

Mirrors within the Wall: Enlightenment Authority and the Dialectics of Visual Desire in Ledoux's Project for the *Saline de Chaux*

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Presentations of the Gaze: The Theater of Surveillance

In his monumental treatise, *Architecture, Considered in Relation to Art, Mores and Legislation*, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux profoundly connected the discourses of social order to the architectural metaphors of vision and light.¹ Light radiating through the lines of his imagined buildings carried the force of natural law and "imprinted the movement of social virtues."² Ledoux's reflections on architectural geometry as a mechanism of social reform, as well as his interest in light as an all-pervading, clarifying force, raises the question of Ledoux's architectural relation to that paragon of Enlightenment authority — the panopticon. One of the most seemingly panoptic of Ledoux's projects, the *Saline de Chaux*, was actually built in the 1770s as a royal salt factory in the Franche-Comté, a forested province of eastern France. At the same time, architecture was imagined by Ledoux as that seductive and celestial light, "comparable to the beneficent stars which illuminate the world," towards which the eye would inevitably be drawn, and the *Saline de Chaux* became for Ledoux an elaborate visual lure.³ In Ledoux's description of the *Saline*, social order seems to fluctuate between the signs of a clarifying surveillance and the seduction of a shimmering architectural mask. This essay seeks to map the interactions between visibility and social power in Ledoux's conception for the *Saline de Chaux*. To do so is not merely to examine a significant moment in the invention of Enlightenment-era institutions; it is simultaneously to reexamine certain key words such as transparency, surveillance, and the gaze, terms which have been used to address not just the Enlightenment as such, but the entire condition of modernity. On a more specific level, this essay seeks to take seriously Ledoux's insistence on the seductive qualities of light and architecture and, thereby, to interrogate the role of visual desire in the architectonics of power.

The *Saline de Chaux* is doubly situated among the spaces of 18th-century France. On the one hand, as a project commissioned and built between 1774 and 1778 for the king and his *Ferme Generale*, the *Saline de Chaux* was

politically informed by those institutions of royal surveillance by which the French economy was taxed and regulated. On the other hand, as the urban core of Ledoux's imaginary and ideal city of Chaux, the *Saline* itself contained the nucleus from which an entire Enlightenment sociability was to be envisioned. Ledoux thus situated his project within pre-existing relations of power even as he also imagined a new social scheme. It is somewhere between these two spatial readings, between the confirmation of an established order and the desire for a utopian fulfillment, that the *Saline* appears suspended. In his florid prose, Ledoux describes the intended power of his architecture at the level of the subject: specifically, the subject caught in a field of visual space. How did this subjectivity imagined by Ledoux function, and how might it fit into an archaeology of Enlightenment disciplines and institutional regimes? How, on the other hand, might it call for a revision of historical paradigms that have painted such regimes and institutions with slightly too wide a brush? To begin to answer these questions, it is necessary not only to reenter Ledoux's drawings, narratives, and imaginary subjects, but also to test the paradigms of certain theorists of visibility and power, either to discover whether their various accounts convincingly deepen a historical understanding of the *Saline de Chaux* — or, alternatively, whether the *Saline de Chaux* demonstrates the limitations of these paradigms. Beginning with Foucault, briefly touching on Sartre, then considering Lacan in detail, this essay will reexamine the meanings of surveillance, of spatial subjectivity, and of scopophilic desire in the architectural imagination of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux.

Control over individual workers was an overtly central issue in the program of the *Saline de Chaux*. The production of salt at that time involved a policed territory in which the supervision of the state pervaded every aspect of salt extraction, such that salt remained a state monopoly.⁴ In Ledoux's idealized scheme, the plan of workers' dwellings rotated radially from the central figure of authority: the plan of the factory took the form of a semi-circle in which the entry-gate, symmetrically flanked by

workshops and workers' housing, were aligned in a geometric arc that radiated from the director's house [figure 1]. The main spaces of salt production and storage, meanwhile, stretched axially like wings from either side of the director's house. Justifying the plan, Ledoux wrote that "one of the great motive powers which ceaselessly connect governments to their self-interested results is the general disposition of a plan which collects at one enlightened center, all the parts of which it is composed."⁵ The geometric point, by which the director's house collected the peripheral buildings along its radii, was an inflection of the monarchical gaze for which that of the director was substituted. "The eye," as Ledoux points out, "easily surveys the shortest line," and the geometry of surveillance follows that of the circle and the arc.⁶ As in the majority of Ledoux's designs, the director's house acted as another legible mask, as the architectural expression of the institutional surveillance that it represented. The elevation of the director's house, with its monumental portico and crowning attic was designed, according to Ledoux, to "dominate those buildings subordinated to it through its height and simplicity."⁷

It would be tempting to read a panoptic intention into Ledoux's architectural scheme for social reform. In Ledoux's architectural vision, the walls become legible, their utopian contents revealed in the geometries and iconographies of which they were composed. The facades of the director's house and those of the workers' lodges addressed themselves to each other reciprocally. The rusticated pillars and severe attic of the director's house commanded the view from each lodge; meanwhile, the low pavilions and symmetrical wings of the four lodges offered to the director's house a subordinated row of radiating, regulated harmonies. Each massing and elevation was constructed as legible mask through which every space and function in the visual field was to be mapped. Each sculpted surface, from the monumental columns of the director's house to the carved urns spilling petrified water, combined the hierarchical signs of a feudal economy with the Enlightenment promise of transparency and access in which the very walls were made to divulge their contents and reveal their character. Even as the walls of the factory were made into objects of a certain legibility, their arrangement was governed by the regime of an all-pervasive gaze. Anthony Vidler has pointed to the similarity of the plan to that of a

Roman theater. Dubbing the *Saline de Chaux* a "theater of production," in which the lines of spectatorship between the "stage" and "seats" have been reversed, Vidler describes the architectural metaphor as "balanced between a prepanoptical symbolism of surveillance and a model of community."⁸ Because Ledoux's walls were metaphorically rather than actually transparent, and because Ledoux's social harmony was largely effected in a frozen communication among stone-faced facades, one may be inclined to conclude that panopticism emerged oneirically in the *Saline de Chaux*—as the poetic representation of an emerging scopic discipline.

