invention and the creation of American space is rooted in the frontier (a border between two countries or the outer limits of knowledge or achievement) experience and the development of the United States by the European settlers. The unique impact the land has on these people in establishing and guiding their new way of life is illustrated in the writings of Frederick Jackson Turner. In 1893, he wrote an essay which,

"Was intensely concerned with the personal results of exposure to the wilderness. For the frontier experience was supposed to have produced the most thorough - going changes in human nature, as well as in society. Not merely did it break down old arrangements and generate new institutions, particularly in the political and economic field; fundamentally and first of all it affected the emotions. A man was influenced in his attitude toward himself and toward his neighbor, toward God and toward nature, toward government domestic and foreign. And it


was his new attitudes, very naturally and very largely, that then determined his social
development."^7

This social development began to manifest itself in the way the land
was used and in building design. As the buildings embodied the outlook of their
builders, they also perpetuated those same attitudes that inspired their designs. "The
ideals of equality, freedom of opportunities, faith in the common man are deep
rooted in all the Middle West. The ideals of the Middle West began in the log huts
set in the midst of the forest a century ago."^8

How a new generation of institutions can be crafted in a foreign
environment from an established order can be understood in Thomas Jefferson's
work and thinking. For Jefferson the European Enlightenment was the guide for the
construction of democracy. "The heroic aspect of classicism was accepted by
Jefferson as a European myth to be 'made' American (and for this reason it could
be used with freedom and open-mindedness). But when this heroic aspect was
presented as value, as constructed reason, as a quality capable of unifying the
divergent ideals of the composite society of the young United States, it had also to
be presented as an accessible, diffusible, social value...The values were imported
from Europe already elaborated in all their weighty solemnity, but they were
immediately stripped of anything that might isolate them from civil life. In other
words, they were deprived of their aura of inaccessibility."^9

The center of any democratic setting is the collective voice of its
people. This is the core of the form. If such a free center is lacking, then history

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7 Ray Allen Billington, p. 33.
8 Ray Allen Billington, p. 39.
9 Manfredo Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development
determines the meaning of the form. Such a center cannot exist in a non-democratic atmosphere. The Berlin Wall was a futile effort to try to remove a community's natural center. O.Henry, who became a writer while confined behind the walls of a prison, expressed the need for a center in a writing entitled, "The Voice of The City":

"The other day I became confused. I needed a ray of light. I turned back to those school days for aid. But in all the nasal harmonies we whined forth from those hard benches I could not recall one that treated of the voice of agglomerated mankind...In other words, of the composite vocal message of massed humanity...In other words, of the Voice of a Big City...Now the individual voice is not lacking. We can understand the song of the poet, the ripple of the brook, the meaning of the man who wanted $5 until next Monday, the inscriptions on the tombs of the Pharaohs, the language of flowers, the 'step lively' of the conductor, and the prelude of the milk cans at 4 A.M...But who can comprehend the meaning of the voice of the city?"  

O.Henry speaks of that underlying voice that begins as a whisper and rises to a thunderous roar as it defines the development of the form of our centers. This voice speaks of those things that man needs, or more importantly, within the democratic context, wants. These things are eloquently discussed by Sherwood Anderson in Mid-American Chants:

"I do not believe that we people of mid-western America, immersed as we are in affairs, hurried and harried through life by the terrible engine-industrialism-have come to the time of song. To me it seems that song belongs with and has its birth in the memory of older things than we know, in the beaten paths of life, when many generations of men have walked the streets of a city or wandered at night in the hills of an old land, the singer arises.

The singer is neither young nor old but within him always there is something that is very old. The flavor of many lives lived and of many gone weary to the end of life creeps into his voice. Words run out beyond the power of words. There is unworldly beauty in the song of him who sings out of the souls of peoples of old times and places but that beauty does not yet belong to us.

In Middle America men are awakening. Like awkward and untrained boys we begin to turn toward maturity and with our awakening we hunger for song. But in our towns and fields there are few memory haunted places. Here we stand in

roaring city streets, on steaming coal heaps, in the shadow of factories from which come only the grinding roar of machines. We do not sing but mutter in the darkness. Our lips are cracked with dust and with the heat of furnaces. We but mutter and feel our way toward the promise of song." 11

A society's concern about such yearnings is embodied largely by the public spaces it reserves equally for the greatest good for everyone. The extent to which public space is used, enjoyed, and protected is a measure of a community's embrace of its citizens and respect for their freedoms. The definition of a public place is dependent, like the city, on an overlap, juxtaposition, and separation of experiences. In the city all meaningful experiences are dependent upon interaction with other individuals.

A public place is created and maintained by public authority and accessible to all citizens for their use and enjoyment. It is a place which is defined by a collection of individual experiences and symbolic of social, political, and philosophical ideals. The representation of a public place is synecdoche for a city. It is defined through ownership, accessibility, symbolism, a need for expression, and a reminder of one's freedom to engage in it. It is a structure which not only houses activity of a collective and public nature but symbolizes these activities.

"The public is a sphere of broad and largely unplanned encounter. No individual is sovereign in this sphere, but each, on entering it renounces the right to dictate the terms upon which he communes and conflicts with others. His projects are subject, not to the discipline of domestic affection, but to the vacillating opposition of adversaries and fools. His time and rhythm are to a great extent his own, but they are also forced into flexibility which they need not otherwise acquire. If a person is to advance in the public sphere it is either in opposition to others, or in agreement with them." 12


In the modern American city the definition of a public place emphasizes the individual rather than the collective. The center becomes the individual's perception of that place. As J.B. Jackson states, "We did not come here for what an earlier generation called togetherness, we came for an individual, private experience - a sequence of emotions, perceptions, sensations, of value to ourselves."

