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Circularity, Power and the Technologies of Seeing: Panopticism and its Antithesis as Spatial Archetypes of Visual Contraception in Space

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Introduction

As an archetypal building of the Enlightenment values of the late Eighteenth Century, Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison of 1790 has become widely representative in architectural theory of a paradigmatic shift in the spatial tactics of architecture that accompanied the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Cited by Anthony Vidler as the paradigm of the "dominant" typology of machine culture, the Panopticon resides, with Laugier's Primitive Hut as representative of the Eighteenth Century "attempts [by] architecture to endow itself with value by means of an appeal to natural science or production and instrumental power" (Vidler, 1977: 1). In the period since Vidler's essay the Panopticon has become central to many discussions regarding the peculiar relationship that links architecture with the broader operation of spatial power, representing historically the articulation of an Enlightenment philosophical idea as well as marking a changing paradigm in social reform from physical punishment to visual control. The idea of the prison was simple: circular in form, the building located prisoners at the periphery of the building under the gaze of a central guard tower. Large windows at the outer wall of the prisoner's cells, and dark blinds surrounding the inner tower, meant that the prisoners were illuminated in silhouette at all times in their cells while the guards, inside the tower remain concealed from view. The outcome is that prisoners, at all times, would be under the impression they were being watched, even if the tower was empty. This perception was considered by Bentham to be enough to ensure appropriate behaviour amongst prisoners with limited or, potentially no, staff resources.

This efficacy, in an era dominated by the Industrialisation of production, meant the Panopticon not only represented a machine-like precision in its treatment of prisoners but, through its perceived transparency, a more enlightened attitude to punishment that was in tune with the broader themes of the utilitarian logic of reason, rationality and the greater social good. Light and transparency, increasingly associated with "reason",



became the perfect metaphor from which this mythology of the industrial age was articulated in the ocular form of the prison. As Jacques-Alain Miller, reflecting on the Enlightenment values that facilitated it, writes,

the Panopticon is the temple of reason, a temple luminous and transparent in every sense: first, because there are no shadows and nowhere to hide: it is open to constant surveillance by the indivisible eye; but also because totalitarian mastery of the environment excludes anything irrational: no opacity can withstand logic (Miller, 1987: 6-7).

Due to its ingenious allocation of visual power, the Panopticon has become a celebrated dimension of the emerging theoretical field often termed “visual culture” and central to the work of authors such as Jonathon Crary (Crary 1992; Crary 1999), Martin Jay (1993) and Gary Schapiro (2003). This field of study has built on the immense cultural legacy of the celebrated French thinker Michel Foucault whose work, presented in the manner of an “archaeology” of historical ideas, attempted to unearth the hidden mechanisms of authoritarian power that predominate Twentieth Century society. Foucault’s influence on the field of architectural theory has been substantial, introducing new techniques for conceptualising the relationship between architectural form and power. In fact the Panopticon owes its widespread recognition in architectural theory to the work of Michel Foucault whose 1975 work *Discipline and Punish* unearthed the Panopticon as not only a largely insignificant idea in correctional reform but an emerging paradigm in the embedded spatial construction of Twentieth Century society. Prior to Foucault’s treatise, the Panopticon was a forgotten prototype that, while realised in few isolated incidences (and long after the death of its primary patron), had been organised by scholars amongst the infinite number of failed schemes for restructuring prison life that had dominated the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century attempts at correctional reform. Foucault’s treatise, as well as resurrecting the Panopticon as an architectural idea, went much further, demonstrating its logic in the evolution of a number of institutional structures of the Nineteenth century, such as hospitals, asylums, military barracks and schools.

