A DRUG REHABILITATION CENTER
FOR WOMEN WITH CHILDREN

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(ABSTRACT)

The design of a drug rehabilitation center for women with children incorporated the treatment theories of therapeutic communities. At the time this center was designed, only two facilities of this type were in use specifically for women. The Washington metropolitan area was in need of such a treatment program for women.

Three architectural concepts were studied which were appropriate for this type of facility: threshold, community and natural light. Threshold became a symbol for change. The development of a small community within was the unifying concept for this project. Natural light was developed as an important element which is a healing medicine for the psychological and mental health of a person.

Society needs to deal with the problem of drugs and the hold they take on people. It is no longer responsible for us to turn our heads from this affliction. Facilities such as the one developed in this thesis will help mothers overcome their addictions, while obtaining some family cohesion. The children that are able to participate with their mothers will hopefully avoid the same mistakes their own mothers made. One day they may grow up to become responsible, contributing parents and citizens.
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CONTENTS

1 SITE LOCATION PLANS
2 SITE PLAN
3 CONCEPTS
8 THRESHOLD
9 HOUSE 3
12 PATH
14 CHILDREN'S HOUSE
19 BUS STOP
20 GROUP HOUSE
23 ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
26 BUILDING JOINTS
28 FINAL PLANS
29 FINAL AXONOMETRIC
30 BIBLIOGRAPHY
31 VITA
AREA PLAN

COMMUNITY PLAN

FINAL PLAN

KEY
1. Admin. Building
2. House 3
3. Children's House
4. Bus Stop
5. Community House
The Drug Rehabilitation Center for Women with children required a carefully chosen site. It was important to select a symbolic location. Del Ray Alexandria is a diverse community that supports the metaphor - change and growth, this is the same metaphor that nurtures the community within the drug rehabilitation facility. I was able to find a site that was near a depressed area. It was visible and accessible to people in need of childcare while residing in a rehabilitative facility. This site is also on the edge of an area that is becoming a middle class community.

The site becomes a threshold from the depressed part of town to the middle class area. The process of rehabilitation is a threshold into a renewed way of life. The site is two blocks from an elementary school, on a bus line, and near playgrounds and grocery stores. This eliminated the need for cars. This site is approximately 450' wide and 115' deep and has streets on 3 of the 4 edges. This challenged me to relate to 2 street corners, one of which is prominent. These limitations and conditions guided me to some strong architectural conclusions. This drug rehabilitation center is based on the “therapeutic community” treatment model. One of these programs exists in the D.C. area and it is named Second Genesis. Second Genesis is a coed facility that has locations in Bethesda, Maryland and Alexandria, Virginia. They gave me the opportunity to view the house in Alexandria and talk to one of the residents. After our discussion, I realized that the initial contact with the community within this facility is a critical one which often impacts the individual’s decision concerning their commitment to the program.
BUILDINGS JOINED BY SPACES

SITE UNIFIED BY A PATH

BUILDINGS ORDERED BY A WALL
INITIAL CONCEPTS: WALL & THRESHOLD ORDER SITE

SITE CLARITY: PATH DEFINITION EVOLVES

PATH STUDY: CIRCULATION IS DELINEATED
Therapeutic Communities are based on positive peer pressure. Everyone has their own responsibilities. If an individual does not fulfill their responsibilities, the entire group suffers. Cooperation and optimism help the program to run smoothly. If one person is not able to handle their work, it is important that the others pitch in to help finish the job. This builds a trust in people. This trust in turn leads to better relationships. Children are able to share in the healing process of this program because many believe that these kids have already seen the worst in their mothers. These mothers have already been through a detoxification program before admittance to this program. The basic component in a Therapeutic Community is a unit or a pod. These units or pods become like families. One person becomes the matriarch, or leader. Several units come together to form a community. The community shares common space in the first building known as the group house. Uses for the house include dining, classrooms, recreation rooms and counseling areas. The women of the community are responsible for the maintenance of this building, as well as the cooking and planning of all meals. At the time the mothers live in the community house, the children live in the second building or the children's house. When the mothers have earned the right to live with their children, they progress to the halfway house, House 3. Upon gaining this right, these women must obtain jobs, and pay rent. These mothers learn about budgeting for their families while gaining greater financial responsibilities. The fourth building on the site is the administration building. The admittance of women to the facility proceeds within this building. This is the building the women are initially exposed to upon entering this complex and treatment program.
“Places remembered and places anticipated dovetail into the temporal span of the present.” - Aalda Van Eyck

