

Architecture, Operations and Change

Whether as a result of a new social awareness, social change, technological advances or economic realities, prisons, as a distinct building type, will decline in importance and potentially cease to exist in the near future. In many ways this ultimate development in the relatively short history of incarceration will bring prison architecture full circle.

Correctional architecture and operations have assumed a variety of roles and relationships since the inception of incarceration. Throughout this history, architecture has introduced, facilitated and at times forced operational change. However, an appropriate and timely operational response is critical if actual correctional change is to be successfully adopted and maintained. While architecture can play a lead role in introducing and facilitating change, it cannot achieve or maintain it. This is the role of operations.

This article examines the changing role and relationship of correctional architecture to operational change. It traces this evolving role from the point of development of the prison as a distinct building type, through the introduction of reformatory programs, to initial moves toward softening of the correctional environment. Finally, the article discusses the current transitional phase, which sees architecture assuming a more prominent role in guiding operational responses. The Development of the Closed Institution Until the latter part of the eighteenth century, imprisonment was not a recognized criminal sanction. As such, within criminal justice, the role of built structures was limited to providing temporary detention and containment. Offenders were held temporarily, until the punishment prescribed by the courts was fulfilled. This singular function of providing indiscriminate, collective containment could be easily met by any secure structure, making it unnecessary to develop a distinct building form. Conversely, the "operations" of the day the spectacle of corporal punishment - was of utmost importance.

Around 1780, penal practices were revolutionized. Recognizing that corporal punishment was becoming as heinous as the crime itself, the state distanced itself from this sanction by introducing incarceration. The act of retribution was thereby redirected from state to institution and from body to soul. A complex system of incarceration was developed to respond to these revised intentions, with the penal institution emerging as the means by which this new system could be applied.

Institutionalization was simultaneously occurring in the areas of mental and physical illnesses (hospitals), education (schools) and the structuring of the workplace (the factory). The driving force behind this widespread institutionalization was a need for the production of useful and compliant individuals, an economic necessity for the new industrialized age.

The specific objectives of the penal institution moved beyond the singular purpose of containment to ensuring security, preventing moral contamination and providing a healthy environment. All three objectives could be satisfied, almost exclusively, by the physical structure: security through the provision of clear sight lines for continuous surveillance, the prevention of contamination and transference of criminal tendencies through physical separation, and the protection of health through the incorporation of newly developed mechanical systems such as plumbing and ventilation.

Consistent with these objectives, the basic institutional model comprised individual cells arranged in such a way as to allow continual supervision of all areas. The panopticon prison, a circular arrangement of cells around a central observation tower, first proposed by Jeremy Bentham in 1787, represented the idealized institutional form. Radial or rectangular cell blocks and the more recent telephone pole plan are all variations on the same theme. When correctional programs were expanded to include work, this design concept was adapted to the institutional workshop. Pentonville Prison, constructed in 1840, carried the concepts of supervision and separation to its limit with the inclusion of a chapel in which each inmate was physically isolated in a separate stall.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the prison as an institutional building type had been perfected. However, the desired results had not yet been fully achieved. It was recognized that secure, individualized confinement, while beneficial to the good order of the institution, did little to improve the individual. Therefore, additional intervention was required. As a result, the notion of the prison as a place of reformation, be it through introspection, religion, work or education, was gradually introduced. The prison as a recognized building type remained stable and relevant to the original cause over the next hundred years. Progress toward the objectives of reform was addressed primarily through operational change. Correctional architecture contributed little to these developments beyond the construction of additional buildings for programming activities. The development of the institution had reached the point where the emphasis was on the operations rather than on the facility. Normalization of the Institutional Environment The move toward diluting and potentially eliminating prisons as a distinct building form began in the 1960s, with the shift toward less institutionalized environments. Similar objectives were being pursued, to varying degrees, for such other institutions as schools, hospitals, the workplace and group housing. While each of these building types had unique operational reasons for change, the common impetus was recognition of the shortcomings of institutional settings.

By their very nature, institutions in general, and correctional institutions in particular, were ill equipped to prepare individuals successfully for life in the community. Inherent in the objectives of isolation and conformity to institutional norms was the loss of personal identity and dignity, the elimination of personal responsibility in the name of institutional efficiency, the inability to address individual needs and the establishment of an "us/them" dichotomy composed of those "in charge" and those "under charge." Staff, as well as inmates, were victims of this institutionalization.

