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Architecture as a Performing Art

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Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
110 Cherry Street
Suite 3-1
Burlington, VT 05401-3818
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Architecture as a performing art. -- (Ashgate studies in architecture)
I. Series II. Feuerstein, Marcia F. Ill. Read, Gray.
720.1'9-dc23

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:
Architecture as a performing art / [edited] by Marcia Feuerstein and Gray Read.
pages cm. -- (Ashgate studies in architecture)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
NA2542.A719 2012
720.1--dc23
2012034188

ISBN 9781409442356 (hbk)
ISBN 9781472411334 (ebk)

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG PRINTGROUP
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Acknowledgments

The process of bringing together this collection of essays has been a privilege and a pleasure. The book represents the generosity and cooperation of a group of scholars and designers dedicated to exploring the ideas that underlie architectural design. Their ongoing research, enthusiasm, and insights into the topic built this project from a conference discussion at the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture in Montreal into a far-ranging exposition of the essential intertwining of performance and design.

Several in particular have assisted the process by reviewing manuscripts and offering advice, including Sarah Bonnemaison, Paul Emmons, and Alberto Pérez-Gómez. Other colleagues reviewed manuscripts with honesty and precision along the way. We thank Roann Barris, Karen Bradley, Marina Giammattei, Amy Gilley, Rumiko Handa, Adam Hardy, Thomas Mical, and Madlen Simon. Joseph Rykwert and Raymond Quek were particularly helpful in guiding our efforts as the project took shape.

We also thank our respective universities, Virginia Tech's Washington–Alexandria Architecture Center, particularly Jaan Holt and Paul Emmons, for supporting the project both materially and academically, and Florida International University for a sabbatical leave that allowed time for concentrated focus.

Marina Marmelic has been an invaluable editorial assistant, who kept the manuscript on track. Finally, Ashgate editor and publisher Val Rose encouraged us from the start and cheerfully replied to all our queries throughout the process. This book represents the thoughtful, timely, and cooperative effort of those involved.
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Introduction: The Play’s the Thing

Gray Read

What if buildings were considered not as objects but as actors in the city, which perform with and among people in the small improvisations of urban life? What if design focused on how architecture acts, even without moving, in a thousand stories depending on the people, the place, and their interactions in the moment? From this point of view, an architect is akin to a theater director for he or she develops a building within a narrative of use, so that it may interact meaningfully with people and place. If director and architect embrace their multivalent ethical roles within a community, both aim for more than simple enactment or fulfillment of a functional “need.” Both have the power to craft situations that invite flashes of real understanding to ignite between people, so they may act thoughtfully in their own lives. Both architect and director set up the broad conditions of a situation, and then focus tightly on the details in order to open up events, like a well-made dinner party can open to free-flowing conversation that has nothing to do with food. A well-wrought performance seeks an ineffable chemistry, both planned and unplanned, so spectators and performers alike come away having shared something real together, while a well-wrought building opens to the events of life, both planned and unplanned, so that people can make the choices that define their lives.

The contributions presented here collectively explore the deep tradition of thought that casts architecture as both set and player in the ongoing theater of social life. They offer historical analyses of how architecture acts in the social world as well as examples of architectural experimentation in theater with real people in real time, which might enrich contemporary design practice. In these studies, memory and imagination merge, so looking back is a means to look forward and to speculate on how architects might act now.

In this collection, we focus on how people, places, and things interact in time in relation to each other, rather than on their separate identities, thus developing a heuristic approach associated with ecological thinking. First, we observe that architecture acts, albeit not as a human actor. Buildings are created things or, to use sociologist Bruno Latour’s term, “non-humans,” that act socially with people in
Secondly, we understand “performance” to include the social role-playing and negotiation of everyday life as well as formal, staged presentations. This definition is consistent with the work of contemporary scholars of performance who consider any action that is contrived to be seen (or read or heard or measured) by others as performance. So the swish of a dress on a summer day in the city is a performance by the person wearing the dress and by the dress itself. The city also has a role, as well as those who notice the subtle rustle that might be a flirt. From this point of view, the architect works behind the scenes, directing some of the non-human actors who perform every day in the city. Each decision by an architect, like those of a director, affects what happens in ways that he or she can intuit but not determine. A director’s vision emerges with and through actors, while an architect’s vision evolves within the social and physical practices of drawing and construction that create buildings, which act in the city.

This point of entry draws on ideas of “event” and “situation,” which continue to accumulate a rich meaning in many fields including architecture. An event is simply something that happens in a place and for a duration of time, so the emphasis is placed on action rather than object. “Situation” summons Jean-Paul Sartre’s assertion that freedom is meaningful only through choices made in a resisting world. In and through situations, one chooses who one will be. Sartre’s ideas extended into the Situationist movement in art and literature in the 1950s and 60s, which influenced a group of leading architects including Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas in particular, who build to provoke meaningful events among people.

A situation includes all those present as well as the objects, phenomena, and circumstances that play a role. From this point of view, the same movie seen on successive nights is a series of distinct events because the audience and the moment change. Likewise, the habitual activities within a building may have a cycle and rhythm, but are continually remade by the inhabitants who choose how they will use the spaces, even as the physical construct remains the same. The movie and the building perform in many events with a changing cast of active participants. From that point of entry, the intellectual project proposed by the essays presented here considers buildings not as objects in relation to other buildings or even as expressions of social structure or cultural aspirations, but primarily as actions in the world that make a difference in the social life of a place.

So how does architecture act? Theater director Peter Brook tells a story at the beginning of a treatise on theater that recognizes the power of architecture and of choice. He recalls trying to speak at a university on a stage in the glare of lights, where he could not see his audience. Suddenly he stopped, realizing that his words made no sense cast out into the darkness to no one in particular. At his request, Brook and the audience moved to a classroom, where they packed in together in close contact with each other. By sharing the space Brook could recognize the audience, not as an anonymous mass but as a group of students, and his talk became a conversation. As soon as he escaped the “one-way glass” of the stage, Brook could give his attention to the students, while they gave theirs to him, and talk could flow with ease. Brook stressed that attention is the most valuable gift
that one person can give to another and also the most difficult gift to hold. Actors who ask for attention are continually at risk of the sly creep of boredom. In his story, the classroom acted with Brook and the students to keep boredom at bay. Brook writes, “The essence of theater is in the mystery called ‘the present moment.’” He designs performances as structured conversations that emerge among actors and audience in a well-defined place and time. He challenges actors to speak with their bodies face-to-face with spectators, so they might feel every movement together in the moment. In 1972 Brook and his troupe visited desert towns in Africa, performing on a carpet they laid out on the ground. By stepping on the carpet an actor asked for the attention of those gathered and carried the burden of holding it. Stepping off the carpet, he or she became a spectator alongside others and re-entered the social role of being a stranger in the town. On the carpet a gesture or word could summon a fictional world that townspeople could embrace as a story, laughing with the slapstick and feeling with the characters, as they responded to both the actors and their neighbors. The carpet almost magically empowered actors to construct an imaginary elsewhere within the intense presence of townspeople gathered together, an elsewhere that was not exactly superimposed on the architecture of the town, but there nonetheless.

Laying down a carpet, or even drawing a circle in the dirt to designate a space, is a primary act of both theater and architecture. That act demarks a doubleness in the present, so that being there can be understood as simultaneously in a landscape and set apart from it, in the immediacy of time and set apart in an alternate time of a story, conversation, or other event. Brook describes theater as a multi-layered, human connection in the present moment that “releases the hidden collective potential of thought, image, feeling, myth, and trauma … so powerful that it can be dangerous.” In this sense, theater both opens up time and compounds space. To create this doubleness, Brook argues that theater needs only an empty space, someone who walks across it, and someone who watches. The space, by its emphatic emptiness, stands open to imagination.

In this conceptual framework, Brook’s work as a theater director is architectural. He creates a place and atmosphere, a situation, where the creative imagination of both actors and spectators can flourish. Brook’s carpet also gives the empty space of theater an edge, a threshold that one can leap or straddle, thus making the doubleness of theater tangible through an architectural gesture. Similarly, the threshold of a room defines a realm apart from its surroundings, for example a meeting room, dining room, or garden, where events can unfold with an independent sense of time and purpose, even while remaining in place and on the clock.

Much of modern theater focuses on drawing spectators into the ambiguity of acting in the story and acting in the social world simultaneously, highlighting the roles of the “real” world as performance and conversely casting theater as real, social action. Parables, parody, and political theater in particular walk this line, so actions on stage directly affect actions in life. For example, when director Augusto Boal returned to Argentina in the 1970s, governmental repression made meaningful traditional theater impossible, so he acted in the streets, devising events, in which
actors played in and on everyday life with the purpose of making the effects of political oppression felt. In this “invisible theater” passersby who watched or participated were provoked to think about their own situation, yet they might learn only later that the actions were pre-conceived. This form of theater clearly can be manipulative. Yet it occupies the same territory as architecture for it engages people unawares in the actions of daily life, and can invite them to see their own actions in an alternate story of “reality,” like opening a window can suddenly bring in the scents and sounds that remind us where we are. Boal effectively snapped open the narrative of daily life and cast passersby as “spectactors” (his term), erasing the distinction between actor and spectator. He acted so that the shock of double vision might spur citizens to action.

WHY THE ART OF ARCHITECTURAL PERFORMANCE IS IMPORTANT NOW

Most immediately, the skills to create theater are the skills of urbanism, the deft creation of places where people come together to speak and listen in the many forms of social encounter. Buildings play a part every day in the actions of those who inhabit them, often at the boundary of awareness, like Boal’s invisible theater. Metaphorically the city has always been the theater of urban life, the built microcosm where people act socially and strategically, often so that others will watch. The quality of urban life and the choices people make have much to do with how architecture organizes and presents people to each other and how it opens to the improvisations of life or resists them, for example Peter Brook insisted on finding a room better suited to the conversation he had in mind. Luckily the building was flexible enough to offer an acceptable room, although a nimbly designed building could act with more character than flaccidly accommodating his request.

Brook’s empty space of performance only works when surrounded by people. Its emptiness actively presses into the fullness of the city to make a place for thought and action. In desert towns in the Sahara, Brook learned by trial and error where and when to set out his carpet so an event would work well. In a notable failure, Brook laid the carpet in a narrow street and drew a crowd that was too big. The actors found themselves aggressively squeezed on all sides so they could neither think clearly nor connect with the spectators. Even the slapstick fell flat. The next day, they chose a public square on the edge of town where they drew a crowd mostly of children, so the improvisation took a different direction and everyone had fun. Throughout the trip, Brook experimented with the place and time of carpet plays, and each choice emerged in the character of the improvised event. Through these experiments, Brook learned to read city structure and the urban life it holds, so he could place the carpet strategically. Similarly, architects can hone urban sensibilities through observation and experimentation in the city, so the architectural spaces they press into the city might act skillfully with people in the performances of urban life. Such urban knowledge was long a part of an architect’s intellectual heritage, yet the erosion of cities in the twentieth century also eroded that base. Rebuilding now requires constructing anew the practice
of urban thinking. To remember historical urbanism through study and to learn contemporary urbanism through experiments that engage real people and places can enrich architectural imagination and build urban skill.

At a deeper level, thinking of architecture as performance reckons with the real by placing buildings back into time, focusing on how the physical design plays out among people—in the instant and over a long duration. To cast buildings as players in urban life suggests that their primary value is not in what they are but in what they do, as acts of imagination in and of the world. This shift from identity toward action turns away from treating buildings as autonomous objects to be seen or experienced by well-behaved viewers. The thing-ness of buildings seems to fade into the flow of events that subsumes them with people, systems, and phenomena.

Consider a street market, for instance, which changes from week to week and season to season. Which part is architecture? What is infrastructure and which part display, performance, or urban event? When architecture is an action, then it does not have to be a building. Currently, the profession is broadening to include practices that act solely in the virtual realm and those that reach out into the city to modify infrastructural systems in ways that may not leave a visible trace.

In this change of focus, the role of buildings broadens to become more social partner than disposable product. Bruno Latour half-jokingly calls everything that is not a human being “non-humans,” thus backhanding the social sciences for excluding the ecological/material world from studies of social behavior, “like the missing masses for a cosmologist trying to balance out the weight of the universe.” He enters the question by considering how designed objects act socially, for example he writes in detail about the mechanical chivalry of the door-closer, which acts with at least part of a doorman’s courtesy, yet extracts the person from the task. In his discussion, Latour queried the door-closer in an effort to propose an intellectual structure that gave non-humans an equal role, as actors who affect other actors, whether they engage humans or not.

The action-oriented shift in thinking, which Latour pursues in studies across several disciplines, demands that social actions be considered in the same terms as physical and ecological actions, for none are truly separable. From this base, one might ask how architecture acts in relationships between people and species other than human, or what the smallest modification in a landscape is that might spark a new situation. Thinking ecologically, all actions make changes in relationships that can induce other changes in a cascade or flow of effects, rippling far beyond the source. In this sense, design is a well-studied action embedded in a web of previous actions that coalesces in an identifiable thing, a building, which is then let loose from its architect to affect the continuing present, and open like a question for other actions to follow. In Latour’s terms, architecture acts across many arenas of description—political, social, cultural, theatrical, technological, medicinal, artistic, material, poetic, etc. Its actions have real consequences that can be observed and measured, limited only by the questions we ask.

The shift of thought that refocuses architects on making things happen rather than making things brings together two, seemingly contradictory, meanings of the words “performance” and “act.” In one sense, a car, an employee, and a building
“perform” insofar as they “act” effectively in the physical present. The car goes fast, the employee meets objectives and the building shelters and protects people as it was designed to do. Performance is measured against a standard: 0–60 acceleration time, miles-per-gallon, sales-per-month, and many other criteria that show changes to the physical and social world. This sort of performance is often called function. Alternatively an actor or musician “performs” insofar as he or she “acts,” representing something not present by telling a story or creating an ephemeral experience in a bracketed world identified as “not-real.” A musician’s performance may be measured in terms of right notes and wrong notes in following a score, but surely the truer judgment emerges in opening the mind and the heart to a shared spirit, across the threshold of “what if?” This kind of performance is usually called art.

A focus on actions rather than objects trumps this division by encompassing people and situations together in narratives of desire. A driver and car go fast together (also depending on a good road and gasoline, etc.) and a poetic desire to fly is as old as Icarus; an employee works a job, so person, task, and the things affected by the work conflate with a narrative of the company mission and personal identity; and the act of sheltering depends on the stories of both building and inhabitants. Similarly, a play or concert includes the actions of those presenting a narrative or song and those watching and listening, as well as the actions of the place, the set, and the story. Among them, the event opens to shared imagination and real choice. The performance of architecture with people in place is both physical and narrative. It plays a significant part in events that make measurable changes in the world and reflect on them simultaneously, often in the same move.

This collection of chapters on architecture, the most “real” of the arts, explores its intersection with the most “unreal” of the arts, theater, to find them wrapped around each other. The chapters are presented in two groups. In the first, “Designing Performance,” authors consider the act of making architecture. They focus on how architects work behind the scenes in the process of design to create entities that perform effectively either on stage or in daily life. This process reveals a rich negotiation between many actors, both human and non-human, that continues in the performance of the finished work. The second group of essays, “Performing Design” explores how buildings perform in the city with and among people. In particular, authors consider how both architecture and theater create the ambiguous thresholds that frame play as life and life as play, and look at how people straddle and cross them. As playwright Tom Stoppard bluntly observes, every exit is an entrance somewhere else.19

**DESIGNING PERFORMANCE**

Two studies open the drama by reaching into ancient stories of the origin and acts of architecture. Alberto Pérez-Gómez revisits the Vitruvian story of the birth of architecture to find a clearing, similar to Brook’s open space, where people
gather to give attention to each other and open their minds to the breath of the spirit and the voice of stories. This primary act of architecture coincides with the mythic creation of language and culture. Lisa Landrum follows in a second act that reconstructs an original understanding of architectural acts in a play by Aristophanes. “To architect” is recognized as a civic act, which creates conditions for peace and the good of the polis. Framed in this way, architecture is less an object than an action of bringing people together, so they can speak and listen. Both contributions rediscover an ancient architectural tradition that places narrative and dramatic interaction at the heart of social life.

Within the large scope of “to architect,” the defining action of a designer is to draw, to commit line to paper. Paul Emmons and Carolina Dayer examine this seemingly direct act to find an instant-to-instant improvisation between drawer and drawing. As an example, they look closely at the work of artist Paul Klee to find high-risk feats of line that solidify the actions of drawer, pen, ink, paper, and viewer in non-moving motion.

How the actions of life intersect the actions of design is the focus of Sarah Bonnemaison’s study of the invention of a modern apartment kitchen. The daily patterns of cooking and eating in Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation contain within them the personal history and the process of design undertaken by the designer of the kitchens, Charlotte Perriand, as she navigated between efficiency studies, the long-held traditions of family life, and a modern role for women in the city.

In Latour’s terms, the cast of characters in Bonnemaison’s story might include, in addition to Perriand herself: kitchen appliances, American home economics, an image of a woman preparing a salad, and post-WWII reconstruction. Latour would give each of these entities equal footing as actors that affect others, so no special ontological privilege is given to people over objects, concepts, or events. Some of their interaction is still embedded in the habits of apartment dwellers, even as conditions change and new bargains are struck.

A reading of architecture as ongoing action within time emerges clearly in Peter Goché’s photographs of performances centered on buildings that act in the present by recalling the roles they played in the past. The buildings, which have survived change and reuse, are central characters in Goché’s slow, ritual-like events. The experiential character revealed in performance suggests that the buildings have a presence as part of the landscape, which grows stronger through their adaptation or resistance to change.

In the last act of this section, Tim Gray and Melli Hoppe incite an old building to become a player in the process of design and performances presented by students of architecture and students of theater. As part of a design studio, the two groups interacted with a gutted theater building by creating objects and movements that modified the structure and occupied it in new ways. The students built and performed in creative negotiation with the place, with each other, and ultimately with a larger group who came to watch the performance.

In these chapters the process of design emerges as interaction, improvisation, and negotiation between many actors, which remains embedded in whatever is
produced and continues to play in the ongoing present. The inquisitiveness and joy of design at its best lays the groundwork for architecture that is sustainable in both fact and spirit.

**PERFORMING DESIGN**

Performance theorist Richard Schechner writes that when he performs he feels that he is “not me, and not not me either.” His double negative (and logical contradiction) conveys the ambiguity that defines theater, as well as the elusive nature of identity in the first place. To cast architecture in that suspension recovers its playful seriousness in the sense that buildings propose a utopian world (a non-place) at the same time that they modify the physical world that is clearly not a non-place. Architecture catches us in a double bind.

The Italian baroque theater in particular played on the ambiguity of street and stage, casting architecture as scenery and scenery as architecture, citizens as players and players as citizens. In the 1550s Sebastiano Serlio published a set of drawings for stage settings that depict the proper place for tragedy, comedy, and satire: tragedy required the town square where the king’s actions represented the state; comedy resided in the courtyards and interiors of palaces where the domestic life of the nobility unfolded as a soap opera; satire, raucous and sexual, was unleashed in the countryside. Serlio’s idea that the city was a place for the weighty performances of public life was articulated particularly powerfully in the architecture of a theater built in Sabbioneta, Italy in the late sixteenth century. Ann Marie Borys invites us into the double bind of a building that engulfs spectators in a vision of an ideal city, casting the theater as city and city as set. Through illusion, allusion, and projection, the theater in Sabbioneta juxtaposes the world of the play with that of the city, setting up a shock of recognition at the threshold.

In contrast, the countryside made a setting for satire. Tracey Winton examines how Palladio’s Villa Rotonda, perhaps the most-studied building in Western architectural history, frames the fields around it as the realm of the satyr, the sexual trickster. By recognizing a counterpoint between the villa in the country and Palladio’s other project in Vicenza, the Teatro Olimpico in the center of town, Winton analyzes the villa not as a geometrical object but as a theatrical viewing box. This shift in scholarly approach puts people back into the scene and puts the building into time as a narrative and into place as an act of landscape.

In Serlio’s scheme if the urban scene is suited for the momentous events of tragedy, then what of festival—the few days every year when the city is purloined for pleasure? Mikhail Bakhtin notably called medieval festival “the world upside down,” when peasants rule the unruly streets in an orderly disorder that somehow returns to normal right on time. Playing an urban scene as revel and satire surely turns the serious architecture of the city into a landscape of adventure. Urban festivals, surviving in contemporary Mardi Gras and other holidays, overrule
architecture in acts of theater that can throw the deeper structures of social life into question, twisting one’s point of view or reigniting memories of how the existing hegemony came to be.23

Carnival’s annual reversal of city and theater is a community event that has survived from medieval holy days to contemporary urban raucousness. Everyone is both actor and spectator. In view of this lineage, Louise Pelletier considers the architectural action of Oscar Niemeyer’s Sambodromo in Rio de Janeiro, a street stadium which presents festival parades as spectacles for tourist entertainment, turning Bacchanalia to profit and banishing satire to the margins.

If satire is the voice of festival, then its tone is playful and its topic political. Christine Macy offers an example from nineteenth-century Germany in which disenfranchised residents adopted the satiric wit of a traditional festival parade to make their grievances heard. They acted together in the playful realm of festival to appropriate the streets and to prod the political structure toward change, thus architecting a peaceful transition toward more inclusive government.

In both cases, carnival bares the push and pull of power by occupying the city while defining the actions as play in a not-serious time out of time. The mask of “not-me,” particularly of a joker, allows bitter differences to be aired, and may open the way to change in the world of “not not-me.” When the dawn breaks to bring the city back to normal, something is changed. Normalcy itself is seen more clearly as another act in the play, albeit a weightier one; the roles (and architecture) of daily life are distanced somewhat, like costumes that hang in the closet next to the feathers and sequins of carnival. Other narratives become plausible as well as other roles. In the morning, we check again on the important relationships to see whether they have shifted in the night.

In Latour’s terms, the actions of carnival are equal to those of any other time of year. They gain strength through allegiances with other actors, human and non-human, whether within the bracketed realm of revelry or not. The jester has always been able to challenge the king, but so have philosophies, viruses, drought, rabble-rousers, and statistics.

When actions in theater have the same footing as everything else, moving from one role to another still implies a moment of vertigo in between, as we readjust to a different circumstance. The moment can be as small as an “Aha, you’re joking,” or as large as a paradigm shift that makes us see familiar things differently. Architecture specializes in thresholds that render some of these shifts spatial, so walking from one room to another, or from city street to interior, proposes a shift of role and an instant of reorientation, however small.

Architect Jean Nouvel expands these vertiginous architectural transitions into a fine art of spatial manipulation that destabilizes expectations, so people may open their senses more acutely to the experience of the present moment. Beth Weinstein analyzes the public spaces of two theaters designed by Nouvel that make a transition from the street into a performance hall. Both heighten theater-goers’ awareness of their own movement, position, and the gaze of others, so they might step into the auditorium in the double consciousness of performance.
Architecture that recasts performer and spectator and confounds their roles has a long history that laid the intellectual foundation for Nouvel as well as for directors Peter Brook and Augusto Boal. The final presentations analyze two architectural settings from the early 1930s that drew on theater to define modern presence in the private realm and in the public respectively. In the first, domestic life was opened to self-awareness by a series of large painted and sculpted figures by Bauhaus theater director and artist Oskar Schlemmer installed on the walls of a house designed by architect Adolf Rading. Marcia Feuerstein examines how the figures interact in their places with people moving through the house to create moments of intense contact between them. Secondly, a series of 1932 performances at the Sorbonne proposed a theater of conversation where professors and students could discuss large moral questions within the buffered realm of “what if.” Performances set up architectural/social events in the university and in the city, where public discussions could develop freely, then reach out to act in the political situation swirling around them at the time.

**CODA**

Recall Peter Brook’s paean to the mystery of the present moment. Recall also Latour’s philosophy that validates non-humans as actors that make a difference both socially and physically. Each of the stories presented here acts in the present moment that you read it, invoking histories and buildings that you might know. Each modifies those histories and buildings by proposing another way to understand them. Together they lay out an approach to design and architectural analysis focused on how buildings act as competent non-humans that are part of the city and the landscape. They spur us to ask: how do buildings interact with people, how do they interact with other non-humans, including living beings and vital systems, such as water, air, soil, and sunlight, and how do they act within social constructs and institutions? Finally, how do they touch us in the moment, like acts of theater, to spark connections among us, human and non-human, and open up real choice?

Finally, an image of Charlie Chaplin and his cane might crystallize the question. Charlie’s cane, a length of bamboo crooked at the top, was a highly responsive partner integral to the character of the little tramp. The cane was part of Charlie’s gait, his gestures, and his persona to the point that it was less an object or symbolic “attribute” than wholly subsumed in the character. The cane does not represent Charlie, nor give him special powers. It does not work for him; rather he plays with it to strut like a dandy, hobble like an invalid, fight like a swordsman, poke his rivals, and hook the beauty. In one scene he uses it to catch a fish. The cane was Chaplin’s partner over many years of creative practice, in which they explored the pathos of a modern everyman. The little tramp reached out from the stage in earnest playfulness to address some of the most pressing ethical issues of modern life in the city. The cane, through
its design, acted with Charlie, resisting some movements and strengthening others, beautifully open to improvisation. Could architects design buildings to perform in that spirit?

NOTES


3 Sartre was referring to moral situations and the radical freedom of choice. See Jean-Paul Sartre, “For a Theater of Situations,” in Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (eds.), *Sartre on Theater* (New York, 1976), p. 4. Guy Debord and the Situationist movement in the 1950s and 1960s defined art as the creation of situations, extending the idea into urban events and architecture’s role in them.


5 Peter Brook, *The Open Door* (New York, 1993), p. 3.

6 Ibid., *The Open Door* p. 14 ff.

7 Environmental psychologists study the effect of architecture on social behavior. See the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

8 Brook, *The Open Door*, p. 97.

9 John Heilpern, *Conference of the Birds* (New York, 1977), pp. 83–94. This describes one of the improvisations Brook's company developed during the carpet tour of the Sahara desert. Brook launched the tour as an experiment in theatrical communication across boundaries of language and culture. The company improvised scenarios with pantomime, nonsense words and slapstick that evolved with the responses of impromptu audiences in desert towns.

10 Brook, *The Open Door*, p. 98.

11 Bruce Wilshire clarifies this point. When a character is murdered in a play, the actor is not harmed, so the action within a story is not the same as an action in fact. Yet drama is meaningless if it does not impact attitudes, feelings, and actions outside the playhouse. The boundary between performance and ethical, existential actions is always negotiated. See Bruce Wilshire, “The Concept of the Paratheatrical,” *The Drama Review*, 34/4 (1990): 169.


14 Mostafavi calls this back and forth of improvisation a bottom-up logic of urbanism. See M. Mostafavi and Gareth Doherty (eds.), *Ecological Urbanism* (Zurich, 2010), pp. 36–8.

15 See Heilpern, *Conference of the Birds*, pp. 73–94.


21 Utopia literally means no place. Architecture and urban design have long been studied for the ideal plans they embody and for how the physical situations they create correspond with those ideas. Latour considers both ideas and physical things as independent actors that can affect other ideas and things. See Harman, *Prince of Networks*, p. 16.


PART I
Designing Performance
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Architecture as a Performing Art: Two Analogical Reflections

Alberto Pérez-Gómez

Architectural design is usually identified with the production of novel and striking visual images that, nevertheless, seldom result in a built environment capable of revealing a true sense of the inhabitants’ place in the world. The result is usually shock and short-lived amazement: one more tourist attraction, an identifiable brand for an institution, or a fashionable destination. Given this prevalent situation, the consideration of potential alternatives towards the creation of more meaningful environments is compelling.

The experience of architecture is never merely spatial, and yet what passes today for architectural design is often no more than a manipulation of geometric spatial concepts. Indeed, our lived world is rich in sensations and emotions that arise from our bodily actions and engagement in the world. Perception is never a purely passive reception: it is action, and the motility of our embodied consciousness implies time.1 Our lives are in this sense fundamentally deployed in a temporality that accompanies our pre-reflective bodily motions and intended actions, and which is also a lived spatiality. This interweaving of lived time and space, together with its bearing on significant experience and the construction of meanings, tends to be ignored by conceptual and objectifying design practices. I will endeavor to unearth alternative possibilities by following the analogy between architecture and the performing arts that happens to be present in the depths of our Western architectural traditions. Since performance is by definition a temporal event, whose meanings are therefore impossible to paraphrase beyond their experience, this framework offers a fertile ground to meditate upon architecture. I will offer two lines of argumentation that are not fully autonomous, but will allow me some clarity of exposition.

ORIGINS

The origins of architecture in human cultures are closely related to ritual: as propitiatory and mimetic object-making (as in the case of an altar for sacrifice or
a tomb), and as place-making for the deployment of rites, which came to include theatrical performances, particularly in the European traditions. Architecture is fundamentally characterized by its capacity to frame such events, rather than by a particular style, materiality, or design method. Sociologist Roger Grainger defines two fundamental kinds of human action. There are human actions performed in the understanding that the agent controls the outcome (i.e. planning). This is the sort of action that becomes more prevalent after the Cartesian ego becomes identified with the autonomous subject in the early nineteenth century, and assumes the role of responsibility for “development” by means of controlling nature and technological domination. This first kind is of course the one we moderns take for granted. Yet there is another sort of action done in the belief that its efficacy is not controlled by humans in any reducible sense, but proceeds from elsewhere, ultimately manifesting the presence of the sacred, or the presence of a meaning that is “already there” before us. This second kind of action is called ritual. While ritual action and the manifestation of the divine through human artifacts were common in traditional cultures, they are arguably less common today, though by no means impossible. As Grainger writes: “the great danger which ritual avoids is the danger of the confusion of man and God.” Ultimately life is uncertain, and our self-conscious rational ego controls very little. Yet it is obviously difficult for a modern man to be able to affirm, with the confidence of the medieval Japanese poet Yoshida Kenko (ca. 1233–1350), that “the most precious thing about life is its uncertainty.” The possibility of the second sort of action in a secular world, in the form of participatory acts (in dramatic events) and poetic making, is the main argument convincingly articulated by Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly in their recent book All Things Shining.

If one may dream of an architecture capable of revealing to others a meaningful world, one less flat and nihilistic, one must reconsider the origins of architecture as the space of participatory performance. Vitruvius describes his understanding of the origins of architecture in a few insightful paragraphs at the beginning of his second book of De Architectura. He understands this “space” as a clearing in the forest that makes possible language and culture, one that will eventually become the political space of the city (the polis, the urbs). His story starts with a spark from heaven, one generated by the wind in a storm: it is a gift whose origin is the divine breath of nature. The spark lights a fire that the first humans manage to maintain and domesticate, giving themselves a “dwelling.” This fire lights up human desire as well, revealing the bitter-sweet space in which we collectively recognize ourselves as humans, capable of thought, yet mortal, capable of love and compassion. In “Book One,” Vitruvius discusses obsessively the importance of the winds for the health of the city and its inhabitants: he has in mind much more than practical issues. The very possibility of the citizen’s spiritual well-being was at stake. Indeed, architecture offered a clearing that was also an epiphany of the sacred—the gift of a place for human situations to be enacted in time—capable of further disclosing through significant action the appearance of a sacred world.

Vitruvius’ position in the early Roman Empire is an echo of Greek cultural accomplishments, which included the transformations of ritual into the dramatic
plays of the classical tradition (ca. fifth century BCE) identified by Aristotle as the first poetic art. As Lisa Landrum suggests in her contribution to this book, the term “architect” identified specific dramatic characters that lead others in acts toward the instauration of order. The call “to architect” appears in works such as *Cyclops* by Euripides and *Peace* by Aristophanes, plays that reveal the cultural roots, connotations, and expectations associated with the person of the architect and his actions, a term that would eventually (a few centuries later) give its name to the Latin discipline of *Architectura*. This understanding adds a new dimension to the more conventional understanding of the architect as “master craftsman,” which has been taken for granted in most histories of architecture. In these plays, the “architect” appears as a hero and legislator who opens a clearing for political and social order, a public space (both physical and political) as a site for collective orientation, which is not invented or created, but drawn from the pre-existing orders of culture and the cosmos. Several philosophers and cultural historians have argued that the “space” that opens up between the spectators and the actors and is mediated by the chorus, the same space that is expressed by the physical configuration of Ancient Greek and Roman theater buildings, makes possible the appearance of the sacred for the audience. In this space the acts and deeds of the gods, which contribute to the always possible but often uncanny plots of Greek tragedies, offer the possibility of “distant participation” that characterize *theōria* in philosophy and science.

Not surprisingly, Vitruvius speaks of the architecture of the theater as a cathartic event, not as a mere “building” or aesthetic object. Emphasizing the importance of a healthy site for the spectators, he writes: “When plays are given, the spectators, with their wives and children, sit through them spellbound, and their bodies, motionless from enjoyment, have their pores open, into which blowing winds find their way.” Ruth Padel has explained that, indeed, the classical Greeks acutely felt their vulnerability to external forces and emotions, personifying them as demons and divinities. The Greeks perceived what was inside their bodies as the complex seat of consciousness, made of the same fabric as the physical universe, with parts analogous to the earth and qualities mirroring divinities that were dark and ultimately unfathomable. This analogy runs through ancient medicine, anatomical divination, and architectural theory. Thus Vitruvius expresses a belief in similar correspondences as he explains the power of architecture to both reveal a cosmic order and support health and well-being. Forces from the outside of a city or a building were regarded as aggressive and frightening (the source of disease in Hippocratic medicine), therefore Vitruvius considered proper orientation to the winds as crucial for all architecture. In the theater, the vulnerable spectators came to make peace with the world, to find points of coincidence between *phrenes* (or mind) and madness, to try to understand “the terrible as good.”

