

# The Barren Landscape: Reading U.S. Corporate Architecture

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## Introduction

Architecture is traditionally seen as an expression or embodiment of cultural values and constructs, either existing or aspired to in a given society. Architecture can also be seen as political practice, however, as an explicit attempt to change those values or create new constructs, or as a reflection of social relations of domination and resistance.

In this paper, we examine modern corporate architecture in America, initially from the first perspective, "reading" corporate architecture as a material embodiment of corporate values, constructs and culture. In doing so, we follow and elaborate on Guillen's (1997) discussion of Taylorism, aesthetics and architecture. Guillen argues that Taylorism found an aesthetic expression in the European modernist architecture of the 1890-1930 period. He demonstrates that Taylorism was reflected not only in the adoption of scientific management methods and principles to architectural projects and methods, but also in the development of a new "technocratic ideological approach to problem solving that highlighted neutrality, efficiency and planning" (Guillen, 1997, p. 687). Most importantly, Guillen argues, European modernist architects developed an *aesthetic* interpretation of scientific management that emphasized "regularity, continuity, and speed at the expense of symmetry, ornamentation, and solidity" (p. 691), expressed in an architecture that glorifies monotony and standardization as the new ideals of beauty. While modernist architecture was not adopted in the United States until the 1930's, it has dominated the landscape ever since. In fact, the imposing, monotonous, homogenized and mechanized buildings that form the skyline of American cities have become emblematic of the "modern age", of corporate life and of the American capitalist identity itself. At the *cultural* level, this architectural style expresses the dominant values of US corporate life, centering around Taylorist preoccupations with order, regularity, control and efficiency.

At the *political* level, the architecture becomes instrumental in maintaining this order and control. Two issues are central here. The first deals with the role and place of human beings in the organization, whether as building or as culture. We argue that corporate design in either form has no place for humans, except in their fixed, engineered position. The modern organization in its idealized aesthetic form is barren, devoid of human emotion, human clutter, human irregularity, and human "messiness" in any form. Thus, the preferred portrayal of corporate buildings is one that is clean, organized, impersonal, silent and above all, *empty*. While justified under the rationale of efficiency, this barren landscape rarely accomplishes efficiency. Instead, we argue, it is the *image of efficiency* that is a central element in both the architectural form and in the maintenance of the structural and ideological relations of control inhabiting the form.

We conclude the paper with a brief examination of a second element of political practice, namely issues of resistance and control. Here we explore the implications of modernist architecture for organizations that seek to change their culture and practices and look at the relation between physical, organizational and informational architecture. Finally, we explore different ways in which the occupants of organizational spaces can and do resist the imposed meaning of organizational architectural design, thus highlighting the politics of reception (Barris, 1999) as well as the politics of change.

## **READING CORPORATE ARCHITECTURE**

As was suggested above, our first priority is to establish and describe the parameters by which one can “read” corporate architecture in America. We use for this purpose a model proposed by Guillen (1997). He suggests that Taylorism -- commonly known as scientific management, a very mechanistic approach to the design of workplace productivity<sup>2</sup>-- had a profound and long lasting impact on the development of European modernist architecture of the 1890-1930 period. Taylorism, Guillen argues, shaped not only the professional reconstruction of the discipline, but also the key aesthetic tenets underlying modernist design, "producing an unlikely synthesis between art and the mechanical world" (p. 683).

Using an impressive array of examples and sources, Guillen demonstrates that European avant-garde modernist architects were drawn to Taylorism in part because of economic considerations of cost and efficiency. Taylorism was reflected first in the adoption of scientific management methods and principles to architectural projects and methods. It was reflected also in the development of a new "technocratic ideological approach to problem solving that highlighted neutrality, efficiency and planning" (p. 687). He notes, however, that while "cost and efficiency were socially and politically constructed as important concerns, .. the romance of modernism with scientific organizational ideas and methods went well beyond immediate economic considerations, leading to the formulation of an aesthetic based on the efficiency of the machine and of scientific management" (p. 684).

