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ARCHITECTURAL FREEDOM BEYOND PLANNING

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ABSTRACT:

Architecture can be crude in a way, where each choice leads to the reduction of possibility. As planning can enforce limitations on freedom by imposing a specific scheme and establishing a system of order onto a given site. It is possible to imagine a mirror image of this typology of architecture, a force as intense and brutal but used instead in the service of positive intentions.

The wall as an architectural element represents the principle of decision, inference, and the notion of order onto a place. These decisions are architecture's true nature; its performative powers result into the aesthetic effects and experience of architecture. It need not necessarily involve such intentions as confinement and separation, but can rather facilitate new activities beyond planning.

This paper aims to study: the inevitable relationship between architecture and violence, a fundamental performance of exclusion and inclusion by literature reviews; with the help of case studies rethink the idea of the wall as a means of restraint, division, and exclusion; and to investigate new ways in which these elements could become a tool for initiating change, for providing freedoms, and for allowing the emergence of unpredictable events. The study also aims to discover what instrumental collaboration can be derived between architecture and freedom; and explore the wall as a medium of freedom beyond architectural programme.

Keywords: Architecture, violence, planning, wall.

INTRODUCTION

• The Architectural Paradox

Bernard Tschumi believes that people connected with Architecture feel a sense of dismay because the split between utopian dream and social reality has been deep rooted. Attempts to reformulate the concept of Architecture have long existed to bypass this split. However, in this process, a new split appears, regarding the essential element of Architecture: space. The author describes the split as, “an unavoidable paradox: the impossibility of questioning the nature of space and at the same time experiencing a spatial praxis.”

He tries to establish a relationship between the contradictory nature of space and praxis, and claims that to define space means both “to make space distinct” and “to state the precise nature of space.” With time, space became absolute and started to dominate the senses and bodies by containing them. Kant, described space as neither matter nor the set of objective relations between things but as an ideal internal structure, an instrument of knowledge. With the increasing gap between abstract spaces and society, questions on space started to widen. The author asserts that to determine space means “to determine boundaries.”

Violence of Architecture

1. “There is no architecture without action, no architecture without events, and no architecture without program.”
2. “By extension, there is no architecture without violence.”

Here Bernard Tschumi uses violence as a metaphor for the intensity of a relationship between individuals and their surrounding spaces.

“Architecture’s violence is fundamental, and unavoidable.” This implies that action and space are inseparable and both qualify each other.

Individuals intrude and inflict violence on spaces by their mere presence. The human body has always set limits to the most extreme architectural ambitions. “The body disturbs the architectural order. And is theorized as an equivalent to a dangerous prohibition. But if bodies violate architectural space, there is also a symbolic or physical violence of building on its users. Discomforting spatial can take any form.

Steep and dangerous staircases, corridors consciously made too narrow for crowds, introduce a radical shift from architecture as an object of contemplation to architecture as a perverse instrument of use.

The love of violence is also an ancient pleasure, architectural theory has refused to acknowledge such pleasures. The presumption that architecture should be pleasing to the eye, and comfortable to the body paint a moral picture instead of a true or an ideal one.

“The architect will always dream of purifying this uncontrolled violence, channeling obedient bodies along predictable paths and occasionally ramps that provide striking vistas, ritualizing the transgression of bodies in space.” A near frozen relationship between action and space, a new order after the disorder of the original event. Control must be absolute. Such control is not likely to be achieved. The relationship is subtle and unavoidable, interdependent in a way where it becomes impossible to determine which one initiates and which one responds. When the relationship is independent, a strategy of indifference is observed, where “architectural conditions do not depend on utilitarian ones, in which space has one logic and events another.”

“The architect’s view of the user’s needs determines every architectural decision.” “Spaces are qualified by actions just as actions are qualified by spaces.” The underlying violence in architecture changes with the rational and irrational forces at play.

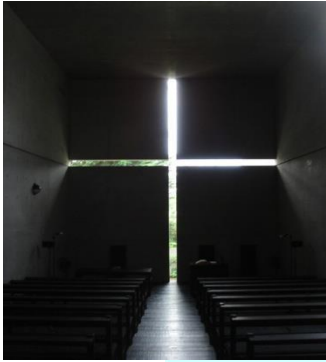
“A building is a point of reference for the activities set to negate it. A theory of architecture is a theory of order threatened by the very use it permits. And vice versa.” The violence of architecture also contains the possibility of change. It should be understood, its contradictions maintained, with their conflicts complementary.

