

isolation

tel·e·sis

(te-lə-səs)

Progress that is intelligently planned and directed : The attainment of desired ends by the application of intelligent human effort to the means.

Telesis: Isolation

The College of Architecture Student Journal at
The University of Oklahoma

How can design aid people's sense of belonging? Part 1

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Editorial

The Call for Work

On May 5th, 2020, police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on the neck of George Floyd for at least 7 minutes and 46 seconds. Despite Floyd's body lying unresponsive for 1 minute and 53 seconds, officer Chauvin persisted. George Floyd went into cardiac arrest and was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. He had allegedly used a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill to buy cigarettes. This was not the first state-perpetrated murder of a person of color, but the initial outrage and subsequent demand for change has been at a scale seen seldom throughout history. A national swell to defund the police, surrounding the assertion that Black lives matter, has brought a newfound level of scrutiny to the police force, jail and prison system, and the systemic racism and inequities in this country.

Isolation can be defined by the distinct experience of "otherness". It describes the experience of incarceration. It contains every instance of discrimination. It embodies the final moments of George Floyd and every murder

before him. It is in Jim Crow laws, segregation, redlining, and every other divisive tool used to diminish community power. It is in the systems of interstates, highways, and railroads that systematically separate by race and income. Isolation can call to mind desolate imagery or a solitary figure, but should also be associated with crowded prisons or long voting lines in Black neighborhoods. Isolation as otherness is a lens through which we can tear out the roots of structures of prejudice and injustice. It lays bare the systems and institutions whose foundations need not be salvaged as they were built on the sands of division. It asks not only that we reconcile where we have been, but more importantly that we have the courage to imagine where we must go next.

Telesis: Isolation is a platform to discuss the systemic change required - at both the infrastructural and social level - to dismantle the equally systemic injustice and inequality. Previous editions have remained philosophical or theoretical in nature; now more than ever, the editors at Telesis believe such a luxury cannot be afforded if we are to be the voice of a new generation in architecture. Design Against [a previous issue of Telesis] asked its authors to be bold in their convictions while Metamedia turned its attention specifically to the social cross section of architecture's influence. Isolation

therefore may represent the confluence of its predecessors, inviting authors to be bold in their calls to action, certain in their convictions, and unafraid to propose radical solutions, as necessary. Architecture has been a profession with a history of, at best, enabling systemic racism if not assuring its generational persistence. We've welcomed all community members, but specifically students, academics, and practitioners in architecture to take ownership of this professional history and use their expertise to invent new solutions for its problems. We are a community with expertise in accessibility, compassion, dignity, resilience, trust, and most importantly the creativity to remain nimble in transforming each of these into a design ideology.

Telesis Team Statement

On December 11th, 2020, the AIA approved changes to its Code of Ethics by addressing the design of carceral facilities. This occurred after the writings found in this volume of Telesis were composed by contributors and curated by the editorial staff. The AIA's new Code of Ethics forbids members from "knowingly designing spaces intended for execution and torture, including indefinite or prolonged solitary confinement of prisoners." By making this change to its code of ethics, the AIA is embracing the goal of

decarceration head on. Their act hopefully serving as the impetus for other organizations to disallow the continuation of our flawed carceral system. The following pieces employ a reformist approach, showcasing how design may have been leveraged in the meantime.

The Telesis Team



Randall Kinnaman

Incarcerated by Association

When parents go to jail, their kids go with them. Maybe not in the literal sense, but the kids do face many issues when having an incarcerated parent. It is a childhood in constant motion with very little stability. For me and my family, we were nomads traveling from town to town every time my father was moved from one prison to the next. Our hardships seemed to be of little concern to those who were making the decisions. How little the family unit matters becomes even more apparent when visiting the prisons. The visitation areas are unwelcoming, difficult, and provide no space for the intimate bonding a family needs. This puts unnecessary strain on a family that has already been through so much. Of all the prisons I have visited, there never seemed to be much thought into the design of the waiting and visitation areas for families. Just improving these spaces alone would provide a substantially better experience for families and inmates alike while avoiding any undue stress.

While it is critical that the design is focused on inmate and staff safety, all users need to be considered. Families are impacted by the design as well and this fact is too often forgotten. Prisons naturally create disadvantages for families; there is no need to add to the hardship. Families know their loved ones are incarcerated, they do not need to feel or experience the

incarceration themselves. Sadly, this is the visitation experience for most.

I feel as though my childhood was misplaced. I was continuously on the move. Between kindergarten and high school, I had lived in seven different towns following my father from prison to prison. The only thing that remained constant was, ironically, that every prison was different. The rules and regulations for visitation were never the same and we were continuously having to adapt to the changes. Visitation made us feel as though we were intruders or even inmates ourselves. We were processed, pushed through metal detectors, and our food and belongings were checked. As a kid, I did not really understand this process, nor did I care. I was just happy to see my father.

The experience of going through security was rough and the actual visitation was not much better. The visitation area was a large room filled with tables that families were meant to share. The room can be best described as a grade school cafeteria. It was loud and people made

a continuous effort to talk over one another. There were no quiet, intimate moments shared among families, which is something desperately needed to maintain a bond.

As I began to move into my teenage years, this lifestyle began to take a toll on me. I started to dislike visiting prisons. I began to see the process as intrusive and unwanted. The feelings of joy I once had when I went to see my father were replaced by fear and embarrassment. I began to see how some of the guards viewed us as an annoyance. The visiting areas did little to alleviate these fears. The visiting areas felt unsafe. I was in my teenage years when I made the decision to stop visiting my father. This continued until his passing.

It was not until I had a child of my own that I realized how terrible this must have been for my dad. I could not imagine a day where my daughter did not want anything to do with me. He must have had a feeling of complete abandonment and isolation. This is a fundamental reason why it is important to create a private, welcoming environment for families when they visit. Visitation can have a direct positive impact on the inmates, subsequently reducing their chances at recidivism.

The leading cause of prison deaths in 2016 was suicide, and according to the prison policy initiative, the cause of this is "certain features

of the jail environment enhance suicidal behavior: fear of the unknown, distrust of an authoritarian environment, perceived lack of control over the future, isolation from family and significant others, shame of incarceration, and perceived dehumanizing aspects of incarceration." Society will never be able to quantify the emotional toll suicide takes on the victims' loved ones. Something that could be quantifiable is the financial impact.

However, there has been no study done in the United States to show the monetary effect suicide has on the taxpayer. In the UK, a study was done that showed in a single year, suicide among inmates could cost the taxpayers upwards of 3 million pounds, which translates to about 4 million US dollars. This number would be significantly higher in the US though, because the UK only has about 61 suicides a year compared to roughly 4,000 in the U.S (League, Howard). Sadly, this is not the only impact family visitation has on the detainees.

From my own perspective and experience, I see a lot of similarities between prisoners' experiences and what soldiers experience while deployed. The difference, however, is that soldiers are briefed



**Visiting Center at Central Utah Correctional Facility.
Image Courtesy of Utah Department of Corrections.**

at length about the effects the separation will have on the family unit prior to their deployment. Separation has a negative effect on the power structure in the family. When so much time is spent apart, the family will adapt and learn to live without the absent parent. The family will get used to doing things a certain way and this ends up making it harder for the parent to reintegrate into the family unit. I have experienced this myself

just in the short time my dad was released. I had stopped visiting for a while and no longer saw him as an authority figure. My attitude towards him, along with all the common struggles inmates face in society with integration caused him to reoffend, earning him his third strike.

Successful reintegration is a key component in a person's chances of not reoffending. There are many different studies that show the different levels in which family visitation helps reduce recidivism. A study done in 2012

showed that visits can reduce reoffending by 8% and this could increase by the frequency of the visits (Mears). Even with all this information, jails are doing nothing to improve the visitation experience.

The current visitation policy at Oklahoma County

Jail is very restrictive. It allows for a maximum of 25 adult members per floor for each visitation period. Who visits is also limited. Detainees are only allowed five people on their visitation list and three of those must be immediate family. When it comes to minors, each one must be accompanied by an adult and only allows for two children at a time. Time limit cannot exceed 15 minutes of non-contact visitation per week. There are no contact visits between family and detainees. Contact visits are only for attorneys and law enforcement. There is also a strict dress code and visits can be cancelled without notice, at the discretion of the staff (Inmate). Restrictive visitation policy, coupled with an unwelcoming environment, discourages visitation. Based on all the data showing that good visitation experiences can have such a positive impact, the obvious strategy would be to encourage and incentivize visitation.

Norway is often looked at as the example when it comes to incarceration, and rightfully so. Halden prison in Norway is a great example of how making visitation a priority can help create a more rehabilitative environment. Family visitation is seen as a resource. Halden prison allows private visitation for up to two hours twice a week, it has toys for the children, and even a changing table. Families



are not searched prior to entry; the inmates are searched afterwards (Trust). This proactive approach to reducing recidivism can be easily adapted into the future design of the Oklahoma County Jail.

Although safety is the main priority, the ultimate objective of jail is to rehabilitate the detainee, which justifies the idea that the family visitation experience should also be a priority in the design process. If we are ever going to lower incarceration rates, we must reduce the rate at which people reoffend. Therefore, the design of visitation should be a focal point so that families can be used as the valuable resource they are. We must get rid of restrictive policies that discourage visitation. The design itself must be both, welcoming and reassuring. Color, acoustical design, lighting, and a different approach to material selection can have a big impact on the mood and mental wellbeing of prisoners. This will have the same impact on families and friends during visitation.

I am not a designer. I am not going to leave you with an architectural masterpiece; I will leave that up to future architects. My hope, however, is that my own experience from spending my childhood visiting multiple prisons will inspire designers to focus on visitation as an integral function, rather than an afterthought.

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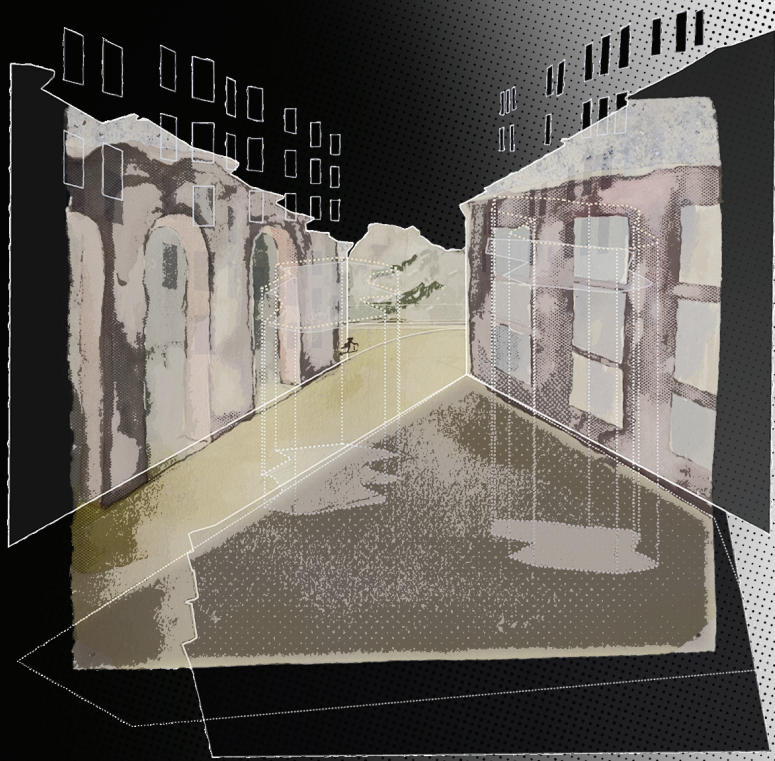
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Giuliana Vaccarino Gearty

Disorientation

IsolationNegotiated Manifesto

In an interview in 2003, the author Elena Ferrante asks, "When does the city become the city of being lost"? What is the value of unpredictability, of heart-quickenning disorientation, of "debris in the muddy water of the brain"? Turning again to Ferrante, feeling lost in the built environment allows for possibility and excitement, recalibrating our patterns of experience so that not everything is predetermined, mapped out, explained. Feeling lost broadens our interpretations of the city, allowing for ambiguity and contradiction, messiness and obscurity-conditions that, as Robert Venturi would say, reveal what is most substantive and meaningful in human life. Yet for those who live in a gridded city, is wandering beyond our reach? Can our feet echo the distorted eddies of thought in our minds? When and where is this city of being lost? Michel de Certeau can provide insight: "Walkers... follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it...Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks.'" Perhaps our own rebellious feet can help us look anew at our city, trace deviant paths, connect fragments of trajectories, lead us to the unexpected. Through creating more opportunities to allow ourselves to feel lost, and through embracing, even seeking, the sensations that come with it, maybe we can make our lives richer and our cities more vivid.



