

INTRODUCTION

The subject of the thesis is an artistic research of prison typology, which is viewed from the perspective of vibrant matter. The focus of the research rests on three pillars: (1) the introduction of the so-called modern prison, which is directly linked to the prison abolition movement; (2) the presentation of theoretical frameworks as methodological underpinnings; (3) critical analysis, interpretation and deconstruction, which forms the core of the thesis. I accomplish the third point – critical analysis, interpretation and deconstruction in the form of an internet archive – through a search of existing scholarly and artistic research on prison matter. The starting point of the research is critical theory, not a positivist paradigm. The aim of the research process itself is to answer the question of whether and how an investigation of prison matter and strategies could contribute to the debate on the issue of prisons, and consequently their abolition. Again, the form of the practical part is only discussed at the end of the theoretical chapter; the above only serves as a second blueprint for the reader's imagination as they navigate the forthcoming passages.

The theoretical part of the thesis presents the initial theories and methodologies, which are then used during the practical part of the artistic research. The first chapter focuses on the birth of the modern prison as conceived by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. It draws primarily on his treatise *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,¹ in which Foucault operates on the relations in modern society, which, according to his analysis, are conditioned by apparatuses of power that cannot be seen but nevertheless produce living hierarchies. Central to this paradigm is Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, which was designed as a prison but has the capacity to adapt to any other institutional arrangement (school, hospital, military base, etc).

In direct continuity, the movement for the abolition of prisons (also referred to as *prison abolitionism*), which had its origins at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, is presented. Its main theses are conveyed through the texts of the Marxist thinker, feminist Angela Y. Davis. The goal of prison abolitionism is not the abolition of prisons (or the prison-industrial complex)² in the current social constellations, but a total reform of society in which prison as the primary

¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Prague 2000.

² For the term, see Mike Davis, *Hell Factories in the Field*, *The Nation*, 1995, pp. 229-234. For a definition, see note 43.

form of punishment would not be an option. This turn will henceforth be referred to as a *theory of change* – in the sense of a restructuring of society in which punishment and profit do not dominate in favour of global profit.

The second part of the thesis outlines the theories of posthumanism, new materialism and forensic analysis. Posthumanism is introduced through the ideas of philosopher and feminist Rosi Braidotti and her publication *The Posthuman*.³ The author discusses the current of critical posthumanism, which draws on the practise of critical schools since the 1980s. She exposes the problematic points of humanism and anthropocentrism and proposes an alternative future – posthumanism – in which humans, animate and inanimate nature and matter form a unified structure whose shared goal is the preservation of life. The ideas of the new materialism are described through the work of political scientist Jane Bennett and the book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.⁴ Bennett argues for the vibrancy of matter and its agency in global affairs. She explores how we would view events if we took this liveliness of matter into account. According to Bennett, the contemporary paradigm that matter is merely a passive entity reinforces an anthropocentric approach to the world, resulting, for example, in the climate crisis. The final third section is devoted to the methodology of forensic architecture and the memory of matter. The work of British-Israeli architect Eyal Weizman is presented through the publication *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*.⁵ The forensic method works with architecture as a site of crime, an object of investigation, but also as a form of presentation of the resulting findings. The case of torture in the Syrian prison of Saydnay is presented here. The memory component of matter advocated in Weizman and Thomas Keenan's short essay *Mengele's Skull: The Birth of Forensic Aesthetics*⁶ is also mentioned.

The text implies the following questions to stimulate the reader's imagination so that the abstract concepts of liveliness and the scope of matter are intertwined with reality: *How, for example, would we view repressive typology if we considered the work of French philosopher Bruno Latour on the network of agency,⁷ inanimate and animate elements, and their effects?*

³ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge 2013.

⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham 2010.

⁵ Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*, New York 2017.

⁶ Thomase Keenan – Eyal Weizman, *Mengeleho lebka: Zrod forenzni estetiky*, Praha 2022.

⁷ Tereza Stöckelová – Bruno Latour, *Stopovat a skládat světy s Brunem Latour: Výbor z textů 1998-2013*, Prague 2016.

Can matter itself tell us something about the repressive function of typology? Can the testimony of matter and elements support the movement for the abolition of prisons? How can we view bars differently if we look not only at their strength but, for example, at aspects of their semi-transparency and ability to conduct heat? What is their possible future? Would our attitude to prison space remain the same if we thought of prison walls as porous membranes that let nothing and no one in, but flow through them into the public space of prison practices? How would the perspective of prison tolerance change if its concrete walls were understood as active elements that shape not only movement but perform violence? What effect does the reflectivity of materials have on the soundscape of the prison?

Due to the necessarily limited scope of the thesis, the text focuses on a relatively narrow section of a large and complex issue. My treatise is purely subjective⁸ and my background for it is my study of architecture at an art college. It is therefore artistic research,⁹ not art historical. The terms I use in the thesis, whose meanings can be inflected in different ways and with different intentions, are explained in the first reference in the footnote below.

⁸ I disagree with the conclusion of Thomas Nagel's *The View From Nowhere* ^{that} objective perspective exists and that man can provide a *view from nowhere*. In: Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, New York 1986.

⁹ On the possibilities of artistic research, see for example Hito Steyerl, *The Aesthetics of Resistance? Artistic Research as Discipline and Conflict*, *ArteActa*, 2022, no. 7, pp. 125-132.

THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN PRISON

I.

*"And if this reform was anything more than the temporary result of a confluence of contingent circumstances, it was because a whole web of relationships was woven between this superfluous and subliminal power."*¹⁰

Michel Foucault's work is inseparable from the subject of prisons. Foucault's focus, which is centred on change in the systematic approach and performance of various things (working with madness, sexuality, language, prison, etc), presents very consistently what the nature of the relationship between knowledge and power is. Knowledge, according to his theory, is historically contingent (not objective and permanent) and power, which is very closely related to it, is not centralized but woven into layers of society from institutional units to discrete individuals. They thus form a network that is almost invisible at first sight and very difficult to trace even for those who seek to map it. Central to this endeavour (to which the membership of the later prison abolition movement, which will be the subject of the next chapter, also refers in theory and thought) is the essay *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.¹¹

The book is introduced by the story of the criminal Robert François Damiens, who was sentenced to a brutal public execution for attempting to kill King Louis XV, which is described in the text with all its obstructions and procedural steps. In contrast to this case, Foucault selects the strictly regulated schedule of a classic day of a French prisoner, whose level of detail includes praying, dressing, and washing hands in addition to the "normal" daily activities.¹² The examples chosen illustrate how radically the way in which crime was punished changed in the eighteenth century. Linked to this was the definition of what constituted a crime for which one was to be punished.¹³ Foucault comments on the turnaround by saying: *"It was therefore necessary to control and record all illicit practices. It was necessary that offences should be precisely defined and punished with certainty, so that in this mass of illegality, alternately tolerated and punished with quite inadequate indignation, it*

¹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline* (note 1), p. 137. (translated by author)

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison*, Paris 1975).

¹² Foucault, *Discipline* (note 1), pp. 33-42. (translated by author)

¹³ Discussed in the context of the history of Western society.

might be determined what was an intolerable offence, the author of which was subjected to a punishment from which there was no escape."¹⁴ The first case, the execution of Damiens, represents a punishment that is brutal, public, chaotic, carried out directly on the human body, and physical in nature. The second example, in the form of a silent prison, differs in all of the above – it is far less brutal, it is carried out out of public view (i.e., in a private prison building), and the execution is subjected to an orderly and austere procedure. Its object is newly the *soul*. Although the second example might appear to be the 'more correct or slightly better way', one cannot ignore the fact that the execution of the sentence is also far more refined, precisely in the fact that the execution of the sentence is hidden.

II.

