

## CHAPTER 1

# Prison Architecture as a Field of Study: A Multidisciplinary Contribution

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*My cell is as large as a student's small room: I would say that roughly it measures three by four and a half meters and three and a half meters in height. The window looks out on the courtyard where we exercise: of course it is not a regular window; it is a so-called wolf's maw with bars on the inside; only a slice of sky is visible and it is impossible to look into the courtyard or to the side. The position of the cell is worse than that of the previous one whose exposure was south-south-west (the sun became visible around ten o'clock and at two it occupied the center of the cell with a band at least sixty centimeters wide); in the present cell, which I think has a south-west-west exposure, the sun shows up around two and remains in the cell until late, but with a band twenty-five centimeters wide. During this warmer season it will perhaps be better this way. Besides: my present cell is located over the prison's mechanical workshop and I hear the rumble of the machines; but I'll get used to it. The cell is at once very simple and very complex. I have a wall cot with two mattresses (one filled with wool); the sheets are changed approximately every fifteen days. I have a small table and a sort of cupboard-night stand, a mirror, a basin and pitcher made of enamelled iron. I own many aluminium objects bought at the Rinascente department store that has set up an outlet in the prison. I have a few books of my own; each week I receive eight books to read from the prison library (double subscription). (Antonio Gramsci, April 4<sup>th</sup> 1927, from the English translation 1994/2011: 91-92)*

These lines from “Lettere dal carcere” (1947) were written by the Italian politician and philosopher Antonio Gramsci. His letters give a detailed description of prison architecture as well as how prison life affects the body in the way he

sees his surroundings and hears sounds, and the way light finds its way into the cell and makes it possible for him to read. Gramsci, also a journalist, Communist and resistance fighter, was arrested in November 1926 by the Fascist regime in Italy. After a long time in custody he was in 1928 sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment. He died in April 1937, just a few days after being released, 46 years old. The biographical material he left through his letters is of considerable historical and penological value and reminds us, among other things, of the importance of prison architecture and how the human body habituates to material conditions. Small details, like different objects and things, which in ordinary life outside prison seem insignificant and taken for granted, become important inside the prison in order to construct a meaningful existence.

The way Gramsci describes his cell tells us that this room and the space connected to it, hold his whole existence – simple, but at the same time very complex: in the bed he sleeps, lies awake, dreams, worries and feels the structure of his bed. With the aluminium objects he eats, feels his appetite and is reminded of food and meals outside prison, and with the help of the basin and pitcher he washes himself and tries to uphold some measure of hygiene and an acceptable appearance. In the mirror he can see an image of himself – of who he has become. In reading the books he – according to himself – works, but at the same time he is reminded of the 'real work' right beneath him as the prison design has placed the workshops there. Right outside the cell is the courtyard where he can be outside, but through the narrow window he only gets a glimpse of the sky. The rest of the prison landscape and its surroundings are hidden from him. Everything he needs is in one sense provided, for example shelter, food, various utensils and health service (the last, though, was badly met in Gramsci's case). On the other hand everything is taken away from him. Gramsci's description is therefore extraordinary in describing what Goffman (1961) refers to as total institutions. Often, like in a prison, life in a total institution is regulated by a totalitarian regime. Laws, rules and regulations tell what a body can and cannot do, and strict schedules regulate where a body should be in each hour of the day, which Moran (2012, 2015) refers to as carceral TimeSpace. In prisoners' stories of what it is like to be in prison, as in the text of John and in the chapters written by James, Fransson and Brottveit, the pain – expressed in the anger, frustration, bitterness, helplessness, hopelessness and sadness the prisoners feel – is often linked to an intricate interplay between the total institution, the totalitarian regime and the relationship between the material and the social.

Our point of departure in this book project is to explore prison architecture in terms of how materiality, place and space intertwine with people's experiences of a prison – how it is experienced, how it is assumed to be experienced, and how it should be experienced – and how materiality, place and space appear in different contexts. Prison, architecture and humans are, in this anthology, understood as related concepts. We draw upon a complex and reflexive cultural concept, understanding prison architecture as both discursive, relational and historical.

## On Architecture, Humans and Prisons

The earliest definition of architecture and its obligations is from ancient history. Vitruvius wrote in the first century BCE Ten Books of Architecture: *De architectura*<sup>1</sup>, and included both town planning and the planning of fortresses. Vitruvius believed that architecture must unite:

*Durability (firmitas) - Structures must be stable, durable and resistant to stress*

*Utility (utilitas) - Structures must be useful and appropriate*

*Beauty (venustas) - Structures must be beautiful and for the enjoyment of humans.*

In the narrow understanding of the concept of architecture, it involves art or science to plan the design of a man-made environment - the meeting between man-made space and nature, and the interaction between man and his surroundings. The architecture icon, Arne Gunnarsjaa reproduces several earlier definitions, in order to attempt to make a summary definition:

*Architecture is the art of solving a building assignment by first analyzing and formulating the problems of the task based on the different and often contradictory needs and requirements that are promoted, and analyzing the site's particular site character, and then answering the task by providing the visual form and the whole, in conjunction with the nature of the place, while resolving technical, constructive, functional, social, symbolic and economic requirements; so as to create a synthesis - an architectural whole - place and construction, and facilitate the lives of humans and work in this so that life can take place; all realized in a particular technical / constructive design and with a certain visual form expression; a characteristic formal organization: a particular style.*  
 (wikipedia.no)

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<sup>1</sup> Vitruvius "De Architettura" in Arts and Humanities Through the Eras ID: ISBN: 978-0-7876-9384-8

The Swedish historian of architecture Elias Cornell (1966) defines architecture as the “esthetical organization of practical reality”. It refers to the composition and design of buildings, walls and fences that physically constitute a prison. According to time and shifting perspectives, different philosophical positions have emerged. One is postmodernism, a movement in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in art, literature, architecture, and literary criticism. Postmodernism asserted that the world is in a state of persistent imperfection and constantly insoluble. Postmodernism promoted the perception of radical pluralism; that there are many ways of knowledge, and many truths in a fact. From a postmodernist perspective, knowledge is articulated from different perspectives, with all its uncertainties, complexities and paradoxes. Postmodernism was also a movement within architecture that rejected modernism and the avant-garde, and was understood as a project, according to James Morley, that rejected tradition in favor of going “where no one has gone before” or: creating forms having no other purpose than that they are new. Postmodernism includes skeptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy, history, economics, architecture, fiction, and literary criticism. It is often associated with deconstruction and poststructuralism, and as its use as a term gained considerable popularity at the same time as the post-structural ideas of the 20th century (Frichot and Loo, 2013).

Someone who has had a far-reaching and significant impact on both the practice and thinking of architecture since the 1980s, is the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In the book “What Is Philosophy?” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994:2) elegantly connect architecture and philosophy writing:

*There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature.*

The philosopher's answer to “What is philosophy?” is always already architectural when they say it is “the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:2-3).

The work of Deleuze has contributed to critical approaches regarding ecological, political and social problems that architecture has to deal with, and to the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. He manages to think otherwise and at the same time reinforces architecture's relevance to philosophy. The discussion about the link between philosophy and architecture may relate to

the assumption that architecture has to do with built projects. It is however valuable to understand architecture as “thinking-doing” because when architecture is practiced and a prison is constructed, immanent in all this activity the productive role of critical and creative thinking continues:

*What the philosophy of Deleuze and also Guattari provides are the critical and creative skills by which we can further expand the field of architecture, question authorship and creativity, reconsider architectural ethics and politics, and rethink what architecture can do and what it can become. It follows that an architect, with her required spatial, temporal, corporal and affectual abilities, participates in ‘forming, inventing and fabricating concepts’ thus becoming-philosopher.* (Fricot and Loo, 2013:4)

One example of how Deleuze has inspired others creatively is, among others, in an essay from 1996 where Elizabeth Diller introduces the “crease metaphor” (Diller, 1996:92). She described the laundry work of prisoners in correctional facilities and observed that they developed a coded communication language formed by ironing crease patterns into prison uniforms:

*Like the prison tattoo, another form of inscription on soft, pliable surfaces, the crease is a mark of resistance by the marginalized (ibid:86). Unlike the tattoo, the crease acts directly on the institutional skin of the prison uniform, and unlike the tattoo, its language is illegible to the uninitiated.* (Diller, 1996: 93)

The crease<sup>2</sup> possesses a resistance to transformation, having a long memory and is hard to remove. Its resistance persists until a new order is inscribed (Burns, 2013:32-33). Several of the chapters in this book are inspired by the reading of Deleuze. Also Doreen Massey points out that a place, such as a prison, is not just physical buildings but overlapping social activities and social relationships that are in a process of change. A place, like in this book – a prison, does not have one unambiguous identity without friction. This is because a place evolves through many social relations and meetings (Massey, 1991).

According to the Norwegian philosopher Dag Østerberg (1998) architecture has to do with relationships between the material and the social, in the way that it conditions social relationships, as well as how people react and

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<sup>2</sup> Diller’s essay points to a discussion regarding the “fold” metaphor as a discourse for poststructuralist architecture. For readers interested in this debate regarding architectural acts and pattern-making and various positions regarding Deleuzian positionings we refer to Burns (2013).

leave their footprints in the materiality. This understanding of prison architecture draws attention to how architecture is lived, how it speaks to people and affects bodies, and how architecture, prison artefacts and people melt together and create forces that produce energies and atmospheres in the prison (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Architecture is never neutral. It is at all times, and places involved in exerting power. In general, architecture can be understood to be the result of a multiplicity of desires - for shelter, security, privacy, control and for status, identity, reputation (Dovey, 2013:133-134) – and, a place for torment where punishment takes place (Christie, 1982).

