

Architecture Demonstrates Power

By

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Architecture is intricately tied to political power. It provides a model for the system of structural thought used by a society to conceptualize the world. Such architecturally based structural thought includes understanding of social and political relationships. These relations of power are embodied in architecture, especially the monumental architecture created by political powers. These monuments demonstrate the power of the individuals responsible for their creation and they demonstrate the nature of that power.

Axial buildings and city plans are consistently related to power from on high, divine or lineage-based power, which dominates the community. Axial architecture directs the people to the seat or the symbol of that power. Non-axial architecture and city plans, on the other hand, consistently give people choices and assert the equality of constituent parts rather than the supremacy of a single goal. Furthermore, non-axial architecture is constantly related to political power as a mandate from the masses. Even in prisons, where the warden's power over the inmate represents the extreme of social control, architecture that embodies top-down distribution of power can be contrasted to architecture showing control vested by the community. Architecture demonstrates possession of power and the nature of that power.

Part 1: How Architecture Is Tied To Power

Looking at architectural history, the tie between architecture – especially monumental architecture – and political power can be consistently seen. One important step in exploring this connection is to assess how and why this tie exists. In *The Domestication of the Human Species*, anthropologist Peter Wilson¹ argues that, from its very conception, architecture relates to the way we understand the world. It allows us to conceptualize reality clearly and helps societies form systems that explain their cultural and social practices. Leaders utilize this framework for understanding reality to convey the nature of their power over the populace. They express how they wish to be seen and force their particular view of that power on the populace through architecture.

Architecture Defined

“Architecture” can be taken to mean many things, from 1) any built structure, to 2) the design product of a specifically trained type of artist. I resist both extremes. Architecture is not just sticks stuck in the ground or any haphazard pile of rocks, and it is not necessarily envisioned as a novel creative act authored by an individual identifiable designer. By emphasizing a modern, western definition of the architect as a type of artist who must produce creative, novel designs, which do not replicate any previous traditional form or model, I would slight all the people who put extensive effort into designing buildings within a tradition, simply because they use a vernacular vocabulary. The architect designs architectural space.

Wilson defines architecture in terms of permanence. For him, any temporary structures are impermanent and therefore not architecture. This definition is problematic

¹ Wilson, Peter J.; *The Domestication of the Human Species*; (New Haven, Yale University Press: 1988)

because, for one, he draws the line for what counts as permanent as an existence of around six months. Is a dwelling built with the builder's intention of moving on and reestablishing life in another place really permanent, whether or not it is sturdy enough to last about half a year? Is the Mbuti pygmy's hut that lasts a month so much less permanent that it is not architecture? Furthermore, the Mbuti define their political lives according to whether or not they are at their hearth.² This shows they are thinking of politics through the built environment. Such thinking seems a far more significant indicator of a change in the nature of building than an arbitrary time limit of six months for permanence.

Another possible definition is based on enclosure. If a person can go inside of a structure, then it is considered architecture. This definition is more useful because the distinction between inside and outside has significant cultural impact because it creates a boundary between two distinct spaces. However, I find this definition unsatisfactory because some significant funerary and religious architecture has no interior, such as the complex around the pyramid at Zoser.³

In this paper, "architecture" will refer to structures built with attention to their construction, including sturdiness and aesthetic product. Sturdiness relates to permanence, but does not require a time limit. The aesthetics of the building is important because an "attractive" building shows the care and thought the builder has put into the building, and the effort made to comply with cultural standards of building. I choose this definition because the thoughtful and consistent construction of buildings creates an entire milieu, the "built environment", which differs from the milieu in which those without constructions

² Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, pp. 27, 42

³ DeLong, David, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, University of Pennsylvania, September 11, 2002

live. The existence of a built environment, varied though it may be, significantly impacts those living within it.

Architecture is the result of deliberate intention, when people choose to build. Despite common misconceptions, not all people live in a built environment or have an innate, natural need for shelter and privacy. Societies all over the world live without houses. Many, such as most Australian Aborigines⁴, live without structures of any kind. Such life is not limited to temperate areas. For example, the Ona of Tierra del Fuego live in near-Antarctic conditions but build no dwellings, only temporary windbreaks for nocturnal shelter. The absence of houses in their culture is not due to a lack of skill in construction, as they build “elaborate conical huts for ritual purposes.”⁵ The absence of dwellings shows a choice not to build them, since the Ona and other similar groups have the knowledge and tools necessary to build solid, permanent buildings. These cultures demonstrate 1) that not all people build, 2) that buildings are unnecessary in harsh climates, and 3) that people who do not build may have the ability. People have claimed that a built environment is universally necessary based on a psychological⁶ or physical need for shelter, which is universally present where people are capable of building. The counter-examples above demonstrate that a universal human need for shelter does not exist and that a building is the result of a choice, a specific intent to build. As buildings do not simply fulfill a need for shelter, buildings must primarily serve some other function, such as to structure social interaction, to indicate private or sacred areas and individual status.

⁴ Myers, Fred R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986)

⁵ Rapoport, Amos, *House Form and Culture*, (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle, NJ: 1969), p. 20

⁶ Freud, quoted in Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 180

Structure

The most far reaching difference between open and domesticated societies, between Paleolithic and Neolithic societies, between hunter/gatherers and agriculturalists, between nomads and sedentarists, is that in the former the sense of structure and constraint is tacit, subjective, personal, and focused, whereas in the latter it is explicit, embodied, objective, and externally bounded. The source of this difference, its origin, lies in the adoption of architecture as the permanent living environment. ... In a very real and literal sense the adoption of architecture is an acceptance of structure and constraint.⁷

Architecture impacts sedentary peoples by making concrete structures present in the material world.⁸ The advent of architecture not only embodies but also creates structure. As architecture appears in a society, it creates a physical base on which to form ideas. This physical base allows further elaboration and exploration of whatever ideas of structure might have previously existed. Most significantly, architecture demonstrates, whereas nature lacks, clear limits and enclosed space. With the distinction of inside/outside, people begin to think about compartmentalization.

Nomadic societies tend to be focus-based. They identify certain important sites, based on, for example, a spring or a tree, and the influence of the group associated with that site radiates out from it, but there is no final limit.⁹ The sites may be sacred, and they may be related to essential needs for survival, such as water. Often, the sites are powerful, sacred and materially necessary. The sites identified with a clan or tribe may be scattered about, but cannot be mapped as an exclusive territory, only as a path from one significant site to another.¹⁰ This focus basis of society is significant because nomads do not simply think of territory or space this way, but their thought in general has “a relative inconsistency in

⁷ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 77-78

⁸ Wilson refers to people who live in a built environment as: sedentary, domesticated, agricultural, and Neolithic. He uses the terms: nomadic, open society, hunter/gather, and Paleolithic to refer to people without a built environment. In order to avoid conflation of the methods of subsistence, historical period, and living environment, I will only use the terms: sedentary, nomadic, domesticated and open society.

⁹ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 29-30

Myers, Fred R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*

¹⁰ Herzog, Werner, *Where Green Ants Dream* (film)

classification, which in turn points to a lack of development of the boundary concept.”¹¹ In other words, nomads, without a built environment, do not think in terms of categorization or delimiting factors. Some societies, such as the Inuit, even intentionally destroy any developing concepts of clear-cut delineation that a child might exhibit.¹²

The very structure of nomadic hunter/gatherer life cannot be conceptualized by the observer through any technique that uses such boundary concepts as frontiers, categories or compartments. These societies are better conceived and described as they seem to conceive and describe themselves – that is, as being held together by mutual attraction and common focus.¹³

Structure requires clear contrasts and related definitions. In a structured system, if an object is other than x, then it is automatically in a contrasting category not-x. It is not simply “dissimilar to” or “not very close to” x; it is “not-x”. Structured thinking demands classification. This classification is based on a contrast between two opposing predicates, and the possibility that the type of predicate cannot apply to the subject that is being classified. A subject could be either white, not white, or uncolored. This sort of understanding requires a boundary concept. A subject is either one or the other, it cannot be both; there must be clear delineation. There is no compartmentalization of different types in nomadic life because there is no limit concept. If no compartmentalized concepts exist, there can be little entailment or building from one concept to another, the heart of structured thinking. Nomadic concepts are without any delimiting boundaries, based instead on similarity and grouping around foci. Even the use of the phrase “structure of nomadic hunter/gatherer life” now comes across as inappropriate, since a system based on apparently random foci does not seem structured at all. An absence of categories, classification, and delineation is consistently evident through different communities of nomads. Such

¹¹ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 31

¹² Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 31

¹³ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 31-32

consistency over widely diverse groups is significant, since their most apparent similarity is the absence of architecture.