Travis Howell + Tanner Pickens

Dismantling Isolation

A History of Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce

Historically, cities have always divided themselves. Whether it is a division of voting districts, neighborhoods, or even division by sports teams, cities across the world are divided. These divisions sometimes are natural boundaries such as rivers while others are the result of man-made boundaries such as railroad tracks. Also, divisions can even be created along invisible boundaries where one house is in one district while their neighbor is in another. In most cases, these divisions are used to define an area and create a sense of community. Sadly, though, these divisions have been abused for decades. During the expansion of cities throughout the United States, cities divided areas to segregate by race. De jure and de facto segregation left minorities with little support from either the government or city residents. Caucasian people were encouraged to build and develop on prime properties and left damaged, dangerous, and undesirable properties to minorities. Furthermore, during instances of gentrification, residents who had transformed less desirable land into meaningful neighborhoods were displaced. In spite of those in power trying to force them out of their homes, through the power of will and strong community bonds, some minority communities were able to build and create vibrant neighborhoods that allowed residents to thrive. But as cities continued to expand, some saw

these areas as detrimental to their personal agendas.

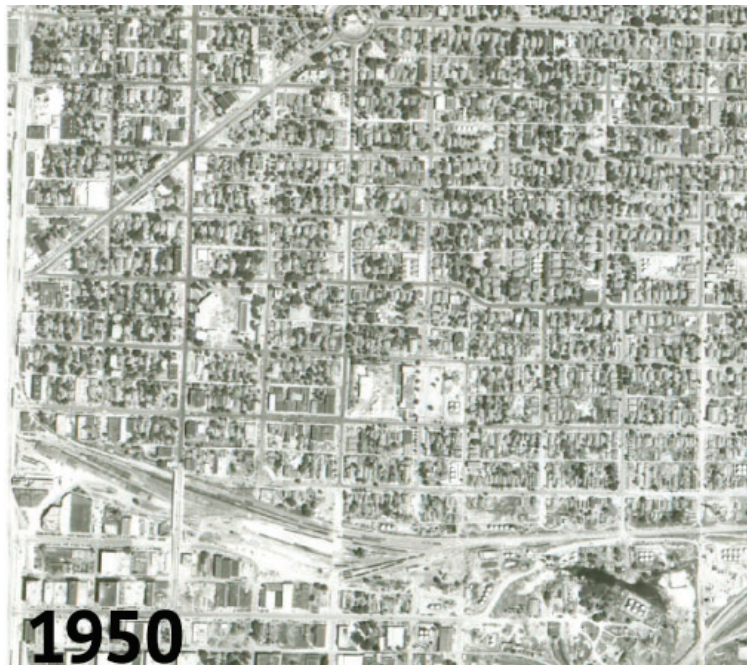
One example of where this happened is located just east of Oklahoma City's entertainment district known as Bricktown, in a neighborhood called Deep Deuce. This district was originally designated as the African American neighborhood during the decades of segregation and Jim Crow laws. Before this designation, the area was used to drill for oil. After all the wells went dry the area was left in ruins. It was scattered with the remains of old drilling equipment and had extremely poor soil conditions. Making the entire area just off downtown Oklahoma City wholly undesirable. When Oklahoma was admitted to the Union in 1907, the first laws passed through the senate were laws establishing racial segregation within the state. These laws established Deep Second, the area which would come to be known as Deep Deuce. The area consisted of the land south of 4th Street and East of the Santa Fe Railway. Centering itself around 2nd Street as a commercial

district, Deep Deuce took this near wasteland and grew a tight community where those within could be safe. Through the Great Depression and all the way through World War 2, Deep Deuce was able to build a dense urban core that included shops, restaurants, hotels, music halls, and theaters. This area was also home to two schools and churches on almost every block. Even with oppressive laws challenging every move that happened to this neighborhood, the residents were able to fight the injustices that were being forced upon them and build a strong community.

From within Deep Deuce rose several leaders that would change history. One notable individual that had a

significant impact on the community was Clara Luper. A teacher at Douglas High School, Ms. Luper played an important role in starting several high-profile sit-ins at establishments throughout Downtown Oklahoma City. These sit-ins were heard around the country and led to several others following suit. They had a major impact on the Civil Rights movement and helped to bring these oppressed communities out of their decades of suffering. In 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed, neighborhoods like Deep Deuce celebrated this historic victory but, little did they know, their fight had only just begun.

Once Civil Rights laws were created to protect people against segregation laws, racist politicians and private citizens began creating new ways to oppress. One of these methods was the strategic placement of new infrastructure and highway systems. City planners and national highway



developers sought to build new highways right through the middle of minority communities. Because of the previously mentioned segregation laws implemented in cities, many colored communities were located in areas of low property value. This allowed government officials and private agencies to easily purchase properties with little compensation to owners when planning the construction of highway systems. In instances of resistance from community members, eminent domain was abused in order to force people out of their community. This meant those in positions of power could single out minority communities when placing highways in order to reduce the cost and resistance which would have resulted from displacing other neighborhoods. This placement, however, typically divided the neighborhoods where people lived from their central commercial hubs. This is exactly what happened to Deep Deuce. In

1976 Interstate 235 was approved for construction, and when the first 3 miles were built, the highway cut off the eastern half of Deep Deuce, where most people lived, from the western half, where most of the commercial businesses were. This strategic isolation limited access to grocery stores, places of work, schools, and even churches. This led to an extreme drop in property value because of the proximity to the new highway. Ultimately, most of the remaining residents decided to leave the area and resettle in other neighborhoods around Oklahoma City, away from the major wall that is I-235. By the time the highway was officially opened in 1989, the eastern half of Deep



Deuce was nearly abandoned, and the western half was left in disrepair. Then in the early 2000s, when the western half of Deep Deuce was merely a giant parking lot for Downtown, new developments began west of the highway. This development saw the revitalization of Bricktown as a new entertainment district. Along with the forming of this new district, the western half of Deep Deuce was developed as a new housing district. Though this neighborhood reflects the style of Bricktown, it keeps the name Deep Deuce. This is the only reference to the area's past. These developments ignored the exciting and vibrant history that once flooded 2nd street and simply became large apartment complexes and multimillion-dollar townhomes. Though these developments have brought new life to western Deep Deuce, the east side is still left in the shadow of the highway.

Cities around the country have been divided. In our own backyard of Oklahoma City, we have divided parts of the city. This division was caused by a racially fueled highway that has now become a core transportation route that cannot simply be removed. Deep Deuce was just one neighborhood that faced the brunt of this division. This division isolated the people from their livelihoods, which in turn saw the fall of the community.





Kate O'Connor

Design Activism through Student Engagement

Marywood University Project Brief

Understanding how sustainable design benefits a community introduces the notion that architecture is not only an academic discipline, but also one that serves social consequences. In the ARCH399EE Socially Responsible Architecture seminar, students from the Marywood University School of Architecture explored the notion that, as designers, they can create social change. The process provided the framework for engaged and comprehensive learning opportunities, developing value thinking skills, understanding the importance of dignity and empathy, while accentuating citizenship as part of the curricular standards.

Students were challenged to consider how the articulation of space both shapes and reflects political and social biases, and how that might influence the education, practice, projects, and legacy of architects and designers. These projects showcase the work of the students through interventions, strategies, theories, and solutions that hold the potential for significant social change focusing on both advocacy and design

activism, especially as it focuses through the lens of isolation.

The following projects tackle Disaster Relief, Homelessness, and Food Insecurity, especially as it affects underrepresented and marginalized groups. Each of these design proposals concurrently examine how Isolation can be addressed through a Values Thinking approach.

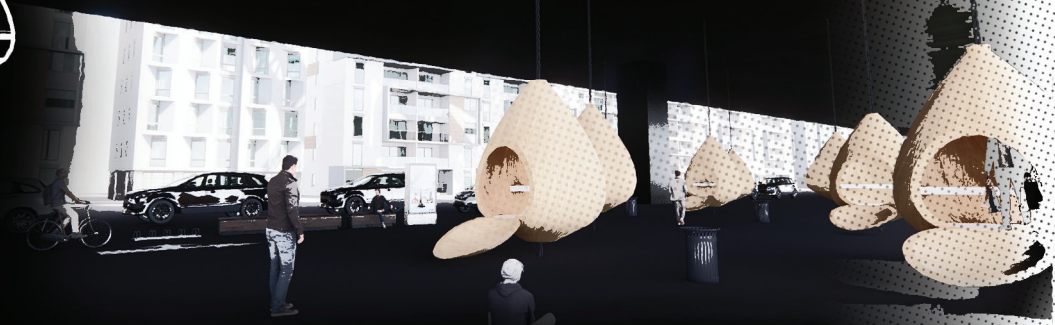
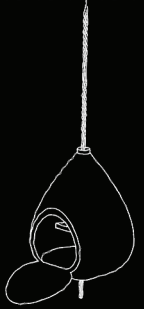


Rebecca Douglas

Food-Fight

The intersection of empathy and design is the future of an architect. This juncture begins with the local community- in this case, Scranton, PA. A large portion of low-income families in the region exist within food deserts, meaning they are more than ½ mile from a grocer in urban locations and more than 10 miles in rural areas. Through exploring the issue of food deserts in conjunction with the historical context of the region, a design solution in system development emerges.

The Scranton region has a long history and extensive networks of rail. Instead of railways falling out of use, and becoming 'train graveyards', designers could intervene, creating a new system of food distribution. Instead of expecting communities to move great distances to purchase food, perhaps the food could move to them. Through tailoring railcars to house mobile grocers, food now comes into the communities. A move that simultaneously answers the problems of food access while also paying homage to the long-standing cultural and historical conditions imbued in the city. This typology, of empathy-driven research and problem recognition, may offer creative solutions while also ensuring access to the most basic of necessities: food.



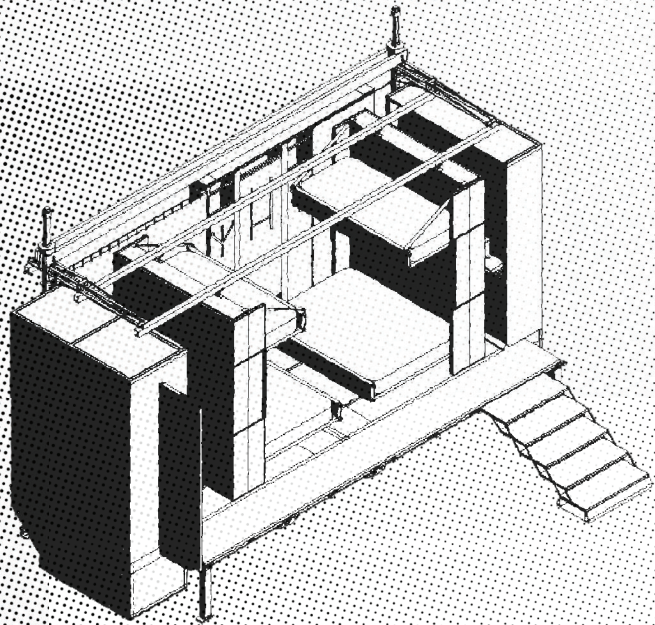
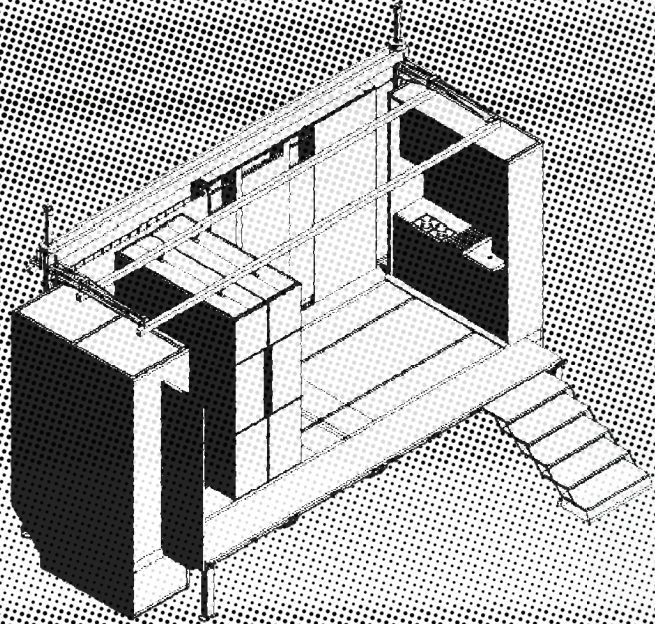
Ian Goodale

Drops

There has been an increase in the need for providing shelter to the Shelter-less. These pods are designed to provide people the basic necessities of shelter and protection from the elements, and offer a sense of community.