- **Church of the Light/ Ar. Tadao Ando –**

For Ando, the Church of Light is an architecture of duality – the dual nature of existence – solid/void, light/dark, stark/serene. The coexisting differences leave the church void of any, and all, ornament creating a pure, unadorned space. The intersection of light and solid raises the occupants' awareness of the spiritual and secular within themselves.

“In all my works, light is an important controlling factor. I create enclosed spaces mainly by means of thick concrete walls. The primary reason is to create a place for the individual, a zone for oneself within society. When the external factors of a city's environment require the wall to be without openings, the interior must be especially full and satisfying.”

–Tadao Ando



- **Le Grand Louvre / Ar. I.M. Pei –**

Pei's design of the Louvre addition implemented a large glass and steel pyramid that is surrounded by three smaller triangles that provide light to the space below Cour Napoleon. For Pei, the glass pyramid provided a symbolic entry that had historical and figural importance that reinforced the main entry.



“Formally, it is the most compatible glass wall with the architecture of the Louvre..., it is also one of the most structurally stable of forms, which assures its transparency, as it is constructed of glass and steel, it signifies a break with the architectural traditions of the past. It is a work of our time.” I.M. Pei



- **Village of New Gournia in 1948/ Ar. Hassan Fathy –**

Designing a new settlement would require an ability to conform the new to the existing conditions, only possible with local materials – furthermore, Egyptian farmers had always used clay to build their homes. Fathy considered mud brick to be the

most appropriate material, for what it symbolically expressed and its resonance with the context. According to Fathy, the use of mud leads to a result which is 'bound to be natural ... most basically of all, in terms of its texture and colour. It's the same mud, the same colour, as the environment – that's one aspect of good faith'.



1. The Wall as a Medium of Division, Exclusion and Difference.

Exodus: or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture

The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture, Koolhaas turns the scheme for a prison into a voluntary, desired habitat by a radical mirror inversion of significance and attraction. He proclaims that "division, isolation, inequality, aggression, destruction, all the negative aspects of the Wall, could be the ingredients of a new phenomenon: architectural warfare against undesirable conditions, in this case London." [1] The form of the prison, implying the notion of institutional order, control, and constraint of individual liberty, is presented as a desirable retreat from the anxiety of an isolated and therefore pointless individual existence. His architectural proposal seeks to make a case against objectionable aspects by presenting the confined space as a series of new extraordinary experiences. The Exodus project is defined by the hermetically enclosing Walls and the intermediate Strip, cutting through the center of London from east to west.

The tip of the Strip continuously expands into the existing urban fabric of London, even though a few of the old buildings are preserved and incorporated into the new territory. Most of the structures from the past will be destroyed and replaced by the constantly modified models of public monuments and symbols. Thus, the scheme for the monumental linear form of the Strip creates the maximum possible contrast between the new area within the Walls and the context of the city. The violation of the urban fabric through architecture produces the effect of a cynical and blunted rendition of power so that the city of London is treated as an insignificant series of private spheres, whereas the new world is projected as a meaningful environment of public spaces. The Walls of Exodus divide the city into a good half and a bad half, into the disparate spaces inside and outside the enclosure. Inside the Wall, the territory of the strip.



The Strip, 1972

(Source: Koolhaas and Mau, S, M, L, XL)

A notorious symbol of Cold War politics, in particular of the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall was part of a physical arrangement that stood between Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc. For most people it is a shock to realize that “it is not East Berlin that is imprisoned, but the West, the ‘open society.’ In my imagination, stupidly, the wall was a simple, majestic north-south divide; a clean, philosophical demarcation; a neat, modern Wailing Wall. I now realize that it *encircles* the city, paradoxically making it ‘free.’” [2] Running a length of 165 kilometers, the Berlin Wall appears in various permutations, depending on whether it is a historically significant part, a more central location, or some other, more distant urban site. According to Koolhaas, the wall has become the basis of a script, because “it was impossible to imagine another recent artifact with the same signifying potency. And there was more: in spite of its apparent absence of program, the wall – in its relatively short life – had provoked and sustained an incredible number of events, behaviors, and effects.” [3] Though Koolhaas describes the wall as “heartbreakingly beautiful,” he is also aware of the immanent cruelty of the demarcation. Its physical appearance expresses an insurmountable obstacle. Its only function is to divide a city into two areas and, thereby, make one of the parts inaccessible and consequently even more appealing. The Berlin Wall deploys the vocabulary of the prison, from which even the attempt to escape can end tragically. Looking at the Berlin wall as architecture, Koolhaas claims that it is inevitable to “transpose the despair, hatred, frustration it inspired to the field of architecture.” [4] For him, the wall was a “graphic demonstration of the power of architecture.” Koolhaas draws a few general conclusions from this case study: “The wall suggested that architecture’s beauty was directly proportional to its horror.” In other words, the aesthetic effects of architecture result from its performative powers. Moreover, *“the wall ... made a total mockery of any of the emerging attempts to link form*

