The Architecture of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Nazi Fantasy

DAVID BERTOLINI

In this article I examine the aesthetic properties of rural German architecture, Nazi ideology, and their manifestation at the death camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Architecture sutures together the gap between the ideological demands made on a people and the reality of those demands in their execution and spatial expression. Jacques Lacan's theory of the Real and Slavoj Žižek's theory of fantasy as the support for reality provide the theoretical framework from which I examine the architecture used at the camps. I posit a theory connecting the horror of the death camps, Nazi architecture, Volkish thought, and the Nazi utopian city of Auschwitz. I conclude that the convergence of these historical, architectural, and ideological aspects are evident in the buildings at Auschwitz I and Birkenau, and reveal how the practices of daily Nazi life and antisemitism work together to become a fantasy that sustains the consistency and meaning of Nazism.

In Nazi Germany architecture and urban design played a crucial role in an ideological fantasy that combined the unimaginable and horrific events of the Holocaust with the idealised Nazi rural image of German citizenry. The Nazis used architecture to unite the nation around a vision of a better Germany. The relationship between architecture and Nation shared by most people was shockingly, yet eloquently, articulated by Heinrich Himmler, who said:

great epochs of a nation find the ultimate expression of their inner force and power in its works of culture. One truth stands at the beginning and the end of each historic epoch: stones will speak when the people have fallen silent. Great epochs already speak in stone to the present.

Himmler was stating the obvious belief that cultural products signify the aspirations of a nation, the metonymical phrase 'stones will speak' summons the voice of architecture and its aesthetic properties. He was making the case.
that there is no difference between architectural expression and the national identity or ideology that inspires its creation.

The Nazis were not against tailoring an architectural style to fit or to take advantage of an opportunity because their ultimate goal was not a unified expression of Nazism but rather a unified belief in Nazism. However, as Barbara Miller Lane notes various Nazi leaders embraced diverse architectural styles which only fragmented their national voice. By 1933 the Third Reich was rife with contradictions which Lane summarises in three points:

an ideology torn by internal contradictions, which the party leaders sought to embody in architecture; a propaganda campaign which was itself lacking in consistent ideological direction; and a building program which sometimes followed the prescriptions of ideology, more often ignored them, and occasionally stood in considerable contradiction to them.²

Lane’s implication is that although Nazism was a unified national prescription, its ideological foundations were initially unable to solidify its heroic voice in stone. Nonetheless, many Nazis understood that architecture was a valuable resource that could disseminate their message within society. The difficulty of concatenating Nazi values in architectural form came from the fact that various styles appealed to the different interests of the leaders. Further, as Lane noted, this mismatched branding was diluting the Nazi message. However, in 1933 Adolf Hitler bridged the style dilemma by interpreting the answer to the question ‘what is German art?’ This was typically answered with the slogan, ‘Germanness equals clarity.’ Hitler stated that to be German meant being logical and truthful – indelibly linking art and architecture to reason, Germanness, and truth.³ Although Hitler’s preference was for monumental projects to express the notion of the heroic, he also saw the importance of connecting the heroic to values based in German Volk philosophy through traditional architectural forms. This gave the Nazis a way to establish a racially pure and militaristic society within the limits of a more normal citizenry.

The Nazi architectural portfolio included a neo-classical style used for the national or state image, a German Middle Age fortress style used for functionary buildings of the youth movement and labour front, and a rural or regional folk style used by the SS and other social institutions. The folk style, Lane writes, was by far the most widely used by officials because it ‘reflected a genuine ideological commitment’.⁴ A traditional or folk style reflected Hitler and Himmler’s belief in a utopian image of a unified rural community of
worker-soldiers. Nonetheless, as described above, the use of interchanging architectural styles and the respective endemic meanings were problematic. Hitler’s clarification provided a unique and authoritative rhetoric to implement the National Socialist message by mapping onto architectural forms that expressed what Himmler called, the ‘word’ in stone. Exactly how could this work? Foremost, there is a unique signifier, in this case ‘architecture’, that is able to bind together (or rather determine) free-floating ideological signifiers, such as community, individual responsibility, and racial order. This process is the Lacanian concept of *point de capiton* or quilting point.

Slajov Žižek explains that the ideological landscape is constituted by non-bound signifiers whose identification is open until they are articulated or fixed by a unique and universal signifier. Most words have a particular meaning, but when they are viewed through the lens of a universal signifier ‘their [new] literal signification depends on their metaphorical surplus-signification’ created by this quilting operation. Thus, Nazi architecture was ‘perceived and experienced as an unfathomable, transcendent, stable point of reference concealed behind the flow of appearances and acting as its hidden cause’. In other words, architecture and its styles became the vehicle for the concrete manifestation of Nazi ideological values and social meaning.

This article examines the rural Nazi-Germanic architecture used at the death camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau and tries to understand its role in supporting and propagating the values of the Third Reich. The intention is to explain how the aesthetic properties of architecture were equal to state ideological goals. I begin by setting the limits of this argument using the documentary film *Night and Fog* (1955). My premise is that architecture sutures together the gap between the ideological demands made on a people and the reality of those demands in their execution and spatial expression. The theoretical grounding underpinning this analysis comes from Jacques Lacan’s theory of the Real and Slavoj Žižek’s theory of fantasy as the support for reality. I posit a theory that connects the horror of the death camps, Nazi architecture, Volkish thought, and the Nazi dream to re-create the city of Auschwitz into a German utopia. I conclude that the convergence of these historical, architectural, and ideological aspects are evident in the buildings at Auschwitz I and Birkenau, and reveal how the practices of daily Nazi life and antisemitism work together to become a fantasy that sustains the consistency and meaning of Nazism.

In this sense architecture empowers members of a society, such as the Nazis, to evade the rigour of self and social reflection by masking the fact...
that they are unaware they lack this critical perspicacity. Although this operation is prevalent in most societies it is difficult to perceive because architectural form is almost always seen as being independent of ideological determination because it is a cultural expression. However, if we look at the extreme uses of architecture we can begin to articulate how it functions as a purveyor and maker of meaning. One of the most extreme uses of architecture occurs at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Thus, the questions are: why do the buildings at the concentration camps have architectural expression? How do architectural properties, such as ornamentation, composition, and materials function at Auschwitz I and Birkenau? Do architectural properties operate differently at death camps than in more typical uses? To answer these questions and to address their ramifications it helps to examine the details of the building themselves, because, initially, some things appear to us as meaningless, or rather, as inert traces that completely escape our attention.