The human voice of the actor, continues Vitruvius, is “a flowing breath of air” that moves “in an endless number of circular rounds, like the innumerable increasing circular waves which appear when a stone is thrown into smooth water.” This requires the architect to perfect the ascending rows of seats in the theater by means of “the canonical theory of the mathematicians and the musicians.”
the design of a theater the architect must apply his knowledge of harmony, and here Vitruvius introduces musical modes and intervals, followed by tetrachords. He also recommends placing bronze sounding vessels under the seats (examples of which have never been found), to enhance the building’s harmonic resonance. The plan of the theater should reflect the geometric essence of the sky, starting from a circle and inscribing four equilateral triangles, “as the astrologers do in a figure of the twelve signs of the zodiac, when they are making computations from the musical harmony of the stars.” Although Vitruvius is describing a Roman (not a Greek) theater, his account of it as a cosmic place for tragedy is poignant enough. It is here that architecture, in its performance, discloses an order that is both spatial and temporal, both bodily and cosmological, revealing the “sense” of being human.

Drama was experienced as a tight weaving of temporality and spatiality that aligned human action with the purposeful movements of the cosmos. Participating in the emotionally charged direction of the plot, the spectators grasped answers to fundamental human questions and attained a heightened self-understanding. Dramatic narrative written by a single poet is distinct from the plural voice of traditional myths, yet both elicit katharsis, the recognition of the presence of Being in the tumultuous events of everyday life. The poetic language of Greek drama is by definition metaphorical, and this is paralleled by the architectural poetic image. Both maintain a high-tension gap, an erotic tension, in which the audience encounters the nearness of distant phenomena and the distance of intimate events. In his Poetics, Aristotle posits mimēsis as the basic function of art: the sense that life presents to the artist and which the artist “re-presents” through the patterns and forms of the medium. Rhyme, rhythm, eurhythmy, and harmony are merely attributes of the underlying sense that the spectator recognizes in the event, as a universal ground in the possible but improbable plot of the tragedy framed by the theater building.

Thus, I have tried to argue that at its origins, the dramatic dimension of architecture is central to its intended meaning. This condition continues through the Christian Middle Ages (as demonstrated in Louise Pelletier’s contribution to this volume), and only begins to transform during the Renaissance, once architectural ideas start to be identified with the visual images of painting. Urban elevations, for instance, attain an unprecedented importance as part of the work of the architect (an early example from the fifteenth century is the work of Bernardo Rossellino in Pienza). Elsewhere I have discussed the implications of the associations between painting and architecture made evident in the early treatises by Alberti, Filarete, and Piero della Francesca, among others, as well as the important differences between the two disciplines’ tools of representation. Indeed, it is only with the advent of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline in the eighteenth century that the architectural project starts to be identified with the representation of systematically related orthogonal projections, potentially becoming an autonomous “work” for disinterested contemplation, associated with the other “Fine Arts.” This eventually opens the possibility to conceptualize an architectural project as the objectification of a future building in the fully mathematical (and reductive) space of nineteenth-century descriptive geometry and axonometry. Almost in tandem with this latter
transformation, however, Claude-Nicholas Ledoux recognized towards the end of
the eighteenth century the need to imagine a set of poetic and political programs
as part of his project for his ideal city of Chaux, resonant with the emerging orders
of the modern world precipitated by the French Revolution. Chaux expressed with
forceful clarity the original condition of architectural meaning in a social context no
longer bound by a transcendental politics.17

In this sense, Ledoux’s work may be recognized at the inception of our more
contemporary explorations of architecture as performance. Every building project
arises out of a narrative vision of life towards a new social contract, in stark
opposition to both functionalism and all self-referential formalisms. Explorations
of this nature continued into the twentieth century under many guises, often
inspired by the artistic avant-garde, as it became conscious of the limitations of
the retinal image (in the work of Marcel Duchamp, for example), and by the work
of cinematographers who clearly understood the spatio/temporal nature of lived
experience. In recent architectural practice, the masques of John Hejduk are
notable examples in which intended programs (or narratives describing the life of
the inhabitants) are a constitutive part of the poetic image. Hejduk’s masques are
never merely optical or pictorial form: they involve the temporal experience of a
significant action.

One might argue as a conclusion that architecture may indeed recover its
“original” dimension as performance as long as the program is understood not
as a list of parts with square footage, but as a promise for a meaningful (political,
public) life issued from the architect’s imagination (both rational and emotional).
Nineteenth-century functionalism reduced the program to a list of parts to be
organized as a diagram and “resolved” like a puzzle in plan, the resulting form of a
building being a mere extrusion whose meaning would automatically follow. Such
buildings were deliberately intended (and “read,” in the competitions of the Ecole
des Beaux Arts, for instance) as touristic visits for a voyeur, in a linear sequence of
unshifting scale. In contrast, architecture as performance privileges the importance
of expression in the intertwinement of use and form, drawing their meaning
from the recognition of their resonance with genuine, historically generated
cultural practices. The experience of such architecture is participatory and never
linear: a space for the performance of habits and actions that resist technological
reductionism and may yet reveal the presence of the sacred.

MAKING

There is another important (and related) sense in which we may speak of
architecture as a performance. As a highly complex operation, architecture
involves the collaboration of many people with diverse conceptual and manual
skills. This obvious condition has lead some to question the ongoing cult of the
architectural ego, and to ponder upon the fallacies of our system of “star architects.”
Similar considerations have also lead to the “spreading out” of responsibility
for the outcome of a project, exonerating the architect from his direct ethical
accountability—a dangerous position that will be addressed in the conclusion of this chapter. In any event, the common assumption is that architects design or “make drawings” (today digital representations), while others actually build. Part of this assumption is that the actual work of the architect, his or her authorial “genius,” resides in such representations.

However, it is easy to demonstrate that prior to the nineteenth century architects generally understood their “work” and ethical responsibility to be kindred to “performance,” including the “actualization” of buildings, gardens, ephemeral structures, fireworks, wonder-producing machines, etc.—all works of architecture insofar as they all framed the possibility of cultural orientation. Not only the building of such works, but even their continuing maintenance, their “durability” (Vitruvius’ *firmitas*), was the architect’s responsibility. Perhaps Alberti was the first to suggest the more modern alternative of displacing responsibility in his fifteenth-century architectural treatise. Even more explicitly in a famous letter to Matteo de Pasti he asks the resident architect to avoid changing the “music” present in his drawings for S. Andrea in Mantua. But the change in attitude that we today take for granted did not happen overnight. Writing also in the fifteenth century, Filarete described the shared responsibility of the client and the architect to engender a future building. The architect, he claimed, was like the mother that had to carry the conception of the client in “his” womb for nine months. The architect received the concept (in the form of ideas expressed in language or numbers), then had to give form to drawings and models, and eventually make possible the transmutation of such imaginary figments into buildings, which once “born” had to be kept healthy and alive: literally like one’s own children. Every step of the way enriched the operation, and while many others were involved in the construction process, the architect was responsible for the success and accrued meanings as the work “matured” into existence. His work was a “performance” of the original idea, always an interpretation, never a mere transcription, regardless of the material medium.

After the Renaissance, systems of architectural representation became increasingly more precise and reductive. The assumption of perspective as a central, even paradigmatic, architectural idea, appears explicitly in the theoretical work of the Baroque Jesuit architect and painter Andrea Pozzo, first published in 1693. Orthogonal architectural representations acquired the same status as perspectives—in other words: still symbolic of God’s light on earth and of a link between the architect’s mind and the divine mind, and never conceived as technical sections in Cartesian space or purely optical emulations of a presumed retinal image like in the nineteenth century—yet capable of fully describing a “project” to come. The final shift that resulted in our own reductive assumptions came with the teachings and writings of Jean-Nicholas-Louis Durand at the turn of the nineteenth century. In the wake of the French Revolution and the secularization of the political realm, this writer and teacher at the *Ecole Polytechnique* (a model for all school or university-based architectural education to come) asserted instrumentality as the only (scientifically) unquestionable value in architecture and architectural drawing: the efficiency and economy of the design operation, leading to functional buildings. This theoretical framework makes “architecture as drawing” possible: the production of
buildings by school-educated “professionals,” potentially executed by others (or in our own days, by a robotic machine) through precise notations. This technological practice is in sharp distinction from an architecture performed by expert architect/builders educated through apprenticeship, endowed with conceptual and manual skills that were traditionally the manifestation of embodied wisdom. Indeed, Durand emphasizes the futility of rendering and color in all forms of architectural drawing; he teaches his students that the use of precise ink lines and absolute precision are indispensable. Drawings focus on the building as object/form, on its geometries and dimensions deployed in the space of descriptive geometry. All additional “information” was deemed irrelevant to meaning.

Let me reiterate: prior to this moment of transformation that sees the beginning of a modern paradigm for representation, architects drew and built models, but the artifacts produced were never reductive. The process of construction “performed” the work of architecture as a translation of intentional, symbolic traces: mostly plans and elevations, and also sections that revealed the “shadowy depths” of the building to come. Such performance was its fulfillment; the architect was deemed responsible for its meaning and emotional effect, despite the complexity entailed in such translations. Furthermore, it was generally acknowledged that the work “gained” in richness in the process of translation from drawing, to physical model, to building. Significantly, this situation in architecture is analogous to musical practices in which, as demonstrated by the eminent musicologist Lydia Goehr, most musical works produced by composers prior to Beethoven’s time in the early nineteenth century were invariably dedicated to a “function” (a party, a dinner, a funeral), conceived therefore for a specific place (a hall in a palace, a performance space, a garden—but never a ubiquitous theater), “authored” (or co-authored) by the client, and only accomplished in performance, preferably conducted or played by the composer himself. No one assumed the musical work’s autonomous existence on a piece of paper, as a score, just as no one would have assumed that architecture existed as an idea represented in a set of drawings.

Under these conditions, apprenticeship was the real education of the architect, with the few exceptions of the weekly readings in the Académie Royale d’Architecture in Paris and J.F. Blondel’s relatively short-lived money-making school in the mid-eighteenth century. At the time of Piranesi (ca. 1750s), Jean-Laurent Legay started to teach his Parisian students, who included many of the now famous “revolutionary” architects of the next generation, that to make architecture the architect must provide a fully comprehensive picture of the future building, including an aerial perspective and a full set of drawings and specifications. This redefinition of the role of the architect was later institutionalized by the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole de Beaux-Arts in the nineteenth century. The work of architecture thereafter existed as drawings, intended as instruments that might dictate with utter precision their execution in the world of experience (exactly like a score by Beethoven or later composers, filled with modulation marks and metronome readings expected to be followed with utmost precision by the interpreters, regardless of the physical conditions and particular circumstances that made possible the work’s performance). This created the delusion that the
Cartesian spaces in which the design was conceived (the three planes of the newly invented “descriptive geometry”) were homologous with the spatialities in which our lives are take place, and that the meaning of architecture is fundamentally dependent on the geometry of its forms and spaces. The same assumption led to the institutionalization of the “optical image” as the proof of architectural accomplishment, evident in the obsessively sophisticated “presentation” renderings of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in the nineteenth century, and today present in the seductive photography and intricate computer-generated images that frequently appear in our professional journals and internet publications.

A critical voice against both the reduction of architecture to a scientific (geometric) operation and the conceit of “architecture as painting” had already risen in the early nineteenth century in the insightful writings of Charles-François Viel. A critical voice against both the reduction of architecture to a scientific (geometric) operation and the conceit of “architecture as painting” had already risen in the early nineteenth century in the insightful writings of Charles-François Viel. Viel complained mostly about the loss of skills that he saw as fundamental to the architect, a loss that he could detect as much in the education at the *Ecole Polytechnique* (architecture as engineering) as in the projects produced at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* (architecture as a Fine Art). He could not accept that architecture could be taught as a “mechanism” (Durand’s methodology) for efficient design and design for efficiency, that large buildings could be designed in a few hours, or that the task of the architect might be similar to the painter’s, reduced to the production of largely unbuildable structures whose meaning and emotional content hinged on their pictorial expression. Insightfully, Viel speculated that the place of architectural education in a university might rather be among the humanities (he emphasized the crucial political dimension of architecture), but this suggestion failed to resonate with educators in the 19th and 20th centuries, more concerned with preserving the professional viability of architecture in a technological world. The continuing loss of conceptual and manual skills is further encouraged today by current technological tools like CAD and Revitt, which produce drawings meant to be unambiguously fabricated by robots (or robotic workmen), thus reinforcing the formal conception of architecture as a tectonic object. These are the objects that have come to constitute the contemporary physical environment, the post-industrial city, mostly the actualization of idealities cut away from the natural world and irresponsible of cultural contexts and materiality. However novel, the result is a world perceived as mostly void of meaning, a world that produces nihilistic and frustrated architects, inhabitants who fail to find meaningful orientation in their lives, and craftsmen turned into manual laborers.

Fortunately for us, out of the same juncture that postulated the aesthetic nature and the autonomy of the work of architecture and led to its consideration as primarily “tectonic” and detached, rather than “scenographic” and participatory, emerge also other possibilities. These are particularly crucial to architectural education and to more enlightened practices, as long as it is understood that education is not ever to be a simulation of practice. At issue is the nature of the theoretical project and its legacy for modernity (a mode of poetic making that is both participatory and critical of present cultural conditions) that saw its inception with the work of Piranesi’s *Carceri* etchings (around the same time as the teachings of Legeay). Emerging as a critique of the banality of perspective, perceived by
Piranesi as already incapable of representing the meanings and enigmas effectively present in lived depth, his *Carceri* demonstrate the possibilities of the poetic image as an embodied image, in stark contrast with the optical (reductive) image that emerges triumphant in modern efficiency-driven practices from the teachings of the *Ecole Polytechnique*. Piranesi’s understanding of poetic making is resonant with the critique of Cartesianism present in the work of the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico, who argues for the origin of human nations in poetic artifacts and products of the imagination. Ledoux’s projects for the city of Chaux mentioned in the previous section, with their poetic programs, are also part of this tradition that continues into our own time, both in practice and in education.

In conclusion I would like to close the circle and call attention once more to the architect’s thoughts and deeds, considering another aspect of the analogy that complements previous observations. I alluded to the architect’s pursuit of social order in classical dramas, a kind of “architecting” that is prior to “building,” and fundamental in that it represents the discipline’s ethical function in culture. We may not be actors in an ancient Greek play, but this insight is crucial for contemporary practice. Through his/her life work, the architect ought to seek the confluence of beauty and the common good. This “performance of a function” in society—function understood as the “office” one holds in life, one’s architectural calling—can be described as a plot: a life told or narrated, and it necessitates conceptual and bodily skills that must be continuously cultivated.

Indeed, a good practice emerges from a constant development of skills and study, seeking understanding of crucial cultural questions that affect our discipline and may be germane to any projects at hand, drawing from history (for stories), and new perceptions from heightened skills, always asking the questions anew when confronting a new project, rather than repeating a formulaic “style.” In this way “performing” architects may truly contribute to society, their acts and deeds constituting an appropriate praxis, a political position driven by ethical concerns. Particularly crucial to open up the possibilities for dwelling in a technological world, architects must recognize their work as much more than a specialized formal or technical pursuit. A philosophical orientation is important, one buttressed by a knowledge of the history of the discipline that demonstrates, through example, the manner in which other architectures have managed to answer the fundamental questions of being human in different times and places.

The constant development of skills involves an understanding of making that transcends representation as a means to an end. The deep interconnectivity of artistic expressions has been discussed in many registers, ranging from psychoanalysis to phenomenology. It is sufficient to recall, for example, the important role that a constant and deliberate practice of painting played in the development of Le Corbusier’s architectural ideas and their maturation. Architecture is “performed” in such acts of making that can reveal a poetic image, a metaphor embodied in drawing, multidimensional objects or other narrative media. Such meanings are “found” through making and not deliberately “created,” and are therefore the primary vehicle for architectural production, the first responsibility of “form giving” that drives our discipline. Furthermore,
this is a particularity of our modern culture that probably saw its inception, as I suggested, with Piranesi’s *Carceri* etchings in the eighteenth century, the first instance in which the “reality” of Cartesian (3-D) space was challenged as the site for the poetic imagination of the architect.

The second aspect of this ethical quest, seeking the cultural and political relevance of making, involves the language that the architect speaks to articulate his or her position here and now, in view of specific tasks or commissions. This demands a serious accountability that can only be drawn from the depths of a historical understanding, one that has to be continuously cultivated and must encompass the whole depth of our local traditions and the way these relate to the Western philosophical and scientific narratives, whose outcome is our technological world. Nietzsche outlines the sort of history required in his essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.” History is inevitable in a world where all religious and cosmological certainties have vanished, and yet it should not lead to imitation or resentment, but empower us and feed our creative vitality.

From this perspective, the work of the architect should be valorized as a life-long trajectory with a discernible plot, the performance of a public function—in the Latin etymology of this last term—a process driven by ethical imperatives, by a sense of compassion for others and our shared human heritage, rather than be judged through some subjective aesthetic merit attributed to fashion or novelty applied to a particular work.

**NOTES**

1 The questioning of the conventionally accepted notion of perception as the passive reception of stimuli by a subject emancipated from an objective world (the Cartesian dualistic model) was a central concern of twentieth-century phenomenology. The same line of questioning has been taken up more recently by neuroscience. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (New York, 1962), and Alva Noé, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).


3 Ibid., pp. 28–9.


5 Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining; Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* (New York, 2011).


8 See, for example, Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (New York, 1960), and, more recently, Andrea W. Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy; Theória in its Cultural Context* (Cambridge, UK, 2004).

11 Ibid., pp. 189–91.
13 Ibid., p. 140.
14 Aristotle, *Poetics* [1447a].
16 Ibid., pp. 281–316.
18 This is also a topic I discuss extensively in my recent book: *Built upon Love; Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).
19 The letter in question is dated November 18, 1454. For additional information see Joan Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti, Universal Man of the Early Renaissance* (Chicago, IL, 1973), pp. 111–12.
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If architecture—as a discipline—is to be understood as a performing art, then both its practice and theory must be seen as performative. That architectural theory in particular ought to be understood in a performative and, specifically, dramatic way is supported in part by etymology: “theory” being linked to and derived from the ancient Greek terms for “theater” (theatron), “spectators” (theatai), and “spectacles” (theamata), as well as the related activity of “beholding” (theaōmai) all that is wondrous and divine. Yet, however much etymology may provide veritable links, it does not always fully persuade; neither does its concise ensemble of interrelated concepts sufficiently conjure the particular circumstances in which such associations were actually experienced and shared, thus bearing vital cultural meaning. Fortunately, the history of dramatic performance offers an alternative and complementary approach. The bond between theory, performance, and architectural activity may be demonstrated most vividly not by etymology but rather by an ancient image of the Theater of Dionysus in 2009, viewed from atop the Athenian Acropolis.
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Greek play: Aristophanes' comedy Peace of 421 BCE, in which the protagonist is called upon to actively “architect” in the course of performing and restoring theōria. This unique dramatization of architectural theory was, and remains, all the more telling given the greater drama of its complex situation, for Peace was performed in the Theater of Dionysus at the base of the Athenian acropolis (Figure 2.1) while architectural work upon the acropolis was flourishing—in spite of a protracted regional war. 

This chapter provides a limited introduction to and interpretation of Aristophanes' Peace. By schematically narrating this play's plot, by describing the dramatic roles of both the protagonist and theōria in it, and by considering these in relation to the play's performative context, I intend to show how theatrical–theoretical architecting not only illuminated architectural practice in ancient Greece but also sought to restore enduring peace to a genuinely troubled polis. Although this comedy was staged close to twenty-five hundred years ago, I believe its remarkably vivid dramatization of architectural activity can still meaningfully animate and re-orient analogous performances of present-day architects, who—like Trygaeus (and Aristophanes)—must continue to seek and show such basic yet profoundly complex conditions as peace. Bearing this in mind, we may now rehearse the plot of Peace.

THE DRAMATIC PLOT: DARING TO ARCHITECT IN ARISTOPHANES’ PEACE

At the start of Aristophanes' Peace we learn that Trygaeus (a farmer)—having become fed up with incessant war and stirred by a strong desire for peace—has decided to mount a giant flying dung beetle (the modified stage machine). With this theatrical device, the unlikely hero soars up to the heavens, thus taking his concern for society’s well-being directly to the highest authority: Zeus. His intent upon reaching Zeus is to boldly question him, demanding: “What on earth do you plan to do?” (line 58). This comic conceit to discover the plan of Zeus is not, however, brought to fruition, for Trygaeus soon learns that Zeus has abandoned the heavens—with all the other Olympians in tow. Only Hermes remains behind as “doorman” to Zeus’ threshold (179). This messenger god then explains that Zeus himself had become fed up with mortals and their misconduct, for although mortals often prayed for peace their actions demonstrated they wanted nothing but war. Therefore, War (Polemos) has taken over Zeus’ place and power (206). According to Hermes, War has imprisoned the goddess Peace in a pit (223), and has resolved to destroy all the Greek cities and citizens (231).

At this point in the play, War himself makes a brief but menacing appearance, thus making vivid his threat to the polis. While Hermes exits and Trygaeus hides, War—monstrously personified—struts into the orchestra, stepping out from behind the skēnē as though stepping out from the halls of Zeus (237). Straightaway, War threatens to crush all the cities and citizens in a gigantic mortar—as soon as he can find a sufficiently formidable “pestle” to replace the ones he has lost. When his assistant (Riot) fails to find such an instrument, War
recedes back into the halls of Zeus determined to produce his own pestle, and then to recommence grinding (269–89).

Witnessing this from his hiding place at some mediating threshold of the orchestra, and recognizing the dire urgency of the situation, Trygaeus feels himself obliged to rescue Peace on behalf of the threatened polis. And so, as War withdraws to prepare his destructive pestle, Trygaeus steps forward to initiate his restorative plan: to draw forth Peace from the deep heavenly pit where she lay hidden.

Standing alone in the midst of the orchestra, Trygaeus begins his plan with a summons. He calls upon “all the people”—specifically farmers, merchants, carpenters, workers, immigrants, foreigners, and islanders—to come forth and lend a hand (296–300). The chorus (twenty-four masked and costumed players) responds to this summons, flooding into the orchestra in exuberant choreography, accompanied by their dynamic props (shovels, levers and ropes), and by the lively music of a pipe player. As this enthusiastic chorus fills the open area of the theater, their own leader rouses them with further incitements, then turns directly to Trygaeus and delivers the pivotal command: “If it is necessary for us to do anything [in view of peace], direct us and architect” (305).

To clarify, the chorus leader urges Trygaeus to actively “architect,” since architektonei is given as an imperative verb. Following this performative demand from the chorus, Trygaeus begins more officially and collaboratively what he had himself—by his decisive opening action—already begun: architecting the recovery of Peace, which now involves directing, or rather re-directing, the excited chorus from chaotic dancing to synchronized rhythms of work so that, together, they may hoist Peace out from the pit.

Although comic complications persist during this hoisting work—as Hermes is initially uncooperative, and the chorus members at first bicker and laugh while pulling their ropes inefficiently in divergent directions (464–507)—the goddess Peace, after much ado, is finally drawn out from the depths of the theatrical skēnē and in to the open orchestra. And, in this way, Peace appears not as an actor in disguise but as an appealing statue (516ff ). What is all the more surprising is that this statue of Peace emerges from the pit accompanied by a lively and lovely (albeit mute) pair of attendants: namely, Theōria, a vivacious figure of “Beholding”; and Harvest (Opōra), a voluptuous figure of agricultural abundance whom Trygaeus (whose own name implies “Harvester”) ultimately takes as his bride (702–8).

Following the emergence of these three feminine figures from the heavenly ground, Trygaeus—with guidance from Hermes—then leads the dramatic action back down to the mortal plane (to the Dionysian theater and the Athenian polis), where he directs a trio of corresponding earthy interventions. These include: first, restoring Theōria directly to the spectators, as Trygaeus escorts this embodiment of “Beholding” to a prominent place among members of Council seated in the theater’s front row (846ff ); second, re-establishing a permanent setting for peace, by installing the retrieved statue of Peace right
there in the orchestra for all those assembled to behold (923ff); and, third, re-

enacting traditional rites of fertility, by commencing his own marriage to Harvest
and inviting the “spectators” to join in the generous wedding feast (1115). And
so, having dramatically restored to collective imagination these three available
ways to peace, the play then culminates in a joyous marriage procession (1329–
59), with all the rejuvenated participants—now liberated from war—together
leaving the theater for the countryside in eager anticipation not only of feasting,

drinking, and dancing, but also of plowing fields and “harvesting” the full fruits
of peace—fruits that include the shared performance and experience of theōria.

Peace, Harvest, and Theōria, then, act in this play as a sacred ensemble of
interrelated figures, which—along with the positive mortal activities they each
represent and actively sponsor—make fully apparent and available the collective
well-being, worldly prosperity, and comprehensive order that the protagonist
had initially sought from Zeus and ultimately restored (in Zeus’ absence) by
architecting.¹⁶

While there is plenty of architectural relevance that may be drawn out from
this play, I will focus here on two aspects: on the relation of Trygaeus’ exemplary
architecting to that of Athenian architects; and on the significance of theōria,
both as a dramatic mode and desirable benefit integral to peace. We begin with
theōria.

2.2  The ancient theater of
Epidauros, 2009.
The photograph was
taken just prior to
a performance of
Aristophanes’ Birds
in the summer of
2009. In some ways,
the experience
of a live event in
Epidauros conjures
the participatory
conditions of
an Aristophanic
performance
more fully than a
tour of the stone
theater in Athens.
PERFORMING THEÔRIA: ARCHITECTURAL ACTS IN ARISTOPHANES’ PEACE

Although we are right to link theōria to what we now call theory, we must not stop there, for, as Aristophanes’ Peace shows, Theōria once embodied the communal activity of “beholding (in the theater).” And this activity was, at the time, less philosophically associated with disinterested speculation, and more socially, politically and religiously intertwined with lively festivals (such as the Dionysia), with civic representatives (especially Councilors and their appointees), and with ritualized modes of viewing sacred and exotic sights (Figure 2.2). Yet we must take a further step, for while “beholding”—as an embodied, communal and ritual activity—is essential to theōria, theōria is more comprehensively understood as a form of “pilgrimage.” The practice of theōria, in and around the fifth century BCE, involved a group of appointed delegates (known as theōroi), led by a designated ambassador (an architheōros), who would travel together to a distant sanctuary (such as the sanctuary of Dionysus in Athens). There, amid thousands of other travelers from dispersed regions, these representatives would behold strange and wondrous sights (at an involved distance), perform official duties on behalf of their own city (such as offering sacrifices and dedicatory gifts), and then return to their home polis, where the architheōros (or one of the theōroi) would present an account of all they had seen. And this public presentation—effectively a re-presentation of the theōria experience—was expected to benefit the home polis, since the local citizens would not only participate vicariously in the unfamiliar yet exemplary stories and images, but also reconsider their own polis in relation to these.19

Such an extensive and dramatically discursive mode of theōria is unlikely to be the sort of “theory” familiar to present-day readers. Indeed, today we tend to think of theory rather reductively: either as the rationale for an applied method, or as an explanation (often couched in terms of the latest “ism”). If thought of as an activity at all, theorizing is frequently dismissed (or, alternatively, celebrated) as a largely irrelevant practice of highly speculative thought—a purely contemplative activity more likely to be pursued by a solitary philosopher than by a politically engaged agent who traffics in exotic religious spectacles. However overdrawn this comparison may be, it helps to expose the gap between what we today call “theory” and what the ancient Greeks actually performed as theōria. Yet, perhaps this gap is not as great as it seems, for as A.W. Nightingale has persuasively shown, the traditional practice of theōria outlined above—with its inherently dramatic, socio-political, and religious modalities—profoundly influenced the foundations of philosophical theorizing. According to Nightingale, it was Plato (himself but a child when Peace was performed) who later appropriated the then common cultural practice of theōria as an apt model and metaphor to help conceptualize and legitimize his own analogous practice of philosophy.20 For Plato, performing philosophy—much like performing theōria—involves, first, detaching oneself (hypothetically) from familiar local situations; then, traveling (by rising up metaphysically) in an attempt to see divine truths; and, ultimately, returning with the obligatory challenge of conveying to others (dialectically) all that had been witnessed, so that a deeper understanding of mortal limitations and potentialities
might be gained. The *Republic* and the “Allegory of the Cave” within it, present Plato’s metaphoric appropriation of *theōria* well.21

Turning back to the drama of *Peace*, however, it is clear that, unlike Plato, Aristophanes brings forth Theōria *not* as a metaphor for a philosophical journey, but rather as a vital personification of the living institution that everyone gathered for the theatrical festival were themselves actively participating in. During the performance of *Peace*, the theater of Dionysus was indeed full of *theōroi* and *architheōroi*, each of whom had traveled to Athens to eagerly behold all that the festival had to offer and would later return to their home *polis* to share—and, so, further interpret—what they had witnessed. Even the protagonist of Aristophanes’ *Peace* performs *theōria* precisely in this traditional sense, since Trygaeus himself, first, travels to an exotic and sacred place (the heavens), then beholds divine sights (the terrible god of War and the re-emergence of Peace, Harvest, and Theōria), and ultimately returns to re-present these benefits to his home *polis* (Athens). In other words, Trygaeus not only leads the recovery of Theōria in a climactic episode of the drama, but also—by his pattern of action—performs *theōria* over the course of the dramatic plot. And just as an *architheōros* would make a public presentation of *theōria* to his fellow citizens upon returning home (especially to members of Council), so Trygaeus presents Theōria directly to Athenian Councilors upon his return from the heavens. But we must note the irony here, for the exotic benefits Trygaeus offers were acquired *not* from afar but from the very grounds of the theater. Indeed, the earthen grounds of the orchestra and the opening of the skēnē would—in performance—seem to give birth to Peace, Harvest and Theōria, thus divulging—by bringing (back) into appearances—all that was thought at the start of the play to have been irretrievably lost.

Trygaeus’ overall performance, then, may be seen to provide an exemplary intensification of the common practice of *theōria*, which his spectators were themselves performing (or ought to have been). And, as already suggested, this practice of *theōria* involved not only beholding divine spectacles at an involved distance, but also participating directly in a rich variety of interrelated social, political, and religious activities: such as intermingling with strangers; conducting diplomatic exchange; sharing in a liturgical calendar that united citizens across the vast panhellenic region; and partaking in the greater drama of common holiday, religious release, and Dionysian worship.22 With so much being involved in this cultural practice of *theōria*, it is now perhaps easier to understand not only why the female personification of Theōria appears as such an extremely desirable and engaging figure in the play,23 but also why she is found together with Peace. Why *is* Theōria together with Peace? Because they are mutually sustaining: *theōria* being both contingent on peace (since traveling was dangerous during war)24 and prerequisite for peace, since by regularly practicing *theōria* friendly interrelations—between individuals and strangers, between cities and their representatives, and between mortals and gods—might be envisioned, enjoyed and sustained. It was this living practice of *theōria*—in all its fullness—that Aristophanes, his actors and audience were together enmeshed in; and it was this same cultural institution—with all its obligations and vulnerabilities—that Trygaeus aimed to revive and
So far I have attempted to show how, in Aristophanes’ *Peace*, theōria is dramatized as a vital practice potentially constitutive of peace and involving not abstract theorizations but shared experiences of order. Given that such experiences were also situated in particular settings, such as the theater of Dionysus (as well as other panhellenic sanctuaries), theōria—from the beginning—also necessarily implicated architecture (Figure 2.3). Yet, this original practice of theory is only half the ground I wish to cover in this chapter, for I also wish to consider Trygaeus’ theoretical–theatrical *architecting* in particular relation to certain architects and architecture of the Athenian *polis*.

2.3 The Theater of Dionysus, with a view to the Athenian Acropolis.

A portion of the Parthenon’s west pediment and south-facing frieze, as well as the boom of a modern crane (engaged in an ongoing reconstruction project), are just visible above the citadel wall at the upper left corner of the picture. This view captures the essential relationship of the orchestra and the Parthenon. Yet it is important to realize that the citadel walls and buttresses of the Acropolis that we see here were built up in the Medieval period, suggesting that the Parthenon would have been even more visible from the orchestra in the fifth century BCE. Furthermore, the stone seats, floor, and raised decorative stage front (at the bottom right corner of the picture) date from the first to third centuries CE—that is, five to seven hundred years after the performance of Aristophanes’ *Peace*, when the “theater” consisted of little more than an adapted hillside for viewing, a leveled area of ground for dancing, and a crafted wooden *skéné* for helping to reveal (and conceal) dramatic effects (cf. note 6).

**ARCHITECTING IN VIEW OF ARCHITECTURAL ACTIVITY: A THEATRICAL MIMÉSIS OF ARCHITECTURAL PRAXIS**

By the end of Aristophanes’ *Peace*, Trygaeus may be seen not only to have recovered and performed theōria, but also to have generally *architected* a comprehensive restoration of order. However, at the moment the chorus calls on Trygaeus to *architect* (at line 305), he responds to particular complications of more immediate concern. First and foremost, Trygaeus finds that he must temper the chorus’ zeal, for these chorus members who have just rushed into the orchestra in response to his summons are so eager to be free of war and so assured they will gain peace that their excessive enthusiasm and premature jubilation jeopardizes the very opportunity to rescue Peace. Their noisy antics and wild dancing not only perpetuate when he restored Theōria to Council. In light of all this, and recalling the chorus’ specific command that Trygaeus “architect,” we may further consider our protagonist as one proactively concerned not only with this broadly inclusive scope of theōria, but also with its most definitive setting: the theater, which was both integral to and representative of the whole diffuse institution.
risk alerting War to their activity (remember, War had withdrawn to prepare his “pestle”), but also make it impossible for them to concentrate on their own serious task at hand. Thus, Trygaeus’ first official act as “architect” consists in redirecting his collaborators toward their common purpose: persuasively reminding them of why they have gathered together in the first place (305–45). Subsequently, Trygaeus persuades Hermes not to block their rescue efforts (by reporting them to Zeus), but instead to sanction their plan and even join them in it (362–429). Trygaeus then inaugurates their risky venture by offering a libation and prayer to the divine Graces, the Horai, Aphrodite, and Desire, who he hopes will also be persuaded to embrace and beneficially sway the plan (431–56).