By applying a mechanical metaphor to the design of houses, public buildings, schools, factories, and everyday objects, European modernism magnified the impact of scientific management, extending it into new realms. If scientific management argued that organizations and people in organizations worked, or were supposed to work, like machines, European modernism insisted on the aesthetic potential of efficiency, precision, simplicity, regularity, and functionality; on producing useful and beautiful objects; on designing buildings and artifacts that would look like machines and be used like machines (Guillen, 1997, p. 685).

The aesthetic order that emerged from this, Guillen argues, uses the modernist trinity of unity, order and purity, and is defined by three main principles: "Empha-

sis upon volume -- space enclosed by thin planes or surfaces as opposed to the suggestion of mass and solidity; regularity as opposed to symmetry or other kinds of obvious balance; and lastly, dependence upon the intrinsic elegance of materials, technical perfection, and fine proportions, as opposed to applied ornament "(Barr, 1995, p. 29, quoted in Guillen, 1997, p. 685). Thus, European modernist architects developed an *aesthetic* interpretation of management that emphasized "regularity, continuity, and speed at the expense of symmetry, ornamentation, and solidity" (1997, p. 691), reflected in an architectural style that glorifies monotony and standardization as ideals of beauty.

Modernist architecture was not adopted in the United States until the 1930's. While American engineering was far ahead of Europe at the turn of the century, American architecture maintained a loyalty to classical, often highly ornamental design well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in spite of the earlier efforts of the Chicago architects. Since that time, however, modernist architecture has come to dominate the U.S. corporate landscape. In fact, to many people the imposing, monotonous, homogenized and mechanized buildings that form the skyline of American cities are emblematic of the "modern age", of corporate life, and indeed, of the American capitalist identity itself. At one level, we will argue, this architectural style provides a cultural expression of the dominant values of American corporate life, which center on Tayloristic preoccupations with order, regularity and efficiency. At another level, the architecture fulfills a political and ideological function by becoming instrumental in maintaining this order and control. The use of space, spatial arrangements, architectural style, colors and furniture choices are all factors that influence and shape human interaction and people's sense of self and identity. Just as the imposing size of the old cathedrals sought to remind the visitor of the nature of his/her relation to God, Tayloristic architecture informs the corporate occupant of his/her place in the corporation, a place that is not only small, but also designated, fixed and controlled.

### **Taylorism and the "Culture" of Efficiency**

What is interesting about Guillen's understanding of a Tayloristic aesthetic as applied to the corporate landscape, is that it may itself be ideological. At one level, it is correct in that it reflects and expresses what we have come to know as a Tayloristic reality in corporate life. That is, corporate culture in the U.S. consistently professes an adherence to the central principles of Taylorism, whether in their original or revised form.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, it misinterprets and distorts the philosophy and teachings of Frederick Winslow Taylor himself in a number of ways. The first of these is that, in our reading of Taylor, aesthetics of any kind would not be considered important or relevant. Taylor, who was born in 1856 and who died in 1915, was to have an enormous impact upon American corporate culture. He managed in an industrial setting, devised schemes by which work and work protocols could be measured and even invented a process by which steel could be tempered. He described in his various writings and in his now famous speeches the "one best way" to run an organization. Taylor, both

during his life and for decades after his death, generated an enormous amount of interest in and controversy concerning his practices and teachings.

As Guillen and many others have noted, Taylor was obsessed with order, productivity and efficiency and argued that ultimately, the only thing that would ensure the wellbeing of a firm and its employees was a managerial reality that was based on those principles. In that sense, to Taylor, aesthetics were not an important consideration. In fact, to the extent that organizational architecture is understood today as representing corporate culture, values and/or aesthetics, it is quite likely that Taylor himself would have objected to such contentions as being irrelevant and unimportant to the internal workings of a firm<sup>4</sup>, even if that aesthetic was "Tayloristic" in nature.

Some may argue that the architecture of a firm influences employee productivity, and hence, architectural design is or should be an important factor in corporate decision-making. Taylor, however, believed that employees were motivated by only one thing which was money (Banta, 1993). His views on this matter were single-minded and unshakable. Employees, as Taylor understood them, were simple, teachable and exclusively motivated by economic self-interest. The primary task of management was to design a system that would allow for optimally efficient work design, mitigation workers' "natural" tendency towards soldiering and tradition, train workers in the use of this system, and motivate them towards cooperation through linking compensation with output, through a piece-work system. In Taylor's view, not only are aesthetics, values and cultures not relevant encouraging efficiency, increasing control or enhancing productivity. They are also irrelevant to his conception of how to motivate people.