Most scholarship focuses on the Nazi national architecture built in Berlin, Munich, and Nuremberg under the direction of Hitler’s architect Albert Speer. Its role as propaganda for Nazi ideology is well researched and in some senses obvious, and it is mostly interpreted using the premise that architecture is a beneficent praxis that was used for the illicit and maniacal Nazi agenda. Contrary to this standard ideological relationship, Žižek provides an alternative approach to the relationship between ideology and its manifestations, such as architecture. He warns that we should ‘avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the “content” supposedly hidden behind the form’ and instead analyse the “secret” of the form itself.’ Many investigations into Nazi architectural practices have typically focused on the ‘secret hidden behind the form’, thus the result is tautological. I invert the analysis, that is, I examine the ‘secret of the form itself’ which are the salient aspects that constitute architecture at Auschwitz I and Birkenau.

The meaning we extract from the signs signifying the Holocaust – horrific acts against the Jew, Pole, and Roma (Gypsy) victims, bureaucratically administered murder, and state-sponsored oppression – dominate our interpretative spectrum. At first glance the buildings and spaces where these acts occurred match this understanding of the Holocaust in general and, in particular, the occurrences at Auschwitz I and Birkenau. But how does this understanding change if things that meant nothing in themselves suddenly signify something radical and important? For example, at Auschwitz I (and many other camps) the barracks and other service buildings used by the prisoners match the gruesome life they endured. However, there are other
buildings at the camp which have gone unnoticed to our gaze; it is as if they are there but not there. Perhaps what might be happening is that one’s inability to see these other buildings as they really are is a repressive act to protect ourselves from the true capabilities of architecture. We falsely assume that these other buildings lack meaning within the symbolic network of the death camp – torture, slave labour, and murder. It is as if we gloss over their real meaning in our rush to understand the horrendous acts occurring within them. But if we pause for a moment, a repulsive image manifests itself. For example, compare the image of the entry gate and the administration building at Auschwitz I (Figure 1) with a German postcard of the city of Auschwitz (Figure 2). Both images project a simple harmonious pleasure that is reassuring and unified. These images share similar architectural content, spatial organisation, and scale. Yet we censor the harmonious features that are out of place at the death camp. Why? What are they masking?

In psychoanalytic terms the appearance of something that is (at first) incongruent with its context is a symptom. Typically, a symptom is understood as a hidden desire that is abominable to social taste but appears in support of some other action or event. What is the symptom in this example? The standard answer is that the Nazis co-opted traditional architectural forms to serve as the backdrop to their evil plans. Thus, the symptom is evil itself and is lurking in unexpected and docile places. But, the sense of enjoyment given by the architectural forms that emerges from the
midst of the horrific acts suggests a different interpretation. In other words, the architectural symptom at Auschwitz I and Birkenau refers to a disturbing underlying Nazi desire. How? Žižek offers two definitions of symptom that can help us focus the answer towards architecture. Following Freud, Žižek explains the symptom as a compromise where the ‘subject gets back, in the form of a ciphered, unrecognisable message, the truth about his desire, the truth that he was not able to confront, that he betrayed’.9 Further, Žižek explains, according to Lacan the symptom is ‘a signifying function which confers on the subject its very ontological consistency, enabling it to structure its constitutive relationship to enjoyment’.10 These definitions help delineate a theory of architecture as symptom and its uses in the public, administration, and guard buildings of the camps: architecture was a symptom covering the Nazi enjoyment of their domination over the radical other, the Jew.

The Normal Nazi World: Architecture at Auschwitz-Birkenau

Alain Resnais’ remarkable and chilling documentary Night and Fog explores the impossibility of representing and understanding the horrible events at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The narration was written by the novelist Jean Cayrol, a
member of the French resistance who was captured and sent to the camp at Mauthausen. Resnais’ film and Cayrol’s text speculate that aspects of everyday life supported the death camps. The documentary begins with a colourful sequence panning across the landscape showing lush trees, ploughed fields, and a city off in the distance that foregrounds its ordinariness (Figure 3). A voice says:

A peaceful landscape. An ordinary field with flights of crows, harvests, grass fires. An ordinary road where cars and peasants and lovers pass.11

The narrator’s description reinforces the harmony and beauty contained in these images and establishes a comfortable and safe space. But as the camera pans further to the right a menacing barbed-wire fence appears along with a highly stylised and threatening guard tower. The narrator observes,

An ordinary village for vacationers – with a marketplace and a steeple – can lead all too easily to a concentration camp.12

This sequence raises one of the main questions scholars and others have concerning the Holocaust which is, ‘how could people conspire to commit such horrific acts?’ Implicit in this question is the belief that many of the Germans responsible for the crimes were normal everyday individuals. This is a difficult proposition to accept because it suggests that anyone – including you and me – are possibly capable of similar acts. The counter argument suggests that the Nazi leadership is alone responsible for the crimes, because
they were evil. Thus, those who were following orders performed their duties without malice or purpose – in other words, they just committed evil acts. The film is unwilling to agree to such an easy answer and quickly cuts to a series of black and white photographs of various guard towers (Figure 4). The voice continues, saying:

A concentration camp is built like a stadium or a big hotel. You need contractors, estimates, competitive bids. And no doubt a bribe or two. Any style will do. It’s left to the imagination. Swiss style; garage style; Japanese style; no style at all. The architects calmly plan the gates through which no one will enter more than once.13

The sequence chillingly describes the commonplace activities and beliefs supporting the innocuous transformation of normal life into the unimaginable spatial realm of the death camp. But of all the occupations involved at Auschwitz why foreground the architect? The catalyst for this essay comes from the implication in Night and Fog that architecture played a crucial, but as yet unidentified, role beyond just providing spaces for these horrible acts.

Perhaps the most obvious answer to the question ‘why the architect?’ is that the camp and the horrible acts that occurred within its boundaries are a spatially organised environment comprised of buildings. Although this answers the question there is an unpleasant residue that remains unaccounted for, which has to do with the relationship of architectural aesthetics and how people behaved in its presence. For example, everyday German life not only harmoniously coexisted with the death camps, it flourished. A recently discovered photo album belonging to the SS-Obersturmführer Karl Höcker (adjutant to the commandant of Auschwitz) depicts such routine and pleasant cohabitation. In the photo titled ‘rain coming from a bright sky’ Höcker is seen in the company of several young female typists from the camp, laughing with an accordion player (Figure 5).
The photo was taken at the Solahütte recreation lodge near the Sola River located a few miles from the camp (Figure 6). The lodge is a traditional shingle-style building replete with repetitive windows humanly scaled along both façades that presents a calming rural traditional life.

