AN EXECUTION SPACE

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A THRESHOLD OF EXISTENCE
AN EXECUTION SPACE

BACHELOR OF ARCHITECTURE DEGREE THESIS DESIGN

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A THRESHOLD OF EXISTENCE
"Dying is easy it's living that scares me to death..."
- Annie Lennox
The goal of this thesis is to provide a facility which will allow for the humane execution of individuals who have received the death penalty. The humane method will be that of electrocution as stated by law. In addition to this the thesis will introduce the notion of the ceremonial aspect of the setting. It is the belief of this thesis that through a series of spiritual spaces the execution ceremony can become more humane to both the participants and the witnesses. Unlike the 20th century practice of keeping the entire process behind prison walls and open only to the invited witnesses, this thesis will open the ceremony up to the public as well as those subject to it.

The spiritual and ceremonial aspect of capital punishment has far reaching possibilities in terms of architecture. It is the spiritual and ceremonial notions that this thesis will attempt to create a junction with. Through these studies it is believed that an architectural solution can be created which will provide a humane as well as a ceremonial environment.
I would like to thank my parents for their unquestionable support (financially and emotionally) of me these past seven years in architecture school. Thanks Gram for the help in making my education possible. Luka thanks for the laughs, the lunch time chats, the Hershey bars, and the sarma. Mags, thanks. Kim Fong thanks for providing me with egg rolls, pot stickers, and an open ear. Veronica Auguste, my Argentinian savior, thanks for the design crit and the graphic consultations. G. Alan Rader, my east coast friend, thanks for reminding me to never assume that people have common sense. Terri Scheibe, thanks for broadening my vocabulary, buttloads. Dougie thanks for being a diehard republican. Jim Monin thanks for the hugs. Holly Schulz, please burn that blue blanket. Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Crone, Mama Andjeich, Mr. and Mrs. Smagula, Mr. and Mrs. Fong, House of Yu, Dairy Queen, and Papa John's for the nourishment this past year.

Andrea Crone I thank you for being the sister I've never had and the friend I could only dream of. I look forward to watching you go through the hell I've just been through, and only hope that I can be as supportive of you, as you were of me. Infinity.

Thanks Harry Eggink for being honest. Thank you Dave Mackey for giving me the o.k. to go thru with this thesis.

Special thanks to CAP for making my past five years interesting, yet at times what appears to have been the inspiration for my thesis.

For all those I haven't mentioned thank you for listening, supporting, and feeding me.
The death penalty in the United States has many factors which affect its administration. Two of these factors; the search for effective and humane methods of execution, and the setting in which executions are carried out are the focus of this thesis.

In the 20th century there have been five lawful methods of execution practiced in the United States. Those five are: hanging, shooting, electrocution, lethal gas, and lethal injection. Executions in the U.S. up to the 1930's were a public matter. In fact, public hangings were often viewed by thousands. Television in the 1950's became technologically advanced and brought with it the notion of broadcasting the execution "live". Surprisingly abolitionists and supporters of the death penalty did not disagree on the broadcast of the execution. Each side felt that the broadcast would strengthen their beliefs. In the case of the abolitionists they felt that the, never seen before, graphic nature of the execution would bring more people to their side. Whereas the supporters felt that the broadcast would enhance the deterrent effect.

During the 1970's the public began to feel victimized, they felt that the death penalty could act as a deterrent, as well as exhibit a "get tough" view toward criminals. So, the result of these attitudes was an increase in the desire to instill capital punishment. The overall symbolic value of the death penalty is what keeps it in the journals of law. It also remains in the minds of the people who feel that the traditional respect for law and order is failing due to the manipulation of the system by the criminal. They also feel that when carried out, the death penalty is a sentence which brings with it an "air of firmness" against criminals and would-be criminals.