*"Although the sentence and the reasons for it must be known to all, the execution of the sentence must, on the contrary, be kept secret; the public must not interfere here either as witness or as guarantor of the punishment; the certainty that behind those walls the prisoner is serving his sentence must suffice to set the example: no more street performances, to which the law of 1786 gave place, which imposed on certain convicts public works to be performed in the town and by the roadside."*¹⁵

Foucault's decision to focus specifically on the way in which punishment is meted out allowed him to reveal not only the technique of exercising power, but also who has that power,¹⁶ and how they construct it. Nor is the selection of the group to be punished random - how the selected society (geographically and temporally) treats those who and which are marginalized serves as an indicator of social values and principles. Foucault is actively concerned with the possibilities of reclaiming *a voice* - closely tied to 'reason' - for those who fall outside the classical normative. The disruption of the exercise of power, which ultimately falls on the individual themselves, is illustrated by Foucault in the architectural design of the Panopticon. The concept of the 'perfect' prison was invented in the late eighteenth century by the British Enlightenment lawyer, philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham.¹⁷

¹⁴ Foucault, Discipline (note 1), p. 137. (translated by author)

¹⁵ Foucault, Discipline (note 1), p. 187. (translated by author)

¹⁶ In the context of the work, it should be added that today it would not only be living entities, but also inanimate ones.

¹⁷ The effort was primarily to reform the law and the theory of the state; the sole purpose of his state was its utility. His political anchorage was liberal; he advocated women's suffrage, the abolition of slavery, and the non-punishment of homosexuality.

The principle of the architectural design of the Panopticon is to provide supervision of inmates without the physical presence of the person doing the supervising. The building is based on a circular plan with a cylindrical tower in the middle. Around the circumference of the circle, cells are spread out in equal parts in the shape of a circular section. In each cell there are two smaller windows in the perimeter wall, the dividing walls are without openings and the wall in the inner circumference of the circle is a lattice. The combination of the bars and the two windows provides a direct passage of light from the exterior to the interior and vice versa, which projects the movement of the prisoner and makes him visible at all times. The walls between the cells ensure that the prisoners or inmates cannot see each other and their communication with words is somewhat restricted. A cylindrical tower in the middle of the layout serves the guards, whose presence is not verifiable for the prisoners - they thus acquire a constant impression of being seen.¹⁸ Into this trap they are caught by Bentham's intention of effective discipline and correction of the soul. Bentham subsequently applied a similar principle in his designs for factories and institutions whose mission was the reformation or education of the soul (school, hospital, etc.). Foucault refers to this architectural principle as "*a machine which, no matter in what sphere it operates, produces homogeneous effects of power.*"¹⁹ However, the system of surveillance did not only apply to the prisoners – the guards were subjected to a similar situation, as the prison was to be open to the public, and anyone at any time could enter the building (hence the guard tower) and check the guards at work.²⁰

Based on an analysis of Bentham's work, Foucault argues that certain established systems (routines) and ways of thinking become internalised within us.²¹ The prisoners in Panopticon are policing themselves, behaving as if they are always visible. People also function this way in society – they do not step out of the normative and form their own identity, they fulfil the role of the *obedient body*.²² What discipline represents is the limitation of consciousness - it is

¹⁸ Full quote: "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the pair of seeing - being seen: in the circle around the edge, one is completely visible without seeing anything; in the central tower, one sees everything without being able to be seen in any way." In: Foucault, Discipline (note 1) p. 283. (translated by author)

¹⁹ Ibidem, s. 284.

²⁰ However, the idea of external control has not become a reality. The way into a modern prison is through the executors of power (i.e. the officers and members of the supervising body), the other way is through incarceration.

²¹ They identify internally.

²² Foucault, Discipline (note 1), p. 416.

power itself that produces it: '*Power actually produces; it produces reality; it produces the realms of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that can be gained about him belong to this production.*'²³

The modern prison produces an intricate network of power. Power is subliminal and its partial invisibility ensures its greater effectiveness. Power is everywhere and permeates everything. The shift of punishment from the body to the soul shows how ruling entities seek to shape consciousness, behaviour and identity. These disciplinary mechanisms are inscribed by the prison into the persons themselves, and in representation on the outside, into the public at large. The practical part will focus in its execution on how matter or spatial norms work with power and repressive strategies. These strategies will then be revealed in other typologies where they may be presented with quite different intentions.

REFORM AS STATUS QUO

I.

Prison reform has occurred continuously throughout modern history. The prison structure improves its administrative layers and sectors; the elements that enter, supervise, educate and punish are transformed. The system is set up so that with each reform comes a more "humane" version of the previous state. To this reality, then, we must relate another insight from Foucault's writings, which he drew upon in his groundbreaking publication *Are Prisons Obsolete?* from 2003, Angela Y. Davis. This is the fact that *the reform of the modern prison* (programmatic, but also architectural) begins to be talked about at the same time as its creation – the phrase is thus historically linked and it is natural for human perception to hear these words together. Prison began as a reform and remains a reform to this day.²⁴ From an abolitionist perspective, however, its reform is undesirable – or desirable only when it acquires abolitionist potential, that is, when it tends towards the demise of the prison. For the prison is not feminist – it does not reflect the political, social and economic inequalities in society (which lead to imprisonment) and therefore should not exist.²⁵ Otherwise, when reform is presented as "improving the prison", it is merely confirming and legitimizing the prison industry, which by

²³ Ibidem, p. 274. (translated by author)

²⁴ Foucault, Discipline (note 1), p. 323.

²⁵ Mark Morris (ed.), *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists*, 1971. Available at: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/instead_of_prisons/, retrieved December 27, 2024.

reform means punishment, served with freedom or money. At the same time, it reinforces the social consensus that prison, is the only possible solution to lawbreaking and prevents any imagination of a world without it.²⁶

In order to link the subject and premise of the present thesis in a sustainable and functional way, it is necessary to briefly introduce the conditions under which the prison abolition movement took shape and what its key messages were. As I do not focus on a geographically specific location in the text or in the practical exploration that follows, and as I do not work with national histories, I will continue to refer primarily to the principles shared by the movement globally. I will introduce it through the author Angela Y. Davis, who relates her writings primarily to the realities of the United States incarceration system.

The ambition of the prison abolition movement is to reject prison as the primary form of punishment in an effort to convert *retributive justice*²⁷ to *restorative justice*.²⁸ The concept of retributive justice is punishment and the primary victim is de facto the state. For restorative justice, the main goal is so-called restoration of conditions, where the state (hence the legal norm) is relegated to the background and the pursuit of reconciliation - repairing the damage - becomes the key. Survivors are to be compensated for the harm they have suffered, and the perpetrator assumes a greater responsibility for redressing their actions. However, the needs of the offender are also taken into account to avoid prison recidivism. To help visualize the concept, I cite the questions written by Howard J. Zehr in *Changing Lenses - A New Focus for Crime and Justice*: (1) *Who has been injured*; (2) *What are their needs*; (3) *Whose obligations are those needs*; (4) *Who is involved in the situation*; (5) *What is the appropriate course of action for engaging the parties involved in efforts to address the causes and make amends?*²⁹ The movement's demands are thus directed towards criminal justice reform and massive *decarceration*.³⁰ Until the demands are met, reforms of the prison system that do not strengthen the system but the rights of incarcerated persons (right to education and information,

²⁶ Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Prague 2021, p. 22.

²⁷ Punisher – retrieved from: <https://slovník-cizich-slov.abz.cz/web.php/slovo/retribuce>, retrieved January 2, 2025.

²⁸ Resurgent – retrieved from: <https://slovník-cizich-slov.abz.cz/web.php/slovo/restorativni>, retrieved January 2, 2025.

²⁹ Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses - A New Focus for Crime and Justice*, Harrisonburg 1990.

³⁰ For mass release of prisoners, see incarceration, retrieved from: <https://slovník-cizich-slov.abz.cz/web.php/slovo/inkarcerace>, retrieved Jan. 2, 2025.

community building, reconciliation practices, etc) should be pursued simultaneously.³¹ Davis sees, for example, the decriminalization of drugs or the legalization of sex work as intermediate steps towards restorative justice.³² She then reflects on the (positive) impact that the legalization of marijuana and hashish and the simultaneous decriminalization of sex workers has had on decarceration in the Netherlands.³³

II.

