

MATERIAL MATTERS – THE SOCIAL CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE STATE PRISON OF EASTERN JUTLAND

by
Trine Brun Petersen

This article presents a case study of the State Prison of Eastern Jutland, which is a closed prison in Denmark inaugurated in October 2006 and designed by the architectural firm Friis & Moltke. The relationship between the built structure and penal policies is revealed, and the extent to which a prison structure can be viewed as a 'social choreography' is discussed. Social choreography is understood as certain preferred patterns of action inscribed in the structure and interiors of the building. The model for the State Prison of Eastern Jutland represents a break with earlier models for prison buildings and an ambition to realize a new, modern kind of prison service. The study draws primarily on a body of theory on architecture, space and discipline in the tradition of structuralism and post-structuralism. It demonstrates how physical structures, understood both as architecture and the design of interiors and furniture, can be considered actively to contribute to the establishment of a social 'order'. This occurs by way of patterns of action which are either encouraged or discouraged by the structure. The article is rooted in design research, a relatively new field of academic enquiry. It aims to combine the study of material objects with theories from cultural studies and sociology, and makes a tentative attempt to view design analysis in relation to multimodality and social semiotics.

1. Introduction

A prison is a pregnant object of analysis for anyone interested in how material objects can instigate a certain order and favour particular 'patterns of action' over others. Moreover, a prison is an institution in which groups with different backgrounds and interests must live

and interact, and this makes an analysis of the normative aspects of the designed structure particularly interesting. The relationship between the built environment and notions of power and discipline is very obvious in a closed prison, as has been eminently explored by French philosopher Michel Foucault in his influential prison study, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault 1975). In his analysis, Foucault focuses on the Panopticon as the 'Leitmotif' for a general tendency towards surveillance and discipline in modern society, where the bodies and minds of subjects are linked, and even constituted by, a net of discursive forms of power. Although the analysis has had great influence on general thinking about punishment and power, it has little to say about prison architecture in general. Inspired by the overall analytical framework of Foucault, it is the aim of this article to undertake both an analysis of a specific penal structure as well as a theoretical exploration of the relationship between design, power and behaviour. Therefore, the study operates on both the level of the spatial organization of buildings and floor plans and the level of interiors, in order to reveal how the prison can be seen not only as a manifestation of certain penal philosophies, but also as a social choreography that stages the social relations of its occupants.

Central to this theoretical perspective is a more general question of how physical objects and structures, such as design and architecture, can be viewed as semiotic systems. This is a fundamental question for design research and has been discussed in several research publications (Vihma 1995, 2010; Guldborg 2012). The aim of this article is not so much to contribute to this discussion of design semiotics as to explore how design analysis, social theory and social semiotics can be combined to analyze 'things-in-use' and their social consequences.

In the following, a short account of the theoretical sources of inspiration and methods is presented, followed by an analysis of the architecture and design of the State Prison of Eastern Jutland. The

analysis is conducted 'from above'. It begins with how the prison can be seen in relation to a general 'prison typology', which is followed by an analysis of the overall principles of spatial organization and it concludes with an analysis of the dual function of the common room/unit office as well as the furnishing of the cell sections. The unit office plays a central role in the orchestration of the relationship between prison officers and inmates and the development of its design sheds light on how different understandings of the 'realities of prison life' can be played out during a design process. The analysis is conducted on three levels: 1) the macro level – the overall spatial organization of landscape and buildings, 2) the meso level – the internal spatial organization of one of the cell units and, 3) the micro level – the equipment and furniture. These levels are somewhat parallel to the four levels of analysis used by linguist Michael O'Toole (O'Toole 1994), but the levels of 'Room' and 'Element' in O'Toole's model are here combined in the micro level, which is analyzed as a total 'interior'.

2. Theoretical perspectives on architecture, space and social choreography

A number of influential scholars have contributed to the body of theory and knowledge on the relationships between physical and social structures; however, these relationships are often addressed in philosophical terms in which the actual objects play a rather modest role and the level of 'interior design' is often neglected.

The thought of a contingent relationship between ideologies and buildings is expressed in the first chapter of Dick Hebdige's study on subculture (Hebdige 2003), in which he analyses stylistic choices as 'semiotic warfare' against an oppressive, capitalistic society. Striving to establish the connection between ordinary things like safety pins or ripped clothing and social and cultural 'meaning', Hebdige points to institutional architecture as the most obvious example of

how ideologies are given physical existence and power relations are established and naturalized: "Most modern institutions of education, despite the apparent neutrality of the materials from which they are constructed (red brick, white tile, etc.) bear implicit ideological assumptions that are literally structured into the architecture itself" (Hebdige 1979: 12). As can be seen from this quotation, the relationship between architecture and ideology seems rather self-evident in Hebdige's view. Ideologies are transformed into brick and furnishings and thereby reflect well-established hierarchies. In his view, the design **reflects** the values of society without adding anything itself. One could say that the design is the visual and outer expression of a deeper social logic.