One city that has been impacted by homelessness is the city of Syracuse. With close to 1,000 individuals sleeping outside at any given point there is a need for shelter.

Drops proposes a strategy of suspending pods from existing structures, such as bridges, to promote community and help prevent isolation.



Ben Gravel

Disaster Displacement

Following a devastating natural disaster or climatic conflict, architecture plays a crucial role in not only rebuilding lost infrastructure, but being able to react to the needs of the community by providing comfort and safety as they endure struggling times. A successful disaster relief approach should meet short term needs as well as long term efficacy, depending on the type of natural disaster and the location of construction. Long term adequacy should especially be important in high poverty areas and in families who are not financially capable of moving out of a temporary home shelter and progressing toward a better quality of life. For instance, many of the people who were affected by the 2010 Haiti earthquake still reside in temporary shelters and are not financially stable enough to move elsewhere. They are currently living without basic necessities such as access to plumbing and electricity, which clarifies the need for an effective long term infrastructure.

In recent months, residents of California have experienced severe turmoil from the effects of tragic wildfires that have spread across the state. The eastern part of the state, away from the shoreline, is where a majority of these wildfires take place. Unfortunately, the average annual household income in this area of the state is the lowest, which prioritizes the need for long term

relief housing strategies. Due to the effects of climate change and global warming, the "fire season" is starting earlier and ending later each year. The earlier spring snowmelt creates longer, more intense dry seasons therefore making the vast forested regions more susceptible to severe wildfire. Therefore, the need for disaster relief housing in California is increasing in demand as the climate is continuing to rapidly affect communities.

In order to provide for individuals and families displaced by wildfires, there are a few characteristics of a relief housing or shelter that would best suit these people. It is critical that the shelter is constructed using abundant and renewable materials from local communities, making the unit as a whole cheaper. A lower cost housing unit will make them more affordable for people affected by wildfires in low income areas. Also, it is important that the unit is made of noncombustible materials so that it withstands the spread of surrounding

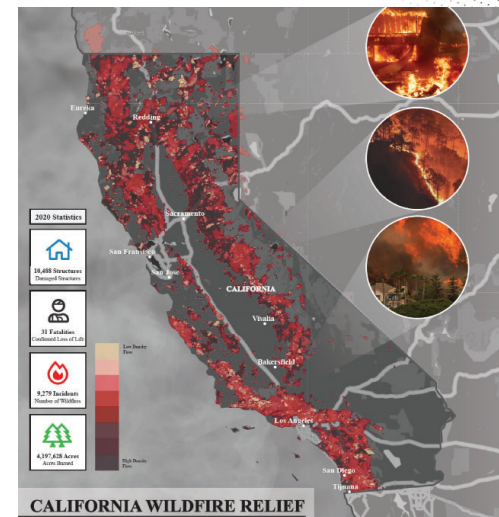
wildfires. Specifically, as the exterior skin of the structure, incorporate CMU blocks, metal and sheet glass, or any material that passes the ASTM E 136 as a non-combustible material. The units should be adaptable and easy to assemble with basic tools and little knowledge of assemblies. Each unit would be transformable, so that it has the ability to adjust and adapt in order to account for a variety of living situations.

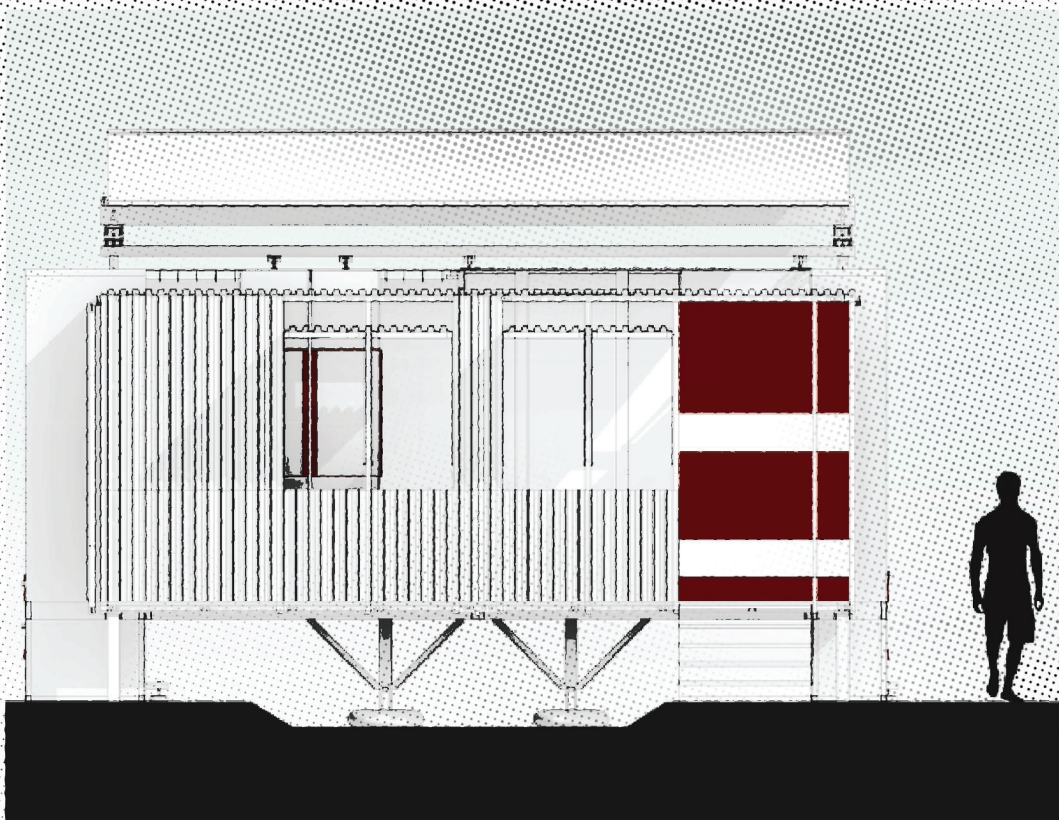
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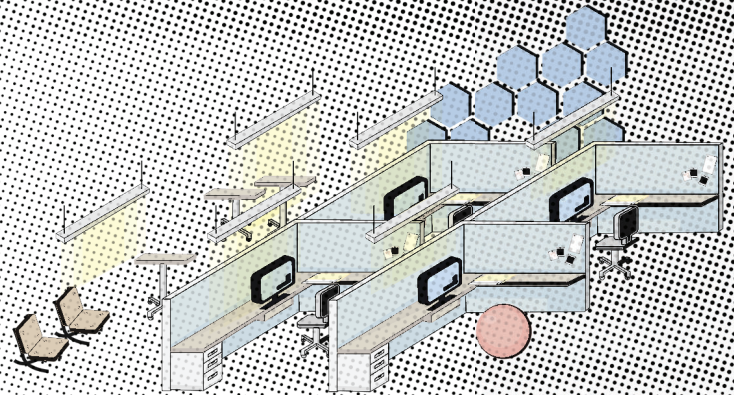
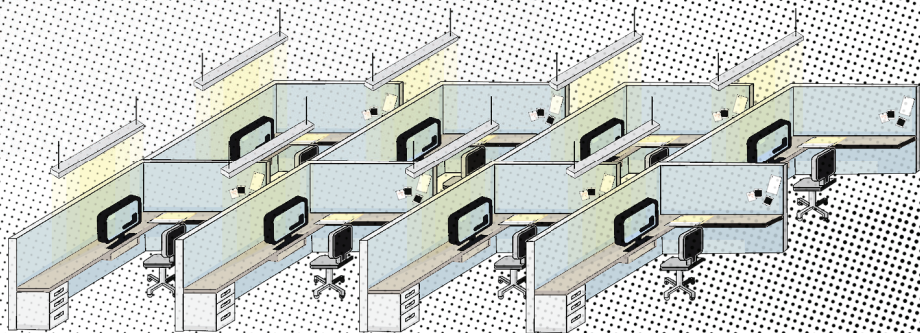
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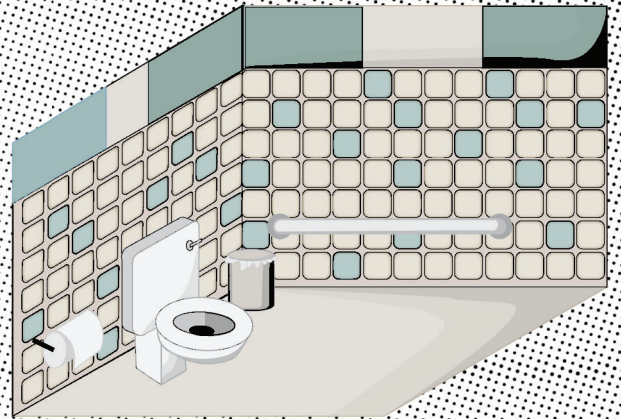
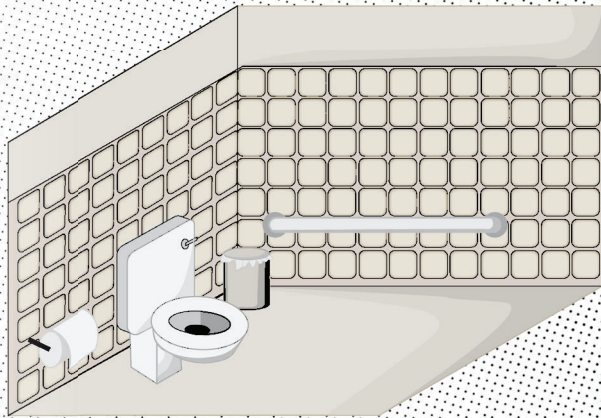
Ryan Godfrey

Sensory Sensitive Schematics

Isolation can occur when someone, or a group of people are treated like others. Thankfully, with social media, time to listen, and avenues for minorities and/or the systematically ignored to share their stories, architecture and architects can begin to create a more inclusive environment. Not inclusive solely in the sense of personal interaction, but in the way rooms, buildings, and systems are designed. Individuals with autism have revolutionized entire fields: take Temple Grandin who not only changed how the medical field perceives and helps with the challenges autism can present, but also the cattle industry with a conveyor system for slaughtering cattle in a way that is more humane, natural, and easier to control. But, what if an office or bathroom is designed in a way that is impossible or extremely difficult to be in for a person with autism? Thankfully, there is a plethora of simple solutions to help spaces be more inclusive towards these individuals, and any individual who has similar needs, that does not require extensive research or detailing on the architects side, or large sums of money on the owners side. Inclusivity does not need to be expensive or difficult, sometimes it just takes some empathy and listening.

Being inclusive and mindful of people who are sensitive to sensory inputs does not have to be more expensive or specialized, or even decrease the number of work stations in an office. In fact, it offers more flexibility in work environments and is appealing to neurotypical individuals too. Calm spaces, adjustable desks, a variety of seat options, and adjustable lights are things many offices already use at little to no additional cost. A yoga ball as a chair is cheaper than a regular chair, an adjustable desk that can move is cheaper than a cubicle, and sound masking wall tiles are cheaper than traditional decor and can be a great place for branding. Adjustable lights allow for any individual to feel a level of control over their environment for a minimal price. Inclusivity is achievable in the most rigid office environments.

Restrooms are the epicenter of conversations about inclusivity in many cases. Autism is no exception. Restrooms for anybody can be overwhelming and/or boring. Having acoustic tiles and sound masking blankets or decor can be a cheap way of decreasing the reverb without spending a lot of money. But, be careful of not making the restroom too overwhelming. Covering pipes can be useful in any environment to decrease inconsistent, distracting sounds that would annoy anybody. Designing, remodelling, or revamping for decreasing sensory triggers can be appealing to everyone. Inclusivity does not mean isolating or discriminating against a different group, it means allowing spaces to be inhabited by all regardless of who they are.





