University of Cincinnati

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I, Allen Fee, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

It is entitled:
Reclamation: Reclaiming Identity and Rebuilding Community to Combat Criminal Recidivism

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This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Aarati Kanekar, Ph.D.

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UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

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Reclamation: Reclaiming Identity and Rebuilding Community to Combat Criminal Recidivism

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Architecture

in the School of Architecture and Interior Design at the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning

Allen Fee
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Committee:
First Chair - Aarati Kanekar
Second Chair - Michael McInturf
Upon release from prison many former inmates become recidivist. They can break parole and/or commit another crime and be reincarcerated based on poor access to stable housing and work due to stigma and availability of proper environments, as well as a lack of suitable work programs and/or housing. The formerly incarcerated also suffer many psychological problems such as feelings of a lack of control and the loss of their independent pre-prison identities.

Many halfway houses that provide these services have unstable atmospheres or can’t provide support for the former criminals seeking jobs. Proposed is a facility in the Avondale neighborhood of Cincinnati that will incorporate housing with a commercial aspect to be staffed by residents. The commercial facility will provide a community asset that is currently lacking in the area, comprising of a fresh market grocery store that directly engages the community with the center. The center will also providing for the housing of the former inmates in residences designed to help ease their transition back into society at large, refraining from dehumanizing aspects such as communal bedrooms and non-privacy. Architectural elements of personalization and interactivity will allow residents to exert a control and ownership over their environment, allowing them to reclaim their independent identities lost in prison.

The building designed will showcase a manner in which architecture and architectural interventions can be used to help a community and disenfranchised individuals reclaim their identities and help create dialogue and reduce stigma with existing residents. This project will hopefully spark interest in the idea that architecture can be part of the process of combating larger social problems.
I would like to take a moment to thank the University of Cincinnati and its faculty for guiding me on this path.

I would never have made it without the support of my family and friends, especially my parents. Here’s to the next great adventure.
Criminal Recidivism is the process in which people released from prison can break parole and/or commit another crime and be reincarcerated. This can be attributed to poor access to stable housing and work, which is a direct result of the stigma and availability of proper environments, as well as a lack of suitable work programs and/or housing. Many halfway houses that provide these services have unstable atmospheres or can’t provide support for the former criminals seeking jobs.¹


2. Only 40% have gainful employment.¹

3. 44% rearrested as of a year of release.¹
Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* in French is a philosophical work published in 1975 discussing the dawn of the modern age of prisons and how social and other mechanisms led to their existence. The fundamental themes that Foucault focused on were power and knowledge. He discussed their importance and how they could be deployed as forms of social control through societal institutions. *Discipline and Punish* is Foucault's attempt to unpack the changes in western penal system and how social institutions led to the modern prison system of his time, which is still highly similar to our modern prisons in America and other Occidental nations.4

There have been a lot of studies in regards to recidivism rates, including some important work from the Urban Institute that examine causes at large that play into lack of employment after prison. Cambridge University completed a study on rates of recidivism as well. A large amount of the literature focuses on the psychology of prisoners and how that will affect their time after prison. Foucault’s *Discipline & Punish* is an excellent examination of the rise of the modern prison system and its dynamics. The aftereffects of prison and the psychological effects have been compiled in *Prisoners Once Removed*, reintegration strategies are discussed in *Beyond Bars: Rejoining Society After Prison*, and more personal versions of these effects are presented in *Among Murderers: Life After Prison*.

Former inmates without stable family lives have choices between chaotic homes, halfway houses, or no home at all; this can lead to a desperate situation for some, while it can vary from case to case many parolees and recently released are required to maintain a stable address and job to maintain eligibility for parole or receive help from post prison agencies. The former inmates are then more likely to turn to crime again out of desperation or due to unstable influences. Our prison system tends to create a revolving door system of institutionalization that can lead to recidivism.2 Even if a former inmate does not commit another crime they can be stuck in spirals of depression and maladjustment stemming from their feelings of loss of identity and preventing them from reintegrating back into society and perpetuating discord and disunity in their respective communities. A lot of housing provided by former prisons and parole agencies is subpar and frequently repurposed older buildings not designed for the housing of those who aren’t living traditionally.3 Responding to this problem allows for communities to focus on other issues that feed into and out of this problem and can help solve many urban ills.