This point of view is largely in line with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who has written extensively on social reproduction in a number of contexts. In a short, but weighty article, written as a tribute to the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss and published in 1970, 'The Berber House or the World Reversed', Bourdieu analyses the traditional house of the Berbers as a structure in which the most fundamental distinctions of their cosmology are materialized. In the analysis, the house of the Berbers not only reflects but also reproduces the fundamental principles and distinctions of the Berber culture. As such, the house is seen as a form of lived ideological relation, which both reflects and actively structures the life that is lived within it. However, Bourdieu's analysis is undertaken from a rather distanced point of view, in which the culture of the Berbers reproduces itself through its dwellings; a process which seems to take place without any conflicts or negotiations between conflicting interests.

Obvious and reasonable as this relationship between ideology and built structures may seem, two reservations can be raised: firstly, following the argument of Dutch philosopher Peter-Paul Verbeek (Verbeek 2000), the transformation of 'ideas to physical form' is not transparent or neutral, but adds something of its own to the equation, and, secondly, the physical *gestaltung* of the ideologies

and power relations not only reflects but actively contributes to the establishment of a specific social order. This standpoint may be seen to echo Halliday's statement that language does not passively reflect or correspond to a pre-existing reality, but rather contributes to its construction (Halliday 1997: 43). In line with this standpoint, I would suggest that design should not merely be considered a passive reflection of some pre-existing ideological content, but also as a physical manifestation that has social consequences of its own.

Newer approaches in the field of social semiotics may be one way to increase the understanding of design and architecture in their social consequences. Kress and van Leeuwen's focus on 'signs-in-use', as well as on how communication is structured by social and political dimensions (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006; Hodge & Kress 1988; Kress 2010), may be of inspiration to design research that aims to see design as a 'system of meaning' with interpersonal, experiential and textual consequences.¹ Similarly, the focus on the context of the communication situation seems relevant to design research, as the meaning of a given artifact will be very different depending on the context in which the user meets and interacts with it.

This social semiotic approach has been applied to analysis of non-verbal sign systems, such as paintings and architecture, as part of a general research into 'multimodal communication'. In his book, *The Language of Displayed Art*, Michael O'Toole strives to demonstrate the validity of his Halliday-based trifunctional model for other domains of expression such as painting, sculpture and architecture. In his analysis of architecture, he emphasizes the functional aspects of architecture, but also states that buildings **signify** their use: '[t]hey have signs of their practical function written all over them: they **signify** their function as use' (O'Toole 1994: 85, original emphasis). The chapter's focus on how the dominant principles of social organization are echoed in our built structures is largely in line with the thinking of Bourdieu and Foucault. It has, however, the merit of a detailed and precise terminology to trace and name the different functions of

the building, which allows for a clear systemisation in the progression of the analysis. Likewise, unlike most works on architecture, it does not stop at the analyses of the architectural frame and floor plan, but includes furnishings and products, which are addressed as 'elements' in the model. On the other hand, the attribution of certain traits as either experiential, interpersonal or textual may be difficult to apply, given that many designs will constitute all three at the same time, as O'Toole readily recognizes in his analysis of this analysis of Alver Alto's Enzo-Gutzeit building. My addition would be that not only exquisite or well-designed objects have this quality. In practice, it is quite difficult to tell experiential from interpersonal traits, and many very drab objects have interpersonal consequences precisely because of this characteristic. This is particularly evident in a prison setting, in which the absence of exquisite objects and the selection of 'vandal-proof' furniture is as socially significant as the expensive 'designer furniture' found in bank lobbies or in the mansions of the wealthy.

The concept of 'social choreography' is central to my analysis of the prison. In using this term, I aim to describe how certain patterns of action are 'staged' or 'pre-scripted' by the design of the prison. As such, the concept is related to what perceptual psychologist J. J. Gibson and, later, design psychologist D. Norman have termed 'affordance' (Gibson 1977; Norman 1998). In a design context, affordance is widely understood as a term for the actions that a certain object makes possible and the term has been widely used in usability research. But unlike the concept of affordance, the term 'social choreography' aims to highlight the social and normative embedding of our patterns of action.