Villalsolation

At the peak of the pandemic, Buenos Aires (BA) was the epicenter of coronavirus cases and deaths in Argentina. In mid-March, the government imposed a two-month nationwide mandatory lockdown enforced by the police that would eventually become one of the world's longest quarantines, lasting five months.

Yet the situation is more complex. By the end of May, as Buenos Aires city (the "Autonomous City of Buenos Aires" or CABA) prepared to loosen the original lockdown, the COVID-19 cases worsened in the approximately 2,000 slum districts in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area -located just 10 miles away from CABA. Residents of Villa Azul and Villa Itatí, two of the country's poorest slums, were cordoned off due to a spike in cases. Such formal closure merely confirmed the historical stigmatization of the villas.¹

The derelict living conditions and the lack of a dignified public realm in the slums accelerated the spread of the virus which soon escalated into a city-wide sanitary emergency. In response to that, the government decided to police the villa's entrances in an attempt to prevent a disaster by impeding people from crossing the borders. Nevertheless, the slums lived in isolation long before the pandemic.

Rather than proposing alternate solutions to containing the spread of the virus in the city,

this article will describe the living conditions that led to the sanitary emergency in Itatí and Azul and will make the case for advancing a public space agenda for the future equitable development of the slums.

Background and the Pandemic

Villa Azul and Villa Itatí are just two of the many shantytowns or "villas miseria" that emerged under the military regimes of the 1950s and 1970s in the outskirts of the Greater Buenos Aires area. Originally, they were a single settlement, but the Southeast Access Highway construction in 1971 split them in two and hardened their segregation from the 'formal city fabric.'²

The original settlers of the villas, looking for better opportunities in BA, came from the impoverished northern cities in Argentina, Paraguay, and other bordering countries. This migration pattern persists. There are almost 20,000 people in both settlements,



The communities live in a permanent state of emergency in make-shift homes of low-quality, unstable materials and construction techniques. Image Courtesy of La Nación Newspaper.

approximately 5,000 households living in precarious conditions.³

Urban neglect reigned throughout the years and divided the “formal city fabric” from what it is not. The 2010 census reported that both settlements were far more impoverished than adjacent urban areas, with unemployment rates higher than the country’s median and hazardous living conditions and approximately 20% of houses overcrowded—or more than three people per room. In a 2018 survey carried out by the former administration, almost 70% or 3,383 households were deemed unstable or precarious—indicating that in eight years, the generalized living conditions had not improved. What is more, public space infrastructure is minimal—the muddy and dirty streets

are difficult to walk, and the insufficient parks and plazas are dirty, prone to floods, unsafe, and the epicenter of drug and alcohol abuse.⁴

It came as no surprise that the inhabitants of Itatí and Azul were going to be the hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Apart from the lack of access to basic sanitation and healthcare services, they suffer from chronic illnesses like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes at higher rates. The miserable built environment in the slums accelerated the spread of the virus. Furthermore, just as if living in the fringes of society was not exclusionary enough, in the peak of the virus outbreak the authorities decided to further segregate Itatí and Azul by cordoning them off, curtailing their freedom.⁵

The Importance of Public Space

The pandemic exposed the obvious: health—or the lack thereof—is intrinsically tied to the quality of the built environment and public space. Many studies show that communities like Itatí and Azul, which are exposed to environmental pollution and have less access to community services, are more prone to suffer from mental and physical health diseases ranging from stress and anxiety to asthma, diabetes, obesity and heart conditions.

Access to quality public space can reduce environment-led conditions and diseases as it provides clean areas for recreation, exercise, and socialization free of harmful noise, in contact with the ecology and fresh air. In turn, communities with access to open spaces are happier, suffer reduced obesity and diabetes rates, and have longer life expectancy rates.⁶

Apart from the health benefits, public spaces are powerful catalysts for building democracy

and advancing communities' sense of belonging through participatory placemaking. Participatory placemaking is the combined top-down and bottom-up approach to regenerating neighborhoods affected by social or economic segregation by nurturing "the capacity of a community to continue improving its space after the 'experts' have left." Socialization is the fuel of placemaking, and public space is the platform where participation happens.

These vital urban spaces that range from public libraries to urban parks are places of "encounter and collective meaningful negotiation" where people co-create their own city. Public spaces are essential in vulnerable neighborhoods where houses are precarious, small, and crowded because they usually fulfill basic needs in the community. Streets, playgrounds, and community facilities are beloved points of reunion that encourage playing and exercising, or provide areas to have nutritious meals, or for participation in educational activities. This way, the public realm nurtures social capital, strengthening community relationships, increasing sense of belonging, ownership, and identity.⁷

For a long time residents of Itatí and Azul have not dared to visit their "Pope Francis" park because -as stated on an intercept survey in 2019- the flooded and dark streets, the high levels of crime, and the presence of the police made life outdoors uninviting. During the pandemic the outcome proved lethal -not only was their soccer field the focal coronavirus point where most of the infections happened leaving 1,067 COVID-19 confirmed cases in Itatí alone- but it also rapidly turned into a seized ground in the middle of the city.⁸

Public space is not a silver bullet and should not be regarded as an idyllic solution to the structural challenges in the slums. Still, it could



Police cordoning off the Itatí and Azul settlements.
Image Courtesy of La Nación Newspaper.



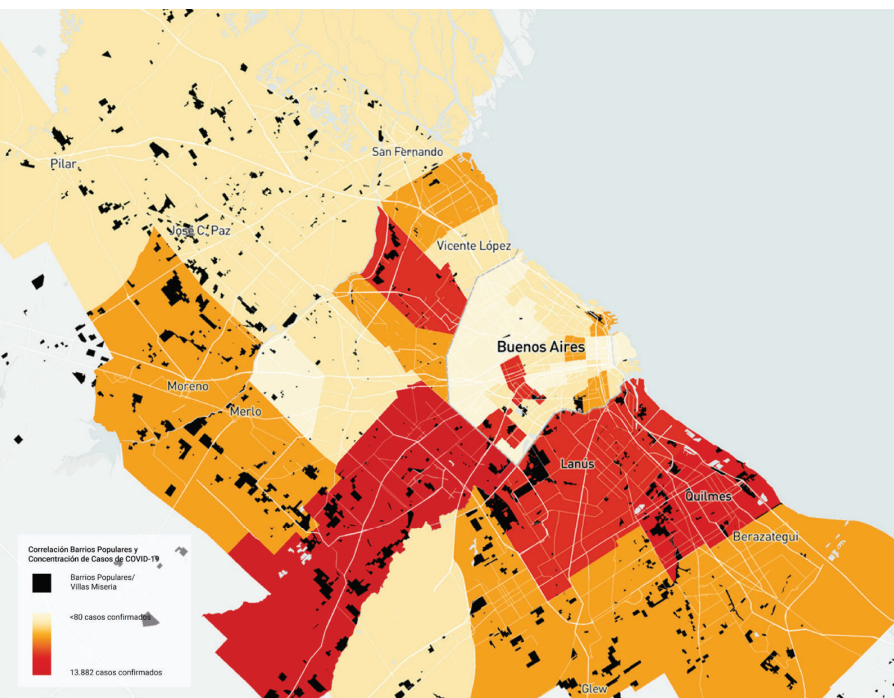
Medellin's school Santo Domingo Savío integrates a generous plaza for the students and locals to socialize and mingle in public space.¹²



Correlation between high vulnerability areas and the location of slums in Buenos Aires.



A threat to the "formal city", Itatí and Azul slums are highly vulnerable and the center of COVID-19 infections.



Correlation between slums and COVID-19 cases in Buenos Aires.



Households in Itatí and Azúl are severely overcrowded with more than 3 people per room. 70% of households in the slums don't have access to the sewage system.

be a lifeline that offers access to safe spaces and a platform for social infrastructure that elevates and dignifies its residents.⁹

A future with participatory public space-making

It is time to change the usual top-down social housing building approach that Buenos Aires has been following and is programmed to resume soon. Solving the inequality and poverty in Itatí and Azul requires a fast and sustainable strategy that engages the residents as co-creators of space.

Long before the pandemic, many cities upgraded substandard living conditions in “informal settlements” by advancing creative placemaking, collaboration, and community strengthening systems. Truly impactful urban projects do not simply erect brick and mortar housing units in a neighborhood. These cross-sector and multiple stakeholder initiatives are focused in the final product as much as in the making process involving the local community in the construction. Many successful hybrid urban projects exist. These examples could inform inclusive development in the Itatí and Azul slums.

One of the most notable public space strategies is the ‘social urbanism’ program that Medellín started in 2003 in response to the increased violence and crime present in the city’s steep

informal settlements. The former Medellín mayor Fajardo’s political strategy was based in advancing public spaces as catalysts for better opportunities and upward social mobility in vulnerable neighborhoods. A series of public interventions – that included parks, plazas, high-quality schools, and a new metro-cable system- enhanced access to city-wide amenities from the relegated parts of the city. Several community workshops and programs were key parts of the plan enabling neighbors to participate in the urban regeneration program, solidifying relationships with other residents and integrating them in the iterative design. Elevating the value of public space repositioned and improved Medellín’s informal barrios reputation. The coordinated effort of residents and the government through the social urbanism program not only built new amenities but also preserved, repurposed, and re-envisioned obsolete infrastructures, such as the Medellín River, transforming it into an urban park for people to enjoy nature and the ecology amidst the bustling city.¹⁰

The coordinated effort of top-down and bottom-up actors has the power to transform the most challenged neighborhoods into platforms for community resilience. The Extended Public Works Program in South Africa illustrates this approach. Born out of the need to reduce fire and flood hazards with minimal disruptions to the villagers in slums in Cape Town, it proposed to reconfigure their shacks by maximizing open space through the ‘reblocking’ strategy. The program – led by community organizations, NGOs, and the government – leveraged the community’s construction abilities to rebuild a healthier neighborhood, encouraging debate and consensus, teaching new skills and creating new jobs for the locals. According to the users, the open spaces that resulted from



Reblocking, a participatory process that engages local residents in the reconfiguration of their shacks.



ETH Zurich and Urban-Think Tank partnered with local NGOs to develop four new shacks through reblocking.¹²

the participatory process increased engagement and the sense of ownership in the villages.¹¹

By integrating participatory placemaking strategies like those in Medellin and Cape Town, Buenos Aires could achieve a much powerful impact for the slums and the overall city in the post-pandemic recovery. A recovery that includes residents and neighbors from Itatí and Azul in the design and decision-making processes will lead to a dignified and empowering outcome that celebrates the community's existing achievements and identity. Contrary to the usual unilateral process of public housing that washes away local idiosyncrasies, participatory placemaking could elevate the existing social capital to create inclusive, healthy spaces.

Participation is not magic; it is a collective process that brings locals and neighbors together to re-imagine a collective, changing future. Adopting and sustaining it in Itatí and Azul will not be easy or fast. Placemaking should be understood as a manifesto – a tool that guides and encourages slum dwellers to be active city-makers to positively transform spaces, minds, and bodies, offering the opportunity to destigmatize the villas for good. Just like freedom, participation is a right – it should be granted and respected.

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ÁREA PEATONAL
TRANSITORIA

← MANTENÉ LA DISTANCIA →





David Swaby

D.C.R. (Drought of Character Rehabilitation)

Two of the biggest atrocities to society today are our insufficient health care and public education systems that are referred to as the pipelines to prison. Many can argue that a big atrocity is the oversaturation of the US prison and jail population with uneducated citizens and the poor resources detainees and inmates are given to be rehabilitated. What opportunities are going to be available to an undereducated marginally illiterate individual having to survive in a job market that all but mandates at least a GED? We have to understand there will be no turnaround in a "criminal's" life if there are no options to better oneself. Many people turn to crime out of desperation. As a society we need to provide better options where crime is not the only thing on the resumes of disenfranchised citizens. Incorporating an education system into the carceral system for inmates that lack proper education is necessary for inmates to form a better future for themselves after release.