There are, however, a number of problems in adapting the *Saline de Chaux* to a history of panoptic regimes. The first problem is that there is that there is no evidence at the *Saline* for the emergence of panoptic modes of surveillance, such as would have rendered a purely representational panopticon meaningful. As Vidler himself points out: "However unruly and undisciplined the workers of the Franche-Comté might have been, the registers of the *Saline* demonstrate none of the continuous preoccupation with police control and physical discipline manifested at the time by English management."⁹ The activities planned for the various buildings that surrounded the director's house were, in any case, to be hidden from exterior view. The architectural gaze that was "symbolized" by the imposing and central position of the director's house did not correspond with any emergent patterns of managerial discipline or to any unifying knowledge over the details of work routine.¹⁰ If, in other words, there was a panoptic impulse in the plan, it was neither a functional one, nor was it clearly related to identifiable practices of French management.

The second problem is the reciprocity of the facades. That is, even on a purely representational level, the *Saline de Chaux* did not function panoptically. As Michel Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish*, the panopticon required an asymmetrical operation of the visual field: "the Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen diad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen."¹¹ In the example of Bentham's Panopticon, the effectiveness of the gaze depended on each prisoner's belief in the unverifiable probability that they were, at any time, actually being watched by an inspector. By contrast, the representational surveillance at the *Saline de Chaux* involved a mutual visibility, as

well as legibility, of opposing facades. The character and social contents of the workers' lodges were revealed in precisely the same way as those of the director's house: the metaphorical transparency of the architecture worked equally well in either direction. Returning to the theater analogy, it was as though both "stage" and "audience" were performing for one another's benefit rather than, as with the panopticon, the "stage" or tower serving as the inscrutable origin of an invisible, anonymous gaze.

The third problem with adapting the *Saline de Chaux* to the panoptic model is the lack of an individualizing social diagram. Panopticism, in Foucault's analysis, involved the division of a social collectivity into a fixed array of slots, in which individuals could be systematically compared, tabulated and surveyed from a single point: "the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of individualities."¹² Ledoux's social scheme, by contrast, produces a nesting of collectivities. The director's house faces not a row of individual inhabitations, but rather the gatehouse and a series of communal lodges; in turn, the lodges each contains two residential wings around a central pavilion and hearth; and each wing contains a series of private chambers. The geometry of the *Saline de Chaux* implies a hierarchical ordering of semi-autonomous groups, from factory down to family; it does not, as in Bentham's Panopticon, imply an arrangement of atomized subjects beneath an anonymous gaze. It is difficult, therefore, to maintain that the utopian contents of the *Saline de Chaux*, even its overt suggestions of surveillance and transparency, correspond with a specifically panoptic desire.

If the design of the *Saline* was not, in fact, panoptic, then what was it designed to do in the realms of subjectivity and surveillance? How might the power of the geometry have been expected to operate? In his analysis of the issue, Anthony Vidler largely evades these questions. Acknowledging a number of functional reasons that the *Saline* is not a panopticon, Vidler writes that "the semicircle was less a *machine à surveiller* than a symbol of such surveillance."¹³ Concerning this problematic symbolism, however, he amplifies the ambiguity of its possible meaning through two conflicting suggestions. In one passage, he refers to the symbolism as "constructed geometrically around an 'enlightened center' with communal spaces for its workforce and with radial axes spreading into the countryside... in every aspect the type of Enlightenment city, following the social

idealism of Jean Jacques Rousseau and the mathematical rationalism of Etienne de Condillac."¹⁴ In a second passage, he asserts that "Ledoux's 'surveillance' appears to have been the aesthetic registration of a ramified system of oversight already functioning and in place, rather than the invention of a new system of worker controls."¹⁵ In the first case, one finds the suggestion that Ledoux has created an idealistic, revolutionary scheme thoroughly at odds with the closed, feudal and absolutist society that it was designed to house. Thus, the *Saline* somehow symbolized various utopian dreams of the *Philosophes*, both their political ideals and their rational cosmologies. In the second case, there is the suggestion that Ledoux, far from creating something visionary or revolutionizing, has merely aestheticized a system of surveillance already well established. He has merely dressed up the *Ancien Régime* in a new set of architectural clothes. In fact, it seems as though Vidler would like to suggest that the *Saline* symbolized both of these extremes, and much more besides. In fact, it is something in the nature of a symbol that it can represent many contradictory ideas at once.

More useful, perhaps, than the question as to what the *Saline de Chaux* represented or symbolized is the question as to how it focused the movements and perceptions of inhabitation. In order to address the issues of surveillance and visual authority in Ledoux's design, it is probably necessary to abandon the notion of the *Saline* as mere symbol, precocious or retardataire, of some other, more concrete power. It is then necessary to ask rather how Ledoux's design, in and of itself, channeled social order in the visual field. In effect, the *Saline de Chaux* demands reevaluation of the intersections among power, visibility and architecture during the Enlightenment, as well as a closer look at the limits of panopticism as an architectural enterprise.