Increased mobility of the modern age necessitates incorporating patterns of movement in any plan for a modern American city, particularly in regard to the consideration of public space. The impact of movement in the design and the translation from static to dynamic forces in the creation of form were addressed as long ago as the 16th Century by Michelangelo while he was working on the interrelations between artillery and the fortifications of Florence.

"Unlike the situation in the other arts, the lessons of antiquity and of preceding generations were of little account; this is one of those rare events in the history of architecture when technological advances altered the basic precepts of design...The challenge encountered by Michelangelo and his contemporaries was more comparable to that of the modern architect in planning for the requirements of the automobile. Artillery, like motor transportation, is a mechanical innovation which is not a part of a building but which affects the way it is used, and consequently the way it must be built...The Peculiarly organic character of Michelangelo's bastios is due to the fact that they are envisaged as a framework to house and release dynamic forces."  

In the Sixteenth Century, the development of modern fortifications radically changed architecture's approach to initiating design concepts by emphasizing the needs and movements of those using the structure instead of the structure itself. Michelangelo's Laurentian Library represents the first dynamic

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planning of the Renaissance that made a visitor pass through the building rather than seek a static vantage point.

An individual's perspective became a key ingredient in the development of the center and, similar to the dominance of the collective voice, usurps the actual physical center itself. It is an individual's placement within a city; their interaction with and circulation through the city and their vantage point within these structures, that determine the symbolic representation of ideals and ultimately form the city.

"While Copernicus's idea that the universe does not revolve around our planet was first being disseminated, the advocates and users of perspective were resolutely maintaining in every painting, every engraving, every bird's-eye view of a city or garden that the center of the universe is the individual looking at it. All things were reduced to signals on the retina; all things let to man."15 This concept of the individual as center is obviously not new; however, it was slower to dominate the development of form in Europe, which was influenced by old values that traditionally placed a heavier emphasis on the importance of God and the collective whole, than it was in American where the evolution of American traditions were new and not reinforced so consistently by historical architecture.

An individual can be a center and give meaning to a place based on his perception and perspective relative to that place. Piranesi illustrates the importance of individual perspective in his series of etchings entitled The Carceri, which are imaginative enclosures whose heavy imagery and forced perspective pull the viewer into the scene. The irony and symbolism of this situation is Piranesi's intentional destruction of the central point in the structure and the

corresponding placement of the viewer as the center. This work has many meanings but one of the central underlying messages is a commentary of his time and his belief in the destruction of the political and therefore social center which results in chaos and a misplacement of the individual.

"In these etchings the space of the building - the prison - is an infinite space. What has been destroyed is the center of that space, signifying the correspondence between the collapse of ancient values, of the ancient order, and the 'totality' of the disorder. Reason, the author of this destruction - a destruction felt by Piranesi to be fatal - is transformed into irrationality. But the prison, precisely because infinite, coincides with the space of human existence. This is very clearly indicated by the hermetic scenes Piranesi designs with the mesh of lines of his 'impossible' compositions. Thus what we see in The Carceri is only the new existential condition of human collectivity, liberated and condemned at the same time by its own reason. And Piranesi translates into images not a reactionary criticism of the social promises of the Enlightenment, but a lucid prophecy of what society, liberated from the ancient values and their consequent restraints, will have to be."16

Italo Calvino's story of the fictitious city of Leonia, described by Marco Polo to Kublai Khan in Invisible Cities, is a foreshadowing of the imagery of form in our cities today.

"The city of Leonia refashions itself every day: every morning the people wake between fresh sheets, wash with just-unwrapped cakes of soap, wear brand-new clothing, take from the latest model refrigerator still unopened tins, listening to the last-minute jingles from the most up-to-date radio...each year the city expands, and the street cleaners have to fall farther back. The bulk of the outflow increases and the piles rise higher, become stratified, extend over a wider perimeter. Besides, the more Leonia's talent for making new materials excels, the more the rubbish improves in quality, resists time, the elements, fermentations, combustions. A fortress of indestructible leftovers surrounds Leonia, dominating it on every side, like a chain of mountains...Leonia's rubbish little by little would invade the world, if, from beyond the final crest of its boundless rubbish heap, the street cleaners of other cities were not pressing, also pushing mountains of refuse in front of themselves. Perhaps the whole world, beyond Leonia's boundaries, is covered by craters of rubbish, each surrounding a metropolis in constant eruption. The boundaries between the alien, hostile cities are infected ramparts where the debris of both support each other, overlap, mingle."17


Today the rapid growth and development of American cities and their suburban peripheries have changed the clear dialogue, meaning, and evolution of traditional urban and suburban forms. It is difficult to describe the form of our cities because the centers are ill-defined and the edges are constantly changing. Downtown areas are now referred to as Central Business Districts and suburbia has evolved into minicities. This has been the result of rapidly changing building technology; more accessible transportation, with the automobile being of paramount importance; and a desire to enjoy the American suburban dream. Definitions of the once integral components of the city have taken on new meaning.