Having properly involved these appropriate divinities and re-oriented his mortal collaborators, Trygaeus (with the assistance of Hermes) then begins his most elaborate practical task: directing the chorus members in their physical work of hoisting a statue up and out of a quarry-like pit and into its proper upright position (458–519). Such a task of coordinating, encouraging, evaluating, and adjusting the overall activity would indeed make “architect” a fitting title for this protagonist, especially when considered in view of the analogous efforts underway at the time of Peace’s performance high upon the Athenian Acropolis. There, architects had indeed been directing hoisting operations and related building activities for decades. Substantial reconstruction of the Parthenon and Propylaea had recently been completed (in 437 and 432 BCE, respectively); and construction of the Erechtheion had just begun—in the very same year Peace was performed (421 BCE). The architects directing this work included: Mnesikles, Kallikrates, Iktinos, Philokles, and especially Pheidias—who is even evoked by name in Aristophanes’ play (a point I shall return to). Of course, none of these architects nor any others were working on the Acropolis on the day of Peace’s performance, since all such building practices would have been suspended for the duration of the theatrical festival. Moreover, all the local architects would have been sitting amidst the thousands of spectators gathered on the southern slope of the Acropolis to behold the dramas, including Aristophanes’ Peace. All the same, when architects were working on the Acropolis, their work, much like that of Trygaeus in the orchestra, would have involved directing diverse agents in elaborate hoisting operations, so as to raise divine statues (and other figurative matter) into the most honorable and revealing positions.

Thus, in the scenes immediately following the chorus’ pivotal command to architect, Trygaeus’ theatrical performance may be seen to closely mime aspects of architectural practice, and yet to do so in ways that reveal the mythic bases of these practices as well as their broadly restorative aims. But there is another way in which Trygaeus’ performance specifically pertains to and illuminates architectural practice. This is brought out right after the hoisting scene by a direct reference to the famous architect/sculptor Pheidias.

Soon after Peace is drawn out of the pit (at line 520), Hermes—while standing beside the recovered statue—explains how “she” had disappeared in the first place. Whereas theological and allegorical explanations (the exodus of Zeus and War’s interment of Peace) had initially made her disappearance understandable, Hermes
now offers a more locally grounded account: Peace began to perish, he claims, when Pheidias and Pericles got into “trouble” (604–16). With this disclosure Hermes connects the loss of Peace in the play to an actual political controversy in Athens, involving Pheidias’ prominent role in the ambitious building campaign of his friend, the statesman Pericles. Before elaborating on this “trouble,” it is first necessary to recall that Pheidias was not only the “overseer of everything” associated with Pericles’ building program, but was also specifically responsible for designing all the sculptural work related to the Parthenon, most notably the forty-foot tall gold and ivory clad statue of Athena that stood within it—a sculpture unprecedented in both its size and expense. The installation of this colossal statue of Athena within the newly completed Parthenon would have been a vivid living memory for Aristophanes and much of his audience. This is not only because of the tremendous symbolic importance of the statue, but also because the spectacular installation of it most likely took place during the Great Panathenaia festival of 438/7 BCE—just sixteen years prior to Peace’s performance.

Thus, by naming the designer of Athens’ most significant statue just after the statue of Peace appears in the orchestra, Hermes would bring the theatrical statue of Peace and the colossal statue of Athena into comparison. The chorus members further this comparison when they take Hermes’ surprising comment about Pheidias’ relation to Peace to account for her “fine facial features” (615–18), as if the statue of Peace had been authored by Pheidias, modeled after his design, or perhaps left as an unfinished work of the recently deceased artisan. Beyond suggesting sculptural and aesthetic comparisons, the mention of Pheidias would, more importantly, invite a performative comparison: between the memorable installation of Athena during that Panathenaia festival, and the dramatic installation of Peace during the Dionysian festival presently underway. This performative comparison is reinforced later in the drama when Trygaeus enacts the “installation” of Peace’s statue as a veritable rite: a hidrusis (923–1115). Such a rite of installing a statue with special utterances and procedures, including an appropriate sacrifice (in this case a mild-mannered lamb), officially consecrated a sacred site. The performance of this rite established a divinity’s vital and enduring influence in a particular sanctuary by properly situating a representation of the divinity. As at least one scholar of Aristophanes’ Peace has argued, Trygaeus’ performance of an actual installation rite during the play, together with Hermes’ direct reference to Pheidias, would have significantly influenced the spectators’ reception of Peace: effectively “transforming Peace into a cult statue—and the Theater of Dionysus into her shrine.” And, so, the statues (of Athena and Peace), the rites (of hidrusis), the sites of installation (the Athenian Parthenon and the Dionysian orchestra), as well as the “architects” (Pheidias and Trygaeus), are all suggestively compared through this theatrical–theoretical performance.

Finally, the mention of Pheidias’ “trouble” adds a critical dimension. For when Hermes claims that Peace began to perish when Pheidias and Pericles got into “trouble,” he alludes to an actual controversy that started when the Athenians accused Pheidias of stealing precious gold and ivory meant for the colossal statue of Athena, and presumed Pericles had been complicit with the theft. This “trouble”
not only led to Pheidias’ imprisonment, subsequent escape, and ultimate death, but also triggered political complications for Pericles, with negative repercussions for the polis. Whether or not this “trouble” actually sparked the Peloponnesian War (as Hermes suggests in the play) is not our main concern here. There are, however, two main observations to draw from Aristophanes’ decision to implicate Pheidias in the way that he did. First, the dramatic poet clearly invited his audience to see Peace—both the statue and the drama—as comparable to Athens’ most important architectural work. And second, Trygaeus’ “installation” of Peace can be seen, more precisely, to re-enact Pheidias’ “installation” of Athena; yet to do so in a way that would also repair the colossal “trouble” that Pheidias’ installation purportedly began. In other words, if we see Trygaeus’ architectural act as miming that of Pheidias’, then this mimetic performance should be regarded not simply as an imitation of the prior act, but—more critically and creatively—as a corrective and poetic response to it. Indeed, by dramatically “installing” the statue of Peace, Trygaeus aims to recuperate and propitiate the very conditions for peace that the famous architect/sculptor and patron/statesmen had promised yet failed to secure through their ambitious building program. Put differently, Trygaeus re-enacts the original installation as it ought to have occurred—accomplishing theatrically (through drama and théòria) what architecture and sculpture alone could not. Given that this architect–protagonist installs Peace in the open orchestra—at the base of the Acropolis—one may further see his theatrical–theoretical act as speculatively re-situating the preeminent site of Athenian influence: away from the top of the monumental Acropolis and down to its peripheral but nevertheless integral sacred site, the Dionysian theater.

CONCLUSION: BRINGING THEÓRIA HOME

One may discern in Aristophanes’ Peace the beginnings of a rivalry between architects and dramatic protagonists (as well as dramatic poets), and between dramatic spectacles and the spectacle that architecture sometimes makes of itself. Such rivalries have indeed gone on to have a colorful history in the Western tradition. Yet, it is more fruitful here to recognize the performative similarities of these poetic agents and to take these similarities as confirmation of their fundamental and potentially cooperative interdependence. As I hope to have suggested through the discussion above, the performative similarities between architects and dramatic agents, like Trygaeus (and Aristophanes), are grounded in their common motives and practices, as much as they are revealed by the situational transformations their analogous deeds help to bring about. Though the deeds of architects and dramatists alone can never achieve peace, both agents are especially capable of persuasively revealing and reimagining its basic settings and practices.

In closing, I will simply reiterate and sharpen one of my claims about Aristophanes’ Peace: this play was devised, performed, and considered in view of architects and their activities, for Trygaeus’ architecting was not only viewed
by local architects (who were among the spectators), but also regarded by an extensive diversity of citizens from across the panhellenic region, many of whom were charged with the responsibility of performing *theōria*—of considering this extraordinary dramatization of *architecting* with their home *polis* in mind. Moreover, Trygaeus’ architectural activity was performed and considered within the Theater of Dionysus, which by its marginal yet integral relation to the *polis* played a critical and influential role for it, by dramatically representing its civic and mythic practices with the aim of interpreting and sustaining their constructive interdependence. Although it is unlikely that Aristophanes intended to compose a play primarily about architects or *architecting*, it is indisputable that this drama, *Peace*, involving a protagonist’s attempt to repair worldly harmony implicates architectural activity as crucial to its plot. If we are to consider architecture as a performing art, then *Peace* might well lead us to re-discover and re-evaluate what such an art promises and entails.

Thus, along with drawing out some of the forgotten architectural relevance buried in this ancient comic play, I hope that (somewhat like Trygaeus and Aristophanes) I have also begun to restore *theōria*—yet again—to both architects and their interpreters as a vital practice to be performed for the good of the *polis*.

NOTES

1 The Peloponnesian War, between Athens and Sparta (and their respective allies), was waged from 431 to 404 BCE.

2 Aristophanes’ *Peace* (together with Euripides’ *Cyclops*) is treated more fully in my PhD dissertation, *Architectural Acts: Architect-Figures in Athenian Drama and their Prefigurations* (McGill University, 2010). Though widely studied in classical scholarship, these plays—the only extant ancient plays with “architects” in their scripts—have not otherwise been interpreted in architectural discourse.

3 My use of *polis* throughout this paper is intended to capture its full ancient meaning as “city-state”—a concept inclusive of not only the physical “city” (as a bounded yet regional setting), but also the community of citizens and cultural institutions that those citizens shared (i.e. their traditional practices, laws, rites, and founding stories). For an overview of the ancient *polis*, see Oswyn Murray and Simon Price (eds.), *The Greek City* (Oxford, 1990), esp. pp. 295–322.


5 Trygaeus’ engagement of the stage machine (hoisting device, or crane) is explicitly marked in the script by his direct address to the “machine-operator” (*ho méchanopoie*, 174). Since this same device is also seen as a “dung-beetle” (*kantharos*, 1, 23ff, 45, 49, 73, 127, 176), it may have been modified, or adorned, in some way so as to resemble this symbolically charged insect. See Olson, *Peace*, note to lines 72–3. On the symbolism of dung-beetles, or scarabs, in ancient Egyptian religion (which arguably influenced Greek perceptions of the insect), see Richard H. Wilkinson, *Egyptian Scarabs*.
On the technical aspects of the méchanē, which was likely operated by a long counter-weighted beam (balanced on a pivoting fulcrum), see Donald J. Mastronarde, “Actors on High: The Skéné Roof, the Crane, and the Gods in Attic Drama,” *Classical Antiquity*, 9, 2 (October 1990): 247–94. A stage machine typically brought a god down to earth at the end of a tragic drama so as to resolve a violent mortal situation. Aristophanes reverses this typical operation by having his mortal protagonist ride the device up to the heavens at the comedy’s start—so as to resolve a situation that the gods have apparently ignored.

6 A skéné is literally a “tent.” Yet, in a theatrical context, skéné refers to the temporary wooden structure that stood at the back of the orchestra—the leveled performance area, or “dancing (ground).” Like the spectator’s wooden benches, the skéné (being an ephemeral single storey enclosure, presumably with a flat roof), was rebuilt each year for the dramatic festival. (A stone theater was not constructed until 338–30 BCE.) Actors made some of their entrances and exits through the skéné’s large central doors, which implied the interior of a temple, palace, city, house, hut, or even a cave—depending on the play’s setting. Although the particular setting was conveyed mainly through verbal clues, the wall of the skéné facing the spectators may have also been clad with painted panels. It is also important to note that, in the fifth century BCE, principal actors likely performed on the orchestra’s dirt ground (not on a raised stage)—thus moving about on the same level as the chorus, with whom they frequently interacted. For helpful discussions of the skéné, and the architecture of the theater of Dionysus at the time of Aristophanes’ Peace (which is notoriously difficult to discern and draw with certainty, since later Roman remains have obscured earlier conditions), see Nicolaos C. Hourmouziades, *Production and Imagination in Euripides. Form and Function of the Scenic Space* (Athens, 1965), esp. pp. 1–34; C.W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes* (London, 1976); Rush Rehm, *The Play of Space: Spatial Transformation in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), pp. 35–62; and John Davidson, “Theatrical Production,” in Justina Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 194–211, with further references.

7 These lost “pestles” allude to Kleon and Brasidas, the pugnacious leaders of the Athenians and Spartans who had indeed recently been lost (i.e. killed) in a historic battle of the Peloponnesian War. In other words, “War” is here searching for a new mortal warlord to execute his work. See Olson, *Peace*, notes to lines 271–3 and 281–4.

8 Trygaeus makes many interpretive comments directly to the audience as he watches War’s menacing show, suggesting that he was “hiding” amid his fellow spectators in the front row. On this and other examples of meta-theatricality in Aristophanes’ plays (i.e. traversing the presumed divisions between spectators and performers), see Niall W. Slater, *Spectator Politics. Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes* (Philadelphia, PA, 2002).

9 My translation (adapted from Henderson) aims to emphasize the back-to-back imperative verbs: phrase and architektōnei, “direct (us)” and “architect”. My translation also clarifies the sense of the initial clause, διὰ τῶν ὁμήρων, which I have indicated as “in view of peace,” but which literally means “toward these things”—that is, toward the chorus’ desire to be free of the burdens of war, as expressed in the previous lines (301–4).

Performing Theoria: Architectural Acts in Aristophanes’ Peace

11 Theoria is often translated as “Holiday” or “Showtime” in order to capture her festive aspects. Yet, theoria literally means “witnessing a spectacle”: combining thea (a wondrous “spectacle” or divine sight), and the verb root hor- (“to witness,” or gaze intently). Thus, I follow Erika Simon in calling Theoria a personification of “Beholding (in the theatron),” see Festivals of Attica (Madison, WI, 1983), pp. 101–2. I discuss the suggestive figure of Theoria further below.

12 Opora names the season (late summer) when the harvest of the vintage took place, see Olson, Peace, note to line 523.

13 “Trygaeus” is a neologism derived, in part, from the verb trugaō, “I harvest (the vintage).” On the manifold meanings of Trygaeus’ special name (which may alternatively be transliterated as Trugaioi), see Olson, Peace, note to line 190, and Edith Hall, The Theatrical Cast of Athens (Oxford, 2006), pp. 328–35.

14 Peace, Theoria, and Harvest likely appeared on the ekkuklēma, a trolley-like cart or “rolling-out device,” which the chorus would have pulled out from behind the skéné (with their ropes). See Olson, Peace, p. xliii–xlvi, and note to lines 517–19. The figures may, alternatively, have been hoisted out of an actual pit—although ancient staging did not rely on such realism, and the skénē did indeed function as the site of miraculous disclosures. On the revelatory (epiphanic) function of the skénē, as well as the ekkuklēma and méchanē, see Ruth Padel, “Making Space Speak,” in Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone (eds.), Masks of Dionysus (Ithaca, NY, 1993), pp. 336–65. Cf. above, notes 5 and 6.

15 Members of the Athenian Council, or Boulē (an important advisory board of elders), occupied reserved front row seats. This Council played a leading role in the administration of festivals, including the City Dionysia. Thus, by giving Theoria to Council, Trygaeus restores the people’s right to “spectating” (theōrein, 342)—as he had earlier promised to do.

16 On the mythic motifs underlying this dramatization of restored order in Peace (such as the mythic return of Persephone from the underworld and, with her, the return of fertility to the earth and revelry to the people), see Olson, Peace, pp. xxxvi–viii; and A.M. Bowie, Aristophanes. Myth, Ritual and Comedy (Cambridge, UK, 1993), pp. 142–50. This trio of feminine figures (Peace, Harvest, and Theoria) also recalls the divine Horai (or Seasons): Peace, Justice, and Good-Order (Eirēnē, Dikē, and Eunomia)—who, being daughters of Zeus and Themis, were likewise constitutive of worldly harmony and regularity (cf. Hesiod’s Theogony, 901–3). It should be emphasized that Eunomia, “Good (socio-political) Order” (as evidenced in proper human conduct), and kosmos, “(rhythmic) order” (as evidenced in patterns of dance, artifacts, and the heavens), were, in ancient society and myth, interdependent. See Jane Ellen Harrison, Themis. A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion (New York, 1962), esp. pp. 514–23; and Martin Ostwald, Nomos and the Beginnings of Athenian Democracy (Oxford, 1969), pp. 62–95. The dramatic actions of Trygaeus were also modeled on myth: notably, on the tragic quest of Bellerophon; and on the justice-seeking flight of a dung-beetle (known through a fable of Aesop). See Olson, Peace, pp. xxxiii–xxxv.

17 Other primary panhellenic destinations for state pilgrimages included the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, of Poseidon at Isthmus, and of Zeus at Nemea and Olympus. Each of these sites hosted festivals involving athletic competitions; in the case of Delphi, the site possessed an important oracle, which was consulted by theōroi on behalf of their city.

18 It must be emphasized that much more than dramatic spectacles were seen at festivals, for a theōros would also behold various events (patriotic parades, athletic contests, elaborate rituals and feasts), as well as sacred artifacts (relics, statues,
and votive offerings), and the settings of the sanctuaries themselves (with their ornamented altars, temples, and treasuries as well as their topographical peculiarities and vistas).


21 See Nightingale, “The Philosopher at the Festival,” pp. 165–72, where she concisely analyzes the frame story of Plato’s Republic, which begins with Socrates traveling down to Peiraeus to celebrate the festival of Bendis and ends with Socrates and his friends “theorizing” (theōrein) elsewhere. According to Nightingale, in Plato’s Republic, “philosophic theōria interrupts and supplants the theōria at the festival” (p. 166).

22 On these profoundly festive aspects of Theōria, see Kenneth J. Reckford, Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy (Chapel Hill, NC, 1987), pp. 1–52. Aristophanes’ Peace would seem to exemplify that “festive character” which, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, was the original “essence of theater.” See his Relevance of the Beautiful (Cambridge, UK, 1986), esp. pp. 57–65. Gadamer’s discussion of theory as “true participation” is also relevant here, as is his valuation of a “pre-theoretical” sense of theory—that is, taking lived experience as the basis for understanding. See, respectively, his In Praise of Theory (New Haven, CT, 1999), esp. p. 124; and Truth and Method (New York, 1993), esp. p. 267.

23 The script presents Theōria as being as sensually potent as she is politically and religiously charged (see lines 871–908). Yet these graphically erotic connotations should not be taken simply as lewd humor, since Theōria’s supposedly naked body was in fact a padded costume worn by a male actor and exaggerated enough to somehow resemble both a calendar of religious holidays and a topographical map: her “ass” is worth waiting four years for, as is the Brauronian festival; and her appealing “isthmus” resembles the Corinthian site of Poseidon’s festival. Cf. Sommerstein, Peace, notes to lines 876 and 879–80. By such imagery, Aristophanes seems to suggest that the Councilors ought to desire the practice of theōria as ardently as they crave regular connection with a beautiful woman. The erotic role of Theōria in Aristophanes’ Peace would further seem to prefigure the comparable role of Eros in Plato’s presentation of theōria, see Nightingale, Spectacles of Truth, p. 115. The actual physical appearance of Theōria in the performance of Peace is unknown, since, aside from verbal imagery, there is no contemporaneous graphic evidence (such as vase paintings) to indicate how she was figured. On what is known about the figure of Theōria, see Hans-Joachim


25 By “order” I mean both *eunomia* and *kosmos*—both socio-political “order” (as upheld by mortals) and rhythmic “order” (as discerned in the heavens). It is important to recognize that Trygaeus restores order at both human and heavenly levels. Cf. note 16, above.

26 The development of sanctuaries outside of main populated areas and the practice of making pilgrimages to them were key to the beginnings of both the democratic city-state and monumental architecture in the late ninth to early seventh century BCE. For this argument, see François de Polignac, *Cults, Territory, and the Origins of the Greek City-State*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago, IL and London, 1995). For a different approach to interpreting the original interdependence of architecture and theory (through a reading of pre-Socratic philosophy and daedalic artifacts), see Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates’ Ancestor* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).


28 Hermes is initially outraged by the mortal’s audacity not only to attempt the rescue of a goddess, but to initiate a course of action unsanctioned by Zeus. The messenger god thus threatens to turn Trygaeus over to Zeus for punishment. But Hermes is eventually won over (by flattery and meat). Then, in a line that closely echoes the earlier call to Trygaeus, the chorus calls on Hermes to “take charge [and] in craftsmanly fashion [dēmiourgikos] direct us in what needs doing” (429). Discussing the fuller significance of Hermes in this play is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that Hermes’ manner of direction (*phrazein*) is paradigmatic for the mortal architect, see Landrum, *Architectural Acts*, pp. 109–14.


30 Hurwit, *Athenian Acropolis*, p. 316. In 421 BCE construction of a new stoa and temple to Dionysus was also beginning directly within the Dionysian sanctuary—immediately behind (South of) the orchestra. (This area, now in ruins and full of trees, is visible in Fig. 2.1, just downhill from the orchestra.) On how these nascent architectural works in the sanctuary may have allusively figured into the emergence of Peace in the orchestra, see Landrum, *Architectural Acts*, pp. 70–71. For a survey of architectural projects under construction at the time of *Peace*’s performance, see J.S. Boersma, *Athenian Building Policy from 561/0 to 405/4 BC* (Groningen, 1970), pp. 82–96.

31 All sanctuaries except the sanctuary of Dionysus were closed during the City Dionysia festival, and all male citizens (including released prisoners) were in attendance; thus, there is every reason to believe that architects would have been present. On these details of the festival, see A.W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford, 1968), p. 59.
As suggested above, especially at note 16.

Pheidias was the episkopos panton, according to Plutarch's Life of Pericles 13.4. Pericles' so-called building program primarily consisted of monumental religious works in and around Athens, including the Parthenon and Propylaia on the Acropolis; the Odeon, or music hall (originally associated with musical competitions held during the Panathenaia festival), which was directly East of the Theater of Dionysus; and the Initiation Hall in Eleusis. See Hurwit, Athenian Acropolis, pp. 157–9.


The Athenians set up the statue (and the Parthenon) as an offering to Athena in gratitude for the enduring peace and civic achievements that followed the Athenian victory over the Persians (in 479 BCE). The relatively peaceful pose of Athena's statue reinforces this meaning, for (although imposing and protective) she stood at ease—with her shield and spear set down at her left side and with a personified Victory in her open right hand. On the peaceful significance of the Athena Parthenos (which becomes all the more prominent in contrast to some of her other statues on the Acropolis, especially the Athena Promachus, the "Ready-fighter"), see B.S. Ridgway, “Images of Athena on the Akropolis,” in Jenifer Neils (ed.), Goddess and Polis (Princeton, NJ, 1992), esp. p. 134; and Donald Kagan, Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy (London, 1990), esp. p. 169.

Hurwit, Athenian Acropolis, p. 25, n. 74, with Philip A. Stater, A Commentary on Plutarch’s Pericles (Chapel Hill, NC and London, 1989), pp. 285–6. Interestingly, modern historians know certain details about this installation because an ancient historian, Philochorus, noted them in the margin of an early copy of Aristophanes' Peace (alongside line 605).

Walter Burkert, Greek Religion (Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 88–92. Peace is the only extant play in which an installation rite is performed in the course of the drama, although a hidrurus is anticipated at the end of Aristophanes' Wealth (1197–8), and alluded to in at least two other comedies (Frag. 256, and 591.86). See J. Henderson, Aristophanes’ Fragments (Cambridge, MA and London, 2007). The English word “cathedral” retains a memory of such an installation rite, since it has—at its core—the Greek root hedra, “sitting-place (of a god).”


This controversy may well have been fueled by Pheidias’ alleged decision to depict himself and Pericles upon the shield of Athena (in the sculpted scene of mythic Greeks battling the Amazons). This was an indecorous act of personal vanity in the eyes of Athenians. For a relevant discussion of the controversy surrounding Pheidias’ alleged malpractice, see Douglas M. MacDowell, Aristophanes and Athens (Oxford, 1995), pp. 186–9.

On the important relation of Peace to contemporaneous events of the Peloponnesian War, especially the so-called “Peace of Nicias” (which was ratified just days after the performance), see Olson, Peace, pp. xxv–xxxi, with references.

In rallying support for his building program, Pericles is believed to have argued that building the Parthenon would lead to more peaceful relations between the Athenians
and Spartans—a “political misjudgment,” according to many of his historians. See Anton Powell, “Athens’ Pretty Face: Anti-feminine Rhetoric and Fifth-century Controversy over the Parthenon,” in Anton Powell (ed.), The Greek World (London, 1995), esp. pp. 246 and 257. The “pretty face” in Powell’s title is borrowed from Plutarch’s account of how Pericles had used the monetary tributes of allies to richly adorn the city “as if she were some vain woman, hung round with precious stones …” (Life of Pericles, 12.1–2).

42 Dramatic poets and protagonists, at times, correspond in ancient drama, in part because dramatists occasionally played the part of their protagonist (as Aristophanes is believed to have done in Acharnians, and as Aeschylus is known to have done in his earliest tragedies). See Niail W. Slater, “Aristophanes’ Apprenticeship Again,” Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies, 30/1 (1989): 67–82. Although Aristophanes did not play the part of Trygaeus, some of this character’s intentions and actions seem to parallel those of the dramatist, as I show in Architectural Acts, esp. pp. 25, 51–2, 65, 87–8, 95–7, and 203–4.


45 Indeed, in spite of an intermittent truce, the Peloponnesian War continued for another seventeen years after the performance of Aristophanes’ Peace—with devastating consequences for Athens. That Aristophanes’ audience may have not yet been receptive to peace is further suggested by the fact that Peace was placed second in the dramatic competition of 421 BCE—losing out to The Flatterers (by Eupolis), who evidently won the judges’ favor.
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Toward Performative Architectural Drawing: Paul Klee’s Enacted Lines

Paul Emmons and Carolina Dayer

Ink, poised upon the nib of a pen, caresses the gently undulating surface and abandons itself into a thirsty sheet of paper. The word “drawing” is a verbal noun; thus making a thing out of what is fundamentally an action. Drawing, a gestural art, is a performance that traces the movements of its creation by recording its unique temporal construction. Architectural drawing is often misconstrued as the transparent translation of a pre-formed idea in the mind into lines on paper instead of a performed bodily, material construction. However, the medium of drawing, whether ink, pencil or paint, must be recognized as an intrinsic companion to creative thought, so the act of drawing resists the reductive Cartesian split between mind and body. Artists such as Paul Klee focus on the process of making as the true locus of invention, acknowledging the productive imagination of the embodied mind’s engagement with active tools.

Some architects sketch in front of clients, builders or other architects, literally performing certain key drawings (usually carefully rehearsed) in order to make them appear as if by magic in a rhetorically persuasive demonstration of a design’s conception. Le Corbusier, for example, recalls from his 1929 lectures: “I had been able to keep a public interested for two, three, or four hours, who followed, at the tip of my charcoals and chalks, the frightening steps of logic. … Thus the audience has the complete development of my ideas facing it.”

Today’s ease of presenting images, which began at least with dual slide projectors well before PowerPoint, undermines the formerly widely known practice of performing the constructing of images. Prior to the era of mechanical reproduction of images, medieval architectural drawing practice, such as quadrature (rotating inscribed squares), was conceived as a Euclidean geometric proof, so that the memory of a specific sequence and the nature of drawn marks elaborated the proportional, tectonic, and symbolic significance of the design. For example, the images in Mathes Roriczer’s Fialenbüchlein of 1486 are printed sequentially so that each illustration shows another step in the development of the drawing/thinking. This memorable approach to teaching architecture
through demonstrative drawings continued to be widespread into the early twentieth century. Today's challenge is to recall the significance of this practice and understand the making of a drawing as intrinsic to itself and to what it expresses.

This chapter examines Paul Klee's “performative” drawings to reveal the bodily thought that emerges between artist and material, which grows stronger through repetition and experimentation. We argue that architectural practice fosters a similar link in the process of drawing that extends toward ethical responsibility for building design.

In performative drawing, the artifact contains the memory of its creation in a sequence of marks that demonstrates their mode of execution. The performance is retained within the artifact so that in observing the completed drawing, one can perceive the original practice of its making. Observers empathetically trace the bodily effort of making a line to comprehend its gestural character. They feel in their own bodies whether a line was drawn quickly or slowly in the same way that an attentive viewer at a ballet “feels” the exertion of the dancer. Studies of eye movements show that when people observe images, they actively construct the figure. In the nineteenth century, Robert Vischer described “responsive sensation” as a level of seeing that includes a bodily, physiological reaction in the nerves and muscles that emulates the dynamism of visually perceived forms. Recent neurological studies also generally support his conclusion that responsive sensations link mind and body with the world, thus contradicting assumptions of Cartesian dualism.

The question of performance in architectural drawing is especially critical because design thinking takes place within the practice of drawing. Since architects make drawings rather than buildings, drawing is the central artisanal craft-knowledge of architecture. In addition to being pragmatic, drawing practices are cultural, historical, and even ritualized. They are ways of thinking embedded in ways of operating. Architectural drawing practices define the collective knowledge of the profession and encompass its evolving ways of operating. Anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, who was inspired by Erwin Panofsky's study of medieval cathedrals, explains that the habitus of a profession is the network of dispositions toward doing things in a certain way. Unlike “habit,” which is fixed and unthinking repetition, habitus is continually adapted and improvised by each person and each new situation. Such practices tend not to be theorized and rather are an ensemble of processes and techniques of performing tasks, which one learns by doing. A well-mastered habitus of architectural drawing practices allows an architect to draw while focusing attention not on techniques, but rather on desires and particularities of the design itself. The habitus, then, is largely tacit knowledge that is known through the body as much as through the mind. Indeed, the habitus of architectural drawing is rarely rationally taught and instead more often “absorbed” by students in the design studio. Reyner Banham wrote, “the secret profession of architecture” is defined not by production of “what” is done, but by practice, how it is done.” He emphasized studio education as “a tribal long-house,” where architects are socialized through rituals. Nevertheless, studies of architectural drawing tend
to focus either on connoisseurship or on the pragmatics of practice without often acknowledging the *habitus* that underlies them. Performative drawing in painting is far more widely acknowledged and valued.

An important exemplar is the Swiss painter and pedagogue Paul Klee (1879–1940) who conceived and created drawings as active performances of line, color, and media. From 1920 until 1931, Klee taught the essential *Vorkors* or basic design course at the Bauhaus, which he summarized in his *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, a book that continues to inform and inspire architecture students today. Throughout this time, Klee united his practice of making drawings with theoretical writing and teaching; lecturing in the mornings and teaching studios in the afternoons. Klee approached painting as a process of formation inspired by modern dance and theater, ranging from opera to circus acts. More fundamentally, the performing arts were the basis for some of his conceptions about drawing. Art historian Christine Hopfengart concluded that “Klee emphasized his conception of the dual function of the Bauhaus, of the equal importance of theater alongside architecture.”

In this study we examine Klee’s writings and artwork to reflect on the implications of performative drawing for architecture, focusing on three key aspects: movement in line, construction with material, and invention through copying. Understanding that a drawing unites mind with body, the making of a drawing is then essential to the appearance of the drawing itself, and to the design of buildings.

**POINTS PERFORM LINES**

Klee explicitly highlights drawing as performance in the opening of his *Pedagogical Sketchbook* by describing a line as a point going for a walk, an independent force, a momentum: “An active line on a walk, moving freely without goal. A walk for a walk’s sake.” In moving across a surface, the pen’s point physically becomes a line by leaving its inky trace. While a line, once drawn, is a static mark, the nature of the line inevitably recalls its kinematic mode of birth. The nature of the drafter’s touch is embodied in the line’s quality and character, revealing whether it was made lovingly, searchingly, hurriedly or in any other way. Klee described the gesture of his ambulating line as “restful, without definite aim or purpose.”

In *Gemischt* (1927) [*Mixture*] (Figure 3.1), Klee laid down a series of overlapping lines, each of which a viewer’s eye can easily follow from beginning to end. Drawn with a reed pen replete with ink, each meandering line began as darkly opaque, then, as the ink is discharged, the amount of pigment decreases to end in a barely visible trace. The varying width and opacity of the lines create a sense of illusory depth on the page while also recalling the moving body of the artist outside of the page. Working sequentially, once the first line dried, Klee responded to it with a second active line to suggest the image of an animal emerging in the drawing. Constructing each line in relation to its predecessor, he created a field of animals interacting with each other. His gestures played out over time, not driven primarily by formal description, but by the joy of making a line, focusing on how the pen touches the paper as the hand and arm move across it.
mimetic outline, Klee’s lines evoke the animals’ nature, such as a cat stretching out on its back finds a parallel in a line that is literally being stretched across the page. The performance of Gemischt shows the moving body of the artist transpiring into the viewer’s perception of line. As Klee points out, “the object grows beyond its appearance through our knowledge of its inner being.” Klee explains his striving to make visible the extra-optical nature of things through drawings that evoke their brute physical presence as well as their cosmic resonance. Gemischt is a mixture at numerous levels. The lines converge into one image to constitute a whole made of still visible parts that maintain a delicate balance between the image as representation and the line as action. The calligraphic doodles of Gemischt constitute a spatially and materially permeated interlinkage of body and soul.

In architectural drawing, the lively presence of the line is especially important because designers often imagine themselves to be walking, as if inhabiting a flow line of human movement within the plan drawing. A 1922 drawing handbook explained how the architect’s imagination inhabits a drawing:

>The architect walks through a building whose proposed plan lies before him on the table just as surely as he will walk through the actual structure later when it has been built. The plan to him is not simply a diagram showing the location and arrangement of rooms. He feels himself in the house, sees the vistas, the heights of the ceilings, the proportions of rooms, and the prospects from the windows.

The specific line Klee described as walking represents the path of a street in Town Square Under Construction (1923), which he labeled as “Plan.” Klee’s performed and performing line suggests Le Corbusier’s later admonishment that architects must “acquire the habit of strolling with one’s pencil, step by step.”
Drawing is a double act of embodiment; its marks are graphic signs that are both physical and representational, maintaining their own presence even as they evoke something beyond themselves. The architect’s physical body is engaged with making the material drawing while the architect’s imaginary body is projected into the drawing to “inhabit” the future building. Thus in performing a drawing the architect feels as well as sees a design, uniting the architect’s bodily and imaginative understanding. Klee wrote, “shortly after application of pencil, or any other pointed tool, a line comes into being.” This vivifying performance of drawing is a key to practicing the inhabitative imagination of the architect. The drawing board is the architect’s stage for this theatrical puppet play, which invites designers to consider future inhabitants.