As these shortcomings related to the institutional setting itself, a fundamental shift in the nature of that environment was required. Initial attempts to create a more normal correctional environment were aimed at diluting its institutional image. A move toward campus-style plans made up of smaller, residential-scale buildings presented a much different image from the monolithic, austere settings of previous decades. The use of residential materials, finishes and forms reinforced these initial changes. A corresponding operational shift from a static means of control to a dynamic model of institutional management, based on positive interaction between offenders and staff, was introduced. Architecture encouraged this dynamic model through the adoption of such innovations as open control stations, the elimination of barriers, the placing together of staff and inmate areas, and the inclusion of spaces specifically designed to encourage interaction.

While new architectural forms present an image and context very different from that evident in the penal

institution of the preceding era, incomplete, inconsistent and sometimes contradictory messages prevail.

- Although campus-style settings became the norm, movement often was, and continues to be, inappropriately structured through the excessive use of fences, barriers and other enclosures.
- The introduction of residential forms and materials, to provide a less institutional setting, is often diluted by the continuing requirement to provide full containment capabilities at the cell, range, housing unit and perimeter levels. This limits the degree to which the inmate can be afforded increased responsibility for personal behaviour. Similarly, it potentially diminishes the reliance on dynamic security. Where static controls continue to exist, there is less incentive to encourage increased responsibility, accountability and positive interaction as the primary means of institutional management.
- Attempts to introduce more normal elements into higher security level facilities are often thwarted by the need to retain the capability for armed intervention. This continuing requirement is a pervasive example of the attempt to overlay a previous operational mode onto a new physical setting. The architecture responds brutally to the potential or actual requirement for arms by setting up an elaborate physical network aimed at effective use and protection of these arms. Inherent in this requirement is the need to separate armed staff from inmates, to incorporate tunnels or galleries for safe transport and use of weapons, to reduce the distance between buildings and to design inmate areas so that they are fully visible from armed posts and galleries. In addition to limiting the architectural response, any requirement for an armed intervention capability dramatically affects both operations and the underlying perceptions of staff and inmates, often reinforcing the "us/them" dichotomy.
- While closed control posts were eliminated in favour of open stations, the requirement for full observation capabilities from these locations continued to dictate and limit the form that the housing units would take. The requirement for direct surveillance from these stations to all areas of the unit effectively eliminated the need for interaction between staff and inmates. All unit activities could be seen and directed from one location. A by-product of this requirement for full observation was a restriction on the possibility of creating an appropriate degree of privacy between inmate rooms and more public common areas. This in turn affected the potential to create an environment that would both respect personal dignity and enhance self-esteem and identity.
- Providing or retaining centralized, remote-control posts contradicts the decentralized, interactive approach encouraged by open unit controls. Similarly, replacing manually operated locks by remote-control electronic systems, while potentially freeing staff for increased interaction, actually eliminates an opportunity for such interaction.
- While offices have been located within inmate housing units to support interaction, inmates and staff are typically there at different times of the day. This reduces, and is perhaps even counter-productive to, effective positive interaction. Even when staff and inmates are simultaneously present, proximity does not guarantee interaction. Where a variety of social and group settings are provided, their use is often compromised or restricted by staffing patterns and allocations that are determined according to post standards from an earlier operational mode.

These examples illustrate that, while architectural modifications have created a new non-institutional image for the correctional facility, contradictions remain. These conflicts between image and practice are

rooted in the temptation, during a period of transition, to continue with the previous mode of operation or to provide a physical capability that exceeds the new operational need (i.e., build higher/operate lower).

Before these contradictions can be resolved, the development and application of thorough and consistent operational requirements is essential. These must be aimed at encouraging responsibility, facilitating interaction and reinforcing both individual identity and self-esteem. Rather than removing basic responsibilities, as is typical in institutional settings, operators must encourage and extend an inmate's responsibility for personal behaviour and the well-being of others. Interactions between staff and offenders must, to the extent possible, occur as a natural by-product of daily living experiences rather than within a more structured approach. To be truly effective, all participants in a correctional setting must be treated with dignity and respect. Operations must be flexible enough to address the diversity of individual needs through the provision of a variety of social and learning opportunities. These serve to reinforce personal identity, while reducing the potential for either isolation or anonymity typical of institutional environments. While architecture can and must contribute to, and in some instances even structure or force, such basic operational change, it can neither attain nor sustain these objectives: this is the role of operations.