At the same time, groups who have architecture think of their lives and surroundings in a structured way.¹⁴ “Architecture is a materialization of structure, and the adoption of architecture as a permanent feature of life introduces spatial organization and allocation as an ordering visual dimension.”¹⁵ Those with architecture use structure to organize their lives. Architecture is a physical manifestation of structure, since it must itself be structured in order to stand. Architectural elements provide clear examples of concepts like a limit, as in a wall, and a compartment, as in a room. Buildings have a fairly unlimited capacity to demonstrate elements of structure.

“Through settlement and architecture the *principle* of pattern and structure is embodied in the atmosphere, the very environment and context of living.”¹⁶ Living in buildings compartmentalizes and structures life, as people interact with structures daily. Peoples living in a built environment organize their lives according to structure. Nomads do not. Architecture is a clear embodiment of structure. Architecture creates structure for those who conduct their lives within it.

Cosmology

Architecture as the physical embodiment of structure provides a paradigm for thinking structurally about life. “The adoption of the house and the village also ushers in a development of the structure of social life, the elaboration of thinking about the world, and

¹⁴ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 58

¹⁵ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 59

¹⁶ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 65

the strengthening of the links between the two.”¹⁷ Architecture allows structured thinking about reality in general, leading society to create structured cosmology.

Each culture forms a framework for understanding the world, a way of thinking about the cosmos. This culturally based conceptualization of the world is its “cosmology”. A culture’s cosmology explains to the members of that culture not only the world’s origin, but also more everyday aspects of life, such as man’s relationship to nature, gender, birth, death, and nobility. Such concepts divide the world into categories, and are clearly grounded in structured thinking.

A society’s cosmology is intricately linked to its architecture since the architecture provides the model for thinking about it. Because of this progression from architecture to structured thought, cosmology is often symbolized by architecture. “Because it is a topography the house may be a model or map for any other structure irrespective of materials, appearances, and location, and the house may equally be understood as a model of any other phenomenon.”¹⁸ The use of parallel structures to analyze the world and build a house leads to the creation of ties between the two, often including explicit symbolic relationships.

Interaction with the house can explain cosmology. For example, in the Atoni culture, the attic contains both the altar and the granary. Heaven is seen as the location of divinity and the source of nourishment.¹⁹ As the roof parallels the dome of the sky, the house illustrates the Atoni notion of divinity. Similarly, gender roles are both defined and exemplified by the house in the Para-Pirana myth about the Roofing Father, whose “head is

¹⁷ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 58

¹⁸ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 67

¹⁹ Cunningham, Clark quoted in Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 69

at the male end of the house, his anus at the female end.”²⁰ Anything that can be thought of structurally, any vision of the world or societal issues can be modeled and exemplified by a culture’s architecture. “House and cosmos are homologous in structure, so the house represents and models the universe.”²¹ As structure dominates both architecture and cosmological thought, the same medium can express both. Through structure, architects are able to create parallel systems that model ideas in physical space.

“In domesticated societies, the house and the village are the fusion of microcosm and macrocosm, body and world, individual and collective, and at the same time they are the presentation of these abstractions to everyday life.”²² From individual buildings to the way they interact, the architecture of a culture embodies its worldviews. Do party walls connect to form an impenetrable exterior, joining the community as a solid physical, social, and defensive unit; or is each house far from the next, asserting its own independence? Do houses face each other, are windows open or walls few, making houses easy to see into; or do they hide their secrets away from the public? Are spaces built specifically for socialization, trade, or worship; or are these activities conducted in the home? Do the priests or nobles live separately from the commoners? Questions like these demonstrate how the architecture of a village illustrates its social life and conceptions of the world. The architecture of a village illustrates its cosmology.

Manipulation of Architecture as Cosmology

“To be able to see the cosmos represented and to be able to move about in it is to place oneself exactly in space and time and to have answered all the mysteries of existence,

²⁰ Hugh-Jones, Stephen, quoted in Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 67

²¹ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 69

²² Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 73

life and death.”²³ Once cosmology is physically represented in a culture through structure in architecture, the representation seems able to resolve all unanswered questions. Relationships between parts become clearly defined by their material representation. The cosmology is now manageable and understandable. If architecture depicts the nature of reality, then new ideas about reality can be demonstrated through manipulation of architectural symbolism.

The building of tombs is an example of how a culture demonstrates belief in continuing existence after death. Great investment in the tomb, the home for the dead, gives it precedence over the houses of the living because it is the permanent equivalent of the temporary house.²⁴ Where so much effort is spent, the expenditure must seem necessary, preparing the occupant for endless life beyond the grave, a life more important than the life they knew. By accentuating the importance of the tomb, people demonstrate belief in an afterlife, the continued existence of the person after death. Tombs “aim to produce *the effect of permanence*. At the deepest metaphysical, spiritual level, tombs overcome death. If this is so, then the greater, more solid and monumental the tomb or mausoleum, the greater the effect of overcoming death, the more convincing and successful the effort would seem to be”²⁵. The more elaborate and imposing the tomb, the more emphatic the victory of permanence over the transience of human life and the inevitability of death.

Splendid tombs would provide the resources for an afterlife filled with glory and prestige. Beautiful tombs make the person’s exploits on earth seem insignificant compared to their possibilities in the afterlife. For example, by building the great pyramids, the Pharaohs appeared to have conquered time and death. The Pharaohs themselves were

²³ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 77

²⁴ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 123

²⁵ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 130, his italics.

considered gods, the incarnation of the god Ra on Earth.²⁶ By elaborating on ideas of permanence and the afterlife, contained in the ordinary tomb, the Pharaohs were able to convey that not only their lives, but also their power, transcended death.

This apparent ability to trump forces like time and death seems to give those who manipulate architectural symbols extreme, almost divine powers. Leaders manipulate the architectural vocabulary of a specific culture to make the people think that the leaders are divine, or whatever else it is that they are attempting to convey. Though they do not manipulate the actual cosmos, they manipulate the people's understanding of that cosmos, the people's cosmology, to make the people think that what they state architecturally is real. The ability to make people perceive their leaders as divinities is real political power that comes from this architectural manipulation.

Individual Power

This is not to say that people simply look around for the most impressive architecture to identify powerful people. Rather, a leader's status is indicated by his control over others, the way that others defer to him, his capacity for leadership, his wealth, and the other ways he is set apart from the populace. Architecture demonstrates all of these, which makes it a highly important indicator of status. Political power is not only linked to architecture through the manipulation of cosmology and the leader's depiction in the architecture, but also to the leader's relationship to the building he causes to be built, his control over its construction and the leadership abilities exhibited by that control. This aspect of the relationship of political power to architecture shows how it can make an individual powerful, as well as define the nature of the ruler as opposed to a commoner.

²⁶ DeLong, David, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, September 11, 2002

Labor is the main asset available to leaders of domesticated societies in their efforts to gain honor, prestige, and acclaim. “Labor, talent, skill, and artistic sense were the main human possessions that people had to create a world which could satisfy their senses and their social and intellectual ambitions. The more labor and so forth that was expended, the richer and more rewarding the world of sensual and intellectual products.”²⁷ Without the aid of sophisticated-engine driven machinery, a domesticated society must produce everything through great quantities of personal investment of effort and time. The more vast or intricate the product, the greater the investment of the people working on it. The significant personal investment that went into creating them makes such products valuable. Conversely, in order to be worth taking up a significant portion of a person’s time – time that could be spent, for example, hunting or working in the fields providing essential food items – the product must be more valuable than other possibilities for the time spent. Therefore, anything lavished with great amounts of time during production is seen as valuable and expensive.

“What we can do, then, is exchange material products in which labor is embodied for respect, credit, and rank – that is, for social standing and assets – instead of exchanging one product for another.”²⁸ Leaders are able to levy, control, and direct vast amounts of labor to create products of great value. The possession of such products impresses, and demonstrates great wealth and the ability to control large amounts of labor. This aspect of display is somewhat circular: by controlling large amounts of labor, a leader can produce objects that require large amounts of labor and thus demonstrate his possession of control of large amounts of labor. These products are the evidence of his power over his subjects, and therefore bestow prestige upon him.