In looking at these photos and considering their meaning, we should not only focus on the individuals asking whether or not they were Hitler’s Willing Executioners, we should also consider those involved in designing the camp or building retreats like Solahütte. We should scrutinise the reasons behind their architectural choices. Further, for architects today it is important to understand how aesthetic properties in architecture create and support social and political beliefs. In doing so we can fully comprehend why an event like the Holocaust and normal daily life appear to be inseparable. Žižek explains that the public character of Nazi anti-Semitism, the relationship between the two levels, the text of the public ideology and its ‘obscene’ superego supplement, remain fully operative: Nazis themselves treated the Holocaust as a kind of collective ‘dirty secret’. This fact not only posed no obstacle to the execution of the Holocaust – it precisely served as its libidinal support, since the very awareness that ‘we are all together in it’ ... served as a ‘cement’ to the Nazi collective coherence.14

Žižek is describing the relationship between our normal life – getting up in the morning, doing one’s job, and socialising – and the ‘obscene superego’
that constituted Nazi daily life. The Nazi obscene superego is the imperative ‘enjoy what you have’, because the Jews are no longer capable of stealing away your livelihood – and together we have taken care of them. Žižek’s notion concerning political power and its supplemental ‘obscene superego’ is a framework that extends to all states and nations. But at its most extreme, in the camps at Auschwitz, its implications are made more apparent. How does this or any other imperative stitch itself in the world? There are many facets to this answer but I believe that architecture functions as a paramount mediator between one’s daily life and the superego imperative – ‘we believe because we must’. I am avoiding the reductive argument that architecture is an inert practice that became the instrument of Nazism (like Krier’s argument discussed below), because the aesthetic properties of architecture render transparent the demands of the obscene superego; which in this case was, ‘kill the Jews if you want to be a true German’.

**The Social and Architectural Context of Nazism**

The notion that there is an ethereal and transcendent German ideal of Nazism linking their ideological values and principles through diverse architectural forms is evident in two distinct images (Figures 7 and 8). The
The former image is from 1934 and shows the Nazi Party Congress Hall in Nuremberg. The filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl documented Hitler marching into the hall to address his followers. Such an image demonstrates the connection between the power of Nazism and its heroic sense of truth, with Hitler as the embodiment of these ideals through the sublime architectural scale and style that comprise the hall. The de-individualised scale of the space, the authoritative and repetitive structure, and the dramatic lighting compel one to surrender their individuality to the event itself – the convocation of Nazi Germanness. The latter figure is a page from the British magazine *Homes and Gardens* showing Hitler in his rural traditional home in the mountains. The distinct messages derived from these environments seemed to be: Hitler is the ‘divine’ embodiment of German truth and he is the domestic image that average Germans measure themselves against.

The Nazis constructed an image of Aryan identity that was represented by the symbols of a rural community; a strong sense of place or rootedness where architecture and landscape bridged the disenfranchisement from achieving one’s true self under the auspices of a unified greater whole. Further, there was a spatial division constructed by the Nazis between themselves and the undesirable or the radical other represented by Jews. In his 1925 manifesto *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote that the ‘folkish National Socialist sees his chief task in educating and preserving the bearer of the...”

**FIGURE 7**

FROM THE FILM *TRIUMPH OF THE WILL* (1935) BY LENI RIEFENSTAHL SHOWING HITLER ARRIVING AT THE NUREMBERG HALL
FIGURE 8
FROM THE BRITISH MAGAZINE *HOMES AND GARDENS* IN 1933 SHOWING HITLER AT HIS TRADITIONAL COUNTRY RETREAT

*Hitler’s Mountain Home*

A Visit to “Haus Wakenfeld,” in the Bavarian Alps, written and illustrated by Agnus P. Haye

It is over twelve years since Herr Hitler fixed on the site of his one and only home. It had to be close to the Austrian border, hardly six miles from Murnau’s own restored Salzburg. It first became a hunting lodge, then a hunting lodge, now a country retreat. Here, in the early days, Hitler’s widowed sister, Frau Angela Rausch, kept house for him on a 10-cent scale. Then, as his famous book, *Mein Kampf* (“My Struggle”) became a best-seller of astounding power (150,000 copies of it have been sold), Hitler began to think of replacing that humble shack by a house and garden of ample scope. In this manner he has throughout been his own architect.

There is nothing pretentious about the Führer’s little estate. It is one that any merchant of Munich or Nuremberg might possess in those lovely hills.

The entrance hall is fitted with a curious display of succulent plants in majolica pots. Herr Hitler’s study is fitted as a modern office, and leading out of this is a telephone exchange. From here it is possible for the Führer to invite his friends or Ministers to fly over to Berchtesgaden, landing on his own aerodrome just below the chalet house.

This room shows the chalet’s lovely setting. In the foreground are the Wagenfeld’s domestic bird and two field-marshals giving lift (left) and von Blomberg (center).
state’ and the ‘realization that peoples are not equal transfers itself to the
individual man within a national community’. Hitler claimed that
‘preserving a healthy peasant class’ was paramount in maintaining a strong
nation. Further, Hitler believed in the concept of Lebensraum, that the
Nazi destiny of unification could only come to fruition in Eastern Europe,
primarily in Poland and Russia. Lebensraum would render continental
Europe not only a territory for Nazi rule but would fulfill the German destiny
for a unified and prosperous new order through settlements.

The idea of a Nazi Volk was believed to emanate directly from Nature and
the natural order bestowed on Germans. This was a descendant of German
Volkish thought, and was anti-Jewish at its root – built on nineteenth century
Jewish stereotypes perpetuated through popular literature depicting Jews as
soulless and lacking German values. These ideas developed the spatial and
ideological identity of opposition between being Jewish, who was uprooted,
and being a Nazi, who was rooted. The Jew was thus the ‘anathema to Volkish
thought’; the paradigmatic other. Nazis built upon the notions that Germans
were transcendent and sensitive while Jews were materialistic and brutish.
Ultimately, Jews were continually characterised as ugly and unable to grasp
true humanity because they relied on ruthlessness and lies.

