



THE TRIAD OF PROPAGANDISTIC ARCHITECTURE: POWER, IDEOLOGY, AND, REPRESENTATION – FROM ANCIENT ROME TO SPECULATIVE FUTURES.

How does architecture function as propaganda across historical, political and speculative contexts, and what does this reveal about the relationship between space, power, and ideology

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Year 3 Extended Essay



Abstract

This essay investigates how architecture functions as a form of propaganda across historical, political, and speculative contexts, revealing its enduring role as a medium through which power and ideology are materialised, performed, and internalised. By tracing two historical contexts, and two contemporary science-fiction media contexts. It demonstrates that architecture not only reflects authority but actively constructs it through form, scale, and symbolism. In Ancient Rome, the *Colosseum* and the *Pantheon* transformed visibility and monumentality into instruments of imperial control, embedding hierarchy into urban space. Nazi Germany, under Hitler and Speer, revived this classical language to legitimise totalitarian ideology, using monumental design and spectacle to cultivate unity, submission, and mythic permanence through concepts such as ‘Ruin Value’. Contemporary case studies, including *Dune* (2021-2024) and *Silo* (2023-), extend these mechanisms into mediated and speculative realms, where architecture becomes digital propaganda – disciplining perception through simulation rather than stone. Employing theoretical frameworks from *Foucault*, *Lefebvre*, and *Virilio*, the essay argues that propaganda in architecture persists as both a spatial and psychological technology of control. It concludes that architecture endures as the most manipulative form of propaganda: one that shapes not only how power is seen, but how it is lived.

Keywords

Monumentality
 Panopticism
 Spatial Hierarchy
 Mnemonic Consolidation
 Visual Experience

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I declare that this report is my own work and has not been previously submitted for assesment



Robyn Holmes

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INTRODUCTION



Figure 2: Denis Villeneuve, *Baron Vladimir Harkonnen observing a fight*, *Dune part two* (2024)

Introduction

Framing architecture as propaganda

Propaganda in architecture and interior design can be understood as the deliberate use of built form and symbolic design to communicate ideology, reinforce cultural values and shape collective perception, as O'Shaughnessy (2016) notes, 'The Third Reich was a fabricator of symbols, and the experience of the Third Reich was guided and structured by symbolism.', (P.215) illustrating how architecture and symbolism became central to political messaging. While the term "Propaganda" today carries largely negative connotations, Potter reminds us:

"Propaganda," despite its negative connotations in our contemporary Western parlance, would not have seemed offensive in the 1930s, and actually... continued throughout the Cold War to have positive connotations of providing access to information.' (Potter p.247)

This highlights that propaganda in architecture is not solely about manipulation but also framing narratives and reinforcing authority. Historically Hussaini argues that 'Art and Architecture have collectively been used as the historical media of communication and preservation of cultures and values for many civilizations.' (Hussaini. et al, 2024. P.1)

Architecture can be understood as a form of propaganda when it communicates power and ideology through its form, scale, symbolism, and spectacle. Buildings are inescapable; they structure daily life and normalise authority through lived experience. This essay argues the architecture functions as propaganda when it is designed is deliberately used to persuade, intimidate, or reinforce political and cultural narratives. By examining the Colosseum in ancient Rome, Hitler's proposed Volkshalle, and recent speculative architectures in *Dune* (part 1–2) (2021-2024) and Apple TV's *Silo* (2023-), it becomes clear that propaganda in architecture is both historical and ongoing, embedded in the way of society imagines and normalises power.

Theoretical literature highlights how space itself is ideological. Henri Lefebvre argues in *The Production of Space* (1974) that built environments embody social relations, while Michel Foucault (1975) emphasises how architecture disciplines bodies by structuring movements and perception. These frameworks clarify that propaganda and architecture is not limited to explicit political regimes but is a broader condition of how architecture can construct belief.

Chapter One demonstrates this, the Colosseum's monumental engineering staged imperial power by providing theatre, while embedding Rome's hierarchy and its seating plan. The spectacle of

violence was less entertainment than ideological performance, reinforcing both the emperor's benevolence and Rome's dominance. Chapter Two studies Hitler's proposed Zeppelinfeld Grandstand, and how it was imagined as propaganda through scale alone. It sought to dissolve individuality into the collective mass of the Reich. Its form borrowed from Rome to fabricate historical continuity, visually aligning Nazis with imperial destiny.

Chapter 3: Contemporary science fiction extends this exploration of architectural propaganda into imagined futures. In *Dune* (2021-2024), Scale on Arrakis communicate dominion over land and people through sheer monumentality. Their imposing forms make ideology tangible, demonstrating how architecture enforces imperial control. In contrast, *Silo* (2023-) reveals a subtler form of propaganda. The underground structures staircase's total enclosures naturalise hierarchy and confinement. By shaping perception and limiting alternatives, the Silo inverts Foucault's idea of space as disciplinary power.

This essay traces a continuum of architectural propaganda across time. From the Colosseum's spectacles to *Silo's* (2023) claustrophobic form, architecture emerges as more than a backdrop: it is an active agent of ideology. Through form scale, symbolism, spectacle, architectural persuades, disciplines, and legitimises authority, embedding propaganda into the very structures of lived experience. This essay argues that architecture functions as propaganda when it deliberately manipulates form, scale, and space to shape public perception and reinforce ideology.

Methodology / Scope

This essay adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodological approach to examine the role of propaganda in architecture. The analysis is grounded in architectural theory and supported by a selection of case studies drawn from diverse historical and cultural contexts. Through this approach, the essay seeks to uncover how architecture has functioned as a medium for expressing power, ideology, collective identity, and how the built environment has been strategically employed to shape public perception and behaviour. The research will engage with theoretical frameworks that address the relationship between architecture, politics, and representation. These frameworks will provide a critical lens through which architectural works are analysed, highlighting how design, form, and spatial organisation contribute to ideological expression and persuasion. The case studies will be used to roadmap and comparatively illustrate different manifestations of propaganda in architecture.

CHAPTER ONE

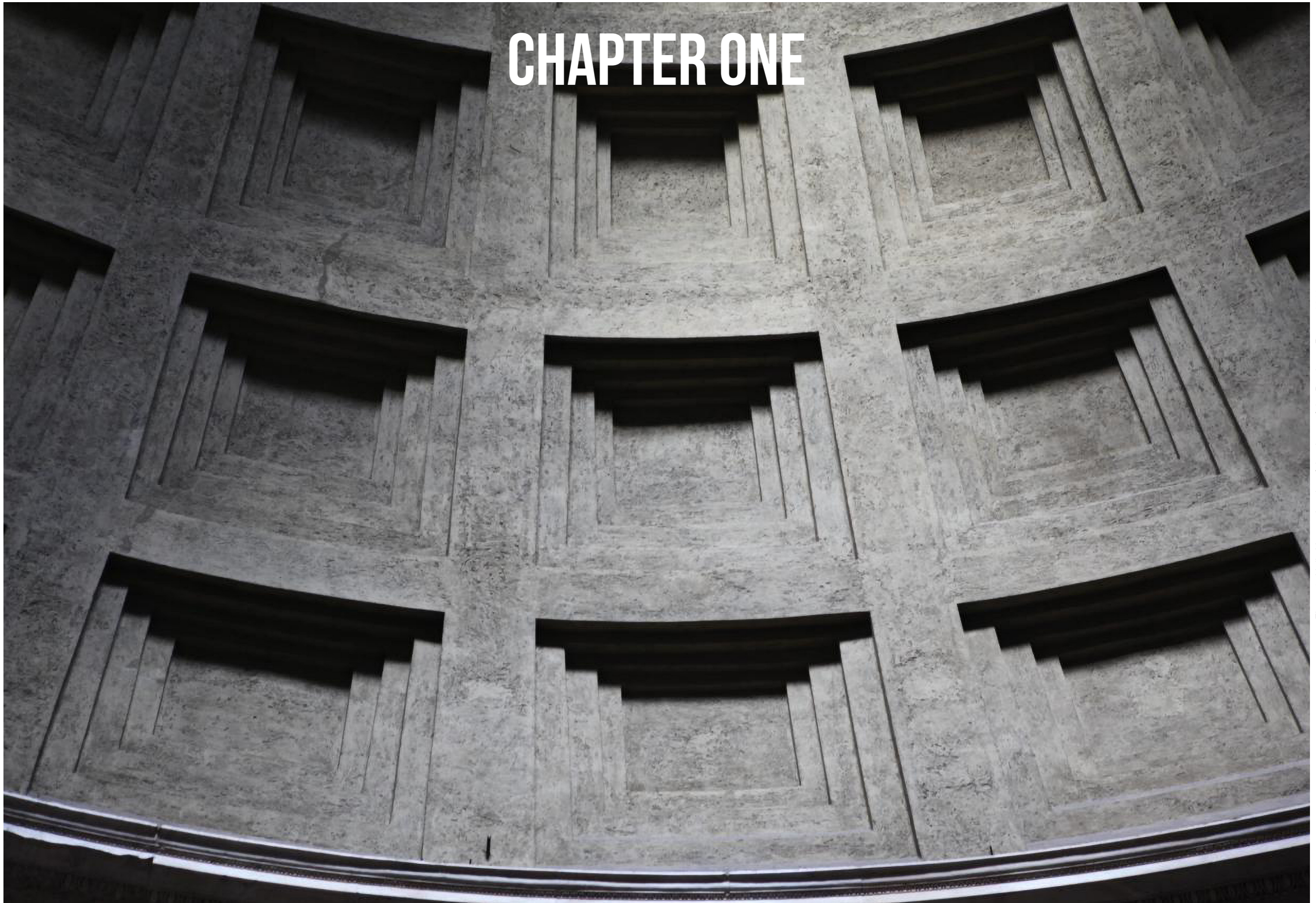


Figure 3: Holly Hayes. *Interior of the dome of the Pantheon, Rome*, 2010

Foundations: Propaganda and power in Ancient Rome

1.1 Overview – architecture as the spatial language of power

This chapter establishes the historical foundations of architecture as a political instrument by examining how the built environment of Ancient Rome functioned as deliberate forms of propaganda. It argues that Roman architecture did not merely reflect imperial power. It actively produced it through spatial control, monumental scale, and the orchestration of visibility.