²⁷ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 82

²⁸ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 80

“The most readily available means whereby great quantities of labor may be used to convert to prestige, a means that is the great invention of domesticated society, is architecture in general and the house specifically.”²⁹ Unlike a crown or a throne, buildings offer unique possibilities of scale that make them more impressive. Furthermore, construction is usually the most labor-intensive task in a sedentary society. Though most houses require a significant amount of work, a palace is much more labor intensive, and becomes even more impressive in relation to the amounts of work expended on an average home. The quality of house produced displays the quantities of work put into the structure, and thus the palace creates an impressive demonstration of the leader’s power. The contrast between the leader’s palace and the average person’s house demonstrates that power.

The palace is monumental architecture. Monumental architecture differs from vernacular architecture, since it is primarily public and political. As buildings that are primarily political in nature, monuments are built by leaders. That is, leaders initiate the building process, starting with some grand dream. They may hire an architect to put that dream into a buildable design. Then, they will levy workers to construct the building. Leaders are the builders of monuments because they are in charge of the building process; they initiate and oversee it. Monuments are also typically much more imposing and larger than other buildings. They always stand out from ordinary buildings, since they are built with the specific intent of making an impression on the public. A monument may be a memorial, or it may be a building that people live and work in daily. A monument may be a huge pyramid or a small, richly decorated chapel. However, it always makes an impression on the people who see it. Monumental architecture is, specifically, architecture built by those with power, not just everyday citizens.

²⁹ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 87

If buildings like palaces display the superior power that leaders control, how do they convert the people's own labor into a demonstration of the leader's power? Are commoners simply duped into thinking that the labor that creates architectural monuments is not their own? Certainly not. The leader must add something for his contribution to be considered significant and valuable. First, leaders mobilize the labor on a unique scale.³⁰ They are able to call upon not only their friends and neighbors, but the entire community to participate in their grandiose undertakings. The ability to organize efforts at a scale beyond the normal cooperation of people is a valuable skill.

Leaders have the vision to create these glorious monuments. They imagine and bring about the creation of these embodiments of power. The imagination and forward thinking necessary to envision and plan, as well as to implement a plan – to create a structure that will glorify the leader and the group is a special ability required for leadership.³¹ “It is this masterminding ability that merits the prestige, and it is the successful and impressive demonstration or display of these abilities – the show, the meal, the monument – that provides the tangible, sensual product which the guests/visitors/followers can appreciate and to which they physically respond.”³² The leader has a unique ability to organize and mobilize the populace to create monumental buildings that are the evidence of his power.

In one sense, we have a common philosophy among domesticated people of reaching for glory through technology: architectural displays are constructed as a testament to the power, force, and energy people can muster and exert on the world. That power is ‘organized labor’ – organized by division and by mobilization. The division of labor makes possible the specialization that

³⁰ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 90

³¹ Who does monumental architecture glorify? The ruler, as has been explained. It can also glorify the group depending on how it compares to the monuments of other groups. If it is more impressive, then the entire group is glorified. However, though great architecture may make a country look strong and powerful, it does not necessarily benefit its people, if it is used as a mechanism of tyranny. Such is the case with the palaces of Saddam Hussein, or the huge audience halls and party grounds of Hitler.

³² Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 90-91

produces the skill and refinement, the ‘workmanship’ and the ‘grace’; the mobilization produces the scale and the might.³³

The majesty of monuments can be attributed to the leader because his ingenuity and supervising ability initiates and facilitates its creation. The monument evidences the leader’s vision and organizational abilities, essential elements of his leadership skills. The monument impresses because it is greater than anything that any of the individual subjects could create. It shows an ability to bring together all the workers’ efforts, a power that only the leader has.

Furthermore, the monumental whole is greater than the parts. Each individual brick is disregarded in the scale, beauty, and monumentality created by the whole. The abilities of the leader are so impressive because the final result is beyond the ability of any of the participants. The monuments appear as superhuman productions. Even to the worker viewing the finished monument, the final effect of the building as “a vast singularity” is overwhelming, “evidence that the sum is not only greater than, but also different from the parts.”³⁴ The individual efforts are barely seen; instead, there is a “mysterious emergence of the monumental whole from its insignificant parts.”³⁵ When looking at a building like the Parthenon, one sees not the individual stones, though they are evident, but the overall grandiose image. This image, as a whole, finished piece of architecture is impressive and beautiful. The beauty of the Parthenon is an additional element that can be attributed to Ictinus and to Pericles, the architect and the Athenian politician responsible for its construction, respectively.³⁶ The spectacle is an added gift from the leader who masterminds the display.

³³ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 88

³⁴ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 131

³⁵ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 131

³⁶ DeLong, David, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, September 18, 2002

This spectacle is a very powerful part of the architecture of power because it overawes people. It provides a singular and unforgettable emotional charge, linked forever in the viewer's mind with that particular site. The monument's ability to influence people, to have an effect on them, makes that building powerful.³⁷ Whether political power is described as the ability to create a desired effect or the ability to control a group,³⁸ the monument embodies power. The creation of monumental architecture is a demonstration of leadership abilities, of the potential for political power. It proves the leader's worthiness and greatness, his capacity for power.

The act of construction was, through the mobilization and organization involved, an act of real power while the end product, as something greater than the sum of its parts and more moving in its magnificence than anything within the capabilities of an individual was both testament and realization of power³⁹.

Monumental architecture embodies the leader's ability to control and affect his followers. It both shows the group his actual power and demonstrates his worthiness and capacity to possess that power. Architecture is a sign pointing to a leader's power.⁴⁰

Contemporary Objections

Contemporary western society does not put enough stock in everyday architecture to see any architectural statement as a demonstration of power. Buildings may demonstrate access to impressive resources, but they are usually not tied to manipulation of people's worldviews and grand assertions of power. If the argument that architecture is tied to power is inapplicable to contemporary society, how useful is it? Though Wilson's argument is fairly convincing in the context of domestic society, which he portrays as an evolutionary

³⁷ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 132-133

³⁸ Referring to theories by Bertrand Russell and Hannah Arendt (Wilson, 117-118)

³⁹ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 148

⁴⁰ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 126

step,⁴¹ even he believes that “the widespread recurrence of symbolic patterns to be found in constructions and layouts... is something particular to the epoch of domesticated culture, something of little moment to hunter/gathers or to urban industrial cultures.”⁴² He also states that industrial societies think of power in terms of “destructive force”, and that any sort of power “can now be measured in terms of equivalents of so many megaton blasts”⁴³. In other words, Wilson believes that industrial, urban societies no longer depict their cosmology in their architecture, nor is their power evidenced in their buildings. With the advent of literacy, the necessity of depicting ideas in architecture falls away.⁴⁴ With writing come other ways of depicting and understanding reality, which lead to the eventual de-symbolization of architecture. Power is demonstrated by the ability to dominate and produce intense forces of destruction, embodied in new stronger arms. In addition, architecture no longer represents cosmic forces, which are usually discussed in texts, so manipulating architecture no longer manipulates ideas about reality. In industrialized society, architecture has, according to Wilson, lost its symbolism and its power. However, he still believes that the argument is valid for certain types of cultures, which he calls domesticated societies, who live in fixed communities in a built environment but are not literate, do not use sophisticated technology, and do not participate in modern warfare. “Until the modern industrial age, the age first of steam, then electricity, and now atomic

⁴¹ I do not believe in unilineal cultural evolution, or cultural evolution in the sense of constant progression. Technological progression is not necessarily tied to moral or spiritual progression. However, to reach its current technological stage, western society must have gone through some technological state similar to these domesticated peoples. If generalizations can be made about vastly different domesticated societies and these societies consistently fall into uniform patterns, then a similar stage in our past must have resembled them as well. We have since moved away from that way of life, but westerners were once domesticated peoples. This is complicated by the possibility that the differing value we place on technology and on profit may be what led western society to become the way it is, rather than our differing condition leading to differing values. If so, then their societies are certainly not slow to learn and evolve; they simply do not wish to change into what we are.

⁴² Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 76

⁴³ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 147

⁴⁴ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 66, 77

energy, the most moving and dramatic advertisement for and demonstration of the human attainment of power was monumental architecture”⁴⁵. While architecture is no longer the primary source of power in industrialized societies because of technology, for domesticated societies it still constitutes the most impressive demonstration of power.

While I agree that there are now impressive means of exhibiting power, such as dropping an atomic bomb, and that architecture is a very effective method of demonstrating power in domesticated societies, I disagree that the former has totally replaced and outstripped the latter in industrialized societies. Though architecture’s role has diminished as a representation of conceptions of the world and as a demonstration of power, it still serves these purposes, and I think that Wilson’s arguments show well how these are connected.

