



AN INHERITANCE IN PARENTHESES  
The revitalized identity

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## THE SYMPTOM OF TODAY

In today's society there is a symptom of leaving the old, abandon it and face the new, use and throw. Only that what we abandon or throw away are not necessarily broken, but we don't care to fix it, we get tired of it and rather want to start fresh again. This symptom appears within, to name some, objects, tools, people and buildings. It is the last mentioned I will focus this text about. How the society for some decades now have left buildings to decay. And in the world today there are not room anymore to leave our buildings to decay and raise new. Our globe cannot hold it much longer, and it is about time that we turn around and explore what is already there, explore ways of new use and ways to fix. With this text I will try to work myself into the matter of a chosen site for an upcoming project.



## AN IDENTITY

An important part of fixing something, is to assure that one preserves the identity of what is about to be fixed. This can be the smallest fragments, something that give future occupants a hint of what once was, or one can conceptually make it quite clear. One can give new life, but we must respect it's very origin. In psychology Identity is defined as an experience of oneself and one's distinctive character, qualities and similarities with and differentiations with other people. Identity is the sum of everything that creates individuality, where an individual is a unit which cannot be divided without losing its uniqueness. Identity can also be in flux, where the façade can hide what is really inside and which character one take to the surface. When talking about individuality one often thinks of a person, but this term can be used in many ways, it just depends on the angle. Objects also have an identity, only that the object itself are not aware of it's very being. Therefore, the term can be transferred to buildings, where the building cannot experience itself, but it's appearance and placement reveal to us an identity and leave us with an attitude towards it, in some way or another. Our attitude toward a build mass is also affected by time and purpose.

By first glance on a building one can see features which hint to us a certain time and use, which can be categorize it in a certain typology or style, for example art nouveau. It reveals it's character, but one has to enter to learn to know the identity.

But what is a building without people? With no careful hands maintaining the bones and the skin. It will start to decay and become a stone in the shoe for those supposedly responsible.

We need the building, and the building needs us. If one wants a long-lasting relationship, it needs maintenance, both among people and for people and buildings. Human shapes building, we give it a place and create tis space. We give it identity. Place and space affect us in many ways and the buildings shapes us as well, built mass activates our emotions in good and bad. I think the identity here play a big role, if it has been taken care of or not. An abandoned building may have a spooky character, but with some care, magic can happen. Humans play a big part in letting the building's identity remain, but it is not given that it has to look the same, as long as we don't forget. When it is first manifested in the landscape, history will be made and then it is not just the building, it is also the place



*Photo private*

## A LANDMARK

In modern times, landmarks can be so much. It can be a feature in the landscape, a monument of some sort or simply something in one's mind which put you in the exact moment of spent time, but for that, one needs a reminder.

In 2011 Wander van der Vaart and Tina Glasner wrote a text based on their investigation in field methods called: "Personal Landmarks as Recall aids in survey interviews." In this text they have findings on how we work with landmarks in our mind: "From these models, it follows that landmarks will be most effective if they are personal events and if they are related to respondents' central lifetime periods" (Van der Vaart & Glasner, 2011). Followed by: "The findings also lead to the hypothesis that some types of landmarks might influence mainly a year recall, whereas others improve in particular recall of the month of events" (Van der Vaart & Glasner, 2011).

With this one can also recall the fact that landmarks, life events, can be evoked if the memory got triggered in a certain frame. But how to relate personal landmarks to a landmark so obvious as a building? For me it is natural to refer to van der Vaart and Glasner's survey because a building can also serve as a landmark stuck in memory, where its very existence reminds about what once was. A monumental building, yes, viewable from high and low, but with a history that can work with many parallels in one's mind.

A landmark like this, a monument, is referable to the very origin of using landmarks, when in ancient times had to navigate after something on land. This could be from nature's side or it could be human made, as a large building. It rises through the surrounding landscape and pinning out a point on the map.

But why bring up the landmarks in our very minds? Because it can also tell something about the attitude towards a place, specially a place holding a monumental building, which has historical walls holding on to stories of the past. Where its history manifests itself as a landmark in time.