Architecture in Ancient Rome was never neutral it was inseparable from the mechanisms of governance social order, and imperial ideology. Rome's architectural landscape was a carefully crafted narrative of dominance. The city itself was designed to communicate messages of stability, continuity and control.

Central to this analysis are two mechanisms: visibility, and scale. Visibility governs who is seen, and who sees, defining the spatial hierarchy of public life; scale, meanwhile, manipulates perception, situating the human body within a framework of awe and submission. These mechanisms together defined Rome's architectural rhetoric.

1.2 The architecture of surveillance: Foucault's Panopticism and the Colosseum

Strechie, (2016) and Hussaini. et al, (2024) state that: 'The Colosseum in ancient Rome functioned not merely as a venue for entertainment venue but as an architectural medium of imperial propaganda, projecting the might and beneficence of the Flavian dynasty. Symbolising their ability to provide for the people and restore stability after the civil war.

These spectacles – ranging from gladiatorial combat, animal hunts and even staged naval battles – serve to dramatize Rome's dominion over both nature and conquered peoples, reinforcing imperial authority throughout performative excess. (Strechie, 2016: Taylor, 1995) By staging these spectacles, emperors emphasised their role as benefactors who care for the population, gently reinforcing the citizens under imperial authority. The spatial organisation of the Colosseum reinforces the social hierarchy of Ancient Roman society: vast seating arrangements displayed the social stratification of Roman Society. As Lefebvre (1974) argues, space is not a neutral container, but a social product that encodes power relations.

While the central area of the Colosseum served as a controlled environment in which the emperor could exercise power over both the performers, and the audience. In this way, Roman architecture

operationalised visibility as a form of control – a principle central to the politics of space. (Hirst, 2005) The principle of visibility as power, spectacle, surveillance, and symbolism combined to embed propaganda into the very fabric of public life.

Foucault's theory of Panopticism highlights how architecture can function as an instrument of power by structuring visibility. Drawing on Bentham's design for the panopticon prison, Foucault conceptualised surveillance as a subtle technology of governance, where control is internalised through the awareness of constant observation (Foucault, 1988). In this sense, visibility itself becomes a mechanism of visibility as power: The panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad; in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; one sees everything without ever being seen. (Foucault, 1988, P.201-202)

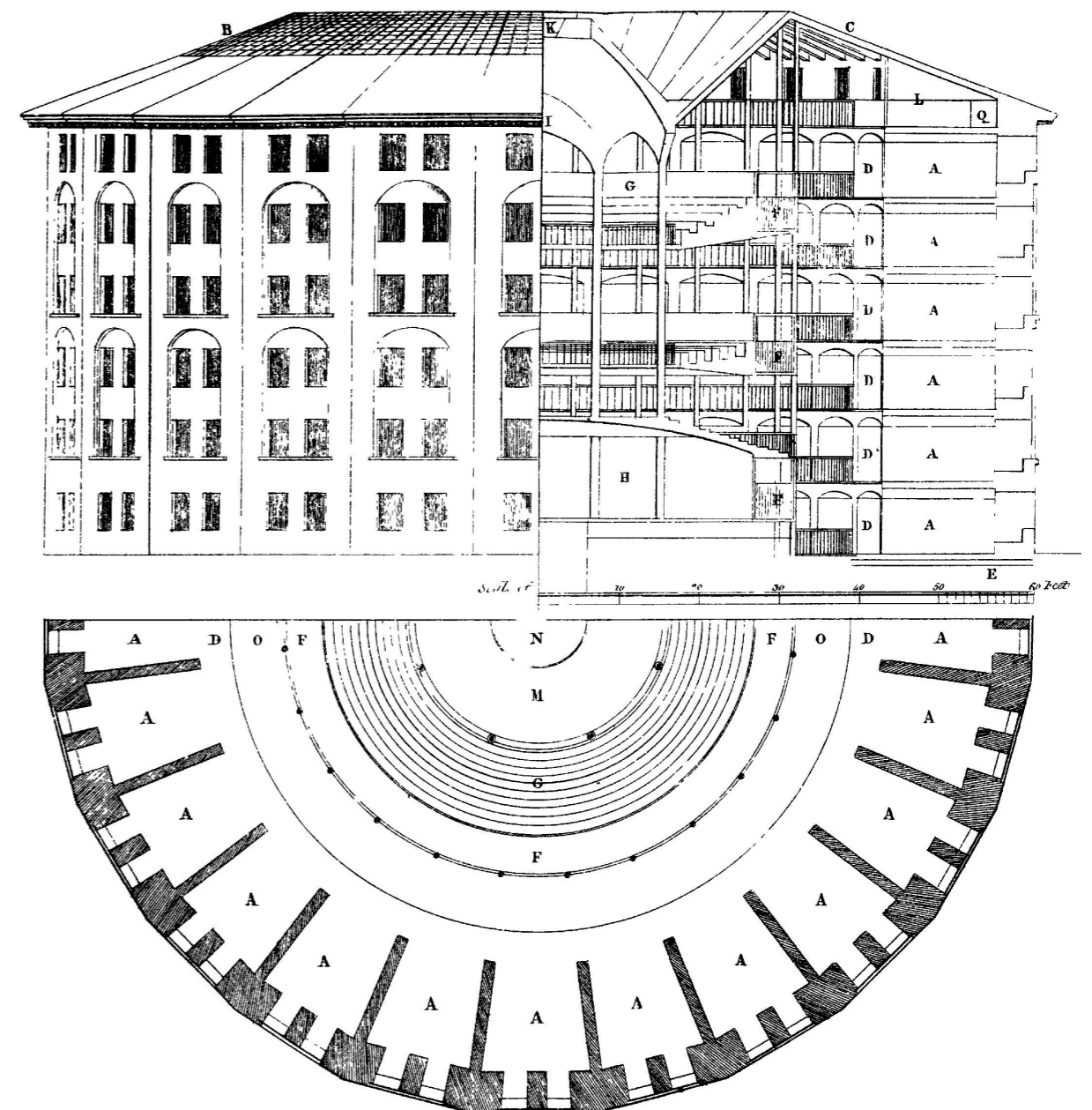


Figure 4. Willey Reveley Elevation, section and plan of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon penitentiary, 1791.

Although, predating Bentham's panopticon by centuries, the Colosseum used the same logics of spatial surveillance and spectacle. As Hirst (2005) notes, ancient and monumental architecture often prefigures modern disciplinary spatiality through its orchestration of collective visibility. The emperor's presence, often elevated, allowed him to survey the population, while maintaining the focal point of the collective attention. The architecture therefore structured, not only the spectacle of violence, but also the spectacle of governance itself, operating as an architectural apparatus of discipline and devotion.

In this sense, architecture operates as propaganda not merely through symbolic form but as a spatial mechanism that normalizes power relations – what Taylor (1995) terms 'munitions of the mind' and what Uysal (2022) identifies as architecture's ideological function. By embedding power relations into its spatial design, where the ability to see – and to be seen – becomes a central means of control. The built environment is therefore not neutral but operates as a form of social technology that regulates.

1.3 Monumentality and Scale: the imperial body and urban power

If the Colosseum exemplifies visibility as power, then the monumental architecture of Rome demonstrates how scale itself functions as political theatre, monumentality in Rome is not just a simple question of size, but of psychological effect, operating through awe, intimidation, and the dissolution of identity before the collective image of the empire.

The Pantheon and the Forum of Augustus exemplify the ideological power of monumentality in Imperial Rome. The Pantheon, with its vast dome and oculus created a direct visual and spatial link between the heaven and earth; its geometry and celestial symbolism expressed the divine order that underpinned imperial rule (Men of Pompeii, 2023; Vlinder, 2022). Similarly, The Forum of Augustus, dominated by the temple of Mars Ultor¹, projects universal authority through richly symbolic sculpture. The forum's porticoes², exedrae², and richly symbolic statuary presented Augustus as the inheritor of Rome's mythic past – aligning his authority with divine ancestry and the virtues of the Republic (Penelope Encyclopaedia Romana, n.d.; Humanities

¹ The Temple of Mars Ultor ("Mars the Avenger") - The Roman God of War - stood as the ideological and visual focal point of the forum of Augustus.

² The Porticoes - colonnaded walkways enclosing the forum - structured circulation and framed views, creating a monumental setting for public gatherings and ceremonies

³ The Exedrae - semicircular recesses opening from the porticoes - housed statues and reliefs of prominent figures from Rome's history.

Collaborative, 2024; CAMWS, 2021). Both spaces served as theatres of political power – where divine association, material grandeur, and spatial mastery transformed imperial ideology into and architectural experience of awe and devotion.