The concept may also be similar to what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) term the stratum of 'design' in their book *Multimodal Discourse*. In their model of four strata of multi-modal discourse, the stratum of 'design' relates to the conceptual side of a given communication situation, but is not itself the actual semiotic product.²

In the design stratum, a discourse may be conceptualised into a 'blueprint' for the actions of others. As such, the term has obvious implications for the concept of 'social choreography', which points exactly to the fact that 'someone' (and not always the architect or designer in the strict sense of the word), has conceptualized a certain interaction before the building or object is actually realized. However, the model of Kress and van Leeuwen seems to lack a term for the reception of a given multimodal communication. In the following analysis, the product itself is seen as a kind of 'blueprint' for the ensuing interpersonal relationship and pattern of action. But it is important to stress that this 'social blueprint' may only partly be the result of a conscious endeavour on the part of its 'designers' and that the interaction may be carried out quite differently than the 'designers' intended.

3. Method

In the context of this study, the prison is considered a socio-material object, which can be understood both as a historically conditioned materialization of a penal regime **and** as an object-in-use with social consequences that can be studied by interviewing and observing its users. The study is composed of two parts. The first part reveals the design process, which draws on written materials such as documents, reports and interviews with the actors involved, such as the Prison Services Unit for Construction, the working party commissioned by the Prison Service and the architectural firm commissioned to build it. The second part is a study of the experience of the prison by its everyday users, which builds on observations and interviews with the local management, prison officers and inmates.

The study was conducted in the period 2005-2009, which is parallel to the building and inauguration of the new prison that replaced the 150 years old State Prison of Horsens, in which all the

officers and prisoners in the study had previously been based. This presented a unique opportunity to study the transition from one materialized system of penal service to another, a transition that reflected a fundamental break with the long-held tradition of prison building in Denmark. The observations and interviews in the prison were conducted on an ongoing basis, but were particularly frequent in October 2007, at which time the prison had been in operation for less than a year. This meant that the prison was still relatively new to its everyday users. The study thereby traces both the intentions behind the new prison, how they were realized materially and how they were appropriated by their users.

4. The State Prison of Eastern Jutland

Since prisons came into being as a specific building type in the late 17th century, their design has traditionally been closely linked with specific prison systems. Typologically, the State Prison of Eastern Jutland is related to the so-called New Generation Prison model, which is characterized by its design of smaller units placed in village-like formations. The model is based on a set of organizational principles that focus on the individual unit, among other things each normal section has its own separate management. The prison officers are employed to carry out a range of duties. They not only guard the inmates, but they also aim to 're-socialize the inmate' by focusing on the group dynamic in the unit. Therefore the informal contact between staff and inmates is considered essential in this type of prison system. Furthermore, the aim is to present an institutional character that departs from former prison typologies, by creating an environment that is as close to normal living standards as possible. This includes noise reduction, non-prison style furniture and decorative elements as part of the interior. In this prison type, the focus has to a certain extent shifted from the overall structure of the

architecture and its 'movement management' to the interior, which is seen as an instrument for diminishing the stress of imprisonment. The model for the State Prison of Eastern Jutland placed emphasis on three founding principles that correspond closely to the penal philosophy of the New Generation Prison: sectioning, normalization and re-socialization.

The State Prison of Eastern Jutland, inaugurated in 2006, was the first closed prison to be built in Denmark since the State Prison in Ringe opened in 1976. There was therefore no appropriate modern precedent for the new prison building. From the very beginning, emphasis was placed on the architecture, both as a means of secure detainment and as a 'technology' to realize a modern penal service with a focus on normalization and re-socialization. In the report on the winning architectural proposal, the Department of Justice gave the following recommendation: "The division into small, manageable compartments, 'small prisons-within-the-prison' will, in the view of the judging committee, give the inmates and the employees a manageable, suitable and clear community..." (Justitsministeriet 2001: 9). This comment emphasizes the committee's overall organizational principles and their aim for a non-institutional character of the prison building. One of the central demands of the prison authorities was for heightened 'static' and 'dynamic' security.³ The architecture was considered to play an important role in creating opportunities for staff to work towards the re-socialization of the inmates. At the same time, however, it was also expected that the movement to the new prison should go hand in hand with a reduction of 10% in staff costs, because the new prison was expected to allow for a more rational work process.

The use of the principle of 'prisons-within-prisons' and its non-institutional character made the State Prison of Eastern Jutland a novelty in the history of Danish prison buildings, which had traditionally been austere, monumental bodies, which privileged the opportunity for surveillance of the prisoners.