Looking at prison architecture in this way, as open and dynamic, we are able to notice people who want or do not want to belong, follow or develop interests, identify or do not identify with a place. In this book, we not only focus on prison architecture as buildings, and other physical installations, but also as social constructions and mental images. A prison is understood as a place in a process of becoming through people's experiences, because of the circulation of stories and representations that together construct a picture of what place a particular prison is (Røe, 2010). 'People', or humans in this context, not only refers to those who live shorter or longer periods of their life in prison, but also to the staff, the architects and the planners and constructors. All the categories of users need to be involved in the design process. How we build and organize our prisons expresses how we understand human beings and their needs, and how a society cares about its prisoners. As Terranova points out in his contribution (chapter 14); architects are humans building for other humans, bridging the concepts of prison, architecture and humans.

## On Italy and Norway

Prison research in Norway has traditionally been more oriented towards other Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries than continental countries like Italy, France and Germany. It is often easier to look to and generalize from countries that we presume are more like Norway. A collage of Italian and Norwegian texts on prison architecture and humans is interesting for several reasons. They are both countries who lock up people for shorter or longer periods of time, but in different quanta and in different kinds of prisons and units. It is possible that the differences in, for example, welfare systems and catholic versus protestant cultures are reflected in perspectives on punishment,

re-integration and reconciliation. Important theoretical influences from Cesare Beccaria, Antonio Gramsci and Georgio Agamben have had and still have today a major impact on the scientific community, offering interesting perspectives that could also stimulate the Norwegian discussion on prison architecture. On the other hand, Norwegian pioneers within criminology, like Nils Christie and Thomas Mathiesen, may offer interesting approaches within the Italian scientific community.

Writing a book on prison, architecture and humans from an Italian and a Norwegian perspective, includes a kind of comparison even if this is not a comparative study. Some distinctions do occur in the texts, but our intention is not to pursue these further here. However, we hope that distinctions could lead to reflection and to new research questions and perspectives regarding prison architecture and humans. It is important to mention that similarities and differences are not phenomes lying there as objective phenomena ready to grasp. They are developed through a process of comparison (Krogstad 2000). How we feel about and understand what we see, hear and read are vital to reflect upon, and are maybe the most interesting aspect of a book like this.

The book draws together a collage of independent multidisciplinary contributions discussing places and spaces where punishment takes place. It is important to emphasize that the contributors themselves have chosen the topics and studies they present. The chapters stand alone and do not represent conditions in Norway or Italy. The texts are written by researchers and architects who work within different disciplinary traditions, practice fields and within various methodological traditions. In different ways the authors are occupied and inspired by theories and approaches within their own and other disciplines, by epistemological and methodological issues, as well as recent developments in their own countries. According to Nelken (2010:13), "What is found interesting or puzzling will vary depending on local salience". This applies to both the authors and the readers. For example, Italy has recently passed a quite new criminal act, which is referred to and discussed by several of the Italian authors in this book, such as Giofrè, Terranova and Giani. Most likely, an Italian reader would be interested in this issue. Likewise, the building of new prisons in Norway has engaged several Norwegian researchers in order to do research on architecture, materiality and space, like Johnsen, Rokkan, Fransson, Fridhov and Grøning.

## The purpose of the book

Socio-materiality has in later years had renewed interest and significance inspired by concepts such as the spatial and materialistic turn and other concepts that we as researchers ponder (see Hammerlin in chapter 12 and Catucci in chapter 16). These concepts and perspectives are often complicated and need a translation to be discussed in a broader sense, but they also need time to be developed together with architects, as for example Fagnoni in chapter 7. In this book researchers and architects study the socio-material conditions in prisons related to time, space, topography and interior. Our hope is that the book can offer an original approach to prison as a study field, and to existing penological writings focusing on prison design, prison furniture, space and place, the body and the prison environment. We hope that new questions and alternative ways of understanding the impact of architecture will arise and open up new ways of doing prison research, also examining the relationship between prisons and their surroundings, as in Trusiani and D'Onofrio in chapter 5.

The book is an invitation to move into different prison landscapes and let pictures, theory, ideas and affects directly and indirectly enable reflection on connections and disruptions, lines and dilemmas related to prison architecture and humans. We ask: What impact and meaning do various types of prisons have for prisoners' lives? How is it to be young and imprisoned? How do women talk about their cells? How can prison architecture be studied? What can prison architecture breathe into the process of becoming within prisons, and does it contribute to becoming somebody else than a prisoner? What is the relationship between prison architecture and the imprisoned body? How are concepts like humanism, dignity and solidarity translated into prison architecture? Could we think otherwise regarding the prison landscape in between the prison buildings? What is the outside and the inside of a prison? What is the connection between prison architecture, ideology and aims of punishment and scientific knowledge? These questions are all brought up through the various chapters in this volume.

The book is organized in three parts: 1) architecture and the prison landscape; 2) perspectives on humans, prison space and the imprisoned body; and 3) prison ideology and aims of punishment. A brief introduction of each part will be placed in the beginning of the various sections of the book. Before the

introduction of the first part, and with a link to Gramsci, we are pleased to present John K.'s reflections on prison architecture and how it affects the body.

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