One issue, then, is the very concept of surveillance or of a gaze in Ledoux's project, and the place at which such a phenomenon arises most explicitly is in his design for the director's house. If the director's house effected a certain type of gaze, this gaze may have functioned, not in the manner of a panoptic tower, but rather in the manner of a stern, paternalistic mansion, with its proprietary prospect over a geometrically carved landscape. In this way, it may have been an object of fear, a prosthetic extension of the punitive look of the director. The possibility of being seen from the director's house could be read negatively as the field of the gaze to be avoided. In that case, the

elevation of the house would function in the manner of Sartre's wartime phenomenon in which the gaze is apprehended as a "white farmhouse which is outlined against the sky at the top of a little hill."¹⁶ Here, the gaze is that dangerous, hostile force which reveals and exposes. The director's house might similarly be seen as the gaze from which to quickly escape; the workers are made to hurry across the open semi-circle between the buildings in order not to be caught idling between tasks. The director's house, then, would seem to serve the negative role of keeping the workers hidden within those interior spaces in which labor and communal life were closely organized. In this way, the director's house, in as far as it held the offices of the king's representative might, embodied that territorial gaze over a geometric landscape through which one was not to trespass except under the orders and service of the monarch.

Such an interpretation, however, seems more literal and heavy-handed than Ledoux's aestheticizing prose would imply. Moreover, it does not resolve the fact that the director's house was designed explicitly as an object to be looked at and contemplated in its own right. Describing an ideal apprehension of the director's house, Ledoux states that "the crowning aspect, in its haughty facade, commands all who approach it to bow their heads. The square and cylindrical courses of the columns, terrifying at a distance, recoil and produce deep shadows, sharp effects; these artful combinations change their effects in the same proportion that the sun lays its methodical course."¹⁷ Even as the house was designed to be sublime and terrifying, it was also fascinating and seductive. The sublime aspect of the house and its direct comparison with the movement of the sun promised that somewhere behind the mere appearance of an official building, lay the transcendent gaze of nature itself. When Ledoux describes the grand geometry of surveillance, he describes, not any mundane notion of administrative oversight, but rather a metaphysical eye which penetrates the ordinary boundaries of space, time and opacity. From the position of the director's house, "the present merges with the centuries: placed at the center of the rays, nothing escapes surveillance, she has a hundred eyes open while a hundred others are asleep, and the pupils of these ardent

eyes tirelessly illuminate the restless night."¹⁸ In Ledoux's treatise, surveillance is imagined as an abstract, transcendent divinity, and the director's house becomes the temple that serves as her icon. This is a gaze which can be neither apprehended nor embodied; it is a gaze whose agency is analogous to that of light. In these circumstances, the director's house, both as a geometric apparition and as a solid object, mediates between the eye of the enraptured spectator and an unembodied surveillance that is both feared and solicited. This is the situation suggested by Ledoux's own prose, but it remains to be seen how it might be made to function in his architecture.

Situations of the Eye: Frameworks of Spatial Identity

For this other gaze, not the conscious awareness of being seen and not the phenomenological experience of being surveyed, but rather that gaze which is solicited as the object of an impossible desire, it is useful to turn to certain theories of Jacques Lacan. It is, in fact from this notion of the gaze that Lacan reveals the limitations posed by phenomenological construction of the being-seen. To Sartre's paradigmatic example of the conscious subject being reduced to shame by the gaze of the other, the seeing subject caught in the act of seeing, Lacan asks: "Is it not clear that the gaze intervenes here only in as much as it is not the annihilating subject, correlative of the world of objectivity who feels himself surprised, but the subject sustaining himself in the function of desire?"¹⁹ For Lacan the subject is not some self-reflexive, self-evident point of consciousness, but rather a fictional construction, precipitated by the gaze and sustained by the subject's constant search to recapture the gaze through the scopic drive. At the *Saline de Chaux*, surveillance is deployed in as far as individual subjects are enticed to seek out the evidence of surveillance in the hierarchy of facades and to the extent that they then map themselves as objects within that architectural space. The gaze presents itself as an architectural lure, the terrifying shadows and shimmering forms, in which the subject finds a spatial identity.



Figure 2. Pavilion for workers' lodgings—elevation facing the director's house (from Ledoux, Claude-Nicolas, *L'Architecture Considérée...*). Courtesy of Special Collections Department, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

In this function of the gaze, the notion of a “theater of production” must be extended beyond the semi-circular plan, and the optics thereby implied, in order to include the idea of theatricality as a mode of display, masking and representation. The elevations of the *Saline de Chaux* were designed as participants in a vast spectacle whose drama extended into the landscape and implicated the viewer within a scenographic illusion of infinite vision [Figure 2]. Describing the elevations of the workers' buildings, Ledoux writes: “Half the buildings are covered in transparent shadows. The other half offer a penetrating light whose brilliance could compete for the attention of the eyes with that beauty which is the origin of earthly delights. The bases are imprinted with melancholy colors: Mount St. André, which terminates the horizon, offers its gloomy shades in the distance, and the shining hill opposing it, transports the imagination across an immense plain. What a tableau!”²⁰ The view, in this instance, is that provided at some point in front of the director's house, from which the circle of buildings is the geometric foreground of an immense stage-set. The urns of petrified water that spill out of the

buildings display the character of their inhabitants' occupation, even as they obscure the inhabitants themselves. Surveillance becomes theatricalized as a display of architectural surfaces caught in a web of absolutizing geometries, and panoramic vistas.