Finally, Taylor and his adherents believed that it was possible and advisable to fashion an organizational system that was logical, structured, neutral as to the quality of employees, and not dependent upon individual initiative or creativity<sup>5</sup>. Thus, Taylor (1941) in his now famous work on scientific management, has this to say about how organizations and the people who work in them are to be viewed:

“Scientific Management requires the establishment of many rules, laws and formulae *which replace the judgment* of the individual and which can be effectively used only after having been recorded, indexed, etc.” (emphasis added) (Taylor, 1941, p. 47)

As noted earlier, Taylor advocated the development of a managerial system that was based on scientific research, fixed and objective standards, management control and cooperation. If Taylor were to have been interested in architecture of any kind, it would have been the architecture of managerial decision-making, not the building where such decision-making took place. Furthermore, such architecture would probably more closely resemble the contemporary architecture of organizational information systems, subject to clear-cut rules and principles. Modernist architecture, in spite of Guillen's argument, remains variable, changeable, unpredictable, artistic and individual and in that sense, ultimately, non-Tayloristic.

We have argued, then, that the very notion of a Tayloristic *aesthetic* may itself be incompatible with Taylor's view of the workplace. Taylor's personal views on the matters discussed above are important. Even more important, however, is the collective understanding of what we *think* Taylor's teachings are. While this understanding does not necessarily square with Taylor's actual pre-dispositions, in day-to-day practice, it is these understandings -what we think Taylor meant- that count. And according to these understandings, Taylor or more precisely Taylorism, teaches that an organization must be efficient, orderly, and most certainly controlled. To the extent that this is true, scientific management - or what we collectively believe is scientific management - has severely influenced corporate culture, both in its subjective forms and in its physical expression, in the way architectural space is displayed, used and modeled. These elements provide us with the tools by which we can critically "read" and understand American corporate architecture and provide us with a way to understand its stereotypically lifeless, neutral, monolithic, in short, its barren form.

### **Taylor, Efficiency and Control**

Taylorism has been severely criticized over the years and Taylor's critics are legion (Etzioni, 1964; Scott, 1995, Morgan, 1986). Nonetheless, many observers believe, as do the authors, that Taylorism has left an indelible mark upon the American corporate landscape.

It is unlikely that Taylor or his adherents were or are psychopaths, dedicated to the mindless domination and manipulation of a firm's employees<sup>6</sup>. Taylor himself was quite explicit on the matter of control, arguing that control of employees was a necessary element in making a firm efficient. Efficiency, however, was the ultimately purpose and the essential element in making a firm profitable and successful. The guiding principle was and is this simple and straightforward. But has Tayloristic architecture in fact assisted us to achieve control, efficiency and, ultimately, success? We think not! Nor do we think that those who are responsible for the design of organizational space actually believe this either. What we do propose is that modern architectural spaces create the *illusion* of efficiency and the *reality* of control.

Organizations have a physical presence. They are housed in buildings, which are designed and decorated usually with some explicit aesthetic or informational purpose in mind. The literature on the organizational physical environment is rather limited, however. Some of this literature suggests simply that the architecture of the organization expresses (or seeks to express) the organizational culture, vision or symbolic image of itself (see e.g. Schein, 1984; Steele, 1973). Thus, a bank will usually select a very different style of architecture than a design firm for instance. Furthermore, the relative allocation of space and resources across organizational participants usually says something about hierarchical relations in the organization, while the overall layout of the space may express its organization's relative openness to the outside. Depending on the organizational image

and the nature of their relationships with clients, organizations may also want to present themselves as prosperous (or not), progressive (or not), and high tech (or not). In this sense, physical form has a rhetorical as well as an expressive function. Finally, the nature of the physical environment is said to influence organizational behavior in that factors such as lighting, furniture, layout and space can impact productivity and communication.