MATERIAL PERFORMANCES

Like buildings, drawings are constructed out of specific materials. Klee wrote, “a picture is built up piece by piece, the same as a house.” Materially, performative drawings look beyond formal appearance to the practices of creating drawings or “factures”—from facio and facere (Latin for “to make” or “to do”). Such artifacts are indexes of their procedure of having been made in a certain way out of particular stuff. In Klee’s Gemischt (Figure 3.1) the ink lines change in opacity; this also causes a shift in their apparent hue from sienna to blue. When the ink is laid on thickly, the sienna color, made from earth, precipitates out to sink deeply into the paper while the lighter blue remains dissolved in the liquid. This phenomenon is invisible when the ink is wet, but as it dries, the secret sedimentation leaves the line bluer on the surface, and in this way the drawing performance continues even after the artist has laid down the pen.

Moving from line to a field of material, Klee’s drawings and paintings explored the manipulation of matter as primordial. For example, in Grüne Pflanzen Blutlaus (1924) [Green Plant–Blood–Louse] (Figure 3.2), Klee readied his canvas site with gesso, a fine white gypsum mixed with animal glue, which is widely used to prepare a substrate to receive oil or acrylic paints. For Klee, gesso was not a mere support; instead he recognized the material presence of the white ground and allowed it to act on his imagination as he manipulated it. Upon this active ground, Klee constructed paintings using watercolors, a medium rarely used with gesso. The play that occurs between the two materials shows Klee’s keen awareness of matter. While gesso is a dense, solid, and heavy material, watercolor is transparent, liquid, and light. Klee wrote that a “concept is not thinkable without its opposite” and that a “duality should be treated as a unity,” an idea concretized in this artwork. The painting emerged out of the interaction and differing performance of these two materials. On one hand, when gesso dries, it binds into a smooth but brittle surface that may crack, revealing the inherent qualities of gypsum plaster. On the other hand, the watercolor dries rapidly, does not change its internal structure, and responds to the moistness of the materials it touches. Klee describes the beginning of the work as a “harnessing of energy.” For Grüne Pflanzen Blutlaus, he set up a
layered interaction between opaque and transparent, solid and liquid, hard and soft. The whiteness and tactility of gesso and the colorful aura of watercolor meet to reveal and highlight their opposing qualities. Where the gesso is smooth and without cracks, for example, the brush stroke of the watercolor is noticeable. Where the gesso has cracked, the watercolor permeates to bring forth the fissures in subtle colors. Throughout *Grüne Pflanzen Blutlaus* the contrast and dialogue between smooth and hard, wet and dry performs a dynamic play that grows out of the interaction of its material qualities. The material processes and manipulation of its making remain present in the artifact.

Since drawing materials can be considered analogous to building materials, the tactile action of drawing directs the material and constructional imagination of the architect. In the performance of architectural drawing, a designer is invited to think as if the future building is being constructed. The material presence of the paper as a ground serves to remind designers of the building site as actual ground, while the thoughtful effort to make the marks prompt them to consider imaginatively the propriety and properties of building materials.

**COPIOUS PERFORMANCES OF BODILY DRAWING**

Performative architectural drawings, through their overlaying and redrawing, promote the thoughtful development of designs through a continuous rebirth. To enhance that dialogue in the process of drawing, Klee developed an oil-transfer system that allowed him the pleasure of transforming drawings as they were translated from one medium to another. First, Klee drew with graphite on a lightweight sheet of paper (Figures 3.3 and 3.5), then placed a thin sheet of paper coated with an oily ink in between the original drawing and a new blank sheet of paper. With the three layers together, he traced the lines of the pencil drawing,
3.3 Paul Klee, *Konzert auf dem Zweig* [*Concert on the Branch*], 28.2 × 22 cm (11 1⁄₈ × 8 ⁵⁄₈ in.), pen on paper on cardboard, 1921, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland.

3.4 Paul Klee, *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* [*Twittering Machine*], 64.1 × 48.3 cm (25 ¼ × 19 in.), oil transfer drawing, watercolor and ink on paper with gouache and ink borders on board, 1922, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY.
3.5 Paul Klee, *Zeichnung zur Zimmerperspective mit Einwohnern* [Drawing for *Room Perspective with Inhabitants*], 33.6/33.8 × 25/24.7 cm (13 3⁄₈ × 9 ⁷⁄₈ in.), pencil on paper on cardboard, 1921, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland.

3.6 Paul Klee, *Zimmerperspective mit Einwohnern* [Room Perspective with Inhabitants], 48.5 × 31.7 cm (19 ½ × 12 ½ in.), oil transfer drawing and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 1921, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland.
using a pointed metal tool to transfer them into a new drawing on the bottom sheet (Figures 3.4 and 3.6).

Simultaneous with the intentional tracing of lines, the copy system also records tacit or preconscious bodily actions that Klee performs while constructing the oil-transfers such as the pressure of the heel of his hand as he steadied the stylus for tracing. The oily layer in between the two drawings renders visible the actions of copying as well as the intentional marks of representation, to reveal an embodied process of drawing. In the oil-transfer *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (1922) [*Twittering Machine*] (Figure 3.4), the distinct darkness on three of the corners indicate pressure, perhaps from Klee's hand, thus materializing his touch like finger printing.

As a drawing is being traced, a new drawing is being made, transforming both in the material development of a design. The multi-temporal dimension of the oil-transfer technique allows the artist to retain the existing drawing in his awareness through tracing it, while at the same time perceiving a new drawing, which is tactualy present but not visible until the moment the three sheets of paper are separated. This dialogue between past and future in the process of image-making appears in the finished work, drawing attention to the temporal sequence of transformation. Once the entire drawing was transferred, Klee separated the sheets of paper to find that the new yet old lines were present again, although transformed. The new lines revealed their origin since the pressure of the metal point pushes the oily ink into the paper, leaving an indentation. Similar to digging a foundation trench in the earth, the strongest pressure leaves deep furrows surrounded by ink pushed up to the sides that results from the process of tracing.

The marks present in the oil-transfers reveal physical qualities of all involved: paper, ink, stylus, and artist. For example in *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (Figure 3.4) the tooth or texture of the paper appears where the pressure of the artist's hand had transferred ink lightly to the surface. Because this materialization of touch is faint, the oil marks subtly bring out the weave of the paper so it becomes an active presence in the image. Another aspect is that the oil-transfers are usually made on larger paper than the original drawings. The new size allows the artist to consider the copied image not a mere reproduction but a continuation of the creation that contains the memory and essence of the initial drawing. In both *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (Figure 3.4) and *Zimmerperspective mit Einwohnern* (1921) [*Room Perspective with Inhabitants*] (Figure 3.6) the artist reinterpreted and remade the transferred image in the whole extent of the new, larger site.

In some cases, Klee reinforced the transferred lines with a small brush or reed pen and ink, gouache or watercolor. Adding new lines above the transferred lines gives another layer of depth to the drawing, insinuating a spatial relationship between the background and the foreground that remembers while allowing for change. In *Alter Dampfer* (1922) (Figure 3.7) and *Die Zwitscher-Maschine* (Figure 3.4), Klee added lines and inked surfaces to accentuate different parts of the drawing. While the oil-transfer is usually a strongly executed, faster line, the inked or watercolor lines are slow and certain. Finally, some oil-transfers were also transformed with the addition of gouache or watercolor that Klee used to explore the perception of
movement, which extends from physical to emotional and even spiritual. In *Alter Dampfer* (Figure 3.7), Klee combined two colors simultaneously, letting the wet watercolors mix, while in works such as *Zimmerperspective mit Einwohnern* (Figure 3.6), there is a palimpsest of revealed and hidden colors. The final act of coloring tempers the oil-transfer by allowing all the materials to be joined with a wash and yet letting the particularities of each line stand on its own. Klee’s tempering combines colors and lines to create a harmonious dialogue between them. The oil-transfers demonstrate how the *habitus* of drawing as a disposition to work in a certain way stands open to adaptation.

Klee’s oil-transfers can also be understood in relation to mundane reproduction practices widely used in business, including architectural firms at the time. For making copies, mass-produced oiled sheets were being replaced with carbon paper that was made much more resistant to touch to accommodate the greater force of typewriters. Within architectural practice, blueprinting technologies emerged in the late nineteenth century and were quickly adopted to make copies of large drawings. But in drafting rooms, retracing drawings remained an important activity. Architectural drafters were advised to have standard details on cards that could be slipped under linen tracing sheets to copy a detail. Not unlike Klee’s oil-transfers, this required a complete redrawing as each copy was also an original drawing that could simultaneously be re-evaluated and adjusted.
In *The Culture of the Copy*, Hillel Schwartz distinguishes between two modes of copying: one, like Klee, approximates the actions of making the original and the other reproduces the original immediately in a sudden wholeness. The latter is typified by copy machines, scanners and the copy function on computers. This copying as appropriation is distinct from performative copying that re-enacts drawing, inviting reflection, reconsideration and growth.

**PERFORMATIVE DRAWING**

This close reading of some of Paul Klee’s work while at the Bauhaus defines three aspects of what we identify as performative drawing: (1) well-drawn lines contain the character and sequence of their making which narrates a story; (2) sensitive manipulation of drawing materials constructs meaning; and (3) thoughtful copying as re-enacting is a vital evolution. These aspects of performative drawing in turn provide three important reminders to architects directing their imagination while drawing. First, rather than seeing a drawing as an object to look at, architects can imagine moving within the drawing exercising an *inhabitation* to consider the design as it might be experienced. Second, by attending to the facture of the drawing, the architect can consider more deeply the materiality of the building and its site through the *constructive imagination*. And third, the laborious process of working and reworking a drawing need not be inefficient as it is a reservoir for critical examination of a design by enhancing the architect’s *productive imagination*. All three are united in performative drawing; that how one makes a drawing can be very important to what one designs.

Cartesianism, long questioned in critical thought, tenaciously remains in architectural drawing by dismissing the touch of mark-making as superfluous to the design idea. This radical bifurcation of mind and body reduces the prevailing understanding of architectural drawing to diagrams that merely record pre-formed information about a design. The long dominance of this viewpoint in modern times also directs the development of computers in design drawing. Today, a CAD operator’s movements manipulating a mouse have little intuitive physical or spatial relationship to the lines of the design being produced (Figure 3.8). Although twentieth-century hand-drawing practices were primarily understood as Cartesian, they also continued, mostly unnoticed, many of the tacit practices in the *habitus* of embodied design drawing. With the growth of computer technologies, these present but invisible aspects were forgotten and omitted.

Because of the enormous potential and revolutionary nature of this already ubiquitous tool, how drawing is now conceived is of great theoretical and ethical importance. As techniques become rationalized within operating systems, architectural practice is too often reduced to production and theory is reduced to technique. This is evident in architecture today where the word “performance” is narrowly used to describe the technical functioning of buildings, while the rich cultural dimension of performance is neglected. More than ever, our concern should be directed toward the *habitus* of architecture; how the techniques of
making drawings engage the architect mentally and bodily in developing a design. The enormous potential of computing for enriching the *habitus* with performative drawing can be realized in both software and human–machine interface (HMI) that engage the architect’s bodily imagination in virtual worlds. However, when automation does not engage the designer’s full sensibilities, complex tasks are achieved without a full investment of time and thought. As Marco Frascari has argued, this can ultimately lead the operator-architect to feel less responsible for the design and thus less ethically bound to a building’s impact when constructed in the world.\textsuperscript{51}

Performative drawing in architectural design challenges the inhabitative, constructive, and productive imaginations of the architect, which in turn can encourage an ethical concern for the quality of human life and the environment. This ethos is integrated with the creative work of architects in their “power to serve humanity.”\textsuperscript{52} Nurturing the culture of the *habitus*, as an evolved and evolving approach to embodied practice, is key to informing and advancing the active, expressive, and ethical thought of the architect.

NOTES

1 Philip Rawson, *Drawing* (Philadelphia, PA, 1987). The authors extend their thanks to Professor Carol Emmons for her advice and criticism of a draft of this essay.


6 A professor at Cornell University described creating his textbook from “classroom sketches on large sheets of wrapping paper.” Clarence Martin, *Details of Building Construction* (Boston, MA, 1899), preface, n.p.
11 Of Vitruvius’s extensive list of topics to be included in the architect’s liberal education, only drawing requires “skill.” Vitruvius, I. 1. 3.
14 Tacit knowing in skillful performance, like playing a musical instrument, focuses attention upon the completion of the activity, not the individual muscle movements required in executing the skill. Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NY, 1966).
18 Klee writes in a 1921 letter to his wife Lily: “Here in the studio I am working on half a dozen paintings, drawings and thinking about my course, all at once, for everything must go together or it wouldn’t work at all. It is this natural way of doing things that gives me strength.” Klee, *The Thinking Eye* (Introduction), p. 32.
24 Ibid., p. 151.
25 In *Gemischt*, Klee first drew the general layout of the figures very lightly with graphite.

26 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, p. 66.


32 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, p. 103.

33 Klee’s interest in puppets extended from subjects to objects of his work. Paul Klee, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern, Germany, 2006).

34 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, p. 78.


37 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, p. 15.

38 Ibid., p. 17.


43 Paul Klee expresses the influence of Kandinsky’s color studies in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, p. 467.


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Performing the Modernist Dwelling:
The Unité d’Habitation of Marseille

Sarah Bonnemaison

THE DELIVERY BOX

The corridor is a dimly lit, quiet, and cool space—a good thing in a Marseille summer, where temperatures hover around 35˚C. At the entry to each apartment, there is a blue metal box for the delivery of fresh milk and croissants. These remind me of the rotating cabinets in nunneries where one can buy sweets without disturbing the seclusion of the cloister. And like in a nunnery, the casier de livraison in the Unité d’Habitation connects each cell—as the architect Le Corbusier calls the apartment—to the larger community. It is a rational and efficient solution to the distribution of food. Each morning, a delivery person rolls a cart down the corridor and, without disturbing the residents, delivers goods to each address that has a standing order. As people wake up on the other side of the wall, they need only open the box from the inside of their dwelling to collect their croissants and milk and prepare their petit déjeuner (Figures 4.1–4.3).

This little delivery box encapsulates more than groceries. It represents, in miniature, the complex dynamics of relation, communication, concealment, exposure, and efficiency that is the performance of modernity in the Unité d’Habitation. Although it is the smallest performative component of this large building, we find in it all the significant features of modernist architectural ideology—functionality, anthropological analysis, and aesthetics.

Histories of modern architecture, whether written by architects or historians, often show buildings without people. Architects focus on forms, light and color, materials, landscapes and views, while historians are usually interested in architectural intentions, discourses, the dynamics around creation and construction, and so forth. And the fact that these buildings were made for people to live in, and that people still live in them today, is easy to overlook when one reads about well-known works of architecture. Sociologists have occupied
4.1 Security guard distributes the mail to each floor, Unité d’Habitation, Marseille, in 1986.

4.2 M. Muller, the baker, puts a tray of croissant in the oven. It is four in the morning at the Unité in May 1986.
this vacancy in architectural criticism—taking seriously Shakespeare’s dictum that “the world is a stage.” Richard Sennett, for example, has written on the performance of public life in the city, while Erving Goffman analyzed everyday life as a performance.\(^1\) In this study, I explore the idea that various notions of performance are central to the design of the Unité d’Habitation in Marseille, including functional performance or ergonomics, the performance of everyday life or ethnography, and the self-conscious performance of art or modernist aesthetics.

**EFFICIENCY AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE KITCHEN**

The design for the Unité d’Habitation in Marseille began in 1947, as part of a post-war reconstruction effort to house the working class, set in motion in France. For Le Corbusier, the commission was an opportunity to design and demonstrate collective dwelling. Building on his projects from the 1930s, particularly the Pavillon Suisse and the Cité de Refuge, which provided temporary housing, he imagined the Unité as a community of residents and, as with all his large projects, as a prototype for many such future buildings.\(^2\) The first one realized was a 14-story building with 350 apartments, designed for the post-war demographic of young families. In the spirit of functionalism and efficiency, Le Corbusier cut the number of corridors, by making the two-story dwellings accessible from a single corridor every third floor. This substantially reduced the walking distance for delivery of goods such as food, ice, and mail. As a result, half of the apartments have their entry and kitchen on the lower level of the unit, and the other half on the upper.

The early schemes for the building show little attention to the design of the kitchen in the apartments, as Le Corbusier wanted to replicate the collective amenities of Moisei Ginzburg’s Narkomfin workers’ housing in Moscow of 1928. There, a central servery and dining hall enabled residents to eat together, or to take their meals back to their apartment. Le Corbusier transformed the idea of a collective dining hall into the provision for a restaurant that could also deliver meals on demand in the central commercial zone half-way up the building. An interview with Madame Lhérisson, the last resident who had lived in the Unité since it opened in 1951, recalls with delight the early days when the Unité functioned as a cooperative. At lunch time, she would pick up two prepared meals cooked in the delivery boxes on each level are of a different color; the ones on the 7th level are blue.
restaurant and bring them to her apartment to eat with her husband every day. “That was such a time saver!” she said.³

But in post-war France, the annual design exhibitions increasingly included furniture, machines, and specially designed objects for the preparation of food at home. And issues related to the scientific management of the servantless household grew within the larger effort to study labor scientifically, making the home in general and the kitchen in particular a topic worthy of investigation. As a result, the request for an individual kitchen for each apartment of the Unité returned to the drawing board. Unfortunately, Le Corbusier knew little about kitchens. His previous projects show them as service spaces: utilitarian rooms tucked away from the heart of the dwelling and intended for servants, which he had considered until then unworthy of design attention. Faced with the need to develop a housing prototype in which the kitchen would be very much a part of the dwelling, he went to visit what was, at the time, the most influential kitchen design for workers’ housing — the Frankfurt Kitchen (Figure 4.4).⁴

The Frankfurt Kitchen was designed by Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, as a member of Ernst May’s design team for the City of Frankfurt’s social housing program. This modular kitchen, a compact 6.5m² (1.9m by 3.4m), was installed in 10,000 dwellings during 1926 and 1927.

It incorporated the most up-to-date equipment such as a gas stove, electricity, a folding ironing board, integral plumbing, and waste disposal. Its metal-lined storage drawers for dry goods resisted vermin, a lamp gliding on a track brought light where needed, and in-counter steamers kept food warm. That this kitchen was intended to transform people’s way of life is indisputable—a revealing indication of its goal to engineer society through design are the stamped labels on the storage drawers, prescribing the healthy foods that should comprise a worker’s diet (potatoes were notably excluded).⁵

Schütte-Lihotzky was explicit that her kitchen was designed for functionality. Not being a cook herself (in fact, having been raised in a Viennese bourgeois household she had rarely cooked at all), she turned to first principles of efficiency to design the kitchen. This meant American principles of efficient design for everyday activities in the home, best known at that time through the writings of Christine Fredericks and her German translator and proponent Irene Witte. Practitioners of “domestic science” and “home economics” recorded and analyzed everyday domestic activities with scientific accuracy and preferably cutting-edge technologies of visualization and mapping. The goal was objectivity and accuracy; the results, however, were more ambiguous. Commissioned, choreographed, and directed, these ergonomic studies were, in effect, performances of everyday life that carried with them certain assumptions about modernity.

Ernst May was quick to understand that the success of the Frankfurt housing program hinged on the success of this new type of kitchen. By placing all the cooking tasks in one enclosed room, and separating it from the rest of the apartment, the Frankfurt Kitchen radically altered traditional working-class patterns of cooking, eating, and living in a single room. In Frankfurt, associations of housewives demanded to be part of the design process and pushed for meetings
4.4 Promotional film on using of the Frankfurt Kitchen, 1929.
with the architects and Building Commission to contribute to the design process of this new housing type. Thus, Schütte-Lihotzky took on the role of “performing” feminine expertise—i.e. standing in as an ethnological substitute in press conferences and public meetings extolling the new social housing program in Frankfurt, and its heart, the kitchen. It is difficult to imagine today the degree to which this kitchen served as a lightning rod for public reception of this massive housing effort. It became the central, one might even say the characteristic, feature of the project. It was the focus of an educational film that, according to Schütte-Lihotzky, “explains how to use the kitchen”—showing a young woman preparing food, cleaning, and ironing with a minimum of effort in this small space that had cleverly designed features suited to each task, just like the galley kitchen of a railway dining car (Figure 4.4).

An alternative approach to kitchen design in the same period was found in workers’ housing in Munich, under the leadership of that city’s socialist housing director Karl Preis. This kitchen design was set squarely against the idea of the “machine for living,” relying instead on an ethnographic approach that adapted existing social living patterns in an aim to accommodate the full diversity of urban society. Cultural geographer Leif Jerram explains that “the Munich City Council deliberately and explicitly built homes for different types of workers existing in different social contexts in different parts of the city.” A variety of designs were built in Munich. The smallest was the Kochnische, probably designed by Karl Meitinger, a small niche fitted with modern appliances directly off a larger room that accommodated people’s own furniture such as a table, cupboard, and bench meaningful to create the social heart of a home. Also linking the living room to the kitchen was a design for the postal union settlements by Hanna Love, based on principles developed by Erna Meyer. Hanna Love’s kitchen was divided from the eating area by only a thin wooden partition that was glazed a meter above the ground, so the children remained in view of the working mother. The passage to the eating area was open and a narrow band of glass attached to the ceiling prevented the smoke from drifting out the kitchen and into the living space, leaving the space underneath open so that children could be heard and easily reached. The formal cupboard stayed in the eating area, a further nod to the traditional kitchen. This design was employed in over 12,000 dwellings built in 1927–28, and post-occupancy studies showed that the strategy of conserving traditional living patterns associated with the kitchen was well received.

These differing ideologies drove heated discussions in Germany about modern kitchen design. At stake, of course, was not the design of the kitchen, but the way that architecture would shape the behavior of the person working in it, the woman who would soon be a mother of children growing up in a modern household. In a revealing analogy, the exhibition catalogue in Munich presented the woman in the kitchen not as an efficient worker, but as a “creator;”
Even the functionalist kitchen of Frankfurt could not escape the human imperatives of women living in the apartments. In post-occupancy studies carried out (against the wishes of Bauamt Director Ernst May), sociologists interviewed residents of the Frankfurt housing projects. Complaints about the kitchen figured prominently, and one of the most frequent was that there was no shelf or ledge near the kitchen window. As it turns out, this was a socially normative means for women to show their pride of home and housekeeping skills, through the display of objects and flowers that were visible to others. In the German debate between the functional Frankfurt kitchen and the more traditional Munich kitchen, Jerram says, we see a desire for unity between head and heart and between rational and elemental.

THE “ART OF LIVING”

Twenty years after these debates, Charlotte Perriand found a way to unite the apparent opposites in her design for the kitchen module in the Unité d’Habitation in Marseille through what she called the “art of living.” The debate over modernity had emerged among intellectuals and artists in Paris in ways wholly different from social-democratic Germany. Artists like Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso explored motion studies and mass production in provocative work that aimed to unsettle and renew cultural assumptions. The ethnographer Michel Leiris shared with the Surrealist poet André Breton a fascination with the elemental impulses and aesthetics of “primitive” and the “modern,” publishing in journals such as George Bataille’s Documents (1929–30) and Albert Skira’s Minotaure (1933–39). This is the cultural milieu of Le Corbusier and his professional collaborators—Pierre Jeanneret, Jean Prouvé and, significantly for us here, Perriand.

After the lengthy interruption of World War II, and in the context of post-war reconstruction, we can see the themes of efficiency and ethnography re-surface in a new set of debates about the nature of housing. In France, the Unité d’Habitation in Marseille was one of the country’s first high-rise housing projects. Le Corbusier described it as a vertical village, a single building that would contain all the amenities of modern life: work, play, commerce, sociability, education, and exercise. He called it the “unité”: an organic and integrated whole. It is a megastructure, a framework for living that suspends individual apartments in an infrastructure of streets and services that mirror urban infrastructure, but in a vertical format. Like a small village, the social networks of the Unité are supported by social services such as a pre-school on the terrace, a library, a common room for meetings and events, and gymnasium. Small businesses are all gathered at mid-height—such as the bakery that prepares the croissants for morning delivery. Each apartment is conceived as a cell (the word cellule evoking
the organic, almost biological underpinnings of the constituent unit). And within
the cell, the kitchen is again a design challenge.

To this, Charlotte Perriand brought her concept of the “art of living.” She began,
as we might expect, with efficiency studies, relying on the French counterpart of
Christine Frederick, Paulette Bernege, for principles of kitchen design. Bernege,
perhaps unconsciously thinking of the Soviet Union in her quest for modernization,
rationality and efficiency in kitchen reform, “equated the distance of repeatedly
walking the eight meters between her kitchen and dining room over forty years to
that between Paris and Lake Baikal in Siberia.”

Certainly, Perriand’s design for the Unité’s kitchen module draws from motion
studies, in that the measurements for shelves, work surfaces, and storage units are
all as close as possible to the reach of the woman doing the work. She also looked
to local practices of food storage and preparation in Provence, as an ethnographer.
For example, she adapted the traditional ventilated cold cabinet to a centrally
serviced high-rise building by using cool air pulled from the corridor (through
the difference in pressure) to chill a vegetable drawer. She re-connected the (by
now normalized) separate kitchen back into the living zone through the device
of a “kitchen-bar,” which allows the woman to be part of family life in the living
area, while serving dinner through one door and concealing dirty dishes behind
another. The “kitchen-bar” was the centerpiece of a publicity photograph of the
prototype in 1950 (Figure 4.5). In this mise-en-scène, a housewife wearing a white
apron is salting a salad on the counter. The bowl is accessible from the dining side,
as are the plates and glasses on the shelf above. The kitchen cupboards behind her,
by contrast, conceal their workaday contents behind sliding doors. Perriand has
also added tactility and handicraft to the kitchen, with textured surfaces, sculpted
wooden cabinet pulls and colorful ceramic tile countertops. Nature is an important

4.5 Publicity photograph of
the kitchen bar
designed by
Charlotte Perriand
for the Unité.
part of the story here. The wood is varnished to highlight its grain and a bouquet of daisies adorns the kitchen-bar.

In Perriand’s design for the apartment kitchens in the Unité, we see ideas about functionality, ethnography, and artistry. These are not, however, clearly separated intentions overlaid in a sequential design process. Rather, they are inseparably related aspects of her approach to design, one which transformed functionalism into ethnography and art, art into functional objects, and ethnography into her reasons for looking at function, and an inspiration for her art.

Already in the 1930s, at the peak of her creative collaboration with the architect Le Corbusier and the engineer Pierre Jeanneret, Perriand was deeply immersed in photography under the influence of Man Ray. Her subjects are landscapes and nature; people captured in everyday moments, seemingly unaware of the camera; and found objects, usually manufactured goods that have been cast away. During this time of creative synthesis, Perriand’s approach to design reached full maturity. She produced her best-known pieces—the fauteuil grand confort, siège à dossier basculant, and chaise longue—through a meticulous and systematic observation of people caught reclining or resting unawares. This research on “natural” body positions directly informed her concepts for furniture (Figure 4.6). When people sit, what do their bodies tell them? Rather than, what does society demand? This led her to the idea that furniture could adapt to different body positions, if it were allowed freedom of movement.

In this way, the back support of a canvas chair should tilt, or a reclining chair should be allowed to slide on its support if one wishes to be more, or less, horizontal. And when it is time to photograph her chaise longue, Perriand makes herself the model showing how one might sit in such an unfamiliar device. Yet she turns her head away as if she, like her real life models, had been captured napping. The idea is to promote an art of living—immediate, informal, physical, and beautiful.

In making prototypes of furniture Perriand went into the streets of Paris to collect bits and pieces of trash. For example, she took an old bicycle frame to a welder to create a support for a chair, and linked it with springs to rubber or cowhide for a seat. In this, she shared a fascination for industry and machines with the Dadaists, the Cubists, and the Surrealists, but the glory and promise of progress, were consistently undermined by poetic and subversive moves. The machine could save labor, but it could also kill—as had been so painfully experienced in the First World War. In this context, we see the association of
4.7 M. and Mme Aubert were one of the original families who moved into the Unité. He worked on the tramway in Shanghai and the couple came to retire in Marseille—photograph taken in 1986.

4.8 The woman grew up in the Unité and was thrilled to move into an apartment close to her parents—photograph taken in 1986.
animal hide and the old bicycle as an open system of meaning rather than a rational functional design. If Perriand's initial research on body positions is clearly ethnographic, her process of prototyping was art in the spirit of Dada. And her final designs were created for mass production, by rationalizing decisions about sizes, materials, finishes, and hardware.

Like other artists, she had great misgivings about the machine aesthetic. Her designs for furniture in the post-war period show a drastic shift away from metal and a favoring of warm materials and organic forms. On her return from Asia in 1945, she brought a new sensibility toward materials and poetry into her design work for the furniture of the Unité d'Habitation. In a notable departure from her earlier use of steel and industrial methods of fabrication, the demonstration unit for the apartment of the Unité exhibited in 1949 included a rustic three-legged pine chair and wooden bookshelves that are simple, unadorned, and natural.

The craftsmanship is inspired from traditional furniture found in farmhouses of central France, the work of the hand is celebrated, the materials are warm to the touch and the forms organic. We also see natural artifacts on the shelf (conch shell), vernacular architecture (photograph of a windmill), and handicraft (homespun throw rug on the wall).

The furniture for the Unité can also be read as a kind of montage, or staging for a story in which a child of nature, like a homing pigeon, finds refuge in the concrete cliff of the Unité, overlooking the bright summer sun reflected by the waters of the Mediterranean Sea (Figures 4.7 and 4.8). In this, the elemental is brought back to the scientific, rational analysis that generated the modernist kitchen, dwelling, and high-rise housing complex. According to Mary McLeod, Perriand's designs for the Unité brought together a scientific rigor of motion studies with a sense of style lacking in many other modern kitchens of the inter- and post-war periods. I would add that she also studied the way people live from an ethnological point of view that can be seen in the detailing of the cupboards and in the furniture she created for the Unité. In many respects, it seems that her kitchen designs achieved a unity of head and heart, and of rational and elemental, that had eluded the earlier German designers.

NOTES


2 Pavillon Suisse 1930, Cité de Refuge 1931. In both cases, engineering was by Pierre Jeanneret, and interiors and furniture were by Charlotte Perriand.

3 Interview by Colette Dumur with Madame Lhérisson on October 15, 2011 in the Le Corbusier Unité apartment # 750. The restaurant owners, the Kelly family, also cooked warm lunches to take out for the residents.


7 Because Schütte-Lihotzky was the first woman designer to work in the office she was pushed to the forefront of issues of publicity surrounding the kitchen. She recalls: “Ernst May repeatedly mentioned the fact that it was no coincidence the Frankfurt Kitchen was designed by a woman for women. This stemmed from the prevalent petit bourgeois perception that women were, by their very nature, meant to work at the domestic stove. It seemed to follow therefore that a woman architect would know best what was important for kitchens. That was good propaganda. But the truth of the matter was that I had never run a household before designing the Frankfurt Kitchen. I had never cooked, and had no idea about cooking.” Schütte-Lihotzky, Warum, p. 93.

8 Ibid., p. 93.


10 Ibid.

11 The lessons learned in the cooking classes could flow seamlessly back into the home. As Schütte Lihotzky recalls, “so many dwellings in Frankfurt had the Frankfurt Kitchen, so it was not a big step to conceive of a teaching space as a series of nooks that resembled the Frankfurt Kitchen where groups of four children could comfortably study cooking and practice together.” Schütte-Lihotzky, ”Passages from Why I Became an Architect,” West 86th, 18/1 (Spring/Summer, 2011): 86–96.


13 Ibid., p. 552.

Staging: Making a Scene

Peter P. Goché

Our experience as occupants of a new setting begins with the impulse to instantaneously scrutinize everything. This impulse can be sustained by a designer through a precisely choreographed threshold. As architect and artist, my goal is to assist the occupant in maintaining his or her initial ontological wakefulness through staging often-temporary assemblies within a host space and thereby extend the passage sequence.

This photo-essay illustrates the role of staging as a means to reveal the experiential nature of lived space. In 2000 and 2007, I developed two performance-based productions, the first within the Des Moines Art Center’s Maytag Reflecting Pool and the second in a nineteenth-century receiving vault at Woodlawn Cemetery in Des Moines, Iowa. Both sites belong, by purpose, to the public as well as to the larger, all-inclusive, whole that is the landscape in which we live.

Each inquiry is part of a process by which the cultural history and sensual experience of the particular settings are revealed. The resultant staging yields what Joan Simon calls a socio-graph, a support system for the occupation of place. To this end, the act of making a scene assists in cultivating place-based knowledge. It is an embodiment of an interdisciplinary agenda that embraces the artist as craftsman, choreographer, and scribe in the service of heightening the cultural experience of lived space.

Drift (Figure 5.1a), a performance art installation, was developed for the Maytag Reflecting Pool at the Des Moines Art Center. The interior courtyard is bounded by the work of Eliel Saarinen, I.M. Pei, and Richard Meier. The initial building, constructed in 1948, was the last building of Eliel Saarinen’s own design and framed a view of Greenwood Park to the south. The courtyard contained a reflecting pool and single sculpture by Carl Milles, Man and Pegasus. The 1968 addition by I.M. Pei filled the courtyard’s field of vision to the south while maintaining the pool. A large window frames the once-open view of Greenwood Park. The Richard Meier addition was opened in 1985 and consists of a restaurant in the northwest corner of the courtyard that looks inward to the reflecting pool. This architectural context produces a courtyard circumscribed by the various programmatic conditions particular to viewing art and watching people.
The performance consisted of casting wax tablets (Figure 5.1b) into the water and carefully wading out into the shallow pool to light them. The work incorporated (and magnified) the space of the site and created a private, contemplative experience for the 100 or so people who silently looked on as the water’s surface began to dance with light. Each ignition was punctuated with silence followed by the acoustic creep of footsteps through water:

*Suspended by water, memories dance upon the belly of its corpse. (performance text)*

The conceptual aspect of this exploration focused on the sentimental nature of candles as a way of developing a scene of intimacy within a voyeuristic environment. The site (Figure 5.1c) was transformed into an arena in which the audience was invited to be actively present, immersed in a multi-sensory experience. Each viewer became aware of his or her own bodily presence while watching in silence with intensity linked to deep reflection.