The structure today of the CBD reflects the emphasis and importance which have been accorded to the ideals of the individual, and the investment to fulfill them. Although architecture has done well in addressing specific needs of individuals, it has done poorly in addressing the greater collective need of all individuals. In a discussion, in the School of Architecture at Rice University, Colin Rowe suggested that the emphasis on the individual and not on the collective was the fault of modern architecture. The design of a hotel was used as an example: the large interior spaces for public interaction, such as lobbies, are awkward, whereas individual hotel rooms are thoughtfully and efficiently designed. The manifestation of this emphasis on the individual leaves these new CBDs without a symbolic center, no physical limits, no interconnective patterns of growth, and few pedestrian linkages.

The new Mississauga, Ontario City Hall complex provides one type of coherent solution for a city that lacks a center and shows the potential for the creation of a new architectural form in the context defined by the contrast of city to suburbia. The site for the complex is virtually the dividing line between city and country. "As a city, Mississauga, Ontario, lives in the shadow of its eastern neighbor,
Toronto. An aggregation of three previous towns - Mississauga, Streetsville, and Port Credit - it had experienced pronounced growth by 1974 as Toronto suburban patterns spread ever farther west. For all its intentions, the city still had no real center; but in 1982, Mississauga invited all Canadian architects to enter a national competition for the design of a new city hall and civic square. The resulting structure is referred to as a "city building." A new urban form which provides a center representative of the public life of that city.

The counterpart to these new urban centers is the changed definition of "suburbia." The Post World War II archetypal suburban refuge was described in 1961 by Lewis Mumford "as a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste." Today suburbs have evolved into "minicities" with mid-rise office towers, hypermarts, mega shopping centers, restaurants and all the other convenient amenities one might desire. D.D. Boles describes suburbia as an exurban frontier; a big new spread-out small town. Ms Boles explains that "a typical exurban settlement contains a population of 150,000 spread out over 250 square miles-a larger land area than the city of Chicago with its three million inhabitants. Its downtown is a strip ten miles long, and its residents think nothing of an 80-mile commute to work."

Worsening traffic congestion, increases in water and air pollution levels, and concern about future energy sources are causing more people to reconsider the conveniences of living in suburban environments where they work

20 Thomas Fisher, p. 78.
and have cultural amenities at hand. Kenneth Jackson illustrated this point in his lecture, "Metro: A Line to Suburbia", at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts on March 29, 1989. Mr. Jackson illustrated how land values in the American city have changed relative to the city's patterns of growth. He emphasized that as people found living in suburbia more desirable the value of urban land decreased. Today there seems to be a reversal in this pattern, the value of urban land is exceeding that of suburban land. The least expensive land lies on the periphery of these two areas. Motion has reversed from outward extension to an inward emphasis.

The residual spaces resulting from the blurring of the traditional form of the city has created sources for new forms. The areas between suburbia and CBDs which are the physical by-products and products of our cities are rarely noticed. These zones house: warehouses, industrial buildings, railway stations, airports, viaducts, water-towers, large cemeteries, low-income housing projects, prisons, rows of electric power stations and wires, gas reserves, garbage dumps both full and expectant, and lastly they emphasize the backside of parking garages and buildings. Urban sprawl is consuming these residual spaces in the hope of a synthesis of new spatial compositions, which may begin to make our cities cohesive again. Steven Holl points out, "In the middle zone between landscape and city, there is hope for a new synthesis of urban life and urban form...Between the center city and the countryside an intensified urban realm will spring up, a coherent mediator between the extremes of the metropolis and the agrarian plain."\textsuperscript{21}

As any dynamic form is continuously being re-defined by its center and edges, the American city is in a state of change too. Historically, the city has been shaped by three determining factors which are particular to it alone: the

\textsuperscript{21} Steven Holl, "Within the City, Phenomena of Relations," \textit{Design Quarterly} 139, p. 6.
use, rejection, or adaptation of European models; the impact of the frontier on the natural consciousness; and the pervasiveness of American democratic ideals. This form was initially dominated by a uniquely American attribute, the collective voice of democracy and the creation of and need for public spaces. Next to dominate the development of the American form was the perspective of the individual because there was no architectural tradition to lessen his importance. Ultimately a new edge, embodied by openness, and a new center, embodied by the individual, have led to the transformation of the classical city form, resulting in the current modern American form which confronts us today.
THE EVOLUTION OF A PROTOTYPE - THE AMERICAN PRISON:

The forms of buildings and city patterns of previous generations constitute an urban vocabulary that enables expression to be given to ways to create new structures for contemporary needs. The language of the past is never adequate to speak completely to current matters, and is necessarily changed. New urban forms arise from earlier ones and exist as transformations of those initial conditions. Rarely is it a matter of direct plagiarism, but a transformation of an existing building type to suit new social needs.

How this process evolves can be traced in the development of a prototype prison for the American penal system in the early Nineteen Century. The genesis of cellular confinement lies rooted within the Catholic Church of 14th Century Europe. During that eposque the Church sought places where wrongdoers would be made to avoid worldly things and forced to accept their penitence. Structures where individuals could be isolated, deprived of human contact, material possessions and even light did not readily exist. Consequently, unused, but extant, tomblike spaces within cities and fortresses became the first places used for cellular confinement. These conditions were not regarded by the Church as forms of torture, but rather as a right and suitable condition for penitence. Often ancient Roman edifices were used for confinement.