It is by looking back from the portico of the director's house that one could map one's place within the scheme of the factory. The workers could see the subordinated outlines of their quarters, the guards could see the threshold over which they stood watch, and the travelers could see the distances from which they had arrived. One literally had a picture of one's place in this geometric universe. The picture was a schematized image of spatial identity: worker, guard and outsider, identified with the metonymic forms of place and of architecture. It were as though one could see oneself through the gaze of the director's house. The gaze, for Lacan, was that which produced the subject as a picture. In his diagram of the eye and the gaze, Lacan sets each term as an opposing geometric point, each the apex of a triangle that overlaps the other, such that the eye corresponds to the subject who sees, while the gaze is that which

captures and defines that subject. "I must," states Lacan, "insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture."²¹ If the subject becomes a picture under the gaze, it is not as a geometric point, but rather through the mediation of a screen, the mask by which the subject is marked in the field of the gaze. As previously noted, the buildings of the *Saline* were only metaphorically transparent; in fact, it was their very opacity that allowed for the play of power and desire, that temporarily stopped the movement of the eye through perspectival space and presented a mediating representation. In Lacan's description: "the Correlative of the picture, to be situated in the same place as it, that is to say, outside, is the point of the gaze, while that which forms the mediation from one to the other, that which is between the two, is something of another nature than geometrical, optical space, something that plays an exactly reverse role, which operates, not because it can be traversed, but on the contrary because it is opaque — I mean the screen."²² At the *Saline de Chaux*, it is the forms of the buildings, the details of their facades and their positions in the landscape that constitute the architectural screens of a spatial subjectivity. In as far as the director's house is constituted as a temple of surveillance, it framed those tableaux within which spatial identities could take shape.

It is no accident that Ledoux was simultaneously involved in the design for an actual theater for the City of Besançon in which he had contemplated the ambiguities of theatrical spectatorship. In his famous conceptual sketch for the theater, Ledoux drew the tiers of seating reflected from the pupil of an eye peering out from a point near the center of the stage [Figure 3]. From within the eye, or alternatively from the reflected theater, a large beam of light appears to radiate downwards. As at the *Saline de Chaux*, the lines of spectatorship have been reversed and the place of the audience has become the object of spectacle. It is as when the actor suddenly looks at the spectators; the eye looks back. Ledoux magnifies that eye, and in its magnified form the eye becomes, not a tunnel to the soul, but a mirror to that which it surveys. The reflection in the pupil marks the position of the eye as an object on the stage. The eye is mapped into the space even as the space is inscribed in the eye, and the frame of the pupil is itself framed by the semi-circle of the theater. It is with this sense of doubling back and reversal that the director's house becomes both an object

suspended in the visual field and a place from which that field appears to emanate. Stated another way, the director's house was an austere but richly textured monument, which invited the eye to possess its form and linger over its surfaces, but it was also simultaneously a metonymic representation of a power by which individuals were subjected to various classifications, identities and hierarchies. The house stood as an architectural screen between this eye and the gaze that determined the eye's social place.

While the elevations and outward forms of the buildings produced the screens upon which the eye could fix its spatial identities, the architectural plan contained the structures and hierarchies according to which those spatial identities were arranged and fixed. It was at the level of the plan that Ledoux saw himself imprinting the laws of sociability on the various inhabitants. Each wing of workers' housing was designed as a separate, small community, united around a communal hearth that served as its social center. Describing how he imagines the workers to inhabit these places, Ledoux writes: "These men, concentrated in these favorable places, grow and multiply their existence under the laws of nature; each worker possesses the secrets of the gods; surrounded by the sweetest illusions, he is with his wife and with his children during the hours destined to repose; he is sheltered from all the costly distractions and Dionysian deliria which can disrupt the marital pact, tempt or snare into idleness."²³ This utopian fantasy of paternal and familial life within an innocently tribal community, a utopian ideal not far from that of Rousseau, dictated a social and moral order by which the inhabitants would ideally be arranged. More importantly perhaps, this scenario described a set of sentimental associations between the inhabitants' place within the building and their corresponding sense of belonging to a social grouping. Identities were being mapped into architectural spaces. In elevation, the communal spaces would be marked by the raised pavilions, and the communal fires were to have been visible as plumes of smoke rising from their tops, and such identities were then embodied as metonymic forms. The architectural gaze, which organized the workers' buildings from some invisible point inside the director's house, was then designed to fix and subordinate those smaller communal identities within a larger orbit of power.