4.1. Architecture and organizational principles

The ambitions for the new prison were that, in almost all respects, it should be differentiated from the traditional prison model, not least the now 150 years old State Prison in Horsens, which the new prison was to replace. This ambition is especially evident in the placing of the prison. Whereas the old prison of Horsens was placed on a hill in the vicinity of the city of Horsens and acted as a landmark of the city and its authority, the new prison is placed low in the terrain outside the city and out of sight for the general public. When seen from a distance across the landscape, the State Prison of Eastern Jutland does not draw much attention to itself. It consists of eight, fairly small buildings surrounded by a concrete perimeter wall (cf. ill. 1). Contrary to tradition, the wall winds and twists its way through the landscape, following the contours of the terrain. Not only does this feature mean that the prison seems to cling to the landscape, making the large structure relatively inconspicuous, but it also allows for views over the wall from inside the prison. This strengthens the buildings' relation with the surrounding landscape and possibly helps reduce the sense of confinement for those inside. Apart from the perimeter wall, there is not much to give the building away as a closed prison containing some of the allegedly most dangerous inmates in Denmark.

Of the eight buildings inside the perimeter wall, four contain cell units, so-called 'normal sections', and one is the 'maximum security section', which is placed away from the others in a 'bulge' in the perimeter wall, without any contact with the rest of the prison. The remaining buildings have communal functions, and include the entrance and administration, a small supermarket and the church, library and sports hall. The four normal sections and the community building are situated around a lake in the middle of the prison premises. This provides the individual sections with an attractive



Ill. 1: *The State Prison of Eastern Jylland seen from above.*

Photo: Courtesy of Friis & Moltke.

view and contributes to the feeling of a classic Danish 'village' set around a central village pond (cf. ill. 2). Each normal section consist of a group of three adjoining sections containing cells, offices, teaching rooms and a section containing the workshops in which most of the inmates spend their working time.

The prison is built in a modern, compact style reminiscent of the functionalist tradition of Scandinavia. The dominating materials are yellow brick, zinc and concrete, which are natural materials with a long-term association with the Danish building code. The buildings have flat, sloping roofs and bands of windows in grey metal and are set in a stringent and tight language of form (cf. ill. 3). The architecture relies on the cube as a recurring element, which can be seen not only in the actual buildings but also in their smaller elements. For instance, gutters, fallpipes and bars, are in a cubic form, clearly



Ill. 3: The normal section seen from distance. Photo: Courtesy of Friis & Moltke.



Ill. 2: Normal section by the lake. Photo: Courtesy of Friis & Moltke.

marking them as stylistically significant contributions to the overall appearance. At the rear end, the normal sections have balconies that the inmates can use when not locked in his cell. They are sealed by bars and, together with the perimeter wall, they are among the few traits that clearly mark the building as a prison (ill 4).

The organization of the prison as smaller prisons-within-the-prison is its overall guiding principle and what most clearly sets it apart from earlier prisons in Denmark. The existence of several prisons within the overall prison framework means that the penal service can be differentiated to the needs of a specific population of prisoners occupying individual cell blocks. This principle is known as 'sectioning', which means that the inmates can be placed in smaller groups with little or no contact with the rest of the prison – a principle



Ill 4: The balconies of the normal sections are sealed by bars. Photo: Courtesy of Friis & Moltke.

that was new to the Danish prison service at the time of this build. Sectioning was supposed to allow prison officers better control of the prison population in an emergency, but it was also designed to allow officers to get to know the inmates in order to support them in their re-socialization process. The re-socialization process was also meant to take place through enhanced socializing between inmates and officers; an ambition which was largely thought could be realized in the organization of rooms for socialization between inmates and officers. In particular, the combination of common room and unit office turned out to bring the different agendas of the actors involved in the design process to the fore.

4.2. Floor plans and re-socialization

The normal sections each consist of three smaller, two-storey sections of which two contain cells. The third, the staff section, comprises a guard room from which the prison section is kept under surveillance as well as a number of offices for the prison staff (ill. 5). The two wings of cells and the staff section are connected by a common room that serves both as a living room for the inmates on one of the floors and as a protruding part of the prison officers' office. Connected to the staff section by a glass corridor are the workshops and teaching rooms, in which most prisoners spend their days working or studying. The prisoners housed in a normal section will spend by far the majority of their sentences commuting between the cell wing and workshop in their own normal section. Generally, the 24 inmates on one floor will be able to meet and socialize in the common room connecting the two wings, but the wings can be divided by sealing off this room and the individual cell wing can be divided down the middle, thereby restricting the number of prisoners in one cell unit to six.



Ill. 5: Blue print of one of the normal sections. Drawing: Courtesy of Friis & Moltke.