Structures such as the Forum of Augustus and the Pantheon articulated the emperor's power as an extension of divine order, designed to transcend human proportion: The posture of the Roman buildings helped to create a Roman culture in parts of the empire beyond Rome. And advertise on the wealth, power and the taste of the emperor. (Hussaini. et al, 2024. P.2)

The city itself functioned as a monumental organism, through which, each axis, and vista were choreographed to reinforce imperial presence. These structures, engraved with imagery and dedications to the emperor's, projecting their image to the collective conscious of the city, ensuring power was seen and felt at every scale. In this way, the imperial body was mirrored in the body of the city; vast, ordered and eternal. Scale thus became an ideological medium, a tool through which architecture could embody Rome's ambition to extend its empire beyond geography and time.

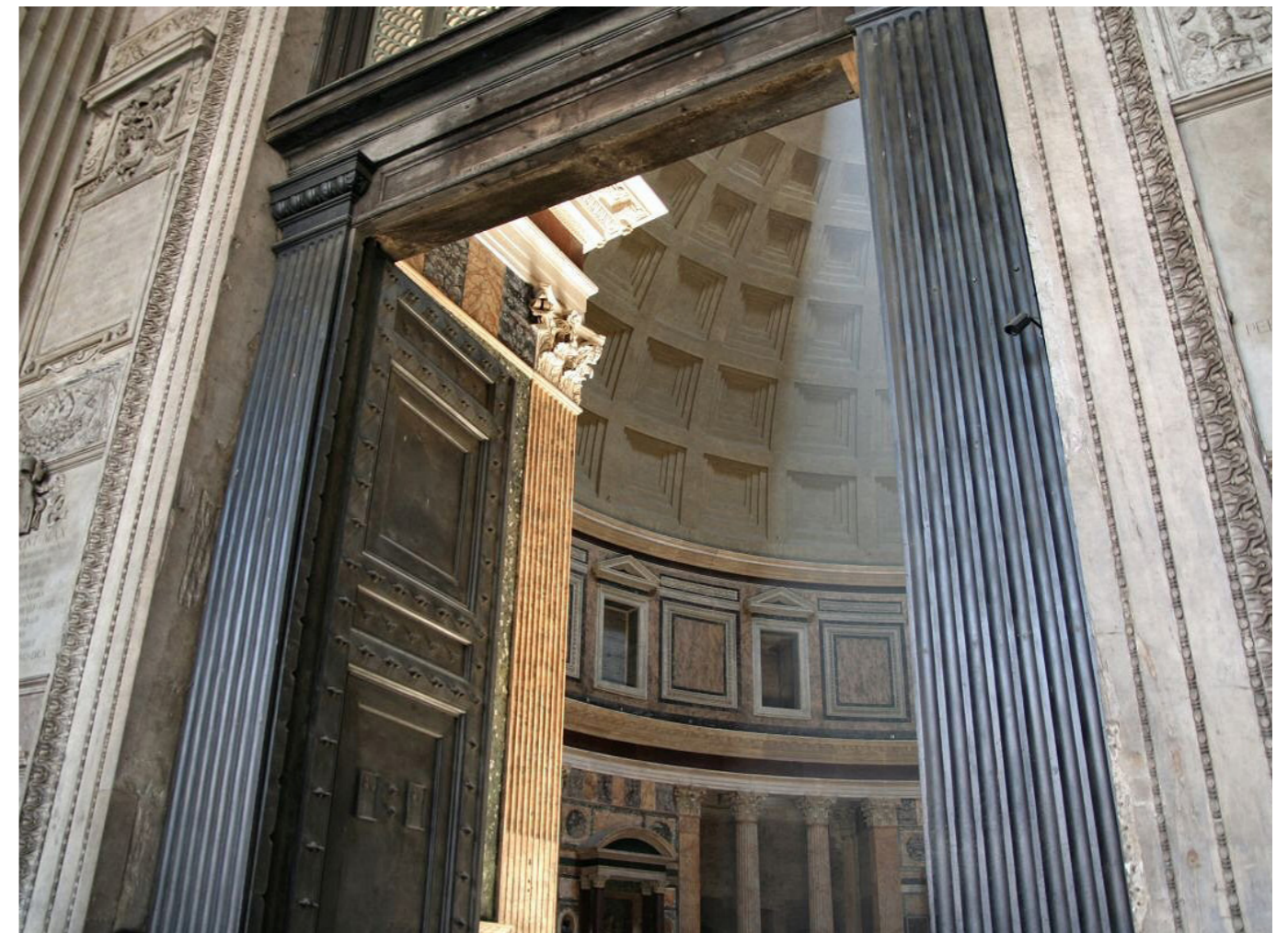


Figure 5: Holly Hayes, *Glimpse of the interior through the huge north door of the Pantheon, Rome, 2010*



Figure 6: Evert Ariëns, *The oculus in the dome, Rome, 2007*

1.4 Legacy: The Roman template of Power

Roman architectural propaganda extends far beyond antiquity. Rome became the blueprint for subsequent regimes seeking authority. Modern totalitarian states inherited this Roman temple of power, using architecture to communicate legitimacy, order, and continuity.

Emperor Augustus¹ architectural programme turned the urban landscape into a living emblem of imperial ideology. Grand public spaces, temples, and monuments celebrate peace and prosperity while masking the violence that made them possible. As Hussani et al. observe, Augustus: Notably commanded flourished arts as a propaganda tool in his quest to make Rome the new Athens, the cultural as well as political nerve centre of the Mediterranean. (Hussaini. et al, 2024. P.2) Through this precedent, architecture became an enduring medium of statecraft. The example of Rome reveals that propaganda in architecture lies not merely in symbolism, but in the very experience of space.

1.5 Summary

Roman architecture demonstrates that propaganda is not only a visual or symbolic device, but a spatial technology of governance – one that naturalises hierarchy through spectacle and order. This Roman precedent becomes the ideological blueprint for later regimes seeking to materialise power in stone. The manipulation of space and scale transformed the built environment into a performative extension of imperial authority. Through structures such as forums, temples, and theatres, Rome created an architectural language that communicated discipline, unity, and divine sanction. This legacy endures in modern state architecture, where monumental forms continue to evoke ideas of legitimacy, collective identity, and the illusion of permanence.



Figure 7: Matthew Karsten, *The exterior of the Colosseum, Rome, 2022*

CHAPTER TWO

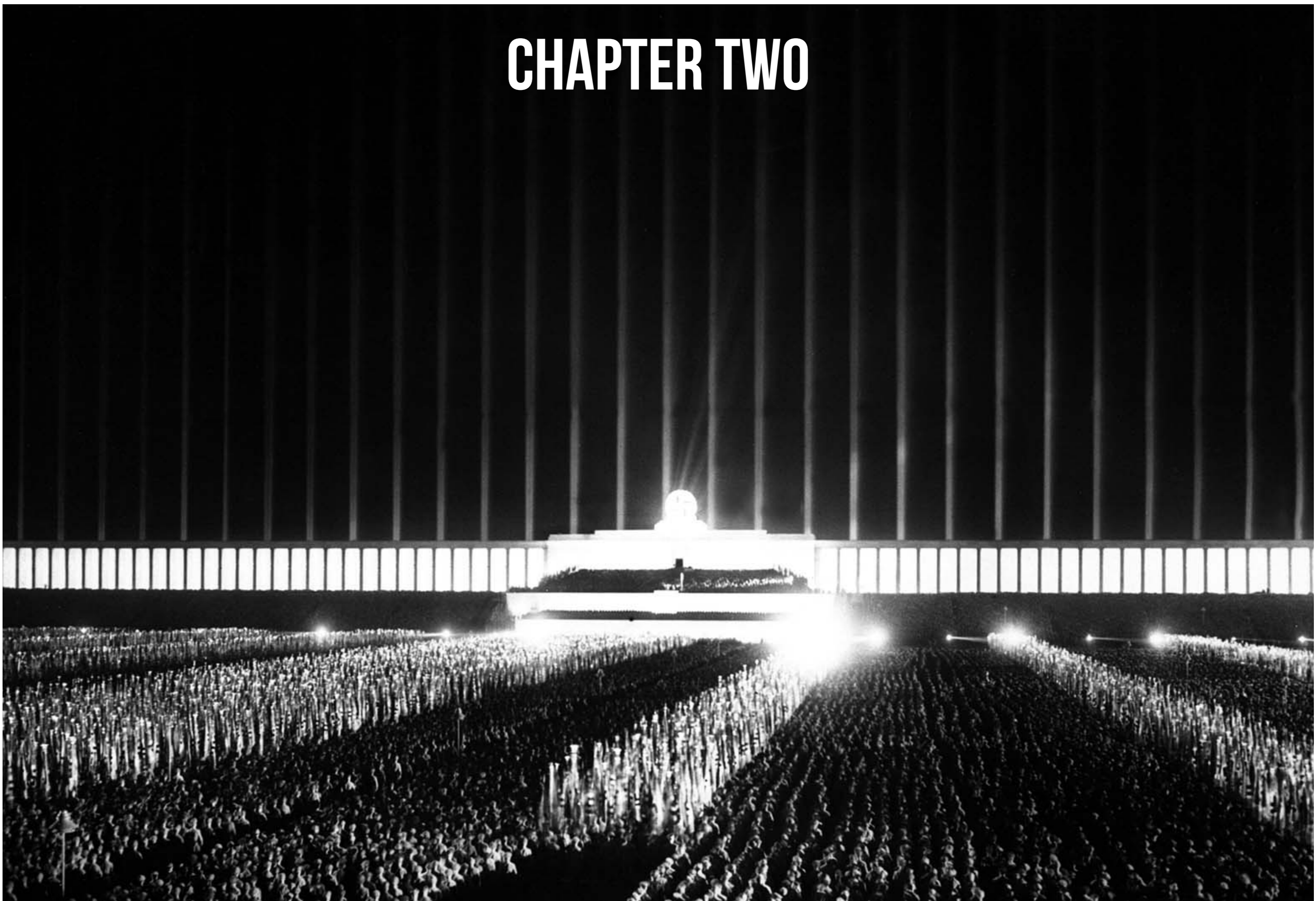


Figure 8: The cathedral of light was documented in the Nazi Propaganda film Festliches Nürnberg, 1937.