In the same year as Foucault published *Discipline and Punish* another French theorist Denis Hollier recognised a common ancestry in the work of Foucault and Bataille, contrasting the “ostentatious” extroverted architecture celebrated in the writings of Bataille on the Bastille with the “insinuating concavity” of Foucault’s Panopticon “that surrounds, frames, contains, and confines for therapeutic or disciplinary ends.” (Hollier, 1989: 66). The Panopticon, released to the public only a year after the razing of the Bastille, marked, for Hollier, a confluence in historical terms between the monolithic architectural expression of state power, and its increasingly clandestine retreat into the hidden spaces of the modern institution. Earlier again in 1975, another French critic Jacques-Alain Miller, had written an influential article entitled “Le despotisme de l’Utile: la machine panoptique de Jeremy Bentham” (Miller, 1975) which, relentlessly pursuing the utilitarian logic of Bentham, exposed the Panopticon as a utilitarian machine, programmed to eliminate waste through the positivistic moral associations of work and the social deterrent of punishment. Translated into English in 1987 (Miller: 1987), Miller’s essay, together with Foucault’s epic study and Hollier’s genealogy of the prison, provide a rich foundation for exploring the scholarly dimensions of the Panopticon and its relationship to the broader field of visual culture.



This paper will explore the peculiar visual dimensions of the Panopticon and their relationship to a broader understanding of power and its spatial evolution in architecture. Drawing on “visual culture” as a field of study, the paper will demonstrate how the Panopticon, while maintaining the illusion of transparency, harbours a complex network of visual perversions which, far from representing the “transparent” values of enlightenment reason, secretly undermine and even obscure them. As an exercise in spatial organization, the Panopticon retains a frigid control over visual phenomena to such an extent that the “visual” is in fact rendered invisible by the overwhelming schema of “division” that isolates and prevents any spatial or psychological continuity. The paper will demonstrate how the fascination with the Panopticon as an architectural “paradigm” in recent French thought overlooks the emergence in their own culture, at almost exactly the same time, a model of spatial organization which, also marrying vision and circularity, was not only a rival to the intrusive omnipresence of the Panopticon, but its antithesis.

Vision and Circularity in and around the Panopticon

In his celebrated essay on the “meaning” of the Eiffel Tower, the French semiotician and philosopher Roland Barthes describes Maupassant’s insistence on lunching in the Eiffel Tower as it is the only place in Paris where one could escape its all consuming gaze. Barthes, reflecting on this concludes that

[t]he Tower (and this is one of its mythic powers) transgresses this separation, this habitual divorce of seeing and being seen; it achieves a sovereign circulation between the two functions; it is a complete object which has, if one may say so, both sexes of sight. (Barthes, 1979: 4)

The relationship between the Eiffel Tower and the city is structured on a reciprocal relationship of vision: from the centre looking out, and the outside looking in. The Panopticon, is the antithesis of this model of monumentality, operating as a kind of “visual contraception” whose sole function is to prevent the two “sexes” of sight from ever coming into contact with each other. The outcome is that neither of the “sexes” of sight is fully developed, resulting in a building whose very function is an overwhelming visual impotence. The outward looking “gaze” of the guards is rendered obsolete by its superfluity (the perception of it’s presence is more important than its actual presence), while the inward looking “gaze” of the prisoners is thwarted by the dark and shadowy surrounds of the tower which prevent even the most determined stare from entering. This results in a highly manufactured visual transaction where those who can see don’t need to and those who would like to, can’t.

Unlike the Eiffel Tower, which has a direct relationship between itself as object and the city (as its circumference) the Panopticon has a problematic visual scenario where the outside world and the inner chamber are both focussed on the prisoner, who becomes the effective “wall” of the prison. As a result the prisoner, trapped by the pervasive gaze of both the public and the inner tower, presents, both inside and out the visual theatre which sustains the building and the humanitarian values that it embodies. The prisoners are rendered obedient through the two directional penetrative stares, one outward, from the centre, and the other



inward from the periphery. They occupy a nebulous space in the visual realm, between the centre and the circumference, refuting the logic of both the inside and outside.