"These findings from autobiographical memory research suggest that the most suitable landmark events are important, domain related, and personal" (Van der Vaart & Glasner, 2011). And for the very building I have in mind, I know there is a lot of personal landmarks which relate to a time most have not lived in. So, when a place carries a rumor, carried through generations, how does this affect the people living nearby? I would say that depends on the placement of a building. If it brings shadow to the neighbors, or have a program which brings disturbance to its surroundings. The place I have in mind is built as a community, like a super small village, isolated from human pollution. But the psychological effect of the place is maybe another story. This will also make the society in some way or another have to relate to this landmark, both visually and psychologically. A monument to be observed from a great distance



## .THE MENTAL HOSPITAL

Mental hospitals from an older day quite often appear as landmarks, impenetrable buildings in all its glory with an ostentatious appearance in the horizon.

There is a specific building which I have in mind. A building abandoned for some years now. And for its identity I think it is hard to change peoples' attitude towards it. In this case it is not necessary its monumental architecture which creates an attitude, it is the history taken place, the program this very building where made for. A mental institution. To understand the structure of a building, one must understand what's taken place there.

The building has served the mentalness more or less its whole time of living, but the activity has change within the rhythm of society. It was built as an asylum, function as a container for those who were to be considered deviations in society. Here has shock treatment and lobotomization taken place. Here I want to discuss Erving Goffman's book "Asylums, essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates". The book was written in 1961, after the author had spent a year working as a physical therapist's assistant in a mental hospital for doing research work on patients in that type of institution. It is through this field work he found his theory "Total institution", where he places mental hospitals in the same category as prisons, consecration camps, monasteries, orphanages and military organizations. A total institution is defined as a place of residence and work, where a great number of individuals are cut off from society for a period of time. In his book Goffman is merciless towards the system and write from the patient's point of view.

The book had many days of glory, but it has also been a theme for discussion.

In Raymond M. Weinstein's article he criticizes the book quite strongly, he argues: "There is too much attention given to the myriad forms of betrayal, mortification, and identity transformation to which inmates are subjected and too little attention given to the therapeutic or rehabilitative functions of the hospital." (Weinstein) Followed up by: "Most mental health researchers today do not blindly accept Goffman's model of men-tal hospitals, as they realize that it is more an exposition of a personal point of view than a carefully controlled study." (Weinstein). This analysis of the "Asylums" makes me think of the time Goffman wrote this book, early 60's. Could it be that he was "stuck" in another period of time? And a myth that he wanted to reveal. I have thought that maybe his mind was already set before he starts working as an assistant, that his mind was not neutral. I think as an outsider of these institutions; a neutral mind is not easy to maintain.

Because in 1965, fifty-two years after the opening of Dale asylum, the building changed name to Rogaland psychiatric hospital. I read this as a start for a deeper understanding of individuals minds, but it was not until the 80's the psychologists arrived. From then on, the place was no longer supposed to be a container, but an institution that worked to get the patients so healthy that they could be discharge from the hospital. In 1993 the building opened up to become a refugee install and in 2001 the place closed as a psychiatric hospital.

Parallel with these programs there was a department for treating people addicted to drugs which closed in 2004. So, the building has had different programs but with a clear common denominator to house the deviation in society.

Regarding "Total institution", nursing homes can be argued to be a small part in this term. Maybe not so literally in the "total", but as a container for humans which deviates from the society. One can read it in the architecture of the institution, which have similar features to the mental hospitals. In 2008 Professors for Health science Solveig Hauge and Kristin Heggen wrote their text "The nursing home as a home: a field study of residents 'daily life in the common living rooms.'" Here they introduce a model for nursing homes in the 50's, same time as Dale's days of glory: "In about 1950, the nursing home developed within the framework of a medical model requiring nursing homes to become more like a hospital than a home." (Hauge and Heggen, 2008). And they showed a concern about the individuals taken place in this type of institution:

"Studies of privacy and control in nursing homes show that this is a major problem in institutional care. The possibility of maintaining autonomy in everyday matters is limited" (Hauge and Heggen, 2008).

By learning the history, I see that the situation at institutions in a general suffer from this. Mental hospital has also functioned as a current and frequent home for many over the decades, but it has never been treated like that. I think here, the architecture plays an important role. How the space is facilitated creates the attitude toward the program.