Modern Totalitarianism: Architecture as Ideology in Nazi Germany

The propaganda of Ancient Rome established a template for architecture as an instrument of authority – a language of scale and spectacle that would resurface in modern regimes. Nowhere was this inheritance more explicitly mobilised than in Nazi Germany, where classical form was revived to legitimise a new authority.

2.1 Overview: architecture as political scripture

This chapter introduces Nazi Germany as the apotheosis of architecture's ideological potential. A regime in which spatial order became a literal manifestation of political order. Under Adolf Hitler and his chief architect, Albert Speer, the built environment was mobilised as propaganda to express the ideology of permanence, and unity.

Hitler conceived cities as living monuments, Nazi ideology was literally written into the city. Hitler saw each block and boulevard as a propaganda canvas. The Third Reich “used the social power of architecture as a tool to support the new order” (Uysal, 2022) Through architecture, the regime sought to communicate and naturalise its power. Embedding ideology into everyday life.

This chapter positions Nazi architecture as a continuation of classical traditions established in Ancient Rome and Greece, appropriating their monumental language to construct a visual mythology of power. By reviving form, used in Ancient Rome, the Third Reich sought to link its political project to the perceived timelessness of antiquity. Speer's designs reinterpreted Roman ideals of order and dominance to convey hierarchy and national destiny. In doing so, Nazi architecture did not merely imitate the ancient world – it weaponised its aesthetic authority to legitimise tyranny through spectacle and spatial control.

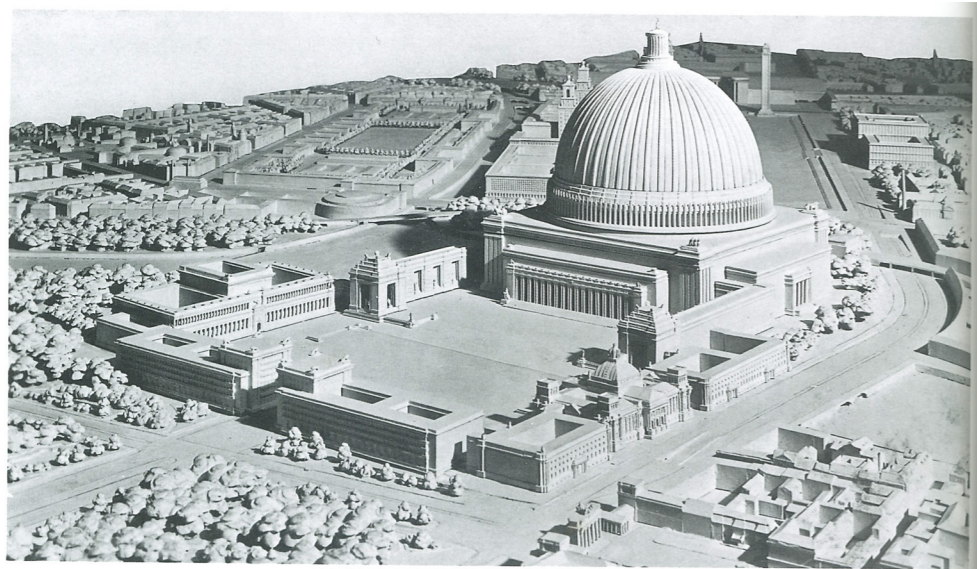


Figure 9: Albert Speer, *Scale model of the Volkshalle*, 2013

2.2 The Weaponisation of Architecture: space as propaganda

The Zeppelinfeld Grandstand was the only space conceptualised for Germania, by Albert Speer and Adolf Hitler that was seen through to completion. The square complex is a monumental structure with a Podium that positions Hitler above the collective. It has space for up to 200,000 people to observe mass events. The architecture of the Third Reich was not merely expressive – it was performative, producing ideological subjectivity through collective spatial, and social experience. The Cathedral of Light at Nuremberg employed pure form and the illumination of over 150 spotlights to evoke transcendence, transforming this meeting into almost a ritual. By relying on Foucault's notion of Disciplinary space, we can begin to understand how visibility has an impact on the collective.

2.2.1 Ruin Value: Time, Memory, and the Eternal Reich

Ruin Value is the idea that a building can be designed, so that when it eventually degrades, it leaves behind aesthetically pleasing ruins that would last far longer without any maintenance at all. ‘Hitler's chief architect, Albert Speer, favoured a “theory of ruin value” in which German buildings would collapse into aesthetically pleasing ruins’ (Ross, 2014)

It is a principal idea in Nazi construction, in the hopes that when Hitler died, Germania would last long after he died, reinforcing the visibility of the Reich, such as ancient Roman and Greek ruins. ‘I want German buildings to be viewed in a thousand years as we view Greece and Rome’ (Hitler, cited in Speer, 1970, p. 56).

Speer's invocation of Roman Ruins was not only aesthetic but ideological – a deliberate strategy to fuse architecture with myth and memory. As Huyssen (2010, p.19) suggests, ruins operate as cultural “screens” onto which society projects anxieties about time and decay. For the Third Reich, this projection became a tool of self-mythologisation, positioning Nazi architecture as part of an eternal historical continuum. By designing structures that would decay beautifully, Speer (Ross, 2014) sought to ensure that even in ruin, the remnants of the Reich would continue to communicate grandeur, endurance, and the illusion of timeless imperial destiny.

Figure 10: The cathedral of light was documented in the Nazi Propaganda film *Festliches Nürnberg*, 1937.



2.3 Legacy and Continuity: The modern spectacle of power

Nazi architecture's legacy endures not only in physical remnants but in the ongoing aestheticization of political power. Modern spectacles – from national parades to state architecture – continue to draw on its logics of visibility, order, and unity. The architecture of totalitarianism thus reveals how space can be weaponised to shape collective consciousness to choreograph emotion, to discipline bodies, and to translate ideology into lived experience: 'He was its ultimate administrator and editor-in-chief. An ideologue of propaganda to the core, he believed this was the best way to gain and retain power.' (O'Shaughnessy, 2016, p.2)

Across these examples, Nazi Germany demonstrates how architecture functions as an apparatus of social engineering, transforming political ideology into spatial experience. Shaping how individuals perceive themselves in relation to power and their community. The architecture of the Reich amplifies this quasi-religious atmosphere, transforming political gatherings into sacred rights of collective submission. Through monumental form, ritual space, and the manipulation of time and memory, architecture becomes a means of producing collective identity – not through persuasion, but through embodied participation in space. 'Art and architecture were a synthesis under the Reich' (O'Shaughnessy, 2016, p.234) The synthesis of aesthetic and political control remains one of the most cautionary aspects of the Nazi legacy, revealing how architecture continues to operate as an ideological tool for shaping the collective.



Figure 11: The cathedral of light was documented in the Nazi Propaganda film *Festliches Nürnberg*, 1937.

2.4 Summary

This chapter examined how Nazi Germany represented the apex of architecture as a tool for propaganda and ideological control. Under Hitler and Speer, the built environment became an active medium for performing power – transforming political ideology into monumental space. Architecture functioned as political scripture, inscribing Nazi ideals of permanence, order, and unity into urban life.

Through the case study of the Zeppelinfeld Grandstand and the Cathedral of Light's, the chapter explored how architecture was weaponised to produce collective identity and emotional submission. Drawing on Foucault's concept of disciplinary space, it demonstrated how visibility and spatial hierarchy became instruments of control, embedding surveillance and spectacle within architectural form.

Speer's concept of Ruin Value further extended this propaganda into time, seeking to immortalise Nazi ideology through the aesthetics of decay, echoing the grandeur of Ancient Rome. This continuity positioned the Third Reich as the inheritor of classical imperial power masking its violence behind monumental beauty.

Ultimately, this chapter argued that Nazi Architecture was not merely representational, but performative – a total synthesis of aesthetics, politics, and ritual that disciplines bodies and engineered belief. Its legacy persists in modern political and media spectacles, where visibility, scale, and order remain central to how authority is both constructed and perceived. The Nazi appropriation of classical form reaffirms that propaganda in architecture operates through performance as much as permanence. Its legacy extends beyond totalitarianism, shaping how modern state and media aestheticize authority.



Figure 12: The cathedral of light was documented in the Nazi Propaganda film *Festliches Nürnberg*, 1937.

CHAPTER THREE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY
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Figure 13: Morten Tyldum, *Title Sequence, Silo*, S1 e1 (2023)

Contemporary Media: Architecture, Imagined Futures and Propaganda in Sci-Fi Media

While the architecture of the Third Reich demonstrated the extreme physical manifestations of propaganda, contemporary culture reveals its evolution into mediated and speculative forms. The same logistics of visibility, monumentality, and control persist – now refracted through cinematic architecture.