*Vault*, developed in the confines of the City Receiving Vault at Woodland Cemetery, was presented to the public on June 9, 2007. The performance was based on the desire to unfold a cultural view of the world through the re-insertion of rite in a long-since vacant setting.

The City Receiving Vault (Figure 5.2e) was built ca. 1850 and is believed to be Des Moines’ oldest standing building. The vault served as an on-site morgue where bodies would be stored in the winter until spring when the ground could be manually excavated. The vault sometimes held as many as 100 bodies.

The installation consists of a measure, a baldachin, and a reliquary. The measure (Figure 5.2c and 5.2f), a sinuous arrangement of half-inch-thick steel print plates on \(1/2\times1\frac{1}{2}''\) \((1.25 \times 4 \text{ cm})\) steel bar stock blocking, was placed on the floor of the vault proper. A large \((72'' \times 216'' / 183 \times 549 \text{ cm})\) muslin cloth (Figure 5.2d) was placed over the measure bearing a corresponding ink impression. The reliquary (Figure 5.2a and 5.2b), a small box in which thorns were kept, was placed atop a modeling stand. Each of these pieces was accompanied by a white floral wreath and pool of white candles. Occupying the two niches adjacent to the entryway, the wreaths and candles stood as memorials to those interred in this facility. The audience assembled amidst these elements within a cavernous vault with peeling paint that recalled the past and signified a world beyond the one in which we live.

Essential to this staging was a performance sequence including an acoustic intoning of the measure, a placement of the baldachin, a presentation of a requiem (“Vocalise I” by Sergei Rachmaninoff) performed by concert violinist Caleb Polashek, and a recital of the following incantation:

*And now, with calm economy, I await the ghost hour. In this still moment, I am present. Descending from flesh and bone, a mark appears. This mark is humble … almost silent. In a delirium of immediate recognition, I study its nuance and am reminded of my childhood tracings while playing in the dirt. Of thorns and steel and ink, I commit this work to ordinary time, to ordinary people, to ordinary passage.*

In this way, the viewer entered into a full sensory experience and corresponding recognition of mortality. What remains and is contained, as a result, is the collective memory of repeated human celebration specific to this place.
5.1c Candlelight animating the space of the site, *Drift*, Des Moines Art Center, 2000.
5.2c The measure in the confines of the vault, *Vault*, City Receiving Vault, Des Moines, 2007.
5.2e City of Des Moines Receiving Vault.

5.2f Detail of measure.
Salvaged Layers was a site-specific performance, which took place at the Irving Theater in Indianapolis, Indiana in 2010 as the culmination of a semester-long project that challenged students to explore issues of craft, making, and place through a series of full-scale built installations. The Irving Theater and the history of the Irvington neighborhood, where the theater is located, inspired both the installations and the performance (Figure 6.1).

The project was an interdisciplinary collaboration between two groups of students from separate universities, a group of eleven fourth-year Ball State University architecture students led by faculty coordinator Timothy Gray and nine Butler University theater students led by faculty director Melli Hoppe.1 The students were challenged to interpret, amplify, and make visible the existing qualities of the space through both installation and performance; the two groups informed but did not dictate the activities of one another. The theater, which had been gutted in anticipation of a planned renovation, gave students a rich and evocative palette to engage while simultaneously liberating them from conventional notions of stage and audience, where the performer and audience were separated (Figure 6.1).
viewer are normally separated. Students were challenged to create theater
where memory and interpretation of the place were equal partners to the actors
and the installations in the development of the final performance.

PROJECT

Positioning this project as a cross-disciplinary collaboration gave students the
opportunity to explore ways in which the different disciplines could creatively
engage one another while grounding their activities in the specific circumstance of
the site. They learned how to articulate their ideas through drawings, photography,
audio recordings, and videotapes shared over the Internet.

The architecture students drew on a rich mix of precedents to inform their
approach including the work of architects Elizabeth Diller, Thom Mayne, Zaha
Hadid, and Bernard Tschumi, all of whom have been directly involved with
performance as an art form and have cast their design work as part of the
performance of daily life. Tschumi famously stated “there is no place without
event,” in his advocacy of an architecture “concerned with spatial discourse
associated with time, action and movement.” Students were encouraged to
consider these potentials as they developed their designs.

In addition, the architecture students’ conceptual approach borrowed from
artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark, who reveals through dissection. His violent
interventions offer a new understanding of the familiar, “interrogating the
relationship between art and place.” The students also looked to the work of
David Ireland who, unlike Matta-Clark, treats discarded buildings with a respect
approaching reverence. In both his Capp Street home and the Headlands Center
for the Arts, Ireland approaches the restoration of the ordinary as an archeologist
might approach a historic site, celebrating and revealing the layers of time
embedded in a building and searching for aesthetic potential in the process of maintenance and repair.

In the absence of a conventional functional agenda for the project, students were encouraged to empower emotion over intellect for their initial response. Rather than understand the building through an analytical reading of past uses and modifications, the students were encouraged to identify their emotional reaction to the space in the present, to be inspired by the textures and smells of the place, including the quality of light, the layers of dust and time, and to engage the immediacy of their experience through photographs, charcoal rubbings, and written word. The students were to distill the qualities of the site that resonated with them, and then propose what artist Robert Irwin might refer to as a “site conditioned response,” where “the sculptural response draws all of its cues (reasons for being) from its surroundings.” The installations were to be a response to an existing condition of the site identified by the students.

The theater students modeled their approach after such precedents as the Welsh performance group Brith Gof, whose “‘placeevents’ … operated within architectures that were not backdrops,” but rather “the performance and place are invested in one another.” In one notable performance, *Tri Bywyd [Three Lives]*, Brith Gof built two transparent structures of steel tubing within the ruins of an abandoned farmstead so that the original site could be seen through the scaffolding. Using the ruins of the farmstead as a starting point, three stories about three separate lives took place in the parallel architectures.

Inspired by the book *Theatre/Archaeology* by Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, the directors of Brith Gof, the theater students began their process by researching local history, folklore, hearsay, memoirs, and biographies to create material for their performance. In addition, the students reviewed the work of other groups known for including the surrounding space into the viewer’s experience of the work, such as Redmoon Theater, in Chicago.

Richard Schechner, founder of The Performance Group, used the term “environmental theater” to describe site-specific performance. Schechner formulated six axioms for environmental theater:

1. It is necessary to accept a definition of theater which is not based on traditional distinctions between life and art.
2. “All the space is used for performance” and “all the space is used for audience.”
3. “The theatrical event can take place either in a totally transformed space or in ‘found space.’”
4. “Focus is flexible and variable.”
5. “One element is not submerged for the sake of others.”
6. “The text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of a production. There may be no text at all.”

As suggested by Schechner’s axioms, the entire building became the site for the performance, and there was no distinction between performer and spectator. The whole room was transformed into a theatrical space. The focus was flexible,
meaning the audience could choose where to focus. In addition, the architecture students’ installations had their own significance and identity creating a synergy with, but not necessarily in service to, the performance.

**PROCESS**

Since access to the theater was limited, all projects had to accommodate a one-week window for installation and removal, a significant constraint. In addition, salvaged material from the recently demolished Indianapolis Colts football stadium, the RCA Dome, was made available to the students for investigation in addition to the fabric of the theater, which informed student proposals.

As the architecture students developed their design proposals, they worked with the instructor to design and fabricate a preliminary faculty-led project, investigating ways to join and tension the materials salvaged from the RCA Dome and to understand their potential. Enlisting the students to work collaboratively on this introductory project, completed in the first three weeks of the fifteen-week studio, armed them with practical fabrication skills that informed the work they were designing independently. The project, termed the “SWOPE” after a gallery in which it was briefly exhibited, helped to ground the students in the significant challenges of construction, and helped them to establish realistic time frames and budgets for the fabrication of their work.

Perhaps most importantly, by completing the “SWOPE” installation piece early in the semester the architecture students were able to transport the work and set it up at Butler’s black box theater, giving the theater students physical access to it. Within days images were posted to Facebook of the theater group aggressively inhabiting and transforming the piece, amplifying its potential in creative and unexpected ways (Figure 6.2). The architecture students, excited and empowered by the theater students’ response, continued to look for ways for their installations to be both spatial and kinetic without being prescriptive as to how the performers should engage the work (Figure 6.3).

As the architecture students advanced their individual and team proposals (six projects were generated by student teams) they used two distinct methods to research the history of the building: first through an analysis of past uses and the recorded history of the building, and second through a direct analysis of how the building was experienced in the present. Students using the second method of analysis were to engage the history of the place as it was embedded in the patina of the walls; to experience and appreciate the smells, textures, and rhythms of the theater as it existed in the moment. Students were challenged to respond to these cues and to propose built interventions designed to reveal and amplify existing conditions. The theater students were charged to do the same as they developed characters and movement studies for the performance, but had the added potential of the architecture students’ proposed installations.

The design ideas generated by the architecture students were shared with the Butler students on a Facebook page set up for the project. The theater students,
in turn, videotaped movement studies and dialogue in response to the images, and posted these to the same website. As the architecture students developed their designs, process models, and full-scale material investigations, these studies were continually posted for review and comment by the Butler students and other interested parties. The theater students posted their work as it evolved in a similar manner, using video and recorded dialogue. In this way the students entered into a remote collaboration (the two schools are 60 miles apart), each group informing and influencing (but neither dictating) the activities of the other. Throughout the project, the students at the two universities used a variety of media to interact and collaborate on the project, including Skype, Facebook, YouTube, and SoundCloud.

PERFORMANCE

Some of the architecture student proposals, such as the “Choppa” by Jay Weeks and Austin Lucari (Figure 6.4, bottom right; Figure 6.3, left), responded to the conditions of the theater but existed as discrete objects in the space. The “Choppa” was located on the gradually inclined floor of the old theater, focusing awareness on this condition and recalling the past use when seating filled the area. The “Choppa” was manually operated and scraped on the high side of the bare concrete floor as it rotated, periodically tensioning and releasing with a sharp bang. In this piece, the tensioning of the rods as they rotated against a fixed steel plate completed a circuit, triggering a short burst of intense light from the center of the apparatus (similar to a strobe). The “Choppa” calibrated the scale of the space both through sight and the reverberation of the sound. The uncomfortable and disquieting operation of the elegantly designed apparatus amplified the sense of the theater as a “cold, uncomfortable, and scale-less” space, qualities identified by the student team at the outset of the project (Figures 6.5 and 6.6).

Other student proposals directly engaged the existing conditions, such as the “Perch” by Paul Reynolds (Figure 6.4 top), which was discreetly attached to an existing opening...
in the former projection booth. The “Perch” celebrated both the rich patina and the moment of penetration through the existing wall, and provided an elegant and dramatic platform that allowed one to pass through the existing opening. The “Perch” respected the integrity of the theater by attaching to the existing wall with an elaborately contrived compression system that required no physical connection to or violation of it. Cables, which supported the cantilever (on the theater side), tied back to steel truss members on the projection booth side of the opening, which in turn tensioned against the head of the existing opening (Figure 6.4, top). This system cinched into place and became more secure when loaded. This method of installation allowed the “Perch” to be both installed and removed with no modification of or damage to the existing building. The uncomfortably dramatic cantilever of the “Perch” confronted and amplified the audience members’ understanding of the existing condition, while the method of attachment (in the spirit of Ireland’s work) suggested the found condition to be something of value and significance.

Another student proposal, “Strata” by Luke Haas, Mark Vanden Akker, and Brad Wanack (Figure 6.3, bottom; Figure 6.7), was site-specific in the most literal way, actually manipulating the base building condition. The proposal called for removing a bay of ceiling joists, re-attaching them using a series of waterjet-fabricated hinges, then counterweighting them, allowing the joists to pivot vertically through a series of cables and pulleys. Mirroring the realities of practice, the students’ designs were modified to address concerns raised by the building owner, and to accommodate some of the existing conditions discovered during the process. What began as a design for a simple one-directional curve became complex, as certain joists were required to be left in place to stabilize the existing roof trusses, which had begun to rack over time. Fluorescent tubes suspended between the ceiling joists...

(left)
6.6 Theater student Joe Esbenshade interacts with “Choppa” during the performance, with “Strata” above, 2010.

(right)
completed this installation, which confronted one’s understanding of the space as a static, rectangular volume by celebrating and revealing the previously concealed depth within the roof trusses overhead. The installation reinterpreted the static and mundane ceiling joists as kinetic sculptural components and redefined the building as a dynamic part of the performance rather than a static container.

Just as the history of the theater was embedded in the patina of its walls, the students sought to celebrate the iterative nature of their collaborative method by reintroducing the process in the finished work. In one instance, the Ball State students kept a digital log of recorded sounds from the actual fabrication of the work, such as sounds of chop saws, drills, and grinders as well as dialogue between the students. They used garage band software to mix the sounds into an eerie, abstracted sound track, which they played at the beginning of the performance. In another instance, one student salvaged plywood sheets that had been used as a jig and welding surface during the fabrication of another student’s project, and modified the material for use in his finished installation. The second student’s finished work included the burn marks, screw holes, etc. from the material’s previous use as a jig, recording and celebrating the process of construction (Figure 6.3 right, Figure 6.9).

Likewise, the theater students’ performance became a collage of the stories they developed through their research, one overlapping another, like peeling paint revealing bits and pieces of the past. The interaction of movement and text with the installations provided form, texture, and inspiration for their characters. This interaction allowed the actors’ storytelling to become more abstract, their gestures to be less literal, and helped to ground the performance in the immediacy and the experiential qualities of the space (Figure 6.8). The historical and contemporary aspects of the building merged, fusing the past with the present.
REFLECTIONS

While students were encouraged to think of installations that could define space, or were kinetic and ripe with potential for interaction, there was no storyline to which they were responding. Throughout the process, the activities of the architecture students were unlike preparing a stage set because they led rather than followed the choreography of the performance. By the same token, the theater students were invited to react/interact with the work freely, so they engaged the installations in bold and unexpected ways, amplifying the potential of the architecture students’ projects. For example, a series of partitions in a student installation called the “Beater” (Figure 6.10) created rooms for the actors to run through in one scene, and the “Choppa” became a machine for an actor in another scene. There was very real excitement and synergy between the two groups, and there was great consensus among those involved in the project that the collaboration resulted in a whole that was in fact greater than the sum of the parts (Figure 6.9).

The semester culminated in a well-attended and well-reviewed two-night performance at the Irving Theater in Indianapolis. The synergistic relationship between architects and actors emerged in mutual respect as well as a real shared sense of both accomplishment and ownership of the project.

Despite these strengths some constraints limited the full potential of the project. With one exception, the two groups of students were unable to meet face to face and develop real-time and place interventions together—and the various media (Facebook, video- and audio-sharing websites, etc.) created significant limitations due to the inherent abstraction of the virtual representation of ideas. Although the architects went to great lengths to represent their ideas using a variety of media,
there was no substitute for actually watching the theater students interact with the finished installations in place (Figure 6.11). The theater students had limited time to experiment, improvise, and rehearse with the constructed pieces throughout the semester while the work was developing. With the notable exception of the “SWOPE” piece previously described, the performers had very limited access to the installations prior to the event, which forced them to choreograph much of their physical movement in a very short amount of time.

With that said, there was a tremendous energy in the theater the week before the event, as the architecture students were working (installing) alongside the theater students (rehearsing) well into the night. Much came together in the final week, but in some cases a disjunction remained between the narratives generated by the theater students and the physical qualities of the installations.

Nevertheless, the students were empowered to think about their art forms in new ways. They blurred the boundaries between space and performer, past and present, life and art. The architecture students were reminded that buildings do not exist simply as objects, but are instead environments defined by human activity. The Irving Theater itself was an active participant in the process, the memory of the historic place was made visible through the performance of Salvaged Layers.

NOTES


PART II
Performing Design
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Through the Lens: Image and Illusion at Play in the Ideal City

Ann Marie Borys

... the general culture of Europe in this period was probably the most theatrical in its history ... theater taught about the world and how to display oneself in it.

William J. Bouwsma, The Waning of the Renaissance

“Street” and “stage” are interchangeable ideas in the Renaissance, but perhaps never more so than in the oneiric utopia of the ideal city. “Theater” performances happened in the street before the development of special theatrical spaces in gardens and palaces. More to the point, it was widely perceived that urban public life was itself a kind of performance. Therefore, a reflexive condition was set in motion when theatrical space was moved from private interiors to become a visible presence on the street, a theater building. It is especially fitting that the first such permanent theater building was conceived for an ideal city, Sabbioneta, Italy, where the citizens were clearly actors in an urban drama staged by the ruling founder. The design of this theater ingeniously amplifies the inherent mirroring of roles between stage and street, audience and actor. The theater at Sabbioneta, conceived as a *camera obscura* (Figure 7.1), provides a lens through which the theater of urban life was projected directly onto the stage and an image of theatrical self-awareness was projected back onto the street.

The theater, constructed in 1588–90, is widely acknowledged as the first permanent theater to be constructed since antiquity. Kurt W. Forster’s seminal interpretation of the project focuses on its role in the development of theater design as a distinctive social and spatial type and he articulates its political and rhetorical message in terms of a symbolically potent location and iconographic program. Hermans and Mazzoni updated and extended Forster’s work so that we can now fully appreciate the dramatic intentions of its patron, Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga, in making a highly visible gift of a theater to his city just as the Emperor Vespasian, his mythic predecessor, had bequeathed the
Colosseum to the Roman population. Both rulers gave something to the city that had heretofore been privately held by the ruling class.

Vicenza’s more famous Teatro Olimpico, completed about five years before the theater at Sabbioneta, was also intended to be permanent, but it shared with the temporary theatrical spaces of the **cinquecento** the limitations of being constructed within an existing building. Most notably, Teatro Olimpico was built within a mute brick structure that offered no face to the city. Therefore, the massing and façades at Sabbioneta carry special significance: Duke Gonzaga’s theater was the first to declare through its form and character an articulate relationship to the street and the city. The architect he selected for this innovative project, Vincenzo Scamozzi, did not share with Palladio the basic intention of reconstructing the theater space of Roman antiquity, so it is not surprising that the massing and façades were not shaped on the ancient model. Instead, Scamozzi invented a proper character for the theater in the city according to his own ideas on architecture. His innovative design for the theatrical space unified the immeasurable illusory space of the performance with the measurable space of the audience. I propose that his original designs for exterior and interior are linked, and that they are consistent with fundamental beliefs Scamozzi expressed in his treatise, *L’Idea dell’Architettura Universale*—that architecture is a science, and the city is the work of the architect.

Scamozzi’s deep investigation into the nature of the city is apparent in the second book of his treatise, devoted to historical determinants of city location and form, including environmental factors such as water, air, light, and wind, and
cultural factors such as population size, economic, and political relationships to other cities, and defenses. He clearly designates the architect as the one responsible for using this body of knowledge to determine an advantageous location and the best design for cities. While Vitruvius and Alberti shared a similar conviction, sixteenth-century treatises had largely ignored the question of the city. The theoretical stance that emerges from Scamozzi’s lengthy treatment is most remarkable because he moves beyond static descriptions of building types and hierarchies typical of Renaissance categories, seeing in the city what Françoise Choay calls “a dynamic field of desires, the power of invention, and the creativity of humankind,” in short, a place of drama in the conduct of human affairs.

His assertion that architecture is a science means in part that mathematics and mechanics are the means for discovering the truth of things. While Scamozzi continued humanist habits of finding unity and synthesis through the analogical thinking best captured by themes of microcosm/macrocosm, he was also in tune with the changing conception of mathematics as “the ultimate explanation of natural phenomena.” We can see that the theater at Sabbioneta exceeds the idea of the stage as a microcosm. Here, the entire theater is an instrument, a metaphorical camera obscura that sets up an interaction between the performance space and the city outside. If it is not exactly an infinitely reflected mise-en-abîme, it is at least the suggestion of one: a self-same representation of an ideal city within an ideal city.

FROM FESTIVAL SPACE TO THEATER SPACE: THE INVERSION OF ILLUSION

Theater and festivals were an integral part of Renaissance street life and, in turn, the street and the urban piazza were at the heart of the Renaissance development of the theater. Public performances marked holidays and significant occasions, entailing elaborate ephemeral architectural settings that temporarily transformed the city. However, the city was always still perceptible: “ephemeral architecture derives its power to impose an imagined place and moment upon a merely given one from the fact that it is incomplete and is seen to be so.” The architects that we connect with famous cinquecento theater designs, including both Serlio and Scamozzi, were also festival architects for their princely patrons. They experienced for themselves the power of ephemeral performance structures to transform the city through a reordering of perceptions of space and also of time within a simultaneous awareness of the illusory and the real.

Festival books provide a record of this temporary architecture that would otherwise be lost to history. The triumphal arch in particular was an element suited to festival architecture (Figure 7.2). Its classical architectural forms enhanced the illusion of timelessness and co-opted the myth of Roman longevity. As a composition, the triumphal arch was flexible in scale, and its elements could be combined in unconventional ways without disrupting the
Triumphal arches easily accommodated sculptural relief to specify the festival’s commemorative purposes in a pictorial narrative for a broad audience. Furthermore, the use of the arch created associations with medieval street festivals that were staged or commenced at city gates, many of which were formally related to the triumphal arch.

While Renaissance theater tradition evolved from the street festival as a primary source, there are of course distinctions to be drawn. William McClung writes, “Festival architects harness the world to their purposes when they impose their architecture upon the space of daily life; theater architects project the world upon, or telescope it into, their stages and sets”\(^{10}\) [italics mine]. As the development of a theater tradition within the princely courts took hold, the audience position stabilized with respect to the performance, which was set against one wall of the cortile. The resultant tableau lent itself to the development of constructed scenery.\(^{11}\) The revival of ancient comedic and tragic forms, an important focus among humanist patrons and academies,\(^ {12}\) led to the performance of classical plays and contemporary imitations. Serlio codified the idea that a dense assembly of appropriate buildings forming a street or square was the proper setting for these performances.\(^ {13}\) Consequently, the same architects who transformed urban space with ephemeral and fantastic forms for festivals were also required to precisely invert their creative vision, to develop the stage set as a view of the city in order to “affirm the world of the set as reality, or the theater as the world.”\(^ {14}\) The goal now was to make illusory space seem real. Perspective provided the primary means to do so.

FROM URBAN SPACE TO SCENIC SPACE: THE INVERSION OF PERSPECTIVE VISION

Perspective played many roles in the dynamics of the Renaissance city and theater. Brunelleschi demonstrated the laws of perspective with two painted panels of an urban scene. Martin Kemp recounts the story of how Brunelleschi
drilled a viewing hole through his painted panel at the vanishing point and set up a mirror, so a viewer could look through from behind the painting to see the reflected illusion and then lower the device to compare it with the actual view of the city square.\textsuperscript{15} This double transmission has particular interest for theater: an image passing from the actual urban fabric to the illusion of a panel, and then to the mirror. David Summers puts it this way, “the inversion of the rationalization of vision as the possibility of creation of new kinds of illusion leads to theater, the \textit{theatron}, the place for seeing or for seeing illusion as if seen.”\textsuperscript{16} Kemp is rather less delicate: “Brunelleschi constructed a form of peepshow to heighten its illusion.”\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, Renaissance perspective was first extracted from the city, and over time it re-made the order of the city. Brunelleschi’s innovative architecture was embraced and developed with impacts on buildings and urban space in major Italian cities: “… Brunelleschi designed buildings to be seen perspectivally.”\textsuperscript{18} This new architecture in turn provoked a new fantasy of urban order, an ideal city, expressed most cogently in three late \textit{quattrocento} paintings.\textsuperscript{19} These ideas gained such cultural currency through painting and architecture that we can easily think of Renaissance culture as conditioned by perspective as a \textit{way of seeing}. Finally, this tool that first allowed the development of a newly ordered architecture and the closer simulation of reality in the painted surface was then used to construct illusory spaces—spaces that had the appearance of real-world architectural scale but which were in fact radically compressed. Renaissance theater happened in a certain sense between the spatial expansion of the painted surface and the spatial compression of built forms.

Perspective was an invention of the \textit{quattrocento} that had lasting effects and maintained a hold on cultural production even as newer ways of seeing were developed in the sixteenth century. Treatises on perspective continued to be written, and Serlio’s famous description of stage sets was integral to his 1545 book on perspective. His illustrations of the three types of scenery are iconic, but it is the plan and section that reveal how perspective can be used to accomplish the illusion of grand structures and expansive space within the limitations of the stage (Figure 7.3).

7.3 Serlio’s theater plan and section and his perspectival tragic scene combined, from Sebastiano Serlio, \textit{On Architecture}, trans. V. Hart and P. Hicks (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 82, 85, and 89.
Urban experience, conditioned by architectural forms conceived for seeing-in-perspective, is replicated in an illusory space constructed by means of perspective. Perspective, a way of looking at the world and a technology for constructing a world, is an idea shared between city and theater, both conditioning and creating a particular spatial experience. In Serlio’s constructions, the mirror image of Brunelleschi doubled back.

THE CITY IN THE THEATER: SEEING INSIDE PERSPECTIVE AT SABBIONETA

Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga (1531–91) somewhat anachronistically conceived and constructed, starting in 1556, the ideal city of Sabbioneta as a seat of power distinct from the Gonzaga court at Mantua. He may have designed it himself, perhaps consulting with Pietro Cataneo on the fortifications. Unfortunately, his death led to a decline in the social and cultural importance of Sabbioneta, but it has been well preserved as a result.

Gonzaga chose Scamozzi to design a theater all’antiqua, which was completed relatively quickly between 1588 and 1590 (Figure 7.4). Scamozzi was likely chosen for his skill in the completion of Palladio’s Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, but he was also experienced in festival architecture. He spent seven days in May of 1588 surveying the site and town. His design is preserved in a single autographed drawing that in plan and section expresses the entire synthesis of his response (Figure 7.5).

The theater in Sabbioneta fills its rectangular site. A barn-like box that is about three times as long as wide, and two stories in height, it is engaged in a city block along one of its long walls, but the other three sides face newly made streets. The interior contains a double-story theatrical space, book-ended by secondary spaces on two floors at either end (Figure 7.6). The longitudinal main space contains a raised stage at one end and stepped tiers of seating topped by a curved loggia at the other end. Rooms adjacent to the stage provide access and accommodations for actors and musicians; rooms behind the cavea allow access for privileged audience members.

Stage structure and seating structure occupy either end of a unified space—there is no division between audience and action, just a neutral zone where the space is bounded by the exterior walls. These lateral surfaces are frescoed to visually link the illusory architectural elements of the stage and the constructed elements of the loggia atop the seating risers. The painted architectural elements of the fresco form monumental arches that appear to open onto bucolic landscapes punctuated with monuments of Rome. The decorative ornament carefully knits together the
architectural details of the loggia and constructed elements of the scenery so that the painting succeeds in providing the entire space with a sense of visual continuity at the level of the entablature. The open-air scenes, however, suggest a spatial gap, signifying an indeterminate space between audience and players. Above the painted arch, a continuous painted balustrade is populated with animated theater-goers of less exalted rank than the actual theater-goers invited by the duke.

Though the peristyle surrounding the seating is reminiscent of the Teatro Olimpico, the proportions of Scamozzi’s interior are in sharp contrast, for he stretched the axis of viewing. Forster shows how the perspective of the entire
space, including the illusory sets, was constructed to maximize the visual effect for the duke in his place of honor in the loggia. The elongation also meant that all audience members had a view within a visual angle that maintained the effectiveness of the illusion. The addition of the painted elements helped the eye to move more easily over apparent inconsistencies, engaging the suspension of disbelief even as the central stage set achieved its full illusion.

Scamozzi’s striking innovation was the elimination altogether of any framing device through which one viewed the stage scene (Figure 7.7). It is not surprising that he rejected Palladio’s all’antica solution to the scenic structure, but he also rejected Serlio’s device of illusory downstage scenic flats which were parallel to the front of the stage and perpendicular to the central axis of vision. These flats did not form a “proscenium arch” in the modern sense of the term, but they created a similar spatial boundary between the real space of the audience and the illusory space of the set, resolving discontinuities of scale. Scamozzi’s foremost planes were set at an angle so as to join the constructed stage set with the frescoes of the side walls. Rather than signaling a break to a separate zone of space, the space of illusion, Scamozzi’s design unified the audience and actors in a single space while maintaining the illusion. Only the duke’s party seated in the loggia above was partially separated in imitation of his palace balcony above the main piazza of the city (Figure 7.8). The relationships of the real world were replicated, miniaturized, captured in a box.
The whole interior of the theater works like a *camera obscura* without the reversal of the image. Scamozzi, a careful student of both Aristotle and Daniele Barbaro, certainly knew of such optical devices and might easily have pondered it, metaphorically, as he used science, mathematics, optics, and perspective to solve an architectural problem and create the illusion of an ideal city in a box located at the center of an ideal city. An even more apt description was available to him in the 1558 *Magia Naturalis* of Giovanni Battista della Porta, who called his room-sized projection device a *cubiculum obscurum*, and even showed that “by using a lens that reduces the divergence of the light rays entering through the opening, the image can be seen in its natural colors and the right way up if the lens is positioned correctly.”

This improved *camera obscura* came at the beginning of a new era of scientific instruments for seeing and observing the world. Scamozzi was disposed toward the technical innovations of cartographers and surveyors; and while he may not have seized upon Della Porta’s invention literally, his innovative design at Sabbioneta has the aura of early instruments and mechanical wonders. His whole interior, not just the stage scenery, is a miniature ideal city, realized in a space only 37 feet (11.3m) wide and 120 feet (36.6m) long, in which the audience maintained its physical and social hierarchy. The painted frescos visible through the triumphal arches suggest that this urban space is at the heart of the ideal city—Rome—further dilating the re-ordering of space, and also of time.
If we now see Scamozzi’s interior as having both political acumen, as in Forster’s interpretation, and spatial innovation, we must still consider the form and articulation of the exterior (Figure 7.9). The basic articulation of the box is a palazzo scheme: a base that consists of a plain podium, with rustication at the edges of openings and corners; and a piano nobile with paired pilasters flanking alternating framed niches and windows, mostly blind. The long edge of the theater fronts on Via Giulia, the decumanus of Sabbioneta, and consists of nine bays, while the short sides are three bays wide. Each of the three sides is punctuated by an identical central portal, though the one facing Via Giulia (south) has a Gonzaga coat of arms above.

The ground floor ornament of the theater is relatively subdued—the rustication is in low relief with a smooth surface. The ornament of the piano nobile has greater variety and higher relief but the overall effect is still fairly flat. Double pilasters sit on a barely projecting string course. Their minimal Doric capitals support a canonic triglyph frieze, but the architrave is eliminated for all intents and purposes, and the cornice above subdued. Such a minimal articulation suggests that the job of the orders in this façade is to provide rhythm and framing without any substantial sculptural or expressive effect of their own.

Attention is thereby focused on the elements that occupy each bay (Figure 7.10). These alternate between framed round-headed niches topped by projecting triangular pediments and similarly framed rectangular windows topped by broken segmental arches with inserted oval medallions. The niches and windows present a regular rhythm to the street staggered between “blind” and “light” in order to admit...
light to the interior strategically. The pediments and the plain sills below them are the boldest elements of the composition. The curved perimeters of the niches and medallions in alternating bays are traced by a rope-like ornamental motif that shows the highest degree of refinement in the palette.

Though the overall effect as we see it today is not dramatic, it is clearly noble in the context of Sabbioneta. Scamozzi aimed at a certain grandeur, but he carefully maintained decorum with respect to other important buildings, in particular the ducal palace and the church, both of which front on the main piazza a few blocks to the north. The two-story articulation, not called for by the interior disposition of space, fit the overall fabric of the city. In stage design work, Scamozzi was accustomed to designing entire streetscapes without concern for interiors, tuning each structure so that it worked with the whole (Figure 7.11).

It is therefore easy to imagine him accepting the disjunction between interior and exterior in designing the façade of an urban building. In the case of the theater, he was thinking as much about Via Giulia as about the interior space and function.

The suggestion of a palazzo was consistent with the development of performance spaces within the private palazzi of Renaissance princes. However, Vespasiano clearly wanted his theater to
have a more public presence, and the location on the main street suggests another reference: the city gate where the street begins (Figure 7.12).

Such a reference serves the theater in two ways. One is to recognize the street itself as an important site of performance and spectacle. Imagine processions coming through the gate and heading westward along Via Giulia. Secondly, this association sets an appropriate protocol for entering the theater for a dramatic performance: passing through a “city gate” and entering into an ideal city within. In fact, when entering the portal on the main façade, a theater patron would be coming “through” the painted arch on the interior, giving even more depth to the sensation of a city gate.

To truly appreciate Scamozzi’s intention for the theater’s character, however, it is necessary to repopulate the piano nobile with the statues that would have occupied the niches and the busts in the medallions (Figure 7.13).

This lively ensemble would have been the defining feature marking this building as a unique institution in Sabbioneta, signaling on the exterior something of the character of the interior space. The general motif connects Scamozzi’s façades to a theatrical precedent: Giovanni Maria Falconetto’s 1524 loggia for Alvise Cornaro established some of the norms for courtly theater and displays similarities of composition. The upper story is composed of alternating openings with triangular pediments and segmental arches, with the central and two outermost bays inhabited by statues. In Sabbioneta, the statues with their gestures would have animated the façades, advertising the drama of performances within, and projecting some of that drama to the daily performance of civic life on the street.
A much closer and far more direct comparison can be made with Palladio’s design for the stage screen of the Teatro Olimpico, an interpretation of a Roman design, which was significantly modified by Scamozzi who took over the project after Palladio’s death (Figure 7.14).