The Nazi vision unfolded at the precipice of the modern architecture
movement. From the early 1920s to the early 1930s Walter Gropius and
Bruno Taut championed rational principles, functional designs, and the
expression of individual artistic spirit. However, by 1933 criticism against
German modernism was common – for example in the work of architecture
Professor Emil Högg. Högg argued that these new designs were not only
poorly constructed but more importantly they induced nomadic sensibilities
that indoctrinated people to exude ‘uprootedness, spiritual impoverishment,
and proletarianization’. Högg proposed, Lane writes, an image of a genuine
German architecture inspired by traditional German architectural forms in
the manner of such architects as Messel, Fischer, Bonatz, and Fritz. But it
was Paul Schultze-Naumburg who galvanised the critique against the
Bauhaus architects with a mixture of Volk ideology and antisemitism.
Schultze-Naumburg argued that architecture (as well the arts) ‘expressed
racial identity’. In his book The Face of the German House, Schultze-
Naumburg claimed that work by the architects Tessenow and Fischer (Figure
9) expressed a national and racially pure identity because their architecture
‘grows out of the soil’ and creates the natural bond of ‘blood and soil’.
These works share similar stylistic attributes with the major buildings at
FIGURE 9
SCHULTZE-NAUMBURG CLAIMED THAT WORK BY THE ARCHITECTS TESSENOW AND FISCHER EXPRESSED A NATIONAL RACIALLY PURE IDENTITY
Auschwitz I and Birkenau. These include steep gables of hip roofs, rows of traditional windows, and dormers. Contrary to this, the new architecture promoted by Gropius et al. was nomadic and destroyed the sense of homeland by making the 'German man into a collective entity, a herd animal'. This rhetoric quickly found its way into right-wing antisemitic groups. One such example is the writings of Bettina Feistel-Rohmeder whose 1938 text In Terror of Art Bolshevism connected the anti-Bauhaus critique to antisemitism by outrageously claiming that proponents of modern architecture were Jewish. By 1933 the Nazi vision began to coalesce around the anti-Bauhaus/pro-Volk debate that made art and architecture the perfect forums to exploit the poor economic situation and the general malaise hanging over the country. The universalised argument of a demoralised transient population caused by modern architecture and the Jews was the foundation upon which the idealism of National Socialism was set.

Feistel-Rohmeder and Högg strongly believed that their ideology was embedded in specific architectural forms; however, it is possible that one could argue that architecture is rather a pawn in a maniacal process of projecting ideology upon citizens. This latter position came to a head with Leon Krier's shocking observation: 'It follows to this day, many people are more disturbed by the grandeur of [Albert] Speer's designs than by images of Auschwitz.' He argues that buildings only exhibit beauty and majesty, thus we are confused when they are put into the service of great evil, such as Nazism. Further, Krier argues that it is 'childish to read a particular color or the immanence of a political system into a row of Doric columns' and concludes that 'architecture is not political; it is only an instrument of politics'. It is evident that Krier's defence of classical architecture is a recuperative effort to salvage the reputation of classical architecture from the Nazi regime. However, it is reductive to claim the Nazis relied on traditional and classical forms because these forms provided a calming exterior that 'everyone knew' was innocent, with which they could hide their evil regime. In other words, claiming that traditional and classical forms are 'incapable of imposing terror by the force of its internal laws' misses the point. We can read similar sentiments (of course minus the Nazism) in such diverse theorists as George Baird, who argued that the architect will provide the "ideal" images of human existence, "ideal" frames for human action; or Manfredo Tafuri who claimed that we must restore to 'architecture its original "purity"'; and Kenneth Frampton who wrote that one must see the
dependency of political power on its social and physical constitution, that is to say on its derivation from the living proximity of men and from the physical manifestation of their public being in built form. Although his claims initially make sense to us because we want architecture to have positive aesthetic properties, they fail to address the real issue. If architecture has no culpability beyond its appearance to mask the rise and maintenance of evil or Nazism then the inverse must also be true, that architecture has no intrinsic properties that can affect us in any manner beyond the apperception of its image. But we know that this is not the case.

The Nazi Architectural Fantasy and their Structure of Reality

In the Nazi fantasy Jews were characterised as inhuman beings who stole life from Germany – hoarding and usury, lusting after German women, and controlling the government. Hitler's rhetoric characterised the Jew as enjoying the bounties of life at the expense of true Germans, resenting their 'enjoyment' seeing them 'as foreign and threatening' attempting to 'acquire a sense of the special quality of our way of life'. As stated above, the National Socialist reality functions on a hidden or unconscious desire to destroy the Jew, which allowed the Nazis to once again enjoy their true culture. Both Žižek and Lacan explore the notion of fantasy as the structure of reality. Lacan posits the paradoxical claim that we approach true reality through dreams. The dream-state articulates desires in an unfettered and uncensored process, thus the mandates of social principles are excluded which brings us the closest to what Lacan called the 'kernel of the real'. But this does not mean the thread holding reality together as we experience it is a standard fantasy (like I want to be rich), nor does it reduce life to the proposition that 'life is a dream'. Instead, there is a 'leftover' during our waking consciousness that 'persists and cannot be reduced to a universal play of illusory mirroring'. Žižek explains that we wrongly conclude upon waking from a dream that what we experienced is 'just a dream'. In doing so we gloss over our blindness to the fact that in reality we are only a 'consciousness of this dream'.

In the essay 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I' Lacan explains that reality is predicated on the misrecognition that we see ourselves as complete and total beings. This mistake occurs because of a gap created by the use of language to delineate the world and the split between the 'I' we imagine ourselves to be and the 'I' that we really are. This establishes a distinction between the true 'I' which we imagine ourselves to
be and the true incomplete other ‘I’ that threatens our reality. In other words, the natural world is mediated by our use of a symbolic network to represent things, including ourselves, via images. This sets the stage for our actions which are always determined by our relationship with the other – the other of our image, the other of language, and the other person. Further, Lacan claims, the price to be paid for entry into symbolic reality is that the ‘whole of human knowledge’ is ‘being mediated by the other’s desire’.

We can now see how Žižek uncovers the fracture in the Lacanian dialectic of reality as consciousness of the dream-state. This is the notion that no matter how much we believe in reality as we know it there is always something that cannot be accounted for which is the leftover of the Real. This intricate path through Lacanian theory begins to organise an explanation as to why the Nazis located the representation of the despicable other in the Jew as the cause of German misfortune which however nonsensical established Aryan reality. This is not much of an epiphany until you add the crucial missing aspect, that in order to maintain consistency or the ‘emergence of the represented reality’ one must apprehend the motivation which is the ‘phenomenon, distance, [or] the gap that constitutes [this] awakening’.

In other words, to be a Nazi means you possess an unconscious trauma in the form of a desire that is articulated within one’s day-to-day reality – destroy the other (Jew) because they stole your enjoyment or rather identity.