THRESHOLD

“Places remembered and places anticipated dovetail into the temporal span of the present.” This quotation by Aalda Van Eyck represents in my estimation, the essence of the architectural concept threshold. This topic is explored and Van Eyck’s talent for expressing this idea is shown in the threshold for his house for unwed mothers. There is a complex weaving of space that makes a threshold by allowing many discoveries through time. Architecture goes beyond the three dimensions into the fourth dimension of time. Each step one takes leads to a different view, material, light or texture. This complexity allows one to feel the architecture with the senses. The experience begins with the texture of the pavement extending into a public walk. Architecture moves beyond building limits; a practice Frank Lloyd Wright often used. A person has to break the plane of walls after which this person becomes part of the realm of threshold. There is a series of steps to climb, but once at entry level the experience is just beginning. Van Eyck creates a place for us to turn and allows us to see where we have been. This is the dovetailed experience. After this return to the past, one passes through an architectural element, beginning the physical contact with the architecture. Once again we are offered a view of the past before we actually take the turn and go through the door to the future. It becomes a complex series of architectural events that eases one into the building. It was this attention to the architectural experience that I hoped to achieve in my explorations.
House 3 is essentially a halfway house for the mothers. House 3 is the final step leading to a sober life, but it was the starting point for me. House 3 has to accomplish several things. The house must relate to the street since these women are working full time in the outside world and the children attend the elementary school two blocks away. Furthermore, the house must relate to the facility by facing inward. These women are primarily drug rehabilitation residents, and all their extracurricular activities take place in the complex. These mothers are still part of the program, sharing 2 to 3 meals a week at the community house and attend private and group counseling sessions. They remain members of their family unit. Lastly, these houses had to vary in size depending on the number of children in the family. My initial study of house 3 was a study of threshold through exploring the concepts of Aldo Van Eyck. The final design shows a change in the pavement pattern that indicates the individual thresholds. A series of spaces between walls unfolds slowly to lead one to the building. As time unfolds, one transforms slowly from the realm of the public way to the private home. The back porch is the buffer zone from the inner community's walk to the family's private area. As this community's path leads one through and by these houses, one may visualize the potential for healing. This brings on a new sense of hope.
The path for the site was the most difficult portion to develop. The architecture for this element lies in the details. This path needed a strong statement. It is the tie that unifies this site into a community, and one building. Natural light and materials played a strong role in the development of this structure. Glass blocks suspend in space, giving shelter from rain while illuminating a pattern onto the pavement below. This illumination created a texture on the smooth surface. This texture through light becomes the path that leads one through the facility. The Glass blocks suspend by steel T's that span between steel tubes. This structural system relates to the concepts of De Stijl. Structural members pass by one another, instead of butting into one another. The connections are bolted. The columns are created with 4 steel angles. The angles are equally spaced apart, allowing the steel tubes above to pass through the negative space. This path became a vehicle for the design of the joints between all the buildings and became the unifying element for this site.
AXONOMETRIC STUDY

FINAL PLAN

FINAL ISOMETRIC DETAIL @ PATH

DETAIL SKETCH

ELEVATION DETAILS

FINAL SECTION
CHILDREN'S HOUSE
The Children's house is the anchor for the community. The back wall orders the overall site. This is a "house as a wall." These children are their mother's lifeline. It is most likely because of these children that these mothers have a reason to live, and live their lives sober. This house is in the most sheltered part of the site. It will be the safest place to be and should give the children a sense of security. It is adjacent to the community house, providing easy access to their mothers and the common eating areas. The house has several bays with doors that give direct access to the community lawn, where the children are sure to spend many hours playing. The house developed as a layer of zones. These zones (as in House 3) ranged from the public realm to the private. There is an abundance of natural light and primary colors. A continuous skylight washes the back wall with natural light. The back wall is brick with a smooth finish. As the light hits the brick, a rich, varied color radiates into the rooms. The main passageway moves parallel with the wall and is the most public of spaces. Off the main walkway, within the structural bays are study carols. Each bay contains 2 desks. Within the same structural bay lies the stairs that lead to the sleeping lofts. The zone closest to the hall is a play pit that is about a foot and a half below the main level. This play area receives the most natural light, since it is directly in front of the 2 level windows between the structural bays. The most sheltered area contains bathing facilities, and clothing areas. This linear house as a wall, with its colors, and bright light may be the home these children never had. They will adapt to a new, safer world, while their mothers are taking the very steps that will ensure them safety once they reenter the world outside.
FINAL UPPER LEVEL PLAN

FINAL LOWER LEVEL PLAN

FINAL ELEVATION

KEY PLAN
BUS STOP
GROUP HOUSE
The Group House is the place where a sense of community is nurtured. This is the house where the mothers are initially exposed to the community. The pods, or families live, eat, work, and counsel together at this location. This house is also one of the corner anchor's for the site. The 3 pods are represented on the exterior with dormer windows and the facade language that faces Glebe Road. Behind these windows are 3 separate houses. They become houses within a building. The lounge and recreation areas are below the houses that are built on pilotis. The houses, classrooms, counseling rooms, and T.V. areas surround the main dining area that is the main focus for this building. This room is almost majestic, with a vertical span of 30 feet, topped by a clerestory that allows streams of sunlight to envelop the room in the morning. The windows on the end elevations develop from the brick and its relationship with the roof slope. Steel lintels are exposed above the windows, displaying the veneer nature of the material between the brick piers within the end walls.
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
The Administration Building was the final building to be developed. It is an important building because it is the first part of this complex one is exposed to upon entering the facility. The center of this building is on the main axis of the site, and is aligned with the center of the group house. If one stands just below the apex of the building and looks West, he or she is able to obtain a glance into the future. After admittance to the facility one enters the site on axis through the narrow gateway that generates a slightly larger view. The view unfolds as one progresses through the walls of house 3. After this progression one walks through a forest of columns that create sheltered space allowing an individual to focus on oneself. Mothers who enter here are about to begin the process that will make their lives, and their children's lives free from the bonds of drugs and their grip on life.
BUILDING JOINTS
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