As can be seen from the plan, the cell wings are placed so that no connecting traffic is necessary and there is only one exit. The layout means that the cells can be supervised by relatively few officers, and this is regarded as an economical means of providing better static security. In interviews, some of the officers pointed to this 'cul-de-sac' floor plan as an obstacle to informal interaction between officers and inmates. As prison officer A explained about the difference between the old and the new prison:

In Horsens [the old prison], there were many more opportunities to walk up and down the corridors than here [the new prison]. Here everything is much more central – if you take the stairs from outside, you will end up in the office and then you can take that stairs to get out again ... you don't have to go in to the inmates at all. Whereas, in the old prison you had to, no matter what you were doing, you had to pass by the corridor with the inmates. Then, they got much more used to you being there ... here it is almost as if, when you take a walk down the corridor, they think that something is wrong, since you are coming out to them. (Cited in Petersen 2010: 131)

In the State Prison of Horsens, the layout of the floor plan meant that the officers would often pass by the cells on their way around the building, ensuring a natural flow of staff in the cell blocks and allowing for casual conversations to take place when the officers passed inmates. In the new prison, the economically sound 'cul-de-sac' layout also had the unintended effect that casual encounters were much less likely to occur.

As can be seen from the floor plan of the common room, the architects suggested furnishing it with living room furniture, making the room inviting for informal socializing. At the time of this research, the room was furnished with only a billiard table and two pay phones and nothing else, apart from the unit office, which was placed in one of the corners of the room, connecting it to the staff building behind it. The unit office had two parts: a closed part, to which the inmates had no access and from which camera surveillance of the premises as well as paperwork could be conducted, and a protruding part, situated in connection with the common room of the two cell wings. From this location, direct observation of the common room as well as part of the cell wings could be undertaken. This protruding part of the office was also the central hub of com-

munication and interaction between prison officers and inmates, as could be seen from the numerous written messages that were taped to the glass walls surrounding the area. The administration of medication also took place in this room. This was an important and time-consuming task, as the officers had to ensure that the medication was actually consumed by the inmate and not secretly spit out and later re-sold. As such, this part of the office was a very important arena for the interaction between officers and inmates, and particularly because it was the only 'shared territory' between the two groups in the entire prison.

Originally, the office was designed as an open space, which was separated from the inmates' common room only by an open curved counter. The architects' aim was to create an informal atmosphere and to strengthen the dynamic security by facilitating the interaction between inmates and officers. However, rather late in the building process, the prison officers objected to the solution of an open space as they felt it would jeopardize their safety and therefore exerted pressure to have the open counter changed into a traditional closed office with the lower half-wall in plasterboard and the upper half-wall in armoured glass (cf. ill. 6).

This glass wall ensured visual contact between staff and inmates, but in other respects it radically reduced opportunities for informal contact between the two groups. The armoured glass wall was almost sound proof, meaning that verbal communication was discouraged, which was mentioned by some of the informants.⁴ In this way, the change from open-plan counter to a closed room fundamentally altered the social choreography of the prison. Instead of being a room intended for informal interaction and social contact, it became instead a hard border between the officers and inmates that left few opportunities to have informal meetings. This solution was not in line with the original intentions of the architects, who had envisioned a prison that afforded a large degree of informal contact



Ill. 6: *The unit office in the final version. Photo: Courtesy of Friis & Moltke.*

between inmates and staff. As one of them explained in an interview about the building process:

Well ... in the potentially most social rooms, then I think ... if you are to be negative, that we have had our hands tied in a inexpedient way. For example, in what is so beautifully named 'the unit office', we had drawn open counters and imagined that, when talking about re-socialization ... well, imagine if the inmates had the courage and felt like talking to the staff and imagine if the staff had the courage to sit there without entrenching themselves behind armoured glass – that is a place where I think that they [the Prison Service] have chosen sides, in the worst possible way, they have listened to the cry from those with all the bad experiences and not had the courage to believe that it could be better out there [the new prison]. The

combination of not having fulfilled that and then the fact that there will never be any life or contact there, these are just two things where you have to say: some choices have been – and we have designed it, I am not denying that – some choices have been made that means that it will probably never ever be exemplary. (Interview with the leading architect of the prison, Morten Bluhm. October 2, 2006)

As can be seen from this quotation, the Friis & Moltke architects were aware that the amended layout of the unit office might fundamentally change the social interaction patterns of the prison, but did not have the authority to insist on adhering to the original design. On the other hand, the prison officers had the practical experience of working in a closed prison and were the ones who had to live with the consequences of an open-plan setting, which they saw as presenting a potential danger to them. Observations during the study trips showed that the architects' misgivings were to a large degree well-founded. At the time of study observations in the prison, the unit office was not generally used for anything other than administering medication. The inmates did not linger and the office was not used more than necessary for surveillance purposes by the staff. In an interview, prison officers A expresses a rather extensive critique of the unit office, which he thinks is both too sound proof and obstructs the possibilities of socializing with the inmates:

And I do think that we officers have a tendency to withdraw, because when there is a lot of glass you feel exposed yourself. I know that we are supposed to be sitting here and keeping an eye on them, but then I prefer to get up and go down in the corridors. Then I am among them [the inmates] and can talk to them. I don't talk to them anyway, when I am sitting up here. They feel like monkeys in a cage and I feel like someone sitting and watching them. (Cited in Petersen 2001: 131)

This might seem paradoxical in the light of the fact that it was precisely the prison officers who wanted the enhanced security of a full wall. However, this only testifies to the complexities of the different 'prison discourses' which unfold in a variety of media ranging from speech, writing and physical forms. The final design of the unit office may take heed of the prison officers' concerns about their security, but may have other drawbacks both seen as a isolated artifact and as part of a larger 'prison system', which were not foreseen by the officers when they made their original claim.