"During the Enlightenment and Renaissance there was a rise of rationalist thought and a decline in an exclusively religious foundation for moral principles, philosophers and jurists increasingly lent their support to the doctrine of "the rights of man" as the foundation for constitutional law and public morality. "Philosophers of the time; John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Jefferson, agreed that the most important right of man is "the right to life". The philosophers believed that everyone is born with a "natural" right to life. Therefore murder is, in their opinion, a breach of that right. As a result of this breach by the murderer, executing the individual is not wrong because they have relinquished their own "right to life" by virtue of their crime.

It is the means by which society has chosen to carry out the death penalty that is of interest to this thesis. Execution is a ceremony and should be treated as such. Today the execution is performed within the prison, out of the public eye, witnessed by a chosen few. The ceremony as it is performed today appears mentally detached from the participants. The executioner becomes an object to the executioner and witnesses.

A Threshold of Existence
It is the objective of this thesis to design a series of architectural spaces which disallows the sterility and detachment of the participants and witnesses. The spaces will provide a humane setting for the participants and witnesses to engage in the execution ceremony, both spiritually and physically.
In the United States the law includes capital punishment and five legal methods in which to carry it out: hanging, shooting, lethal gas, lethal injection, and electrocution. The thesis will explore the spiritual and physical experience of the execution ceremony by means of electrocution through a series of architectural spaces. It provides a series of spaces for the arrival, existence, and execution of an individual. These spaces function as a facility which houses individuals whom have received the sentence of the death penalty.

In order for the inmates to exist within their spaces, and to come to their end in the execution space, there exists a facility which oversees them. This facility is the administration building. The activities which occur within this space include documentation of the inmates, administrative duties which pertain to the functioning of the execution facility, security facilities, and visitation spaces for inmates and guests.

The execution facility will provide for the inmates a living space both indoors and outdoors. The living space of each inmate provides a space in which they can spiritually and physically prepare themselves for the execution. It is a place in which the individual inmate can focus on their actions which have placed them here. The inmate exists in this space for 365 days. However, on the 365th day they are executed in the execution space.

The execution space provides a seating area for the family, friends, officials, and public to view the execution of the inmate by means of electrocution.
The context for this thesis shall be that of serenity and natural beauty. Serenity in the sense that the facility shall be free of the influence of the daily sounds and actions like those of an urban context. The visual context shall be natural and open. The view visually and spiritually is far reaching and uninterrupted by man-made materials and objects.

The desert of Arizona has areas which are conducive to this environment. This site will allow for the inner focus of the individual without the social influence of an urban or rural setting. The facility will be located at such a distance from society and cultural influences that it will focus on itself and its natural surroundings.
I've had many questions asked of me as to why I chose to design an execution space. My best answer and the one I feel is the most appropriate is that I believe in the death penalty and I think that we need a space which is open to the public to carry it out in. If one looks at the activity and ceremony which occurs during an execution I can see only a challenge in the design of such a space. To put it in simple terms, an execution is merely an activity which requires a space to perform it in. I have designed that space.

When I began this project I knew that I had wanted to keep the forms and concept pure and simple. I feel that I have accomplished this purity in both form and concept.

To begin with my concept was to use the notion of life and death. That is life as we live it and death as we perceive it. First, let me begin with my feelings about life and death. I feel that life is something we as living beings are all entitled to, yet at the same time I look forward to death. Life is not a "living hell" as you, the reader, may think I'm suggesting. Life is quite good. In fact when a human being takes another human being's life I feel that their life should also be taken.

After life comes death. Death in my mind is something we cannot avoid. Everyone will die eventually. I think that death is simpler and less complicated than living. With this in mind I believe that death is better than life.

Thus with the understanding that death is unavoidable I used the linear walls and corridor to symbolize it and the course it bears in our lives. The living spaces or cells which are placed slightly within the wall reflect the notion of existing and living in parallel to and sometimes even crossing the path of death. The crossing is expressed through the two openings within the walls which allow for the passage of the inmates into the landscaped recreation area.

The notion of the "goodness" or a rise that follows death is expressed in elevation with the rise in the walls, and in plan through the narrowing of the wall thickness. Both of these ideas are fully expressed at the east end of the walls. Where the walls become the narrowest they also become the highest (40'). One may feel that within this space there is no escape from death. Yet, through the narrowing walls there is in fact a gesture towards the notion of escaping death.