Davis dates the origins of the American prison abolition movement to the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in connection with the publication of two books.³⁴ The first is a 1974 essay, *The Politics of Abolition*, by Thomas Mathiesen, a Norwegian legal sociologist. The book presents a new perspective on critical criminology, which Mathiesen applies to the Scandinavian criminal justice environment. His starting point is the collaboration with the *Norwegian Association for Criminal Reform* (KROM) and prison-abolitionist activism.³⁵ Mathiesen's book is published shortly after the wave of riots in European prisons, but also the 1971 uprising at Attica State Prison in New York State, which is still considered one of the most important uprisings in the prisoners' rights movement.³⁶

Michel Foucault, for example, visited Attica Prison in April 1972, his first ever visit to the prison. Shortly after his tour of the facility, the newspaper *Social Justice* published an interview with Foucault in which Foucault declared that the American prison system produces nothing but a person who is rejected by society for release and returned to prison. He denies that there is any reformation in the system, claiming that the system only liquidates people by "destroying" them mentally and physically in prisons, and then releasing them to be sent out and back in again.³⁷ Among other things, he points to the fact of racial discrimination: "*In the*

³¹ Moris (note 25).

³² Davis, Are Prisons (note 26), p. 22.

³³ Ibidem, p. 114.

³⁴ Angela Y. Davis and Dylan Rodriguez, The Challenge of Prison Abolition: A Conversation, *Social Justice* XXVII, 2000, No. 3, pp. 212-218.

³⁵ Thomas Mathiesen, *The Politics of Abolition*, 1974, available at:

<https://archive.org/details/politicsofabolit00math/page/n11/mode/2up>, retrieved December 27, 2024.

³⁶ *Attica Inmate Revolut*, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/attica-inmate-revolt-1971>, retrieved January 2, 2025.

³⁷ Angela Y. Davis, *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 98-100.

*United States, one in 30 or 40 black men is incarcerated: it is here that the function of mass elimination within the American prison system is revealed."*³⁸

The second book, *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists*, which Davis links to the movement's beginnings, was published in 1976 by the *Prison Research Education Action* collective. Reminiscent of a methodology, the essay debunks familiar myths about prisons, the penal system, and the security forces (primarily the police). It briefly identifies the problematic points of the contemporary penal system, offers alternative scenarios, and names critical situations (e.g., juvenile involvement in gang activities) that the social system does not prevent but whose consequences it only punishes. The group defines nine perspectives through which to approach the desired change. These approaches include the rejection of prison as a repressive and oppressive system that must be overcome (like slavery).³⁹ It therefore encourages a move away from retributive justice, the aim of which is not reconciliation but the quantification of punishment – financially or in terms of time. A new restorative justice is only possible when the citizenry fully exercises its share of institutional power and forms a caring community that is open to a new form of justice and seeks to structurally repair the society that is the cause of crime in its current form. In the text, the authors operate with new concepts that defy the systematic legitimization of oppression and name things and realities as they operate in reality.⁴⁰

The prison abolition movement has received media attention in recent years, particularly in connection with the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin.⁴¹ Following Floyd's death, global massive protests have erupted with the aim of eliminating institutional injustice (e.g. through budget redistribution - cutting funding for the police and diverting this allocation to social needs, marginalised communities etc).⁴²

³⁸ John K. Simon, Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview, *Social Justice* XVIII, 1991, no. 3, p. 27. Quoted by Davis, *The Angel* (note 37), pp. 96-107. (translated by author)

³⁹ Slavery is often put in the context of prison abolitionism. It is pointed out not only for its racist nature, but also for its purposeful limitation of the imagination of a better future - W. E. B. D. Du Bois writes about the alternative world after the abolition of slavery, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, New York 1935.

⁴⁰ Moris (ed.) (note 25).

⁴¹ This is a case that has been heavily publicized, racial profiling and police brutality against non-black communities occurs on a daily basis in the United States. For a closer look at the issue of police violence against black women, see: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>, retrieved: 2 Jan. 2025.

⁴² Davis, *Are Prisons* (note 26).

III.

In the context of presenting the principles and values of the prison abolition movement, I will comment below on one of the most problematic points of the current prison system, namely its direct connection to industry, and thus to capitalism and profit.

The term *prison-industrial complex*⁴³ was introduced into the discourse by American urbanist Mike Davis in his 1995 article *Hell Factories In The Field*. Davis [Mike] draws attention to the connection between prisons and the institutions (public and private) that profit from their existence and operation. The operations are tied to construction companies, contractors for prison operations (security technology, food supply, medical staff, etc.). For this reason – steady profit – at the same time, institutions and companies seek to maintain a jurisdictional system, which is directly linked to the executive branch, i.e. political representation.⁴⁴ We can furthermore include in the profits companies using cheap labor (they can be state-owned), but also media and popular culture products benefiting from the stories and free adaptations of incarcerated persons. The author applies the term *prison-industrial complex* to all vested interests that privilege financial gain over the rehabilitation of incarcerated persons.⁴⁵

The phenomenon is also reported by columnist Adam Gopnik, who points to the role of money directly in the criminal process – in the case of *white-collar* crimes,⁴⁶ in which their money is "held accountable" for the crimes committed.⁴⁷ However, if the accused person does not have enough capital to have their crime classified in the aforementioned category, most of the time their misdeed is counted and converted into time that the person in question will be incarcerated. Public funds are then invested in his or her incarceration (which could otherwise be used for prevention or social programs to keep the person from ending up in jail in the first place), which the actors involved turn into their own profit.⁴⁸

⁴³ The phrase is an imitation of the term military-industrial complex, which was used in the 1950s in the American environment. The term is critical, drawing attention to the interconnectedness of government leaders, arms manufacturers and the military.

⁴⁴ A company that is also represented on the Czech market is e.g. Sodexo, retrieved from: <https://uk.sodexo.com/industries/justice>, searched: 5. 1. 2025.

⁴⁵ Davis, *Hell Factories* (note 2), pp. 229-234.

⁴⁶ For more details see Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White-collar_crime, retrieved: 2. 1. 2025

⁴⁷ Adam Gopnik, *Should We Abolish Prisons*, *New Yorker*, 2024. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/07/29/abolition-labor-the-fight-to-end-prison-slavery-book-review-until-we-reckon-violence-mass-incarceration-and-a-road-to-repair>, retrieved 2 Jan 2025.

⁴⁸ Davis, *Are Prisons* (note 26), p. 91.

Capital plays a key role in the occupancy and operation of prisons, and it bears repeating that it is mainly people from marginalised communities who end up in prisons. Davis [Angela] responds to Foucault's statement after his visit to Attica by noting that in the 1990s, one in three to one in four men of colour end up in prison (a tenfold increase on Foucault's claim).⁴⁹ People often enter prisons primarily because their communities have been previously criminalized, their socioeconomic status in society is unsustainable, and they are overwhelmingly victims of systematic racism and poverty.⁵⁰ These people include those suffering from mental illness (which Foucault writes about in the margins of society).⁵¹ Geographer and prison abolitionist Ruth W. Gilmore, in her groundbreaking essay *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation*, comments on the massive expansion of prison construction (in the US) as a "geographical solution to socio-economic problems".⁵² She goes on to describe the massive construction as a response to a surplus of capital, land, and labor. Recognizing the link, then, between the prison ordinance and the politically interested group (the heteropatriarchy)⁵³ is a self-affirming confirmation of the fact that a retributive justice system does not reduce crime and its goal is not to reduce crime⁵⁴ – this consequence would not be a gain for the system, but a loss. The system simply eliminates those who are most affected by the failures of the social fabric of society and could potentially produce a profit in the prison sector.

IV.

The alternative put forward by the prison abolition movement is full of hope for a feminist future. It opposes the domination of global capitalism and incorporates the animal and plant kingdoms alongside the human population in its vision. Part of the strategy is a subversive prison reform that, as an intermediate step, will deconstruct the position of criminality in the direct crime-punishment nexus and shift thinking towards critical analysis, Davis states, "*We*

⁴⁹ Davis, *The Angel* (note 37), p. 98.

⁴¹ Davis, *Are Prisons* (note 26), p. 118.