6.3. Furnishings and normalization

While the tight connection between the macro and meso levels of the building and its penal philosophy seem rather obvious, it remains to be seen whether the micro level of equipment and furnishing also can be said to contribute to the social organization of the building.

Both historical and more recent examples show that prison interior designs have often been characterized by the use of resistant materials and fixed furniture, thereby limiting the inmates' control over their environment.⁵ In the case of the State Prison of Eastern Jutland, the Building Programme stated that normalization was to be a central feature of the new building, thereby seeking to differentiate it from the past tradition of bleak and depressing prison interiors.

The ambition of 'normalization' was evident in the interiors of the cell-wings⁶, in which the hard, impervious materials characteristic of traditional prison designs were generally avoided. Instead, the equipment and furnishings were approximated normal. The kitchens were of a normal, albeit quite institutional, model from the Danish firm 'Invita' and kitchen knives were readily available. Similarly, the furniture in the cells and the common rooms came primarily from the series of furniture produced by the workshops of the Prison service – i.e. made by the inmates themselves. This line of

furniture, known under the name of 'Ribel', was originally designed by an architect in the 1950s for use in the Danish prisons, but has since been modified. It is built on the square as the fundamental element, which in the chair makes up for both legs and armrest and in the table for legs. The overall shape of the chair is very solid and sturdy, which is underlined by the use of only straight angles. Two unattached cushions function as seat and backrest. The series is made of solid ash wood and wool upholstery, which are by no means cheap materials, but very durable, testifying to an institutional logic of writing off expenses. In general, the furniture appears to be compiled of a series of elements that are not fitted together, and this seems to express an additive logic of construction rather than aesthetic ambitions.

The 'Ribel' line is used in several Danish prisons, but is also marketed and sold to other public institutions, offices and student housing (cf. ill. 7). There is nothing in its design that specifically points to its origin or use in prisons, but its vandal-proof design and materials mark it out as a product intended for rough use by those who may not take care of the furniture. It is interesting that, contrary to the Prison Service's high ambitions that the architecture would help 'reform' and 're-socialize' the criminal subjects, no such ambitions were attached to the level of furniture, which, it could be inferred, is seen as having little consequence for the social life of the prison.

Nevertheless, although the interiors in both the cells and the communal areas are modest and somewhat institutional, they do bear witness to the Prison Service's principle of making the interiors as 'normal' as possible. The principle of normalization was even more evident in the two apartments, which the prison offers to long-term prisoners with smaller children. In these apartments, long-term inmates can spend a 'mini-vacation' with their families (cf. ill 8). These apartments were furnished with 'non-institutional' seating, tables, beds and lightning from a known Danish furniture



Ill. 7: Furniture of the series of 'Ribel' is widely used in the prison.
Photo: Trine Brun Petersen.



Ill 8: The apartment for visiting families had coloured walls and was filled with non-institutional furniture. Photo: Trine Brun Petersen.

firm, making the break with the realities of prison life particularly evident. Seen in this light, the prison furniture contributes to the overall semiotic system of the prison on a no less significant level than do wall and floor plans. This is no doubt due to its less permanent character: furniture can be moved or changed. However, as a part of a physical realization of a specific penal philosophy and everyday order, furniture and interiors are as much a part of the regime as is the overall structure of the building.

5. The prison as a semiotic system

As demonstrated in the above analysis, the prison can be seen as a semiotic product. In the complex semiotic system of the prison, different understandings of the realities of the everyday life of the prison and views of how the penal service should be conducted are played out, both verbally and materially. The penal philosophy is strongly manifested at the level of the overall spatial layout, which supports a new regime based on an extended degree of sectioning of the inmates into 'prisons-within-the-prison.' The importance of enhanced dynamic security is emphasized in the building programme

and other official documents, but there is a certain consensus between the architects, the prison officers and the inmates that the design of the unit office as well as the general layout of the prison did not support the Prison Service's ambition for a higher degree of social interaction between staff and inmates. This was even more pertinent, since the challenges in facilitating social contact between officers and inmates in a closed prison are well known (Kjær Minke 2012).⁷ At the micro level of interiors and furniture, the argument of this article is that social significance should not only be accredited to furniture and objects that testify to their users' importance or wealth, but also to objects provided for those who are not in a position to choose for themselves.