Without doubt Jeremy Bentham, in designing the building was aware of the visual gymnastics which structured the diagram. In his discussion of Law and Order from the 1790s he had advised lawmakers to

Preach to the eye, if you would preach with efficacy. By that organ, through the medium of the imagination, the judgement of the bulk of mankind may be led and moulded with pleasure (Bentham, quoted in Miller, 1987: 15).

The plan of the prison, in establishing a visual hegemony over space and individuals, allowed for the operation of power in a very direct sense, operating directly on the body of the prisoner, without inflicting any harm. This was the theme that structured Foucault's genealogy of the modern prison (Foucault, 1991) which, he argued grew as a response to the barbaric excesses of public torture. Beginning his book with the horrific dismembering of Damiens the regicide, Foucault argues that the highly visual pain inflicted on the bodies of transgressors, had, rather than enforcing authoritarian power, begun to undermine it. As an increasingly sympathetic populace reacted against the brutal violence of excessive state-sanctioned punishment, considered by many (including reformers such as Beccaria) to be drastically out of proportion to the crimes committed, the state acquired new tactics of punishment which, rather than being executed as public theatre, became overwhelmingly clandestine. This for Foucault represented the birth of the modern prison, marking a movement from punishing the body of the prisoner, to trying to redeem the soul of the prisoner through reform. Both of these "tactics" in punishment, rely on the visual to deter potential offenders from committing crimes: in the first instance through draconian intimidation, and in the second, through a monolithic wall which protects its operations from view. The Panopticon, whose design coincided with the escalating excesses of the Terror in France, embodied this visual nexus, by framing, at its outer wall the collision of these two necessities. The prisoner as a result was inflicted, with Enlightenment rigour, to the all pervasive gaze of both the public and the state. These gazes, operating independently, were offset by the prisoner's own isolation, unable to see either their overseer, or the public that surrounded them and witnessed the spectacle of their incarceration. The unprecedented public "theatre" that the Panopticon provided, fulfilled visually the role of deterrent as well as the clandestine, internal operations of surveillance. This enabled the building to sit, as Bentham proposed, on quite public sites so that the machinations of punishment could be exposed to view. Despite actively partitioning the colonial government to make the Panopticon the primary mode of incarceration in the new colonies in Australia, Bentham was opposed to the idea of exporting convicts, preferring instead the "spectacle" of their reform as a way of operating on the collective conscience of the populace. Though never continuous, the Panopticon, in this way, has both "sexes of sight" as Barthes put it, going to precise lengths to ensure that the two "sexes" never meet.

The idea of this "sexuality" of sight postulated by Barthes provides an interesting framework for exploring the perverse dimensions of visual demarcation that operate in the Panopticon. Barthes terminology is novel but the antecedents of this idea can be found in the first published work of Friedrich Nietzsche from 1872: *The*



Birth of Tragedy (Nietzsche, 1993). In this opening work, written when Nietzsche was only 28, he posits a way of understanding Ancient Greek culture as the emergence of two concurrent forces: The Apolline and the Dionysian. Apollo as the god of light is representative, in Nietzsche's work of the forces of individuation and, as well as sculpture, the architectural objectification of form that can be found in the austere monuments of the Acropolis. The inner-sanctum of a Greek temple, which, through its location commands not only its own site but the broader geography of the area, is an outward looking space, dark at its centre but all-pervasive in its visual territory. The exterior of the temple, in a similar manner, attracts the visual gaze, without allowing it to penetrate the centre (cella), where the statue is housed. This mode of thinking has clear parallels with the visual demarcation of the Panopticon. The Dionysian, on the other hand, is a mode of thinking which, rather than "individuating" is based on connection and continuity, connecting individuals and transforming them, through space and music, into a seamless crowd. The archetype of the Dionysian mode of seeing is the theatre, which, when occupied, creates a temporal venue for transgression as individuals are released from the burdens of individuation and immerse themselves in collective solidarity. Central to both of these modes of seeing is the relationship between circularity and vision: in the first case an outwardly radiating gaze, while in the second, a contained and continuous inwardly circular gaze.

