

ARCHITECTURAL SHIFTERS

A video-tape by Juan Downey for Public Television.

Western architecture translates the typical building forms of a specific material into the form of another (e.g. wood to stone); it transforms a concept into an image of a building and borrows elements from vernacular design. A wide spectrum of translations and transformations can be grouped under the general name Architectural Shifters. Functionalism, adaptive reuse, symbolism in civic design and classical proportions in corporate design will be analyzed in the following examples:

1. The Funerary Complex of King Zoser, Egypt, c.2160 B.C.

This monumental building complex honoring the deified Pharaoh Zoser is a mythic landscape that displays through the use of symbolic structures (i.e. twin palaces standing for Upper and Lower Egypt) the Pharaoh's hegemony over a unified Egypt. Interviews with French engineer, Jean-Phillippe Lauer, who has spent the last ten years rebuilding the ruins at Sakkara, point out that its architect, Imhotep, can be credited with the invention of dressed stone buildings and overall how his designs represent a translation of wood and other vernacular forms into stone--specifically the arch (based on bent wooden forms) and columns (based on bundles of giant reeds).

2. El Escorial, Spain, 16th C. Philip II of Spain's retreat, El Escorial, was an active collaboration between the monarch and

his two architects, Juan Bautista de Toledo and Juan Herrera to create a synthesis of four building types--Pantheon, Basilica, Palace and Monastery into one unified structure that expressed Philip II's personal, political and religious needs. Interviews with George Kubler (George Kubler, Building the Escorial, Princeton University Press, 1982) also show how the building was intended as a political act intended to revive architecture in Spain and is a deliberate expression of St. Augustine's aesthetic and mathematical philosophies. Computer graphics will be used to show how the building synthesizes different architectural forms, as well as to diagram through the use of overlay drawings, the relevant mathematics involved.

3. Malmasion, France, 17th and 18th C. When Napoleon was away on his Egyptian campaigns, Josephine redesigned the interior of Malmasion to recreate Napoleon's military tents, albeit in a more luxurious form, so she could in some way share her absent husband's reality. Her translation of a utilitarian vernacular form into a private decorative scheme altered, concentrated and embellished the meaning of the original. Computer graphics and animation will be used to point out the link between the tent and the interior.

4. Villa Savoye, France, 20th C. Although built for a private client, the Villa Savoye expresses the changed needs of the modern technological state which requires an interface between civic structures and the individual. Interviews with architectural historian, Fernando Montes explain how this "machine a

"vivre" was designed more with the automobile in mind than the needs of the client (it was never truly lived in). The house is a simplified, almost Neo-classical form raised in the air on a pedestal and designed to be seen at a high speed from a distance. The house in effect is built in the center of a road and represents a brief waystation; the pilotis are designed to shelter a car and the axis of movement through the house is an interior continuation of the exterior vehicular movement. Computer graphics and animation will show how the building was designed to accommodate the fast cars Savoye drove. A video journey through the house will show how its organization is based on a continuous pattern of movement that translates vehicular movement into pedestrian passageways. Visual comparisons will be made to Le Corbusier's 1923 book, Vers Une Architecture to show how this building is an expression of his ideas ("l'esthetique de la vie moderne") about the synthesis of the automobile and classical architecture, especially the Parthenon.

All four of these buildings are examples of how architecture can be an expression of the concretization of power. By studying these examples of past civic and corporate structures, a better understanding will be reached about how to best achieve new expressions of civic or corporate architecture.

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Video is an invaluable tool in understanding architecture. The "1000 pictures" it offers is one of the best ways of knowing

how a work of architecture exists in all its forms--scale, complexity, materials, variation, how it relates to and controls human beings. In this study of Architectural Shifters, video will not only be used in its more usual role of "showing" what a building looks like (something video excels in), but it will also be used to explicitly demonstrate how movement is a factor in the experience of a building. Video/computer graphics will be used extensively to demonstrate aspects of structure, the relationship of mathematical systems to a building and its relationship to the site. In the case of the Funerary Complex of King Zoser, computer graphics will be used to rotate the building in space, demonstrating how it was seen at the time it was built. Computer graphics will be used as overlays, often as a form of drawing (both static and active) to call attention to certain concepts embodied in the building. Various experts will explain their unique theories about the significance of a building's design.