

A SPATIAL ANALYSIS

A documentation and analysis of some the key spaces
that help tell the story of the ISLAND.

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The mission

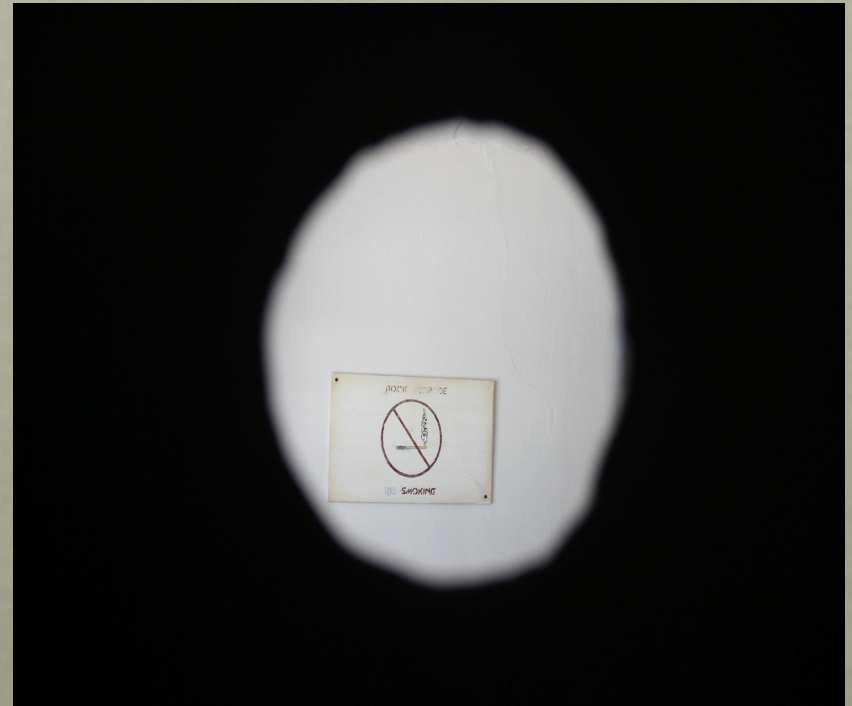
Given that Robben Island has gone through many changes, from being a maximum security prison and to being a museum that receives over a 1000 visitors a day. The physical spaces are changing and with the passage of time, the physical memory of the space is eroding.

- The purpose of this study was to ascertain the extent and nature of the changes that have taken place and,
- To find creative ways of enhancing the visitor experience by letting the physical environment and the buildings speak

background

The spaces surveyed include, the Kramat, the Maximum Security Prison, the Leper Grave Yard, the Good Shepherd Church, the Lime Quarry, the Officers Club.

This is start of several iterative conversations about memory and space that will guide the interpretation.



Specific Questions

Although guided principally, by the desire to preserve the spaces and buildings in their 'original state', there is an understanding that the Island is not static, we need to deal with the following questions.

- To what extent do the spaces resemble the condition at the point of decommissioning?
- How far or how close are spaces to the 'shared' memories of the ex-political prisoners, warders, heritage experts and others.
- How can the space be 'treated' in such a way that they can tell the story of the Island.

Guiding Principle

The current visitor has a very surface encounter with the environment and with the built environment. All knowledge is transferred through the tour guide. We were guided by the principle that with minimal intervention, the land and the buildings, could be made to speak a different way. The Island could tell its own story.

Guiding question

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Left alone to 'experience' the Island unguarded,
**would a visitor be able to
know what took place here?**

Church of the GoOd Shepherd

Built by Lepers, the Church of the Good Shepherd is a great example of a building that can speak about the early history of the Island, the Island as a place of banishment or seclusion for 'undesirables'. At the moment the buses stop and the tour guides talk about the story of leprosy. Inside the Church there is an exhibition called Stigmata about leprosy and early history of the Island. Architecturally the church should be treated as an artifact that speaks of the spirit of the lepers, condemned to die on the Island.



Church of the Good Shepherd

Currently the church is out of bounds for visitors. This is mainly for heritage reasons. The church could not cope with a steady stream of visitors without deteriorating.

Thought must be given as to how the need to provide the visitor with a rich, tactile experience and the need to preserve the church can be balanced. **What design options are there that can make the visitor experience the space without ruining it?**



Leper graveyard



Leper graveyard

The graveyard is an important touchstone for the early history of the Island. It is a 'shrine' to the condemned. It is also an important protected area for birds to breed. Currently, the tours stop and visitors get some information on the space and its significance from inside the bus.



Leper graveyard

Currently the graveyard is in an state of neglect. The fences are not mended, the grounds are not taken care of, the pathways are not cared for. **The graveyard occupies an important and visible part of the tour.** This is an ideal space to allow for a walk about. Using the language of stones, the space could tell the story of leprosy, seclusion and death on the Island. With proper care and beatification, the Graveyard could be tranquil/contemplative space, a walk away from the Maximum Security prison.