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One of the major forces presented as an obstacle is instability when being released from prison. Without access to a lot of options, criminals frequently turn back to crime out of desperation. Surroundings play a huge role in providing stability for people and examining how the respective communities one might be returned to are contributors to failure in ex-convicts. The book heavily promotes a self-responsible outlook, but presents a very defeatist attitude about societal impacts, as they are seemingly immovable forces. Restoring a sense of control over your environment is necessary to provide stability. Examining possible solutions to these structural issues can play into the discussion of what role urban areas and architecture can play solving the larger issues and the personal psychological ones.

This comes to bear when looking at works such as Beyond Bars: Rejoining Society After Prison by Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards. The book is presented almost as a how to for ex-convicts. It is a stark and pragmatic examination of many of the hurdles faced by former inmates as they attempt to reintegrate themselves back into their communities. The book is meant to be a manual for the common criminal, someone who has been arrested for petty crimes such as possession or larceny. Enumerated obstacles can include lack of stable housing, destructive social networks and families, unsympathetic parole officers, and just bad luck bred out from unstable environments. Halfway Houses and factors such as location, design, and management come into play (IE: Communal living beds vs. private rooms).

One of the major forces presented as an obstacle is instability when being released from prison. Without access to a lot of options, criminals frequently turn back to crime out of desperation. Surroundings play a huge role in providing stability for people and examining how the respective communities one might be returned to are contributors to failure in ex-convicts. The book heavily promotes a self-responsible outlook, but presents a very defeatist attitude about societal impacts, as they are seemingly immovable forces. Restoring a sense of control over your environment is necessary to provide stability. Examining possible solutions to these structural issues can play into the discussion of what role urban areas and architecture can play solving the larger issues and the personal psychological ones.

RECIDIVISM & IDENTITY

Foucault says that an individual should not hold sway over other individuals, and this access to other individuals is the problem. As this applies to prisoners it seems that Foucault implies that inmates have become a permanent lower delinquent class that are conditioned to be surveilled and have their individual power reside in the hands of others. This feeling of surveillance pervades prison architecture, replacing that sense of control over your environment could help reduce these feelings. Further investigation of these psychological effects could be undertaken to examine how members of the delinquent class can rise above this stigma and have active roles as individuals in their community and society again.

One of the major examinations conducted by Foucault in the latter portion of the work was on Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. The Panopticon was designed to be an efficient prison system with a central observation tower surrounded by a wall that contained the cells for the prisoners. In this way fewer people would be needed to observe the prison population. Foucault believed that the Panopticon as applied to society was a negative concept. The idea that visibility and knowledge of a collective’s actions could be accessed and observed by an individual or an individual organization was a threat to the individual. Foucault asserts that the concept of individuals observing the group and holding sway over that group’s actions is prevalent throughout society as a whole. We have institutionalized this control in our daily lives, from our educations, to our police, and even our homes.

RECIDIVISM & IDENTITY

4. Bentham’s panopticon

Foucault’s Panopticon

Among Murderers by Sabine Heinlen offers a detailed analysis and in-depth view into the minds of former criminals and their sense of loss and identity, whether their personal conception of themselves or their loss of identity within the community. The three men represented in the book have all committed capital crimes such as murder and have all spent decades behind bars. These examples are all extreme versions of what awaits criminals after time incarcerated. The three men have trouble just crossing the street, using an ATM, or even just choosing a dish at a restaurant. Incarceration leads to a cultural vacuum, where inmates can be largely removed from the zeitgeist and be presented with a vastly different world upon release.6

Heinlen allows for the humanity and confusion to shine through the three men she presents, and one can begin to see the common threads that can be shared amongst many former criminals, such as lack of individual agency. Ex convicts (especially the longer they are incarcerated) depend heavily on and cling to relationships with others, living environments that encourage interaction and support as well as the establishment of relationships with community members. In this book the three men use each other as a support system but others might not be so lucky.