3.1 Overview: Sci-fi media as Speculative Propaganda

This chapter extends the investigation of architectural propaganda from the physical realm of historical power to its contemporary manifestation within fictional media. While the architectures of Ancient Rome and Nazi Germany demonstrated how scale and visibility could embody ideology in stone, Modern sci-fi translates these mechanisms into speculative, cinematic worlds. Here, architecture no longer operates solely as built form, but as representation – a visual and emotional medium through which belief systems are projected and internalised. The screen becomes the new civic space of persuasion, where imagined structures communicate authority, hierarchy and ideology with the same potency once achieved by the Pantheon and Zeppelinfeld

As propaganda moved from physical space into the cinematic frame, architecture continues to communicate ideology through form, visibility, and scale. Fictional architectures in science-fiction cinema extend the persuasive strategies once embodied by Rome or Nazi Germany, transforming material power into a visual experience. Through framing, lighting, and spectacle, the screen disciplines the viewers gaze much like the panoptic city that once disciplined the body.

In these speculative narratives (*Dune* (2021-2024) and *Silo* (2023-)), Architecture becomes a narrative agent that constructs and critiques these systems of power. These imagined spaces reveal how visibility, scale, and spatial order continue to manipulate perception. Both demonstrating that propaganda, equally, can thrive through simulation and effect.

Expanding on the theoretical frameworks previously explored, this chapter examines how fictional architecture disciplines the viewer through spectacle and spatial ideology. Foucault's notion of visibility as a mechanism of control, remain essential to understanding how these imagined environments reproduce structures of belief. Strategies of power persist withing contemporary cultural production.

The cinematic frame performs a disciplinary function comparable to the panoptic mechanisms

identified by Foucault. Through orchestrated perspective, lighting, and camera movement, the viewers gaze is directed, controlled and positioned withing systems of visibility that mirror real structures of surveillance and order. The spectator becomes both participant and subject, inhabiting an architecture of representation that teaches how to see, and thus, be seen, in relation to power.



Figure 14: Denis Villeneuve, *Home of the Northern Fremen*, *Dune* part two (2024)

3.2 Monumentality and ideology in *Dune* (2021-2024)

Denis Villeneuve's *Dune*⁴ (2021-2024) presents a cinematic spectacle where monumentality becomes both an aesthetic and ideological device. Through vast landscapes, monumental architecture, and intricately designed cultures, Villeneuve develops Frank Herbert's universe into a visual storytelling spectacle. The film's visual language operates beyond mere spectacle transforming architecture and design into tools for expressing systems of power and belief. As Wang (2021) observes: The ornate designs, cultural motifs, and architectural choices are not arbitrary; they are intentional decisions that reflect the essence of each faction, contributing to the overarching visual narrative. (P.5)

⁴ The conflict between House Harkonnen and House Atreides is central to the political dynamics of *Dune*. The Harkonnen's, ruling Arrakis through oppression and exploitation, control the planet's spice production, which is the most valuable commodity in the universe, essential for space travel, commerce, and political power. The Atreides, portrayed as morally upright and loyal, are assigned stewardship of Arrakis by the Emperor. The feud is both personal and systemic, reflecting broader imperial strategies: the Padishah Emperor manipulates the two houses to maintain control over the spice economy and prevent any single house from becoming too powerful. This struggle over Arrakis highlights the interplay of wealth, resources, and power, emphasizing themes of political manoeuvring, betrayal, and the precarious balance of politics.



Figure 15: Denis Villeneuve, *Patrice Vermette's reinterpretation of the 'Volkshalle', Dune part two (2024)*

The understanding of monumentality aligns with Sigfried Giedion's (1941) assertion that monumental architecture reflects 'the collective will of a period'. In *Dune* (2021-2024), Villeneuve translates this idea into cinematic form: each structure is not only a setting but a semiotic statement about the civilisation that produced it. Each built environment – whether the H.R Gieger infused, Nazi Germany inspired brutality and scale of House Harkonnen's Geidi Prime, or the monumental fortress cut from rock on the desert planet Arrakis – serves as a manifestation of identity and ideology. Architecture thus becomes a political language, encoding authority, and survival across its multitude of monumental forms, across the universe, and therefore, become extensions of the political and spiritual ideologies that govern the universe of *Dune* (2021-2024).

The deliberate visual construction situates *Dune* (2021-2024) within a lineage of cinema where form operates as ideology. The monumental scale and composition symmetry of Villeneuve's mise-en-scène evoke the aesthetics of empire and quasi-religious mythmaking, a direct link to Hitler's Germany.

As Wang (2021) further notes:

The intentional crafting of these elements reinforces the themes of power, politics, and survival, elevating *Dune* from a mere visual spectacle to a cinematic experience that resonates thematically and emotionally. (P.6).

Monumentality in *Dune* (2021-2024) is therefore not only a matter of scale, but also of meaning – it becomes an instrument through which Villeneuve interrogates the mechanisms of domination, devotion and subtle forms of control. Woolen (1983) remarks that early modern theatre was a 'vehicle for political propaganda, a laboratory for avant-garde experimentation' (P.13). *Dune* (2021-2024) similarly functions as a contemporary laboratory where monumental design operates as both political statement, and aesthetic experiment. However, this interplay between spectacle and ideology invokes Woolen's critique of realism: 'Realism' has always been the refuge of the conservative in the arts, together with a preference for propaganda of a comforting rather than disturbing kind.' (Woolen, 2013, P.43).

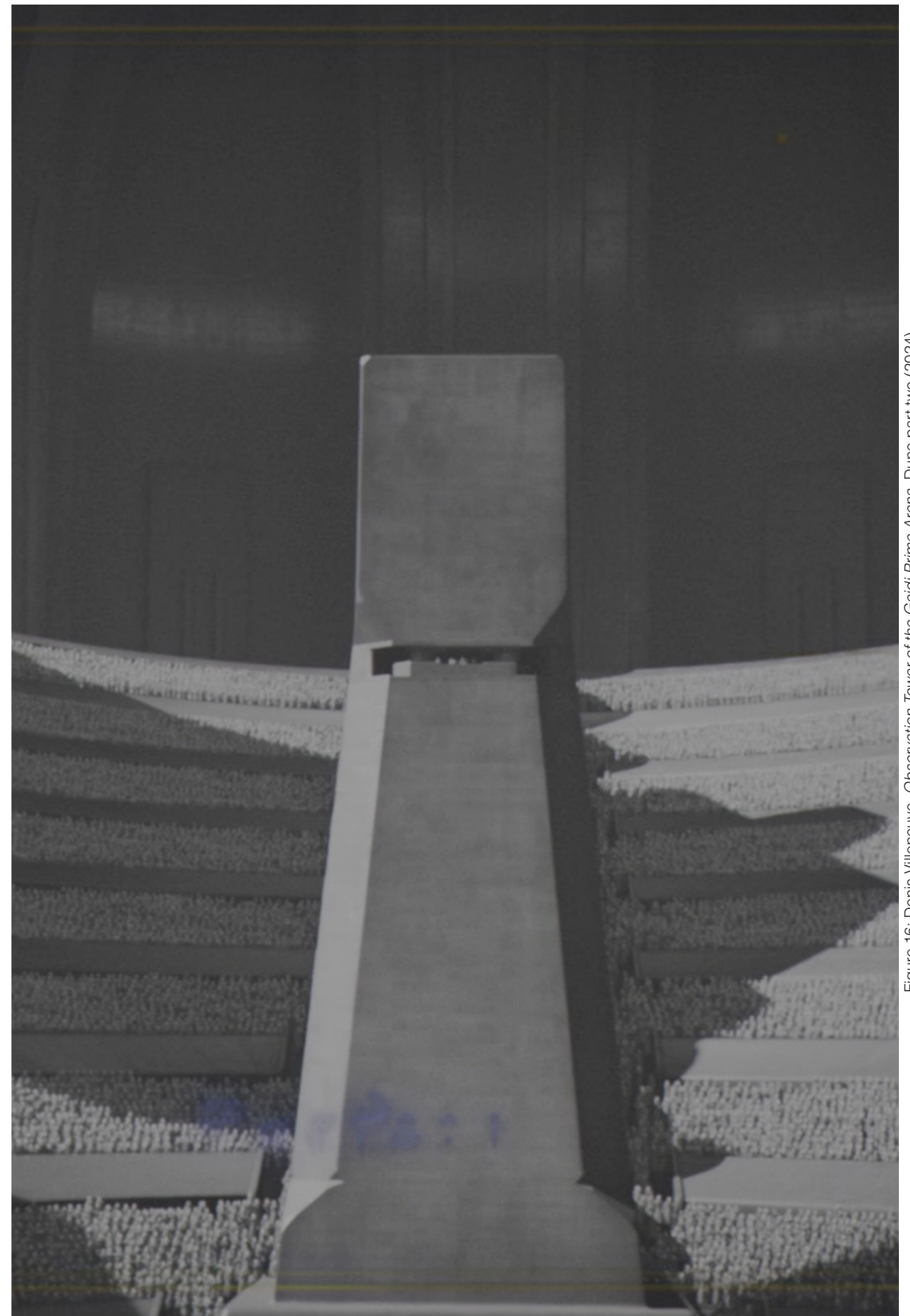


Figure 16: Denis Villeneuve, Observation Tower of the Geidi Prime Arena, Dune part two (2024)