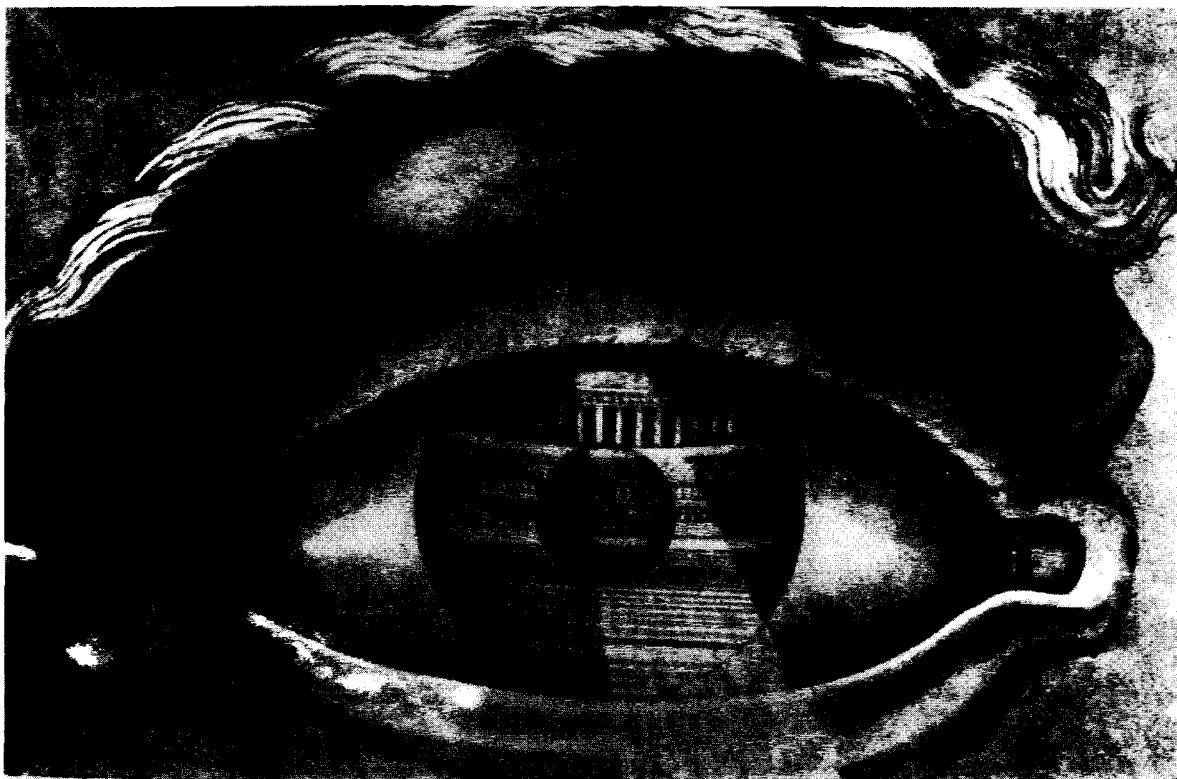


Figure 3. Theater of Besançon—above, conceptual drawing of theater with tiers of seats reflected in the pupil of an eye—below, sectional perspective of theater interior(from Ledoux, Claude-Nicolas, *L'Architecture Considérée...*). Courtesy of Special Collections Department, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

The visual structure of such spatial identifications can be explained by the action of that same *méconnaissance* by which the subject is able to form any specular image of its own existence. In his “Mirror Stage” essay, Lacan describes the precipitation of the subject in that paradigmatic experience, in which the subject, upon perceiving its body in the mirror, identifies with the completeness of that *Gestalt*, as the sign of its own unified existence. Lacan describes the phenomenon as “a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.”²⁴ Buildings, in their metonymic relation with habitation, become the spatial lures by which identities are assumed and the fate of the *corps morcelé* of an individual subject is paralleled by the identification of a complex social class with the unified *Gestalt* of a communal building. Finally, the unified form

of the entire *Saline de Chaux*, held in the seductive orbit of that gaze which is at its center, allows the subject caught in the chaotic conflicts of a *société morcelée* to identify with the illusory form of a unified social body.

The Movement of Desire: Architecture of the Scopic Drive

It is not merely from some static geometry of the plan, however, that visual desire is made to function. Rather, it is in the sequential movements through space that the viewing subject is caught and pulled forward along a certain path. Inscribed into the *Saline de Chaux* was a ritualistic path that led from the countryside, along the symmetrical axis through the gatehouse, across the open semi-circle and into the director’s house, inside of which Ledoux had designed a chapel to the Supreme Being. Vidler describes this path as “an allegory of natural, industrial and spiritual power marked at each step by architectural motifs,” the sequence of which “established a narrative that moved from nature to worship.”²⁵ Perception was directed along a chain of visual experiences, each framing and anticipating the next. Guided



Figure 4. Entrance pavilion with portico and internal grotto—frontal perspective, sections parallel to main axis (from Ledoux, Claude-Nicolas, *L'Architecture Considérée...*). Courtesy of Special Collections Department, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

along the syntax of this changing axis, vision was always enticed by the promise of a 'through' and a 'beyond.'

The formal structure of this narrative path can be traced to the initiation rites of contemporary Freemasonic lodges.²⁶ Such rituals were punctuated by the repetition of threshold and entry, designed at the most significant moments, as a movement through a dark enclosure into a space of brilliant light. In the ritual axis of the *Saline de Chaux*, the path crossed the boundary of the River Louë and continued through the open countryside straight towards the monumental gate marked, like the Athenian Propylaia, by six monumental Doric columns with a wider opening in the center. From a distance, the columns stood as a screen to a dark opacity beyond. Passing between these columns, one entered a grotto that was sculpted into the interior of the porticoed entry gate [Figure 4]. The grotto was designed to awe the spectator, its rocks assembled in an enormous vault as though "giants had detached the craggy summits of mountains in order to assemble them in a pile."²⁷ At the center of this shadowy, subterranean *mise-en-scène*, appeared the

rectangular portal that framed the director's house as a bright object in the distance. Following the gleam of this pristine temple, one entered into open space of the semi-circle. Passing the portico of the director's house, one entered the darkness of a vestibule, beyond which a stairway rose up to a chapel illuminated as a temple of light. This dialectical system of light-into-dark-into-light, repeated in variation, provided the theme by which the path was structured as an endlessly interesting ritual.