"Early places of confinement were crude structures, seldom built for the use to which they were finally put. They were likely to be strong cages within a fortress or castle enclosure or subterranean portions of public buildings. Although both classical Greece and Rome are reported to have used stone quarries as prisons, and a number of large public prisons existed in Rome for different kinds of offenders, the only place of confinement about which much is known is the Mamertine Prison. Begun about 640 B.C. by Ancus Martius, and later enlarged, it appears to have been a 'vast system of dungeons' constructed, for the most part, under the Cloacae Maxima, the main sewer of Rome. The construction existing in the late 19th Century consisted of two chambers, one below the other. The upper room measured 30 x 22 feet and received light from a hole in the ceiling 16 feet above the floor. The lower chamber, which was reached by means of an aperture in
the floor of the room above, was cone shaped with a diameter of 20 feet and was completely dark.\footnote{22}

The prison prototype changed in 16th Century France. The emphasis shifted from the idealized situation of individual penitence within secluded confinements, to the housing of prisoners in large uncategorized groups. Rarely were they separated based on the crime committed, age, or sex. Such institutions were called hospitals and operated with an emphasis on profit and not personal reform. Sociologically these "hospitals" were a dismal failure and served more as a propagation of corruption and disease rather than a place of penitence through introspection. John Howard, and a book he wrote in 1777 entitled, The State of Prisons, was primarily responsible for enlightening the European populace of the horrors of their prison systems, as well as greatly influencing the creation of a prison reform movement. To public dismay, Howard stated that:

"The operations of the jails and prisons was often a sinecure, a moneymaking operation for a particular official who had no government funds to run his institution. As a consequence, buildings were in disrepair, living quarters were incredibly crowded and unsanitary, prisoners were rarely provided with food and had little means of keeping clean. Howard was struck by the almost complete lack of supervision and control over prisoners. Shakedowns and assaults were common and the sophisticated inmates freely corrupted the younger and more naïve."\footnote{23}

By making the public aware of prison conditions, Howard's work encouraged new thinking about the philosophy of imprisonment. To reduce the financial burden of prisons on the public and to eliminate a dangerous level of idleness in prisoners, England avoided the concept of the "hospital" type of confinement and developed instead the "workhouse," where prisoners were put to work to pay for their keep. If the prison was to be productive, the work would have


\footnote{23 N. Johnson, p. 5.}
to be well supervised and living conditions so improved that the prisoners would remain healthy to work. These conditions and objectives led of necessity to the design of a new prison form.

After a visit to a Russian textile mill in 1787, Jeremy Bentham developed the idea of the panopticon prison type. Panopticon means having all things visible within one view. The Russians used a circular plan system to allow for the efficient supervision of numerous workers by a nominal number of supervisors. The panopticon prison type, as proposed by Bentham, would consist of: "A very large circular building of cast iron and glass containing cells on several tiers around the periphery. The cells were to have barred fronts, and to be heated in winter and artificially cooled in summer by means of air forced over ice and directed through flues into the cells. Speaking tubes would connect each cell with the keeper’s tower in the center. By these means the keeper in his louvered tower could carry out continuous, and unseen surveillance both visual and auditory over the inmates." 24

This adaptive form would have suited the needs of the prisons, as brought to light by John Howard and the prison reform movement; however, George III of Great Britain put a stop to the construction of Bentham’s panopticon prison type calling it totalitarian and too avant-gard. Consequently, Americans were the first to put Bentham’s ideas into practice, setting the stage for the development of the modern prison form.

Prisoners were then being housed in well fortified structures that had been put into disuse because of obsolescence. Since they were invariably enclosed by massive walls, prisons took on the same intimidating aspect that the original military function inspired. It was not until the 1800’s that the inherent

24 N. Johnson, p. 20.
symbolic content of these fortified walls was recognized and then manipulated. From this time on the design of prison facades served a public purpose by admonishing those who would violate the Law. The symbolic goal of the facade's design had little connection to the structure or function of the interior activities. As the function of the prototypical prison evolved so did the strength of this separating device. The design of the facade was now more than a matter of economy and security. An 1826 encyclopedia article illustrated this desirable image:

"The style of architecture of a prison is no matter of slight importance. It offers an effectual method of exciting the imagination to a most desirable point of abhorrence. Persons, in general, refer their horror of a prison to an instinctive feeling rather than to any actual knowledge of the privations or afflictions therein endured...The exterior of a prison should, therefore, be formed in the heavy and sombre style, which most forcibly impresses the spectator with gloom and terror. Massive cornices, the absence of windows or other ornaments, small low doors and the whole structure comparatively low, seem to include nearly all points necessary to produce the desired effect."25

The inadvertent image of heaviness and despair was adapted as the appropriate symbolism for these structures and was intentionally manipulated to convey a powerful, deterring message to the public. It attempted to control those who lived around the prison, and those who would see it. The emphasis on the symbolic quality of this separating device isolated it from both its surroundings and from its internal architecture.