Cosmology’s illustration in architecture does not stop with the advent of literacy or industrialization. For example, the nature of the contemporary American family and the individual are demonstrated by the residents in a house, who are usually only the parents and children up to their teens, and it is illustrated by the fact that the children tend to have their own rooms, if possible. The house therefore demonstrates the primacy of the nuclear family. Each person’s right to privacy and ownership is emphasized by the separation of rooms and the enclosure of the home. If any groups are created, the parents are thought of as a unit, and the children are thought of as a group, which corresponds to the living arrangements. This is very unlike, for example, the Batammaliba house in Africa, which has one sleeping room for the women and small children, and another for the men.⁴⁶ Such a physical grouping is attached to a different formulation of the nature of the family and its constituent parts. In Batammaliba life, the family is composed of not parents and children

⁴⁵ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 147

⁴⁶ Blier, Suzanne P., *The Anatomy of Architecture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 14-15

but more along the lines of women-with-babies and men. These different building choices and room use make statements about the nature of both American and Batammaliba life, and the way we conceptualize our lives.

Cosmology may be less explicit in American architecture, but it is still prominently involved in architectural practice as people strive to create buildings that will promote certain types of environments and interactions. The ideals involved are more covert than they are in many domestic societies; however, buildings still express the architect and builder's beliefs concerning how people will and should interact, what should be hidden from a building's occupants and surroundings, what is important in the surrounding area, the value of aesthetics and historical reference in new construction, etc. If buildings no longer expressed ideas, there could be no Le Corbusier, no Mies van der Rohe, no Frank Lloyd Wright, no Gaudí, no Calatrava. Though the role in industrial society of architectural representation of the nature of reality is reduced compared to its role in domesticated societies, it still exists. Architecture in industrialized societies is not empty of cosmology.

Western society also continues to rely on architecture as a symbol of power. This is demonstrated in America by prominent portrayal of the White House during a crisis. The media televises views of the White House not because they are waiting for the President to emerge, but because it represents the office of the Presidency. The building itself represents political power. If Americans truly didn't care about architecture, the President and Congress could conduct the business of governance in underground bunkers, like the shadow government after 9/11, just as well and far more safely than on Capitol Hill. Instead, the American people were outraged at the thought of government in hiding. The Jeffersonian buildings represent the government to American society; one of their functions is to represent the power and legitimacy of the government. A government from a bunker

would seem somehow illicit. The White House and the Capitol Building are essential symbols of the American government and the American cosmology.

Often, the symbolism of a building may be overlooked, but that does not mean that it does not represent its builder's ideals and goals for reality. Americans did not see the World Trade Center as more than a financial office building until after the terrorist attacks, yet the attackers found it a potent architectural symbol of capitalism and American "financial hegemony"⁴⁷. The fact that it was part of a competition for the tallest building in the world makes it similar to the construction of displays for feasts by the New Zealand Maori or tombs for the African Merina.⁴⁸ By building the Sears Tower, which topped the World Trade Center by eighty-six feet,⁴⁹ Chicago tried to assert itself over New York as the dominant city in America, and the world. Skyscrapers are seen as a symbol of strength and economic prosperity, as demonstrated by the construction of Rockefeller Center during the Great Depression, attempting to instill hope in the future through its vision of the ideal city in New York.⁵⁰ The builders of the Met Life Tower were also well aware of the connection between the imposing architecture of skyscrapers and power. Their company song touted, "We're the guardians of 'the Tower,'/ And the light which it enveils;/ It's a symbol of our power-/ To its height no other scales. ..."⁵¹ Even to these modern New Yorkers, there was a clear connection between their building and power, exhibited in height. By planning to build the tallest building in the world in the reconstruction at Ground Zero as designed by the architect, Libeskind,⁵² Americans assert our resilience and continuing world domination,

⁴⁷ Sharon Burdick, in comments on this paper.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*, 83-86, 91, 124-125

⁴⁹ Dupré, Judith; *Skyscrapers: A History of the World's Most Famous and Important Skyscrapers*; (New York: Black Dog & Leventhol Publishers, 1996), p. 67, 69

⁵⁰ Dupré, Judith; *Skyscrapers*, 33, 43

⁵¹ Dupré, Judith; *Skyscrapers*, 27

⁵² Lower Manhattan Development Corporation website, "Selected Design for the World Trade Center Site", http://www.renewnyc.com/plan_des_dev/wtc_site/new_design_plans/selected_design.asp

both economic and political. The reconstruction shows our feeling that our status in the world is tied to the way our power is demonstrated by our buildings.

The great pyramids at Giza, the soaring French Gothic Cathedrals, Mayan temples, and the megalithic monuments of Stonehenge and Carnac inspire open-mouthed awe even today in people of industrialized nations. Corporations compete to build soaring skyscrapers as families build mansions in the idiom of English country manors and French châteaux. Architecture is still intricately tied to power, but its prominence has become less explicit.

Summary

Architecture therefore demonstrates power through the depiction of a leader's control over a community, his ability to organize and mobilize them; it shows his power as a leader. It also shows his ability to create a desired effect. From vision to the awesome impression the final product gives the viewer, the leader is responsible for creating the desired effect. By controlling architectural symbols and manipulating the structures used to envisage the world, leaders create buildings as great symbols of power. Architecture demonstrates power.

Part 2: What Architecture Can Tell Us About Power

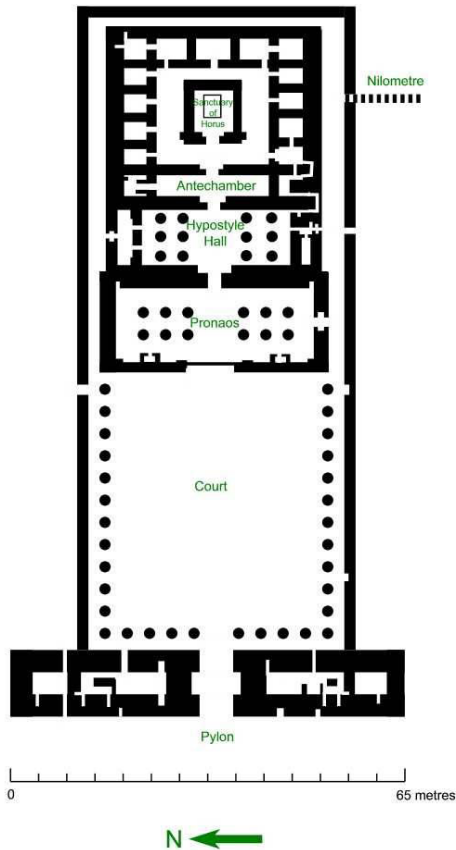
If architecture demonstrates power, then that power should be evident from the architecture. If the impact of power upon buildings is visible, one should be able to discern information about that power. Monumental architecture in particular conveys the nature of the power that created it. The cosmology represented in the architecture demonstrates the type of power that created it. A pattern exists wherein axial buildings and cities are created by authoritarian powers concentrated in a single ruling figure, which can be contrasted to a non-axial pattern in more egalitarian societies. Furthermore, this correspondence between building orientation and power scheme results directly from differing ideals about the nature of the world and of power.

Axiality in Buildings

Axiality in a building occurs when it is clearly oriented in one direction, emphasizing opposite walls that are far from one another, and provoking those who use the building to walk longitudinally within it.⁵³ This means that the people who enter are directed to the opposite end of the building where something significant occurs. Archetypal examples of axial buildings include Egyptian temples, Roman basilicas, and the Christian basilicas that evolved from the Roman.

⁵³ David DeLong introduced me to the concept of axiality in a lecture on September 11, 2002.