If it is well facilitated, it will not end with a bunch of individuals, stacked together and then followed by Goffman's book.

In the anthropologist Edmund Leach' text "An anthropologist's reaction on a social survey" he has some good point which can be seen in parallel to how one could read the misinterpretation of people living an institutional life. "...a social field does not consist of units of population but of persons in relation to one another." (Leach 1967) And here one can take Edward T Hall's "Proxemic" term to discussion. Where proxemics is the study of how people unconsciously structure the space around them and how this structure varies with every culture. To maintain all these structures created in a mental institution, is maybe why Goffman had the view on this type of institution as he had. Hall talks about "proxemics in a cross-cultural context". This regard, coming from different borders, where for example Americans and Germans have different norms of intruding someone's space. Where the American can "pop" their head into a door, but not consider themselves as inside, while according to the German, he has already entered. But one can also take the term on a micro level and see the mental institution as one world, isolated from what's outside. Another example: "To a German, light furniture is anathema, not only because it seems flimsy, but because people move it and thereby destroy the order of things, including intrusions on the "private sphere" (Hall, 1969).

If one view a mental institution as the whole world, where each individual count as a border, there will appear several proxemics within the walls and maybe that is really what Goffman observed. Maybe the micro proxemic view is his misinterpretation.

Goffman had a great impact on the understanding of problems related to institutional life. But one can argue that this impact is why Goffman's heritage "Haunts" our understanding of institutional buildings today?

I have personally described Dale psychiatric hospital as a place with dark history. This based upon my readings on it, and people's general attitude towards it, an attitude which has followed generations. I now realize that I have to shed new light on the place.



*Photo private*

## A PARENTHESIS

This attitude has really putted the place in a parenthesis, because what we put in a parenthesis is not the protagonist, it is something we cannot oversee, but we will not give it much attention. It is like passing by, an afterthought, and what is complete will remain complete without it. A parenthesis in our society is this abandoned institutional building. It has been condemned for its programs and pushed out of the society. And now have the symptom of today let its glory fade away. Where the discussion of filling the old structure with new program or has been constant.

For the aspect of this parenthesis I want to refer to Michel Foucault's "Heterotopia". He used this term to describe several layers of meanings or relationships to other spaces than what is obvious. Where Heterotopia is the contrast to utopia, by this means that there can be real places built into society's foundation, but still outside society. This is maybe an answer to why Dale psychiatric hospital has been abandoned for several years.

Foucault had different principals to describe the layers of Heterotopia. One of them are called "Heterotopia of deviation", which is defined as: "Spaces where those whose behavior deviates from the usual norm are placed (prison, psychiatric hospital)" (Wikipedia). And to drag a parallel to the nursing home, Foucault also mention this type of institution in the field of tension between "crisis heterotopia" and "deviation heterotopia" as deviation in the modern society, where deviation heterotopia has taken over. So, no matter what your deviation is, institutionalizing is the only answer.

“The term heterotopia has and also been used to describe places which, unlike utopias, have really existed, but which have a special status in space and in consciousness - and are different from everyday spaces through a kind of modern “rites of passage” (Wikipedia). In the context of a mental institution I think this is something which can be related, where I imagine an institutional life is everything about different from everyday space.

Foucault also writes that: “Heterotopia has the ability, in a single real place, to juxtapose multiple spaces, multiple locations, which are in themselves incompatible.” (Foucault, 1984). Here he used cinema and Theater as examples. This I would argue could also be shed in the light of mental illness. Where the body exist in this exact room, but the mind has wondered in a space, maybe to be compared to a cinema or theatre, where the person plays out the confused mind. And what happens when several of those minds exist together within the same parameters. How many rooms do then exist but will never unite in the exact here and now?

Dale has been a parenthesis in its society since the very beginning. Built outside of the city, as its own little society cut off from everything that could remind of a “normal” life. For every time the society had a group of people they, assumable, did not know how to deal with, sending them to Dale has been the decision. Putting them in this parenthesis of society, us and them. This made the place a “victim” for rumors and fear and have brought a social behavior towards the place and building.