The vision of Bentham's panoptic prison was realized first in America by John Haviland in 1824. Prior to this, the first and only notable activity in the development of an American form was the Pennsylvania Quaker William Penn's revolutionary penal code in 1682. Like the 14th Century Europeans, the Quakers implemented the system of isolation, believing solitude served several purposes. It was "punishment par excellence, but more importantly, it would give a man time for

reflection and contrition and protect the naive from contamination by the more sophisticated, preventing also plots, escapes, and attacks on keepers."26

A system of penitence, Howard's reform movement concepts, the symbolic potential of the facade design, and inherent ideas of the panopticon were at the heart of Haviland's design of the Cherry Hill Penitentiary near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It became one of the most frequently copied prisons in the world. The plan of the structure was radial with a central rotunda. From the rotunda, which housed the general services of the institution, radiated separate wings housing the cellblocks. The cells were modern, equipped with hot-water heating, water taps and toilets. The spaces between the wings were exercise yards which were visually monitored from the central rotunda and the guard houses on the outer walls.

A second American prison form followed in New York in 1817, the Auburn Prison which improved further upon the Cherry Hill model. The layout of the Auburn plan was also radial, grounded by a central building to house offices, a mess hall, and a chapel. It was flanked and joined on its periphery by multitiered cellblocks. Separate from this structure were shops, a hospital, and a power plant. The complex was enclosed by a massive wall. Although the Auburn method of imprisonment was acknowledged as humane and progressive, the individual was deprived of all self-expression and became part of a wholly unified mass. Adherence to the system was enforced by regulating the prisoner's activities: they marched everywhere in "lock step" when the ringing of bells called; all dressed in striped uniforms; and a strict silence controlled personal intercourse.

26 N. Johnson, p. 29.
Unlike Cherry Hill, where the inmates worked in isolation, the Auburn system grouped its prisoners in factory-like work situations. Auburn inmates proved to have a higher productivity level then the isolated Cherry Hill workers. The Auburn inmates became so reliable that they were engaged in the housekeeping activities which maintained the prison. "America, with its tradition of hard work and chronic labor shortages, could not really tolerate the degree of relative idleness which Europeans would permit running their prison systems under the [Cherry Hill] regimen."27

Although John Howard’s writings had caused insightful criticism of the penal system, there was no instrumentality in England to bring about change and to allow a new institutional form to evolve. This was despite Bentham’s adaptive re-use of the design of the textile mill seen in Russia. Conditions in America however proved favorable enabling new forms to be put into place. The success of Cherry Hill became then a model to be followed in other parts of the world.

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27 N. Johnson, p. 27.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Holl, Steven. "Within the City, Phenomena of Relations." Design Quarterly 139, 1989.


DESIGN PROGRAM

The objective of this program is the resultant transformation or creation of new forms through the overlay of a master plan over an existing set of building types.

MASTER PLAN:

A CONSERVATORY, LIBRARY, AND RESEARCH CENTER

These three structures are the first of a series of buildings within a larger master plan to be constructed. Their relationship to each other and the site will determine the context for the incorporation of other cultural buildings on the site creating a unified totality.

CONSERVATORY: Entry hall should not be traditional but contain some mode of display that will feature the activities of the institute, previews, and public information regarding conservation related activities in the country and the world. Includes ticket counter and coat room.

- Entry Hall 2,500 SF
  - Includes ticket counter, coat room 2,500 SF
- Temporary exhibit house, h=15'-50' 2,500 SF
- Casual dining areas adjacent to displays 1,750 SF
- Food preparation 450 SF
- Restrooms (3 fixtures per sex) (2)150 SF
- Auditorium 2,000 SF
  - Accommodates 150 people; platform, podium, rear screen, 4 projectors; adequate lighting; adequate public address system.
- Administrative offices 1,500 SF
  - Director/curator (200 SF), assoc. curator (150 SF), recept./clerical (250 SF), research assist. 5 @ 100 SF.
- Conference room 400 SF
- Mechanical equipment 150 SF

DISPLAY AREAS: Each display house has corresponding propagation greenhouse; separate space for mech. equip. & storage; a public film/text display; and computer monitored water systems: sprinkler, mist, fog.

- FERN HOUSE & FOSSIL DISPLAY: h=25'-45' 2,500 SF
  - Dense, prehistoric, very humid-water important factor.
- HOT TROPICAL HOUSE: h=15'-25' 2,500 SF
- Intense light, colorful, dense coverage, creeping, large.
- Texture is dense with ambiguous height; plants are large scale providing heavy and cool shade.

**ARID DISPLAY:** $h = 15'-25'$  
2,500 SF
- Intense dry heat; isolated plants - few and rugged with little shade - self - defensive.
- Terraced clear planes; well-defined forms; clear light, oasis (water) juxtapose.

**PALM HOUSE:** $h = 15'-85'$  
10,000 SF
- Dense; height required; water - tropical; enough room to view each; root-bulb, not spreading cluster. Traditionally this is the center of a conservatory. Clear height with uneven growth.

**ORANGERY/CITRUS HOUSE:** $h = 15'-20'$  
5,000 SF
- Need height; rational and calculated ordering; warmth and light; similar units.

**SEASONAL HOUSE:** $h = 15'-25'$  
5,000 SF
- Patterning which is seasonal - parterres - seen as a pattern from above; rational, celebrational, illustration. Ordered visually into: fore-, middle-, and background.