A large majority of the carceral population is uneducated, many of whom did not complete high school. The question we have to ask ourselves is how do we prevent recidivism for an individual whose only experience is in the criminal world. Perhaps providing new experiences in prisons will prevent inmates from returning to the carceral

system. There is research directly linking literacy and lack of education to high recidivism rates. This is because after being released from jail or prison, there is no greater option but to commit crime. Why continue to incarcerate people instead of getting to the root of the problem? "Research has estimated that illiteracy rates in prisons are as high as 75 percent of the prison population. This unaddressed issue in the United States' prison system is inextricably linked to high recidivism rates." (Sainato, 2017)

Education is the key to unlocking the future. In the case of many inmates around the United States they are never allowed access to this key after being incarcerated. If anyone understands the need for the carceral system, I do. I come from a third world country where crime and violence run rampant on most inhabited islands. Although there is a need for incarceration as a form of punishment, there is also a need for a multifaceted system that educates

prisoners and rehabilitates them so there is a lower recidivism rate. My proposal for this multifaceted system is to implement GED, or Associate Degree programs for those inmates that already have a GED or High School diploma. This is only part one. The other portion of this program establishes inmate jobs that fund such programs while also not only putting a dollar a day in their pocket but also providing education. The final aspect to this program would be a partnership between local businesses to provide jobs for these newly educated and rehabilitated inmates after release.

It has been proven that inmates who have gone through some form of academic educational programs have a higher chance of being employed after release. "Prison inmates who receive general education and vocational training are significantly less likely to return to prison after release and are more likely to find employment than peers who do not receive such opportunities"(Davis, 2013). By educating inmates and detainees, prisons will have prepared inmates for the process of reintegrating into life outside prison, thus reducing recidivism rates. This reduction will lessen the need for prisons and jails which will open up funds for use in other areas of the US economy.

After doing some research for my proposal, I found that "Prison education is a cost-effective way to reduce crime and leads to long-term benefits across the entire U.S.

population."(Bender, 2018). The United States spends approximately \$80 billion dollars on corrections annually. If the population of inmates were lowered, then it would free up more money for education and health care. This is desperately needed in states like Oklahoma where the education system is 47th in the entire country but has the most incarcerated females and the number one incarceration rate in the entire world. I believe that if we simply educate inmates, we will largely decrease the prison and jail population. "In 2016, the RAND Corporation produced a report that showed individuals who participate in any type of educational program while in prison are 43 percent less likely to return to prison."(Bender,2018). If the carceral system incorporated nationwide education programs in prisons and jails, it would have effects not just on individual inmates but on generations to come. Children of parents who have experienced such educational programs would reap the benefits as well, because the mother and/or father would now see the importance of education and living a life free of crime. For many families, crime and life in prison are all they know. Each generation simply follows in the footsteps of their mother or father.

When doing research, I questioned if there were any programs already like this in the United States. I discovered that most prison systems provide a GED program to prepare inmates to pass the test. "Inmates who don't have their high school diploma are required to participate in GED courses in their prison's Education Department... Prisoners who refuse to participate in their GED are actually subject to sanctions, including incident reports if they refuse to go to class once enrolled(Zoukis). This program to me seems hostile and does not provide any initiative. My proposal incorporates GED and Associate Degree Programs as well as implementing partnerships with local businesses to



provide jobs after release.

Many countries across the world utilize education and vocational training in their prisons and jails by focussing more on rehabilitation rather than punishment. The articles I found on different programs implemented around the world are very innovative and intriguing. My favorite is a financial literacy program for prisoners in Ethiopia. "Young men and women at Mekelle Prison, in northern Ethiopia, are provided with microfinance and insurance loans to start cooperatives

based on business ideas developed in educational and vocational classes offered while they're behind bars." (McCray, 2015). I love this idea because it takes reliance off of local businesses and gives the inmates financial freedom and something to lose. After they are released they have something that they have worked hard for and would not jeopardize by committing another crime and being

reincarcerated. Another favorite of mine is prisoners studying for free in India. "...the Indira Gandhi National Open University set up 94 study centers in jails across the country that offer a broad range of educational and vocational classes leading to degrees, free of cost" (McCray, 2015). This program is amazing to me because it goes above and beyond what many prisons are doing all around the world, not just the United States. Inmates do not only have the opportunity to earn vocational certificates but even Master's Degrees. If we had a program like this in US jails and prisons it would inspire inmates to better themselves and not have a desire to commit crimes after release because they will have the tools they need to live a better life.

Unemployment is largely one of the main causes of reentry into the Carceral system and "between 60 and 75 percent of the formerly incarcerated remain unemployed up to a year after their release,..." (National Employment...). There has been so much research done that shows education while incarcerated helps reduce recidivism and the possibility of getting a job after release. One has to wonder why the system has not implemented nationwide education programs in prisons and jails. There are great innovative ideas being brought to the table like that of the many Unions, advocates and employers that can help the transition after release. Labor unions as well as

inmates have a lot to gain from implemented work programs because it gives them access to a well that was formerly inaccessible and now it is opened and flowing with hydrating H2O. There is so much that inmates bring to the table, ideas that could have been cultivated in prison or jail that the everyday person may not have thought about. It is a true injustice to the world to keep that closed off by not allowing them to get gainful employment and put some of these ideas to work.

The best case scenario for my proposal is that there are prisons all over the United States that will begin to implement vocational training and proper educational programs to allow access to degrees and certificates. The worst case is that only a few implement it and they lead by example, have so much success that the results are undeniable and the other institutions follow their lead. There is no reason why the government would not want to lower the recidivism rate of course unless they benefit from it, but that would just be inhumane. What government would incarcerate its citizens purely for financial gain? The positive effects on communities all around the United States would be immeasurable if people have less incentive to commit crime because they do not have any other way to make ends meet. By incorporating these ideas we not only lower recidivism rates but lower overall crime rates in US cities because now prisons and jails rehabilitate and produce educated, critically thinking, business minded citizens and not the same criminals that entered on day one.

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Jake Lange

The Right to Move a Chair

Our Current Situation

The alienating design of correctional facilities, their capacity to isolate those who reside there from one another and with the outside world, and the way in which they deprive their residents of autonomy is a problem because it does not serve the purpose of rehabilitation. This translates to leaving released detainees stranded in the same world they left upon becoming incarcerated. This often leads to recidivism. The restriction of self-determination in the context of a fluorescent-lit grey box serves only as a means of dehumanizing its inhabitants, creating toxic authority figures, and burdening society through recidivism and intergenerational poverty.

The players

Detainees:

The architecture of prisons and jails in the United States is, in a word, bad. There are better and worse examples, but the pervasiveness of exposed cinder block, stark white or grey walls, no privacy, no sunlight, and countless other deprivations surely reinforces this claim. After all, does a different image than the aforementioned

elements come to mind without effort?

All of the architecture in correctional facilities is oriented toward the maintenance of institutional control over residents, as noted by the National Museum of Crime and Punishment's article on the design of prison facilities, which notes "[...] The most essential role of any prison is to ensure that people cannot escape" (Crime Museum). This paradigm of control, as Doctor Marayca Lopez notes in an article from Penal Reform International, is manifested in the architecture, and indeed, with the advent of incarceration becoming Euro-American society's primary form of punishment in the eighteenth century, the architecture itself became the punishment (Lopez, 2014). And as some recidivism statistics will show later on, it seems clear this architecture, designed to serve as a key element of an incarcerated person's punishment, is not having the desired effect.

Consider this paper's eponymous

design element: immobile chairs. In the typical carceral facility's dayroom (common area) there will be an arrangement of tables, each bolted into the ground and with chairs physically attached to them via an unjointed metal bar. In *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, a brief documentary filmed as part of an urban design research project in the 1960s, William Whyte, the principal researcher, notes that people in public spaces pick up and move chairs even when there is no real reason to do so. A person may only move their chair a foot from where they are, without changing the direction they face, whether they are in the sun or the shade, and so forth (Whyte, 1980). In prisons, the autonomy of a detainee to determine where they sit is taken away from them, and this extends to every moment of their day. Residents are only allowed out of their cells when they are told they can come out, and even then, must only go where instructed. If a person cannot decide for themselves when they want some fresh air, or when to eat lunch, or where to sit, how could they ever be expected to believe in their ability to choose a different life from the one which resulted in their incarceration?

Staff:

In light of the many conversations which have occurred in 2020 regarding the criminal justice system, it has become unquestionably clear that the dynamic between those with power,

particularly the power of the state backing them, and those who have historically been subject to that power, and unjustly harmed by it, requires reassessment. Much like there have been calls for community policing, the integration of authority figures into the populations over which they preside can be applied to prisons. At the level of physical design, many prisons in the United States have adopted the indirect model of supervision, meaning there is very little direct interaction between staff and detainees.

This exemplifies once again that prisons and jails emphasize security over rehabilitation, and there is reason to believe that this model is actually detrimental to security goals. A study conducted for the Canadian Correctional Service indicated that detainee-officer interactions were less frequent and less friendly under this model, which creates a higher likelihood of unsafe situations arising (Werner, 1989). Similarly, the oft-cited Halden Prison in Norway has adopted the direct model of supervision and, among the myriad other design and administrative choices that make this prison a model of reform, this has resulted in the prison's two-hundred fifty-one residents (of whom, over half are convicted of violent crimes) experiencing very few violent incidents (Benko, 2015). Thus, the design of American prisons and jails renders staff less safe and more prone to needless violence, despite security resting at the core of these designs.

Designers:

There is a considerable dilemma faced by architects and designers in the United States regarding contemporary carceral design. Who is the client when designing a correctional facility? For whom should an architect design? Is it ethical to use one's skills, and to employ one's practice, to design a jail or prison? That final question is

even more complex than it may seem, as one might easily design a prison with the hopes of achieving their own goals and paradigms of rehabilitation and humanizing the incarcerated, but ultimately they are constrained by the desires of the entity that is paying them.

In a paper published for the School of Commerce at the University of South Australia, Giustina Consoli analyzes the discussions held between prison operators, contractors, and architects, and the dilemmas faced in particular by the latter. In interviews, there seems to be a consistent uncertainty among architects as to what their role was in these projects (Consoli, 2012). These interviews represent a microcosm of the field and its experience of this problem, but if one is willing to expand to the macro-scale, it is reasonable to infer that this uncertainty equates to a larger dilemma around how much architects and designers are responsible for upholding different philosophies of incarceration, and how much agency they have to change or maintain whichever philosophies may prevail today.

The importance of carefully crafting processions, indicating boundaries, delineating which spaces are meant to be used and which are not, and controlling the flow of foot traffic is central to the entire history of architecture. But the way these elements of design dictate people's behavior comes from a place of empathy, with the goal being more enjoyable and useful spaces for their inhabitants. To apply these techniques as a means of punishment, as a way of harming the inhabitants of the space is inherently contradictory to the common values with which architects imbue the spaces they create. So long as states and private prison operators require these design paradigms, the architect's dilemma will persist.

Society:

Eighty-three percent of state prisoners released in 2005 across thirty states were arrested at least once in the nine years following their release, according to the Department of Justice (Alper, et al., 2018). Aaron Gottlieb with the University of Illinois at Chicago, writing for the National Institutes of Health, notes that, while prior research is not extensive, "some evidence suggests that higher rates of incarceration may be associated with higher rates of relative poverty, while other evidence suggests the opposite" (Gottlieb, 2017). The list of social ills with strong connections to carceral phenomena goes on, but to simply list them ad nauseam contributes little to the discussion. One might conjecture that Gottlieb's notation about poverty and incarceration is circular rather than ambiguously unidirectional, where the already impoverished are more likely to be incarcerated, and as a result of this incarceration, their ability to leave or stay out of poverty is diminished, and they sink further into indigence.

The Equal Justice Initiative notes that the Bureau of Justice estimates the annual cost of mass incarceration in the United States at eighty-one billion dollars, but that this cost is incomplete, not factoring in policing, courts, and costs paid by the families of the incarcerated (EJI, 2017). The discussion around how prisons and jails seek to offset

their immense operation costs through unpaid prison labor programs is too large an issue to discuss in detail here, but it should be noted that this practice represents another programmatic means of dehumanizing detainees. This requires notation so as not to imply that prisons, still incurring the same costs, should seek to become financially self-sufficient through such programs. Instead these costs to society need to be mitigated through much more deeply impactful changes in the way people are policed, adjudicated, and incarcerated.

Society bears the cost of mass incarceration, and it is doing nothing to reduce or eliminate this expense with the way correctional facilities are designed now. Clearly, something needs to change if recidivism and prison populations are to be reduced, and the intergenerational suffering of the already disenfranchised is to have any hope of redress.