Prisoners Once Removed is a compilation of various studies conducted that expound upon the impact of incarceration and the impact reentry has on the individual, their families, and their communities. People in prison often lose their sense of self and can come out of prison institutionalized and directionless. This also affects their relationship with the community at large. They no longer have an idea of their identity within the community and can be rejected by their former peers. It is important for the people released from prison to be invested and interactive with the community as well as with each other for support and finding a way to reclaim their identity on a broader and personal level.7


Housing for former criminals is typically called a “halfway” house meant to help reintegration back into society. They can be run by charitable organizations or for profit entities. Their origins can probably be traced back to charitable Almshouses for the poor and destitute. The idea likely spread upon the increase in the prison industry at the end of the 19th century. There are a few of these quote unquote “halfway” houses in Cincinnati and they can tend to have a negative perception in neighborhoods they try to locate themselves in. This can be tracked to the perceived stigma of ex convicts as well as aversion to low income housing in general with ideas that the addition of low-income peoples will lead to more crime and bring down property values. A lot of these perceptions can be combated by attractive design that allows for the destruction of preconceived notions and a reevaluation of the residents.

A specific example of successful integrated housing for former inmates is located in Rotterdam in the Netherlands. The project is a redesign and reprogramming of a housing / commercial project located on the water in Rotterdam. The complex is made up of a series of elevated angled cubes meant to evoke a “forest” of sorts. The cubes were completed in the early 1980’s based on designs completed in the 1970’s by Piet Blom, comprised of 38 single family homes and 2 large “super cubes” meant for commercial development that never appeared. Eventually one super cube was turned into a youth Hostel in 2009 and in 2013 the other super cube was converted to housing for ex convicts by Exodus, a group focused on criminal reintegration with society, and their designers Personal Architecture BNA, a local firm in Rotterdam.8


TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
The architects wanted to create a sense of community in the center while also preserving facets of individuality that are important to restore in an ex-convict. There are multiple gathering spaces as well as a communal kitchen and lounge on the top level. The 24 residents are given studio-like rooms that include individualized touches such as private showers and toilets and even little “porch lights” on the doorposts of each room. The fine line between individualization and communal living is an interesting take on the solution that tries to balance or take a “small steps” approach of reintegration process. The location is an interesting choice in that the seemingly tony surrounding neighborhood might not offer employment options to the ex-convicts.

The original cube complex is a bit odd as well due to the raised nature of a large portion of the structure and the relative unpopularity of the public space beneath the cubes. The project is a great example of how good design and humanizing elements can come together to create a welcoming space for ex-convicts, but the location and some of the programming would leave something to be desired. Navigating this problem but examining the interior successes will be helpful in the design of something similar and applying it to a stateside perspective.

Another project that is very similar is the Castle Gardens housing project, completed in 2010 by the Fortune Society, another organization dedicated to the reintegration of ex convicts, as well as providing services to low income families and the former homeless. The building was constructed in the West Harlem neighborhood in New York City and designed by Curtis + Ginsberg Architects. The building is 11 stories tall with terraced green rooftop levels. There are 114 affordable housing units, including 50 studios for ex convicts, as well as 20,000 square feet of meeting, office, and community space for the group. The spaces offer job training as well as training in green technology, which was a focus for the building as it received LEED Gold. The terraces are integrated into the learning programs and provide areas for relaxation for residents and views to the nearby Hudson River.9