As well as being a pioneering work in philology during its own time, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and its thesis of the Apolline/Dionysian distinction in Greek culture has become an important work in studies into visual culture (see, for instance: Schapiro, 2003: 127-156) as well as Nietzsche's understanding of art and aesthetics (Young, 1993). Despite Nietzsche's own savage critique of the work, published as a foreword to the 1986 edition, the work embodies important insights into the relationship between space and vision, and provides a convenient model for illustrating what Barthes refers to as the "sex of sight": an outwardly radiating gaze that "emits" and an inwardly radiating gaze that "receives". The first is embodied in the individual, the second, in the crowd.

The Panopticon is structured on the vision of individuals: individual prisoners, an individual guard, individual windows that locate the prisoner in space. Miller has argued that the function of the Panopticon was not, indeed punishment, but the classification, categorisation and subsequent organization of collectives into individuals. Referring to Bentham's plan to use the Panopticon to draw labour from the poor and destitute, at the same time removing them as a collective from public view, Miller argues that "[t]he utilitarian is as repelled by crowds as he is by beggars" (Miller, 1987: 17). The Panopticon was a spatial construct of individuation: deeply wary of the constructs of a social collective and suspicious of any human congregation other than the isolated individual.

This nexus between the individual and the collective which is at work in the Panopticon is instrumental in understanding the spatial politics of the Eighteenth Century. Michel Foucault's work maintained a profound faith in the innate tendency of architecture and authority to "isolate". His analyses of the spatial constructs of institutions are concerned with the location of the individual in space and time; isolating the subject from any modes of communication, exchange, spatial motion or networking. This model of isolation is structured on the principle of division: separating individuals from each other as a means of disempowering them. Foucault describes these strategies as "dividing practices" whereby the "subject is either divided inside himself or



divided from others”(Foucault, 2001: 326) with the net result of objectivising the individual and preventing the formation of a collective. As an examination of the individuating dimensions of power, Foucault’s archaeology of these “dividing practices” is profound, pursuing them meticulously in the asylum (Foucault, 1989), the hospital (Foucault, 1997), methods of organising knowledge (Foucault 2000a; Foucault 2000b), and finally, individual sexuality (Foucault 1990; Foucault 1992; Foucault 1998). Foucault, in his essay “The Subject and Power” articulates concisely this impulse of power to divide and individuate. He writes

This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognise and others have recognised in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects.

Foucault identifies, quite deliberately a starting point for these tactics of “division” as the last decades of the Eighteenth Century identifying the Panopticon as, predictably, the critical moment in this paradigmatic change. While the Panopticon was only realised years later, and had little discernible impact on corrections, it is representative of a changing mentality that Foucault observed in the Nineteenth Century institution. What is absent, in its entirety in Foucault’s work is any dissection of the spatial power of the collective as an institution and its emergence, from the ashes of the French Revolution as a powerful political force at the same time that the Panopticon was attempting to dismantle the collective. Foucault’s work establishes, very clearly an “Apolline” invasive correlation between the vision, power and the individual while neglecting the simultaneous emergence in French culture of a “Dionysian” attitude towards vision and the collective. Indeed in the same decade that the Englishman Bentham was trying to gain political support to build his Panopticon, for Foucault the archetypal form of these practices of division, Robespierre, in Paris was announcing

For be assured of this citizens, whenever a line of demarcation is established, whenever a division is perceived then there is something that threatens the safety of the Fatherland. It is not natural that there be any separation amongst those equally devoted to the public good. (Robespierre quoted in Leith, 1994: 385)

The French, in the wake of the Revolution, were not concerned with division, but connection and used visual continuity, through ceremonial spaces, festivals and parades to connect individuals and, through celebration, unite them. Politicians like Robespierre were more than aware of the importance of the crowd in providing political legitimacy in the turbulent post-revolutionary landscape. The model of this archetypal space of celebration was the amphitheatre, which, like the Panopticon, hinged on a powerful relationship between circularity and vision.