⁵¹ Davis writes in the book's introduction, "According to a recent study, there may be twice as many people suffering from mental illness in prisons and jails than in all U.S. mental hospitals combined." See Davis, *Are Prisons* (note 26), p. 11.

⁵² Ruth W. Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, New York 2022, p. 85.

⁵³ Heteropatriarchy (etymologically derived from heterosexual and patriarchy) is a social construct within which heterosexual men have authority over other cisgender men, women, and people with other sexual orientations and gender identities. This term emphasizes that discrimination against women and LGBT people is based on the same sexist social principle.

⁵⁴ For more details see: <https://www.vera.org/news/research-shows-that-long-prison-sentences-dont-actually-improve-safety>, retrieved: 27. 12. 2025.

*cannot focus only on crime and punishment. We cannot see prison only as a place designed to punish those who have committed crimes. (...) Why are so many prisoners illiterate? This clearly shows that we must turn our attention to the education system itself."*⁵⁵ And it is education that Davis identifies as the strongest alternative to prisons – schools available to everyone, everywhere, with quality facilities and state support.⁵⁶ To schools must be added quality and affordable health care, employment opportunities or unconditional income. For those in prison, affordable housing is a key consideration, the lack of which can be a contributing factor to incarceration.

The process of levelling the playing field then allows us to master the art of imagination, which limits contemporary capitalist thinking, whose interest is that no one imagine anything beyond the limits of capitalist scope. The abolitionist futures movement, active in the UK from 2018 until today, operates in its vision with a world based on social, not criminal, justice.⁵⁷ The discourse needs to turn away from the question of what to do with people in prison (if we are considering abolition) to the reasons why people end up in prisons. We need to think about the web of prison interconnectedness and strive for a community of economic and social justice that may address very different problems than those we face today.

*"When someone tells us we just need better police and better prisons, we counter with what we really need. We need a new vision of security that includes abolishing the police and prisons as we know them. We say demilitarize the police, disarm the police, abolish the institution of policing as we know it, and abolish incarceration as the dominant mode of punishment."*⁵⁸

The critical analysis, the core of the practical part, aims to deconstruct the phenomenon of the prison (which includes the aura of the prison's indispensability) in a similar way to the prison abolition movement. Architectural knowledge figures here as a tool for uncovering the layers within buildings – thus, it will be explored what traces the desire for constant profit leaves within the prison typology, and what place architecture creates for these practices.

⁵⁵ Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle*, London 2022, p. 24. (translated by author)

⁵⁶ Davis, *Are Prisons* (note 26).

⁵⁷ For more details see: <https://abolitionistfutures.com/>, retrieved: 27. 12. 2024.

⁵⁸ Davis, *Are Prisons* (note 26), p. 95. (translated by author)

THEORETICAL FRAMING

In the following chapter I will introduce two theoretical-methodological frameworks that will accompany the artistic research in the practical part of the thesis. I choose posthumanism as a philosophical starting point, which is consistent with the belief in the need to abolish prisons. New materialism will be presented as one of the posthumanist branches that emphasizes the agency of matter above all. The methods of forensic architecture serve primarily as a support for the individual steps of analysis, but at the same time encourage the use of architectural knowledge for theoretical or artistic research, the result of which is not a three-dimensional object, but a series of knowledge about matter, in textual and visual form.

POSTHUMANISM

I.

The starting point for introducing posthumanism as a philosophical movement and critical theory is the 2013 publication of the same name, *The Posthuman*,⁵⁹ by Italian-Australian philosopher and feminist Rosi Braidotti. The book presents not only the basic theses of contemporary posthumanism thought, but also its foundations. It also sets out its goal, which is the permanent preservation of human and non-human life. For an expanded posthumanist vocabulary, I recommend the *Posthuman Glossary*,⁶⁰ and the *More Posthuman Glossary*,⁶¹ also edited by Braidotti. The contents of the books are arranged alphabetically like classic dictionaries and define newly acquired or introduced terms.

The posthumanist turn occurs when feminist antihumanist and postanthropocentric thought are combined. In the aforementioned publication, Braidotti describes and analyses humanism as a movement (or Enlightenment concept) whose centrality and universal representative (of the movement and the world) is the "man" who is "*masculine, white, urbanized, heterosexual, capable of reproduction, speaks a standard language, and is a citizen of a recognized state*."⁶² This "man" is the perfect representative of reason. Humanism, according to the author, made possible the foreign imperialist policies that led to massive colonization. As a result of colonization practices, a discourse of *we* (a community of human-men endowed

⁵⁹ Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (note 3), s. 65.

⁶⁰ Rosi Braidotti – Maria Hlavajova (ed.), *Posthuman Glossary*, London 2018.

⁶¹ Rosi Braidotti – Emily Jones – Goda Klumbyte, *More Posthuman Glossary*, London 2023.

⁶² Rosi Braidotti, *Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism*, in: Richard Grusin, *Anthropocene feminism*, Minneapolis 2017, pp. 21-48, op. cit. s. 23.

with reason) and the *other* is established. Otherness (difference from the man) becomes a symbol of subordination and a social hierarchy is constituted. Otherness is attributed to women, to non-European (or now non-Western) populations, but also to animals and things. The "others" are then forced to function in asymmetrical power relations and their difference (or otherness) is reduced to a pejorative label that socially and symbolically disqualifies them.

The first critique of humanism occurs when Michel Foucault, in his 1966 work *The Order of Things*, announces the "death of man" and questions the fact that "man" is supposed to be the centre and measure of all things. He postulates the theory that individualism is historically and culturally conditioned, not innate.⁶³ Foucault's critique has been loosely followed by the so-called critical schools since the 1980s, which include feminism, postcolonialism, anti-racism, environmentalism, and others. These schools enrich each other from different perspectives – they focus on the dialectic of "us and the other". In what ways the oppressed "others" are then inflected by each school in its own way, to quote Braidotti: "*They are sexualized, racialized and naturalized OTHERS whose social and symbolic existence is considered expendable and unprotected.*"⁶⁴

At the same time, Braidotti also seeks a reflection rather than a rejection of humanism.⁶⁵ She chooses individualism as one of the examples of why reflection is more important than rejection – although she considers it one of the main problematic points of humanism, he points out that through experiencing it one becomes aware of one's own position as the oppressed or oppressor. At the same time, she describes the role of individualism in the process of urbanization, which keeps humanity isolated (from nature, both animate and inanimate), thus reinforcing the anthropocentric model of the world.

II.

The post-anthropocentric model is related to the moment when framing and relating to the world is not connected to man as the most advanced creature. Animals, plants, cells, bacteria, things etc. – acquire an autonomous position in the intricate system of the planetary whole

⁶³ Michel Foucault, *Věci a slova*, Brno 2007, p. 294.

⁶⁴ Braidotti, *Four thesis* (note 62), p. 24.

⁶⁵ A similar interconnection can be found in the case of art and architectural history in the transition between modernism and postmodernism. There is a reassessment and a lesson rather than a comprehensive rejection.

and their viewpoint is not tied to the human entity. Braidotti refers to this methodological procedure (in which humans are decentralised and deprivileged) as the practise of defamiliarisation.⁶⁶ In its application, anthropocentric values are de-identified and an ethical turn is made (the previous form operates with the established dichotomy of man vs. nature). Posthumanist ethics operates on a *zoecentric* principle – embracing all living and non-living things – and seeks to permanently integrate and embrace the connections that interconnect us with many others on the planet.⁶⁷ The goal, however, is not to homogenize humanity – blurring that line (between humans and "the other") points to the structure and dynamics of power. Power takes on a new form as a field as a medium where diversity is valued. The bond of the newly formed community is not trauma or a desire for revenge of previous violence and oppression, but a compassionate recognition of interconnected positions within a network of which non-anthropomorphic actorhood is the majority.