What Lacan called the Real is one part of his tripartite explanation of human subjectivity: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Lacan posits the interworkings of the Real in relation to the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The Symbolic is, perhaps, the most easily understood part of his theory which he defines as the mediation of the world through signs. For example, names, attributes of things, and descriptions of things are not the thing in itself, rather they are a symbolic system that structures and describes them using language. The Imaginary is the configuration of the ego (what one imagines themselves to be), such as, I am a lawyer, a father, or a Nazi; it is the realm of images or appearances. Lacan sees this stage as how we imagine ourselves to be within the world in relation to one another. The fundamental problem is that we imagine ourselves as complete and totalised beings, but because the Symbolic is always incomplete our imagined self is flawed.

According to Lacan, meaning is always out of our reach because a signifier (the part of the sign that represents an object) never reaches its signified (the part of a sign that comprises an object’s concept or meaning) because another signifier always intervenes. Together the Symbolic, the Imaginary,
and the Real constitute a paradoxical space of a unified and cohesive consciousness that is plagued by the fact that it is always incomplete. The Real is the cause of this incompleteness and creates anxiety from those objects, feelings, events, or people that are not symbolised or properly accounted for in reality. Because the Real is impossible to imagine, represent, or to attain, but is always present, it constantly returns to the symbolic and imaginary as a traumatic entity. In other words, it is a symptom that we build a coherent set of beliefs around, however problematic they might be.

If we apply Lacan’s theories to the analysis of buildings at the Auschwitz camps and their relationship to a Nazi’s individual identity we blatantly see the Real as the brutal act of killing Jews (and others) en masse. It appears impossible to discern for ourselves or attribute to the Nazis any meaning of the Holocaust because it is unimaginable and it cannot be symbolised. In other words, it is easy to follow the hateful rhetoric of Nazism and the growth of nationalism and the German war machine until we get to the Holocaust. For us the Real (the murders) are meaningless and unimaginable, but nonetheless, the Nazis secretly, and ironically, blatantly pursued the Final Solution. There seems no manner in which to resolve the fantasy structuring the Nazi reality. Yet a clue becomes evident, I believe, if we look closely at how architecture is used at Auschwitz I and Birkenau. Architecture is the only thing capable of holding together the hidden desire to eradicate all of the Jews (the Real), on top of an ordered spatial milieu (the Imaginary), with the meaning derived from aesthetic aspects of architecture and Volkish ideology (the Symbolic).

Recall that Žižek explained that through the dream we approach the fantasy framework that structures our activities in reality. Further, because we are always already within ideology there is no place outside of it to make an objective judgement; thus, questions such as ‘What is antisemitism?’ and ‘How can one be free of prejudice and hate?’ will never return answers. Žižek explains that when we try to understand Nazi Germany by an objective inquiry, such as by suggesting that the Nazis unfairly labelled the Jews as inferior and evil with no real argument to support their claim, we are doomed to fail. We fail because adding rationalisations to confirm unconscious prejudices is tautological. Instead, Žižek suggests that the answer to the antisemitic idea of Jew cannot be that Jews are nothing like Hitler imagined, rather the answer is that antisemitism has nothing to do with the Jews, and the ‘ideological figure of a Jew is a way to stitch up the inconsistency of our own [Nazi] ideological system’.

His point is that
everyday individual experiences (that are seen as non-ideological) are unable to dismantle the ideological prejudices, because prejudicial ideology is staked out and reinforced in the activities of the everyday experience. Žižek explains that anyone in Nazi Germany was inundated with hate propaganda outlining the official party line on antisemitism. Thus, when a normal citizen encountered, say, their neighbour who was nice, friendly, and whose children played with their own (and who also happened to be Jewish), one would think that of the two conflicting images of a Jewish man, the one from normal non-ideological experience would prevail. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Rather, Žižek argues, the German citizen responded to this gap between lived experience and prejudicial ideology in an inverse manner. Žižek writes that a German might have turned this gap, this discrepancy itself, into an argument for anti-Semitism: You see how dangerous they really are? It is difficult to recognize their real nature. They hide it behind the mask of everyday life – and it is exactly this hiding of one’s real nature, this duplicity, that is a basic feature of the Jewish nature. An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour.

The Žižekian ‘gap’ separating the actual Jew and the dangerous Jew is the object cause of Nazi desire where the ideological fantasy sutures over the discrepancies by inverting the obvious innocuous facts to prove the hidden dangers conspired by Jews. Using this, we can now begin to articulate the role architecture played in the persecution of the Jews. Foremost, architecture became a symptom of antisemitism promoted by the Nazis while also providing a link to the Nazi utopian dream. Architecture was a suture binding normal Germans to the horrific plight of the Jews. As a suture architecture covers the gap as a symptom of the Lacanian Real and reinforces one’s inability to dismantle the ideological prejudices surrounding it. This is evident, for example, in the Warsaw ghetto where the normalcy of German-Nazi daily life surrounded the confines where Jews faced starvation and ultimately deportation. In other words, there could not have been one (normal daily Nazi life) without the other (Jews suffering). The object cause of Nazi desire, the Lacanian object a, is to take back from the Jews that which rightly belongs to the German people (which the Jews have been stealing); this is the enjoyment of prosperity, liberation, and moral certitude. What remains unclear is the extent to which the ‘Real’ emerges with the Nazi dream.
The Nazi Myth: Heidegger, the City of Auschwitz and Concentration Camps

The link between architecture and the Nazi fantasy was reflected in the work of many Volkish thinkers and politicians, as well as being influenced by the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Despite differences, the common thread is provided by the notion of ‘blood and soil’. Kim Dovey writes, Heidegger's notion of dwelling made architecture appendant with being. Architecture was one of the National Socialist's primary modes of expression. Dovey further explains that the Heideggerian individual's mode of being in the world was predicated on a rural identity and the “other” of this “authentic” mode of dwelling was the rootless urban dweller and particularly the urban Jew. It is well documented that Heidegger intuited in Nazi politics a vehicle for German society to achieve its ontological destiny or true being. His philosophy attacked what he saw was the wasteland of modernity which is the ‘idle thought or thought without foundation and power’. Contrary to this, in 1933 he wrote in the Declaration of Support for Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State, the ‘labor of the various groups supports and strengthens the living framework of the State; labor re-conquers for the people its rootedness; labor places the State, as the reality of the people, into the field of action of all essential forces of human being’. Heidegger posited an ontology of being based on doing that transformed ‘space into place, houses into dwellings, and settlements into cities’. In other words, human essence is no longer an endemic property of a person but rather the product of work or doing that becomes the ‘strongest expression of the new German reality embodied in the National Socialist State’. Heidegger explained in 1935 that Germany was ‘awakening from the darkening of the world ... the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into mass, the hatred and suspicion of everything free and creative’.