**OUTDOOR PATHS AND GARDENS**

**BACK OF HOUSE:**
- Staff entrance
- Laboratories/storage bank  
  - Space for live planting storage, 8' long tables, large utility sink, floor drains with hose attachment, shelving, high ceiling/grid system to hold special projects, numerous electrical outlets
- Propagation greenhouses  
  - Includes refrigeration plant storage
  - Head house, boiler room  
    - Incoming display service and preparation area:  
      - Shipping and receiving area  
        - Preparation area  
          - Power shop  
            - Equipment storage and workshop  
              - Shelves, supplies and tools and lighting, hardware, etc.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:** Botanical and horticultural: ancient herbs, original manuscripts, collections of botanical art, nursery and seed catalogues, periodicals, books-13th-20th C.
- Reference collection dried plant specimens-carefully mounted, labeled, and curated. Study of plant taxonomy, ecology, anatomy, morphology, economic botany, floristics, and conservation.
- Offices  
  - Librarian, assist. librarian, part-time clerical
- Book collection  
  - 2,000 SF
- 2,500 linear feet of shelving, 20,000 volumes
Reference collection 2,000 SF
Space for readers 1,200 SF
- Minimum 40 seats/30 sq.ft. per reader space
Individual research bays - 5 @ 20x10 1,000 SF
- Access to both dried and living collections
Utility/mechanical room

PARKING: 600 visitors: 1 car/3 visitors 200 SPACES
SITE SELECTION

The city was once a forested land, became farmland and then a settlement along a river. The city's growth was determined by the nature of the land, shared American ideals, and industrialism. An inscription from an 1820's map reads: "Columbus, the seat of government, is regularly laid out on a pleasant rising ground, on the east bank of the Scioto, just below the confluence of the Whetsone, 45 miles north of Chillicothe."¹

The simplicity of this description is no longer evident in the growing city of Columbus. Today the form of the city is defined by the routine of adding and subtracting buildings. The survival and richness of a city is dependent on the use and re-use of existing forms. In Columbus, the Ohio State Penitentiary, which has an internal order similar to that of a small town, is in risk of being subtracted from the city. The application of the previously described design program is imposed on this site to illustrate the inherent value of this site in the city's form.

If the twenty-three acre site, which has been on the outskirts of a city for the last 150 years, is saved, it finds itself in a position of either being engulfed by the rapidly sprawling edges of the city or making a forceful physical statement and remaining a zone distancing suburbia and the city.

For 150 years this location housed the Ohio Penitentiary which closed its doors in August of 1984. Today the site remains unoccupied, but still maintains a strong presence and reminder of its past as one enters downtown Columbus. There is no visual access to the site because it is surrounded by a wall

constructed of Ohio Limestone which stands 35' tall. At the base the depth of the
cell. Atop this ridge sit eleven guard houses built
at various times during the Pen's evolution. The Pen is comprised of twenty
buildings; eighteen are within the walls and two are on separate adjacent lots. The
on-site buildings are: Administration Building, St. James Hospital, Deputy's
building, Machine Shop, Tin Shop, Death House, Honor Dorm Laundry, Cell
blocks, Welding Shop, Firehouse, Industries Building, Food Services Building,
plumbing Shop, Power Plant, and Dormitories. The Garage and Pump House are
both off-site structures.

The site overlooks the Scioto River and is on the western edge
of the central business district. It is a trapezoid with its northern most edge on
Maple Street, the "back" of the present configuration of buildings, and 517' in length.
To the south is Spring Street and the "front" of the complex which runs 815'. The
west edge is Neil Avenue (1,433') and the east edge is West Street (1,464'). South of
Spring is the Scioto River and a riverfront lot (150'x180') on which stands the Pen's
Pump House. Spring Street connects downtown Columbus to the freeways leading
to the suburbs. Also of note are the railroad tracks which form a triangular path
around the site and separate it from the CBD and the freeways. Finally, there is no
zoning for the property, but the immediate surroundings are zoned M for
manufacturing under the City of Columbus.

The characteristics of the site provide the means to explore the
nature of a specific type of public structure through its relationship to the contrast,
inversion, and overlap of its own past and potential future. Its most salient
characteristics are its vast size, 23 acres, and its highly engineered enclosure, a 35
foot high Ohio Limestone wall. The structure embodies two notions of public
control: on one hand the prison represents man's inhumanity to man; on the other it
illustrates the State's right to enforce democratic authority and justice. It figuratively and literally represents its public nature with a constant and closed structure. An examination and inversion of this structure provides a means for anchoring and creating a new public place, which is socially, politically, and philosophically open. The solution will be communicated through a variety of contrasts and comparisons with existing structures throughout the city.
SITE ANALYSIS

The following topics and corresponding photographs were part of the initial analysis. From this analysis diagrams were created which were later incorporated into the final design of the master plans. The collection of information included a visit to the site.

WALL: Plan is series of points in motion.

WALL SURFACE: Interior (white paint for high visibility), exterior repetition (contrived image and rough Limestone). Two scales (site and indiv. bldgs). Use exterior wall to inform interior structures and interior structures to inform wall.

MIRROR: Place between two poles. Distortion. Reversal.

FRAMED VIEWS: Central point, panoptic, frontier, white walls; foreground, middle ground, back ground.

GUARD HOUSE: Point where city reflects on self; vertical movement; access from exterior; panoptic; communication; light; defense; offense; standing space; armed and fortified.

PRISON ROUTINE: Layers of penetration and routine. Processing: loss of identity and possession - start over; cell assignment - 4 types; guard house - observation; dining - lock stop; work.

STATIC VS. FIXED POINTS: Formal and geometric analysis with green spaces in city; city; self.