On postanthropocentrism, it is worth mentioning the work of biologist, historian of science and feminist Donna Haraway. Her 1985 *Cybor Manifesto* describes Braidotti as the first feminist post-anthropocentric *manifesto*.⁶⁸ The subject of the book is the cyborg, conceived as a post-anthropocentric and post-metaphysical construct, offering a new political, technology-influenced, theory. The newly produced reality focuses on the ecologically responsible construction of a classless, sexually egalitarian and anti-racist society. In the context of Haraway, to better understand the critique of humanism, we can quote her statement on difference, which also describes her conception of feminism: "*Some differences are playful, and some are reasons for historical and systematic oppression. Feminism is about being able to distinguish between these two poles.*"⁶⁹

III.

At the point where there is a synergy of feminist anti-humanism and post-anthropocentrism, the term Zoe is rediscovered and introduced.⁷⁰ The zoecentric orientation subsumes both

⁶⁶ Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (note 3), s. 88.

⁶⁷ Braidotti cites the creation and introduction of the concept of gender in feminist practice as one example.

⁶⁸ Donna Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*, 1985. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnownarrativemedianandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_----_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf, retrieved January 5, 2025.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Related to the Greek terms Zoe and Bios. According to Aristotle, -bios- is a rational, i.e. logically endowed -zoe-. Bios is about the life of humans (endowed with logic), Zoe is about the life of everything.

animate and inanimate nature, is dynamic, and represents the self-organizing structure of life itself. Its practise is the abolition of the dichotomy of man and nature.⁷¹

One of the posthumanist critiques is the critique of capitalism, which is related to the previous chapter on the prison abolition movement and is therefore briefly mentioned. The focus of the critique is primarily on the commodification of life itself – individualistic identity is a key component. The inanimate form of being (i.e. that which the text above refers to as zoecentric) is reduced to mere utility and market value. To classical capitalism, the author adds a reference to so-called *advanced capitalism*, for which people are no longer individual entities, but merely data points that are oriented towards trends. The goal is diversity, which capitalism itself then produces for profit.⁷²

Braidotti divides posthumanism into three strands, which flow side by side but diverge at key points. The first stream, so-called *reactionary posthumanism*, denies the complete decline of humanism, considering its form to be the only functional and adaptable to the global economy. The second stream is *analytical posthumanism*, of which the focus on scientific and technological studies is an important part. It also includes techno-optimism and machine life, which brings new insights into ethics. However, this current does not work with a theory of subjectivity.

The third, highlighted by Braidotti, is the current of *critical posthumanism* – it has its roots in the critical schools, rejects individualism, and deals with the subject and its position not only in society, but also in the structure of the world-planet. What Braidotti emphasizes is its hopefulness and its movement towards the realization of monism⁷³ – being part of one planetary whole. To this awareness the author attaches two concepts. For a better understanding and reading of them, I also attach their original (English) wording in brackets. The notion of embodiment emphasizes the fact that subjectivity is inseparably linked to the body. Human being is bodily, which includes biological, physiological and sensory aspects. At the same time, corporeality is constructed by social, historical and material conditions. The

⁷¹ Braidotti points out, for example, situations where there is talk of a climate crisis and what is at risk is nature. In the zoecentric view, the dichotomy is abolished and the climate crisis is no longer seen as the extinction of nature, but as our extinction, because nature is no longer separate from humanity.

⁷² Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (note 3), p. 58.

⁷³ For more see. Baruch Spinoza. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza-modal/>, retrieved 5 January 2025.

body and the mind form a whole that is shaped by internal and external interactions.⁷⁴ The concept of *embodiment* describes the embedding of the subject in the environment. It reflects the idea of embeddedness in social, ecological and cultural contexts – our being is not isolated, there is a constant interconnection with other beings (e.g. humans, animals, microorganisms), systems (e.g. technology, energy networks) and environments (urban, landscape).

The ideas of posthumanism are central to the work as the underpinning of the theory of change put forward by the prison abolition movement. The critiqued form of oppression and power asymmetry in the humanist model is one of the models keeping the prison system alive. Overcoming the "*us and the other*" moment partially erases the predefined social inequalities whose victims were subsequently part of criminalized communities. Alternative models of justice (see restorative justice) can be inspired by a caring approach that values diversity (difference is no longer a source of oppression) and focuses on healing, not retribution. Equally important is the inclusion of animal, vegetable and inanimate entities – at this point the theory is linked to a method of looking at the prison where the primary focus will not be on the experience of the prisoner (as a human actor) but on the prison (as a matter).

NEW MATERIALISM

Rosi Braidotti is also one of the first to use the term new materialism in her philosophical practise. She associates its origin with the duo of thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, whom he does not identify as the authors of the term, but rather as the initiators of the discussion that led to its birth. Their initiation lies above all in the call for the creation of new geophilosophical concepts that will support new environmentalist positions. The new materialism is thus described by Braidotti as a new research methodology of non-dualist being.⁷⁵

The theory of political scientist and philosopher Jane Bennett is presented below through the 2010 publication *Vibrant Matter: A political ecology of things*.⁷⁶ In the book, Bennett mentions a number of important authors from the fields of philosophy, political science and

⁷⁴ Braidotti connects this notion to feminist critiques of body vs. mind dualisms, nature vs. culture, etc.

⁷⁵ Not working in the dualities mentioned above: man vs. nature, nature vs. culture, us vs. the other.

⁷⁶ Bennett (note 4).

biology, whose ideas on living matter I do not present below (due to the format and scope of the work). These authors include (in chronological order) Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Charles Darwin (1809-1882), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Hans Driesch (1867-1941), Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), Félix Guattari (1930-1992), Bruno Latour (1947-2022).

The publication *Vibrant Matter: the Political Ecology of Things* acts as a manifesto for a politics of the more-than-human⁷⁷ – vitalist philosophy. In its conception, it uses the phrase political ecology, which is used by the French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour (a similarity found especially in his 2004 book *The Politics of Nature*).

The main thesis of the book is the necessity of acknowledging the active participation of non-human actors in the events of the world. The argument for this thesis is presented by the theory of vibrant matter, which pervades both human and non-human bodies. Bennett argues that everything is alive, everything is connected, and everything is in process – not only animals, humans, plants, but also wood, sand, light, air, etc. She refers to all matter on the planet as living. This aliveness is not hidden in a mechanistic way (in construction) but in the interrelationships. Matter is alive because it can change the world – have effects that shape networks of relationships in infinite interactions. Networks operate at a variety of scales and are applied even to aggregations of matter. The human body is thus a network of organic matter that functions by connecting many systems (other networks). At the same time, Bennett points out that even the human body is not 100% human – there are bacteria, parasites, and in some cases prosthetic parts.⁷⁸ Bennett refers to composite networks into one mass as assemblages (see Deleuze and Guattari).⁷⁹ The action of objects (their efficacy) is referred to as thing power. Thing power allows objects to come alive and to have both subtle and dramatic effects. A coherent argument then refutes the idea that people are the active and living ones, and things are the passive and dead ones – the binary between object and subject is disrupted. To illustrate this, we can consider environments that are often described as

⁷⁷ A term taken from the English language (more-than-human) – a theoretical concept that recognizes that human life (and society) is deeply connected to non-living entities (animals, plants, inanimate objects, technology, natural systems, etc.).

⁷⁸ Bennett (note 4), s. 4–19.

⁷⁹ Gilles Deleuze – Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus : capitalism and schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987.

passive, even though their design works with active potential – e.g. the role of light and openings in Gothic temples, the choice of cold air in gambling rooms.⁸⁰

Bennett then presents the newly described arrangements in the context of political analyses of events and asks how they would change if we also took into account the scope of non-human agency. The starting premise is that if we start to take into account the agency of non-human actors (granting them their right to agency), a new form of more ecologically responsible politics will emerge, transforming the role of ethics. In particular, he sees the transformation in a society that is less (or not at all) focused on the individual and on blaming (and hence punishing) the individual. An active emphasis on networks and their synergies has the potential, according to Bennett, to disrupt entrenched systems such as capitalism.