7. Photo showing the communal space and kitchen that houses smaller residential scale appliances and furnishings.

The building is in a neighborhood of similar income levels as well as mixing ex convicts with other residents of similar income levels. The building is also successful in integrating the community services directly to the building nut on their own floor allow for interaction but with a larger sense of independence than the other precedent listed perhaps. The mixture of uses while retaining a sense of independence and individuality will be important in the future of my own thesis project. Height and views play a large role in the complex and could be integrated into a proposed project. Castle Gardens was constructed on a vacant lot so it also provides a chance for studying the reintroduction of missing urban fabric.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
The facility will include a grocery to be developed separately with a partner. The mixed-use residential portion of the facility will include a restaurant to be staffed by residents, as well as administration and community space for classes and training for residents and community members alike. The program allows for interaction between the neighborhood and the residents within the facility, giving an opportunity for the residents to be accepted back into the community and rebuild their sense of self through private personal space as well as provided communal space within the center itself.

Using this research I have devised a Program that incorporates elements I feel are missing from the above circumstances in that they do not provide direct access to jobs. By creating a mixed-use facility the two parts can work hand in hand to encourage the residents and help with their journey towards reintroduction to society. The program includes a smaller number of units than listed in the projects above and larger one-bedroom spaces for the residents to give them a greater sense of identity and autonomy.

**PROGRAM:**

- **12 ONE BEDROOM UNITS** = @ 700 SF
- **3 DUPLEX UNITS** = @ 1350 SF
- **18 FULL TIME RESIDENTS**
- **RESTAURANT** = 4000 SF
- **ADMIN / COMMUNITY** = 3400 SF
A location that exhibits many of the conditions that lead to instances of recidivism is the neighborhood of Avondale in Cincinnati. Avondale has been a part of the city since 1896 and was originally an enclave for the wealthy who wanted to escape the city basin. After the introduction of streetcar service the suburb grew as an upper middle class Jewish neighborhood that eventually gained a small upper middle class African American population by the 1940’s. The construction of the Millcreek Valley expressway leveled much of the historically black West End neighborhood. As African Americans were only allowed to move to neighborhoods where their race already resided, a large amount moved to Avondale. This caused the beginnings of far suburban white flight that began in the 1950’s.

Riots in 1967 and 1968 destroyed the neighborhood’s two business districts on Reading Rd. and Burnet Ave. White flight increased dramatically and the neighborhood has been in decline since, becoming a high poverty and crime food desert.11,12

The historic and future context of areas of the neighborhood for mesh well for the selection of the site. The site also needed to be well connected by transit and centrally located within the community to take advantage. I specifically looked at portions of the former Burnet Ave. commercial district on the stretch of road from University and Children’s Hospitals from around the intersection with Erkenbrecher Rd. up to the avenue’s terminus at Forest Ave. The area has remained blighted due to population loss and property destruction following the race riots in the late 1960’s that were especially damaging to Burnet Ave., which was a historic business district that featured numerous shops and apartment buildings.
In the past few decades the avenue has become home to various medical office buildings and services for the nearby hospitals. The most recent construction were two midrise buildings for Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and the Cincinnati Herald, both designed by DNK Architects and completed in 2009. Large stretches north of these buildings have become vacant lots or low rise nonurban buildings such as a filling station and strip mall type buildings, leaving semi isolated historic mid rise buildings and breaking up the rhythm and fabric.