Once again the lowest level is completely different, but the upper register bears comparison: alternating aediculae framed by an engaged order and occupied by statues. It is important to remember what the function of this element was in the Palladian scheme, and to recall Scamozzi’s connection to it. Palladio’s design intentions for Teatro Olimpico were singular in the context of sixteenth-century developments. Designing for a scholarly academy committed to a revival of classical culture, his aim was to recreate the theater of Roman antiquity as closely as possible. The antique stage, as interpreted from texts and archaeological evidence, was backed by a flat wall that was mostly opaque; it was to be ornamented so as to represent the façade of a royal or noble household. Although not stated explicitly, this implies that the stage space in front of it is analogous to a street, and this was where the dramatic action took place. Therefore in the ancient model and in Palladio’s project, the stage space is essentially a street running perpendicular to the audience’s view. Scamozzi’s transformation of the façade enlarged greatly the central portal, essentially transforming it into a triumphal arch. By constructing perspectives of streets behind the screen, he implied that the façade we are facing is in fact a city gate rather than a palazzo. This was more in keeping with the norm for the cinquecento stage space; still a street, but one rotated such that the audience looks down the street rather than across it.

Though Scamozzi worked with Palladio’s overall scheme for a stage screen in Vicenza, we have already noted that the Serlian stage had no such screening device, and that Scamozzi rejected even a slight suggestion of a spatial break at Sabbioneta. However, we might imagine that the Palladian stage screen, meant to represent a façade on a street, in fact provides a model for the theater façade itself.

In Vicenza, Palladio’s screen with its enlarged openings forms a boundary between the space of the cavea, stage, and the illusory space of the scenery. In Sabbioneta, Scamozzi unified the entire theater space within a continuous space of illusion, and the stage screen appears again, this time as the building façade that forms the boundary between the actual space of the street and the illusory space of the theater interior. In turn, this dramatic stage screen transformed the street into a space of performance.
CONCLUSION: ROMA QUANTA FUIT IPSA RUINA DOCET

As a festival architect, Scamozzi created ephemeral architecture that re-orders time through the re-ordering of space. He was also an architect for whom all building is a “question of location in history” as well as location in space. The Latin inscription featured prominently on the façade, and also repeated within, shows Scamozzi using the perspective paradigm with respect to time as well as space: “Rome teaches us how great she was by her ruins”—the phrase, interpreted by some as nostalgic, in fact acknowledges our chronological perspective and its limitations. It reminds us that even Rome, however great, passes to ruin; it provokes the pretenders to antique forms of ruling, of building, and of performing to realize both the greatness and the fragility.

The perspective paradigm, a “visual model that defines and positions the spectator in relation to the picture” or view, governs the spatial sense of the Renaissance ideal city. In the theater at Sabbioneta, Scamozzi used the perspective paradigm, but surpassed its limitations to weave a more complex possibility for the role of the theater in the city (Figure 7.15). As if in a camera obscura, the spectators entered into a room in which the ideal city outside was projected onto the stage. At the same time, an image of theatrical space was projected outside onto the façades. The ambiguities between urban space and performance space were allowed to echo. Scamozzi’s theater as a camera obscura projected the ideal city of Sabbioneta directly into the theater, a city within a city, with a consequential perception of performance space amplified outward from stage, to theater, to street and city and back again.

NOTES


4 Scamozzi, *L’Idea*, 1:152: “Whoever will want to judge honestly cannot doubt that the treatment of shapes and sizes of cities, and fortresses, and on, properly awaits the Architect ...”


6 Francesca Fiorani, *The Marvel of Maps: Art, Cartography and Politics in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT, 2005), p. 44.


8 Ibid., p. 98.

9 Ibid., p. 88.

10 Ibid., p. 103.

11 Forster, “Stagecraft as Statecraft.”


14 McClung, “A Place for a Time.”


19 The association of the paintings generally attributed to Piero della Francesca with the body of theory on urban form is widely discussed in Renaissance scholarship. A detailed analysis with respect to perspective construction is provided by Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. by John Goodman (Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 279–375.

21 The historical details of the commission have been recounted in a number of different publications. The most complete account in English is David Michael Breiner, *Vincenzo Scamozzi, A Catalogue Raisonné* (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1992), pp. 717–25. See also Stefano Mazzoni and Ovidio Guaita, *Il Teatro di Sabbioneta* (Florence, 1985).

22 Forster, “Stagecraft as Statecraft.”


24 Forster, “Stagecraft as Statecraft.”


There are three kinds of scenes, one called the tragic, second, the comic, third, the satyric. Their decorations are different and unlike each other in scheme. Tragic scenes are delineated with columns, pediments, statues, and other objects suited to kings; comic scenes exhibit private dwellings, with balconies and views representing rows of windows, after the manner of ordinary dwellings; satyric scenes are decorated with trees, caverns, mountains, and other rustic objects delineated in landscape style.

Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, Ten Books on Architecture, Bk. 3, Ch. VI, 9

Not far outside Vicenza, on the hillside below where the Madonna appeared on the top of Monte Berico, in 1426 and again in 1428, to ask that a sanctuary be built to her, rises a mound, shaped into a platform on which stands a house of brick, detailed with speckled Vicenza limestone quarried in the surrounding hills, flanked by a small woodland and cultivated fields. And if you descend from the house, down the slope, and follow the river into the old city, about half an hour later you will find yourself at an old, irregularly shaped fortification that houses the famous Teatro Olimpico designed by the same architect.

This is the earliest permanent theater of the Italian Baroque, most famous for its unique stage sets, representing the ancient city of Thebes, built in forced perspective. The scenographic depth of this stage (Figure 8.1) demonstrates one of the three dramatic settings Sebastiano Serlio described in his treatise, genres distinguished visually by architectural locales that are also iconographic attributes. This shows the Tragic Scene, which features public buildings and civic monuments, its via regia aligned east–west with Roman Vicenza’s decumanus maximus.

The humanist poet Giangiorgio Trissino called his gifted protégé “Palladio” after an angel of Vitruvian architecture in his heroic poem L’Italia Liberata dai Goti. Liberation from barbarian influences (which Vicenza had endured repeatedly from late antiquity on) involved reviving classical architectural ideas. So in 1545, to tutor him in classical architecture, Trissino took the young
stonecutter on a two-year visit to Rome, where they met Serlio: a man totally obsessed by Roman architectural history, and a pupil of architect and stage designer Baldassare Peruzzi. Serlio had already published engravings that fleshed out Vitruvius’ three types of dramatic sets, and illustrated them in perspective.

Up until this time, the Roman tradition of building theaters had faltered and dramatic performances came to be performed in temporary venues of all kinds, both indoors and out, such that now in Italy the dramatic setting was typologically undefined. Teatro Olimpico was thus the first of its time to return to Vitruvian guidelines. It is entirely inwardly oriented, its only outward expression an annex projecting beyond the original outer wall to accommodate the extension of the sets behind the frons scaenae.¹

The project began in 1579 when the Olympic Academy, of which Palladio had been a founding member twenty-five years before, commissioned him to create a permanent stage, because reviving the classical tradition of drama was an interest at the heart of their humanist program. Palladio had drawn the remains of Roman theaters, including the Teatro Berga (at the foot of Monte Berico) and the arenas at Verona and Pola, and had built temporary wooden theaters. His recent patron, Count Montano Barbarano, had made a reconstruction of the Berga stage.
and a frons scaenae ornate with statuary, and it was among Palladio’s drawings for an edition of Vitruvius published in 1556 by his friend Daniele Barbaro.

Palladio’s solution was to translate the spatial structure of the open-air Roman theater into an enclosed architecture to protect perishable sets, such that even the building elements became actors, feigning to be something else. The historic frons scaenae became a wall furnished with openings in the form of a triumphal arch, with niches inhabited by statues, in front of which the actors roamed, rather than behind as in proscenium theaters. His frons scaenae has been described by one scholar as a “great architectural curtain: a screen, and not a frame.”

Palladio died before completing the work, and it was his successor Vincenzo Scamozzi who oversaw the illusionistic permanent sets for Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex. Although a Renaissance pastoral had been planned as the first production, the academy’s aspirations to found a center of ancient civil culture and knowledge led them to settle on the tragedy, whose themes concerning Apollo, vision, and knowledge echoed the theater’s perspectival intentions, and the noble setting of the ideal city.

In contrast to the urban backdrops used in Tragic and Comic stage scenery, Serlio’s Satyric Scene (Figure 8.2) shows a woodland path lined with trees prefiguring an urban colonnade, flanked on either side by undecorated rustic huts. At the threshold of the engraving the earth breaks down into massive rusticated blocks of stone that establish the stage edge, forming steps down to the space of the audience, while materializing geometrical lineaments useful in perspective, yet rarely visible in nature. In his treatise, Serlio explains its character as follows.

The Satyric scene is for representing Satires, in which they criticize (in fact mock at) all those who live licentiously, and rudely. In the ancient satires they practically identified corrupt men and criminals. However it is understandable that such license should be granted to those unreserved characters, whom we would call country folk. Thus, Vitruvius in discussing the scenes, wanted this type to be ornamented with wooded groves, rocks, hills, mountains, greenery, flowers, and fountains. He also wishes there to be some rustic huts, as are shown here …

Describing a contemporary example he has seen, Serlio elaborates:

What magnificence there was, to see so great a number of trees and fruits, so many different kinds of herbs and flowers, all made of the most delicate silk in a variety of colors. There were cliffs and rocks arrayed with diverse sorts of sea shells, snails, and other little animals, with branches of coral in many hues, mother of pearl, and ocean crabs laid and thrust through between the stones. […] I say nothing of the Satyrs, of the Nymphs, of the Sirens, and various monsters and other strange beasts, costumes for men and youths (according to their size) so skilfully made, representing those living creatures running along and moving themselves according to their proper nature. And if it weren’t that I should be too prolix, I’d tell you of the superb apparel of certain shepherds, made with rich cloth of gold and silk, lined with the finest furs of wild animals. I would also tell of the trappings of some fishermen, no less rich, whose nets were woven of fine gold filaments, and of others with their instruments entirely gilded. I would describe some shepherdesses and Nymphs, whose dresses were fashioned with no regard to price …
8.2 The Satyric Scene, reproduced in Daniele Barbaro, *La Pratica della Perspettiva*, 1569, p. 158.
Serlio reveals that the genre was not defined by the grotesque characters; instead, the object was now the rustic setting; pastoral drama had adapted the intentions of ancient satire to ennoble its visible world.

Satyric drama appeared before 500 BC, specifically in the work of Pratinas, a playwright from near Corinth where the poet Arion first established choruses of “satyrs.” Written and staged by tragedians for festivals, satyr plays were performed to lightly reflect on the three tragedies preceding. Although Euripides’ The Cyclops was the only satyr play to survive antiquity intact, fragments from other works like Sophocles’ Ichneutae reveal that the genre had featured, in addition to the eponymous Dionysian retinue including Silenus, satyrs, nymphs, and fauns, plots involving tricksters and deception, as well as magic and marvels, elements related to familiar folklore motifs, in a colorful and fabulous world of fantasy, with an obligatory happy ending, and thus an optimistic worldview. Satyr plays feel not unlike our “black comedy”; their exploits involved gods, heroes, and creatures associated with springtime revelry, and particularly those who could return from the underworld, such as Odysseus and Heracles. The mythological theme of resurrection thus suggests a metaphorical relationship to the procreative landscape and fertility rites proper to agrarian and pastoral landscapes.

Teatro Olimpico’s tragic scene for the City of Thebes formed part of a broad thematic movement in Renaissance culture, in which the theater represented the “Ideal City,” perhaps most visibly posited in the tiny Teatro all’Antica Scamozzi built in Sabbioneta in 1588, its lateral frescos of an idealized Rome a key to the form of the ducal city. The new Satyric Scene—which Renaissance pastoral plays had liberated from the rank debauchery and cannibalistic terrors of The Cyclops—similarly aimed at defining an “Ideal Countryside,” echoing with the landscapes and details of the poets, ancient and contemporary: from Hesiod and Theocritus to Ovid, Vergil, and Horace, Poliziano and Sannazaro, Spenser, Sidney, Tasso, and others, evoking the mythical Golden Age and bucolic landscapes of Arcadia, restoring to the countryside the ludic and erotic spirit proper to its classical nature.

In Veneto paintings of Palladio’s era, the viewer’s “perspectival” gaze acts like a force “seeing through” and revealing form in the natural landscape. Giovanni Bellini, who painted the landscape around Vicenza in the quattrocento, rendered crude architectonic elements appearing in the earth and rocks that prefigured Serlio’s perspective scene for satyr drama. Both offered sixteenth-century dramatists and artists a model for visualizing geometrical lineaments underlying Nature’s inchoate forms, allowing them to rise into visibility.

The satyric genre enabled humanists to unfold the philosophical dialogue between Art and Nature in a way that the two urban scenes could not, by an inversion in the layers of representation. Serlio’s strategy was to bring the Roman open-air theater indoors, and construct a set to represent the fields and woodlands outside of the city, as if the theater’s walls and thresholds were a filter or camera obscura lens through which crude Nature arrived more refined, in a proto-architectonic state, within it.
With this reversal in mind, we might return to the countryside just outside Vicenza, to Palladio’s Villa Rotonda. In the central hall, the trompe l’œil frescos dematerialize the solid mural elements into a screen that admits only Nature’s most essential formative principles. They preside within as iconic statues, the pantheon of Olympic gods—the same configuration they came to take in theaters.

Palladio had begun designing Villa Rotonda (Figure 8.3) in 1565, long before Teatro Olimpico was commissioned. Originally Villa Almerico, later renamed Villa Capra, it has been known throughout its history as the Villa Rotonda after its spectacular cylindrical central salon. Of the volumes published about it, little elucidates its iconographic program.

The house is sited like a textbook Roman city, sheltered by the crest of the hill, and on the diagonal of the four directions. From the outside, its four classical temple fronts seem to furnish a perfect quadrilateral symmetry, although this is inflected at points both within and without, by dimensions that shift with the prospects. By crystallizing in the landscape a sacred dwelling place that evokes the temples of the classical gods for a patron thus divinized, the house provides a stage on which the humanist ideal of self-deification could be acted out. Palladio believed that the temple façade derived from ancient domestic architecture, so that his imitation of history would revivify the ancient origins of sacred form.
Villa Rotonda’s perfect geometries spoke of Neoplatonic philosophy. The venerable “problem” of squaring the circle, which had engaged even Leon Battista Alberti, symbolized the translation of incorporeal ideas, by rotations in space, into material bodies. Circles symbolized heavenly things, while things square or quadrate represented the earthly world, including the elements, qualities, seasons, and cardinal directions. Circularity in the square plan would emanate like a source of divine energy that multiplied and corporealized in earthly matter, as it did in Nature.9

The great hall at the center of Villa Rotonda, coupled with the perfectly square outline in plan, recalls the traditional diagram of the four cosmic Elements and their qualities, with God at the center point, the locus of the coincidence of opposites (Figure 8.4). In the floor at the center of Palladio’s drum, which rises from the piano nobile to a lofty oculus, is an architectural detail: a drainage plate in the form of a large perforated disc of colored marble is set into the floor. In 1613 when Inigo Jones visited, the oculus above was open to the sky, like the one at the Pantheon, so that any rainstorm would transform the grand hall into a marvelous fountain, fluidly sketching the axis mundi; the porous marble allowed rainwater to drain into a cistern in the cellars below.

This spectacular marble medallion is barely mentioned in the vast literature about Palladio, though it is one of the most significant of the architectural features.
and, as indicated by its placement alone, is a key to the iconographic program of the villa as well as its program of use. The annular surround, resembling a sunburst, is made from inset marble planes of red alternating with white, divided into sixteen equal segments, in the typical form of a Renaissance wind rose.

In the porous portion in the middle of the disc, and hence in the exact geometric center of the villa, is a weird face (Figure 8.5), itemized occasionally in architectural literature as a faun. A faun is a Roman vegetation spirit, a son of woodland Faunus. This isolated face, very much a dramatic mask, is ornamented with vine leaves and clusters of grapes which contextualize his pointed, goatish ears and flattened nose to reveal that he is a satyr, of Greek origin, an attendant of the god of wine: a god who had blessed the surrounding hills for countless centuries. In features and artistic expression he strongly resembles traditional Roman satyr masks related to the theater, such as the second-century marble carving (Figure 8.6) now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome.

Although in his treatise Palladio classes the Rotonda with city houses because of its proximity to Vicenza, it is a suburban villa, and the river that separates it from the city is called the Bacchiglione. In all likelihood, especially given its geometrical location as well as the viticulture of the countryside beyond, the name of the river, and the wine cellar below gently wafting fumes of the vintage up through his nostrils, this may be an iconographic conflation pointing to the Roman wine god Bacchus himself. Bacchus was the leader of a troupe of celebrants of the mysteries, including the elderly figure of Silenus, drunk, and riding an ass, whose name had come to mean something common on the outside yet inwardly precious. Bacchus was also the god of theater, and in his Greek form as Dionysus had a special relation to the satyr play.
8.6 Roman satyr mask, second century CE, Hall of the Faun, Capitoline Museums, Rome.
This mask is a mystical object, a poetic question in the architectural soul. It evokes parallels to the architectural façade, particularly one as face-like as the Rotonda with the pediment’s oval windows for eyes that survey the countryside, and whose biaxial symmetry conjures up the four faces of Janus Quadrifrons and his monumental Roman arch, which Palladio drew while visiting Rome in the 1550s.13

Around the time when Palladio began the Villa Rotonda14 the Olympic Academy he helped found first began staging theatrical performances, and the architecture of theater was frequently on his mind. In 1562 Palladio had constructed a temporary wooden theater to stage Trissino’s Sofonisba inside the great hall of the Palazzo della Ragione in the heart of Vicenza. In this room within a room, perspectival scenery would dematerialize the wall through a painted “picture window.”15 This solution was unsatisfactory for Palladio; he saw the problem of engaging the spectators as architectural, so the scene as an unfolding vista would have propelled him towards the more volumetric and spatially integrated setting of the kind envisioned by Baldassare Peruzzi and Serlio. Inside the Palazzo della Ragione, he was limited. But nearby he was building a house with magnificent sightlines.

The echo of Bacchus’ name and satyr revelry boded a pleasant retirement for the house’s patron, Paolo Almerico, who had lived many years in Rome as a papal prelate. Palladio died in 1580, and Vincenzo Scamozzi took over as architect. Then Almerico died in 1589, and within two years the brothers Odorico and Marco Capra acquired and completed the villa. Capra means goat, and while it is tempting to read the marble satyr as a family emblem, the sculpted stone cannot be dated to determine whether or not it was added at that time.16 The satyr scene and its figures had been a popular artistic subject in the cinquecento Veneto: Titian’s Bacchus and Ariadne of 1523 depicts bacchanalian processions of maenads, satyrs, fauns, and Sileni, whose orgiastic ritual celebrations are thought to lie at the origins of Western theater.

The presence of Bacchus as the genius loci of the Villa Rotonda answers another mystery: why Palladio chose to detail the porticoes facing the four directions with the matronly proportioned Ionic order. Vitruvius, however, specified that the Ionic order was to be used for temples dedicated to Apollo, Diana, and Bacchus, all of whom were associated with hunting and woodlands.17 Around 1540, Palladio had drawn a reconstruction of the Arch of Jupiter Ammon (demolished in the seventeenth century) in Verona, which shows the curling volutes of the Ionic capital juxtaposed with a keystone in the form of a satyr head with rams’ horns; the volutes and the horns are aligned and identically drawn.18 A 1530 drawing by Giovanni Caroto shows that the columns were actually Corinthian, and Palladio had re-envisioned the volutes as horns in his drawing. The ram-horned Egyptian sun god and supreme deity was a hybrid of Amon-Ra with Zeus or Jupiter, the father of Bacchus.19 In Roman art, Jupiter Ammon was depicted in “clypeus portrait” form, meaning a low relief of his face fitted into a circle, with the surround shaped like a shield (Figure 8.7). This is precisely the layout of the satyr’s face in the floor, a face that lies directly under the one opening to the Sun.
Ammon’s name means “the Hidden One,” signifying the occult life-force underlying creation, an interior solar power forming matter from within. From the mask, the god’s laughter spreads like the winds, in ripples and waves, creating the smaller perfect world of the villa, and finally fading in an unknown distance. Likewise, from the center out, Palladio unfolded his villa in onion layers of walls, passages, and screens, including public rooms and hallways, culminating with the exterior walls, and the Ionic portico followed by a great stair on each face leading out onto the podium and finally stretching toward the landscape. Although this is not a farm villa, the walls of the podium are set low enough not to obstruct long vistas from the elevated house. On page 18 of the *Quattro Libri*, Palladio describes its siting:

*The site is one of the most amenable and delightful that can be found, because it sits on top of a little hill very easily climbed, and is watered on one side by the navigable river Bacchiglione, and on the other surrounded by very pleasant hills, which render the appearance of a very great theater, and are all cultivated, and abounding in excellent fruits and superlative vineyards: Whence since it enjoys the most beautiful views in every direction, of which some are restricted and others most extensive, and still others which end only with the Horizon, the loggias were built there on all four faces, beneath the level of these and the Hall are all the rooms for the convenience and use of the servants. The Hall is in the center, is round, and snatches the light from above. The smaller chambers*
are divided off. Above the large rooms, which have vaults whose height follows my earlier formula, surrounding the Hall there is a place to promenade, fifteen and a half feet in width. At the ends of the pedestals that buttress the steps of the loggia, there are statues by the hand of Messer Lorenzo Vicentino, a most excellent sculptor. [My translation; emphasis mine.]

Palladio’s visualization of the landscape as a vast theater situates the house as the protagonist at the center of the ring of hills, much as on the interior of the Hall he constructed a microcosm of that relationship, an annular passage on the upper level (just under the stucco spectators in the dome) from which to look down into the center towards the Bacchic mask grinning from the floor (Figure 8.8). The double relationship is dynamic and circulates the visual energy like winds in all the directions, as whoever stands in that position, in that space of the protagonist, commands a panoptic view of the same cavea of hills—so long as Janus’ doors

8.8 Sketch of central hall, Villa Rotonda.
stand open. This is emphasized by the flights of steps coupling the loggias to the landscape, which while square, mimic raked theater seating.

The viewing position is marked out as a standpoint by the satyr mask. Whoever is privileged to stand there obtains a clear view in all four directions as he or she turns in a complete circle, and the architecture itself acts like a frame for each view beyond. As one commentator noted, without appreciating the meaning of his insight, it is like being in a revolving restaurant, since the view changes while the architecture stays the same. The rotating villa essentially transposes into architecture the Greek periaktoi described by Vitruvius, which had been revived in Italy in 1543, revolving wooden polygonal prisms, their faces painted with different backgrounds for scene changes.

In each of the four directions a different scene materializes, like a medieval Book of Hours showing the labors of the changing seasons. If one took the Teatro Olimpico’s frons scaenae from which the streets run back toward multiple vanishing points and folded it around in a ring, so that the streets shot out from it in all directions, the city would become the villa. Conversely imagine the Villa Rotonda cut in section and unfolded to achieve the seven streets of Thebes, each leading towards its gate. Prior to building the house, Palladio had been drawing the Greek and Roman theaters for Barbaro’s Vitruvius. The metaphor of rotation and the theater in the round are additionally encoded in a final detail in the great hall: the internal stairs on the diagonals of the Greek cross, with their rotated orientation and rotating forms recalling the diagrams for the Ionic volute in Palladio’s and Scamozzi’s treatises (Figure 8.9). Even needing multiple stairs for patron and servants, these four stairs recollect the rhythmically placed vomitoria that moved
large audiences in the Roman theater. Each stair here has a curtained window, a miniature space of appearance, not only alluding to the theater as an ordering principle for everyday life, in that all human artistry is a representation of Nature, but also demarcating the space of ascent as a dramatic one, of self-awareness, in denoted fictional or imaginary space.

It is worth returning to the conventional Renaissance symbolism of circle and square. Although these formed the basis of the vocabulary of almost all lineaments underlying humanist architecture, including the Villa Rotonda which was rather late to the game, these two forms had complementary meanings. The circle, which has no beginning and no end, symbolized the realm of the heavens, and with its center point marked it was the astrological symbol for the Sun. The square, with its four corners and sides, referred to the corporeal realm of matter, the Earth, divided in time and space.

Palladio had studied historical theaters, and to illustrate Daniele Barbaro’s edition of Vitruvius, he had drawn up a plan (based on the remains at Berga) overlaid with a twelve-pointed star composed of four equilateral triangles, which appeared in Book V, Chapter VI, “Della Conformatione del Theatro” (Figure 8.10). In his treatise, Barbaro propagates the Neoplatonic model of generation moving from ideal to
physical, squaring the circle, observing that the design begins by locating a center and drawing out a circle to define a circumference, in which the four equilateral triangles are traced, and which “are similar to those which the Astrologers in their descriptions of the twelve celestial signs give a musical convenienza.”

If we superimpose the plan of Villa Rotonda on that theater, the proportions of the inner circle of the rotunda and the semi-circular lineament framing the orchestra within the cavea register, while the structure of the frons scaenae or stage building aligns with the divisions that Palladio used for the rectilinear rooms on the ground floor. These have only bilateral symmetry, not quadrilateral, and are reflected across the line which separates the audience’s half-circle from the half-square of the stage. Formally, relationally, and proportionally, the house reveals the underlying lineaments of the Vitruvian theater. Barbaro’s book was published in 1556, so Palladio’s drawings of the Roman theater and a Vitruvian frons scaenae with recessed perspective scenery predate by a decade his project for Villa Rotonda.

Inside the rotunda, the frescoed walls dissolve into the architectural screen which so interested Palladio, simulating an open portico, a space suggesting a Roman piazza inside this ideal city, hosting the permanent audience of gods—including Bacchus and the satyr Pan. The painted columns which both help us “see through” the walls and rooms and demarcate this space are different from those outside, being a modified mix of Ionic and Doric, with fluting to a third of the way up the trunk, even showing budding Corinthian acanthus, symbolizing a temple dedicated to male and female divinities. Even the late frescos in this hall reinforced it as a hermaphroditic space, and for the humanists Bacchus represented a hybrid of male and female characteristics, the artificial and the natural, youth and maturity, a place of metamorphosis by “seeing through”—perspectiva.

The Renaissance “villa” was an estate composed of multiple elements, including the house, which might include a pleasure garden, parkland, woodlands, pavilions, agricultural land, vineyards or orchards, and water sources. From Pliny the Younger’s descriptions of his Tuscan villas, Renaissance architects had reappraised the pictorial role of Nature, wild and cultivated, as layered scenery in relation to views from the house. The house was thus a kind of theater, in the sense of an optical instrument that frames the natural world, thus redefining it as a cultural element. As a whole, Villa Rotonda defines a spatial depth and range in scales and offers a nuanced spectrum ranging from wildest Nature (a dark forest, as on the house’s southwest face) to the most rarified artifice of the architecture. The use of the architecture to define a philosophical and artistic position toward Nature thus works pictorially as well as symbolically. Spatializing the theater in this special way allows for a double inversion of the typical Satyric Scene to use the actual countryside as settings for pastoral drama. In fact, the layering of the house (Figure 8.11) permits one to view the consecutive “rotating” scenes from within the rotunda, and then to move outward onto the squared outdoor platforms of cascading steps, uniting the beholder with the reality of the landscape.
Villa Rotonda employs the real, tangible landscape as the “imaginary space” that the audience is meant to “look through” into another world. Looking becomes spatial movement into a Golden Age hosting the nymphae and baccantes of mythical antiquity, or an Arcadia of charming shepherds and maids. The effect of transforming the articulated frame of each portal from a simple threshold into a scenographic device is to raise the status of the surrounding countryside to the level of art. This set of spatial relations has a double function of ennobling all real outdoor activities taking place in sight of the house as meaningful poetic drama, increasing one’s awareness of the everyday world, and creating the illusion of a Serlian stage in four directions, with the formal walls and portals inside the house functioning as the frons scaenae. Since the scene was intended as pastoral, instead of a geometrically elaborate Renaissance garden, the house sits on a Roman belvedere. The original statuary adorning the pediments and stairs descending from the portico is carved in a simplified style, and in feeling suggests the country people and rustic deities described by Palladio’s friends and mentors, Trissino, who himself wrote pastoral drama, Serlio, and Barbaro.

The satyr in the floor is a liminal creature, at once divinity, man, and animal, coupling the lusty passions (which symbolized the will) with human reasoning. The stone’s perforation creates a literal joint between the noble, upper part of the house and the underground, more crudely shaped grottesque vaults, the articulated herringbone brick of the undercrofts, a reference to the inchoate...
matter underlying emergence of architectural form, and implying the vertical axis that leads up from the dry, dark earth, by way of watery liquids that drip and airy vapors that rise, through the satyr all the way through the oculus to the Sun, fiery source of all luminous form.

The Villa Rotonda, which is a cosmological diagram, a house in the antique style, a temple to Bacchus and an ideal city, is also a theater. To be more precise, it conjures up and plays out the archaic rusticity of the satyric scene described by Serlio and embedded in Palladio's description in his Quattro Libri. The satyr at the center thus also reveals the metamorphic character of the building itself.  

In that connection, there is one more important point to make regarding our protagonist and tutelary spirit. There is a reason that our satyr (an otherwise most corporeal creature, intoxicated and priapic) appears only as a head. In Renaissance iconography, the satyr (as an artificial creature) was a symbol of the demiurgic powers of the creative imagination to atomize percepts from the memory and to recombine them into innovative composites. This was the faculty in which man was godlike, and so deserved to dwell in temples. For Palladio to place the image of a satyr at the heart of the architecture, at the confluence of the winds and the waters, the Sun above and the stone below, was a deliberate message regarding the central role of the architect’s personal imagination in bringing the elements of the universe of Nature into order, the construing that makes landscape out of mere countryside. The theatrical scene is thus also a metaphor for the fertile space of appearance in the faculty of phantasia, a faculty located, as it happens, in a “clearing” or ventricle in the geometrical center of the round human head, a space analogous to the stage of a theater or the hall of the Rotonda with its frescoed audience of gods.

NOTES

1. The frons scaenae, or scaenae frons, was the elaborate architectural backdrop to the Roman stage, two or three storeys high, including ornamental façades, classical columns, and balconies, and offering multiple entrances to the stage as locations for dramatic action.


4. Richard Johnson Walker, The Ichneutae Of Sophocles, With Notes and a Translation into English, preceded by Introductory Chapters dealing with the Play, with Satyric Drama, and with various cognate matters (London, 1919).


6. Ibid., p. 125.

7. Considerably later paintings by Ludovico Dorigny done in the 1600s, which built on and clarified an existing iconographic program.

8. See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Oration on the Dignity of Man, 1486, for example.

9. See Nicholas of Cusa, De Quadratura Circuli, 1450.
10 The god Faunus, sometimes conflated with Pan, has also been identified with the wind god Favonius.

11 In pre-Roman and Roman times the river was called the Retrone or the Retenus. In a document from Vicenza from 1074, the river was named Bacalone, probably deriving from the Veneto word “baccajare,” which means to rumble. Bacchiglione was thus a later adaptation of the name.

12 Desiderius Erasmus, *The Sileni of Alcibiades*. Also see Raymond Waddington, *Aretino’s Satyr* (Toronto, 2004), p. 114: “Benvenuto Cellini, who cast both medals and bronze statues, believed that the molten metal poured into the mould animated the inert body with ‘blood’ and therefore infused it with *spiritus* or ‘soul.’”

13 RIBA XII/4Br, Burlington-Devonshire Collection; elevation and plan of the Arch of Janus Quadrifrons, built by Constantine II around 356 AD.


15 The perspectival “picture window” of the history painting was outlined by Leon Battista Alberti in his 1435 treatise *On Painting*.

16 Christian Goedicke, Klaus Slusallek and Martin Kubelik, “Thermoluminescence Dating in Architectural History: The Chronology of Palladio’s Villa Rotonda,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 45/4 (December 1986): 404. The authors note that the support holding the mask was replaced, making it impossible to verify whether the present mask is original or even in its original orientation.

17 In the Villa Sarego (c. 1569) Palladio used heavily rusticated Ionic columns, suggesting that he was treating them as related to the appearance of architectonic order out of raw Nature.

18 Drawing by Palladio, London, RIBA XII 22, sketch London, RIBA XII 14r.

19 *Bibliotheca Classica*, John Lempriere, 1788.


21 Marco Frascari has written a marvelous essay on rotating villas; see Marco Frascati and David Lewis, *The Macaronic Dream of Casa Girasole* (London, 2004).

22 Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola in his treatise *La due regale della prospettiva pratica* (Rome, 1583) mentions the *periaktoi* made by Bastiano da Sangallo for the Farnese theater in Castro in June, 1543.


24 *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), fifth chapter.

25 Satyr comes from the word *satyros*, derived from the phrase *in lanx satura* meaning “a mixed dish,” “a dish filled with various kinds of fruit,” from the feminine of *satur* “sated.” The Roman writer Varro had further defined *satirae* as being a medley of prose and verse composition.
Performing Architecture: From Medieval Festival to Modern-Day Carnival

Louise Pelletier

There are many people in Paris quite content to be the spectators of spectators; and to us a wall, behind which something is going on, is a sufficiently exciting spectacle.

Victor Hugo, "Notre-Dame de Paris" (1831)

In 1984, Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer conceived and built in Rio de Janeiro what was to become one of the most imposing structures designed for contemporary popular performance. The Passarela do Samba, also known as Sambódromo or “stadium” of samba, consists of a series of concrete structures on a section of about 700m on either side of Avenue Marquês de Sapucaí that can sit up to 88,500 spectators (Figure 9.1). Built in only four months, it rivaled all open-air structures existing at the time for any kind of performing art, from the classical theaters of antiquity built to hold entire populations to most contemporary stadiums conceived for various kinds of performances. It became an instant symbol of Brazilian popular culture. Commissioned by the Governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Lionel Brizola, and his Vice-Governor Darcy Ribeiro, Niemeyer was asked to find a permanent architectural solution to replace the arquibancadas, those temporary bleachers (tiered stands) of steel tubing erected yearly in the streets of Rio for the most popular carnival celebration: the parade of the samba schools.