At this point the wall ends and there is a gap or a threshold between the wall and the execution space. As one exits from between the walls into the execution space they pass through an open expanse of land. As one turns to the left and to the right they catch a glimpse of freedom.

This space represents the threshold between life and death. The view of freedom in my conception is a foreshadow to what lies in the future.

The narrow opening into the final execution space expresses the idea of your awareness, as the person about to be executed, of what is about to occur; the execution.
I feel that the use of the tall, narrow passage enhances the passage from one space into another. The executioner enters the space facing the public. Upon entry into the space they turn to their immediate right and walk along side a thirty-eight foot high wall. The executioner is viewed in profile by the public because the feel more expression and emotion can be seen in this manner. With this in mind the electric chair is also viewed in profile.

The view which the executioner sees when sitting in the chair is that of an open landscape. In my view the landscape is also a symbol of the freedom that is about to come with death.

Along the wall and the procession into the actual execution space there exists a series of twenty-five living spaces or cells. Each one adjoining the southern wall of the two walls. Within each space exists an inmate awaiting their execution. Each space contains a sleeping area, a wash closet, a sink, a shower, and an area for meditation. The meditation area allows for the inmate to view, across the corridor, out into the open landscape while seated on the floor.

The only cell which has a passage into the corridor between the two walls is the one which is the farthest from the execution space. This cell is occupied by the inmate who is scheduled for the next execution. The inmate is placed in the cell farthest from the chair for several reasons. To begin with the longer that one resides at the execution facility the awareness or fear of death becomes less evident.

As the year passes the focus becomes the self as well as the past of the executionee. The walk within the corridor to the execution space allows for a final reflection of one's past actions and future endeavors. During this reflection and journey down to the execution space the other inmates can hear the passage of the inmate as well as glimpse them as they walk by.

In terms of views the inmates are exposed to several which emphasize the landscape. There is a view from the meditation area within the cell across the corridor into the landscape. The view is such that the inmate is always subtly reminded of their imprisonment, yet the freedom which surrounds them. The natural landscape symbolizes the freedom, and the view across the corridor is a subtler reminder of the unavoidable fate which lies ahead.

The inmates who live in the cells at the end of the walls have a view which is overpowered by a forty foot steel mesh fence. This view is such that the notion of freedom, exists mentally, but physically the imprisonment is still there. As the inmate moves into the next cell (west) each time another inmate is executed, the view of the fence becomes less powerful. The landscape and the freedom that is symbolized through the landscape overpowers the fence. This gesture reflects the idea that as an individual, spiritually, you begin to become more in touch with yourself. Unlike when you first
arrive at the facility you are close to your execution and are mentally focused on the chair. As your execution comes into perspective so to does the steel mesh fence and the power it possesses over the landscape. The fence symbolizing power and control, brings back into perspective the reason for being here and your loss of freedom.

Each time an inmate is executed, the next day, the remaining inmates move westward, into the next cell, and a new inmate is moved into the cell closest to the chair. The rotation of the inmates occurs in an east to west direction, but the journey to the final execution space is in an easterly direction. Thus they walk into the sunrise, into the beginning of a new day, a new existence.
To address the arrival of the inmate to the execution space there exists an administration building. Within this building activities such as processing the inmate, security functions, administrative responsibilities, visitation, and meal preparation are carried out.

The structure itself and the form of it is a gesture toward the cells through the material use, the roof form, and the fenestration. In plan there exists a granite wall along the north side of the structure. This wall acts as a gesture to the walls which the cells are lined up along. There exists a central area, the sally port, within the building which all who enter must pass thru. This space is represented by the circle in the plan.

The administrative area and the visitation area of the building both have a southern exposure. The security and the kitchen area are located on the north side of the building. The security is located on this facade so that it may have full view of the cell area. Being that the administration area is occupied during most of the day, it was decided to place it on the southern side of the structure.