to meaning [...] ... I would never again believe in form as the primary vessel of meaning.” [5] “As an object the wall was unimpressive, evolving toward a near dematerialization; but that left its power undiminished. The wall was not an object but an erasure. ...It was a warning that – in architecture – absence would always win in a contest with presence.” At this point, Koolhaas acknowledges, “it was as if I had come eye to eye with architecture’s true nature.” [6] Though its physical presence is marginal, “in its ‘primitive’ stage the wall is *decision*, applied with absolute architectural minimalism.” [7]



The Berlin Wall as architecture
(Source: Koolhaas and Mau, S, M, L, XL)

• Demarking the World and Enabling Difference

An enclosure or boundary establishing difference need not necessarily be conceived as an effective obstacle but can also function as a kind of sieve. In the Deleuzian sense, it functions as an environmental modulation with only marginal physical traces. According to Mary Douglas, the pursuit of purity is directly related to the fears held by a society that can displace its self-loathing onto an outside territory or a particular social group regarded as impure. [8] The community seeks to shut out all that appears strange, unassimilable, or undefined. For example, the approximately 1500-mile-long Great Wall of China, which was built starting about 221 BC, served more as a strategic tool to ensure unity of the empire and exclude an alien culture than as an efficient physical barrier. Yet, it was a means for shutting out distracting and illicit elements that existed in the rest of the world and that could threaten the concurrence of the community. In Franz Kafka’s “The Great Wall of China” the progression of the entire work is described as a piecemeal structure: “After the junction had been made the construction of the wall was not carried on from the point. Naturally in this way many great gaps were left, which were only filled in gradually and bit by bit. ... In fact it is said that there are gaps which have never been filled in at all, an assertion, however which cannot be verified, at least by any single man with his own eyes and judgment, on account of the extent of the structure.” [9]

In Kafka’s view, the creation of fragments committed to finding unity and closure does not simply fail. Rather, in the process of building, the very existence of such unity and wholeness is *a priori* uncertain. Despite the wall’s ever-deferred state of completion, the presumed existence of the emperor ensures unity, which becomes most important during a process devoid of an overview. [10] The Great Wall was built during the reign of Shih Hwang Ti, the same emperor who decreed the burning of all books—save those of the useful sciences, such as necromancy, medicine, and agriculture. In addition, all men who were in possession of books were forced to labor on the Great Wall’s construction. Although the wall could not be regarded as an effective barrier nor a military success, it is in line with the principle of information exclusion, as indeed is the burning of books. This way, it serves as a means of self-restriction that makes the segregated territory compatible with the prevailing ideology.

[11]

The wall not only functions as a division that supports the dominant ideology through the expulsion of foreign influences. It can also be a means by which a majority seeks to control the territory of an apparently threatening minority. A case in point is the situation of the resident foreigners in medieval Venice. For the right to do business in the archipelago city, immigrants (such as Germans, Dalmatians, Greeks, and Jews) lived as segregated members of society. They were obliged to reside in special buildings, to which they had to return at nightfall.

For example, to ensure that the Germans could not smuggle in goods after dark and avoid paying customs, the Venetian government locked the gates of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi at dusk from outside, and guards patrolled the area around it. For economic reasons, the building became a space of permanent surveillance. By contrast, the Jewish quarter, the Ghetto Nuovo, was founded on a single island situated far from the center

of the city. Connected to its surroundings with only two bridges, its building structure functioned like one wall towards the outside that created an open area in the center. [11] As the Jewish community grew over the years, the ghetto was threatened by severe overcrowding. When diseases struck the lagoon, the government often connected them to the conditions and the population density of the ghetto. Yet, although the walling-in was a compulsory measure that was ordered by the dominant majority, the seclusion also provided a secure retreat from visibility. As a consequence of the spatial isolation in the ghetto, the members of the community gained bodily security and a protected place, which offered the opportunity to build synagogues and practice religion openly. Like Exodus and the territory enclosed by the Berlin Wall, the Ghetto Nuovo presents a place of escape within architectural confines, which, in some way, also provides unexpected options for inmates. Yet, in the Exodus project, the enclosing walls and their surveillance culture are established as the main principle of freedom and collectivity for the new “meaningful environment,” whereas in the Ghetto Nuovo, by means of the wall, the residents could gain an unprecedented form of social life, forestalling or, at least, reducing external control and observation.