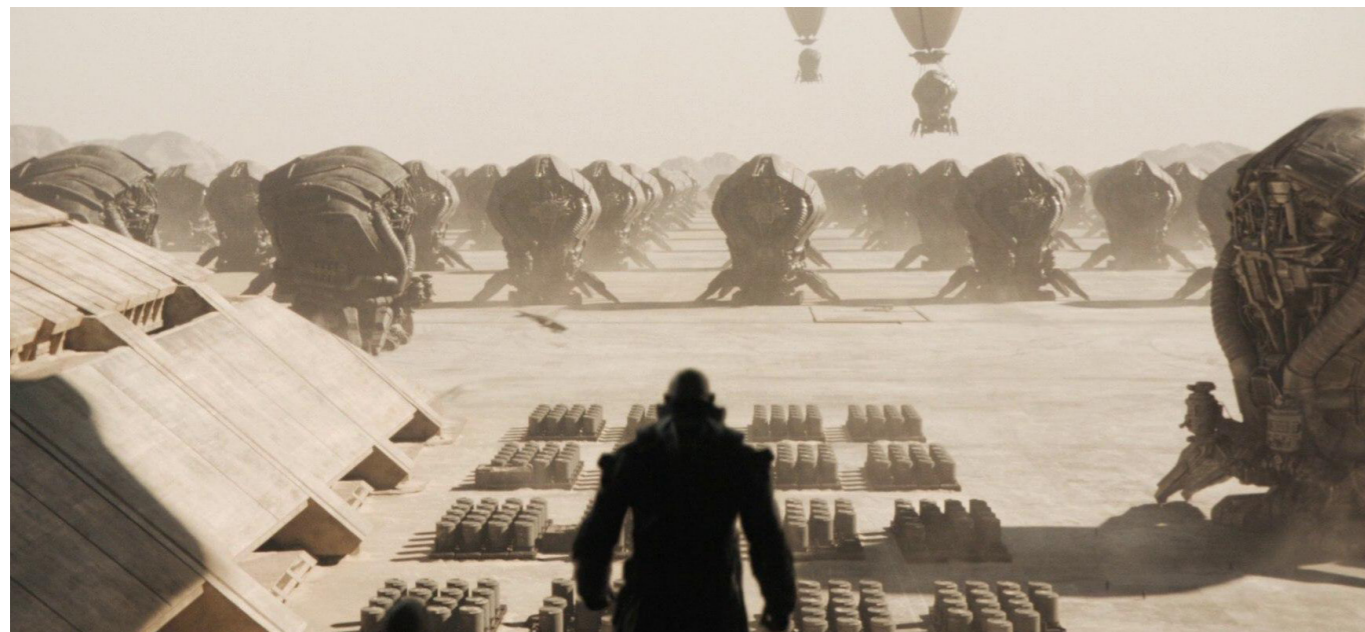


Figure 17: Denis Villeneuve, *Harkonnen Spice Harvesters*, *Dune part two* (2024)



Figure 18: Denis Villeneuve, *Landing Fields* *Dune part two* (2024)

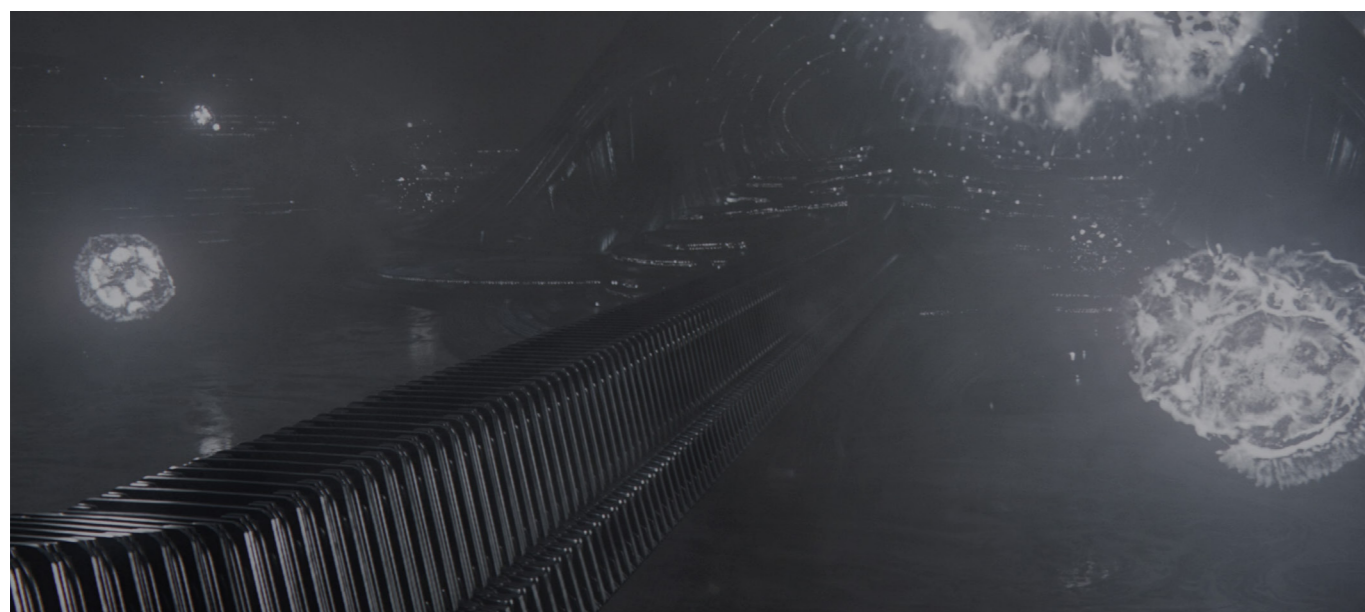


Figure 19: Denis Villeneuve, *The palace on the Harkonnen home planet, Geidi Prime*, *Dune part two* (2024)

3.2.1 Summary

Villeneuve's monumentality straddles this tension between realism and abstraction. The film's resist comforting realism, instead using monumental forms to expose the ideological structures and struggles underpinning power and faith. Ultimately, *Dune's* (2021-2024) monumentality serves as a lens through which the films ideological undercurrents are articulated. Architecture becomes a vessel for myth, and myth becomes a vessel for political critique. The world building transforms cinematic space into an arena where ideology is both performed and questioned – a reminder that monumentality, in both art and architecture is never neutral, but always ideological.



Figure 20: Denis Villeneuve, *Interior of an Arakeen Palace*, *Dune part two* (2024)



Figure 21: Morten Tyldum, *The cafeteria with a screen to the "outside" Silo, S1 e1 (2023)*

3.3 Confinement, Hierarchy, and Control in Silo (Apple TV+, 2023-)

'To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper.'
(Certeau, 1984, P.103)

If *Dune* (2021-2024) externalises ideology through monumentality and spectacle, *Silo* (2023-) internalises it. The Apple TV+ series, based on the book *Wool* (Hugh Howey), constructs an architecture of total confinement – a vertical megastructure extending both upwards and downwards beyond comprehension. Within this subterranean world, architecture becomes not only an expression of power, but it's mechanism: the silo's very design enforces hierarchy, control, and ignorance.

The silo functions as an inverted panopticon. Unlike Bentham's transparent prison, where visibility disciplines behaviour, *Silo* (2023-)'s Architecture operates through concealment. Knowledge of the outside world, the structures origins, and even the truth of its purpose is obscured by architectural containment. The populations obedience is sustained through spatial isolation and narrative manipulation – architecture as an epistemological prison. The highlight of the space, the staircase that descends 144 floors, visually unites the inhabitants of the silo, yet physically divides them through endless verticality, producing what De Certeau (1984) might call a 'tactical resistance withing a strategically total architecture system'. The act of walking becomes an act of defiance and self-definition within a space that choreographs movement, perspective and even belief systems.

The Silo's internal hierarchy literalises social stratification, much like the colosseum. The upper levels house 'Judicial' and 'IT' – the two leading political powers of the silo – the lower levels, power, and waste. Movement between levels is not restricted, yet physically arduous, making it difficult to traverse; this reinforces both class boundaries and psychological containment. The decent downwards is almost seen as a decent into ignorance, whereas the inverse, a symbolic act of resistance.