Bennett explores her assumptions through discussions of ordinary things and physical manifestations. This is reflected, among other things, in the structure of the order of the book and the titles of the chapters.⁸¹ She works with the random grouping of unwanted things (waste disappears in Bennett's theory, since it represents living matter whose action continues),⁸² stem cells, metal, electricity. She draws attention to the power and agency of vibrant things not only in large events, but also in the interconnection of disparate matter-thus helping the reader connect to her thinking about different kinds of agency. Examples of these powers include the property of conducting electricity or producing gases. It is worth remembering that the human ability to detect the actions of inanimate objects is severely limited – the range of the visible spectrum, the maturity of the palate, the range of hearing, etc.

In order to read and grasp the text, the author requires a certain degree of imagination, but also a willingness to shatter received ideas about how the world works. It follows the aforementioned issue of humanism, where agency is attributed to people, especially those

⁸⁰ Bennett works with the environment through the concept of Shii. For more see. Bennett (note 4), pp. 34-35.

⁸¹ Chapter titles (1) *The Force of Things*, (2) *The Agency of Assemblages*, (3) *Edible Matter*, (4) *The Life of Metal*, (5) *Nor Vitalism, Neither Vitalism nor Mechanism*, (6) *Stem Cells and Culture of Life*, (7) *Political Ecologies*, (8) *Vitality and Self-interest*.

⁸² However, this living matter does not only have positive connotations - in the case of matter (currently referred to as waste), it is, for example, the production of gases in landfills.

"important" in social hierarchies.⁸³ This notion, according to Bennett, is distorting because we never act alone and so it is impossible to trace who and what exactly caused what - he simultaneously labels every action as a trans-action.

The work takes lessons and encouragement from Bennett's approach with regard to thought experimentation. The author is not working with what currently is, but what could be. She highlights the role of an experimental approach, because given the web of interdependent networks, it is never possible to predict what the original intentions were, what the unexpected intentions were – the important thing is not to fear failure, because even that has its findings and consequences. The emphasis on the liveliness of matter, its importance and its involvement in world events forms another fulcrum to the analysis.

PROOF AND MEMORY

I.

The following paragraphs present the practise of forensic architecture as a loose methodological association to the theories discussed above. Primarily the practise of forensic architecture is described, with the key publication *Forensic architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*.⁸⁴ The author is the British-Israeli architect Eyal Weizman, who founded the eponymous Forensic Architecture Research Centre at Goldsmiths University of London in 2010. The professional team includes people from the fields of architecture, film, art, journalism, science and law.

*"Forensic architecture is part of a broader development that I would call the 'forensic turn', a human rights turn to forensic methods practiced as a counter-forensic approach."*⁸⁵

In the book, Weizman defines forensic architecture as an investigative practise that operates with architectural evidence. This practise does not only include the examination of the crime scene (i.e. the area/object where the crime was committed) and the research of the traces

⁸³ Primarily a man-man in a leadership position: ruler, president, prime minister, etc. However, he points out that even in a post-humanist perspective it is important to think that even an ordinary person without a high position has a role to play, for example in the war in the Middle East. It is just that this agency is less visible and takes a longer path to realise - e.g. by unravelling the financial flows of companies involved in war conflicts.

⁸⁴ Weizman, *Forensic* (pozn. 5).

⁸⁵ Weizman, *Forensic* (note 5), p. 78.

found (reconstruction, photographs, analysis). The presentation of these findings to the public plays an equally important role. Architecture is the main actor in the three phases mentioned above – it is the object under investigation (building, detail, city, landscape), it represents the method of research and serves as a form of presentation. The contemporary is thus subjected to investigation through spatial arrangement, where materiality – of matter and environment – is the field of interest. The political outcome of the practise of forensic architecture is the participation in countless international processes that have human rights and environmental protection as their subject. The violent actor is overwhelmingly the state.

The opening story of Weizman's book is the story of the trial of David Irving, a British amateur historian and, above all, a Holocaust denier. The subject of the trial was Irving's questioning of the gas chambers in the Auschwitz concentration camp. During the trial, the evidence turned to the ruins of the roofs, in which pipe holes were found through which toxic gases flowed, confirming that the chambers were used for the mass execution of Jewish prisoners. What Weizman emphasizes about the story is the moment in which Irving wanted to elevate matter over memory, and thus advocate for a history without living testimony – the enduring tension between testimony (language) and evidence (material) is shown here.⁸⁶ The story that follows is diametrically opposed in scale and performance. The author writes about the development and improvement of satellite imagery, specifically single pixel resolution. Since technology has already achieved high accuracy in this regard, satellite imagery can often help in exposing human rights violations. This is not the case in all cases – some places on maps are completely erased or presented at such low resolution,⁸⁷ that their legibility does not allow for testimony. In other cases, satellite imagery is powerfully abused - the public is provided with imagery that (for supposed protection) does not distinguish the human body. Military techniques, however, are afforded much higher resolution, human body detecting, which allows for targeted localization and killing.⁸⁸ On the abuse of power over images, Weizman writes: "*The military maintains its technological and optical superiority by*

⁸⁶ Ibidem, pp. 13-22.

⁸⁷ Illustrative list available at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_satellite_map_images_with_missing_or_unclear_data, retrieved 5 January 2025.

⁸⁸ Weizman gives the example of the exemption Israel has gained in US imagery, which provides data to, for example, the Google Earth platform. More on the issue available at: https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/satellite-imagery-and-the-palestine-israel-exception/?generate_pdf=view, retrieved 5 Jan. 2025.

*releasing only those images and footage that serve its goals, and denying access to others, citing various 'national security' reasons."*⁸⁹

Despite the easy abuse of power for the benefit of the state or private society, Weizman describes forensic architecture as a subversive practise. The way in which the elements are viewed is fundamentally forensic, but what is being investigated are mostly the institutions that have monopolized the practise (the police or the military are given as examples). The approach can therefore also be described as counter-forensic, it turns state resources against the violence it itself perpetrates.⁹⁰

II.

The theoretical premise of forensic architecture is that an architectural mass (of various scales, e.g. a table, a building, a village) is not a static entity. On the contrary, it is a continuously dynamically changing element – shaped by any material (concrete, wood, glass, steel, plastic), it reacts to environmental conditions and interacts with other actors. Any transformation can then be registered as information. Each material can be a sensor of countless events and interactions. In his work, Weizman points primarily to buildings as exceptional sensors of social and political events. Among the reasons he includes their physical anchorage in space, proximity to people, and contact with both external (uncontrolled) and internal (controllable) environments. At the same time, buildings are associated with a specific actorhood (political, social, strategic) that was behind the decision to create them.

Buildings are active sensors that gain both concerned and observer perspectives in the event network. They record the events that take place in them and the events in which they figure. In order for a building to provide information as a sensor, other sensors (chemical, physical, photographic) are needed, which are then interpreted by the expert community.⁹¹ In capturing an event, matter becomes a medium,⁹² which, properly, the analytical team should not anthropomorphize. The aim is to describe how buildings actually *sense* the events inside and

⁸⁹ Weizman, Forensic (note 5), p. 30.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, s. 9.

⁹¹ Ibidem, pp. 52-54.

⁹² Here we are close to the ideas and examples of Jane Bennett. Weizman as a medium describes a wall that has uploaded a neighboring explosion. Bennett is working with gunpowder that was caught on a palm that either could have fired or was within three feet of the shot.

around them (e.g. the movement of people) – what form the building's experience of internal and external events takes.⁹³

The knowledge of matter and the emotional connection to space allows for another form of proof method. Architecture is used as a mnemonic device in composing the event before, during and after the violence. Various witness accounts can insert living and non-living matter into a physical or virtual model and act out their memories there. Weizman, along with human rights scholar Thomas Keenan, writes more about this phenomenon in their 2012 book *Mengele's Skull: The Birth of Forensic Aesthetics*.⁹⁴ In the book, they describe the work of British historian Frances Yates on the art of memory (*ars memoriae*) through the story of Simonides, the inventor of the mnemonic device of the memory palace. By reconstructing the seating chart of a banquet, the poet Simonides was able to identify dead bodies after the building collided. The memory palace method is based on anchoring information in an imaginary space (individual information in individual rooms) to which memory can arbitrarily return and retrieve information.⁹⁵ Weizman uses the new concept of *the architectural image complex* for the forensic procedure. This method allows the forum (the public) to examine a scene using imagery that is pieced together to reveal or highlight sets of relationships in time and space. The compositing of images works with materiality, mediality, and meaning, depicting both before and after simultaneously.