“The Egyptian temples are based on one straight path leading ‘in’ towards a final but unreachable goal”⁵⁴. One enters the temple of Horus at Edfu⁵⁵ between two massive pylons with a niche at the top corresponding exactly to the path of the sun. Walking through a series of doorways aligned along an axis parallel to the solar path, one proceeds through a courtyard into a series of halls. As one approaches the inner sanctum of the temple, a place



Temple of Horus at Edfu, Floor Plan

where only priests were allowed to go, the columns in the halls take up more space, closing in and creating varying degrees of darkness. The walls around the halls start out at only half the height of the columns and later let light in only through small clerestory openings⁵⁶. Furthermore, the ceilings get lower and the space becomes more contained and darker. Finally, one reaches the shrine containing an obelisk, which contains a statue of the Pharaoh. Not only does the path one takes to traverse the temple correspond to the path of the sun in the sky, but the level of light also recreates the course of the sun. In

the courtyard, the light is bright; then it decreases as though moving through twilight into night. Finally, the building’s alignment to the path of the sun allows the sun’s rays to pierce the inner sanctum where they illuminate only the statue of the Pharaoh. Since the Pharaoh is

⁵⁴ Norberg-Schultz, Christian; *Existence, Space & Architecture*; (New York, Praeger Publishers: 1971), p. 50

⁵⁵ Image source: From Luxor to Aswan, “Edfu temple Plan”, <http://c.yorkmiller.users.btopenworld.com/templans/edfu.htm>

⁵⁶ Clerestory windows are near the ceiling, above eye level, and serve to let in light and circulate air.

considered to be the divine incarnation of the sun god, Ra, this is a sacred event, depicting the eventual reincarnation of the Pharaoh and the rebirth of the sun after each night.⁵⁷ The orientation of the temple allows the sacred event to happen and the cosmic order to be reenacted. The temple's axuality makes it able to house the most powerful god. The far end of the temple is the location of the God's embodiment.



Roman basilica at Trier

The Roman basilica is an axial building type, which is longitudinal and typified by an apse at one end opposite the entrance. These two ends are connected by a long central aisle, often accompanied by smaller side aisles and, sometimes, smaller alcoves off the sides. The basilica at Trier,⁵⁸

which was Constantine's post before he became Emperor, is a good example of a simple basilica from the late empire.⁵⁹ When the Roman Emperor visited cities throughout the empire, he conducted audiences in the local basilica. During these public audiences, he sat enthroned in the apse at one end of the long central aisle of the basilica. At other times, the local governor conducted law courts from the same place.



Trier, Interior

⁶⁰ Through the presence of the Emperor or governor, the

⁵⁷ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, September 11, 2002

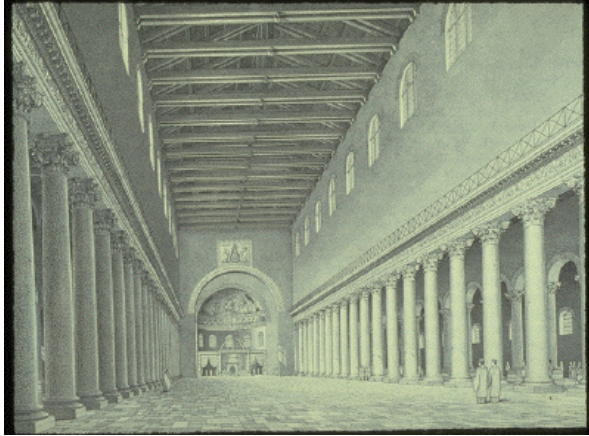
⁵⁸ Image source: <http://www.pitt.edu/~tokerism/0040/roman2.html>

⁵⁹ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 2, 2002

⁶⁰ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 2, 2002

apse became the seat of political power. Later Christian basilica churches were explicitly patterned after Roman civic basilicas. In the Christian basilicas, the apse became the location for the altar, as it was in the first basilica church, Old St. Peter's in Rome.⁶¹ The altar in the apse represented the divine power that accepts the sacrament.

Consistently, in these examples and in others, axiality leads to the symbol of power. The aisle down the middle of a church is, to the believer, a path leading to a space of authority, where one worships the God who holds judgment over one's eternal future. The Roman basilica leads the supplicant directly to the ruler of the world.



Old St. Peter's, Rome

The Egyptian temple directs one to the embodiment of cosmic power and order. All of these buildings lead the supplicant to the source of authority. Axiality represents authoritarian power. Whatever is at the end of that axis shows what the users of the building value and what has the most power over them.

Non-Axiality in Buildings

Non-axial buildings are without any dominant orientation, often involving conflicting axes and emphasis, as well as circles and spirals. Non-axial buildings include Ziggurats, Persian hypostyle halls, Buddhist stuppas, and Arabic style mosques, as well as most centralized buildings. Non-axiality denotes equality, not privilege. Consequently, non-programmed Quaker meetinghouses, such as Haverford, Gwynedd, and Falls meetings,

⁶¹ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 2, 2002

Image source: Humanities 103, Introduction to Medieval Civilization, "Early Christian Architecture under Constantine", http://www.owl.net.rice.edu/~huma103/lec5I_II.html

make the benches in their meetinghouses face each other instead of watching a minister perform a ceremony at one end, since all the members of a meeting are important and equal. The non-axial orientation allows all members of the meeting to interact equally.



Great Mosque, Cordoba

In Arabic style mosques, like the Great Mosque at Cordoba,⁶² each supplicant in prayer is as equal as the hypostyle columns of the hall and as the trees in the forest the columns resemble.⁶³ Here, the only orientation indicates direction of prayer, not the location where a particular event will happen or person

will appear, so it does not matter where one is located in the mosque. One need not look at the niche indicating the direction of Mecca, only pray towards the wall on which the niche is located. At Cordoba, one cannot even see the whole Mosque. All Muslims in the Arabic style mosque are put on equal footing before God despite difference in location throughout the hall by their similarity to the non-hierarchical columns.

Non-axiality not only shows the equality of the building's users, but also shows a different attitude toward power. For example, in Sumerian Ziggurats, such as the one at Ur,⁶⁴ the worshipper never meets God head-on, as he constantly



Ziggurat, Ur

⁶² Image source: Medieval Narrative, the Roots of Medieval Europe, http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/digital/2000/c_n_c/c_04_medieval/roots_medieval.htm

⁶³ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 9, 2002

⁶⁴ Image source: Alan Peterson, Art 201 History 1, "Sumeria", http://www.coco.cc.az.us/apetersen/_ART201/sumeria.htm

changes direction in his long path to the inner sanctum; he never sees the blinding power of God. In the Ziggurat, the worshipper gets very close to the inner sanctum before seeing it, making the experience intimate and personal. The Ziggurat at Uruk is designed in a spiral, and at Ur, the processional approached the Ziggurat from three different directions, then circumambulated the temple on three different levels before proceeding to the topmost level containing the inner sanctum.⁶⁵ The non-axial procession in the Ziggurat creates a personal, non-authoritarian experience of God. Unlike the axial building, where one is faced with that power and overawed by it, where the altar, throne, or statue dominates the entire space, in the non-axial building, the sacred is almost secret.

Furthermore, worship in the Ziggurats was participatory and involved the entire community, not just an exclusive group of priests. This participation emphasizes the equality of the community members. In fact, these non-axial buildings have the overarching trait of being participatory – meaning that anyone can go anywhere, even to places like the inner sanctum of the Ziggurat. In the axial building, one needs special privileges to approach the altar at the sacred far end of the building, whereas all areas of the non-axial building are open to everyone.

One need not be a priest to reenact the cosmic dance by circumambulating the huge mound of a stupa. The Buddhist stupa represents the universe. Worship is performed not by a priest, but by anyone who circumambulates the stupa.⁶⁶ Thus, any Buddhist can participate in this aspect of the universe, a holy world in miniature. The stupa allows all people to participate equally and to encounter the sacred personally. The power of the sacred in the stupa is not stifling or authoritarian; it is accessible to all. The equal, participatory, and non-dominating nature of the stupa typifies non-axial buildings. The

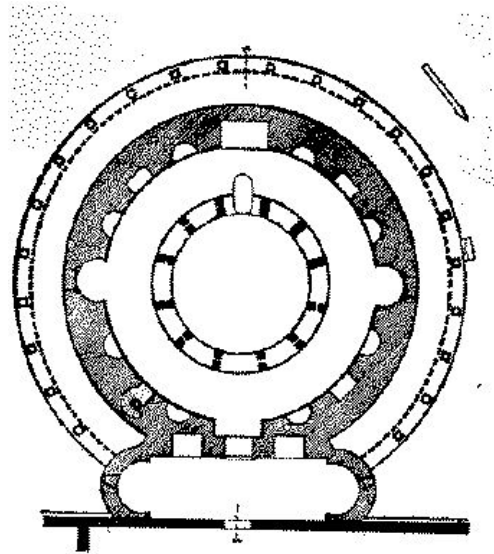
⁶⁵ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, September 11, 2002

⁶⁶ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 9, 2002

non-axial building calls for equality and participation. In a non-axial building, anyone's action is significant, not simply that of the authority.