While the above perspective is obviously concerned with physical form, it is difficult to see any independent aesthetic concern or consideration. First, the need for the organization to "look good" appears justified only *instrumentally*: It expresses the existing culture (or preferred images thereof), it impresses the clients and it advances the need for enhanced production. Organizations spend money in order to look good but looking good is not important in and of itself. It needs to accomplish something else: establish an image, impress clients, and so forth.

Gagliardi (1990, 1996) touches on the instrumental role of the physical environment in noting that we should not view artifacts as mere reflections of the culture. Rather, we should see them as "primary cultural phenomena" in and of themselves. Artifacts "influence corporate life from two distinct points of view: a) artefacts make materially possible, help, hinder or even prescribe organizational *action*; b) more generally, artefacts influence our *perception* of reality, to the point of subtly shaping beliefs, norms and cultural values "(1996, p. 568)

Obvious examples of the instrumental role of artefacts - in this case, architecture- are the ones mentioned earlier, where the organization attempts to project a favorable or preferred image through selecting a particular style of architecture and design, thereby impressing its identity on people inside as well as outside the organization. Modernist architecture is expressive, in this sense, of Taylorism, but not in a direct sense. The architecture expresses Tayloristic thinking *not* by creating efficiency itself (as Taylor would have advocated), but rather by creating an *image* or an illusion of efficiency. It is this image that appears to dominate architectural choices more than its actual impact on organizational work needs and processes.

As a case in point, we will briefly describe the corporate headquarters for Pittsburgh Plate Glass (PPG) Industries, featured on the cover page (<http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/johnsonburgee/ppg.html>) and in a slightly altered version, in the appendix. Located in downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the complex of buildings sits on a five-acre site and includes six glass-sheathed buildings: one forty-story tower at 635 feet, 4 smaller buildings at 6 stories each and another at fourteen stories. The buildings enclose a stone plaza, which is totally empty save for a 14-foot rose granite obelisk in the center. The entire complex was designed by architect Philip Johnson

As a visitor to the complex, one is usually struck by several impressions. One is that the architectural design is very unusual and striking. It has faint reminiscences of palaces and gothic cathedrals, impressions that are counteracted by its very stark, dark and modern appearance. The complex is also very over-

whelming - its size, color, reflectiveness and height dwarf not only the person standing before it but also the buildings around it. Finally, the overall impression is one of starkness and barrenness. While the complex sits in downtown Pittsburgh, a very heavily populated area during working hours, the large plaza appears, and often is, empty. Most of this is by design as neither the plaza nor the buildings around it have any place where people could possibly sit. It is also by impact though - the place diminishes people to the extent that one does not want to sit there, even if one could.

It is easy to look at the PPG building and see it as an expression of the corporation, reflecting first and foremost its product - glass- and also the corporate size and prosperity. The building also expresses, however, in an almost idealized form, the image of the barren landscape, the corporate space that exists for itself only and takes pride in its order, its regularity, its structure, its ideal-typical appearance of the modern and efficient organization.

If people are not featured in the external landscape of PPG, the internal landscape provides an interesting additional commentary. <sup>7</sup> Imagine having an office at the 38<sup>th</sup> floor of the main building, looking out over the city at a height of 600 feet, through walls that are barely visible, consisting of floor to ceiling sheets of glass. While this may appeal to some people, we have been told by others that it is in fact frightening, disturbing and distracting and that people work with furniture placement and other devices to shield themselves from the view and that meetings held high up in the buildings result in people huddling in the center of the room. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious response is not clear but the evident lack of comfort is readily apparent.

The PPG building in this sense is an interesting example, in that its modernist architecture is very expressive of the corporate image and product. It is also an interesting example because it illustrates the "disconnect" between the image of order and efficiency and the reality of life inside the image. True Tayloristic architecture, if we can conceive of such a thing, would place work needs and efficiency needs as primary, not a corporate image or projection of identity. While Taylor may not have been interested in people's sense of comfortability, to the extent that a lack of comfort interferes with productivity, such design becomes antithetical to Taylor's teachings.

This raises a related issue, namely the question of audience. Unlike Taylor advocated, it often seems that organizations spend more money and resources on external than internal concerns. To many organizations, it is more important to have an architecture that *looks good*- that is, projects the proper image from the outside or makes a particular statement to the inside, than one that feels good for the employees to live and work in.