As a whole, the prison and especially the common room/unit office, can be seen as a pregnant case of what O'Toole refers to as a 'semiotic instability' (O'Toole 1994). Drawing on the terminology of Kress and van Leeuwen, one might say that a fundamental struggle over the right to define the reality of prison life is played out in the design stratum and stabilized by the production of a certain design (production stratum) that testifies to a general lack of confidence in the inmates, who are considered potentially dangerous. This is evident on all levels, but particularly in the case of the unit office, whose status changes from being the open part of a system of two offices to becoming a *terrain vague*. In Kress and van Leeuwen's terms, this change of meaning takes place in the transition from 'design' to 'production'. In this process, it is emptied of its intended function without being assigned a new one. As a result, the unit office was seldom used by the prison officers⁸ and not deemed satisfactory as either a place for socializing or as a working space. Interestingly, O'Toole implicitly suggests that the actual use patterns of a given room can be seen as an indication of its 'semiotic instability', but does not explore the concept in depth (O'Toole 1994: 93).

Fundamental to my analysis is the discussion of how places, buildings and things can be considered. On a very general level,

the layout of the building reflects the view on crime, crime prevention and the criminal subject. The analysis of documents and discourse from the building process shows that many decisions are the outcome of a combination of economic concerns, incentives to save money and sheer coincidence, rather than of careful analysis and deliberation on behalf of the involved actors; factors which are difficult to disentangle with the passing of time.⁹ Furthermore, the analysis shows that, far from reflecting an overall prison ideology guiding the assumptions and decisions in the building process and an unproblematic transformation from 'mental' to 'physical' structures, the design of some features in the prison was actually the product of the input of different actors with different value systems and different interpretations of the situation. In the analysis of both the design process and the reception of the prison among its users, it is clear that the prison officers' experience and expectations of prison life were in opposition to the ambition of the architects for an open, welcoming interior that would enable staff and inmates to foster trustful relations to the greatest possible extent. Furthermore, the architects' professional insight into the building as a complex socio-material structure was not heeded by the prison authorities. In this sense, the prison stands out, not as the materialization of a hegemonic cultural assumption on the nature of crime, but rather as a result of conflicting positions and interest, which in the design process is transformed into a physical reality with implications for how the building structures the social life of its occupants.

6. Conclusion

The aim of his article has been to analyze and discuss the State Prison of Eastern Jutland in the light of a body of theories exploring the relationship between architecture, ideologies and patterns of action.

The article has focused on the prison as both an expression of a new approach to penal services and as a building type in which social relations are staged and given shape through the physical setting. The overall disposition of building elements, the structure of the unit office and the choice of furniture were analyzed in the light of both what they indicate about penal principles and how they contribute to a certain social choreography. At all three levels (macro, meso and micro), examples can be found of how the sometimes conflicting assumptions of the realities of prison life are given physical shape, which influences the future possibilities of interaction in the prison structure. For analytical purposes, the three guiding principles of the prison: sectioning, re-socialization and normalization, were assigned to the levels of architecture, floor plans and furnishings, respectively, while in reality, of course, the three principles are simultaneously active on all levels.

On a more general level, the article has relied primarily on structuralism and post-structuralism as an analytical paradigm, which may lead to an over-emphasis on the material and disciplinary character of the design. However, spaces and furnishings are also transitory arrangements, which can be transformed and changed in accordance with the life that is lived in them. An analysis from a phenomenological point of view might have been better suited to understanding how spatial organization can be seen, not only as a materialization of certain conceptions and anticipations, but also as an ongoing process. Similarly, a discourse analytical framework might have produced an even more explicit focus on the different interests involved in constructing a complex institutional building like the prison, which would have been an obvious extension of the Foucaultian perspective.

7. Further perspectives

This article has focused on a case study of a large, rather new prison but its theory and method may be applicable to other institutional settings. Whether the conclusions will also hold for other types of institutions as well as non-institutional buildings can only be answered by further research. Furthermore, the interface between design research and theories about multimodality and social semiotics has tentatively been explored. It seems that social semiotics has a lot to offer design research, especially in terms of understanding the object in its social context. Insight from linguistics that studies language in its context of use may also be relevant to design researchers in their aim to understand things in use. Traditionally, Danish design research has been closely tied to the schools of design and architecture and hence focused on knowledge that could inform the actual design process. An interesting point of development would be whether O'Toole's concept of 'semiotic instabilities could be developed from being a purely analytical concept into an approach and way of thinking for designers and architects that could inform and clarify the choices taken in the design process.