## THE HERITAGE

The current heritage of the protagonist in this text is mainly of rumours and fear. Where the building mass is left to decay, while the walls carry a hundred and ten-year-old history. The history may have features which give the surrounding society all right to feel fear and distance to it, but the building and property itself should not remain with this reputation. Clearly this is its identity, and this must live to an eternity. But we must learn to get along with the past and have a change in our attitude towards this mental hospital. Maybe Goffman’s words have imprinted us with the way we act towards the building. Even though there are dark features in the activity, one must also think of the variation in activity taken place here. And the building itself are now ready for a new era, a new attitude.

Even though the modern society suffer from the use and throw mentality, the future of exciting buildings is brighter. Where the awareness of heritage is getting relevant in the construction of identity. This is said by Anne Kathrine Larsen, which wrote the text “Bringing the past to life. Museums, games and cultural trails”. And I see it quite relevant in the light of built mass. Larsen’s text talks about the modern way of displaying the past. Now we are no longer outside viewer of glass cases we become participants

Larsen argue: “The interest in cultural heritage is also connected with a general reflection on one’s own present through a comparison with and positioning in relation to the past” (Larsen 2013).



Being a participant in a constructed past is something she compares to a liminal experience, where one must make a trip to arrive to the scene where the history will be acted. Where the participants get an understanding of and an approach to the surroundings and the environment where the history took place. And the walk back will also bring some time of reflection and processing of the experience.

This liminal experience is something I imagine have taken place at Dale. Where the road to get there is quite isolated and bring time to wonder what to expect. I would also argue that staying at a mental hospital is a liminal experience, where you are put in this parenthesis, this bubble, this little village.

Larsen's text enlighten something important regarding heritage, where modern society praises the history by acting it out, I think the same eagerness should be showed towards Dale. Even if the built mass should be destroyed, the land will always carry this history. We should not necessary act out electroshock and lobotomizing, but getting ready to enrich the heritage and bring it into the future.



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## A NEW ERA

A possible way of bringing the exciting into a new era could be to soften it up, give the identity some new features. A program which play with the participants rather against. Today the architecture of the building is shaped in a sociofugal manner, this system make sense when one is dealing with heterotopia of deviation. Hall argues that when stress increases, sensitivity to crowding rises. When this happens, people get more on edge and therefore more and more space is required. This in many ways give the architecture meaning. A mental hospital must be a place containing a lot of stress. That program is history now, but for what will come, one can work with what is already there. I wonder how far one could go to transform the place into a sociopetal system, not so far that the identity vanishes, but far enough to change society's attitude and stress toward the place. To take a proxemic point of view: "According to Hall, the study of proxemics is valuable in evaluating not only the way people interact with others in daily life, but also "the organization of space in [their] houses and buildings, and ultimately the layout of [their] towns" (Wikipedia).

In his field work, Hall also got following founding's: "Everything from an office to a town of city will reflect the sense modalities of its builders and occupants. In considering solutions to problems such as urban renewal and city sinks it is essential to know how the populations involved perceive space and how they use their senses." (Hall, 1969). Hall have a very positive attitude towards Japanese and their way of preserving space. Especially their way of designing gardens, where they employ vision and all the other senses as well as olfaction, shifting's in temperature, humidity light, shade and colour.

All of this work together to enhance the use of the whole body as a sensing organ. Hall compare the Japanese gardens with the painters of renaissance and baroque painters: “In contrast to the single point perspective of renaissance and baroque painters, the Japanese garden is designed to be enjoyed from many points of view.” (Hall, 1969). One can in many ways also compare the Old mental hospital with the single point perspective, instead of leading the individual to a spot he or her can discover something just for oneself.

In his field work Hall also discovered: “In this review it was shown that different use of the senses leads to very different needs regarding space no matter what level one cares to consider it.” (Hall, 1969). This “different” need has not been preserved in the built mass of institutional buildings. Another of Hall’s discoveries were that the position of the body in conversation varies within the culture: “It is not surprising, therefore, that the olfactory boundary constitutes for the Arabs an informal distance-setting mechanism in contrast to the visual mechanisms of the westerner.” (Hall 1969)

This individual need for space is something I want to challenge the existing structure with, and maybe, when one has maintained a comfortable space, the boundaries of coming together can be lowered. And for the aged and rusty, a new era can begin.



*Photo private*



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