For Heidegger, the German transformation was not just a political doctrine but rather the aestheticisation of technology through society itself. The notion of ‘doing’ or ‘making’ was the vehicle that connected the naturalness of daily life, the transformative and heroic qualities of Nazism, and the despicable other. Further, the merging of these ideas found a natural vehicle for their expression in architectural forms. Thus, it was a simple matter to naturalise the eradication of the Jews with a vision of Nazi Germany's greatness, which is evident in the unfolding events at Auschwitz. Van Pelt brilliantly summarised the ironic point, pointing out that the camps at Auschwitz were not only built ‘right next to an existing town, but this very
town had been designated as a center of growth by the same men who had ordered the construction of the camp. National Socialist Auschwitz was to become a district capital and the site of massive industrial activity.49

In what follows I will demonstrate how architecture is the link between the Nazi dream state that required the copasive cohabitation of destroying the Jews and building a utopian city.50 By 1940 Himmler, with Hitler's approval, considered Poland as the site of their grand vision of reclaiming the heroic heritage of Medieval Germany. Thus, a vast redesign and resettlement effort began. They were intent on designing a utopia for soldier-farmers who would live in small L-shaped houses embracing a small lot for farming (Figure 10). These homes exemplified German practicality, the new social-political order, and the desire for large propagating families. Under the oversight of the Reich Authority for Spatial Planning numerous design competitions were organised (Figure 11). One winning design was submitted by the architects Max Halpaup and Carl Nagal, who proposed a living farm complex that would be individually owned and operated by newly resettled
German Nationalists. Their design was praised for its proper use of German architectural traditions. The Reich Authority even produced manuals and drawings explaining how to convert a Polish farmhouse into a German farmhouse (Figure 12). However, the huge scale of the resettlement project required the financing and the displacement of thousands.

The rise of Auschwitz I and subsequently Birkenau were tied to the German Eastern project via the massive building projects in Berlin led by Hitler's architect Albert Speer, and with the IG Farben Company building a factory nearby. Initially, most of the labour force for both the national building effort and Farben was provided by a normal economy employing German citizens, but as the war continued most companies were forced to send all able-bodied men to the war. Concurrently, German political dissidents were diminishing; thus, the prisons at Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Mauthausen were becoming a financial liability by their diminished use. But Himmler was not willing to abandon control of either the camps in Germany or his interest in furthering the German East project; this led him towards a radical plan. The Nazi building and war efforts were faced with limited budgets and shortages of materials in Poland and Germany. Himmler and the SS realised that existing camps could provide slave labour to produce building materials as well as build and ultimately work in newly established factories. They further calculated that by expanding the camps in the eastern German territories the slave labour could finance and construct the redevelopment.

There were three concentration camps at Auschwitz that shared a complex and diverse beginning. Auschwitz I was established first as a slave labour camp
for ethnic Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, and as killing site for the Gestapo. Birkenau or Auschwitz II was initially planned as a large slave labour camp but became an extermination camp for Jews, Poles, and Roma; Auschwitz III at Monowitz was primarily a labour camp for the Buna-Werke factory. Auschwitz I was the administrative compound for all of the camps and was intended to be the actual and symbolic site of the German East project.

The site for Auschwitz I was chosen because it was a former Polish military barracks that could easily be adapted into a prison. Although it had a meagre beginning the camp later became a bargaining chip to entice IG Farben to build a factory near the city of Auschwitz. The camp’s potential was its pool of slave labour and because it happened to be near sand and gravel pits capable of providing building materials. It was believed the new camp would help finance the vast remaking of the city of Auschwitz according to master plans designed by the architect Hans Stosberg. Hitler committed a significant amount of resources to expand the camp to house the newly relocated Polish Jews. Himmler promised a sizeable workforce and access to the gravel and sand pits nearby, all of which required a huge expansion of Auschwitz I. It is unimaginable to think of a city full of families could be located within walking distance of the death camps. But Hitler’s rhetoric cemented a ‘heroic struggle to overcome the diseased body of the German Volk’ in the German psyche. The normal urban experience of German families, such as working, eating dinner, walking in the garden, were tightly integrated with the crimes that occurred at the concentration camps because without them the very core of their being – the Nazi fantasy – or what Heidegger calls Dasein, would disappear.

I described above three compelling reasons supporting the claim that architecture was the vehicle to sustain the Nazi fantasy at Auschwitz I and Birkenau. First is the fact that numerous civilian and military architects and engineers designed many prominent buildings at the camps that included the Kommandantur building (Figure 13) which housed Himmler’s luxury apartment, the Commandant’s lavish offices (Figure 14), and an exhibit room ‘designed to provide visitors to Auschwitz with a permanent exhibit of the camps’ great accomplishments.’ Additionally, designers created the Block Commander’s office (see Figure 2), the crematoria, and the Birkenau gate. Second is the redesign and development of the city of Auschwitz in the image of Nazi values and social structure. And third is the fact that numerous housing communities were planned for families of those who worked at the camp and more importantly for the managers of the IG
Farben factory that employed slave labour from Auschwitz. The German utopia and its symbiotic relationship to the camps are evident in the hundreds of documents and architectural plans. However, the question remains what evidence is there in the designs of the camp buildings that, following Žižek’s critique above, links the unconscious fantasy of eliminating the Jews and its copasetic relationship with normal German society? I attempt to answer this difficult question by providing a close reading of two symbolically important buildings – the gate at Birkenau and Crematoria II.