Whereas the walls of the Ghetto Nuovo are a means to provide a safe, segregated place amidst a prevailing culture of visibility, the Great Wall of China functions as an agent of establishing and maintaining the dominant ideology. Referring to Borges’s interpretation of the Great Wall, the infinite Strip of Exodus, likewise, serves as strategic device, both to eliminate the insignificant past and to create an ideal unity during the building process. In addition, its confinement and self-restriction provide a social sieve against the “impure” territory outside the walled area. By delimiting the environment and excluding the chaotic “bad half of the city,” Exodus affirms its identity and meaning within the “good half of the city.” presents the important, valuable part, whereas the zone outside the Strip is an underdeveloped and futile area of urban chaos.



India-Pakistan border, 1947
(Source: <https://www.vox.com/2019/3/22/18277409/british-failed-india->

Sacred Nature of City Walls

Physical structures, ranging from simple signs to insurmountable barriers and hermetical enclosures, prevent any interference between two places. They manifest the difference between the two spaces. According to Mircea Eliade, “the enclosure, wall, or circle of stones surrounding a sacred place – these are among the most ancient of known forms of man-made sanctuary [and serve] the purpose of preserving profane man from the danger to which he would expose himself by entering it without due care.” (Eliade, 1949, p.370). This principle of separation and change is emphasized, for instance, through the ritual importance of the threshold of houses, temples, and cities.

The notion of inside and outside space is not only essential to a single building but also to the idea of a city. The founding rites of ancient towns served to ensure that city walls were regarded as a sacred and invulnerable segregation for a new settlement: "Long before they were military erections, they were a magic defence, for they marked out from the midst of a 'chaotic' space, peopled with demons and phantoms, an enclosure, a place that was organized, made cosmic, in other words, provided with a 'centre.'" The founding rituals hence make a connection to the transcendental order that does not change over time.

The border sets up the difference between inside and outside, yet it also creates an opposition that requires justification. The quality of sacredness is then a particular condition of the precinct within. It is dangerous to approach the threshold of the sacred space unprepared or unaware of its ritual importance, whereas following the rites of entering ensures that the person will share certain qualities with the sacred. Moreover, by being admitted into the sanctuary, the ordinary or useless thing becomes meaningful and sacred.

The sacred nature of city walls is guaranteed by a complex procedure of divination, whereas its violation means sacrilege. In *The Life of Romulus*, the most well-known narrative on the foundation of Rome, Plutarch emphasizes the sacred and inviolate character of the city walls by describing the cutting of the initial furrow, the *sulcus primigenius* (Plutarch, 1991). He states that the founding of Rome is tainted by fratricide: "As Romulus was casting up a ditch, where he designed the foundation of the city wall, [Remus] turned some pieces of work into ridicule, and obstructed others, at last, as he was in contempt leaping over it, some say Romulus himself struck him, others one of his companions. He fell, however." (ibid.). Given that the Romans considered all ploughed land that is part of the city walls as a sacred place, Plutarch's account suggests that Remus committed sacrilege and was killed in return.

In antiquity the very idea of *urbs*, which means city, is associated with ploughing, as the word is etymologically connected to *urvum*, which is the curve of a ploughshare [69]. In addition, it relates to *orbis*, which is a curved object: a globe and the world. Yet, thinking of the city primarily as a tissue of buildings, streets, and public squares stands in opposition to the idea of the city as primarily a community of citizens, as expressed in Nicias's poignant words to the Athenian soldiers after the defeat at Syracuse: "You are yourselves the town, wherever you choose to settle . . . it is men that make the city, not the walls and ships without them."

Sacredness was an attribute of the city walls, but not of their gates. According to Plutarch, "Where they designed to make a gate, there they took out the share, carried the plough over, and left a space; for which reason they consider the whole wall as holy, except where the gates are". The ritual of raising the plough and carrying it over the place of the gates should have ensured that the plough ridge itself was not crossed. The idea of this ritual is conveyed in the Latin word *porta* for the gates, meaning 'carry' (*portare*). Referring to the sacred character of city walls, Kari Jormakka notes that during the celebration of a Roman triumph, Rome is symbolically conquered, and "the city symbolically drops its defense before the hero, then rebuilds the enclosure to safely capture the good fortune within its walls." (Jormakka, 1995, p.89). The spoils that were captured from the defeated country then transmit their powers to the triumphant city. The route of the triumph, framed by the important monuments of Rome, projected a symbolic order onto the urban fabric. Following the same principles, in the sixteenth century, Pope Sixtus V and Domenico Fontana inserted new streets into the old structure by connecting the main churches into a sacred route. The new streets enabled not only the circulation of the pilgrims along the path but also functioned as attractions and commercial elements. These interventions can also be interpreted as a means to recreate the sacredness of the city: Rome was turned from a city with sacred monuments into a sacred city as a whole.