One example here is the College Center in our educational institution. This is a building that most people would argue looks very nice: it appears modern with lots of open space, a progressive feel, high ceilings, and tasteful colors and usually it elicits many compliments from those who visit the campus. For the people

that inhabit the space, the story is very different though. Wide hallways, staircases and a huge public square are set against tiny faculty offices, limited restrooms, lack of noise barriers, permanently sealed windows, horrible acoustics and shared spaces that dwarf the people in it. The light and delicate colors and materials require constant retouching and repair and have not withstood the general damage inflicted by young people using any space. It is a space that looks good but feels bad. It reflects the preferred image of the College but not the actual culture or practices of the people in it. People if anything, are considered incidental to it at best, and distracting and destructive of it, at worst. Does it provide an *image* of an effective, efficiently functioning organization? Yes, it does. Does it *actually* promote, enhance, make more efficient or facilitate work process in the organization? No, it does not. In fact, in its relative space allocation it makes an interesting statement about the importance of appearance versus the importance of work and often interferes with the effective accomplishment of work.

A third issue is the question of *whose interests* are expressed in the physical form of the organization. Taylor talked endlessly about the need for cooperation and the presumably shared interests on employers and employees in the corporate enterprise. Is this reflected in corporate architecture? Certainly in the above example it was not. At a more general level, decisions about architecture and design are usually made by a small and selective group of people in the organization whose priorities may not be shared by everyone. Hatch (1997, 1990) adds that this may result in differential responses on the part of organizational groups:

For example, an exquisite new corporate headquarters building may favorably impress investors ('they must be generating great wealth to afford such a wonderful facility'), customers ('this kind of opulence indicates real staying power'), and community leaders ('what a marvelous aesthetic complement to the community'), while simultaneously being viewed as irresponsible by union leaders ('that money could have gone into better wage packets') and environmentalists ('a little less squandering on executive perks and more environmental projects might have been possible (1997, p. 257)).

Strati (1990) similarly reports a study at an Italian university in which the mathematicians for whom the new building was designed felt that its modernist and rational design was antithetical to their aesthetic image of themselves as free mathematician-artists and therefore interfered with their effective functioning.

The harmony that Taylor advocated was of course dependent upon individual subordination to the general interests and U.S. organizations often go to great length to ensure such subordination, among others by limiting individual expression of interests and taste in the organization. At the personal level, organizations specify dress code, hairstyles, jewelry, professional demeanor and proper styles of speech. At the design level, they specify the kinds of decorations that are and are not appropriate to individual offices. An interesting additional exam-

ple is the recent move on the part of many corporations in downtown Pittsburgh to prohibit employees from smoking in front of the very buildings from which they were banned, on account of the fact that "it looked unattractive". Efficiency is hardly a consideration in this, of course. Employees now take smoke breaks that involve a long trip away from the office, the office floor, and the office building to get to the back alley where smoking is allowed, and tend to linger there, if for no other reason than that it is a long way back!

What is suggested in the above three examples is that Tayloristic concerns with efficiency and productivity are not realized in modernist architecture. The predominant concern is with *the image* of efficiency which is more illusory than real, and grounded more in rhetorical, ideological concerns than in the work-based reality of the organization. Ultimately, of course, the image is a very important one. Modern organizations are heavily vested in appearing efficient, orderly, rational and controlled for it is this ideological image that conceals the underlying reality of the organization - a reality that is often non-rational, chaotic, arbitrary, political and exploitative. As long as the organization appears to meet our Tayloristic conceptions of "proper" organizational life, however, that reality is concealed and control is accomplished.

Control is of course also accomplished in many other ways, including the economic and political relations that exist in the workplace. A Tayloristic aesthetic aids these relations, we argue, by neutralizing and concealing the nature of the organizational structure. A final important consideration deals with the ideological impact of organizational architecture and design on people's sense of self and identity, whether as employees or as clients.

Barley's (1991) excellent semiotic study of funeral parlors serves as an interesting example here. Barley points out that the heavily ritualized and aestheticized culture of funeral parlors is designed not as a way for people to confront the pain associated in our culture with the death of loved ones. Instead, it is designed to contain and restrict emotional expression by making death appear like sleep and by presenting an aesthetically pleasant physical image, both through interior design and through bodily manipulation of the dead person. The aestheticizing of the process in this case fulfills an anesthetizing function, placing the real, emotional, and often unregulated process of grieving *outside* the organizational context. This allows the organization to manage and control the process and to appear orderly and efficient, thereby meeting its own needs rather than those of the client.