The last, but no less important layer of forensic practise mentioned in the thesis is its adherence to aesthetic practise. In context, Weizman quotes Latour's definition of aesthetics in the book, "*For Bruno Latour, aesthetics is the capacity to perceive and be troubled, it makes us sensitive, a capacity that precedes any distinction between the tools of science, art, and politics.*"⁹⁶ The author's adherence to aesthetics is primarily associated with the ways in which reality is perceived and subsequently communicated to the forum. During the course of the investigation, the passage of time changes and sensitivity to any matter that might bear the burden of proof increases. In Mengele's skull, for Weizman and Keenan, aesthetics represents "*any process of inscribing a material surface. Everything is a sensor. Everything registers.*"⁹⁷

⁹³ Weizman, Forensic (note 5), pp. 36-47.

⁹⁴ Keenan - Weizman (note 6).

⁹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 99-101.

⁹⁶ Weizman, Forensic (note 5).

⁹⁷ Keenan – Weizman (note 6), p. 107.

The sensor in *Mengele's skull* is a bone, specifically the skull of Nazi doctor Josef Mengele. Its identification by world leaders in the field of forensic analysis has become an internationally watched event, with the main aim of convincing the forum of the skull's identity. Paradoxically, the scientific community would settle for less data and facts than it needed to produce for the public. Central to this task was the meaningful and credible presentation of the forensic findings. Expertise and clarity of message create what is called a probability of fact. Latour (as the expert voice of the actor-network) is again quoted here: "*Facts, contrary to the old adages, obviously do not 'speak for themselves': to claim that they do would be to ignore the role of scientists, their disputes, their laboratories, their instruments, their expert articles, and their indecisive speech, which is sometimes punctuated by deictic gestures.*"⁹⁸ Mengele's skull did not speak human language, but it did record many events in Mengele's life. Its material form thus made it possible to link the biological object to the dead man's history.

We can also talk about sensitivity when interpreting the impact of the described practise. In sum, forensic architecture explores and records the historical and cultural changes between architecture, media and violence. What Weizman highlights about the nature of his work is that although the advocacy and process is filled with violent and brutal content, their sensitivity and sensitivity to their surroundings (both human and non-human) continues to deepen. The premise that by exposing repressive structures and strategies we will achieve a heightened sensitivity to zoe in society is also worked with in the present artistic research.

III.

The research project *Forensic Architecture: Torture in Saydnay Prison*, which has been running from 2011 to the present, is an auxiliary study for the practical part of the artistic research. The object under investigation is a prison (a detention facility run by the Syrian government in close proximity to the capital Damascus). As there are no records of incarcerated persons and access to the facility by humanitarian organizations is not allowed, the number of detainees is speculated to be now in the tens of thousands.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 32.

Without photographs or plans, the depiction of the prison was unrealistic. However, when the survivors came forward, it was possible to reconstruct the appearance of the prison based on their memories. In 2016, research teams from Forensic Architecture (FA) and Amnesty International travelled to Istanbul, where some of the former prisoners were staying. These were subsequently interviewed and, alongside the narrative, the FA team members modelled a virtual building. The detainees recounted that they entered the complex already blindfolded, making their memories of the space very fragmented. Part of the basis was thus not even based on visual memory, but on acoustic or olfactory experiences. Prisoners recalled their cells, staircases, heavy metal doors or barred windows, and identified transitions between rooms and spaces mainly on the basis of changes in the environment (temperature, humidity, light levels etc). The final "memory" model was equipped with every last item the survivors could recall. The team reported on the memory modelling process in the terms of memory palaces - the more detailed the model was, the deeper the memory and ability to recall. On the experience, Weizman writes, "*Memory, like matter, is malleable, constantly changing and subject to violence.*"⁹⁹ The interactive and ever-evolving model has become an archive of testimony that documents and partially depicts the existence of architecture as a tool of spatial torture. The extreme and brutal form of the building makes a strong case for research teams seeking to secure access to the building for independent monitoring groups and humanitarian organizations. For artistic research, the moment of confession is crucial – in the case of the work, the architectural mass will bear witness.

METHODOLOGICAL OTHERNESS FOR ARCHITECTURE

The publication *Research Otherwise* by a collective of authors led by the editor Nitin Bathla in 2024 was also an inspiration for the methodological approach to artistic research in the field of architecture for this thesis.¹⁰⁰ The Department of Theory and History of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zurich is behind its publication. The book describes three different methodological practices (transdisciplinary, sensory, restitutive) that treat architecture predominantly as a tool, not as an outcome.

⁹⁹ Weizman, Forensic (note 5), p. 87.

¹⁰⁰ Nitin Bathla (ed.), *Research Otherwise: Pluriversal Methodologies for Landscape and Urban Studies*, Zurich 2024.

Formative for the present thesis is the chapter on restitutive methods, which, according to the research team, aims to explore and critically look at power relations (or hegemony) in the world. The research field goes beyond the human condition and returns the object of research to communities that have been marginalized and subordinated to power. While the selected projects in the book do not inflect narratives in which the community or network is inanimate matter, the framework does not rule out this possibility. Radical cartography, forensic approaches, and cross-species and multi-human ethnography are among the sub-methods of restitutive practise.¹⁰¹

Radical cartography is critical and combines geographical research with knowledge of power arrangements. Its subject matter is most often the analysis of orthographic images and the representation of biopolitical control in maps. An example of critical and radical cartography is provided by the Situationists International, an art-political collective that operated in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰² The forensic method is associated with the work of Eyal Weizman – a practise that links architecture, aesthetics, law and the burden of proof. The target recipient is the forum. Interspecies and multi-human ethnography shares its basic thesis with postanthropocentrism. It is part of the so-called species turn and extends its inquiry to include animals, plants and other organisms (including inanimate nature). Interspecies ethnography focuses on how the being of living organisms is shaped by political, cultural and economic networks. Multi-nonhuman ethnography includes the material world and is concerned with intersectionality - the multilayered web of agency of animate and inanimate matter. The work of researcher Anna Tsing (and team), who have developed the *Feral Atlas* platform, is a case in point. The project's scope is various researches working with creative and imaginative levels to make visible the more-than-human world and to find radical hope in it.¹⁰³

The framework is expanded by the insights of posthumanism, the new materialism and the hitherto unmentioned theory of story-forming matter, which is described in the *Posthuman Dictionary* by Professor of Environmental Studies Serpil Oppermann.¹⁰⁴ The latter is a conceptual tool of material critique. Narrative matter builds on the doctrine of the new materialism (i.e. the fact that matter is alive, active and creative) and extends it by adding a

¹⁰¹ Bathla (pozn. 100), s. 30–34.

¹⁰² Archive available at: <https://situationist.org/>, accessed on 5. 1. 2025.

¹⁰³ For more details see: <https://feralatlas.org/>, accessed on 27. 12. 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Braidotti –Jones –Klumbyté (note 61), pp. 411–414.

layer of narrative agency of matter (a non-verbal way of narrating its own material formation). American ecologist and philosopher David Abram speaks of matter as an eloquent matter that embodies stories in many forms. Stories of matter can tell of resilience, water-holding capacity, evolution, violence and extinction. Oppermann gives the example of fossils that tell the story of extinct species, or year rings that describe drought and rainy seasons. However, the narrative layer of matter is not a defence of its meaningful existence. On the contrary, it represents a new layer of postanthropocentric coexistence on the planet that is articulated and represented in animate and inanimate matter and being. By interacting with matter, human reality enables the existence of narrative agency, and through its practise we gain a broader awareness of the overall state of the world and society. Ultimately, the findings of narrative matter encourage us to be more attentive to inequalities and oppression, and a new sensibility invites us to imagine alternative human and more-than-human societies.