FIGURE 13
KOMMANDANTUR BUILDING
Top: Kommandantur building courtyard side (Auschwitz –Birkenau Museum box BW 173/1, file BW 172/1); bottom: Kommandantur building exhibition pavilion (Kommandantur Building, box BW 173/3, file BW 173/11).
The Birkenau Gate: The Substance of the Void

The building referred to by the narrator in Night and Fog, who said, the ‘architects calmly plan the gates through which no one will enter more than once’, is the Birkenau gate (Figure 15). This is a horrifying structure today because we know what occurred beyond its walls. But we must resist mapping
our horror onto the structure when reflecting back on the early 1940s. The narrator’s observation presents the contradictory facts that the victims moved through the gate to their deaths and that German citizens and military personnel saw their own actions – designing the building, calculating capacities, and implementing bureaucratic tasks – as normative. We can link this to the Žižekian analysis above by locating this contradiction in a binary opposition between substance and void (or lack of substance). The binary opposition can now be stated: the Nazis are substance because they possess Nazi-Volk ideals and the Jews are the void, lacking this substance. But, as I have argued above, although this kind of opposition appears as a contradiction, for the Nazis it was a co-dependent difference that founded their very being. But it is more than just ‘one entity cannot exist without the other entity’, because if this were true the Nazis would have just deported rather than incarcerated and killed Jews. Recall the complex justification whereby Hitler and his ardent supporters imagined the Jew had stolen German ‘enjoyment’ through their crude and brutish manner. Thus, the Nazi citizen needed to reclaim their enjoyment (wealth, prosperity, and righteousness). And accomplishing this required a concrete manifestation of these beliefs. I believe this fantasy is evident in the Birkenau gate. The actual gate is, in reality, an opening in the building’s façade that symbolises the Nazi difference of substance and void. In other words, the architecture that comprises the Birkenau gate recreates the signifying message of the Nazi identity through fantasy. This architectural composition sutures the incommensurable reality of the Holocaust with the normalised reality of living with such horrific actions.

Upon closer inspection the architectural aspects of Birkenau gate give rise to an important question: ‘For whose benefit were these architectural attributes designed?’ The arched opening is a void through which the train tracks lead into the disembarking platform, thus the building itself cannot be seen at the point of arrival nor from the place of disembarking. The hole receives the path of the train, but not the people. The victims never touch nor do they occupy the building, so we can deduce that the building was not designed for them. Further, the actual security barrier is a fence that is located so far away that it would appear inconsequential. Certainly, the architectural elements are transparent to our contemporary gaze because we imagine travelling toward it knowing what we know now, but we must keep in mind that the victims were packed like cattle into windowless cars. Their inability to perceive the gate as a void transforms the train’s inhabitants from subjects apperceiving the world into objects being judged. In this sense, the architecture gives compositional
prominence to the void and symbolic presence to those who pass through it unaware. The other co-dependent element that is built upon the opening (or rather the intangible void) is the solid and tangible presence of the tower. The metaphor is expressed by the dichotomy between the heavy tower directly above the void and establishes the Nazi fantasy described above in a concrete spatial manner; this can be seen in various other gatehouses (Figure 16).

The architectural drawing in Figure 17 depicts a building (the final design after several variations) that was carefully considered from a compositional point of view that skilfully balances an asymmetrical façade. The design merges the pastoral and traditional Germanic features of articulated windows in the façade that flank the more austere and prescriptive design of the tower. Additionally, the location of the building and the vertical dominance of the tower organise the entire camp. In Figure 18 we can see that the building (bottom left of the image) establishes an axis that bisects the camp to create a space for the victims to disembark from the cars. In this zone victims were catalogued and sorted for work details or immediate murder. This space symbolically serves as the place where Nazi ideological beliefs are enacted through ‘doing’, thus conferring upon all Nazis their true sense of being. Further, the axis controlled by the tower moves through the judgement zone and ends, sadly and ironically, towards an area between crematorium II and III. The planning and design of the Birkenau gate suggests, as Žižek would say, a surplus enjoyment that exceeds the requirements of what one would expect at a death camp.

The crucial issue is that the architectural aspects or aesthetic qualities of the Birkenau gate are not that different from buildings designed by such
architects as Herman Muthesius (c.1905) or early Peter Behrens (c.1906). Certainly, Muthesius and Behrens were not Nazis, nor was their architecture used to express Nazi ideals. Yet their work is discussed in similar terms of providing and creating an authentic human expression. In a lecture in 1908 Muthesius said that the sincerity of his architectural forms ‘reeducate the masses so as to imbue them with purity, authenticity, simplicity – “true” bourgeois values’.60 Further, Stanford Anderson explains that Behrens’ architecture brings together art and life. The German modern architecture critic Walter Müller-Wulckow wrote that Behren’s crematorium for Prussia expresses the ‘seed of a future common faith in life and in the immortality of the spirit’.61 In these cases, traditional forms possess a unique set of

FIGURE 16
COMPARISON OF CONCENTRATION CAMP GATE HOUSES
Top left: Dachau camp gate (Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau); top right: Birkenau gate (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum); bottom left: Buchenwald gate (Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, 009-006); bottom right: Sachsenhausen bate (Sachsenhausen State Museum).
aesthetic attributes that create in the user's mind a certain pleasure and enjoyment that match the set of beliefs that comprise their world and self-view. In other words, a 'nation exists only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialised in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths or fantasies that secure these practices'.

Architecture is one of these practices. It participates in propagating 'national myths or fantasies'. For example, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co offer a more colloquial way of saying the same thing. For them architectural styles 'aspire to organize what can be called a collective dream, to give substance to a symbolic code capable of welding the solidarity – urban or national – of communities fragmented by inner conflicts'.

The Birkenau gate evokes these kinds of beliefs – authenticity, elementary principles, tradition and rural values, and small town communities. Together with the Volk antisemitic ideology the Nazis created a strong and satisfying image which they manifested in the architecture designed for Auschwitz – of which the Birkenau gate is an exemplar. The building's presence focuses one's gaze toward a unified representation of German-Nazi ideals whose principles achieve their true meaning, paradoxically, from being in close proximity to the death camp. This phenomenon is most evident in the dichotomy created between the solid tower and the void. The tower perches awkwardly on top
of the void as if it were admitting to the viewer that something was missing; that in itself the tower is incomplete thus points toward an incommensurable something. In short, the Nazi-Germanic ideals of substance and presence represented by the tower require the ‘incommensurable something’ which is the presence of the substanceless Jews. The idea that architecture expressed the Nazi fantasy that Jews must perish is also eerily represented in the architecture of the crematorium itself.