Another example of this is the kind of interior design we usually see in U.S. health care facilities where women get mammograms. The waiting rooms - and one spends a lot of time waiting in these places- are designed in ways that are considered tasteful and pleasant by conventional standards: soft colors, rounded shapes, soft carpets and fabrics, soothing images of flowers and other things of nature, all with heavy "feminine" overtones. The overall impression is complemented by small, caring touches such as the availability of herbal teas and decaffeinated coffee. The softness and blandness of the design stands in sharp

contrast to the stark appearance of the examination rooms, which of course are designed to convey the traditional scientific, objective, and hence reliable image of the medical profession, thereby creating its own ideological position of the subject. The waiting room design also stands in sharp contrast to the mental and physical agony often experienced by women in the examination process. In this sense, the room serves not only to sooth women and to give some affirmation of the "shared feminine", even though may be hard for some to relate to the way in which the feminine is presented there. It also serves to deny the much more unpleasant reality that is at the heart of the visit itself.

It is an interesting exercise to imagine these spaces redesigned in a way that would more openly and honestly connect to the reality of the experience, at least from the client's perspective. One of our colleagues recently underwent a radical mastectomy and built an art exhibit around graphic art she produced in the time period dealing with the cancer and the operation, and before and after pictures. Imagining such an exhibit in the waiting room would create a very different aesthetic picture and also afford art a different role in the process. The argument, of course, is made though that the organization's purpose may not be to confront women that directly with the reality that constitutes the very reason for their visit, namely the possibility that they may have breast cancer. The organization's purpose is a more controlling one that seeks to minimize both the realization and the expression of emotional pain within the situation - a purpose that is accomplished both by the waiting room design and by the examination room design, albeit it very differently. Modern organizations do not "do" emotion, especially not uncontrolled, unpleasant emotion and go to great length to mask, structure, suppress and manipulate emotional expression (see e.g. Fineman, 1993). Architectural design enhances this control through creating the image of efficiency and through the impact of this image on employees and clients.

In short, organizational architecture fulfills an instrumental function by the way in which the *image of efficiency* controls people: the way it defines, places, controls and contains them, physically as well as symbolically. This is not only an external impact process -- people become complicitous in that they internalize the images around them. Thus, Gagliardi notes that organizations through artefacts educate and shape our perceptive faculties, our "sense of taste, of smell, of touch, of hearing, as well as sight" (1996, p. 573), developing in us a *particular* sense of what is appropriate, aesthetically and otherwise.

## **RESISTING THE BARREN LANDSCAPE**

The previous section of the paper argued that a critical reading of corporate architecture reveals its ideological function of control. While the dominant image is portrayed as one of order and efficiency, rooted historically in Tayloristic thinking, its actual functioning is much less concerned with efficiency and much more with control. The dominant image thus produces a view of the organization as orderly, structured, predictable, routinized and fixed, whether or not this is appropriate to workplace needs, actual organizational processes or the human experience.

In this sense, Tayloristic architecture and design not only distorts Taylor's original pre-occupation with structuring individual and organizational processes to accomplish optimal efficiency and productivity. It also distorts and masks the "experienced reality of organization which operates to provide a comforting sense of security and, at the same time, to defer action which may threaten the status quo" (Carter and Jackson, 2000, p. 180).

Ideological and political practices, however, are never simple or singular. Forces of maintenance and control are always connected to forces of change and resistance and we will briefly outline some of the key factors of this connection in this last section. First, we will explore the implications of modernist architecture for organizations that seek to change their culture and practices. Here we will look at the relation between physical, organizational and informational practices. Second, we will explore different ways in which the occupants of organizational spaces can and do resist the imposed meaning of architectural design.