2. The Wall as a Medium of Freedom Beyond Planning

Kowloon Walled City at the boundaries of Hong Kong provides an example that outstrips Koolhaas's idea of Exodus. Here the wall as means of separation and a spatial difference becomes a tool that allows a liberty zone beyond planning. Both schemes, Kowloon City and Exodus draw on a dialectic view of the existing city; both enclaves introduce an artificial and scale less design within a deficient exterior. However, Kowloon's dense and chaotic spatial structure is quite the opposite of the giant squares of Exodus but nonetheless outperforms Koolhaas's plan. Whereas the autonomous shantytown of the Walled City provides refuge and asylum for various people outside society, the inmates of Exodus voluntarily leave society and enter a totalitarian system of preprogrammed activity and surveillance.

The Walled City was a political no man's land free of government interference and its inhabitants can be regarded as the true "voluntary prisoners of architecture." (Girard & Lamnot, 1993; Miyamoto, 1997). Throughout the ninety-nine-year lease of British rule in Hong Kong, the Walled City, which was initially a walled fortress built in the mid-nineteenth century, remained an area of *anomaly* inside the British domain and yet outside the colonial authority. Because the disagreements between the Chinese and British governments over the status of Kowloon Walled City were never settled

and as the situation threatened to spiral out of control whenever authorities tried to impose their will, the territory became a kind of political vacuum free from political control. So Kowloon's continually growing community developed its autonomy within the confines of the old city's walls.

And although the wall was torn down during the Second World War, the site became the perfect place for refugees, because there the illegal immigrants were free of legal regulations and prosecution. Using architecture as a means of migration and

freedom, the Walled City proved highly adaptive to future change. The population of Kowloon continued to expand, from a few thousand inhabitants in the fifties to 40,000 people in the early eighties. The low-level houses gave way to high-rises until the entire area was covered with a single dense structure of fourteen stories covering 2.7 hectares. (The site itself measured little more than 100 x 200 m).

Its constant dampness came from overhead pipes carrying water, which, along with artificial lightening also contributed to its greenish atmosphere. As there were no automobiles in Kowloon, the only circulation space was a warren of passages that one could traverse without once setting foot on the ground. The roofs cape was the only escape from the density below. Without legal regulations regarding property rights, labour, or the environment, the Walled City quickly became a hotbed of untaxed and unrestricted economic activities of any kind. Many illegal businesses flourished under conditions of exploitation so that Kowloon became synonymous with all that was dark and threatening in society. Of course, the illegal activities could flourish inside the Walled City only because of the demand from outside. Eventually, after its final demolition in 1993, the site became a public park and the former residents were moved to public housing areas. Yet, behind the negative image of decay and social marginalization, Kowloon was closest to an autonomous, self-organizing city. Despite its chaotic structure, it also provided utopian conditions for its inmates.



Kowloon Walled City, Hong Kong, 1980
(Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/493900/the-architecture-of-kowloon-walled-city-an-excerpt-from-city-of-darkness-revisited>)

CONCLUSION

The wall as a minimalist architectural means represents the principle of decision, inference and the supposition of order onto a place. However, when Koolhaas proposes that each architectural choice inevitably leads to the reduction of possibility and liberty, it need not necessarily involve such intentions as confinement and exclusion, but can rather engender new activities beyond planning. The Berlin Wall, the Venice Ghetto, or the Kowloon Walled City make clear that, by encircling a certain area, a wall allows for specific conditions and liberty zones beyond legal order. Even though such disciplinary schemes involve, for the most part, fictitious means of power and control. When stripped of its ideological framework, space proves flexible to different and new functions beyond a deterministic correlation between form and content. Adopting the idea of the *social condenser*, Koolhaas speaks of an architectural nuclear reaction initiated by extraordinary building size and maximum program difference. By creating conceptual voids, these spaces are experiments of freedoms, even if they create temporary, unintended, accidental, involuntary, unplanned, and unforeseeable events. In this understanding of architecture as a means of creating freedoms, space is not something static and unchangeable but a creative process of unfolding and evolving, a constant creation of new worlds.

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