Centralized Building and Non-Axiality

The centralized building typically commemorates a specific spot. In the case of religious buildings, it elevates this spot as sacred for an event that occurred there, an artifact that rests there, a person buried there or the ceremonies conducted there. For example, a Greek tholos, a round temple, rests over the oracle at Delphi.⁶⁷ The tholos emphasizes the sacredness of the spot.



Ste Costanza e Agnese, Floor Plan

Bramante designed the dome of New St. Peter's to be centered directly over the tomb of Peter. This uses the sacredness of the martyr's tomb and translates it upward, making the point at the center of the dome most holy.⁶⁸ The sarcophagus of St. Costanza stands at the center of Ste Costanza e Agnese in Rome.⁶⁹ The most sacred space stands at the domed center of a round, barrel vaulted aisle, which uses concentric rings to concentrate the sacredness in the center.⁷⁰ A centralized building, equal on all sides, emphasizes the spot in the center. This center can be the location of authority, as at L'Hôpital des Invalides, where Napoleon is buried, or it can simply designate sacred space, as in many Renaissance churches. Centralized space, equal on all sides, emphasizes the central point as the most

⁶⁷ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, September 18, 2002

⁶⁸ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 23, 2002

⁶⁹ Image source: http://www.owl.net.rice.edu/~huma103/lec5I_II.html

⁷⁰ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 2, 2002

important, and creates an entire zone of sacred or elevated space within the centralized area focused on the center.

The surprising thing about centralized space is that what rests at the center is usually unimportant. The building confers power to it, not vice-versa. Louis XIV's body was switched out for Napoleon's and the character of Les Invalides didn't change. The Pantheon in Rome was built as sacred space for all the Greco-Roman gods. A centralized space based on the geometry of a perfect sphere, it contains niches with statues of all the gods all the way around the circular walls.⁷¹ It honors all the gods equally, and creates a shared sacred space. When the Christians appropriated the building, they removed the statues of Roman gods, but were able to use the same sense of sacredness created by the geometry of the centralized architecture to promote a powerful feeling of sacred Christian space. The emphasis on the center lends increased importance to whatever is located there, without discretion.

The ability to change the symbol of authority located in a centralized space and the sense of shared sacred space that it can create contrasts with the effects of power change in the axial example of the Basilica of Maxentius. Attempting to legitimate his reign, Maxentius built this basilica during a massive building campaign. At the time, he and Constantine each controlled part of the Empire and vied for control of the whole. Maxentius built monumental architecture as a propaganda strategy. When Constantine eventually overthrew Maxentius in Rome, he appropriated the nearly completed Basilica of Maxentius and built a new, unplanned apse onto it, thus proclaiming a new seat of power and claiming it as his own to show how he had displaced Maxentius. Today, this basilica is often called

⁷¹ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, September 25, 2002

the Basilica of Constantine.⁷² In this axial building, unlike a centralized building, the symbol of authority could not be replaced without changing the architecture of the building.

Undifferentiated emphasis on the center and lack of orientation makes the centralized building non-axial, and makes it consistent with the egalitarian nature of other types of non-axial buildings. In his description of the Panopticon as democratic, Foucault relies on the ability to switch out the sentry in the center and have the architecture transfer importance and authority to the new occupant because he is at the center.⁷³ The fact that such an exchange is possible demonstrates that the centralized form falls squarely in the category of non-axial, both in lack of orientation and in a tendency to depict equality.

Axiality and Non-Axiality in the City

Ideas of axiality apply on the macro level, not simply to buildings, but also to cities. Not only does the church of St. Peter's direct you to the altar,⁷⁴ but one of Rome's major avenues also directs you straight to its door, so that the ultimate goal is the symbol of divine and papal authority.⁷⁵ Most avenues in Rome are also part of the axial authoritarian statement of the Catholic Church. These roads are not simply paved open spaces; they are paths. A path is a location of movement. When a path is built as a road, it displays the attitude of its builders toward the people who travel along it. Any path must have a reason for its creation. It may direct travelers to a goal, as do the Roman avenues created by Pope Sixtus V,⁷⁶ which cut diagonally across the city from one major landmark to another. Made to direct pilgrims to the major sites in Rome, these avenues funnel them into goals of the

⁷² DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 2, 2002

⁷³ Foucault, Michel; *Surveiller et punir; Naissance de la prison*; (France: Éditions Gallimard, 1975), p. 209

⁷⁴ Both Old St. Peter's and Michelangelo's New St. Peter's are basilicas and, consequently, axially oriented.

⁷⁵ DeLong, Lectures on History and Theory of Architecture, October 2, 2002

⁷⁶ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 180

Vatican's choosing. These are paths toward a goal, and reflect the same ideals as axial architecture wherein interior space is a path to a goal.

Two ways of identifying the path toward a goal are: first, such a path will have a goal at both ends – it leads only from one place of significance to another, and second, it will give the traveler no significant alternative to the goal, forcing him to access it. St. Peter's in Rome exemplifies such a goal, as the traveler moves from the road leading from the Castel Sant'Angelo into an enclosed oval plaza in front of the church, which leaves access only to St. Peter's.

Sometimes a road forms a perimeter, designating the final limits of a place. When a road traces the edge of a farmer's field, it acts as a perimeter on at least one side of the field. The path can, in this case, be oriented not toward the traveler, but toward delimiting the fixed space on either side. This is similar in many ways to the axial path to a goal because it closes space off, limiting movement and choice.

Often in America, a path is thought of as the road out of town, an opportunity for movement anywhere the traveler chooses.⁷⁷ The interstate highway system is a good example of a path that leads away, since any particular place can be either accessed or bypassed giving the traveler, not the city planner, the power of choice. Contrasting the plaza in front of St. Peter's with I95 to Philadelphia demonstrates the difference between a path toward a goal and a path away from a center and the way in which the former forces the traveler to a single goal whereas the latter gives the traveler the power of choice.

“The character of a path is thus determined by its relation to places. It either leads towards a goal, away from a point of departure, or it forms a ring around the place”⁷⁸. There is also another possibility for the path; it could be created as buildings are erected along it,

⁷⁷ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*; (New York, Clarkson Potter: 1996)

⁷⁸ Norberg-Schultz, *Existence, Space & Architecture*, 51

so that it becomes most important as an avenue of access to these buildings. In some ways, this is similar to the perimeter paths, since it emphasizes the static locations on either side as opposed to the movement of the traveler, but it does not delimit the spaces, closing them off. Instead, it provides access to the spaces on either side. These paths which concentrate on access can either be crooked, haphazardly traced out by each individual building, or an arrow-straight part of an orthogonal gridiron plan. The former emphasizes the buildings at locations where the road turns, whereas the latter treats all buildings along its length equally, allowing equal opportunity for access to all.

While Europeans were asserting the aesthetic superiority of crooked streets, Americans were converting many unplanned cities to gridiron plans with regular city blocks.⁷⁹ Europeans objected to the gridiron plan because there is “no grand hierarchy of places in a grid.”⁸⁰ They felt that this lack of hierarchy and grandeur indicated of a lack of sophistication and culture. This movement in America towards the gridiron plan was not arbitrary, but based on the value we place in equality. By converting the streets to an orthogonal plan, or by choosing the grid from the start, lots were regularized to a standard size and shape, and bends in the road that emphasize buildings were eliminated, so that every building has an equal opportunity to attract the traveler, an equal opportunity to be accessed from the road. “The symbol of a grid, paradoxically, is its very lack of symbolism. Precisely because all places are alike, the grid was a uniquely appropriate choice for a young democracy.”⁸¹ Americans value the gridiron plan based on the equality it embodies.

Furthermore, Americans avoid making any paths be paths to a goal. Instead of traveling to a place, which is the climax of and reason for the trip, we place climaxes along

⁷⁹ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 16-17

⁸⁰ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 11

⁸¹ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 12

the way, in the center. Our important locations are stops along the open road, not final ends. For example, both the River Walk in San Antonio⁸² and Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial⁸³ start out small, grow to overwhelming proportions, then peter off again, so that "the most intense moment along the journey is in the middle,"⁸⁴ not a goal at the end. Climaxes as points along a journey allow free movement. The American path never forces the traveler to stop at any particular goal; it simply gives him the option of stopping.