The spatial organisation of the silo therefore becomes a diagram of power: verticality and monumentality become interlinked as the architectural language of domination for the collective users of the space. In this sense, *Silo* (2023-) translates Foucault's theories of visibility and control into an architectural system of invisible surveillance. The inhabitants are structures – their perception and understanding becomes constrained by the architecture itself. This aligns

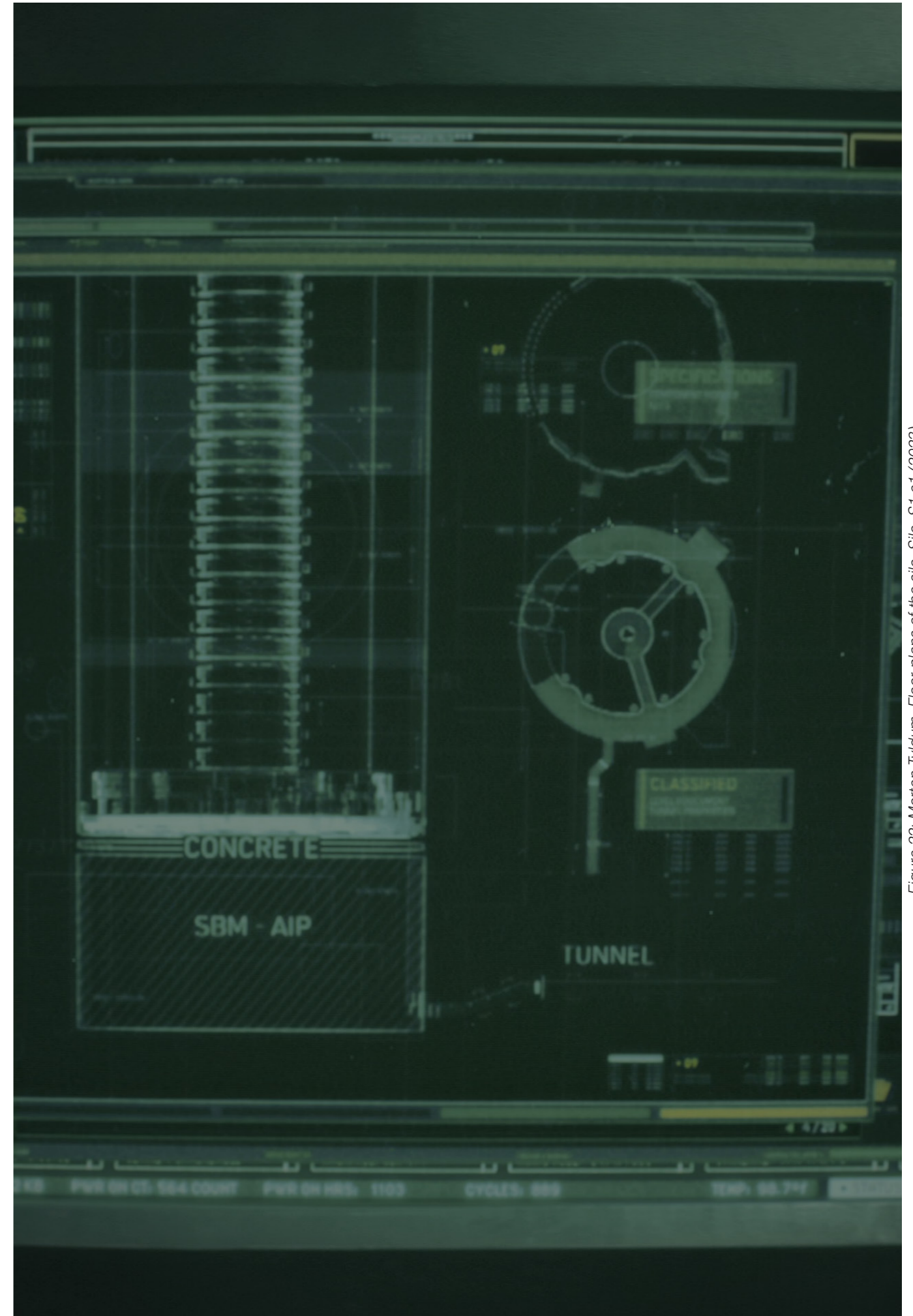


Figure 22: Morten Tyldum, Floor plans of the silo, Silo, S1 e1 (2023)

Figure 23: Morten Tyldum, A view down to the bottom of the silo, *Silo*, S1 e1 (2023)



with Virilio's critique of the modern 'industrial proliferation of visual and audiovisual prosthesis. (1991, p.6) where instantaneous mediation replaces embodied perception. In *Silo* (2023-), truth is mediated through screens that project images of the outside world. Throughout Season 1, The lead character, and therefore the audience is led to believe that this projection is false, and the desire to see the 'truth' of the outside world becomes its own form of oppression – a hyperreal transparency that 'conceals' more than it reveals. Virilio leads us to believe that modernity has replaced physical presence with mediated immediacy, where reality is consumed through screens rather than experienced directly. He describes this as producing an overabundance of images and a collapse in memory and understanding:

We now routinely see the encoding of increasingly elaborate mental images together with a steady decline in retention rates and recall... a rapid collapse of mnemonic consolidation. (Virilio, 1991, P.6-7)

The inhabitants trust in these screens mirror Virilio's warning: that technology's acceleration of vision results in the erosion of truth. The spectacle of transparency – the ever-visible window to the world – becomes the perfect concealment mechanism. Total visibility in this sense, becomes indistinguishable from total blindness. Architecture and technology converge to form a blend of panoptic visibility and technological enclosure – one that disciplines not through watching bodies, but through programming perception.

Ultimately, *Silo* (2023-) transforms the panoptic model into an architecture of disinformation: one where visibility is weaponised and knowledge is a controlled resource. For the viewer, and inhabitants, the challenge lies in discerning the truth from projection – a task that reveals how contemporary architecture, both fictional and real, participates in the politics of perception itself.

3.4 Synthesis: From Spectacle to Simulation

Both *Dune* (2021-2024) and *Silo* (2023-) illustrate how contemporary media reconfigures architectural propaganda from physical monumentality to digital simulation. Where *Dune* (2021-2024) monumentalises ideology through scale and spectacle, *Silo* (2023-) internalises it through enclosure and absence. Together, they form a continuum: from spectacle of belief to the simulation of control.

In *Dune* (2021-2024), monumental architecture operates as a visual rhetoric of power – vast open spaces invoke psychological submission. In *Silo* (2023-), power operates through spatial compression and sensory deprivation, reducing the scope of perception. Both use architectural form to model how authority is seen, felt, and remembered.

Neuroscientific studies reinforce this phenomenon. Bar et al. (2007) found that participants ‘liked the curved objects significantly more than the control objects... and liked the sharp-angled objects significantly less,’ correlating sharp forms with a heightened amygdala activation – the brain’s centre for fear and threat detection. Such findings underscore how architectural form operates not only symbolically, but viscerally. Monumental form evokes authority and intimidation; curved organic form; safety and submission. Within both *Dune* (2021-2024) and *Silo* (2023-), these aesthetic strategies manipulate emotion to reinforce narrative ideology: *Dune*’s (2021-2024) monumental sharpness commands reverence, while *Silo* (2023-)’s oppressive enclosure induces compliance.



Figure 24: Morten Tyldum, *Interior Lighting of the silo*, *Silo*, S1 e1 (2023)

3.5 Summary

The transition from spectacle to simulation reflects a broader cultural shift identified by Virilio, where mediated experience supplements direct engagement. Architecture in these worlds becomes not only representation, but psychological – a form of environmental propaganda. Through Cinematic design, the viewer is disciplined to respond affectively to form, scale, and materiality in ways that mirror real life ideological conditioning.

Thus, the speculative architecture of science fiction performs as both critique and continuation of historical propaganda. They simulate the aesthetics of control to expose its psychological mechanisms. The cinematic frame becomes the new civic movement – a virtual architecture of persuasion that governs through image, emotion and affective response. In this transformation, propaganda transcends the monumental and enters the mnemonic: from the visible to the perceptual, from architecture as structure to architecture as simulation. Spectacle becomes system; the imaginary becomes ideological.



Figure 25: Morten Tyldum, *Title Sequence*, *Silo*, S1 e1 (2023)⁵

⁵ *Silo* is a dystopian sci-fi series on Apple TV+ that explores themes of authoritarian control, social hierarchy, and the manipulation of truth within a confined underground society governed by an ancient document known as “The Pact.” The title sequence continuously references DNA, using the spiral staircase as visual metaphor — echoing the double helix structure and symbolising how control, order, and identity are encoded into the very architecture and governance of the silo itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