Something one should note is that there are three concrete towers which exist on the site. Two of which are in the walls and the third is along the security fence. All three of these towers have 2-3 snipers within them ready to use their high powered rifles should there be an escape attempted.
The inmates exist at this facility for 365 days. Most of their time is spent within their cells. Each cell has a sleeping area, a meditation area, and a bathing area. The interior of the cell is kept simple through the use of materials and forms.

For instance the bathing area, as shown in plan is simply a steel grate with a shower head and a wash closet. The water from the shower falls into the steel grate. The floor of the meditation area is hardwood to allow for the physical unity with nature through the natural material. In order for the inmate to view out into the open landscape they must sit on the floor and look through the opening in the wall, across the corridor, into the landscape. The remaining floor area and the interior walls of the cell are polished, smooth concrete. The concrete conveys a feeling of coldness and acts as a mental reminder to the occupant that the space is overpowering.

Each cell except for the last, which has two, has only one door. The door is used to exit and enter the cell when the inmates rotate to the next cell, it is used to exit and enter for the use of the recreation area, and it is used to receive the meals through it. The cell which has the second door, of which is located along the north end of the cell, is used only to enter into the corridor on the 365th day. The 365th day is the day upon which the inmate in that cell is executed.

The overall form of the cell is such that I tried to reflect an appearance of an old shack. Hence the use of the aged appearing concrete and the tin roof. The window openings and the tin roof form was kept simple to allow the architecture to blend in with the surrounding landscape. The cells architecturally are expressed along the wall, yet at the same time become a part of the wall. This notion is achieved through the use of the same material, concrete, but with a different texture in each structure. I tried to create a balance with the power and beauty of the natural landscape and the function of the facility through the use of subtle colors, materials, textures, and forms.
The final space, that of the electric chair, is designed as such to allow for the unity with the natural environment and the open landscape. The two walls which border the chair at a ninety degree angle have two functions. First, they block the view of the inmates into the space when they move around outside of their cells. This is done to enhance the mystery of the space. Second, the walls act as a backdrop for the chair. The chair is placed in the corner thus minimalizing it within the space. The thirty-eight foot high wall overpowers the chair yet at the same time causes the spectator to focus on it.

When the spectator enters the execution space they enter through a tall narrow opening directly behind the chair. The first thing they see after passing through the huge wall is the electric chair, the focus of the space.

The simple granite block bench seats which exist in the space for the spectators to sit on are parallel to the north wall. They are oriented in such a manner that the spectator can view the chair and the subsequent execution in profile.

The entire space is open to the landscape on the east and southern sides. It is also open to the sky above. This is designed as such to allow for the feeling of freedom and the freedom which I feel accompanies death. Therefore the executioner faces the east when seated in the chair.

There exists along the same line as the north wall, off into the landscape, five radio towers with flashing red lights. Each tower rises in height as they progress into the east. The rising towers are the final gesture towards death and the freedom of the open landscape.
The materials which have been used for the structures have been chosen to express the sombering mood and air of the facility. The use of the concrete for the cells allows for the blending of the architecture into the landscape, as well as conveying a feeling of power and strength.

The walls on the exterior are of concrete, but the finish is very coarse. The reason for this texture is such that when one comes into contact with the wall you want to withdraw yourself. The texture expresses the belief that most people try to avoid death and do not want to come too close to it. Although, most of us come closer to death than we know.

The corridor between the walls is covered with a gray/black polished granite. There is steel grate flooring in between the two walls. This smooth wall surface and steel grate will enhance the sound of the inmate passing down the corridor to the electric chair. This sound effect allows for the remaining inmates to hear the resonating footsteps, and realize that an execution is about to take place. The inmates know that the only time the ten foot wide corridor is used is when an execution is about to occur.
A. Threshold of Experience

Jumps with a pure land → crosses thru the land, leaving a mark. Only a faint mark, not so strong a mark that nature cannot rebuild reason. Man moves on, grows, equates himself to nature, to begin to mold into his words... civilization? Totally changed attitude.