The amphitheatre had been derived by the Romans from the Greek theatre, which had, as a spatial form managed to connect the audience, the performers and the landscape in a symbiotic relationship that, for the duration of the performance rendered individuals members of a broader collective mass. Vitruvius writes at length of the differences between the Roman and Greek theatre but fails to give any account of the emergence of the Amphitheatre (as distinct from the theatre). The amphitheatre was the only truly innovative typology that the Romans developed and was intended to create a space for vast numbers of people to collect. As a



typology it was, by definition, almost entirely without division, allowing the crowd to merge into a continuous mass seated around a central arena. In the decades before the Revolution, fuelled by a resurgence in Classical architectural typologies, well-known French architects like Etienne-Louis Boullée and Jean-Jérôme Servandoni proposed vast amphitheatres for Paris, while students at the Academy of Architecture regularly prepared plans for similar structures as part of the curriculum (See Leith, 1991: 17). Boullée's design, which was to house in excess of a hundred thousand citizens, was instrumental in establishing the amphitheatre as an important typology in the formation of a French national culture. Boullée argued, in a manner similar to Bentham, that there were considerable "political, social and moral" benefits associated with the provision of vast amphitheatres and his grand design, documented in a powerful watercolour rendering, was inspirational to the post-revolutionary obsession with the typology, spawning an infinite number of schemes and proposals to provide vast enclosures for public celebration. Festivals such as the Festival of Federation of 1791 were held on vast empty landscapes with a tendency to form natural amphitheatres, allowing vast crowds to amass without any spatial or visual division between its members. This would be a space, as Leith concurs where "everyone would be able to see everyone else and merge into a single entity." (Leith, 1994: 384).

Boullée's amphitheatre, like Bentham's Panopticon, was never built but, like the Panopticon, serves to articulate an idea of spatial organization that uses vision and circularity as a means of controlling space. The amphitheatre, as Elias Canetti, the primary theorist of crowds this Century, has noted presents a wall to the outside, whereby the crowd itself marks the boundary of exclusion and inclusion. Inside the "ring" as Canetti calls it, is a continuous wall of vision, focussed on the centre. Any break in this ring constitutes the collapse of the crowd as a psychological phenomenon. In the opening paragraphs of his epic work *Crowds and Power*, Canetti defines the crowd through the "reversal of the fear of being touched" where individuals no longer crave their own individual space, but its disappearance or absorption by other bodies. The opposite of the spatial environments documented by Foucault, this dense mass of bodies in space has its own peculiar characteristics which psychologists throughout the century, from Gustave Le Bon (2002) to Sigmund Freud (1955) have tried to understand. While the complex spatial relationship between the crowd and the amphitheatre is a vast area of study and outside the scope of this paper, it provides an interesting insight into the visual dimensions that are embodied in the Panopticon and allows for an interesting point of departure in terms of its spatial analysis.

The amphitheatre allows for the emergence of both sexes of sight simultaneously: from the centre to the periphery and from the concentric rings of the periphery back to the centre, in a diagram not dissimilar to the Panopticon. The circle has natural optic dimensions and is related to the eye as well as the lens. For Bentham it also had inherent operational advantages, minimising wastage and providing a general spatial efficiency. In his notes he wrote that "I cannot help looking upon every form as less and less eligible, in proportion as it deviates from the circle." (Bentham, 1995, 44). The essential difference between the spatial principles of the panopticon and the amphitheatre is not the all-pervasive vision, but, in fact "division". The amphitheatre prevents, at any cost, division between members of the crowd. The panopticon, as its antithesis establishes division at every point in its social structure: this division is spatial, psychological and, most importantly visual,



preventing and the simultaneous sexes of sight from ever coming into contact. This prevents a visual autonomy from ever emerging as well as a collective psychological profile that unites members in a crowd.