PATHS: Daily routines; visual routines; life-death. Order and connections are based on visual paths. Tower=point, wall=line, sight, lines, mirror.

FORMATION OF CITY: Form of control determined; placement of buildings; path placed around the building connecting front doors - most direct paths - visual vs. city grid-grid formed first then building placed on the grid. City grid limitless in extension.
GARDEN: Garden of Eden = earth. Botanical Garden = re-creation of garden thru discovery and collection of fragments and their reassemble in one point. Paradise = heaven. The garden is a cultural invention rather than natural recreation. A place for the general public which is open for social/cultural activity and interaction.

Information obtained from visit to site in Ohio:

O. HENRY:

"Drop A Tear In This Slot"

He who, when torrid Summer's sickly glare,
Beat down upon the city's parched walls,
Sat him within a room scarce 8 by 9,
And, with tongue hanging out and panting breath,
Perspiring, pierced by pangs of prickly heat,
Wrote variations of the seaside joke,
We all do know and always loved so well,
And of cool breezes and sweet girls that lay,
In shady nooks, and pleasant windy coves,
Anon

Will in that self-same room, with tattered quilt,
Wrapped round him, and blue stiffening hands,
All shivering, fireless, pinched by winter's blasts,
Will hale us forth upon the rounds once more,
So that we may expect it not in vain,
The joke of how with curses deep and coarse,
Papa puts up the pipe of parlor stove,
So ye

Who greet with tears this olden favorite,
Drop one for him who, though he strives to please,
Must write about the things he never sees.

“The style of architecture of a prison is no matter of slight importance. It offers an effectual method of exciting the imagination to a most deadly point of abhorrence. Persons, in general, refer their horror of a prison to an instinctive feeling rather than to any accurate knowledge of the privations or inflictions therein endured... The exterior of a prison should, therefore, be formed in the heavy and sombre style, which most forcibly impresses the spectator with gloom and terror.”
"While Copernicus's idea that the universe does not revolve around our planet was first being disseminated, the advocates and users of perspective were resolutely maintaining in every painting, every engraving, every bird's-eye view of a city or garden that the center of the universe is the individual looking at it. All things were reduced to the retina; all things led to man."
"The frontier experience tended, everywhere and at all times, to produce novelty in the form of new men, new institutions and new ideas—again with the further effect of modifying the men and institutions left behind on the sea-coast and in the countries of origin."

"A public place is commonly defined as a place created and maintained by public authority, accessible to all citizens for their use and enjoyment."
NOTES FOR ILLUSTRATIONS:

1. Author, Ohio State Penitentiary: Columbus, Ohio, October 23, 1989.
2. Author, ibid.
4. Author, ibid.
5. Author, ibid.
6. Author, ibid.
7. Author, ibid.
8. Author, ibid.
9. Author, ibid.
10. Author, ibid.
11. Author, ibid.
12. Author, ibid.
17. Author, ibid.
18. Author, ibid.
21. Betty Garrett, ibid, p. 44.


25 Author, ibid.


29 L'Enfant's plan for Washington, D.C. Reps, ibid, p. 510.


31 Ohio Penitentiary File, Ohio Historical Society, c. 1955.

FINAL PROJECT

My thesis is the renewal of a site by breaking down an old order and creating a new order, which restores a publicly owned fortified structure to a city dominated by curtain wall buildings.

My approach to the site was a process of adding as well as subtracting structures and circulation. My principle means of reorganizing the site was the addition of two paths of movement through the site which were visual and limited to pedestrian use.

On grade the entrance to the site is through the front building where previously all prisoners entered and exchanged their material possessions and identity for a number, a cell assignment, and a dark and lifeless existence. The passage is 15' - 0" in width and cuts through the entire section of the building. The pedestrian is free to pass through this entry to an enclosed retreat, a place full of light, life and free movement. The process of movement has been changed through new relationships between paths and panoptic guard towers. Water and light are vital for the new order to survive. It is through these elements that old forms and symbols take on new significance and meanings. The old foundations serve as the footprints for the new. The remaining structures have been systematically broken down and the resulting ruins are an inversion of the previous use. They become an arid house, fern house, orangery, palm court, propagation greenhouses, a library, laboratories, and parking. Those buildings which have not been re-used are raised and replaced with an orchard, a place for memorial plantings. Each space can be purchased and planted by an individual.

The second path is below grade and part of a procession. There is a reversal. The back door, the abandoned train entrance, is now an
entrance to the institution below grade where the botanical garden represents a world within a world. A place where people come to discover a new world and escape the daily routine of the city. A series of juxtapositions occur where masonry, which blocked out light in the previous use of the structure, is replaced with glass. The previous represents rock, stagnation, darkness, deprivation, complete control, and an anchor for a new system which results from the overlay of new to create a new order which is one of cultivation and freedom.
DESIGN CRITICISM

First design thesis presentation of initial analysis and initial program, Friday, January 12, 1991:

Alan Balfour's response - 23 acres - divide into 23 pieces - master planning technique. Reaction to the city - man's objects versus nature's objects. Peter Salter - environmental morality.

Desk crit from Spencer Parsons during Spring Break (Feb. 26 - March 2):

Assign names to different portions of the diagram you have created and then create a narrative for each portion of the diagram.

River: maintaining piece of nature in front to capture nature within. Architecture within nature; nature within architecture at this point introduce theme of Villa Lante and Primitive Eden - order vs. nature.