The Crematorium: The Symbolic Debt

The problem of disposing of thousands of corpses was given to the architect Paul Blobel. First, he conceived of the solution to cremate bodies in open fireplaces. However, over time this became inadequate because of the massive numbers of victims arriving daily who were gassed. Ultimately, it was during the expansion of Auschwitz II or Birkenau that an architectural
solution was implemented that could handle the large quantities of bodies. Here Karl Bischoff was inspired by Paul Blobel's initial designs for a small crematorium and merged the aestheticisation of technology, the cultural justification for Nazi-German identity, and the ideological mandates for killing into a larger crematorium. This new crematorium included a gas killing chamber and was built in conjunction with the expansion of the death camps. The crematorium was located in Birkenau and designated as crematorium II (Figure 19). The architectural drawing of crematorium II (originally designed for Auschwitz I) depicts rendered elevations, a plan, and a building section. It appears obvious that, like the Birkenau gate, the juxtaposition between a mannered and pleasant facade and the horrible function contained within are incommensurable. Yet the architect took great care in designing and rendering the architectural features, such as the deeply set windows and brick edging. A paradox emerges; on one hand the drawing, or rather the building, signifies a rural authenticity, or a 'being-in-the-world' that collates the free-flowing signifiers, such as order, community, and tradition. But this order is only for those who are in a position to interpret it as such. On the other hand, for the victims who were excluded from the symbolic fantasy the crematorium presented a confused and meaningless object. It expressed an unknowable and indeterminate thing. For example,
Dr. Miklos Nyszli describes his arrival at the camp:

One object immediately caught my eye: an immense square chimney, built of red bricks, tapering towards the summit. It towered above a two story building and looked like a strange factory chimney. I was especially struck by the enormous tongues of flame rising between the lightning rods, which were set at angles on the square tops of the chimney. I tried to imagine what hellish cooking would require such a tremendous fire.65

Dr. Nyszli’s account demonstrates the duality projected by the architecture of the crematorium. The resultant paradox is bound by inconclusive interpretations by the victims of the camp and a purposeful and, I argue, meaningful clarity that it exuded for the Nazis. Further, recall the location of the crematoria at Birkenau: Crematorium II and III are on either side of the space that was marked by the axis emanating from the gate building (Figure 20). This axis bisects the camp into distinct death zones that are populated by those who are deprived of legitimacy and human rights because of their intrinsic imagined deficiencies. Only the Nazis believe that they are able to ‘see’ these people as they really ‘imagined’ them to be, a vision that is projected by the juxtaposition and architectural composition of the camp. The articulated space that comprised Birkenau (and Auschwitz I) is meaningful because of the carefully designed buildings which symbolically supported the dream or rather the Nazi fantasy.

Conclusion

There was an absolute philosophical and spatial necessity for the Nazi’s vitality and power (its life force) to have the absent presence of the Jew (emptied of their salient human properties) delineated against a symbol of Nazi immortality in architecture. It provided the meaningful, physical, and ordered world where the Nazi fantasy found the ‘rationale for the inherent deadlock of desire: it constructs the scene in which the jouissance [they] are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from’ them.66 Emil Fackenheim concurs saying that the new Nazi Germanic race required the establishment of the non-Aryan as a ‘walking corpse covered with his own filth, on the theory that he must reveal himself as the disgusting creature that he really is, if disguisedly, since birth’.67 According to van Pelt and Westfall the architecture of Auschwitz I and Birkenau has been mostly ignored by current architectural historians because scholars are concerned with the
prominent national architecture and grand urban designs propagated by Hitler and his architect Albert Speer.68 Most theories that explain the use of architecture in extreme situations take the form of Leon Krier’s reclamation of classical architecture from the Nazis that I discussed earlier. For example, Gillian Rose wrote in ‘Architecture after Auschwitz’ that architecture should be distanced and removed from the camps, claiming that its rules and styles of design are independent of Nazi idolatry. Because, she claims, links between architecture and the death camps fail to distinguish between a city and a social system run by terror.69 On the contrary, Allan Bullock claimed that ‘Hitler's most terrifying accomplishment is the literal way in which he translate[d] fantasy into reality and his unequalled grasp of the means by which to do this’.70 I have argued in this essay that the difference which Rose and Krier clarify between architectural styles and Nazi ideology cannot be reduced to the claim that architecture is by nature only good and ‘evil people’ use its innocence to seduce others into believing their cause. This ruse is impossible for two reasons. First, there is no position outside of ideology to observe the operation of ideology – we are always already within it. Second, the argument that I have outlined in this essay uses Žižek’s notion that we must discard any investigation into the secret behind the form (Rose and Krier’s position) and replace it with an explication of the secret of the form itself. In other words, architecture, like any other human endeavour, is a
'form' intertwined within a fantasy that articulates the symbolic support within any ideological gap that maintains cohesion and conformity. At Auschwitz – both the city and the camps – the gap created between the Holocaust and Nazi society was mediated by an architecture that was socially and symbolically linked as a symptom hiding the Lacanian Real; which is the irrationality of believing that the Jews stole your enjoyment.

How does architecture convince us to see its forms as synonymous with a ruling power? I have answered the question in three ways. One, architecture must be understood as a complex entity capable of affecting one's judgement at the levels of meaning, the social, and the intersubjective. Two, architecture has an endemic capacity of signs that have both a predetermined meaning along with an empty placeholder, waiting for a supplemental meaning to be applied. Third, that architecture, in itself, cannot avoid critical analysis under the rubric that its essence, or rather, its aesthetic qualities, is innocent. Its forms cannot be pure and incorruptible. Instead, we must confront architecture, in this case, as a partnership with Nazism in the development of Auschwitz I and Birkenau. The presence exerted by architecture in itself is located in both its image and within its designed spaces, which means that it is both symbolic and pragmatic. Were the stylistic aspects an insidious gesture to further humiliate the inmates by placing in their view ordered and composed (and ironic) façades while being worked to death? Without question the victims had more dire concerns than contemplating the style of the guard towers. This leaves only the officers, guards, and others employed at the camp for whose gaze the architecture was created. What is the link between architecture aesthetics – style, form, and material – and Auschwitz-Birkenau? The events transpiring in the concentration camp are unimaginable; however, as the film Night and Fog speculates, there are many aspects that have typically been seen as inconsequential, or even guiltless, such as architecture, the city, and one's job. Our understanding of the inconsequential components that comprise the death camps cannot be left as background to the horrific events. It takes intrepidity to imagine that the very mundane process of building with architects, estimates, and competitive bids are also responsible for the death camps.

NOTES

3. Quoted in ibid., p.189.
4. Ibid., p.199.
10. Ibid., p.155.
11. Alain Resnais (dir.), *Night and Fog*, Jean Cayrol, screenwriter (The Criterion Collection, 1955), DVD.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 138.
18. Ibid., p.128.
19. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p.137.
22. Ibid., p.138.
23. Ibid., p.139.
24. Ibid., p.143.
27. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p.49.
42. Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, p.58.
43. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p.50.
51. It is beyond this paper, however, it would be a valuable analysis to investigate the modernist notions that gave birth to Wright’s Broadacre City (1932), Le Corbusier’s City for Three Million (1922) and the German Urban Resettlement Plans for Auschwitz (1940).
53. Ibid., p.155.
58. Ibid., pp.228–30.
59. Ibid., pp.321.
66. Žižek *The Plague of Fantasies*, p.32.