Organizations and the theories we develop for studying them undergo continuous changes. Thus, Guillen (1997) wonders if other organization theories will have a similar potential for aesthetic impact and interpretation as scientific management. There have been some efforts and developments in that direction. Steele for instance (1973) argued quite some time ago that efforts towards organizational development that did not also encompass changes in the physical structure of the organization were doomed to failure. Also, we have some examples of innovative corporate architecture that seek to express a different organizational reality. Some local examples in Pittsburgh include the Alcoa building that was designed to reflect a flat, open, learning organization type of environment, with equal space assignments for all employees, regardless of position or level, and moveable, flexible walls (<http://www.tda-architects.com/Architecture/93009Alcoa.html>) to a ForeSystems (now Marconi) building that through its slanted shape sought to reflect the organization's non-conventional, non-linear, forward looking view of the world. Whether or not these architectural efforts are successful in creating or reinforcing an alternative reality remains to be seen though.

The "open office" or office landscaping movement of the 1970's for instance was originally heralded as a physical expression of the importance of openness, communication, egalitarianism and connectedness. Its implementation, however, has produced very mixed results. The open office proved to be very susceptible to enhanced surveillance and control motivations on the part of management. Empirical studies did not consistently demonstrate enhanced communication on the part of occupants of open offices. Also, the actual use of the space often led to a reinstating of hierarchical relations and consistent attempts on the part of employees to recreate a sense of privacy and containment that opposed the open office ideal (see Hatch, 1990 for an extensive discussion of the factors and variables involved in open office space negotiation). One of the variables that would seem to be essential here is the extent to which the architecture is an actual rather than a rhetorical or ideological expression of the organizational culture.

While many companies may profess an acceptance or adherence to the principles of the learning organization, for example, the structural reality of the organization rarely conforms to this type of thinking. And even within learning organization theory, we find many contradictory and unresolved problems related to organizational hierarchy that are bound to result in cultural and architectural contradictions (Sidky and Kersten, 2000).

At the individual level, one of the key ideological impacts of organizational aesthetics lies in the process of subjectification, the ways in which it defines, shapes and controls individual identity to be small, regular, predictable and substitutable. Ideological subjectification also functions to silence other identities and existences. As Carter and Jackson (2000) note, the extent which organizational members "accept the created aesthetic as a definition of the appropriate response to an organization" is also "the extent to which we abdicate or deny our *own* ability to formulate a response. Acceptance, intentional or unintentional, means that, as individuals, we accept anaesthetization." (p. 195)

Here it is tempting to view the organizational employee solely in the role of aesthetic consumer, who both absorbs and is absorbed by a completed and reified product that is the organizational architecture. However, even organizational culture is a potential battleground "where various political and ideological causes engage one another" (Said, 1994, xxii). Employees and others participating directly or indirectly in the organization must be seen as (potentially) *engaged* spectators, active participants in the construction of organizational reality - a view that highlights the politics of reception (Barris, 1999).

Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1997) provides an interesting ethnographic study of the politics of reception in relation to Iranian architecture. They examine the way in which architectural design enacts power, status and conflict, but also how architectural features can aid in the survival and preservation of group's cultural identity and thus be symbolic of resistance. In terms of U.S. corporate office behavior, much less is known about this process. Several things are worth mentioning though, just in terms of our own personal experiences.

First, different groups of people tend to respond differently to different spaces. The visitor to campus "feels" the space differently than its occupant. Some occupants are in control of their spaces while other organizations have elaborate rules and restrictions on the ways in which they may and may not alter the space they inhabit. While employees may attempt to personalize the space, making it feel and look less barren, erecting barriers for privacy, blocking up windows and doors and so forth, organizations often regulate those attempts under an "aesthetic" heading. This highlights not only the differential way in which the aesthetic is perceived but also the politics of reception. Furthermore, it illustrates the centrality of control rather than efficiency. Employees rarely resist management attempts at change that they can understand and see as rational enhancements of efficiency and productivity. However, they often resist management changes that appear at whim, irrational or only there for personal or corporate control needs.

A related area has to do with political perception of space. This is probably the one issue that has been researched fairly extensively, particularly as it pertains to the political meaning and usage of space, space as a power symbol, and architecture as a potential expression of the hierarchical structure of the organization. The role of resistance in this process is less clear though, confined mostly to horizontal in fighting for space and desire for vertical mobility.