Paths in America tend to be paths away from a center, avenues with no goal to obstruct the view. On the lawn of the governor's palace in colonial Williamsburg,⁸⁵ on the lawn in front of the library at the University of Virginia, designed by Jefferson,⁸⁶ and at the Salk Institute, designed by Louis I. Kahn,⁸⁷ one end of the vista is left open, so that the possibilities of movement go on forever. The Salk Institute provides a particularly fruitful example because he is able to contrast American views of the site with Italian views. In an Italian architectural journal, a large article containing twenty-nine photographs of the institute did not contain a single one depicting the open view toward the ocean.⁸⁸ The Italians could not appreciate an open vista with no goal, as they do not possess the frontier spirit that motivated its creation.

Washington D.C. exemplifies how democratic values are apparent in American city planning, especially important for our capitol city. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who created the city plan for DC, grew up at Versailles, where huge boulevards point directly to the château, enforcing the power of the absolutist monarchy that it represents. He used diagonal streets in his plan, but his treatment of them was very different from the paradigm of Versailles.

⁸² Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 243-244

⁸³ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 244-245

⁸⁴ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 245

⁸⁵ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 215

⁸⁶ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 187

⁸⁷ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 187

⁸⁸ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 187-188

Diagonals with strong goals would have been inappropriate because they would have over emphasized the power of government in a country that had just fought a revolution to rid itself of an overbearing, heavy-handed power. L'Enfant chose to manipulate the symbols of powerful monarchy to fit the American context.

Torn between the hierarchical structure of a radial street system and the knowledge that America had created multiple seats of power, L'Enfant simply added more symbols and more diagonals. In addition to the two great open allées stretching from the White House and the Capitol, and the radials intersecting these focal points, he created many other diagonal streets, all at odd angles with one another. Among the foci L'Enfant created were the National Church, the Supreme Court, and a multitude of statues and fountains, many of which were dedicated to the various states. L'Enfant spread focal points throughout the city⁸⁹.

By creating multiple focal points, L'Enfant de-emphasized the major federal government buildings, bringing them closer to the level of the other focal points, and to the states many of these focal points represent. The odd angles of the intersections of boulevards de-emphasize those boulevards that lead from the Capitol and the White House, not only as other boulevards emphasize other places in the city, but also as they lead travelers in other directions, not converging on a single point.

L'Enfant also used other techniques to diminish the typically axial nature of the radial plan. He has “underpinned his diagonals with a grid.”⁹⁰ Though this combination of the grid and the radial plan created an awkward city plan which some thought robbed the diagonals of their power and others thought created awkward unusable lots by interfering with the gridiron, it was able to create a more accurate representation of our government in our capitol by integrating symbols of a mitigated power with the equality and rights of the citizens.

⁸⁹ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 14

⁹⁰ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 16

By placing the White House slightly off axis from Pennsylvania Avenue⁹¹ and the Capitol at an angle to it,⁹² L'Enfant made the powers of Congress and the Presidency less imposing. Later planners made a similar choice when they placed the Washington monument off axis as well.⁹³ Furthermore, by placing a series of plazas between the Capitol and the White House, L'Enfant lessened the sense that Pennsylvania Avenue was an allée between the two. By continuing boulevards on the opposite side of each building, he made both buildings analogous to the plazas; they became “just pauses and stops along a much longer route.”⁹⁴ By changing the way that foci interact with the radial plan, he was able to make it non-axial and change its authoritative meaning.

D.C. also further exemplifies how American paths tend not to lead to goals.⁹⁵ Because L'Enfant planned the diagonal avenues leading from the Capitol and White House to be open at the opposite ends, his original conception of the city and the way the city was originally built show that he does not intend them to be paths that lead to goals. However, after visiting Europe and studying the great cities and monuments there, later members of a committee for the beautification of the city chose to terminate those avenues with goals – the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. Of course, those European monuments were erected by authorities very different from the American representative democracy, and were testaments to the power of the institutions that built them. However, when the Memorials were built in Washington, even as they closed off the ends of the avenues, city planners managed to thwart the radial layout of the streets and its authoritarian possibilities so that the Monuments became options, not goals.⁹⁶ The reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln

⁹¹ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 209

⁹² Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 210

⁹³ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 177

⁹⁴ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 210

⁹⁵ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 185-187

⁹⁶ Whitaker, Craig; *Architecture and the American Dream*, 221

Memorial prevents the road from leading directly to it. The fact that the Jefferson Memorial is on an island divides it from the rest of the path; furthermore, the road is constructed so that one has the option of crossing the bridge or driving on past. This choice allows the monument to commemorate Jefferson's greatness as a champion of liberty and democracy. These changes in the roads leading to the monuments prevent them from forcing travelers into the goal at the end; instead, they give alternate options, preserving the American values of freedom and the open road.

Summary

Axial buildings lead one to the source of power. Non-axial buildings equate their different users by creating non-hierarchical spaces. This is paralleled by the ways city plans relate one building to another. Paths give access to buildings and relate them to each other; they create direction and orient people within the landscape. Paths to goals are like axially oriented buildings; they lead to seats of authority. Paths away from a point of departure emphasize the personal freedom of the traveler. Circular paths, perimeters, designate a fixed sense of place. Crooked paths emphasize certain locations, to which they give access. Finally, gridiron blocks depict equality.

By looking at actual architecture, we see that axial buildings, paths to goals, and perimeters are consistently associated with authority. The goals to which they lead are seats from which authority dominates. The areas that perimeters create are the districts on which that authority is exercised. Non-axial buildings, like gridiron plans and paths that lead away from centers and bypass goals, emphasize equality and freedom of choice. Thus, axial architecture is related to authoritarian regimes and non-axial architecture to egalitarian regimes.

Foucault and Prison Architecture

The next question to address is how this association of axial architecture with authoritarian power structures and non-axial architecture with power that is based on a mandate from the people holds up when either type of power must create a setting for controlling people. Foucault addresses this architecture of control in *Discipline and Punish*, especially in the section on the Panopticon.⁹⁷ The panoptic system is developed in contrast to a previous system based on administration during the plague, which was an omnipresent bureaucracy.⁹⁸ The guards are always present and the prisoners are immobilized. In this model, power was subdivided with layer upon layer of personnel responsible for their own sections and accountable to an overseer, so that each section is divided into smaller sections like a grid. This plague-based method is a typical cellblock prison plan. The layout based on cellblocks is to be contrasted with the panoptic method, wherein the building is composed of “at the periphery, a building in a ring; in the center, a tower”⁹⁹. A single attendant in the tower can watch all the cells in the periphery building. The Panopticon is clearly a centralized building, which means that it is non-axial and therefore associated with democracy, an association Foucault supports. However, this contrast is far more complicated, as a non-axial building should not assert power, and therefore should not be able to assert power over prisoners, and as the cellblock plan seems to correspond to a city’s gridiron plan and therefore should be associated with democracy, not a paralyzing structure of power.

The cellblock plan is, however, not the equivalent in a prison of the gridiron plan in a city. In the gridiron plan, all streets are equal; there is no hierarchy. In contrast,

⁹⁷ Foucault, Michel; *Surveiller et punir*, 197-229

⁹⁸ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 197-201

⁹⁹ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 201, « à la périphérie un bâtiment en anneau ; au centre, une tour » my translation

the cellblock prison is an embodiment of hierarchy. It is a series of enclosed districts under the control of a guard, which are sub-districts under the control of the supervisors, who report to the warden. Essentially, the cellblock design is a series of nested spaces defined by specific limits at the perimeter. In the plague town this plan is based on, there was “first, a strict spatial division: closing of the city and of its surrounding territory, interdiction to leave under pain of death, putting to sleep of all stray animals, division of the town into separate quarters which were placed under the power of an intendant. Each road was placed under the authority of a syndic; he puts it under surveillance; if he were to have left it, he would have been punished with death.”¹⁰⁰ In this way, every physical aspect of the city corresponded to a level of bureaucracy that strictly controlled all movement within the plague-stricken city. Each street was constantly surveyed, and the guards themselves obeyed a supervisor in charge of a larger section, the quarter. This same system was applied to the cellblock style prison. “This surveillance is supported by a system of permanent registration: relationship of the syndics to the intendants, of the intendants to the magistrates or to the mayor.”¹⁰¹ The minutest details are watched by a hierarchical system that relies on the relationships of power between the different layers of authority.

The final effect is that “of an omniscient, omnipresent power which subdivides itself in a regular fashion, uninterrupted up to the final determination of the individual... the penetration of regulation all the way to the smallest details of existence by the intermediary of a complete hierarchy that assures the capillary functioning of power”¹⁰². The two main

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 197 « D’abord, un strict quadrillage spatial : fermeture, bien entendu, de la ville et du « terroir », interdiction d’en sortir sous peine de la vie, mise à mort de tous les animaux errant ; découpage de la ville en quartiers distincts où on établit le pouvoir d’un intendant. Chaque rue est placée sous l’autorité d’un syndic ; il la surveille ; s’il la quittait, il serait puni de mort. », my translation.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 198, « Cette surveillance prend appui sur un système d’enregistrement permanent : rapports des syndics aux intendants, des intendants aux échevins ou au maire. » my translation.