I would like to express my gratitude to editor Morten Boeriis, who graciously took the time to answer all my questions on social semiotics and multimodality and whose comments greatly improved this article.

*Department of Design and Communication
University of Southern Denmark
Engstien 1
DK - 6000 Kolding
Email: tbpe@sdu.dk*

Notes

1. However, the design cannot simply be equated with 'visual communication' as this approach raises many new questions. See for instance Guldberg 2010.
2. In design research, the term design is often used both in the original sense of 'sketching' or 'planning' but also refers to the actual material product, which is referred to as a 'production' in Kress and van Leeuwen's terminology.
3. In the terminology of the prison authorities, static security denotes security based on material and technical means, such as the perimeter, fences and surveillance, whereas 'dynamic security' is provided by social means, such as the interaction between staff and inmates.
4. Petersen (2010) 'Statsfængslet Østjylland som social teknologi' p. 131.
5. Not much research exists on prison interiors, but Robert Sommer's *Tight Spaces. Hard Architecture and how to Humanize it* (1974), is a rare exception.
6. This ambition to mimic the everyday life of the general public as closely as possible was also evident in the overall layout of the building, in the division of the day into work and spare time, in the activity of 'buying groceries' in the local shop and in the family-sized, standard kitchens and living rooms.
7. Some of the inmates admitted to actively avoiding the prison officers. See Petersen (2010).
8. This was the situation at the time of my research, but it may subsequently have changed due to new guidelines or other factors.
9. A more elaborate analysis can be found in Petersen (2010).

References

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1970. The Berber house or the world reversed. *Social Science Information* 9. 151-170.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Overvågning og straf. Fængslets fødsel*. Danmark: Det lille forlag.
- Gibson, James J. 1977. The Theory of Affordances. In Shaw, Robert & John

- Brandford (eds) 1977. *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Gidion, Sigfried. 1995. *Mechanization Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*. New York: Norton.
- Guldberg Jørn. Forth coming. *Designstudier. En introduction: Samfundslitteratur*.
- Guldberg Jørn. 2010. Design as communication?: If design is communication, then who is the sender, who is the receiver and what is the message? Spain, 10th World Congress of Semiotics
- Hebdige, Dick. 2003. *Subculture. The Meaning of Style*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hodge, Robert & Gunther Kress. 1988. *Social Semiotics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Home Office. 1998. *New Directions in Prison Design. Report of a Home Office Study of New Generation Prisons in the USA*. H.M.S.O.
- Horsens Kommune. 1999. *Myter og realiteter om Statsfængslet i Horsens*. Horsens. Horsens Kommune.
- Johnson, Norman. 2000. *Forms of Constraint. A History of Prison Architecture*. Campaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Johnson, Norman. 1973. *The Human Cage. A Brief History of Prison Architecture*. New York: Walker and Company.
- Justitsministeriet. 2001. *Nyt statsfængsel i Vejle Amt. Indbydt projektkonkurrence. Dommerbetænkning*. København. Justitsministeriet.
- Kress, Gunther & Theo van Leeuwen. 2006. *Multimodal Discourse. The modes and media of contemporary communication*. Great Britain: Arnold.
- Kress, Gunther. 2010. *Multimodality. A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge.
- Lyhne, Vagn. 1997/98. *Kropsarkitekten*. Slagmark. *Tidsskrift for idéhistorie*. nr. 27. 111-141.
- Minke, Linda Kjær. 2012. *Fængslets indre liv. Djøf / Jurist- og Økonomforbundet*.
- Norman, Donald. 1991. *The Design of Everyday Things*. London: MIT Press.
- O'Toole, Michael. 1994. *The Language of Displayed Art*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Petersen, Trine Brun. 2010. *Statsfængslet Østjylland som social teknologi. En diskussion af design som et ideologisk og adfærdsregulerende fænomen*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Kolding, Designskolen Kolding.

- Projektgruppen vedr. Etablering af et nyt fængsel. 2000. Analyse af kravene til et nyt fængsel. Kravspecifikationer. København. Direktoratet for Kriminalforsorg.
- Smith, Peter Schaff. 2003. Moralske hospitaler. Det moderne fængselsvæsens gennembrud 1770-1870. København: Forum.
- Sommer, Robert. 1974. Tight Spaces. Hard Architecture and How to Humanize it. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Verbeek, Peter-Paul. 2005. What Things Do. Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency and Design. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Vihma, Susann. 1995. Products as Representions – a Semiotic and Aesthetic Study of Design Products. Helsinki. University of Art and Design Helsinki.
- Vihma, Susann. 2010. Design Semiotics in Use. Aalto University.