

Why Architecture Matters

Several years ago, I was in Washington D.C., going to the classic tourist spots and visiting several of the popular Smithsonian museums. Because I heavily relied on walking to get from place to place, I passed by many interesting sights that I wasn't otherwise touring, such as the White House or the U.S. Capitol. But among the buildings that I saw in my walking escapades was one that stood out: the [J. Edgar Hoover Building](#), which houses the FBI headquarters.

While the Capitol and White House were striking in their aesthetic appearances, the unadorned concrete of the J. Edgar Hoover Building loomed like a massive prison.



This building is only one example of such eyesore structures that often fill our cities. Outside of traditional churches or some (but certainly not all) government buildings, how often does the newest construction in our cities or towns seem beautiful and timeless?

So many buildings today lack character or aesthetic sensibility. Most office buildings look the same, and aside from the store's name or logo, most grocery or department stores are visually interchangeable.

The style of many of these industrial concrete boxes is called Brutalism. And like [many other modern styles of architecture](#), it isn't particularly concerned with creating a building with beautiful aesthetics. It focuses on function at the expense of form.

Luckily, not all our architecture is so dismal. In the same city as the Brutalist J. Edgar Hoover Building, we can see other federal buildings—such as the previously mentioned White House—that boast beautiful design. Reminiscent of Greek and

Roman architecture, [this style](#), called Neoclassicism, is a nod to the Western tradition that America is part of. Beyond just government buildings, the Gothic-style Notre-Dame cathedral is a stunning example of beautiful architecture. And in our own neighborhoods, we may find examples of well-designed buildings in traditional churches.

There's something uplifting and inspiring about the appearance of these buildings. It reminds us of the beauty in the world, shows us what humans are capable of creating, and, by doing these things, points us toward the divine. These buildings feel meaningful, and by marveling at them, we feel inspired with that meaning. We feel proud to be human.

Certainly, function is important—and form at the expense of function is impractical—and spending *exorbitant* quantities of money to create a more ornamental building may not always be the fiscally prudent decision. But there can be a place to balance form and function. Not every building has to match the likes of Notre-Dame, but shouldn't our churches reflect the beauty and glory of God? Don't we want our government buildings to be a positive reflection of our country? Don't we want our offices, schools, and homes to inspire us in our daily lives?

With all this said, it shouldn't be a surprise that Brutalism is strongly [associated](#) with socialism and communism. As Annie Holmquist explained in a previous *Intellectual Takeout* [article](#):

That connection makes sense, particularly in light of insights from author [W. Cleon Skousen in 1958](#). Skousen listed 45 goals that Communists had 'to soften America for the final takeover.' Two of them relate closely to the artistry of architecture:

22. Continue discrediting American culture by degrading all forms of artistic expression. An

American Communist cell was told to 'eliminate all good sculpture from parks and buildings, substitute shapeless, awkward and meaningless forms.'

23. Control art critics and directors of art museums. 'Our plan is to promote ugliness, repulsive, meaningless art.'

Soulless architecture makes us feel like drones or prisoners—just another cog in a meaningless machine. It's demoralizing.

Most of us aren't in the business of designing buildings, but we can still consider how our surroundings impact our lives. Are our homes cold, empty, and bare? Or are they decorated with beautiful art, meaningful objects, and inviting furniture? Do we put intention into the aesthetics of our spaces? By surrounding ourselves with beauty, we foster meaning in our lives. We make ourselves proud to live in our homes, our cities, and our country.

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