What does this have to do with this?

Man tests himself & other men; in peace, man begins to feel power & strength, man separates himself from other men. Man wants to be the leader, disrupts other men - kills. The group of men reclaim the land & restore peace to the whole.
MEDITATION
  • Think intensely; consider
NATURE
  • Material World
  • Universe
  • Character of person or thing

A place for meditation... understanding - an environment conducive to acceptance.
Realization: accept one's actions.
SITE
- Desert
- Arizona
- Natural beauty
- Untouched by man
- Secluded
- Meditative
- Calming
- Silence

USERS
- 1 Executioner
- 25 Executioners
- 15 Guards
- 5 Administration
- 1 Cook
- 1 Maintenance

SPACES
- Electric Chair Space
- Gallery Space
- 30 Cells
- Kitchen/food prep
- Administration
- Meditation Space
- Gardens (internal/external)
- Visitation Space

OBJECTIVES
- Rational structure
- Harmonious proportion
- Fine materials
- Craftsmanship
- Queued but dramatic light
- Foulent moving space
- Simplicity/purity

MATERIALS: Steel - Concrete

THRESHOLD OF EXISTENCE

POSIGENS

12/93
"Moonlight onto the Executioner"

Upon midnight, the 12th Tone, the executioner shall perform the act.
The moonlight shall be cast upon the space.
The moon shall be full, as bright as the sun, the light shall be white, pure.

Meditation Space
Prior to execution

[Diagram of a garden and executioner]
Humane Litigation
LIFE
POSITION
Execution - Public Morality
Law Order
Genesis 9:6
God
Natural Mediation Retribution

Setting Death Imprisonment Michigan
Strike Noachian Privileges
Setting
Death
Imprisonment Michigan
Op 1987
Pecker
Stark
Preb

The set
Mich
de
113

In 1967, in the execution, a hangman's noose was used as a symbol of the man's death in prison. Is this the process of society?
A Transition Between Life & Death

Electric Chair: (10' x 10')
Galerie Hall: (3' x 2') x 50
Caves: (10' x 10' x 7') x 30

20' x 25'

Administration

Material

Concrete 1:2:4

Cell Area: 2 x (10' x 15') + 1

Visitation Hall: 10' x 30

10' Hall: 10' x 100' + 945'

1.21.93
A THRESHOLD OF EXISTENCE

SITE? TUCSON, ARIZONA

A SURREAL NOTION OF BEAUTY WITHOUT, DEATH WITHIN.
A. Threshold of Existence

- PT's of Tension
  - Execution Space - Death Row, the notion of execution is controversial.
  - Visitation Space - Visitation, visitors know that the victims are imprisoned.
  - The place to end 'this' visitation is an visual distance.

- PT's of Caustics
  - Cells - areas which it happens.
  - Carpenters -

- What Shh
A THRESHOLD
WALL
BARBER SHOP
EXPOSING
BREAST
STRONG
WANTING TO CLIMB IT.
FIRM
RITUALIZING
SAFE (PEOPLE WALK CLOSE TOWARDS)

LEVITATION

CELLS
A PASSAGE THRU THE CELLS, THRU THE LIVING ATMOSPHERE/SPACE.

ELECTROCUTION

EXPERIENCES
FOR THE INSTANT PERHAPS THE VISITOR EXPERIENCES THE LIFE OF THE EXECUTIONER IN THEIR FINAL DAYS.

THEY WALK IN THEIR SHOES?

THE WALL IS A BARRIER WHICH EXISTS. THE PRISONERS KNOW WHAT EXISTS ON THE OTHER SIDE. THEY AWAIT THEIR OWN PASSAGE THRU THE WALL.

THE WALL BECOMES THE THRESHOLD FROM LIFE TO DEATH. CROSSING AND PASSING AROUND, MATURE THRU THIS WALL. THIS WALL IS A METAPHOR/FORESHADOW OF THE ELECTROCUTION. THE FINAL DEATH.