It is in this type of linear, syntactical repetition, visible in the ritualistic path at the *Saline de Chaux*, that one may recognize that sliding away of the signifier by which Lacan describes the movement of desire. It is in the context of repetition that Lacan states that "if the subject is the subject of the signifier — determined by it — one may imagine the synchronic network as it appears in the diachrony of preferential effects."²⁸ It is in the act of repetition that the primal scene is represented to the subject, yet it is in a manner that slides ever further from the original of which it is only a representation. The unconscious nucleus around which the

synchronic pattern is structured, achieves its temporal dimension as a sliding away in the repetition. It is from the structure of repetition that Lacan finds a path into the scopic drive in the field of the gaze. Vision is not dissimilar to the compulsion to repeat, so that “in our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it — that is what we call the gaze.”²⁹ The gaze, in other words, is that which lies behind the desire to see, but that which is repeatedly grasped in vision is never the gaze as such. Therefore, one never sees what one wishes to see, and one is continually driven to see beyond and through; in the next image the dialectic is repeated, the result always unsatisfying.

At the *Saline de Chaux*, the path through the architecture provides a lure not available to painting: the possibility of walking through the various screens and veils; the possibility of playing a spatial game of *fort-da* in which various symbols and lures appear and disappear.³⁰ Desire is given the temporary illusion of fulfillment as ambulatory movements appear to bring the visitor into the imagined other side of those architectural objects of desire. The visitor who reaches the other side, however, only discovers a new lure, which is a variation on the old. When Ledoux consistently instructs his readers to look at his designs, to be seduced by them, he generally also refers to something that the architecture represents but that is beyond anything drawn in the picture. About the grotto of the entry gate, Ledoux writes, “The shadows, incomplete images of this perfect monument, reflect their transparency and harmonize with the morning star in order to allow that opposing body to shine. The tableau is terminated by the columns which illuminate the obscurity of the night, and which the dawn causes to dissipate.”³¹ The movement through the grotto into the semi-circle is compared with experiences of night and morning, and the director’s house becomes celestialized as morning star and sunrise. Such figurative language, however far-fetched and hypothetical, clearly describes the wish embedded in the initiatory path: the play on darkness and light as the representation of some transcendental reappearance. In the reappearance, in the lifting of the veil, one perceives the dialectic of desire.

The initiatory path spatialized the scopic drive. One screen, one tableau after another, allowed itself to be approached and penetrated. Nothing was ever revealed except for a new

screen by which the path was extended. In the chapel, however, the path did achieve a certain kind of end. Appropriately enough, the chapel was inside that one building that seemed most fully to embody the gaze, the point within which a theatrical surveillance emanated, the house of the director and of monarchical authority. The approach to the chapel was up a long flight of steps [Figure 5]. At the very summit of the stairs stood the altar of light, before which Ledoux depicted a lone worshiper with upraised arms. The altar itself is, in fact, nothing but an empty niche, a gaping hole before a blank wall. There is nothing to look at except for the play of light against the wall; there is nothing to pull the eye beyond anything other than the flat opacity of the masonry. The wall is the end of the path as well as the end of the visual chain of seduction. At the imagined source of the gaze, one finds merely the illumination of hollowness and opacity.

Vidler explains this stark iconoclasm in terms of Freemasonic ideals, such that “by transforming the chapel into a primitive mountain, with its flight of forty steps, terraced for the assembly of the different ranks of workers, employees and overseers, Ledoux returned what he hoped would be a natural society of production back to the origins of worship in a generalized version of Freemasonic brotherhood.”³² Original worship, conceived as a direct link to nature, could not be mediated by the substitutes of iconographic representation. The empty niche surrounded the unrepresentable object: light itself. Ledoux describes the necessity of “raising the stairs which recall the lofty skies, the towering mountains and which place between humanity and divinity, that incommensurable distance, which the imagination reaches towards but cannot attain.”³³ The end of the path towards transcendent fulfillment through vision thus ends in a demonstration of its non-attainability. The scopic drive, in a sense, is driven to its limits.

On another level, the empty niche, the gaping hole which is to be filled only by light, reveals the lack that is at the center of Ledoux’s net of architectural desire. Architecture, which elsewhere on the initiatory path had been presented as objects or screens, points of entry for the specular imagination, was present here only as a negative space. The space itself vacillates between two alternative moments. In the one instance, a bright light overwhelms the space, obscuring almost everything but the experience of the light itself; materiality appears transcended. In the other instance, a rainy day perhaps, the light recedes and the viewer is