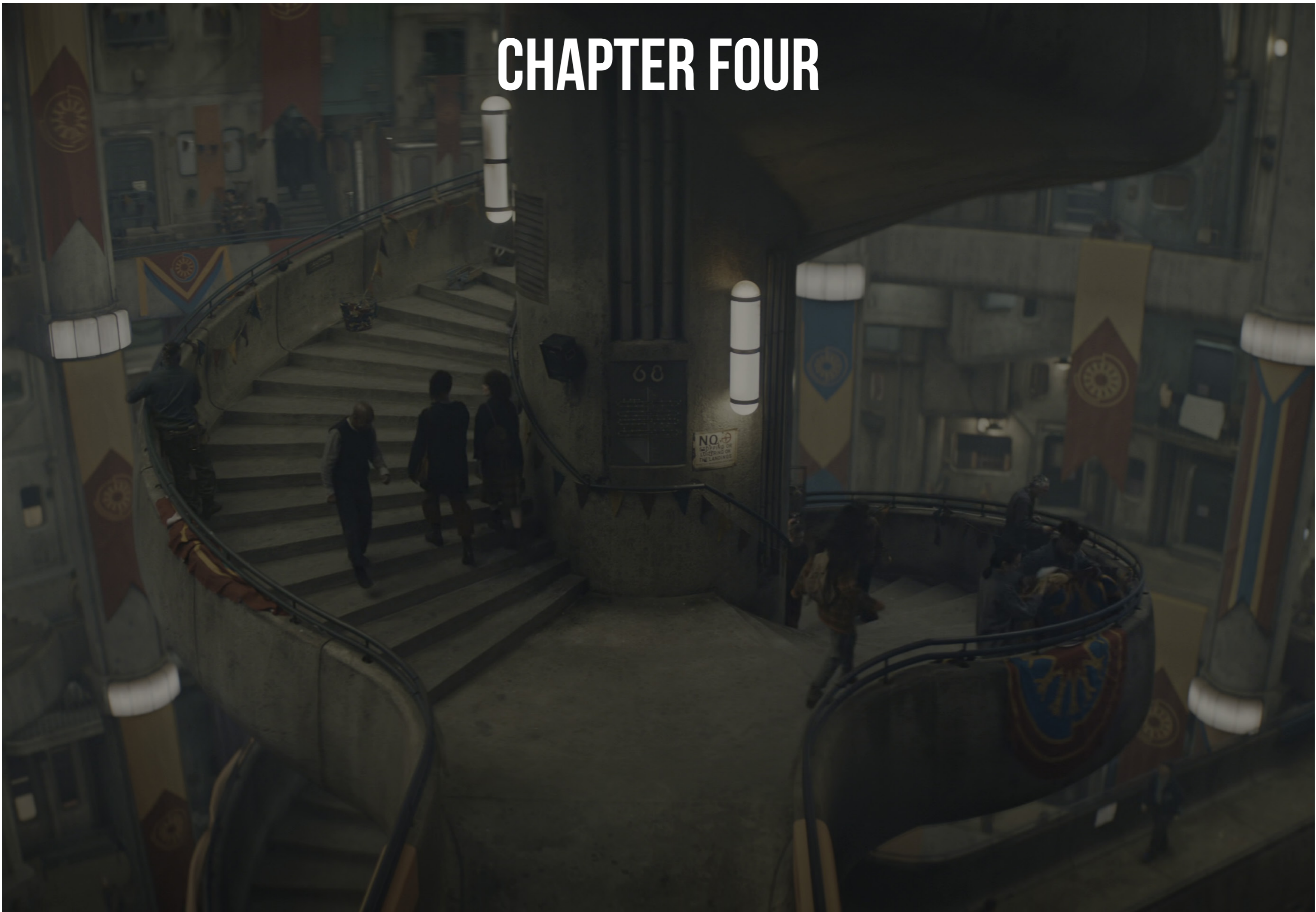


Figure 26: Morten Tyldum, *The 60th Floor*, Silo, S1, e1 (2023)

Conclusion

From the colosseum to speculative cinematic worlds, this essay has traced how architecture functions as persistent mediums for propaganda – a language through which ideology is materialised, performed, and normalised. Across time and culture, the built environment has not only reflected systems of authority but has actively constructed them, shaping how individuals perceive power, identity and belonging. Architecture, as argued throughout, is not a passive container for human activity but a deliberate instrument of persuasion – one that disciplines bodies, choreographs emotion, and embeds ideology within lived experience.

In Ancient Rome, propaganda was spatially enacted through visibility and monumentality. The colosseum with its hierarchical seating, imperial spectacle, and capacity for surveillance, exemplified how architecture could both entertain and indoctrinate. Rome's monumental scale and symbolic urban design transformed the city into political theatre where the emperor's authority was made tangible. These spaces did not merely project imperial stability: they created it, producing collective unity through awe and spectacle. As Foucault's notion of visibility as power reveals, the experience of being seen – and seeing authority – becomes itself a mechanism of control.

This logic of architectural persuasion resurfaces with heightened intensity under Nazi Germany. Under Hitler, and Speer, Architecture became an explicit apparatus of ideological communication. Through grandiose scale, symmetry, and ritualised space, the Third Reich transformed the classical language of Rome into a modern spectacle of order and submission. The Zeppelinfeld Grandstand and the Cathedral of Light demonstrated how form and illumination could elevate political gatherings into sacred ceremonies, where aesthetic unity masked coercive ideology. Speer's theory of 'Ruin Value' further extended the propaganda beyond the immediate present of the time, seeking to immortalise the Reich through the aesthetics of decay. In this, the Nazi regime exemplified the ultimate synthesis of architecture and ideology, transforming it into spatial totalitarianism.

Contemporary speculative media continues this lineage by translating propaganda from physical monumentality to digital simulation. In *Dune* (2021-2024) and *Silo* (2023-), architecture operates as narrative ideology: monumental places and claustrophobic underground bunkers discipline perception and emotion as much as ancient arenas once disciplined bodies. Villeneuve's monumental aesthetics evoke reverence and domination, while *Silo* (2023-)'s subterranean

confinement reconfigures Foucault's panoptic principles through concealment and mediated vision. Both worlds demonstrate that propaganda in architecture has evolved from the spectacle of power to the simulation of control – from the material to the psychological. Virillio's critique of technological mediation underscores this shift: Visibility, once the tool of surveillance has become an instrument of disinformation.

Across these temporal and cultural contexts, architecture persists as a persuasive medium that shape how societies see, feel, and inhabit ideology. The continuum from Rome's arenas to speculative megastructures reveals that propaganda is not confined to authoritarian regimes but is embedded in the very practice of making space meaningful. The same tools that still glorify an empire, now construct digital mythologies, shaping collective belief through representation and affect. While this essay has focused on specific case studies, its argument translates across diverse architectural and interior contexts - such as stagecraft, and circulation control - where spatial design continues to negotiate visibility, hierarchy, and affect as instruments of persuasion.

Recognising architecture's propagandistic potential is therefore not merely a historical enquiry, but an ethical imperative for contemporary practice. Every act of design carries ideological weight, influencing how power is perceived and experienced. As designers, acknowledging this responsibility of how form, scale, and space can both liberate and constrain, inspire and manipulate – vital for continued ethical practice.

Ultimately, architecture endures as the most prevailing form of propaganda – not because it dictates belief, but because it constructs conditions through which belief becomes visible, tangible, and lived.

Glossary

Affective Space

Spatial design that manipulates emotion and sensory experience. Affective architecture persuades through atmosphere and feeling, not just function or form.

Architecture as Propaganda

The deliberate use of architectural form, scale, and symbolism to communicate ideology, reinforce authority, and shape public perception. Architecture becomes propaganda when it manipulates spatial experience to normalise power relations.

Disciplinary Space

Foucault's concept of spatial organisation as a means of controlling and conditioning behaviour. Architecture disciplines by structuring movement, visibility, and hierarchy within its physical form.

Ideology

A system of beliefs or values that shapes how societies perceive power and truth. In architectural terms, ideology is embedded within spatial design, influencing how space is experienced and understood.

Monumental Aesthetics

A design approach characterised by grand scale, symmetry, and order — used to convey stability, legitimacy, and authority. Common in imperial, fascist, and utopian architecture.

Monumentality

A quality of scale and form designed to evoke awe, reverence, or submission. Monumentality operates as an ideological tool, translating political or spiritual authority into material experience.

Panopticism

Derived from Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon" prison and expanded by Michel Foucault, Panopticism describes a disciplinary system in which constant visibility ensures self-regulation and obedience. Used here to interpret both physical and mediated spaces of surveillance.

Propaganda (Historical Definition)

Originally neutral, referring to the dissemination of information or ideas to promote a cause. Only later did it acquire the negative association with manipulation. As Potter (2016) notes, propaganda once also implied education or persuasion through information.

Simulation

Following theorists such as Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard, simulation refers to the replacement of real experience with mediated representation. Within speculative architecture and film, simulation transforms physical propaganda into digital or psychological persuasion.

Speculative Architecture

Architectural forms that exist primarily in fiction or theory, exploring imagined futures or alternative realities. In cinematic contexts, these architectures function as ideological commentaries on power and control.

Spectacle

A term often associated with Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), referring to the dominance of visual culture in shaping social relations. In this essay, it describes how architecture and performance create collective emotional unity and political theatre.

Totalitarian Architecture

A term describing architectural projects designed to embody the absolute power of the state through uniformity, symmetry, and mass spectacle. Often associated with the regimes of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

Visibility as Power

A Foucauldian concept describing how being seen — or the awareness of surveillance — functions as a mechanism of control. In architecture, visibility organises social hierarchy and behaviour through spatial design.

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Footnotes

1 - The Temple of Mars Ultor (“Mars the Avenger”) - The Roman God of War - stood as the ideological and visual focal point of the forum of Augustus.

2 - The Porticoes - colonnaded walkways enclosing the forum - structured circulation and framed views, creating a monumental setting for public gatherings and ceremonies

3 - The Exedrae - semicircular recesses opening from the porticoes - housed statues and reliefs of prominent figures from Rome’s history.

4 - The conflict between House Harkonnen and House Atreides is central to the political dynamics of Dune. The Harkonnen’s, ruling Arrakis through oppression and exploitation, control the planet’s spice production, which is the most valuable commodity in the universe, essential for space travel, commerce, and political power. The Atreides, portrayed as morally upright and loyal, are assigned stewardship of Arrakis by the Emperor. The feud is both personal and systemic, reflecting broader imperial strategies: the Padishah Emperor manipulates the two houses to maintain control over the spice economy and prevent any single house from becoming too powerful. This struggle over Arrakis highlights the interplay of wealth, resources, and power, emphasizing themes of political manoeuvring, betrayal, and the precarious balance of politics.

5 - Silo is a dystopian sci-fi series on Apple TV+ that explores themes of authoritarian control, social hierarchy, and the manipulation of truth within a confined underground society governed by an ancient document known as “The Pact.” The title sequence continuously references DNA, using the spiral staircase as visual metaphor — echoing the double helix structure and symbolising how control, order, and identity are encoded into the very architecture and governance of the silo itself.



Figure 27: Morten Tyldum, The cafeteria with a screen to the “outside” Silo, S1 e1 (2023)