CONCLUSION

The theories presented (posthumanism, new materialism, forensic analysis) advocate a living matter – having agency. They oppose the established assumption,¹⁰⁵ in which matter is merely a "plastic" shape that is fully subordinate to the human being who determines its composition, form or purpose. The theory of the new materialism presents a method in which the gaze is directed precisely at matter as such, not at human agency. The approach of both posthumanism and new materialism implies a transformation of society that is not based on the principles of dichotomies, profit and oppression (of humans and nature). In the new constellations, the social inequality produced by the effects of global capitalism is suppressed, for vibrant matter is not seen as a commodifiable element. Nature becomes a permanent and inherent part of human existence. Methods of forensic analysis and radical cartography use insights from architectural practise, which are then applied to networks of power. Attention is also paid to the power of memory – the memory of matter is created through people¹⁰⁶ and gives its own testimony. To quote Oppermann: *"Giving matter the possibility of articulation through stories that are produced in collaboration with humans is not only a way to liberate matter from silence and passivity, but also to liberate ourselves from the images, discourses and practices of our own Cartesian world of illusion."*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ This idea was born in the Enlightenment, when man became the measure of all things. It has become fully operational with the rise of global capitalism, where the main parameter is the possibility of commodification.

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that people are also influenced by material action, matter leaves traces in our lives.

¹⁰⁷ Braidotti –Jones –Klumbyté (note 61), p. 414.

Why combine the methods of posthumanism, new materialism or forensic analysis with prison typology? For I believe that the idea of passive matter provides only a fragmentary narrative that overlays a layer of communication of inanimate agency. I work with the premise that the matter of the prison can speak to us about place in a very different way than people, and its voice will be a valuable testimony towards prison abolitionism. The political aim, then, is to promote a discussion about the life and agency of matter in architecture – a discussion that could eventually lead to a society based on care and social equality in close connection with nature, and thus to an ecologically sustainable future.¹⁰⁸ The central research question that accompanies the outputs of the practical part is: *In what ways can architecture (whose form materializes punishment) participate in prison abolitionism?*

The final thoughts are also the introduction to the practical part of the thesis – a critical analysis of the elements and strategies of the prison collected in the Internet Archive. The aim of decomposing the prison typology into elements is to explore individual and interdependent actions. An element is a physical and non-physical mass of varying scales (e.g. bars, standards, prison grounds). The exploration thus relates to the materiality of the thing, the occurrence of the element and the related scope. These planes intersect in many ways, but may also exhibit different strategies – for example, in the question of material, it is important to examine how the spectrum of properties of matter used varies.¹⁰⁹ Thus, one of the paths becomes the description of things and facts that we take to be quite obvious and permanent and thus do not take them into account in other non-stereotypical relations. An alternative approach to architectural art research is linked to the process of deconstruction of typology and has the ambition to have an overlap into the political and social space.

In other words, the object of artistic research is a critical analysis of selected matter and principles recurring in prison buildings. The work seeks to ensure that elements and strategies

¹⁰⁸ The implication of a more ecologically sustainable society is Jane Bennett's premise: "*The idea of inherently inanimate matter may be one of the obstacles to the emergence of more ecologically and materially sustainable modes of production and consumption.*" In: Bennett (note 4), p. xiv.

¹⁰⁹ For more on this see Tom Ingold, *Materials Against Materiality*, Cambridge 2007.- David Pye: the properties of materials are innate and are either enhanced or suppressed in use (in sculpture or architecture we encounter the expression "to be true to the material"). Materials have many innate properties and are variable, for example according to their state (liquid and solid metal). The properties are not used in their full enumeration, they disappear after processes before the final form (metal fluidity). The final form is thus usually the central source of the material's characteristics.

are not seen as merely an unchanging part of an open and shared architectural library, with a given and unquestioned purpose. It asks for their definitions, forms and relationships. The treatise includes a critique of how we treat elements with power, and what happens when we deny their liveliness and ability to influence events.

The attempt to speak beyond the mass of the prison is grasped from different positions. A flawless analysis is impossible in this case, and a kind of obstacle is the very fact that the prison (and information related to it) is inaccessible to the public. Thus, the process involves (1) research and research on the architecture of the prison; (2) images depicting the inner life of the prison and its setting in the landscape; (3) norms determining the parameters of architectural form. The aforementioned steps have their shortcomings – images are a very easily manipulated medium, building codes do not always correspond to reality, and the myriad of networks affecting prison life are not captured on an orthographic image. This position is acknowledged in the thesis, and papers confronting this pitfall highlight it in the text.

NOTES ON PRISON

The output of the architectural and artistic research (the practical part of the thesis) is the internet archive NOTES ON PRISON (www.notesonprison.cargo.site).

I.

The archive includes sixteen papers critically discussing prison matter and practices. These contributions are embedded in the body of the archive through three strategies: (1) levels indicating the degree of elaboration of the contribution; (2) categories reinterpreting the divisions of Gottfried Semper's chapter *The Four Elements of Architecture*;¹ (3) labels seeking material, typological and aspectual connections between the contributions. The strategies are more thoroughly described and explained in the text *The Archive Manual*, one of three general texts describing the background, activities and structure of the archive. The second text is the *Glossary*, which defines terms used within the archive that are not common outside of prison abolitionist debates. The final text is titled *Frequently Asked Questions* and describes the role of the prison in society-wide debates, introducing the prison population of the Czech Republic, systemic inequality, and the steps to achieve a theory of change. All of these texts are presented in their "web-version" in the printed form of the thesis, so they are not adapted for continuous reading and continuity.

The papers, text and accompanying visual documentation, are two to three standard pages in length. This has been chosen in order to adapt to the Internet environment and to offer dynamic reading and movement between phenomena. The text of each paper first defines the issue and the layers that make it up. Subsequently, the element or strategy is related to society and how it operates within the prison is examined. The text concludes by finding its analogies beyond the prison compound. The body of the text often links to other papers (and allows for a click-through) and is annotated for ease of retrieval of sources.

The landing *page* consists of an interactive diagram showing the relationships within the archive. It depicts what materials, typologies and aspects are shared between multiple elements or strategies, while reinterpreting Semper's four categories (hearth, roof, enclosure

¹ Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture*. Available at: <https://www.geocities.ws/mitchellmosesstudio/fourelements.pdf>, retrieved April 1, 2025.

and base). The archive works with Semper's theory primarily because it is inspired by 's efforts to return to the origins of matter and clarify the needs it responds to. In the case of the archive, however, the focus is not on architecture as a coherent science, but rather on the typology of the prison, hence the construction of power and surveillance. The diagram thus visually reveals in which categories the elements and strategies are located, where their intersections and shared fields of action are. The labels are provided with an interactive feature that allows the red threads between points to be highlighted, making the intricate web of relationships clearer.

II.

The archive is a paraphrase of the epitaph of prison building typology. It subversively collects and describes elements and strategies whose essence it criticizes and calls for their disappearance. Architecture is not a neutral practise and, in the case of the prison, actively participates in the production of social inequalities. It materializes and sets in motion visions and practices that are used to violence, exploit and exploit criminalized and otherwise marginalized communities. The presence of matter determines accessibility, control and visibility. Understanding architecture as an instrument of violence is a condition for its transformation.

Architecture can contribute to the movement to abolish prisons simply by opposing the construction of any buildings designed to incarcerate people. Any participation in these projects is merely legitimizing the carceral system – political and economic. The desire to "*do something with good intentions*" or the obligation to do something "*because someone has to do it, and I can do it better*" is an alibi that justifies the apparatus as a whole, making architectural offices complicit in the violence mediated by matter. Obviously, the round stamp of an engineering office is sufficient to implement a design in a domestic setting, but even that is not an ethical argument for accepting a commission – in this case, the responsibility is to talk about the issue, to disseminate its forms, and to work together to pursue *a theory of change*. Collective refusal is a political act that has the potential for wider public and professional debate.

The archive's political motivation is to use these findings as evidence for an open letter to the architectural community, the wording of which calls for a complete ban on the design of prison (and other incarceration) buildings. That motivation is also the author's answer to the

research question posed at the end of the theoretical part of the thesis - *In what ways can architecture (whose form materializes punishment) participate in prison abolitionism?* The letter will be published during the defence of the thesis as a performative act of the practical part.

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