The History

There is already extensive writing on the history of incarceration in the United States, so further reading into some of the works cited here would be encouraged. *State of the Art: The New Prison History*, by Mary Ellen Curtin offers some excellent insights into the American prison system over time. Jermaine Thibodeaux has also published extensive academic writings on the subject which beg consideration if one seeks to learn more about how the

situation has developed into what it is today.

With that said, it is worth discussing a few key historical developments that most directly affect the concept of carceral design's effect on behavior while incarcerated and recidivism after release. An early design paradigm was isolation to facilitate contemplation. The idea being prisoners would have time to think about their misdeeds and resolve to improve their character. An obvious rebuttal can be formed as a question: how is prosocial behavior encouraged by placing someone in an antisocial environment?



Halden Prison in Norway.
Image Courtesy of AIA New York.

Skipping forward considerably, the prison system in the United States after the Civil War represents the earliest formal influence of almost all correctional design in America today. With a basis in racism and recapturing free labor for difficult but profitable industries, postbellum incarceration saw the design of today's most common prison layouts and construction methods: panopticons and long corridors lined on either side with cells, separated from the corridor by bars

or a solid steel door, walls of cinder block and floors of concrete, and so forth. Granted, these did not come about in the years immediately following the Civil War, but the new paradigms of justice, law enforcement, and incarceration all laid the groundwork for the mass incarceration seen today.

At its core, the design trends of contemporary correctional facilities reflect a longstanding history of justice philosophies that do very little to create a better society, or to in any way improve the lives of its inhabitants. Any designs from the past which one might cite as having the goal of rehabilitation have clearly been shown to be ineffective, and most of the design choices of today's carceral facilities have nothing to do with rehabilitation.

What Comes Next?

Aesthetics:

The aforementioned work by Doctor Lopez posits "The most effective types of living environments in aiding rehabilitation are those that are domestic in feel and enhance the quality of life. In housing units, an intellectually stimulating environment features abundant sunlight, openness, unobstructed views, landscaping, access to nature, bar-less wood doors and large windows, human scale, movable furniture, normalized materials such as carpet, wood, tempered/shatter-proof glass, commercial grade acoustic lay-in ceiling tile, low ceilings and acoustic wall panels [...]" (Lopez, 2014).

Lopez describes the creation of a space resembling of something that might be found in a house, an apartment, an office building, really anywhere but a jail or prison. The spaces she describes feel familiar and comfortable thus offering greater opportunity for detainees to seek

out and accept the kind of care they need. It also allows staff to feel at ease and develop good relations with detainees. People may protest this sort of design, making comparisons to nice hotels, however, prisons offering comfortable spaces does not equate to luxury. This is not to say architects and designers should not use this as an opportunity to employ the newest innovations in the field- color theory, lighting design, acoustics, materials choices, etc.

Layout:

Historically, there have been a few basic prison layouts which have been pervasive in designing facilities. Namely, as Ryan Jacobs notes for Pacific Standard, one can find plentiful examples of the panopticon, radial, rectangular, courtyard, and high-rise layouts. The study cited by Jacobs indicated that these layouts, particularly as they affect surveillance and interaction between staff and detainees, have considerable negative effects on staff-resident relations. Of these layouts, the campus style layout resulted in the most favorably-perceived interactions between staff and residents (Jacobs, 2014).

But the campus layout goes beyond the issue of surveillance and consequent relations between staff and residents, and returns to the idea of normativity. Of course, it also enhances physical activity, as well as access to nature, fresh air and

sunlight. In the free adult world, travelling outdoors between different buildings to solicit different services is much more normal than spending entire days indoors, walking between specialized areas of a single facility to obtain whatever one needs.

The campus layout is also a remarkably adept means of reducing the way a facility's design isolates it from its community. Its less institutional feel and less intimidating aesthetic should allow it to blend more naturally into its environment and community.

Ultimately, the layout of jails and prisons is a key design element alongside aesthetics which requires careful, rehabilitation-oriented decisions. It seems that designing correctional facilities such that their external appearance resembles other places in the "real world," allows for privacy, or at least non-continuous surveillance.

Spatial Programming:

At its core, the right to move a chair is a manifestation of good spatial programming. This term, spatial programming, exists in the world of GIS and similar fields of research, but here it will be defined as the way a space is intended to be used. The mobility of furniture offers an excellent insight into spatial programming; what can be moved, in what way, and to what extent, programs the space for certain uses and excludes others. Another example might

be ceiling heights. A space with a low ceiling is programmed for ordinary, everyday uses, where a space with a noticeably high ceiling might be programmed for special activities like sports, art installations, or anything else for which a space must be designed to capacitate that activity, i.e. programmed for it.

This concept overlaps significantly with the administrative methods of improving normativity, easing transitions, and creating resident autonomy, but does relate more to the physical environment than bureaucratic decisions as to what detainees are allowed and disallowed to do. With that said, the proposal here is to enable residents to have more control over the programming of the space, with mobile furniture again serving as a great example, or perhaps offering certain choices of color within cells, lighting arrangements which are customizable, and so forth. The autonomy itself acts as a form of normalization, and the outcomes on the environment of the facility will also help to render it less alienating, less isolating, and more conducive to rehabilitation.



Oklahoma County Detention Center in Downtown Oklahoma City.
Image Courtesy of InmateAid.

Work Programs:

Prisons are designed to isolate their inhabitants from the communities into which they are supposed to harmoniously reintegrate. Tracy Huling writes in *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*, that "Since 1980, the majority of new prisons built to accommodate the expanding U.S. prison population have been placed in non-metropolitan areas, with the result that the majority of prisoners are now housed in rural America" (Huling, 2002). There is certainly an argument that there should be some rural correctional facilities, to offer a pathway to integration into those communities as well. With that said, most people in the carceral system are from urban areas, so incorporating these facilities into urban communities is the most effective means of establishing the connection between the facility, its inhabitants, and the community.

But incorporation is not tantamount to sitting—even with a majority of prisons being constructed in rural areas, there are still plentiful examples of correctional facilities located in urban areas. Take, for instance, the Oklahoma County Jail, in Oklahoma City— a thirteen-story red brick megalith not far from Oklahoma City's Downtown. While this is perhaps a better situation than if it were an hour's drive from downtown, the jail's design and form does not enmesh it with the community. It still alienates the community around it, and thus isolates its inhabitants from the community. Again, how are people ever to be dissuaded of antisocial behavior if they are kept in antisocial environments?

Incorporation with the community requires more than the reform of prison design; it must include administrative reform. This should include opportunities for detainees to interact with the community such as work programs. Perhaps detainees with artistic talents could paint

murals or construct public art installations. Detainees with culinary interests could participate in work programs with a local restaurant. Any opportunities which encourage interaction between detainees and the remaining community offers means of destigmatization. This yields a situation in which detainees are able to self-actualize and serve the community. The barrier of anonymity which allows for prejudice and stigma is gone. The acknowledgement of incarcerated people will not stop at tragedy in this model, it will continue into the realm of hope.

Education Programs:

Extensive research exists which indicates a correlation between unemployment rates and crime rates. The scholarly article, *Identifying the Effect of Unemployment on Crime*, posits that "[...] between 1993 and 1998, victimization rates declined for every major type of crime,¹ with both violent and property crime rates falling by approximately 30 percent. Occurring concurrently with these aggregate crime trends was a marked decrease in the civilian unemployment rate. Between 1992 and 1998, the national unemployment rate declined in each year from a peak of 7.5 percent to a 30 year low of 4.5 percent" (Raphael, et al, 2001). The same literature, more specifically addressing recidivism, further asserts that "Holding all else equal, the decrease in income and potential

earnings associated with involuntary unemployment increases the relative returns to illegal activity” (Raphael, et al, 2001). This is reiterated by a study conducted for the California Legislative Analyst’s Office (Peterson, et al, 2017). From this, one can gather that access to employment is a strong indicator of whether a formerly incarcerated person is likely to recidivate. Thus, jails and prisons which offer programs, vastly expanded in capacity, quality, and diversity of subject matter, will succeed in rehabilitating detainees by providing them education and skills.

Unfortunately, offering work and educational programs will not create change on their own. Even in states like California, where an exemplary degree of progress has been made toward ensuring incarcerated people receive education, and can learn skills valuable for obtaining employment, there are laws, policy norms, and cultural stigmas which render it extremely difficult for convicts to find employment upon being released. The Prison Policy Initiative notes “[...] formerly incarcerated people are unemployed at a rate of over 27% – higher than the total U.S. unemployment rate during any historical period, including the Great Depression” (Couloute, et al, 2018). Until September of 2020, it was not possible for the many prisoners in California who worked while incarcerated as firefighters, to become employed as firefighters once freed

(Romo, 2020). Consequently, this change must come not only at the level of program expansion within correctional facilities, but also legislative action to better facilitate the transition from incarceration to employment.

Encouragement of Prosocial Behavior:

The California Legislative Analyst’s Office details cognitive behavioral therapy and substance abuse treatment as some of the rehabilitation programs, alongside the aforementioned education and employment skills programs (Peterson, et al, 2017). An expansion of counseling services, therapy, and access to psychological services is yet another critical administrative component of the reforms required to achieve better transitions and reduced recidivism. The National Institutes of Health indicates “some studies report that at least half of male inmates and up to three quarters of female inmates reported symptoms of mental health conditions in the prior year (compared with 9% or fewer in the general population)” (Gonzalez, 2014). This statistic necessarily draws a correlation between mental health issues, and antisocial behavior resulting in incarceration.

Counseling is paramount in helping people overcome the internal struggles which result in self-destructive behaviors and crime. With this incorporated into the experience of incarceration, residents of correctional facilities will be much better positioned to transition back into society at large, and not recidivate after doing so.

The Right to.... Autonomy

One of the two core pillars of the reforms herein suggested, offering greater autonomy to incarcerated people is essential. Examples of jails and prisons making administrative decisions to give autonomy to their residents include residents choosing

the color of their cell, mobile furniture, arrangeable lighting, and so forth. This autonomy can be furthered by allowing detainees to schedule their own time to a certain extent, choose what sorts of work or recreational activities they participate in, and perhaps even create their own activities and initiatives. Further, allowing detainees autonomy over their own appearance may very well have positive effects, with the psychological effects of attire in general being discussed by the Association for Psychological Science, notably that it can affect interpersonal relations (APS, 2015).

Returning to spatial design, offering incarcerated people the ability to program their communal spaces is just as important as allowing them options within their cells. This concept once again relates to the idea of mobile furniture, in particular to allow for residents of correctional facilities to program their own spaces and cultivate community organically.

Through this introduction of resident autonomy, inhabitants of the carceral system are granted responsibilities and the need to make decisions for themselves that will not only increase the efficacy of their rehabilitative experience, but will establish an opportunity to achieve success when they are released.

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Emily Hays

Incarceration

An essential role for designers is to continually question and analyze the function of a space. As people and society change, the built environment must adapt and respond to that. There are corners of the built environment that do not see the same scrutiny in design and function as others. Ignoring these programs and institutions is a disservice to our practice and in turn, our society as it stagnates development around it. One such institution is the American prison system. Prisons function in many ways, as they always have in this country, and it is clear that the architectural profession, a historically white male dominated field, has invested little in amending this condition. Just because something has been a certain way for a long time, does not mean it has to stay that way. It should not be the practice of architecture to leave it alone because it is controversial. That will not be our legacy.

According to criminologist Bob Cameron the five goals of a prison are retribution, incapacitation, deterrence, restoration, and rehabilitation. The current American prison system has set the primary goal as retribution and has failed at its final and most essential goal: rehabilitation. Under this system, there are currently three million incarcerated Americans. A disproportionate number of those incarcerated are minorities. Americans have been persecuted and stigmatized for

generations in an effort to keep the powerful in power and punish people for their race or "otherness", and the progress to change this is not quick enough. The legacy of racism has shaped our prison system and it will continue to do so until we address it.