Returning to the Panopticon as a schema of *division*, rather than *vision*, the dimensions of its spatial organization are drawn into focus. The name of the prison is Greek, a conjunction meaning “all-seeing” and, as it is positioned historically at the height of the Enlightenment, has become representative of a mode of thinking which is related to reason, utility and the removal of the dark and mysterious spaces in between. As Miller, connecting light with reason, writes

The enclosed space [...] is spread out and open to a single, solitary central eye. It is bathed in light. Nothing and no-one can be hidden inside it—except the gaze itself, the invisible omnivoyeur. Surveillance confiscates the gaze for its own profit, appropriates it and submits the inmate to it. Inside the opaque, circular building, the jailer is clarity. (Miller, 1987: 4)

While presenting itself as a model of transparency and vision, the panopticon, as Miran Bozovic points out in his introduction to Bentham’s *Panopticon Writings*, (see Bozovic, 1995) is based on two illusions—the illusion presented to the public that prisoners inside the institution are being punished and, secondly, the illusion, upon which the entire architectural schema is hinged, that a prisoner in a cell is continuously being watched from the central tower by an unseen but omnipresent prison guard. If either of these visual illusions were to collapse, the utilitarian logic that underpins the Panopticon would also collapse. The public, in the absence of a clearly visual deterrent would commit crimes and the prisoners, in the absence of an otherwise invisible supervisor would misbehave and, potentially, escape. It is the strength of the Panopticon in maintaining these two visual illusions that enables it to function as a visual diagram, both inwardly and outwardly.

Bentham, as a committed utilitarian, was against the idea of punishment altogether, writing famously that “all punishment is mischief”. However, for the greater good of the community, punishment was a necessity as it prevented harmful and dangerous crimes from being committed and so outweighed, in its social value, the harm done to the individual prisoner. *Minimising* (a word introduced into the English language by Bentham) the harm done to the prisoner while at the same time *maximising* (also Bentham) the perceived harm done in the eyes of the community created the visual diagram that then structured the architectural organization of the Panopticon. The circular nature of the building creates a democracy, where each prisoner is located the same distance from the central tower. This is a principle that no other shape can maintain and, beyond simple economy, begins to reveal the deeper philosophical objectives that Bentham employs in the pursuit of his utilitarian ends.

The prison itself, far from being “all-seeing” as its name suggests, is shrouded in mystery and ambiguity using shadows and darkness to ensure the visual hegemony is maintained. Bentham goes to extraordinary lengths to describe the architectural detail of the outer wall of the guard-tower, ensuring that it enables uninterrupted viewing while preventing any prisoners from seeing in. Described famously as “an utterly dark spot” the tower, which was meant to embody the new Enlightenment rhetoric of reason and rationality, became a space



rendered obscure and impenetrable. It is almost religious in character, like the inner-sanctum of the Greek Temple which, as in the case of the Parthenon, might be richly detailed with sculptural relief but is shrouded in darkness and impenetrable. Equally, this central tower of the Panopticon is not “all seeing” at all, revealing only the silhouettes of the prisoners rather than their personal details. Even Bentham himself seemed to overlook this visual truism, going to detailed lengths to prevent the prisoners from being recognised by members of the public who may be invited into the central tower. The transition from the brightly lit exterior to the dark central chamber ensures that, whether masked or not, the facial features of the prisoners, set against a luminescent backdrop, would not be visible. The real function of the masks was not to protect the identity of prisoners, but to categorise them, classify and divide them as a populace and render them without identity. Bentham even proposed that prisoners would wear masks that, according to the relative weight of the crime committed, would reflect a suitable evil expression. Like the overwriting schema of the building, this was not a tactic of visual surveillance, but categorisation, organisation and individuation.