Leper graveyard

With landscaping and constant care, the graveyard could be made into a beautiful, tranquil space with extraordinary views of the Island and its relationship with mainland. There are 7 big trees (which could be become resting spots and watering holes while respecting the birdlife.)



Leper graveyard



Allow the visitor to feel the deeper meaning of the space. Let them feel. Let the ground tell it's manifold stories.

Leper graveyard



The land does not forget

THE PRISON



Maximum security prison

The Maximum Security Prison is the center piece of the current Robben Island tour.



Character and prisons



The current treatment of the The Maximum Security Prison does not convey the character of place that once imprisoned people considered to be the most dangerous prisoners in the land.

The Building does not speak for itself



Information about the prison is transmitted through the guide – the building does not speak for itself. People walk in and out without a sense guided discovery and awe.

space - meaning



There is no induction and orientation which establishes the relationship between the visitor and the space – without information about the prison, when it was built, its architecture and this it was built by prisoners the spaces as presented have no meaning.

No Respect for the Marks of time



The overlay of different exhibitions, and the passage of time means that there is consistent way that the walls of the prison speak. There is also no respect for the 'original' markings and naming of things.

Respect – Ritual - Routine



The dialogue between the prisoner and the prison – between the body brick walls, the cement floors, the prison bars is the basis of dialogue between the visitor and the space.

The messages is in the symbols



The power of the prisoner's story is lost in how the space sends wrong messages. The open doors, loud speaking voices (especially the tour guide), the neglect of the physical space, all contradict the feelings and the testimonies of the people who were locked up here. The prison was never bright, well ventilated paces with open doors.

No Story – No JOURNEY no transformation



Because the story is not plotted spatially to allow for gradually discovery, there is no commitment from the visitor. the drama that is inherent in the logic of the prison and prison life is lost. The story does not unfold naturally as one goes from one space to the next, as the prisoner would.

A Commitment to truth



The Maximum Security prison was built by the prisoners – there is no other greater monument to them. All of them, not just a noted few. Robben Island is about the revelation of the intimate truths of the over 3000 people who were imprisoned there. In Every Name, in Every Story, is the story of our becoming.

The whole truth



In the current experience, there is no presence of warders, dogs, batons, guns, prisoners write about gut wrenching experiences at the hands of warders the speak of torture to the body and torture to the mind. The maximum security prison was run by 200 guards, with guns and dogs between the double security fence. It was a space of Surveillance and Terror

Soul - space - SPORT



Sport, like art and music, was a rare space of freedom, of exertion, of comradeship, of discipline, of fortitude; all be it, behind bars. Sports field provide the space to exhibit the vitality of human endeavor, against all odds

Historicity and space



With the correct labeling of the spaces and the objects, the 'powerful' out of the way spaces could be curated in way that would deepen the visitor experience. Trust the Visitor they get it without too much explanation.

remove what does not belong



The cellblocks have become galleries of different exhibitions. Many of who do not help to deepen the knowledge and the feeling for the visitor.

The Visitor Centre



Restoration is ongoing



Largely restored, the visitor's center is an emotionally charged space – ready to tell its stories

The intimate history of courage



no other space dramatizes the human side of Robben Island than this one. Here, the visitor must feel the bonds of love, the depth of loss, the longevity of friendship and unwavering solidarity. All performed under the cruel stare of the guards ever punishing presence.

Space - More than pictures and text on the wall



giving the visitor the full experience is more than just putting pictures and writings on walls that have their own unspoken truths. Let the Visitor Centre tell its stories in layers first while allowing for today's truths and unfinished stories to complete themselves.

A history cut off



In the current narrative, The Visitor Centre is cut off. Cut off from the only physical connector the prisoner had to the outside world. Today the Building is seething silently, still cut off.

the Building will speak



Using the instruments of separation and surveillance the visitor must be given insight into the intimate trials and triumphs of the prisoners and their families

The sacred is in the material



the buildings - the furniture - the broken communication instruments - the burglar bars, constitute the material evidence of the suffering shared by families and friends of the imprisoned person.

A site of secular spirituality



When these corridors get their turn to testify; humanity will listen with a new intelligence and **with spirits tempered by truths not often shared.**

Heal the space



restore the simplicity and austerity of the prison

The Lime QUARRy



Crime and Punishment



Still bearing the marks left by the men who were forced to quarry stones in harsh weather, the Lime Quarry, is a piece of sculptured earth that pays homage to the prisoners.

The LAND NEVER FORGETS



The land is waiting with stories of cruelty, of pain, of resistance, of solidarity, of friendship, of harsh suns and sharp winds. There are marks left behind, that generations must still come to understand

Design and Meaning



the Lime quarry is an environmentally sensitive spot. What design opportunities are there, to create points of observation and interpretation enhance the sacredness of the space without exposing it to further degradation?

A sacred site



marking a historic return to the Island by former prisoners, a humble pile of stones sits in a prominent spot, unexplained. A powerful Afrikan ritual of remembrance can be presented in a moving way to visitors.