Retribution

In the American prison system retribution comes not only in the prison sentence handed down by the Justice system, but permeates their entire life behind bars. Individuals endure psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, unsafe living conditions, and are withheld healthcare. This is beyond the function of a prison. Research has shown that punishment deters recidivism most effectively when it is

SHAPED BY HATE

Between 1980 and 2015 the number of incarcerated Americans increased from around 500,000 to 2.2 million.² This increase and the current prison population is not aligned with our population. The US makes up about 5% of the world's population, while our incarcerated makes up 25% of the world's prison population.² African Americans and Hispanics account for 32% of the US population and 56% of our incarcerated population, and African Americans are incarcerated over five times the rate of white Americans.¹³ In 11 US states 1 in 20 African American adult males are incarcerated.¹³

applied quickly and consistently. In the case of the prison system, this is applicable when the individual is sentenced to prison. The prison sentence effectively separates these individuals from their communities. The impact of this is three-fold. First, it protects American citizens from the perceived danger the incarcerated individual poses. This means the streets are viewed as safer, fewer innocent victims, and policing is easier. Second, it punishes the individual by removing their freedom, privacy, and lifestyle. This is psychological punishment. Finally, it cuts ties to the prisoners' support system. As part of their limited freedom, prisoners can only see family during visiting hours. In some places, this is now being shifted to a virtual format and will no longer be a free service. Which has raised the question of whether visitations are a human right. Studies show that regular visits from family reduce recidivism, chipping away at prison overcrowding

and easing the burden on the criminal justice system.

The US prison system is overpopulated and cases of assault, rape, and murder within prison walls are not

uncommon occurrences. So much so that Americans often joke about these crimes. It permeates our pop culture, our slang, and our songs. It isn't just inmate on inmate violence either. Accusations of physical, mental, and sexual abuse from prison officials are common. Corruption has fed the chaos and suffering within these institutions. All of this amounts to an environment of fear and suffering, which can have damaging effects on an individuals' psyche. Below is an excerpt of a letter from a man with schizophrenia serving a life sentence for murder in a Missouri prison.

"Please pray for me because I'm lost with what God wants of me and I want to do God's will but I just can't take all this anger that everyone has here. Every time I look at these four walls around me, I can't help to fall into everyone's spell. There's always someone getting under someone's skin. Then before you know it, they are fighting. I'm just tired of the violence. All my life I have seen violence and I'm just tired of it. I had to watch my mother take abuse from her husband. I was even sexually abused by my big brother. So I grew up with anger and this place adds to it. I just want to feel joy and happiness again. I wrote all this to the governor, hoping he would understand."

Solitary confinement is often used for individuals who act out in prisons. These individuals are locked in a small cell for 23 hours a day and only let out briefly to shower, exercise, and see a physician. They are kept from all other inmates and are denied family visitation. Over 60,000 Americans are in solitary confinement. The suicide rate for those in solitary confinement sits at 50%. Solitary confinement amounts to cruel and unusual punishment, though often touted as an action that is in the best interest of the individual. Countless studies have shown that loneliness is one of the most damaging and lasting effects on a person's health.¹ Additionally, there is negligible proof that this

CORRUPTION

In 2011, an FBI investigation of human rights abuse in the Los Angeles County prisons and subsequent attempt by prison officials to derail the investigation led to the arrest of 11 prison officials.¹⁵ In 2014 Operation Ghost Guard led to the indictment of 26 prison officers in Georgia involving smuggling contraband that was used for financial fraud, drug trafficking, and a kidnapping scheme.¹⁵

HEALTH CARE

CCS, now WellPath, is the health care provider to more than 500 prison facilities across the US.¹⁴ A recent investigation shows they acted in the best interest of saving cost and in lieu of saving lives. CCS was sued for over 70 deaths under their supervision, with individuals alleging prolonged suffering, ongoing complications, shortened life expectancy, and debt.¹⁴ After terminating their contract less than two years in, one county called CCS's performance was "morally reprehensible."¹⁴ Over five years, 11 different government agencies filed complaints about CCS.¹⁴

form of punishment is effective. B.F. Skinner wrote, "Punished behavior is likely to reappear after the punitive consequences are withdrawn." So while the benefit of these punishments may be short-lived, the negative ramifications can last a lifetime. The American Institute of Architects finally denounced the design of torture and execution

spaces, which includes solitary confinement in 2020.¹⁸ This is a small step in the right direction.

Access to medical and mental health care are the rights of those imprisoned, but they are not guaranteed that in our current system. Their right to live without constant fear of attack and rape from those around them is a human one. Their protection from cruel and unusual punishment is guaranteed to them by the 8th amendment. There are numerous ways the current prison system punishes incarcerated Americans, and much of it is beyond what is just.

Rehabilitation

"Research has proven that the most effective way in reducing such criminal acts is simply through education. Inmates with at least two years of college education have a 10% re-arrest rate compared to a 62% re-arrest rate. Prisoners with associate's degrees have a re-arrest rate of 13.7%, 5.6% with a bachelor's degree, and 0% for those with a master's degree."¹ The recidivism rate in the US is 76.6%, one of the highest in the world. Research shows that one of the primary causes of

recidivism is unemployment. With 75% of released individuals unable to find employment a year after their release.⁵

As a case study, we can look to Norway, which has taken the radical perspective of treating the incarcerated like human beings. Their recidivism rate is a staggeringly low 20%.⁴ These prisons appear more like dormitories, and vocational training is provided to all inmates. The individuals who are incarcerated here are all treated with respect and dignity, with officials believing that stripping them of their freedom is punishment enough.⁴ These individuals will come back to their communities and if we want them to be productive members of society, we must give them the tools to do so.

The Call

The issues in our prison system run deep and reflect the issues in our country. They are not an anomaly, but rather a symptom. That doesn't mean that we should not seek to address the problem of prisons. The purpose of the prison system is to separate individuals violating the law, punish them for their actions, and rehabilitate them. Their separation from society and the public shame that comes from that is punishment. Increasing prison time for the increasing severity of the crimes committed is punishment. There are limits to the efficacy of punishment,

and architects should not contribute to the suffering of these individuals. Rehabilitation should therefore be the focus of the architecture of prisons since the other goals are achieved by the separation inherent to a prison. We should be designing prisons that not only focus on the betterment of individuals in its care, but on what the afterlife of the prison could be. We can reshape our society and redefine what capital punishment is. We can no longer be complicit in the suffering of American citizens. Architects are responsible for the health, safety, and welfare of the users of a space. When the purpose of a space is to harm the user's health and welfare, architects must put their oath first and recognize that people are suffering. The suffering of any group will send ripples through society. We do not live in bubbles, the suffering of some affects us all. We have the power to change this, and it is our commission to do so.

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Johanna Hilmes

Light at the End of the Tunnel

Color: a concept we learn as children, a concept you need not be a design professional to recognize its impact on space. People can buy a gallon of paint at the local home improvement store for no more than \$40 and paint an entire wall. No need for construction, an architect, or any special skill set to completely transform any room in your home. Yet even this simplest design technique is overlooked in prisons. The choice not to consider color design or theory is made clear by the bleak achromatic walls, floors, ceilings and furniture, or worse yet, the use of highly saturated colors which enhance emotional reactions.¹ These apathetic design choices read to the incarcerated and non-incarcerated community alike that this facility is inconsequential and ultimately unimportant. Designers and outside community members often don't recognize the impact color design has in carceral facilities because they have never spent time in this environment and therefore have never experienced adverse effects of this thoughtlessness. However, don't we all have achromatic paint colors in our homes?

I observed photos of the prison cells in the Oklahoma County Jail. Why are the achromatic color schemes here so much more traumatizing than the ones in most people's houses? After browsing through a couple of photos and different camera

angles, I came to two conclusions. First, the lack of décor and personalization; this brings comfort where color lacks. Secondly, the lighting. The discrepancies across the photos were owed to their tone; one had a yellow hue, one was completely stark, another shaded and dark, and one...almost pleasant. I noticed the mirage of pleasantness was owed to the natural light showing through a sliver of window in the cell on that day, at that particular time. This moment was when I became cognizant to the fact that color cannot exist exclusively from lighting. Well-designed lighting solutions, natural lighting in particular, have the power to give even the melancholiest of spaces a sense of life and comfort. In contrast, inadequate lighting and absence of sufficient natural light can make a perfectly curated color palette muted and valueless.

When exploring how to employ color and lighting in design, you must put yourself in the shoes of the occupant. I put myself in the shoes

of a prisoner and thought about how I would feel if I spent all day, every day in one of the dark and restricted Oklahoma City Jail cells. I put myself in the shoes of a prison guard and thought about how color and lighting could help me to better monitor the activities in the prison and improve my mood during the workday. I put myself in the shoes of the taxpayer, who does not want to provide luxury prisons, but does want to see effectiveness in the facilities their tax dollars are directed toward. We must put forth effort, time and research into prison designs because if not, what is the point of people investing their time and tax dollars into ineffectual spaces intended for rehabilitation?

The possibilities are endless to re-imagine spaces in prisons to better serve the community and fulfil a meaningful purpose. There is not always opportunity, budget, or interest from stakeholders to rebuild or renovate entire prison facilities. However, even with restricted resources there is opportunity to contribute educated investments that will improve the efficacy of these facilities and not let the financial and emotional investments of the community go to waste.

"The future will be in the hands of those of you who belong to the 21st century. You have the opportunity and responsibility to build a better humanity. This means developing warm-heartedness in this very life, here and now. So, do whatever work you do, but ask yourselves now and then, 'How can I contribute to human beings being happier and more peaceful?'

- Dalai Lama

Endnotes

- 1 *The Psychological Impact of Light and Color*. PDF File (2017). Aurora, Colorado: TCP Lighting.





Alex Finklestein and Dr. Jae James

Interview with Dr. Jae James

S1 Alex Finklestein, PhD Candidate OU

S2 Dr. Jae James, Clinical Assistant Professor NYU
University of Oklahoma Carceral Studies Conversations Podcast.
<https://architecture.ou.edu/csc/>

S1 Welcome to carceral studies conversations. This is a podcast series that seeks to understand and illuminate the carceral state and all of its manifestations and allow us to both understand and then deconstruct these complex systems that structure our society as a way to pursue liberation and justice. I am Alex, I'm recording from the University of Oklahoma which is on the traditional lands of the Kato Nation and the Wichita and affiliated tribes and was also part of the Muskogee, Creek, and Seminole Nations. My guest today, Dr. Jae James, is recording on the ancestral Annope (SP) homelands in New York City. Our guest is a professor of social work at New York University. His research and experiences lead him to be a pragmatically idealistic and hopeful humanitarian committed to the evolution of self, social justice, and critical pedagogy. He is the director of the Evolving Justice Initiative: an educational initiative to build community and explore justice in action which we'll hear a little bit more about today. Thank you so much for being in conversation today

Professor James.

S2 Hey, thank you. I'm excited to be here. I am actually in Philadelphia, and I don't know what captured land this is but to also acknowledge that Philadelphia, as much of the United States, as much of the world, is captured land so much love to the aborigines people who existed here, whose histories have been whitewashed in white supremacy.

S1 Absolutely, thanks for correcting me and making that statement because it's important especially as we're talking about systems of colonization and systems of oppression it's important to recognize that. So, I want to start off with this idea, in your research you've called mass incarceration a pandemic. Can you explain how mass incarceration is a pandemic?

S2 Well, so a pandemic is something - similar to COVID-19 - that impacts

people on a global level. To even talk about mass incarceration, I think the first thing I should say is that the term is a euphemism. If we look at the mechanisms that drove slavery, they are the same mechanisms that drive mass incarceration. If we look at the 13th amendment, there's a lot of evidence that shows the end of slavery but also the transition into the prison industrial labor, you saw convict leasing system, you saw Black codes, you saw ideologies that substantiated criminality. Today we have more Black men incarcerated than the number enslaved in 1850. This is not only an American thing, if you look at many of the countries in diaspora people of color are similarly impacted disproportionately via carceral systems. It's a framework and a model that has been utilized throughout the world to continue the historical oppression of people of color.

S1 I appreciate you putting it that way and tracing that historical

lens. Some people might posit that mass incarceration is a backlash to the civil rights movement but it sounds like you're putting it in this longer, continued strain of exploitation of labor.