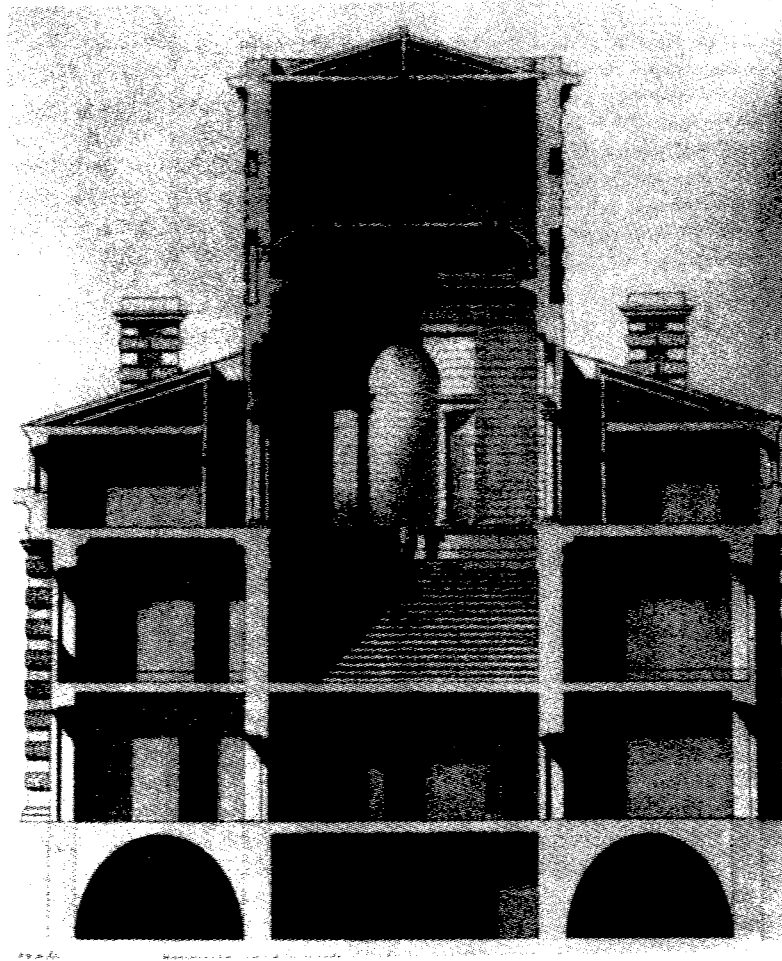


Figure 5. Director's house—section perpendicular to main axis, showing steps with chapel.(from Ledoux, Claude-Nicolas, *L'Architecture Considérée....*) Courtesy of Special Collections Department, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

confronted by a shallow archway behind which appears only the vast greyness of an empty wall. It is in this second instance that one might identify that which Lacan perceived in the anamorphic skull, "the subject as annihilated—annihilated in the form that is, strictly speaking, the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* of castration, which for us, centres the whole organization of the desires through the framework of the fundamental drives."³⁴ The traveler along Ledoux's path of desire, upon finally reaching that inner sanctum which appears as the goal, is confronted by that emptiness by which architecture reveals itself as void and the lure is either displaced into light or else shown as false.

Archaeological Note

Against the analysis here presented, it might be objected that Ledoux's overwrought prose and excitable imagination bear little demonstrable relationship to the institutionalized or emergent modes of 18th-century disciplinary practice, that the scopic desire at the *Saline de Chaux* belongs most properly to the architect mesmerized by his own creation, and that Lacan's theories present a dubious overinterpretation of an elegant but straightforward arrangement of buildings. As to the first objection, one must remember that Bentham's Panopticon too, in the first instance, arose as a utopian fantasy. The fact that Foucault was able to trace a myriad of concrete, panoptic instrumentalities, both before and after Bentham's scheme, magnifies the power of the Panopticon's dream wish for a transparent

society. Conversely, Ledoux's utopian geometry did not arise from a cultural vacuum, and it is likely that an archaeology of theaters, libraries, gardens and city squares from the 18th-century and later would contain social instrumentalities not unrelated to those imagined by Ledoux at the *Saline de Chaux*. If Ledoux's descriptions demonstrate little in as far as how the *Saline de Chaux* might have been experienced by actual, historical inhabitants, it demonstrates quite effectively an Enlightenment model for harmonious social order that diverged considerably from panopticism. It remains, to be seen, then, just to what extent Ledoux's model has penetrated into the foundations of modernity and its disciplines. The use of Lacan in this essay has been neither for the purposes of mystifying Ledoux, nor for the purposes of promoting a Lacanian model of subjectivity over a Foucauldian one. Rather, the point has been to bring out an intriguing point of convergence between the ideal operation of the *Saline de Chaux* and a psychoanalytic account of the desiring subject. I suspect that other accounts could equally be brought to bear on Ledoux's design. Lacanian theory, in this context, is not to be considered a final analysis, but rather the opening of a new path in the history of the Enlightenment.

That complex web of signification, which is wrought by the association of architectural form and social discourse and which arises as a dense, narrativized vision in Ledoux's treatise, refuses that stability implied by the sharpness of the perspectival lines. In the *Saline de Chaux* project that lies scattered among these pages one can trace the spatial archaeology of the Lacanian gaze by which the scopic subject apprehends its own disappearance. Text and image each channel and inform the reading of the other, both containing and diversifying the universe of significations. In taking Ledoux's *L'Architecture Considérée* seriously as an architectural project, therefore, one also obtains the means to enter the spaces as they are mediated by a precipitating set of social discourses. To discover Lacan in these pages is neither to decontextualize Lacan nor to dehistoricize Ledoux. It is, perhaps, to give Lacan a prehistory and Ledoux a second look.

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Notes

¹ Ledoux narrativized his collected architectural projects, both built and imagined, so that the reader was imaginatively drawn into the plans and touristically guided across a panorama of perspectival spaces, within which utopian societies were manifested as architectural forms.

² Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture Considérée...* (Nordlingen: Uhl Verlag, 1981), 180.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ In the mid-18th-century, salt remained both a precious commodity and a monopoly of the crown. The *Saline*, therefore, was much more than a mere workshop. It was also a point of absolute authority over the use of the land and the possession of its resources. To guard against smuggling and similar breaches of authority, the *Saline* was developed as a closed community of workers who were subject to constant surveillance.