The intention in part was to resolve the major disturbances to the circulation in the centre of the city by transforming the event from a street parade into a contained spectacle, but the challenge was also to seat a larger number of spectators and amortize the 7.5 million dollars they claimed it cost every year “just to subsidize the samba schools and to set up and take down the arquibancadas.” Brizola argued that the investment would be recovered in a few years, and the money that would eventually be saved could be invested in new social projects. Nowadays, the schools of samba, where dancers practice throughout the year preparing for carnival, receive a percentage on ticket sales that gets reinvested in the spectacle, thus contributing to the tremendous expansion of the event.
9.1 Aerial view of the Sambódromo in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Also, since the bleachers rise high in the stadium, it has encouraged larger and higher floats in the parade (Figure 9.2). No longer restricted by electric cables or tree branches, floats have become travelling monuments within the space of the Passarela. The unobstructed view makes the procession accessible to up to 100,000 spectators. Yet, the new structure was greatly criticized by local spectators and social critics who perceived that it radically altered the nature of the event. In 1988, a 700 per cent increase in the price of tickets effectively locked the poorer classes out of the event. Since the cheapest tickets are currently selling for the equivalent of a monthly salary for some of Rio’s poorest people, many of them are now forced to watch the event on television.²

ARCHITECTURE AS A PERFORMING ART

Although architecture constitutes a primary context for the performing arts, either through formal theaters or the ephemeral architecture of urban festivals, if it has a performing potential in and of itself, architecture must be defined as an event rather than as a built form. Beyond entertainment, it can help create cultural memories, a sense of belonging, of participating in an order that is larger than the needs of the individual. Moreover, actions or rituals mark defining moments when a building takes on real significance and plays its proper role. In his book on the Abbey of St. Denis in Paris, for example, Abbot Suger (ca. 1081–1151) describes the all-important ritual of consecration of a church as the moment when the building comes to life.³ Likewise, in the early texts on Christianity, the establishment of a place of worship was not distinct from the gathering of followers united through the liturgy. The Greek term ἐκκλησία (ekklêsia), commonly translated as “church,” conveys the more general meaning of “assembly.”⁴

It is my contention that this binding relationship between space and ritual is most explicit in early theatrical performances and liturgical drama that gave meaning to the space of the church as well as urban space, from medieval time onwards. Indeed, Gothic churches were not conceived as unified spaces, but in terms of a temporal unfolding of liturgical services. Later on, the development of such liturgical drama gradually engaged the city as an urban theater. This chapter intends to demonstrate that this ritual unfolding is central to the definition of architecture rather than peripheral, and is easily identifiable in Mystery Plays that developed from liturgical drama within the church and gradually spilled into the city after the fourteenth century. From the Middle Ages onwards, ephemeral structures of such theatrical nature have sought to define new forms of participation within Western (European) cities, whether it be through sacred theater, or political events such as ceremonial entries welcoming important dignitaries into the city or royal processions. This chapter will look at specific examples of urban theater that have contributed to defining new forms of participation in the urban context. It will further extrapolate how architectural events can contribute to define the contemporary city.
MEDIEVAL THEATER AND EPHEMERAL EVENTS

Although the Christian Church condemned theatrical performances during the early centuries as a sign of decadent paganism, once the “immoral” (Roman) theater had disappeared, the Church encouraged the development of a new form of drama that was grounded in liturgy. “On certain solemn feasts, such as Easter and Christmas, the Office was interrupted, and the priests represented, in the presence of those assisting, the religious event which was being celebrated.” No one was a spectator of the liturgical drama, as the ceremony demanded a direct participation of the entire congregation, either through the reciting of crucial passages or the perambulation through the space of the church.

First taken exclusively from the Gospels, these early liturgical dramas were written in Latin and were an integral part of the service. They primarily recounted the life of Christ from birth to the Passion. The oldest versions of such dramas can be traced back to the tenth century in England for the Easter service. The performing space of liturgical drama was the church itself, structured by the main east–west axis and the strategic location of the choir and the altar (Figure 9.3). As opposed to Greek and Roman theater where the action was centralized in a performing area (in the circular dance platform or the raised stage), the Passion Plays of the Middle Ages occupied the entire space of the church, as the congregation moved through the building to follow the unfolding of the story. Moreover, there was no unity of place in medieval plays, but some elements within the church, such as the altar,
had representational value that transcended the story. The altar, for example, was often associated with the tomb because early Christians used to celebrate mass on top of the sepulcher of a holy person, thus it often became the Sepulcher of the Resurrection in liturgical dramas. On the other hand, if an image of the Virgin and Child was placed above the altar, it became the Nativity scene. The space of the church was symbolically transformed by the narrative structure of the procession, like the Stations of the Cross giving specific meaning to various places within the church. The use of Latin for those liturgical plays reinforced the distinction between sacred place and the profane space of everyday life, while the symbolic value of various locations reaffirmed the cosmological foundation of the building.

Although Passion Plays derived most directly from liturgical drama, during the twelfth century they began to be treated separately from church services because of the repeated complaints by theologians and clergymen about “the element of worldly amusement” that had started to become more and more predominant. Non-professional actors performed these plays, although some dramatic associations had a permanent status. For example, in the early fifteenth century, the “Confrérie de la Passion” had secured a monopoly in Paris.

This form of dramatic religious theater did not concern itself with unity of action. The coherence of the plays relied on a shared knowledge of biblical stories. During the plays of the resurrection of Lazarus, the term “platea,” a term with important urban origins meaning the public place, the courtyard or the main street, was introduced to signify the space of representation, the place or stage inside the church. “The use of a stage—even if reduced to supporting a single element such as a pulpit—marked an important break in the evolution of the liturgical theater, creating autonomous acting spaces in a multi-functional architectural context, which is exactly what the first urban plays will try to accomplish.”

A major breakthrough occurred when vernacular languages replaced Latin and “the plays emerged from the churches into the market squares.” As early as the first half of the twelfth century in France, vernacular was used together with Latin. In the French liturgical drama of the “Wise Virgins,” for example, Christ and the Virgins used both languages, while the angels used only French. This gradual transition from Latin to the vernacular languages was also marked by a greater individual inventiveness that eventually permitted this form of performance to leave the precincts of the church and develop into independent dramas called Mystery Plays. These were not strictly speaking liturgical, but were nonetheless religious in character.

Mysteries is a word derived from the Latin “mysterium” which means “religious truth via divine revelation,” but also from “ministerium” which, in connection with medieval performances that often were staged by members of craft guilds, meant “handicraft, trade, art.” The Mysteries often depicted the actions of saints or scenes from the Old and New Testaments. They became widely known in the fifteenth century, although as early as the twelfth century, one such play entitled Adam appeared in France. It dealt with the Fall from Paradise and related events such as the story of Cain and Abel. Such plays were usually performed outside just in front of the church, in the main square, or in front of the main gate (Figure 9.4).
Mystery Plays differed from liturgical rituals in that they took place in the urban context, and could momentarily create a temporality removed from the everyday life.

Other plays from the thirteenth century, known as Miracle Plays, started to deal with historical events, such as the Crusades and important battles. For example in the Miracle of St. Nicolas by Jean Bodel (1165–1210) written around 1200, just after the end of the Third Crusade (1189–92), the action culminates with the conversion of the Saracens to Christianity. Three distinct locations simultaneously occupied the theatrical stage: a palace, a tavern and the prison of the palace. Although the performing area was not unified, the entrance and exit of various characters from the performing area already indicated some spatial coherence carried on by the episodic structure of the play. It concluded with a prayer recited by both actors and spectators, thus involving the audience in an active form of participation that betrayed its origins in liturgical ritual: it became civic liturgy. During the fourteenth century, most of the plays in this genre were devoted to the Miracles of the Virgin Mary.

As urban space played a larger role in the staging of such performances, a new genre arose. Allegorical representation of human temptations and sins appeared in many European countries: they were called Morality Plays. Developed as a variation of the Miracle Plays, these performances were presented outdoors on temporary scaffolds. Whereas Miracle Plays generally related to Biblical narrative or historical events that celebrated Catholic faith, Morality Plays were more allegorical with an ethical purpose. Therefore, the coherence of their narrative structure became more important to convey a moral lesson. As Morality Plays moved out of the realm of the church, they started being performed by professional actors, indoors in the halls of kings or noblemen. It marked the beginning of a theater form that would develop in the Renaissance and that would reach its highest point with the Elizabethan theater and the central role of Vice and Virtue.
In most of Catholic Europe, these Mystery or Morality Plays continued to be performed in churches, while in France and Italy, actors played on elevated platforms installed in public parks or urban squares surrounded by scaffoldings and bleachers, thus anticipating the enclosed auditorium. In England, some plays took place on movable carts called “pageants” that were paraded through the streets, a form that has a common origin in carnival floats.

Although it is controversial to speak of “theatrical space” before the establishment of a frontal stage with a proscenium during the first half of the sixteenth century, multiple stages within a performing area—inspired by the market place—started to develop with the first Morality Plays. One of the oldest performance spaces with multiple stages that has been documented in England, the Castle of Perseverance, has been reconstructed from descriptions found in medieval manuscripts dating back from 1425. The staging indications showed circular scaffolding surrounded by a moat, encompassing stands for spectators. The acting area was not delimited by any physical boundary between the actors and the public. Various scenic places were identified on the peripheral structure, such as Heaven and Hell, but also the World, Flesh and Lust (Figure 9.5). Various mounds along the external belt allowed some spectators to attend the performance in a sitting position, while the rest of the audience stood in the center, around the structure representing the Castle of Perseverance. The actors played either before the scaffolding in front of the various scenic places, or in the center under the castle. The actual performing area was the open space in the centre, and was sometimes raised off the ground, but the distance between actors and spectators remained flexible: actors could descend from their platform and
share the same space as the audience. The absence of division between actors and spectators was characteristic of medieval drama, as was the multiplicity of scenes presented simultaneously.

Later in the early sixteenth century, performing platforms became less specific to the place as troupes of nomadic actors started to perform throughout Europe. Their nomadic condition forced them to centralize the acting area and develop multipurpose transportable stage sets. One of the earliest troupes to be created in Europe around 1550 was the Comedia dell’Arte that performed many plays with a repertoire of well-defined characters. Even though everything was grouped onto a single platform in a space distinct from the public square, the scenery often represented a multitude of locations—known in France as the “Palais à volonté.” The multiplicity of places typical of medieval drama continued well into the seventeenth century, as the early development of formal indoor theaters was often a transposition of the medieval model in which the public gathered around an open square. It perpetuated the notion of a fragmented, non-unified space, as one stage set could represent a number of different places according to the requirements of the scene.

Medieval theater was not guided by a unified theory about staging strategies, as was the case with classical or Baroque theater. However, it was structured around some fundamental principles. Most importantly, the space of performance was intimately tied to the events that were taking place within its context. Within the church, liturgical drama was spatially grounded in the architecture of the building. Similarly, Mystery or Morality Plays, as well as ceremonial entries, were symbolically grounded in the spatial structure of cities: “Before there could be any medieval theater, there had to be a city, a square, a street, a fortification…” As liturgical drama served to qualify the various stations within a church, in a reciprocal manner the spatial order of the building guided the unfolding of the narrative. This reciprocity was also at work in the development of urban centers, as some privileged places were simultaneously invested by multiple functions. The cemetery, for example, was the primary location for funerary rituals, but it also could be the site for a public fair and therefore had an implicit theatrical vocation, since cemeteries often were the performing grounds for Mystery Plays. “The potential theatricality of the place was manifest since its creation.” Similarly, an urban square was simultaneously a place of exchange, a market place, and a ceremonial space. On a day of theatrical performance, it became a microcosm. The fluctuation between these various functions was a structuring principle of medieval urban space that qualified daily experience.

Together with the development of urban theater throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, ceremonial entries—either liturgical or political marking the entrance of a king or bishop into the city—were also transforming cities with highly choreographed events (Figure 9.6). Royal entries first developed as a welcoming gesture toward the sovereign and an acknowledgment of his right of passage, but they soon transformed into binding rituals between two levels of power. During the ceremonies that accompanied the official celebrations, the king and city officials were pledging mutual commitments to maintain the freedom and privileges of the city on the one hand, and to protect the kingdom and the authority of the monarch on the other, thus confirming a balance of power.
Passing through the city gate was a highly symbolic moment that marked a crossing between two distinct spaces. At a ceremonial level, city officials gave the keys to the sovereign, and then processed together from the main gate to the place of gathering—usually in front of the cathedral. The direction of the procession was also highly emblematic. During such events, the streets were transformed with *tableaux vivants* erected on scaffoldings to mark different stations along the way. The actors performing such stationary scenes for the monarch took on a reciprocal representational role.

Tapestries were hung on the façades, which superimposed onto the city an idealized path removed from everyday life. In 1548 for the entrance of Henry II into Lyon, for example, canvases depicting *trompe l’œil* perspectives were placed in various street corners, thus transforming the city into an ideal place. For his entrance to Rouen in 1550, a group of naked men were placed along the way to inhabit an ephemeral landscape designed to resemble a Brazilian scene, with dwellings, animals, and vegetation. The scene at once revealed France’s intention to take control of the newly discovered land under Portuguese domination.

From the first Mystery Plays, ceremonial entries and processions in the Middle Ages, to the temporary stages of nomadic troupes throughout Europe, ephemeral structures have always played a central role in configuring the urban landscape—orchestrating meaningful events in the public domain, and revealing the order of the world through a reordering of the city. Until the end of the seventeenth century, ephemeral constructions played an important civic role, animating cities through different forms of ritual during punctual or recurring events. These ceremonial events were essential to a city or kingdom’s social and political stability, relying on the power of the image to establish order and convey social unity and structure.

9.6 The royal entry of Henri II into Rouen, 1550; French School.
Another kind of urban celebration that combined the festive nature of theater performance and the ordering power of ceremonial entries was the Feast of Fools, a form of temporary social revolution that was a precedent to carnival (Figure 9.7). This medieval popular festival celebrated by the clergy and laity generally took place between Christmas and Epiphany, with its culmination around the Feast of Circumcision (January 1st). For this brief moment, those in subordinate positions enjoyed dignity and impunity as they took a role of mock power. The Lord of Misrule, generally a peasant appointed by the community, ruled over the wild parties that took place during Christmas revelries. Similarly, the Boy Bishop, chosen among children of the cathedral choir or pupils of the monastery school to parody the real Bishop, took possession of the cathedral with full consent of clergymen. Dressed in pontifical robes, and followed by his friends disguised as priests, he presided over ceremonies and went around the parish in a parody of procession, blessing people or cursing them. The church was transformed into yet another form of theater as the altar was converted into a banquet table covered with rich food and drinks. Paradoxically, this festival, which was condoned by the Church until the mid-sixteenth century, made a satire of the solemnity of Christian liturgy.18

All these ephemeral events succeeded in transforming for a few days the experience of the city. They were effective vehicles for the constitution of lasting cultural memories. Whether they were meant to commemorate a specific moment, mark a political alliance, or involve the entire population into a theatrical performance, they imposed on the city a new order and constituted a temporary device that helped citizens find their place in the order of things, either by reinforcing the social order (as in the ceremonial entrances) or by mocking it (Feast of Fools). This enactment of specific events traditionally has constituted an important role of architecture.19
STAGING THE CITY DURING CARNIVAL

The need to participate in such urban or ceremonial events, either liturgical, political or satirical, that developed as part of the medieval worldview has coexisted with other forms of staging of the city that continue to resonate with contemporary practices. Carnival is one such practice that became formalized in the Middle Ages and that still exploits the city as its primary stage set. Although its historical roots can be traced back to pre-Christian agrarian cults and rituals celebrating the beginning of Spring and propitiating the return to fertility (such as the Dionysian celebrations of classical antiquity and the Roman festival of Saturnalia), carnival became an integral part of the Christian calendar in medieval times as it marked the beginning of Lent. The most widely accepted etymological origins of the word “carnival” comes either from the Late Latin expression *carne vale*, which means “farewell to meat,” or from some Italian dialect *carne levare*, meaning “to remove meat.” In both cases, it indicates a period of over-indulgence before the ecclesiastic imposition of the forty-day period of fasting before Easter.20

Traditionally, carnival was celebrated in many European countries with all sorts of performances. In some places, effigies played a symbolic role in the event. In Italy, for example, a large sculptural figure of an old woman representing Winter was filled with sweets and symbolically sacrificed on the public square to make way for the return of spring, a practice that seems to owe much to the primitive rituals. In Portugal, a similar kind of over-sized doll was known as “Entrudo,” from the Latin *introitus* meaning “entrance” (marking the beginning of the Spring), and gave its name to the 3-day period before Ash Wednesday. *Entrudo* was the effigy of Lent, again personified as an older woman, who was judged and condemned to death in order to expel sin from the world.21

From Portugal, the ritual of *Entrudo* was exported to South America in the sixteenth century where it developed in Brazil into a playful celebration—lively and sometimes violent—that included a variety of tricks and games such as throwing flour and water on passersby. It gradually integrated traditions imported from Africa with the commerce of slaves, including singing and dancing to tam-tam rhythms. Because of the increasing violence, *Endrudo* was forbidden in the middle of the nineteenth century, and was gradually replaced by the *Corso*, a more organized parade of allegorical floats and cars throughout the streets in the prosperous areas of the city. *Corso* was joined with a Venetian tradition of *Bal Maqué* which was reserved for the upper classes and became very fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth century. Towards the end of the century, a new kind of music emerged, combining traditional Brazilian songs with African rhythms. The street bands or *blocos* appropriated the music and grafted African dance steps to it, thus creating what became known as the samba.22 Controversial at first because of its lascivious moves, the government tried to forbid it, but it soon became the binding element of Brazilian carnival.

Whereas the activities that characterized the *Entrudo* took place within the reach of the family sphere, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the transition from *Entrudo* to Carnival also marked a passage toward the urban domain. The
first troupes to organize themselves were the Ranchos, controlled by factory workers. Carnival absorbed traditions from other popular celebrations, which emerged in a more spontaneous manner in the urban realm. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, the principal manifestations of street carnival began with bandas and blocos, semi-improvised parades of music bands followed by informal groups of individuals marching in colorful costumes to attract followers. The first official samba school opened in 1928 and was granted the right to perform during carnival in 1936. However, they were confined to a peripheral zone of the city. In 1940, their procession rivaled that of high society and of the Ranchos, which forced the authorities to give them a proper place in the festivities.

The early modern period of the Rio carnival still retained what Mikhail Bakhtin defined as the essence of medieval carnival: a spectacle without a stage and without separation between actors and spectators, an event where all were active participants in the performance. Carnival is not something that one looks at or even plays in, he writes, more like a verb one needs to live it, follow its laws, and lead a carnival existence beyond what is normally permitted: it is a reversal of life, a world upside down. A few decades later, the Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Da Matta defined carnival as the most important social dramatization of cultural identity, a transgression of conventions, a ritual that inverts the established social order. Carnival constitutes a social valve to escape from the reality of a highly hierarchical society.

With the construction of the Sambódromo in Rio de Janeiro, the chaotic nature of carnival was altered. Archival documents demonstrate that the architect was concerned with programmatic questions that exceeded the simple accommodation
of the samba parade. Niemeyer’s solution combines an open-air stadium used exclusively during carnival with almost two hundred public classrooms beneath the bleachers designed to accommodate 16,000 children from the favelas (Figure 9.8). These classrooms double as boxes for jury members of the samba competition during the parades and other administrative functions. A small museum devoted to samba was also part of the program.27

Although the architect conceived two distinct moments within his project—the festive time of carnival and the everyday life in the school—Niemeyer’s Sambódromo resists popular appropriation and imposes its own social order and hierarchy. One clear evidence of this is the fact that at the time of its opening in 1984, “the traditional carnival decorations were banned from display in the building (…) only to be reinstated in 1988.”28 Niemeyer and Ribeiro argued that the decorations were an abomination that conflicted with the purity of the architectural concept. Another contentious element of the infrastructure was the Apotheosis Square, where Niemeyer tried to impose an official ending to the parade, which was not part of the traditional street festival. As a result, the performers were at a loss to know what to do in this vast open space that did not belong in the original ritual, but that tried to impose a new one.

In addition to the requests from the government, Niemeyer suggested freeing the space under the bleachers at street level in order to provide free access for the public that traditionally had participated in the event in a very active manner. For this purpose, he cut out the ground pillars so that the bleachers are cantilevered (Figure 9.9) to open the lines of vision. Even though in its built form the street level area still extends forward beyond the bleachers allowing a close connection with

9.9 The cantilevered bleachers of the Sambódromo open up the lines of vision at street level.
the parade grounds, that area is much more compressed than what was suggested in preliminary sketches. Moreover, “in practice, these spaces were filled with paying seats, which are much more profitable for merchants of the mega-spectacle in which the event has been transformed.”

One could argue that the Sambódromo was built according to the aesthetic requirements of the spectacle, and that initially the delimited space of the parade was divided from the spectators with cords, then fences and bleachers, long before the construction of Niemeyer’s structure. However, raising the first boxes five meters above street level created a very different kind of participation in the event; the separation became solely for paying spectators, thus creating a sense of safety for tourists, protected by the physical fortress of the Sambódromo.

The physical structure of the Passarela has funneled the samba parade “into a fixed context with a hierarchic spatial solution that seems most concerned with controlling not only the event and its participants, but also the audience.” As a theatrical space, the Sambódromo is a hybrid between traditional forms of urban theater and ceremonial processions. The formalized linear procession of this urban corridor imposes on the event a constant flow, which replaces the spontaneity and fluidity of street carnival. Since the parade is in constant motion, the audience perceives fragments of the performance of every samba school, comparable to the tableaux vivants of a previous era, but motion is here inverted. Spectators are now immobile witnesses of a flow that is independent from their own stationary condition, emphasizing the spatial and voyeuristic distinction between observers and observed, between spectators and participants. The spectacle has become an object of consumption.

This compelling example demonstrates the performing potential of architecture to “make” the event, but its overpowering presence can also subvert its original intent. Niemeyer’s Sambódromo, by formalizing the public institution of the samba parade, transformed the communal ritual of carnival into a civic spectacle for public—and touristic—consumption. If architects recognize the social power of architecture as a performing art, then the question of participation must remain in the forefront. Architecture has the potential to support ephemeral events for public appropriation, but it can also become a tool of power by imposing order onto the chaotic nature of existing rituals. If we accept the premise that architecture is a performing art, it is also our responsibility to understand its full potential to avoid making it into a tool that inhibits participation in existing popular ritual and identity-defining events.

NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 152.

3 “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, says he, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of
the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, which joins one wall to the other; in Whom all the building—whether spiritual or material—groweth unto one holy temple in the Lord. In Whom we, too, are taught to be builded together for an habitation of God through the Holy Spirit." Letter to the Ephesians II: 19–22, from Abbot Suger, *Libellus Alter de Consecratione Ecclesiae Sancti Dionysii*, V:15.

4 In French, the etymology of the word *église* is more directly derived from its Greek roots, ἐκκλησία. In English, the word "church" comes from the Old English *cirice*, derived from the West German *kirika*, which in turn comes from the Greek κυριακή (*kuriakē*), meaning "of the Lord". *Kuriakē* is probably a shortening of ἐκκλησία κυριακή (*ekklēsia kuriakē*). Douglas Harper, "Church", *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2001). Retrieved from http://www.etymonline.com on June 14, 2011.


6 In his *Poetics*, Aristotle insisted on the importance of unity of action and unity of time. Unity of place was most likely introduced in the sixteenth century by Italian theorists and became a guiding rule for French drama of the seventeenth century. It implied that the representational value of any given place on a stage set could not be altered without contravening the unity of place.


8 Bertrin and Remy, "Miracle Plays," no page number.

9 Konigson, *L’espace*, p. 52. The stage creates a specific place for the story. This is a major shift away from interpreting the existing spaces as part of the story. It also prepares the separation between actors and audience.


14 Ibid., p. 79.


16 Although short-lived, a French colony had control over the coast from Rio de Janeiro to Cabo Frio between 1555 and 1567.

17 I discussed the importance of ephemeral structures in political events, particularly between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, in another article: 'Architecture of Events: Reconfiguring the City,' *Threshold 31* (Boston, MA, 2006), pp. 44–51.


23 Around 1910, they obtained the right to parade in the centre of town on Monday night, the “slowest” day of carnival. Soon after, they became the main attraction. Pereira de Queiroz, “Carnaval portugais,” pp. 26–8.

24 Today, every school of samba presents a show that involves between 2,000 and 3,000 participants who perform in front of 70,000 to 100,000 spectators.


26 Roberto Da Matta, Carnavals, bandits et héros: ambiguïtés de la société brésilienne (Paris, 1983).

27 In an interview at the time with Niemeyer and the engineer of the project, José Carlos Sussekind, the architect confirmed that the government of Rio requested the following elements of architectural program in 1983: 160 classrooms, 43 administrative offices, the Apotheosis square, a carnival museum, and the preservation of the factory building of Brahma brewery. Oscar Niemeyer and J.C. Sussekind, “A Passarela do Samba,” Módulo, 78 (Rio de Janeiro, 1983): 18.


Twenty-five years ago I tried to crash the Basel Fasnacht. Living in southern Germany at the time, my partner and I had been fascinated by festivals and how they transformed cities. We set off for Switzerland with costumes in our luggage, and on checking in to the hotel, asked the staff to wake us up in the middle of the night. So at three in the morning on a cold February night, we quickly dressed and set off in search of Morgenstreich—the distinctive pre-dawn procession featuring giant gas-lit lanterns and costumed revelers. It didn’t take us long to find a lantern surrounded by a group of people waiting to start in the parade, but then we faced a dilemma. The clique appeared to be dressed ensemble. Their costumes played out a theme featured on their lantern—they even had little lanterns on their heads! This was nothing like the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade that we so blithely joined in with a few years earlier in New York City. As we attached ourselves to the rear of this clique (who seemed to tolerate our addition benignly) and descended through the winding streets of the city accompanied by pipes and drums, our path crisscrossed those of other groups. In fact, each clique was going its own way—up, down, across the routes of others. This was random. Anarchy. Some groups, like ours, were coordinated affairs. Others were what the Baslers call Schyssdräggiigli, or little trails of shit—an apt description of what we felt like, attached to the rear of someone else’s event.

In this way, we learned that Basel’s Fasnacht is unlike any other carnival—although in Basel, like in many German-speaking regions, Fasnacht is the culmination of the carnival season. The word refers to the night before the beginning of the Lenten fast, but the event actually begins on the Monday after Ash Wednesday with the pre-dawn Morgenstreich, in which cliques traverse narrow alleys, crossing other cliques as they gradually converge on Cathedral Square. This is followed by a hot soup in each clique’s cellar as the sun rises. In the afternoon, formal parades, known as cortèges, follow two established circular routes on major avenues. These are accompanied by brass
bands, which also hold giant concerts on Tuesday night. The parades continue Wednesday afternoon, and the event cycle ends on the dawn of Thursday morning, three days after it began.

Baslers consider their Fasnacht the “three most beautiful days” of the year. The cliques—which reflect virtually every interest group, club, association or community in the city—meet throughout the year to plan the theme for their entry and develop it to include a large lantern, costumes, and performance. The themes are satirical: mocking and ridiculing personalities, local controversies, and world events. Themes are often propounded in small leaflets known as Zeedel and addressed in staged poetry slams known as Schnitzelbänke. There are also daytime processions down the city’s main avenues, giant drum concerts, and masquerade balls. An official city-wide committee raises funds, prints guides and awards prizes.

Fasnacht is part of the identity of Baslers. The complex structure of the festival week enables it to appeal to the young and anarchically inclined for its transgressive and transformative character, but also to conservative citizens as an established tradition of the city. Basel’s streets and squares, landmarks and monuments are given meaning through the annual enactment of Fasnacht—from Morgenstreich that starts the festival to the two days of parades and events that follow. The event completely occupies the urban space of the city for its precise 72-hour duration, making visible a central aspect of Basel’s urban geography, what Henri Lefebvre calls its “imagined” dimension. Cellars all across town become crowded workshops and social centers; cliques associated with specific districts compete with cliques associated with others; and revelers occupy the city’s major plazas in front of the cathedral, market square, and bridges, underscoring the historic significance of these sites as centers of political and spiritual authority. I am interested here in the way the city of Basel seems to come alive during Fasnacht. The painted lanterns, expressive costumes, and themes spelled out in dialect call on local knowledge and insider jokes to reinforce the integral relationship between event and city. While Fasnacht has its roots deep in the city’s history, the event we see today has its origins in the late nineteenth century, when it was virtually invented as an “historic” event at a time of dramatic economic and societal transformation.

Basel, like most European cities, experienced substantial growth in the nineteenth century. German merchants, artisans, and manufacturers were attracted by its strategic location on the Rhine and its prominence as a center for silk manufacturing and developing chemical industries, such as synthetic dyes. Yet Basel differed in one significant respect from comparable cities in France, Germany and Switzerland, by keeping political power in the hands of its medieval guilds and reserving citizenship and voting rights to a very small number of residents until the end of the nineteenth century. In this analysis, I will explore how Basel’s Fasnacht offered a way for those who were structurally disenfranchised from civic government to develop social networks among themselves, gain visibility and a voice on civic matters and, eventually, to acquire sufficient presence in the civic realm to bring about their enfranchisement as full citizens.

According to the historian Lionel Gossman, the annual celebration of Fasnacht, with its “extravagant disguises, processions and liberties in which the entire city
was supposed to participate—was viewed by the radicals of the 1840s as a token of a future egalitarian order that would replace the deep social divisions of everyday life in the city.” Although they were excluded from guild membership, residents of Basel who were not citizens could form societies of their own, and by expressing their concerns in the streets of the city—even if only for a few days each year during Fasnacht—they were able to present their agenda for political reform in a public arena, gaining visibility and ultimately legitimacy in the process. In this way, Basel’s Fasnacht served as an ephemeral counterpart to Vienna’s Ringstrasse: it was a civic platform to place a liberal and middle-class agenda in the public eye. The Ringstrasse began in the 1860s with the construction of institutions of arts and culture that were not seen as a threat to imperial order, and culminated twenty years later with the city hall and parliament buildings, marking the ascendancy of the Viennese bourgeoisie to government. In Basel, a similar dynamic was played out in the annually recurring Fasnacht. As progressives took over the event and made it their own, they copied the social networks and cultural practices of the guilds and societies to express oppositional political views in a forum sanctioned by the elite. They also gained a public platform for their political goals.

**FASNACHT IN THE CITY OF GUILDS 1780–1848**

To understand Fasnacht’s role in the political and urban development of nineteenth-century Basel, we must first sketch out the city’s situation at the onset of its industrialization. The urban form and institutional structures of Basel had changed little from the time of their establishment in the thirteenth century until the end of the eighteenth century. Life in pre-industrial Basel revolved around the guilds and honorary societies. To exercise a trade or craft of any sort within the city, guild membership was obligatory. As Lionel Gossman explains:

> “Guildsman” and “citizen” were overlapping designations. To become a citizen, a man had at the same time to be accepted into one of the guilds, [and it was] through the guilds that the individual citizen exercised his political rights. […] The guilds were not simply professional organizations, […] they were the basic political organs of the state.”

In addition to the guilds, there were five honorary societies associated with the districts between the city’s inner and outer ring of urban fortifications. While these originated as guilds, over time they became identified with their geographic location in the city rather than with a particular trade. Both the guilds and the societies, from the late fourteenth century, were assigned responsibility for defending sections of the city’s outer walls. Each had a house for their association, by which name they were informally known. This was generally a several-story building with an armory, a drinking room, and kitchen on the ground floor, and a meeting hall on the upper level. The guilds of the merchant elite outfitted their houses with dance halls, smoking rooms, storerooms, and retail stores, and decorated them with tapestries and wall paintings (Figure 10.1). The houses of the district societies by contrast,
were often small buildings with just a few rooms (Figure 10.2). An eighteenth-century map of Basel shows the headquarters of district societies on the main streets of their neighborhoods between the outer and inner fortifications (indicated in black), while those of the guilds were near the centers of activity for their trades: Freie Strasse, Gerbergasse, and their junction in Market Square (indicated in the central zone) (Figure 10.3).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Fasnacht in Basel was celebrated with processions, banquets, and masquerade balls hosted by guilds and district societies at the beginning of Lent. Young men of the elite families organized spectacular processions with historical themes: a Peasant and Prince procession in 1812, a Bridal procession in 1820, a Chivalric procession in 1834, and the Traveling Arts in 1836. The district societies also organized parades for young men and children in their neighborhoods. The structure of these parades mirrored the stratification of Basel’s society: they were led by sons of the city’s highest-ranking citizens, with other participants in the parade arranged according to their social standing and ability to pay. Those with no standing or money were relegated to merely watching the spectacle. The youth wore militia uniforms and carried guns, representing their roles as defenders of the city’s fortifications. Playing martial music on drums and fifes, they followed an itinerary that began at their society house, proceeded down the main street of their district and through the inner wall into the heart of the city, where they called on the guilds, society halls, and other sites of civil authority, playing music and requesting “shooting money.” Their return home was celebrated with a banquet and a ball in the society house.

Such processions traced a network of dependencies between each district and Basel’s commercial and political core, literally knitting the societies into the city’s political structure and reinforcing its civic hierarchies. In this way, Fasnacht in Basel’s traditional society was understood by the city’s elites as reinforcing the social structure and it therefore had their support. Yet, as we will see, it ultimately played an active role in transforming that structure—corresponding to Natalie Zemon Davis’ view that carnival makes visible potential alternatives to the social order, and can indeed transform social hierarchies, if slowly:

*It is an exaggeration to view carnival and misrule as merely a “safety valve,” as merely a primitive, prepolitical form of recreation. Victor Turner and Mikhail Bakhtin are closer to the truth in seeing it as present in all cultures. I would say not only that it is present, but that the structure of the carnival form can evolve*
10.2 Hans Heinrich Glaser, Aeschenvorstadt District Society house zum Rupg, 32.3 × 20 cm (13 × 8 in.), ink drawing, 1645.