PERHAPS SOME PRISONERS WALK ALONGSIDE THE WALL, WANTING TO STAY ON THE EDGE, WAITING UNTIL THE END. OTHERS JUST PASS RIGHT THRU THE WALL, THE "JUMP" RIGHT INTO DEATH.

2.10.93
Residents both children.

A building that goes to the mountains

Upper end - Lower end.

Institutional - Political - Religious - Culinary.
Perhaps the chair

is on the end of death.

The straight line is a corridor to the chair

Viewed by prisoners outside.

The other inmates view the executioner as they walk down corridor to the chair.

The straight line represents death; it exists and is unwavering, unstrategic, non-premature.

The curve is the path of the executioner. They cross the path of death, lock upon it, & believe it.

- There is always this path to death. It cannot be avoided.
  Some people try to avoid it, but everyone must face it.
  Some of us sooner than others.

- Eight of us, perhaps more, passes along a path: ceases it.
  Ends beyond chair, after death.

- Direct route to chair:
  View from entry
  Main focus of place
Cells along the path...
The wall cuts thru the complex.
Follow the wall to the end

What should be along the wall, in contact with it?

- Administration
- Cells
- Recreation
THE CIRCLE ENCOMPASSES VIEWS THE EXTERIOR AS THEY LOOK AND COMES TO THE CHAPEL.

VIEWS BY PERSONS OF THE CIRCLE.

CHAPEL

COOPERATE TO THE

CINEMATIC LINE IS A

Is ON THE END OF DEATH.

"FEARLESS THE CIRCLE"

The SEMICIRCLE IS THE PART OF ENACTMENT. They CROSS.

and IS UNDIRECTED, UNPLANNED, NON-PREDICTABLE.

So is up toward those others.

So the PART to avoid it's part is that it must REACH.

There is always this part to death. It cannot be altered.

Head focus of death

View from death

Four parts to clear

Eggs executed above. Area present

 frente mirror, passes each part. Cross next.
A. THRESHOLD OF EXISTENCE

Cells & Wall

16' x 13 = 208'

12' wide cells with 2" space in men and women

13' x [12' + 3'(clear)]

208' = 70 yds (men)

THRESHOLD

FEET

ELIPSE
2.25.93

ADMINISTRATION

A THRESHOLD OF EXISTENCE
SECOND LEVEL OF EXISTENCE

SECRETARY, CARPENTER MUST STOP HERE.
WARDEN, ETC., SPACES OPEN UP.

A CANDID OBSERVATION: WHY HAVE SPACE OPEN UP?

Perhaps the game is not as captivating as it should be.

Conference room constraints specific groups opportunities are becoming less.

2-25-93 ADMINISTRATION
In other site plans, like the rock gardens of Japan, one might find similar features as they approach the entrance. Unlike the L.A. County Museum of Natural History, which features a grand entrance with a large space, this museum has a more intimate feel with smaller exhibits and a focus on education and learning. The design of the museum allows for visitors to explore and engage with the exhibits at their own pace. The lighting in the museum is designed to enhance the experience, with adjustable lighting for various activities and functions. This should create a warm light without a harsh brightness.
Prior to World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was like many other European nations. Hungary was a predominantly agricultural society ruled by a few social elites. Following World War I the Austro-Hungarian Empire was split. Hungary emerged with reduced borders.

The cold war is over. They are looking at what effect Soviet domination has had on the people as a whole and where their culture is presently headed. All this will be expressed as a new cultural identity through writing, art and architecture.
GENESIS 9:6
Alfred North Whitehead *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* copyright 1954

American Correctional Association & Nat'l Institute of Corrections *Design Guide for Secure Adult Correctional Facilities* copyright 1983


Norman Johnston *The Human Cage: A Brief History of Prison Architecture* copyright 1973

Sanford H. Kadish *Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice* copyright 1984

Joseph M. Kitagawa *On Understanding Japanese Religion* copyright 1987

National Sheriffs’ Association *Jail Architecture Handbook* copyright 1974

48 Hours (television show) *Death by Midnight* 12.2.92