¹⁰² Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 199 « l’effet d’un pouvoir omniprésent et omniscient qui se subdivise lui-même de façon régulière et ininterrompue jusqu’à la détermination finale de l’individu, ... la pénétration du

keys to the image of the cellblock prison are these ideas of subdivided power and the capillary action of power. The power controlling the prison or the plague stricken town divides itself into smaller and smaller pieces in the hierarchy to reach into all levels of the prison or of society. This pervasive control paralyzes the town or prison, makes it “fragmented, immobile, trapped space.”¹⁰³ Where the gridiron allows freedom of movement, the cellblock, based on the perimeter, freezes all movement with a stifling hierarchy. This embodied hierarchy is the type of organization seen in the party camps and rallies of Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁴ The physically manifested hierarchy creates a tightly controlled and repressed space; everyone must submit to the will of the ruler at the head of the hierarchy.

Panoptic architecture offers a different way of controlling prisoners:

Everyone knows the principle: at the periphery, a building in a ring; in the center, a tower; this tower is pierced by large windows that open to the interior façade of the ring; the periphery building is divided into cells, which each traverse the entire thickness of the building; they have two windows, one towards the interior, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, viewing the exterior, permits the light to traverse the entire cell. It is therefore sufficient to put a supervisor in the central tower, and to enclose in each cell a lunatic, a sick person, a condemned man, a worker or a student.¹⁰⁵ By the effect of backlighting, one can see from the tower the little silhouettes of the captives in the periphery cells. So many cages, so many little theatres, where each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.¹⁰⁶

règlement jusque dans les plus fin détails de l'existence et par l'intermédiaire d'une hiérarchie complète qui assure le fonctionnement capillaire du pouvoir », my translation

¹⁰³ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 198, « Espace découpé, immobile, figé. » my translation.

¹⁰⁴ Riefenstahl, Leni; *Triumph des Willens (Triumph of the Will)*, (Germany, 1935) (film)

¹⁰⁵ Foucault believes that panoptic architecture is not limited only to prisons but can serve for any institution that needs to control people.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 201-202, « On en connaît le principe : à la périphérie un bâtiment en anneau ; au centre, une tour ; celle-ci est percée de larges fenêtres qui ouvrent sur la face intérieure de l'anneau ; le bâtiment périphérique est divisé en cellules, dont chacune traverse toute l'épaisseur du bâtiment ; elles ont deux fenêtres, l'une vers l'intérieur, correspondant aux fenêtres de la tour ; l'autre, donnant sur l'extérieur, permet à la lumière de traverser la cellule de part en part. Il suffit alors de placer un surveillant dans la tour centrale, et dans chaque cellule d'enfermer un fou, un malade, un condamné, un ouvrier ou un écolier. Par l'effet du contre jour, on peut saisir de la tour, se découpant exactement sur la lumière, les petites silhouettes captives dans les cellules de la périphérie. Autant de cages, autant de petits théâtres, où chaque acteur est seul, parfaitement individualisé et constamment visible. » my translation.

The Panopticon uses the geometry of the architecture itself to control prisoners. The centralized building with windows that allow the prisoners to be seen but the supervisor in the tower never to be seen by them, controls the prisoners' behavior through their own self-consciousness about being watched. The number of guards is reduced from an extensive hierarchical bureaucracy to a single observer in the tower. Each prisoner feels as though only he is confronted and watched by the guard, who could observe him at any time. "The placement of his room, facing the central tower, imposes an axial visibility on him; but the divisions of the ring, these well separated cells imply a lateral invisibility."¹⁰⁷ The direct, axial relationship of the prisoner to the guard creates the visual effect that makes the cell completely visible, and it creates a rapport with the tower that symbolizes power and authority. The prisoner has no contact with his neighbors and is unaware of the overall centralized nature of the building. What dominates his life, the only visible connection he has with any other person, is the axial relation between himself and the guard, who as far as he knows, watched him constantly. This axial relationship allows the guard to control the prisoner through his gaze alone.

Despite this axial relationship between the prisoner and the guard in the tower, the source of power in the prison, Foucault still sees unique possibilities for the Panopticon as a democratic system of imprisonment. I believe that this is based on the overall centrality of the design. "This architectural apparatus is a machine for creating and upholding a relation of power independent of the person who exercises it; in brief, the detained are trapped in a situation of power of which they themselves are the bearers."¹⁰⁸ The architecture that

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 202, « La disposition de sa chambre, en face de la tour centrale, lui impose une visibilité axiale ; mais les divisions de l'anneau, ces cellules bien séparées impliquent une invisibilité latérale. » my translation.

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 202-203, « que cet appareil architectural soit une machine à créer et à soutenir un rapport de pouvoir indépendant de celui qui l'exerce ; bref que les détenus soient pris dans une situation de

creates the direct axial relationship between the prisoner and the unseen guard in the tower embodies a relationship of power. The guard seems to be the source, but the tower is the real source of power. The architecture makes the power relations function to the extent that the guard himself is not truly necessary. The thought that they are being watched keeps the prisoners in line. “It is of little import, consequently, who exercises the power.”¹⁰⁹ Because the building itself maintains the relationship of power and the prisoner allows the possibility of constant surveillance to regulate his behavior, anyone, from a maid to a visiting politician can replace the guard in the tower without the prisoner’s perception of his situation, or even the actual relationship of the prisoner to power in the tower, changing.¹¹⁰ This is not unlike the way that Les Invalides was able to remain the same despite becoming the tomb for Napoleon, in place of Louis XIV. The centralized design allows the exchange of occupants in the Panopticon while maintaining the tower’s power over the inmates, and it is the reason that the inmates are the ones who impose restricted behavior on themselves.

The fact that the architecture acts as a mechanism to provide the occupant of the central tower with power contrasts with the cellblock model where power must descend from the central authority figure. Instead of the person being the source of power over the prisoners, the architecture endows the person with power. Because the tower occupant’s identity is unimportant, “any member of society would have the right to witness with his own eyes how the schools, hospitals, factories, and prisons function. There is consequently no risk that the growth of power due to the panoptic machine could degenerate into tyranny; the disciplinary mechanism would be democratically controlled, since it would be

pouvoir dont ils sont eux-mêmes les porteurs. » my translation. Note: I left out the two cases of “que” (that) for clarity, since this is only part of a sentence.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 203, « Peu importe, par conséquent, qui exerce le pouvoir. » my translation.

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 204

unceasingly available to the ‘great committee of the tribunal of the world’.”¹¹¹ The tower occupant’s exchangeability allows the whole society to access the tower itself. If the entire society can access the seat of power, then the apparatus is a democratic one, where power comes from the people rather than from a tyrannical authority figure. The overall centralized design allows for this public accessibility, and thus the democratization of power in the Panopticon. The centralized design allows the Panopticon to be a democratic building, despite the control exercised over the inmates.

Once again, the embodiment of power in architecture creates two contrasting models in the cellblock style prison and the Panopticon. The former, based on nested limited areas, emphasizes a central leader as the source of all power, while the latter, a centralized building, allows all of the society to access power.

Conclusion

Through structural parallels, architecture can represent the way a culture understands the world. Leaders use monumental architecture as a means to represent their rule and to demonstrate their power over the people that they rule. In doing so, they embody the nature of their rule in the plans of buildings and cities. These plans are visual statements of their ideology of power. Some use axial plans to direct people to a goal representing the ruler’s power. Other groups choose non-axial plans to demonstrate the equality and freedom of community members. Much about the nature of political power in any society, especially the relationship of the ruler to the people and where his power is thought to originate, can be discerned by looking at the physical symbols it produces in its architecture.

¹¹¹ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, 209, « n’importe quel membre de la société aura le droit de venir constater de ses yeux comment fonctionnent les écoles, les hôpitaux, les usines, les prisons. Pas de risque par conséquent que l’accroissement de pouvoir dû à la machine panoptique puisse dégénérer en tyrannie ; le dispositif disciplinaire sera démocratiquement contrôlé, puisqu’il sera sans cesse accessible « au grand comité du tribunal de monde ». » my translation.

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