Grid is neutral. Begin crating hierarchy within the grid - Comprehensive of place you are in - Columbus, Ohio.

Narrative - city and garden. Former is ruin. River is informer. Metaphor to help give order - a place which gives back to society.

Systems of order:
1. Visual
2. Site specific grid moves out; city grid moves in to site. How do you organize left side with axis?
3. Re-creation of city within. City as garden with urban-like character.
   - Re-creation and didactic - never asked to go back same say came in - experience more of site and create more freedom - how to create a loop?
   - Space on exterior is ante-room and preparation for what is inside.
   - Guardhouses - infest with new meaning - enter a guard house and carry the grid in with them.

Look at Michael Graves' Environmental Center and how he sets up axes and weaves a walk through the site. The axis breaks down as it goes in to the garden and becomes picturesque as it intersects buildings. Lines of exploration and freedom to inform. Axis implies hierarchy which is control and represents authority. The axis has a termination and a beginning. Freedom is represented in a meandering path.

- Open - part of a promenade and connected with the city, vs. closed with a termination point.
- Wall - point of reflection - panopticon and the frontier.
- Not enough options in terms of experiencing the place.
- Axis needs to help you experience the entire site.
- Precinct - Rossi and Modena - significant ordering and narrative.

**Review Number One, Monday, 1990. (before Feb. 23) with Judith DiMayo:**

- I had just finalized my program. Dimayo jumped ahead not realizing I had not yet made a serious attempt at my design.
- See vertical and horizontal movement as passage and journey.
- Nimes-Jardin de la Fontaine; underground memory - another sense of self. Excavation and discovery.
- Look-up Chatsworth Wall - a well-articulated glass wall which has a clearly defined base, middle portion and top.
- Use the existing established path on the western edge that was used for deliveries in to the site as a means for informing the axis that I have inserted thought the buildings.
- Clairvoyance - the supposed ability to perceive things not in sight. This was related to the use of the exterior wall and my desire to make a series of small openings and passages in it.
- Establishment of the front door and circulation. See Peking - The Forbidden City.
- Why doesn’t the conservatory occupy the entire site?

**Review Number Two: Monday, March 1, 1990 with Anthony Vidler:**

- At the time of this review the majority of my time had been spent trying to draw-up and determine what the existing conditions that I was working from really were. I felt this penalized me.

- A. Todd, "You have got to be convinced!"

*Questions asked of the project and my approach by Vidler:*

1. Have you eradicated too much of the memory - the quality of being haunted-entry
   - Lines of movement
   - Program of structure (memory of that which is/was terrifying).
2. Architecturally the task of making one door and one window.
3. Excitement, dynamic and controversy between walled garden and an opening up to the city.
4. Urban scale space which needs to be treated as such - not on an architectural scale. Is a program even necessary? Can the program be giving the site back to the city?
- The definition of an axis is visual and defined by buildings and spaces.
- Vidler - "It looks like a site you have chosen to put your building on" - ouch!
- Suggests lowering wall on the east.

Quick desk crit with Landscape Architect Barbara Stauffacher Solomon:

- Her reaction to my project: "This is entirely too complicated for me. I would simply by thousands of square feet of prefabricated greenhouses and place them on the site." - Recommended reading Bataille, Against Architecture.

Final discussion with committee before presentation, March 29, 1990:

A.T. - Write down five major ideas and use drawings to express them.
A.B. - Add another layer to determine the orientation and pitch of the roof. "Charming project."
A.P. - "What am I going to have to do to get you to draw? Hire someone if you have to!"

Final Review, Wednesday, April 18, 1990:

Jurors: Alan Balfour Peter Waldman Andy Todd
        Albert Pope Christopher Coe Bill Sherman
        Lars Larup Judith Wolan

Synopsis of Presentation:
Stability of stone wall vs. curtain wall
Urban park and new order
Paths - breakdown of panoptic - one below grade; one above grade.
World within a world
Addition and subtraction
Good to have chipboard model
Back entry - subterranean; front entry - ground path
Forest - memorial park/public gesture

Jury Comments:

LL - Deliberate and successful attempt to deal with eminent and important piece of history. Most success in that is opposite of prison-liberation (knowledge of freedom), freedom and joy. Creates an exciting moment. Wall becomes a beautiful object. Have labotomized a sinister object. Extremely successful!
CC - Funeral aspect worries him.
JW - Should do scale of study drawings of one piece (i.e. hospital) so as not to always view it from a distance. What are the surreal juxtapositions?
LL - 1/2 a story diagrammatic.
JW - Washes not correct technique - Photo Montage?
JW - Thinks that master plan was preceded by emotive judgements. Process of representation should have parlayed process of analysis and determination. Isn't just a master plan - is a poetic piece.
CC - What was thinking behind what buildings held what function?
PW - Consistency to drawings is wonderful. Fascination with tilted planes and window. Line intrusion is repeatedly extruded - does it become as much a prison?
CC - Assumption of reality is a Sweet's Standard construction technique when in fact it wants to be more inventive.
AT - Wonders of "strange small slot for entry." (D - maintain the experience of the individual) Good answer!
AT - Use of forest? Sensual aspect? Is there a merry-go-round?
JW - Urge permission to represent the garden aspect. Not so much sombre aspect but gesture the life of the place.