⁵ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture Considérée...*, 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁸ Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁰ There was no special window in the director's house from which the workers' activities were to be consistently spied upon, and the majority of supervision took place according to quite traditional methods, inside the workshops and factory buildings and at the secured entrance to the factory. See also Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 114.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 201–2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 201.

¹³ Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113–14.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1992), 346.

¹⁷ Ledoux, Claude-Nicolas, *L'Architecture Considérée...*, 134.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, W.W. Norton, 1981), 84–5.

²⁰ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture Considérée*, 112.

²¹ Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.106.

²² *Ibid.*, 96.

²³ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture Considérée...*, 111.

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 4.

²⁵ Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 114.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 114-9, 337-43.

²⁷ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture Consideree...*, 107.

²⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 67.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁰ *Fort-da* (German for 'gone - here ') refers to a child's game discussed by Sigmund Freud in the context of a child's attempt to master the phenomenon of the mother's appearance and

disappearance by substituting a spool for the mother. Lacan discusses Freud's analysis of the game, particularly those aspects that deal with the problems of desire and repetition. See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental concepts of Psychanalysis*, 62, 239.

³¹ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture Consideree...*, 107.

³² Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux*, 119.

³³ Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture Consideree...*, 143.

³⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 106.

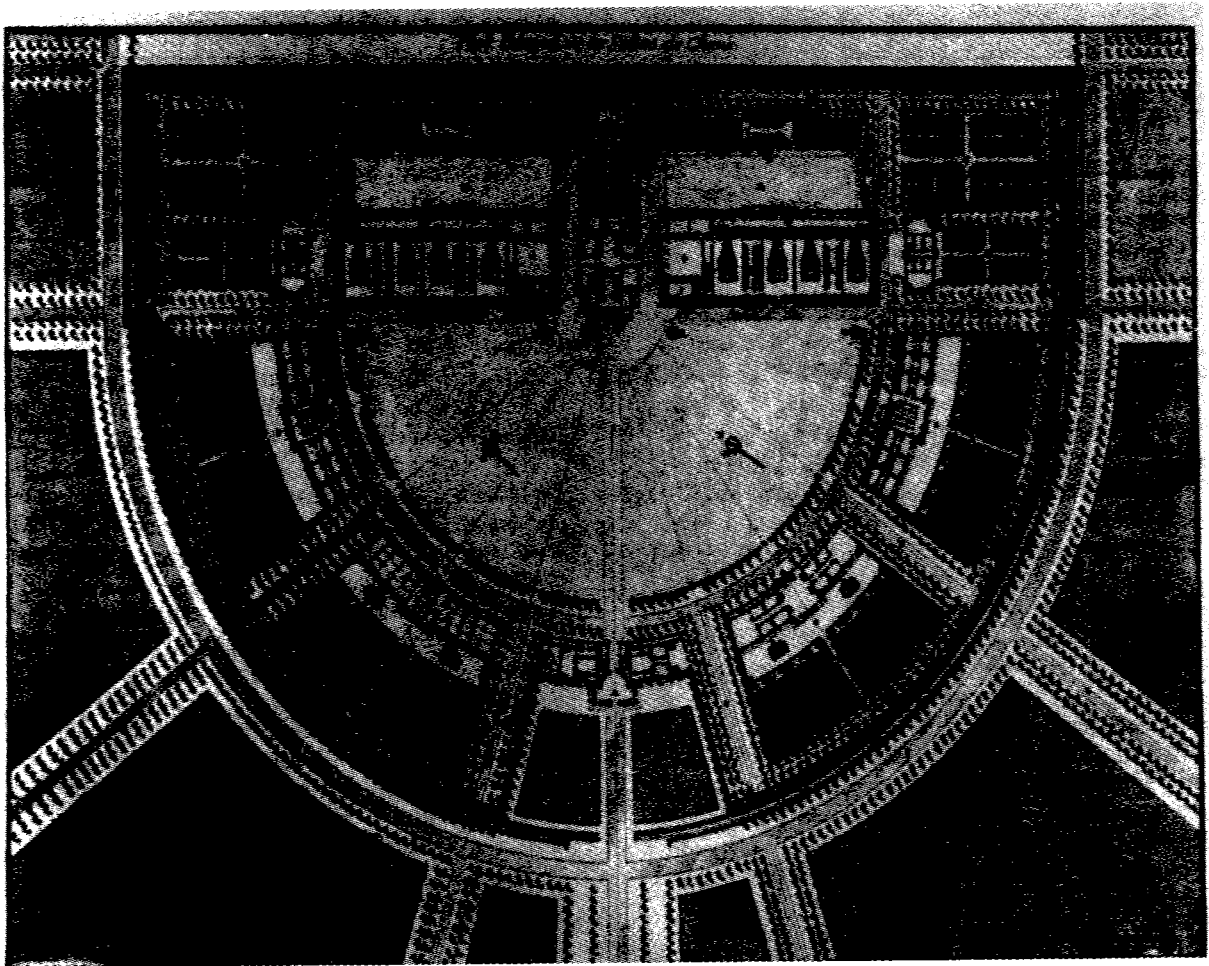


Figure 1. *Saline de Chaux*—general plan of the factory town (from Ledoux, Claude-Nicolas, *L'Architecture Considérée...*). Courtesy of Special Collections Department, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.