Architectural structuring of this new operational order is being explored by the Correctional Service of Canada in select design projects. Innovations being studied for application include: the provision of kitchens to allow inmate responsibility for meal preparation; the elimination of the containment capability of inmate rooms and housing units; the creation of small, autonomous housing units (five to eight individuals); the elimination of continual, direct surveillance capabilities within housing units; the introduction of greater occupant control of his or her immediate environment; and the establishment and promotion of intermediary group settings. Additionally, the design of common use areas will promote the involvement of, and use by, the local community.

While architecture can create a setting within which these basic human values and goals can be addressed, it is up to operations to ensure their achievement. The inability to arrive at an appropriate and consistent operational response will result in the failure of the physical solution (the architecture) and hinder the progression toward an integrated model of corrections. Future Directions - Community Integration Changing the design of closed institutions to more closely parallel a community environment occurs as a transitional phase. This phase is aimed at facilitating the successful reintegration of offenders into the community by eliminating the negative effects generally associated with institutional settings. This new approach to corrections also has the potential to sensitize inmates, staff and the public to correctional facilities as a normal, contributing component of the community. Once the normalized environment becomes the accepted correctional standard, architecture and operations can move toward the broader goals of full integration into, and acceptance by, the community. This is the challenge facing correctional architects and operators in the future.

Again, parallels can be drawn to initiatives being pursued in other settings - hospitals moving toward specialized and extended home care, education being increasingly delivered by correspondence and home schooling, the extended use of the home as the principal work location, more accessible facilities for independent living by people with physical disabilities, and independent housing for elderly people. A raised level of social awareness and a general appreciation of the interrelationship between these

functions and the welfare of the community provide an opportunity to pursue these initiatives. At the same time, the economic capability of the state to continue delivering the present level of services is uncertain, providing the final catalyst for change.

The current emphasis in corrections on reducing the role of incarceration as a primary correctional strategy diminishes the need for a specific correctional building type. This change is being fuelled by a recognition of the shortcomings of incarceration and an appreciation of the benefits of community involvement to the eventual return of the offender to society. As well, reduced budgets, increased operating and construction costs, and such recent technological advances as improved monitoring capabilities, provide momentum and opportunity for the creation of a radically new approach to corrections.

One potential model would see corrections removed from the day-today realm of an individual's existence: corrections would mean treatment and training (not 24-hour housing) to deal with those aspects of the individual that contribute to his or her criminality. This selective form of intervention would eliminate the need for centralized accommodations for offenders. While programming could take place in a centralized location, the offender would spend the remainder of the day as a contributing member of his or her regular environment.

A community-based resource centre would form the primary physical representation of this model. Ideally, the facility would be part of a larger community-resource complex, not only assisting offenders in their varying stages of rehabilitation but also meeting other social welfare needs. In most cases, existing structures could provide accommodation. The less emphasis there is on a distinct physical setting for the provision of these services, the greater the chance of successful community integration and acceptance.

This type of change will not come without its challenges: the loftier the goal, the greater the risks and the more difficult its realization. There will be significant pressure to dilute the image and the reality. Inevitably, there will be demands to create identifiable environments that separate the correctional setting from the community; to replicate community facilities and services in the name of efficiency and local acceptance; to continue with earlier and more familiar physical and operational modes; to consolidate facilities to enhance efficiency and reduce costs; and to address initial problems through reliance on existing institutional capabilities.

Total integration of all offenders into the community will never be fully achieved. In fact, success will require the selective preservation of the closed institution to accommodate those offenders who would disrupt or receive no immediate benefit from the new order. Conclusion In leading change, architecture often becomes the lightning rod for criticism of a new philosophical direction. Throughout the history of corrections, it has always been easier to criticize the architecture than to question the validity of the operational response. When a correctional facility is designed and constructed to respond to a new philosophy, the structural form may demonstrate that current operational modes are no longer appropriate. The ability to discuss and criticize architecture rationally allows buildings to serve as a means of experimentation and to help develop new ideas. As successful community integration will largely depend on continuing correctional practices, the usual role of architecture to respond to initial

criticisms must now be assumed by operations. This will require that correctional operators present a strong, consistent and holistic approach to meeting the challenges without relying on physical solutions. Therefore, current developments toward a more normalized correctional architecture should be viewed as a transitional phase, preparing and challenging operators to develop new modes aimed at realizing the more fundamental goal of community integration.

Correctional philosophy and reality will continue to reflect changes being made in other public domains, demonstrating a natural connection to society. Whereas incarceration was born out of an effort by the state to distance itself from the punishment of the day (corporal punishment), the reduced importance of the correctional facility in the future will result from the realization that corrections should be a contributing and integral component of the community.