Different stakeholders also provide differential politics of reception. One of the large health insurance agencies in Pittsburgh opened a new office building downtown a few years ago. From the perspective of the company management and its employees, the building was a testimony to the company's stability and well-being, expressing prosperity, modernism and generally "good taste" in all its large and small features. To the average person participating in the company's health plans, however, it was a statement about exploitation and waste that flew directly in the face of the company's rhetorical statements about the need for cost-cutting devices. Just as consumer activism has shaped U.S. corporate awareness around issues of safety, greater activism on the part of different stakeholders around corporate architecture may also prove to be an effective resistance to organizational expressions of control.

## **Conclusion**

Guillen (1997) notes that "people seem to yearn for beauty as intensely as they pursue instrumental methods and morally acceptable conditions" (p.700). In this paper, we have suggested that Guillen may well be right, but that corporate architecture, as it has evolved in America, is not responsive to this yearning. Scientific management-or at least what we believe is scientific management-has left a residue of sterile work places. These places model space so as to create the illusion of efficiency and the reality of control. In either case, the result is a barren landscape. Landscapes, however, can and should be challenged, by the people that create them, the people that inhabit them and the people that study them. It is hoped that this paper makes a contribution to this challenge by providing a critical reading of U.S. corporate architecture that highlights text and subtext, appearance and reality, present and possibility.

## **Notes**

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<sup>2</sup> For our purposes, the terms "Taylorism" and scientific management will be used interchangeably to refer to a commonly held set of beliefs that pervade American corporate culture, dominated primarily by notions of efficiency, productivity and rationality. While this set of beliefs originated with Frederick Winslow Taylor, we will argue that it has been altered significantly in practice. The term scientific management was not coined by Taylor, but was actually introduced into the corporate and popular lexicon by Louis Brandeis in 1910 who used this term in a court proceeding regarding the introduction of Taylorism into the workplace and the subsequent conflict and violence that erupted in the factories and other work sites. Brandeis was to become, in later years, a member of the United States Supreme Court.

<sup>3</sup> Taylorism can be summarized in the following principles: 1. "The cornerstone of scientific management is prosperity for the employer and employee. The principal object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee" (Taylor, 1895, p.9 as quoted in Freeman, 1996); 2. Management should take on new responsibilities, including first, developing "a science for each element of a man's work, which replaces the old rule-of thumb method". Second, they "scientifically select and then train, teach, and develop the workman". Third, they "heartily cooperate with the men so as to insure all of the work being done in accordance with the principles of the science which has been developed". Finally, there "is an almost equal division of the work and the responsibility between the management and the workmen. The management take over all work for which they are better fitted than the workmen, while in the past almost all of the work and the greater part of the responsibility were thrown upon the men " (Taylor, 1895, pp. 36-37, as quoted in Freeman, 1996, p. 37). The Taylor Society revised these principles in 1929 to allow them to be applied to a broader context, emphasizing: management research as the only sound basis for the solution of management problems; management standards to "replace chance and variable factors by constants"; management control, based on systematic procedures and defined standards; and cooperation including the "recognition and capitalization of human differences, motives, desires and capacities in the promotion of a common purpose" (Taylor Society, 1972, pp. 10-11; Freeman, 1996)

<sup>4</sup> Taylor was not much interested in the way in which the external world interacted with, influenced, or was influenced by an organization. He represents, in this regard, the archetypal proponent of "closed" systems approach to management.

<sup>5</sup> Employees, in such schemes, are interchangeable; it is, after all, the system that counts. If properly implemented, the organizational system anticipates the generic skills and limitations of an individual and corrects for his or her deficiencies and/or idiosyncratic tendencies. In a very real sense, such a scheme resembles closely a computer-based algorithm. Outputs are predictable and engineered and errors are anticipated and handled.

<sup>6</sup> Actually, some have in fact argued that Taylor's pre-occupation with order and structure was a reflection of psychological imbalances and problems but for our purposes Taylor's psychological health is less of a concern than the impact of his teachings on the functioning of organizations.

<sup>7</sup> Part of the complex is rented out to external shops and restaurants and is not part of the corporate space. Another part is dedicated to what is called the Wintergarden and provides an atrium-like space for botanical, cultural and art exhibits.

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