Future Plans for the site were drawn up in the early 2000’s. It imagined filling in the vacant streetscape to reinvigorate the neighborhood. The goal was to eventually redevelop the street as an active live work street with large mixed use buildings anchoring the block with shops and retail on the ground level and residential units above. This is still the goal in the community and my program would fit in well with these plans and help to add to the vibrancy and revitalization of the neighborhood.
The site chosen is half of the east side of the 3400 block on Burnet between Rockdale Ave. and the now closed off Hickory St. as the base size of street frontage for the project. Filling up almost an entire former block would fill in a large gap that currently runs from the open lawn south of Hickory that runs between Burnet Ave. and Harvey Ave. to the East, and is bound by the Herald building and Northern Ave, this green space could be utilized by the community or residents of the center as an active part of the program as well through outreach events or a community garden. Public transportation is also a large necessity for many recently released who may not have a driver’s license; several bus routes converge and lead to various outer neighborhoods as well as downtown. A few cross routes that are rare in Cincinnati are also available within walking distance, making the siting attractive. The southern half of the site along the green space would include the partnered Grocery store development and the northern half would include the mixed-use residential portion. The urban site was a good model for other larger institutions with similar missions that had access to transportation and jobs. Expanding on some of these models and scaling the program to the local neighborhood can be investigated to create a building that will be a longtime asset to the community and building block for the future.
One of the major items of import in expanding a person’s sense of personal and community identity is the ability to have control over their environment and the ability to set and control their privacy while maintaining connection and access to the greater context, which can be important in transitional housing. While design can accomplish much of this through siting and architectural moves, it is usually things the user can manipulate that allow the occupants to take control of their surroundings to maximize their sense of personal identity and identity within the community. By offering pieces of Interactive architecture that the resident can manipulate to create a sense of self and expression it allows for a claiming of autonomy and a sense of belonging within the housing community and the larger surrounding community. Michael Fox and Miles Kemp enumerate in their book Interactive Architecture that control of space and allowing the user to communicate with the architecture can produce a sense of accomplishment and heightened sense of place.15


IDENTITY & INTERACTIVITY
The implementation of Interactive and Identity centered architecture can apply directly to members of the formerly incarcerated community, allowing them to reclaim their sense of self. Providing agency through User Interactive architecture as a means of creating agency fits well with the processes used by successful transitional housing such as Harriet’s House in Raleigh, North Carolina that uses an 18 month process of slowly offering less assistance to its residents and offering them autonomous housing in small units that promote inter-communal interaction.
The residential portion of the building should include a communal space that allows interactions between residents. Historically I looked at buildings such as the Roman apartment house that focused residents into an interior courtyard, and Corbusier’s housing projects that provided inward looking courts. The idea of the courtyard as an organizational tool provides a center as well as a mediation between the public areas and the privacy of the residence. I took the idea and broke it down to a conception of levels of private and public space. Historically the neighborhood of Avondale has a front porch culture that can be adapted for use in a multi-unit project. This provides a level of controlled access to the resident that allows them to be in the public areas of the courtyard while still in control of their privacy. The courtyard space could provide for resident interaction as well as community interaction in the form of an urban garden that would allow residents to hone their skills and provide produce for the restaurant.
When looking at interactivity and the user ability to define their access and privacy, I looked at a lot of projects that have interactive facades. These facades allow the resident to exert a sense of ownership and identity that they present to the world while also controlling their environment/privacy. I then adapted this to my building and its context, using the neighborhood materiality and history of the awning and shutters in Avondale as a jumping off point.
36. Perspective from the NW

DESIGN EXECUTION
37. Site Plan - Scale 1/64" = 1'

38. Site Diagram - Showing Moments of Community / Resident interaction

39, 40, 41. Spatial Diagramming
42, 43, 44. Floor Plans

PLAN SCALE: 1/32" = 1'

LEVEL 2

LEVEL 3

LEVEL 4

45. Section

PLAN SCALE: 1/32" = 1'
46. Elevation showing operable screens on Units.

47. Perspective from SW
48. Entry Perspective.

49. Balconies showing Operability.

50. Perspective from NE - Showing rear court.
51. Lobby Entry.

52. Courtyard Perspective - Showing screening and Resident porches.

53. View from Resident Porches - Showing Neighboring porches.

54. Residential Apartment - Showing small balcony and operable exterior screen.


LIST OF FIGURES

31. Source - https://lh4.ggpht.com/XP8vyMLWytWpibMrx9oy2BdSv7ZBlDk7tgM1Yj6umvOnp8YamFQO-Sig9k7vOOLP+x114
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THANK YOU