The actual act of “seeing” in the Panopticon is equally superfluous as its operation is dependent on the prisoners perception of being seen, rather than being seen itself. The most important “seeing” at work here is the seeing of the prisoners who are made constantly aware of the foreboding central tower whose inhabitants are shadowed from view. While an interesting dimension in its spatial organization, the actual extent of “visibility” offered from the tower is of little consequence to its operation. This is despite the observations of Jacques-Alain Miller who argued that

The Panoptic field of vision derives its unity solely from its central point. Without the gaze that unifies them, we would have nothing but an unaccounted-for collection of atoms, of inmates immured in solitude, crushed under the yoke of surveillance. From this angle, the Panopticon is really nothing but what the inspector sees. (Miller, 1987: 8)

While clearly a “visual” necessity for the functioning of the prison, the inner tower has no requirement to function as a place of “vision” itself and “what the inspector sees” is inconsequential. The requirement for guards to occupy the tower was no longer central to prison security provided that the prisoners were, at all times, under the impression that they were being watched. Attempting to simulate the “omnipresence” of religious faith, Bentham marketed the prison as being able to drastically reduce prisoner staff to such an extent that he personally volunteered to staff the building himself in order to secure the funds to construct one. Despite his enthusiasm, this venture ultimately failed when, in 1813, to Bentham’s great disappointment, he was unable to negotiate the bureaucratic hurdles associated with obtaining the land.

Despite this the Panopticon, through the insightful analyses of Foucault and other French critics, remains a seminal moment in the evolution of visual culture, not only as a starting point for Foucault’s work, but as the embodiment of a significant philosophical position. While Foucault identifies the Panopticon as a key moment in the evolution of a social apparatus of surveillance, it represents equally an arrangement of categorisation and division, where surveillance, far from being the overwriting theme, is only one of a number of tactics that seek



to render prisoners obedient. The forces of division and vision work in tandem in the building to isolate and implicate individuals in a broader structure of stratification..

Conclusion

In his encyclopaedic work *Downcast Eyes*, the American based Academic Martin Jay posits that post-war French theory has demonstrated a clearly-articulated aversion to the visual as a mode of analysis or insight, sighting Foucault's celebration of the intrusive model of Bentham's panopticon as a clear example of French distrust of the visual. As visual culture emerges as a field of study, greater insights into the exact nature of vision, and its affiliations with systems of power, constitute an increasing and evolving field of research and also the revision of widely held attitudes towards vision and space. Recent theorists have demonstrated clear trends in our society towards visual modes of communication as well as research. Sitting at the nexus of the Industrial Revolution the Panopticon crystallises, for many thinkers the complex and interpenetrating spatial tactics that are now seamlessly intertwined with modern culture.

As a model of Enlightenment thinking and a symbol of mechanisation the Panopticon is a convenient marker in the transition towards an industrialised society and the marks cleanly the important social changes that accompanied this upheaval. While the work of French thinkers like Foucault, Hollier and Miller was central in establishing the Panopticon as an archetypal building of Modernity, and an easily identifiable symbol of the "visual" in built form, it was at the expense of a more complete understanding of the exact operations of the visual in space. The Panopticon represents an impotent and dysfunctional model of vision which is essentially empty and inconclusive. Power flows throughout the building via perception, rather than vision. Vision operates like a contraceptive in Bentham's building: isolated, contained and jealously guarded. It is distributed and demarcated spatially by a series of elaborate illusions. Vision, like the prisoner who inhabits the building, is organised, categorised and isolated.

The amphitheatre is the Enlightenment antithesis of this model of thinking emerging as a conceptual model of space which is Dionysian rather than Apolline. The amphitheatre embraces vision as a unifying and continuous dimension of spatial organization, where vision, rather than being stratified and contained flows freely amongst the individuals of a collective and unites them as a group. In the Panopticon though, vision is stratified, tormented, perverted and ultimately rendered obsolete. The organisational genius of the building is its ability to allow multiple concurrent gazes to operate without ever colliding. The prisoners watch the guards. The guards watch the prisoners. The public watches the prisoners. Their eyes never meet. The prisoner is trapped in an elaborate screen that constitutes not only the buildings outer envelope, but its primary function: division. Dividing populations, dividing individuals amongst themselves, dividing gazes, dividing historical epochs. Even vision, in Bentham's all-seeing prison, is in its nature deeply divided.



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