S2 You can almost see two waves - and maybe we are going into the third if we aren't careful - but in terms of the level of deportation, in terms of the level of electronic monitoring that has taken place. The first wave comes in just post the 13th amendment in the form of Black codes. You fast forward 100 years and post-civil rights we see new Black codes, the war on drugs, stop and frisk, mandatory minimums, etc. So we have seen waves of this. Interestingly enough, you bring up the civil rights movement which is 100 years after reconstruction. A period where America was supposed to pause and take note of the damage it has historically done to people of color in the United States and do something differently. So when that doesn't happen 100 years later the fight and struggle persists. Fast-forward to where we are right now and the fight and the struggle still continues. I think we have seen various aspects of mass incarceration. And let's not even call it mass incarceration. It's like neo-slavery, hyper-incarceration or whatever we want to call it, predominantly focusing on men of color in the US and seeing women of color as the fastest

"There's an analogy I like to use that slavery was the engine that built America and really much of the world. Where slavery was once that engine, the ideologies have now shifted... to carceral systems and the dehumanization of people of color."

growing prison population. But also seeing carceral systems as a way of legitimizing or dehumanizing people. Once the term of criminal is affixed to you, your humanity doesn't really matter anymore. We are seeing that with the wave of police killings taking place in the US. As soon as someone is purported to have a "criminal background" it means their humanity is now somehow questioned.

S1 Yeah, great point about the dehumanization and that its more than just imprisonment. It's this larger system that includes stigmatization, over-policing, surveillance that slowly or quickly erodes a persons perceived legitimacy to be in the world. We have focused so far on the US and these systems, but as you point out this is a global phenomenon. In Africa and in the Caribbean, people of color are disproportionately surveilled, incarcerated, exploited, etc. How would you frame this pandemic or neo-slavery as a global phenomenon?

S2 I think it's the same framework. One of the things we don't talk about is that racial injustice isn't just people making choices happenstance. Racial injustice is predicated on capitalism and capitalism is predicated on having an exploited class. There's a really good word I like "sancopha (SP)" and it's a West African proverb that to understand where you're going you have to understand where you're from. I think too often we have these conversations too soon. Using a historical perspective is critical and so too is understanding the mechanisms of oppression. Initially it was okay to just say Blacks were enslaved because they were lazy or not as smart. And as that became played out there was a need for a new mechanism to justify their

exploitation. There's an analogy I like to use that slavery was the engine that built America and really much of the world. Much of the "G8" and these countries with considerable wealth. This wealth is a byproduct of colonialization and exploitation of countries of color. When you take the engine out of a car, if you want it to keep going you need another engine. Where slavery was once that engine, the ideologies have now shifted. The ideologies that justify this new mechanism of exploitation are now tied to carceral systems and the dehumanization of people of color. If you look at most of the people who have been vestiges of the legacy of slavery, they are predominantly the people that make up the majority of carceral systems. Not just in the US but in most of the world. You have a formula and a blueprint that is tried and true that has been exported. I am from Jamaica so maybe you don't see the carceral state in the same racial way that it exists in the US but you see according to class, those who are imprisoned are those who have been permanently disenfranchised in that system. You can see this framework operating worldwide. Once someone is identified as a criminal, our empathy toward their plight is eroded.

S1 That's really interesting.

I want to follow up on a few things, I like that you put that in perspective. The global exportation of racial capitalism. That capitalism requires these

"I would ultimately be sentenced to 7 years to life at 18, and the judge told me he was doing me a favor."

hierarchies and divisions between people which are often predicated on race or perceived racial differences. They create these permanent inequities and injustices that I want to follow up on. As a social worker you studied the clinical impact of mass incarceration or neo-slavery to use your term. What is the clinical impact and how does that impact or trauma extend beyond imprisonment to inform these cycles of re-entry or recidivism.

S2 I'll share how I came to the work. At 18 years old in 1994 I was arrested and tried under the Rockefeller drug laws. I had never been arrested before. I was arrested on a series of conspiracy charges. At arraignment I was offered 40 years to life at 18 years old. This wasn't just my story, this was the height of what we would call mass incarceration.

You think about 1994 and you think about Wu Tang Clan, "40 of us in the back of a bus, life as a shorty shouldn't be so ruff." Everyone, Tupac's "Dear Mama", everyone is talking about what's happening. I would ultimately be sentenced to 7 years to life at 18, and the judge told me he was doing me a favor. After this experience

I really knew what this system was and I really wanted to destroy it

knowing the impact. That impact is millions of people incarcerated, millions of people disenfranchised, children being separated from their parents. It was always like, yeah, that's the impact. I was finishing - years removed from this situation - I'm finishing my doctorate. I am pretty sure I'm done. I've mapped the history of prisons in the US. I've tied in the lineage of mass incarceration through the 13th amendment. 200 something pages. I bring it to my dissertation chair and he says what's the impact and I asked immediately, "What do you mean?! I've just shown you how people were impacted." And he pushed me further asking how are people impacted - what's the clinical impact? That's when I really started to pause and look into trauma and realize oppression is trauma. We cant have this conversation without talking about trauma. One of the things that immediately struck me was even the clinical understanding we had of trauma told you that it was following an experience. So most of what it was talking about was PTSD and the impact it has on people biologically and the immense harm for those who experience trauma. But there wasn't an analysis of trauma that

was never "post". There wasn't an analysis of a trauma that was 400, 500 years old. As I began to think about that and the impact of trauma, I realized that conversation needed to be synonymous because it was AS important as any conversation around liberation. I don't think we are ever really able to quantify this trauma. We can maybe quantify through how many people are locked up or dollars lost, but this is something so beyond. Generations have felt the impact of slavery. Generations will feel the impact of mass incarceration unless we really begin to heal. It's an incredible question that really deserves a lot of attention but we would all be naïve to say that we know the impact. Nobody can quantify what that impact is.

S1 Yeah, that's really interesting because it makes me think of some theorists, like Ruthie Gilmore, who have defined racism as these systems or policies that lead to premature death with death being the thing that is quantifiable in the end. It seems like you're pushing back on that saying yes there is premature death but ALSO you need to recognize the conditions; the harms that are experienced in life.

S2 Absolutely, I mean if you think about it I think there's nothing that can be separated from trauma. You look at a child growing up and there is this really excellent research called ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) and it looked at disruption in the family ecosystem which can have a lifelong impact. When you think about most people of color in the US, ACEs is what they have lived under. The family structures are often compromised. Even when we think about harm, which is often

characterized as a physical thing, imagine living in a world where whiteness has been synonymous with good while darkness has been synonymous with bad. Seeing that play out at every level of your existence, seeing that play out when you go to school, seeing that play out in all of the stories you are told, all of the movies, heroes and villains. Think about the internalization of that and add layers of poverty, the folks who are bearing the brunt of this, imagine how that impacts their day to day. In communities where violence is disproportionately high, we cannot imagine the levels of trauma they have experienced. The levels of policing is a violent experience. Poverty is a violent experience. Hopelessness is a violent experience. We have to have a more intersectional analysis. Why have we not ever thought about oppressed peoples as traumatized? Neo-capitalism and neo-colonialism have emphasized that we are all autonomous agents, nothing happens in the collective. It is a "to each their own" idea that is bull shit. Until we are able to really have these conversations that are wholistic, we will not progress. I love Audre Lorde quote, "[T]here are no single-issue issues." Until we are utilizing an intersectional analysis to think about all of these sources of harm and our own

response, it will feel like we are continually stuck in this cycle.

S1 Great point. It's interesting that you're expanding this definition of violence to be material, psychological, intergenerational, it doesn't end with an individual, it is community based. I want to turn to what you mentioned about seeking a solution. What does liberation or justice look like under this new definition of violence and trauma?

S2 One of the first steps in everything is awareness. It's the quote from James Baldwin, "not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Again, none of these things are based on new arguments. Baldwin, bell hooks, even further back ancestors have gone about laying the groundwork for what solutions may be. We all have to create these brave-spaces that are really dedicated to liberation. Rethinking educational paradigms and becoming comfortable with the tension required to seek truth. So much of that is contingent on our own feelings. If we are in constant states of trauma, our ability to think and act is hampered. For people who don't see these problems as synonymous they are likely burnt out themselves and shouldn't be at the forefront of these movements.

It is critical that we create the healing necessary for everyone to show up and assess the problem at hand to develop an appropriate response. In heightened states of trauma we can only be reactive. As much as my anger may be valid, it will not evoke thoughtful solutions that serve anybody. It feels cliché, but self-care is an act of political resistance. It is a really challenging question but the focus needs to be on items that are already within our control to start. We need to create awareness of oppression and history at a community level. Another thing that is critical is the creation of liberatory communities because this effort needs to be co-created. When I think about liberation, bell hooks told us, "education must be a field in which we all labor." Liberation must also be a field in which we all labor. We all have to do the work.

S1 And you've been doing some of that work. I would like to give you a chance to talk about one of these brave-spaces you've created at the Evolving Justice Space in New York to create this new paradigm that balances the tension of seeking liberation and reducing harm without the creation of new harm. What does this space look like?

S2 bell hooks has this saying that, "We have to move from an ethos of domination to an ethos of love." I work under the umbrella of "evolve" and the first four letters are love. It's quite simple. I truly believe our liberation will be through community. Thinking about systems of oppression, they have been built around these divides that limit the visibility of our mutual humanity. Before I talk about the evolving justice framework, I created this framework that I usually preface with "who is the best

rapper?" and let people talk smack for a bit. Then I bring in B.I.G. where the "B" stands for bias and bringing into the conversation this education system that we were all brought up under. Understanding that we all grew-up under this umbrella, we can understand that there would be bias against any alternative viewpoints from beyond that scope. To work around this bias, we have to bring about the inquire about our ("I") intentions. These are very intentional spaces. Is the intention to learn or have our beliefs reaffirmed, why are we here? Everyone now where we have such a divide needs to be very intentional. I always ask people what is their north star, their guiding principle. Once that intention is set, we can dig into setting ("G") ground-rules of a community. It's a question of what will make each person to feel grounded in this space. Where people feel listened to with the intent to hear instead of the intent to respond. Really creating basic community practices that allow everyone to show up and bring their expertise and experience to then co-create awareness and action.

"It may feel like we need to react but there is still such a need to build awareness. Even those who experience the effects, they have no idea what systems exist to create problems like mass-incarceration."

S1 I love that phrasing where you are creating an intent to listen as opposed to an intent to respond. Beautiful turn of phrase for a community centered movement and beautiful idea

as a practice. This conversation has been great, I think you've given those who are teaching and engaging in this community a lot to think about and strive for. I want to end with the closing question we ask on this podcast, what makes you hopeful today?

S2 I'm alive! I mean I'm really just going to jack everybody today, but there is this great bell hooks speech where she says, "I'm alive and because I'm alive I have to be hopeful." Hope isn't an academic discussion. The fact that I'm alive means I have hope. For me, it is really a recognition and honoring of just how many have really sacrificed just for us all to be here. That for me is incredibly humbling. To carry that torch of hope so to speak is very humbling. As dark as it may feel, it has been implicitly

darker. I have been blessed to go to Africa a few times, to go to Ghana and be at the door of no return. What that experience must have been, that trans-Atlantic

journey. The first winters on plantations. The brutality that took place there. To know that this is not just an African

experience. To know that all people of color have experienced great levels of brutality throughout the legacy and history of the quest for white supremacy. To see the level of consciousness being raised around these issues. Five years ago we wouldn't be having this conversation without people labeling us as communists or something. I feel incredibly blessed to be in this position to engage in these conversations and see them happening not only here but worldwide. This feels like Malcolm Gladwell's "The Tipping Point". We build these satellites that can help amplify the knowledge until everyone starts to connect. It is such a critical part of change. It may feel like we need to react but there is still such a need to build awareness. Even those who experience the effects, they have no idea what systems exist to create problems like mass-incarceration. Their dad may have been in jail for 20 years but they have no understanding of why. I look at the power of words and of narratives, these theories of liberation are always predicated on story-telling, people being able to share their stories and experiences. Today more than ever I see spaces where people are being give the ability to share their stories and that creates a tremendous amount of hope for me.

S1 I love that answer. Robin Kelley among others have written about how studying, learning, building that awareness is itself this radical act of protest. It starts with these satellites of grassroots, local communities that can hopefully build to a global movement to deconstruct racial supremacy.

S1 This has been such a wonderful conversation! I want to thank you so much for being on today and sharing what you know.

S2 No, thank you man, and thank you for bringing this out to people. Everyone that's listening, continue to search. This is a time where we all need to ask the "why" about our communities and the "why" about ourselves.

This interview was transcribed from the University of Oklahoma's
Carceral Studies Conversations Podcast. <https://architecture.ou.edu/csc/>



Telesis Isolation Vol. III 2020

Gibbs College of Architecture
The University of Oklahoma



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