10.3 Map of the walled city of Basel, showing guilds and district houses, with routes of district society parades.
In the 1830s, the rural hinterland of Basel broke free from city rule in a series of uprisings known as the “Basel Troubles.” The motivation for these uprisings was a growing tension between the city’s monopoly on political power and the industrialization of its rural regions that had begun in the previous century with silk ribbon manufacture. As long as Basel’s tightly structured society of guilds, artisans, and merchant elites maintained its restrictions on citizenship—resisting the political liberalization that was taking place in other Swiss cities—the city’s population continued to decline even while its rural districts were rapidly growing. The result was a civil conflict that led to division of the canton into city and country governments. After the split, Basel’s elite families withdrew their support for public celebrations of Fasnacht, instead sponsoring private masquerade balls and theatrical performances restricted to their social class. Since street Fasnacht had long been discouraged by the city’s religious authorities in the Protestant church as a suspiciously Catholic practice, the processions that remained were small or ad hoc affairs mounted by groups of young men during carnival week.

FASNACHT FORMING THE BOURGEOIS CITY 1848–70

In spite of the cantonal division of Basel, manufacturing did not restrict itself to the city’s hinterland. Inevitably the city also began to industrialize. Between 1848 and 1860, the number of “foreigners” (i.e. non-Baslers) in the city doubled from 6,054 to 11,259, but only 1,223 of these were allowed to become citizens. By 1880, less than a third of Basel’s population held citizenship; 38 per cent were citizens of other cantons and 34 per cent were from the German states of Baden and Württemburg. This sizable cohort of non-citizens found no place in Basel’s traditional social structure, and complained about their treatment in the workplace and the society at large. Merchants and tradesmen drawn by Basel’s growing economy were prevented from exercising their trade or profession in the city, excluded from guild membership and the right to vote, and refused membership in social clubs and associations. Many prospered nonetheless, working for others. They created their own convivial societies in culture, politics, religion, and athletics, with associated society bulletins and newspapers. In many cases, these associations modeled themselves after the guilds, honorary corporations, and cultural or scientific societies of the elite. They varied widely according to the immigrants’ region of origin, their social class, political or religious convictions, and pastimes. They established headquarters in local restaurants or pubs, and several were named after the city districts in which their members lived.

For many of these new social and cultural societies, Fasnacht was the center of their social planning over the year, and a few dedicated themselves primarily to the event, adopting it and making it their own. In the process, they re-invigorated...
Fasnacht, bringing new participants to the event, which they could legitimately claim as a distinctively Basler tradition. In this way, the annual performance of Fasnacht provided not only a space for conviviality among newly arrived Baslers, but it also offered a public platform to promote liberal and progressive ideas that were critical of the status quo. In short, it offered middle-class immigrants a way into civic society that was both unimpeachably traditional and gratifyingly provocative and outspoken.

By 1848, liberalization at the federal level in Switzerland was progressing rapidly, with a new constitution guaranteeing equality (although not the vote) to all Swiss men, and freedom of domicile, religion, and the press. As political events at the federal level superseded the pace of change in the canton, Basel’s municipal authorities were engaged in a rearguard action to resist liberalization. Fasnacht played a crucial role in bringing the concerns of the disenfranchised residents front and center in civic life. And as this new bourgeoisie took up Fasnacht as their own event, filling up the void left by the departure of the elites, the character of the event changed.

While the earlier parades of the guilds and district societies had themes that glorified social order and hierarchy (e.g. peasant and prince, royal nuptials, chivalry), in the bourgeois processions of the mid-nineteenth century, each society developed its own sujet (theme), and it was often provocative or political. The sujet might be represented by an allegorical tableau vivant on a horse-drawn or hand-carried float, and accompanied by a mounted entourage. The political subtexts of Fasnacht subjects were elaborated in satirical poems printed in zeedel (leaflets) that were widely distributed. Audiences who wanted more information (or satirically expressed mis-information) could purchase Fasnacht “newspapers” sold by cliques just before and after the carnival week. The processions began at the many society headquarters in local restaurants or pubs, and proceeded—singly or collectively —to the central civic squares of the city before returning to the districts in which their members lived. Contemporary images suggest that these processions took place at night or in the early dawn of Morgenstreich (Figure 10.4). A prohibition of open torches in 1846 led to the development of Fasnacht lanterns, which rapidly supplanted the floats in popularity and developed into art works in their own right. These giant sculptural objects were shaped and painted to represent the sujet: a Pickelhaube (spiked helmet) lantern represented Prussian militarism in 1857 (Figure 10.5), and a papal tiara poked fun at papal infallibility in 1865.

Participating associations were careful to focus their political satire on neighboring states rather than local authorities. Yet the political messages were nonetheless clear—events in France, Italy, and Germany, as well as ongoing tensions with the Catholic Church, provided ample material to critique royalty, empire, militarism, political conservatism, and ecclesiastical authority. A sampling of the themes from 1849 gives an idea of the range of topics addressed. An entry with the theme of Louis Philippe dealt with the French king’s abdication in that country’s revolution of the previous year, and predicted that the newly elected President Louis-Napoléon would re-establish the imperial crown. The
10.4  *Morgenstreich on Kohlenberg*, pen and ink, ca. 1850.

A small group with stick- and shoulder-mounted lanterns.

10.5  “Prussian helmet” lantern carried in *Morgenstreich*, Samuel Baur, pen and ink, 1857.

The first recorded custom-shaped object-lantern, carried alongside the conventional stick-mounted and hanging lanterns.
Quartet of the Five Great Powers, Metternich, and The Democratic-Mill were unified by their treatment of Prince Metternich, whose reach in European politics was represented allegorically in the “democratic mill,” a machine in which crowned heads were thrown in the top to be rendered as democratic citizens (in mustaches and beards) out of the bottom. And Everyone Under a Single Hat addressed the people’s revolt in Baden near the Swiss border in spring of 1848.

Some topics provoked angry responses from foreign states and their supporters. For example, in 1852 the entry Louis Napoleon ridiculed the president of the French republic who had just engineered his second term with a coup d’état; the accompanying satirical poem declared “the French to be asses who let themselves be ruled by an ape.” A Zurich newspaper was scandalized and Basel city officials fined the author of the text, a known radical. The Papal Encyclical entry of 1865 lampooned Pope Pius IX’s Quanta Cura, which condemned emerging modern “errors” such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the separation of church and state. Paraders in this procession were costumed as Jesuits and monks, resulting in a police inquiry and fines for transgressing the prohibition on wearing religious habits in Fasnacht parades.

But for the most part, these political critiques were protected by the license that had been traditionally allotted to carnival. Basel’s free-thinking and progressive associations found Fasnacht to be an effective vehicle to express their views in public and to reach a large audience.

In the 1850s, even the most conservative city newspapers began to cover Fasnacht as a featured event. Multiple newspapers represented diverse factions in the city and their numbers had grown with the population, from 256 in 1856 to over 400 in 1871. Many of these newspapers represented radical opinions that supported ecclesiastical reformation or were entirely anti-clerical. Large circulation dailies established as organs of political associations reinforced the progressive agendas promoted through Fasnacht. Local newspapers analyzed the themes in depth, particularly when a provocative subject drew censure from a foreign state or the imposition of fines by local authorities. From 1850 onward, Fasnacht subjects were predominantly political, and could easily turn to a threatening edge, yet supporters could always retreat behind the excuse that “it’s all in good fun.”

As Fasnacht gained purchase among the liberal bourgeoisie and sufficient support on the city’s ruling council, the first indications appear that it was helping to integrate non-citizens into Basel’s political life, much as the processions of the eighteenth century had instructed young men in their social roles in the civil society. Fasnacht clubs offered those who were excluded from the guilds and honorary societies opportunities for networking and socializing. One of the best known of these, because of the role it was later to play in establishing Fasnacht as the city’s premier social event, was the men’s social club Quodlibet, established in 1858 for the promotion of amateur theatricals and masquerade balls. Quodlibet, in collaboration with the liberal press, fought all attempts by civic or religious authorities to forbid, restrict or regulate the event, while aiming to rein in its developments under their control.
When revisions to the Swiss national constitution in 1874 extended the vote to all male citizens and offered new freedoms in work and trades, Basel’s guilds and corporations finally lost their hold on city politics. The guilds began to close down their communal houses, eight of them dissolving between 1878 and 1897. In 1881, an alliance of progressives and free-thinkers gained control of Basel’s Great Council for the first time, forming a unified front against the conservatives and confirming the rise to power of the bourgeoisie in Basel’s civic government. It was also a time of significant change to the city’s form and infrastructure. The city walls were demolished, the railroad introduced, bridges built, streets widened and sewage systems were laid out (Figure 10.6). Factories were required to leave the city, and twelve new urban districts were developed outside the former city walls, with housing types ranging from workers’ blocks to villas in gardens.

In this period, cliques dedicated exclusively to Fasnacht began to appear, adopting the names of the districts in which they were based (e.g. Aeschlemer, Santihanslemer) or the bar which served as their regular watering hole (Figure 10.7). These societies were loosely structured, as we see from an advertisement placed by the Steinlemer-clique in the Basler Nachrichten in 1870, telling members...
that its procession would “take place today and a good turnout was expected.”

Local newspapers focused on the themes being addressed. For example, the Swiss People’s Friend wrote of the Muzzle-lawyers, whose subject alluded to a controversial penalty bill for members of the German Imperial Parliament; and the Vaccination Parade, with its subject of mandatory inoculation for newborns.

Local issues dominated the field of subjects: water supply, street widening, sewage lines, city bridges, and a central market.

In the late 1870s, the Quodlibet social club began to invite participation from other societies and the unions in its parades and it began to award prizes in 1884, greatly increasing the number of cliques and widening participation in the event. Cliques formed collection associations and issued Fasnacht “stock” to fund ever-more elaborate processions. Quodlibet began to share its fundraising revenues with participating cliques, gradually assuming responsibility for collecting and distributing funds centrally, and distributing Fasnacht profits to social projects and unemployment relief in the city.

In the late nineteenth century, as Basel’s working class organized, there was an explosion of new unions and associations in each trade. Working-class newspapers proliferated, helping to organize strikes, work actions, shutdowns and lockouts. Changes to civic government followed: first, general election of the government and of the courts, followed in 1896 by a majority of progressive members on the city’s Great Council. The larger context of a newly mobilized working class, coupled with Quodlibet’s efforts in institutionalizing funding for Fasnacht cliques, resulted in a significant increase in working-class participation.
in Fasnacht. And again, the event changed. For the first time, Fasnacht groups began to ridicule the city’s political leadership directly, as well as the city’s elite families, industrialists, capitalists, and the city’s Protestant denominations as well as the Catholic Church.

Subjects in the 1880s addressed local topics of immediate concern to a working-class population, such as the temperance movement, health insurance, strikes on the railway, a new political party for small tradesmen, and gypsies. They also continued to lampoon international events, such as disarmament treaties (Figure 10.8), colonialism in Africa, and conflict in the Balkans, and of course, to attract fines for libel and political insult. Cliques established in this period have endured to the present day: the Vereinigte Kleinbasler or VKB (United Little Basel) in 1884, the Breo-clique as a youth wing of Löwenfels in 1896, the Lälli- and Barbara-cliques in 1902, and the Spezi-clique in 1905. In 1908, the new Basel Wednesday Society joins with the Temperance Gymnastics Society, the fractious VKB spawns the Olympia-clique (named after the gymnastics society of a local silk factory), and the Gambrinus-clique adopts the name of the VKB. The cliques represented a full array of political positions, from the progressive and communist to the populist and reactionary. The city’s elites also returned to the event, finding themselves increasingly on the defensive and thus in an excellent position for Fasnacht participation—the oppositional one. In short, Fasnacht is institutionalized as a vehicle for political criticism and social activism.

10.8 Quodlibet’s Disarmament procession, 1899.

The subject was the Hague conference of that year, which aimed to limit the use of modern technology in war and to establish a peaceful mechanism for the settlement of disputes between nations.
By 1900, the event was firmly enshrined as a characteristic feature of Basler identity. Press accounts praise every clique’s freedom to form its own procession and choose its own route as an expression of the Basel character.

After the turn of the century, the Fasnachts-Comité began to represent the event as a characteristic feature of the city. This development was influenced by the fact that the representatives of the middle class now ran the city government. They interpreted this cultural event, originally created by and for a specific middle class immigrant culture, as a central, “typical” element of the city’s culture. They pointed to the “old tradition” of Fasnacht and its roots in Basel’s society.24

This period also witnesses a rise in scholarship on the history of Fasnacht as a folk tradition, part of a more widespread interest in folklore and regional cultures that took place across Europe in an era of emerging nationalism (Figure 10.9).25 This gloss of historical nostalgia sheds light on the unique quality of Fasnacht—an event constitutive of Basel identity yet created by refusés—and it helps to explain a defiantly anarchic sensibility that has persisted through the twentieth century. At last, the annual procession through the city’s streets, accompanied by visual allegories in the giant lanterns accompanied by rhetorical exhortations in the zeedels, Schnitzelbänke and newspapers, included all segments of Basel society: the middle class, the working class and, in a curious irony, even the elites who had shunned the event for seventy years. Short-lived but resurgent year after year, Fasnacht helped to modernize the organs of a democratic society—the institutions

10.9 Niklaus Stöcklin, Der Morgenstreich, oil on wood, 1925, Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, Zurich.
of government, education, culture, welfare, and a public press—making them more inclusive and keeping the foibles of the powerful in the public eye.

_Fasnacht_'s impact extends throughout Basel, although it is not immediately visible—as is Vienna's Ringstrasse with its parliament, museums, opera, theatre, university, churches, and barracks. Basel's urbanism is performative—a temporary urbanism just discernable beneath the city's urban fabric, made up of hundreds of associations, clubs, and splinter groups that participate in _Fasnacht_ each year, meeting in their clique-cells and running educational programs, drumming schools, lessons in public speaking, and social events. Each February, in the dead of winter, this deeply rooted expression of the city bursts like a strange and beautiful mushroom, exploding into the night and sending its spores out once again, in a pattern of constant renewal.

**NOTES**

* An earlier version of this chapter was published as “Festival urbanism: Carnival as an Expression of Civil Society in Nineteenth Century Basel,” in S. Bonnemaison and C. Macy (eds.), _Festival Architecture_ (Abingdon, UK, 2007).


5 David Harvey, _The Urban Experience_ (Baltimore, MD, 1989), p. 261; see also Henri Lefebvre, _The Production of Space_ (Oxford, 1991).

6 The chemical dye industry, first developed by Johann Rudolf Geigy in 1758, expanded over the nineteenth century to encompass pharmaceuticals, insecticides, and chemical research. Some key companies include Ciba (an acronym for the Gesellschaft für Chemische Industrie Basel) established in 1859, and Sandoz, established in 1886.


8 Gossman, _Basel in the Age of Burckhardt_, p. 20.


11 Martin Schaffner, _De Basler Arbeiterbevökerung im 19. Jahrhundert: Beiträge zur Geschichte ihrer Lebensformen_ (Basel, 1972), p. 1. As Basel’s merchants turned to the countryside—where there were no guild protections—to expand their industrial
manufacturing, the population of the city’s rural areas grew to double that of the city. By the end of the eighteenth century, the ribbon industry employed over 9,000 people in the countryside alone (Gossman, Basel in the Age of Burckhardt, p. 23).


15 Schaffner, De Basler Arbeiterbevölkerung, p. 2.

16 Pfister, Die Einbürgerung der Ausländer.


19 Schaffner, De Basler Arbeiterbevölkerung, p. 113.

20 Citizenship rights in Basel were extended very gradually and incrementally over the course of the nineteenth century. Some significant steps included the Swiss laws of 1848, the great naturalization of 1852 (for French refugees, Catholics, foundlings and the homeless), the question of citizenship for residents of Alsace-Lorraine who declined French citizenship after 1870–71, citizenship for Jews in 1872, further relaxations for citizenship in 1879. See Pfister, Die Einbürgerung der Ausländer.


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The theatrical experience begins long before any curtain rises. It begins with the participatory performance along the trajectory from the street to the performance space entry. It exists in its own right in the liminal spaces and moments between the city and planned event. These liminal spaces offer architects opportunities to construct experiences of heightened sensory awareness that engage the public not only as spectator but also as performer. These pre-performance spaces prime the theater-goer to sense, to engage and to reflect upon the world through visual and spatial distancing, through vertiginous immersion, and as emancipated spectators, to borrow French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s term, and invite the public to make their own performance. The sites examined in this chapter are these liminal spaces between everyday city life and the designated performance space—the building approach, threshold, foyer space, and passages that lead towards the performance hall entry.

Two performance buildings by Ateliers Jean Nouvel—the Opera de Lyon (1993) and the Danish Radio Concert Hall, in Copenhagen (2009)—will be unpacked to reveal how the design of their pre-performance spaces heighten the theater-goer’s experience, visually, viscerally and haptically, to turn the tables, casting theater-goers as performers, empowering them to create their own heightened theatrical experience independent of the planned event and its space.1

Two points must first be made regarding the 1875 Opera de Paris, by Charles Garnier, which may be considered the utmost architectural model for the conflation of performer and spectator. First, the development of the Avenue de l’Opera and the opera house at the end of this axis were linked projects. Thus the vista and promenade through urban space towards the opera were of paramount importance to the design of the total theater experience, an experience that begins and exists in its own right outside of the performance space. Second, the Opera de Paris can be read as Garnier’s constructed manifesto on society, theater,
and the architectural structuring of that social theater. In the introduction to Le Théâtre Garnier offered a space-by-space explanation of design principles realized in the opera house; he stated, “to see and to make oneself be seen, to understand and to make oneself be understood, that is the fated circle of humanity; to be actor or spectator, that is the condition of human life.”

“theatrical sentiment,” or impulse, Garnier argued, was fundamental to human nature, placed third in importance after the “desire for affection and self preservation.”

To see and to be seen, in a specific light, place and context, underlies the structure of the Paris Opera’s public spaces. Plan and section reveal a hierarchical layering of space that distributes theater-goers according to economic class and gender. Although arriving by separate prescribed access points, all entered the cubic space of the grand stair, only to split again according to class—the majority in the thick of things at the \textit{parterre} level while the privileged took their places in private, tiered \textit{loges}. The spatial hierarchy of the tiered galleries, wrapping and seen through porous archways that surround the grand stair volume, identified the social hierarchy of the all-too-visible onlookers.

Ascending the grand stairs located theater-goers as performers at the focal point of the space, with the greatest concentration of eyes upon them. The stairs, like a \textit{haute-couture} catwalk, demanded graceful control of one’s forward, climbing, and turning movement at each of the marble treads and landings. Each change in level and forced rotation functioned as a device to bring the theater-goer’s awareness back to their own performed movement through space, amplified by eyes focused on them, ascending through this gilded cage. Thus attention doubly rested on the ascending theater-goer: the performance resided in their action from the view point of the onlookers as well as the highly self-conscious movement experienced by the person moving.

The importance of the social theater played out in the pre-performance space and time of Garnier’s grand stair is well recognized. The arched openings that surround and overlook the grand stair reflect in miniature the large proscenium arch of the theater, but draw into question where and who the performers are. Through the repetitive archways Garnier critiqued the paradigm of opposing the performer’s space and the spectator’s space while perpetuating that paradigm in the opera house proper. In the theater of the grand stair all participated at some point; in the opera house no one crossed the threshold from spectator to participant.

The opposition between performer and spectator and the paradigm of non-participating spectators increasingly drew critics, as evident in scenographer and lighting designer Adolphe Appia’s 1911 essay “Eurhythmics and the Theater.” He wrote:

\textit{Up until now, only quiet attention has been required of the audience. To encourage us, comfortable seats have been provided in semi-darkness, to encourage a state of total passivity—evidently the proper attitude for spectators. In other words, here as elsewhere, we have attempted to separate ourselves from the work of art; we have become eternal spectators.}
Two generations later in the *Society of the Spectacle* Guy Debord further critiqued a society of passive spectatorship, consumption and mediated experience; this critique continues today in the form of debates around participation and performativity in theater and other spatial and cultural disciplines. Jacques Rancière, French philosopher and advocate of radical democracy and equitable participatory society, reflected on the potential for an “Emancipated Spectator” in his essay of that title. Rancière claimed that the generally accepted modern paradox of the spectator assumed that on one hand there is no theater without the spectator, but on the other hand that being a spectator is “inherently bad (as) viewing is the opposite of knowing (and) spectating is the opposite of acting … To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act.”

Rancière continued by pointing to two mid-twentieth-century theater directors—Bertold Brecht and Antonin Artaud—who attempted to transform the spectator into an active agent. For Brecht spectators were to be activated through defamiliarization and intellectual engagement, provoking an emotional *distance* from the action and actors while raising their “consciousness of the social situation.” Artaud’s model of activation was founded on the *forgoing of distance* between actor and spectator. The spectators were “drawn into a circle of action that restores their collective energy.” Modeled after the Greek chorus, Artaud posited that theater would be rooted in participatory movement, which included the entire citizenry.

Rancière, however, argued for a third approach, stating “being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation …” As such, Rancière’s emancipated spectator is one who participates in a ceaseless exchange of roles, not the obliteration of difference between the positions of actor and spectator, seer and seen. He argues:

*Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting … It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms [the] distribution of positions. The spectator also acts … observes, selects, compares, interprets … [and] composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way …* 

Thus the performance does not offer a singular message or predictable effect upon the spectator, but rather is one part of a network open to interpretation and to be completed in a heterogeneous fashion by a multitude of spectators.

These three models for an augmented experience—as the distanced, immersed, and emancipated spectator—are particularly interesting in respect to the performances that we enact and witness in the spaces outside the theater proper, in our normal situation. We will turn our attention to the public’s augmented experiences that Nouvel has constructed in the pre-performance spaces of the Opera de Lyon and the Danish Radio Concert Hall.

Jean Nouvel’s Opera de Lyon consists of a new horseshoe opera house suspended within the shell of an existing neoclassical structure. The lobby is
tightly packed into the interstices compressed between a black-lacquered vessel that contains the new opera hall and the preserved outer walls, and it winds its way upward nearly a hundred feet, criss-crossed by bridges and escalators. In comparison to Garnier’s highly defined cubic volume and clearly defined balconies that frame the action and instruct the spectator where to look, the vertical ascent in the Opera de Lyon begins via exceptionally narrow escalators from the street level, across compressed interstitial voids, to peripheral platforms with scattered focus (Figure 11.1). After obliquely approaching the Opera through city streets, adjacent plazas, and its surrounding arcade to ascend to the historic grand foyer and new suspended parterre level, the body of the theater-goer is passive—not moving but rather being moved. In addition, elevators transport stationary bodies up through the compressed, vertical lobby from a subterranean amphitheater to the sixth balcony level while the escalators carry passive theater-goers across the center of the space. Meanwhile the place of the active body is pushed to the upper perimeter. Along these upper edges of the void, theater-goers tenuously make their way on perforated metal gangways towards the opera house’s grande salle. The uppermost of these metal gangways overlooks a precipice of nine stories. If not overwhelmed by vertigo from these scattered prospects, one can glimpse other people. The contorted shape of the void crops the view of platforms, obstructing the view of those occupying them.
Visual contact is fleeting as one moves quickly from the crowded street level towards more dispersed, remote, and intimate spaces.

If light from the windows of the neoclassical shell abounds, it does not help the theater-goer see clearly—either the space to be navigated, the individuals present, or the collective society in which he or she takes part (Figure 11.2). Glare and reflections off the black lacquered vessel confound reality, doubling, distorting, and mirroring the already complex play of volumes that interrupt the narrow space bounded by the preserved walls. One loses oneself in a disorienting void, in which the spatial and social structure dissolves into literal smoke and mirrors.

In contrast to the comprehensible order of Garnier’s Paris Opera House, Nouvel’s space is troubling—confounding, disorienting, vertiginous. Extremely compressive spaces—between lacquered vessel and the stone historic enclosure, within the narrow escalators, and the two lobby levels tightly tucked below the parterre level—are counterpoints to the vertical hollow that winds its way from the subterranean amphitheater to the cornice line of the historic outer shell (Figure 11.3). One space preserved from the Opera’s 1831 configuration, the grand foyer, elevated above the entry portico, offers a counterpoint to Nouvel’s world in the form of a clearly defined and illuminated space permitting one to orient oneself in the building and in the city. Here one may also satisfy other senses with food and drink.
The theater-goer’s experience of Nouvel’s pre-performance space does not center on a singular space and action. No singular message is offered for interpretation. Nor does the experience rely on distancing the theater-goer from the performance in a Brechtian manner. One can barely see. Nor is one immersed in the swoon of Artaud’s choric society. Immersed in a spatial swoon perhaps, but devoid of society. Rather, as a geometrically ungraspable space to be navigated, lacking focus, in several senses, the theatrical experience that precedes the planned event is constructed of the theater-goer-as-spectator’s own aggregation of visceral and visual sensations, termed proprioceptive experience. Engaging more than just the eye, Nouvel’s space is equally sensed in the muscles, the ear, the gut.

This perception—proprioception—predominantly has its nerve receptors within the interior of the body, such as joint and muscle receptors and the vestibular receptors of the inner ear, as opposed to being located on the body’s surface or in specific sense organs. Messages originate in the muscles, joints, and vestibular receptors to communicate the position of limbs as one shifts weight and adjusts balance in relation to gravity. Proprioception contributes to kinaesthesis, or the sense of movement, through these internal signals in combination with information from visual and cutaneous receptors.9

The eye’s role, however, is not limited to the contribution of retinal imagery. Within the proprioceptive web of information, receptors in the extra-ocular muscles register the direction of gaze and thus help sense the direction and location of objects, surfaces, and edges in space.10 The muscles focus the individual eyeball and binocular eyes together, offering bodily cues about distance. Thus muscular information, in addition to the retinal image, communicates the depth of space,
and one’s position within it. Conflicting proprioceptive and visual information about distance, particularly the distance to the ground below one’s feet, triggers a sensation in the gut—vertigo.

Nouvel is a master of vertigo as exemplified in the Opera de Lyon’s dizzying and disorienting alternation between physically engaged motion and passive motion, compressive space and immeasurably expansive space. The perception of unfathomable depth through the perforated surfaces of the gangways, the vibration of these gangways underfoot, the inverted and distorted reflections on the lacquered vessel, the indistinguishable edges of black-on-black volumes focus the theater-goer’s attention—proprioceptive, kinaesthetic, and retinal—on the sensing and negotiation of space. Both immersed within and forced to map the space, the theater-goer is obliged to make sense of their position and movement. This heightened awareness, I would argue, demands that theater-goers become attentive, engaged, actively participating, even emancipated spectators. A passive or distracted spectator would be in danger of stumbling or succumbing to dizziness.¹¹

One could argue that this play on the senses that induces theater-goers to focus on the spatial experience is solely in service of preparing the theater-goer for the opera they are about to perceive. The space certainly participates in that preparation. However, I argue that in the work of Jean Nouvel these effects are not unique to performance buildings. Intense plays of compression and vertiginous spaces can be found across the range of Nouvel’s projects, from the Arab World Institute and Galeries Lafayette to the Gasometer Housing and Judicial Center in Nantes. The play on the senses that contributes to the theatrical experience in Lyon calls us to attention both in and out of the performance space. It awakens us to being present in whatever space we inhabit.

A related play on the senses characterizes the public space of Nouvel’s Danish Radio Concert Hall (DR) on the outskirts of Copenhagen. In contrast to Lyon’s confined site, which left no opportunity for an extended axial approach through urban space, the approach to the DR, in the developing Universitetet area, stretches beyond the building’s limit. The compressive experience begins with the above-ground metro-ride to this outlying part of town in a car crammed with theater-goers. Once released, the out-of-place audience traverses a wide path towards the DR, an illuminated blue cube. To enter, one passes through a low, compressive threshold that opens into a vertical space, hoisting the gaze skyward. Situated similarly over the entry to Lyon’s grand foyer, the restaurant extension of the DR foyer compresses the threshold, overlooking the approach and providing a place for eating, drinking, and general warming up for the show.

The meteor, as the concert hall is affectionately called, floats above the ground-level entrance and elevated foyer plinth, spanning between several roughly textured concrete stair cores. Its scaly brown surface earned it its intergalactic name. Once theater-goers emerge from under the foyer, illuminated lines in the underbelly of the meteor draw the gaze up. With heads tipped back theater-goers are also offered glimpses of sky through slivers of space between the meteor’s hovering mass and the multi-layered building envelope. Barely through the door,
11.4 Danish Radio Concert Hall.

Above: approach via metro, entry tucked below the foyer/restaurant. Below left: entrance lobby space with view of the meteor. Ahead is the stair, and to the right the escalator, leading onto the plinth. Below right: view up into the slot between the meteor and the double layer envelope.

11.5 Danish Radio Concert Hall.

Left to right: theater-goers orienting and investigating balconies above a mini-foyer; orienting in the entry lobby space; looking down from the first balcony to the foyer/plinth.
the immersive space demands an effort to establish orientation. Newcomers take time to determine where to go, lured in several directions by scattered balconies and lighting effects drawing their attention. Frequenters of the hall commonly turn 360° to take in the full space and the gawkers who entered just after them (Figures 11.4–11.6).¹²

In contrast to the distant meteor and its access balconies that demand visual scanning, local details, such as the contoured concrete of the stair cores and plywood panel railings, lure one’s hands, bringing one’s sensation of the space back to one’s own body, to the tactile experience, to immediately tangible surfaces (Figure 11.7).

From the entry lobby one continues onto the foyer plinth by actively traversing a moat that surrounds its volume, then climbing a broad stair, or alternatively, to the right, by being passively moved via escalators hovering over this moat up through a narrow slot. At the top of the escalator one turns by 90°, and then again through 180° into the tightest and most remote spot of the now horizontally expansive, vertically compressed space between the foyer plinth and the meteor of the concert hall above (Figure 11.8).

Across, at the greatest distance from the compressed edge, one can see a luminous vertical expanse of glass overlooking the metro by which one arrived. At the opposing corner, nearly hidden from view, is the restaurant, overlooking and compressing the entry. From this remote, compressed edge the underbelly of the meteor arcs up and away creating the generous gathering space of the

¹² Danish Radio Concert Hall, perspective diagram.
11.7 Danish Radio Concert Hall, typical textured concrete conditions, marked by colored light and projections.

11.8 Danish Radio Concert Hall, the Foyer Plinth, at the top of the escalator, its most compressed edge.

11.9 Danish Radio Concert Hall, Foyer Plinth volume.
Left: looking towards the restaurant and main escalators. Center: the gravitational center of the foyer, looking towards the metro. Right: view from the elbow of the first balcony.
foyer, the likes of which could not have been accommodated within Lyon’s tight neoclassical container.

The limits of this foyer space, caught between the plinth and the meteor above, are further defined by thin, plywood-clad, horizontal balconies giving access to the concert hall. Behind these galleries are the textured concrete cores and escalators. Behind these, a glass fishnet enclosure and behind this, the outer most blue scrim. From the plinth all members of the public ascend via adjacent escalators and stairs to the first and subsequent balconies. Along these balconies that lead into the hall one encounters other smaller, multi-level salons. From any single point within or around the foyer one is confronted with multi-level carved or aggregated spaces, diverse programmatic elements (concessions, coat checks, lounge seating, bar-height tables …), and diverse lighting conditions. The space asks to be discovered step by step; no single glance can capture it; there is no singular quality (Figure 11.9).

Similar to the ubiquitous glare, reflection, and distortion off of the lacquer in Lyon, the entire meandering volume of the foyer is splotched with intense patches of white and colored lights, vague projected patterns and images, and their reflections off the polished concrete floor, chrome mullions, and glass enclosures (Figure 11.10). Squinting, the distribution of color, light, and darkness recall rainy-night headlights and neon on the boulevard of a metropolis. During an intermission one spectator commented that the DR is a “night building.” The foyer, she stated, is meant to be a dark space as it is most beautiful in darkness when the colored lights and projections are brightest. Ironically that was the longest day of the year and thus still bright until well after the concert had ended.13

From the beginning of the trajectory to the moment one enters the concert hall the theater-goer moves and is moved, literally and viscerally. Alternating between active explorer and stationary observer the space demands conscious engagement. Moving and being moved, one is lured through layers of space, some aggregated, some carved out from below the feet and above the head. From the foyer plinth and balconies one looks up, down, into the crowd, and
out to the metro and landscape, and reorients. Rotations, revealing what is hidden, lead one on, disorienting and demanding re-orientation, compressing and releasing that compression, ascending and turning again and again, until one is pushed, quite literally by the ticket-holding crowds, down narrow galleries overlooking deep slots of space and into the symphony hall itself.

Not unlike Garnier, Nouvel contests that “everything is theatrical” though with a subtle difference. Nouvel states that “Scenography … is not a question of producing a spectacle … but simply bearing in mind the fact that there is somebody who is looking and something being looked at … in accordance with the precise knowledge of … the emotions you want to trigger.”

Note the clear intention to provoke an emotion, in the public in general and the theater-goer specifically. Yet the focused experience with clear spatial and social ordering found in Garnier’s Opera is broken up in Nouvel’s space into a multiplicitous, layered, and vertiginous space. It is intentionally labyrinthine, Piranesian.15 The theater-goer is propelled through this multiplicity to explore and construct their own understanding.

Several things are at play here; first the physical registration—the proprioception—of compressive space and release. The three-dimensionally carved volume of the foyer space and the aggregation of vertical and diagonal elements that traverse it disorient and destabilize, registering viscerally. At the same time fathoming layers of depth engages the eye, retinally and proprioceptively, as one seeks to measure and decipher the space. Textures bring the gaze and consciousness down to the immediately surrounding surfaces, and plays of light draw the attention towards sometimes near, sometimes imperceptibly distant surfaces. Nouvel aims “to provoke a disturbing, even moving experience … which facilitates one’s awareness of light. The movement and the vibration of time.”16

Secondly, as in Garnier’s grand stair, on the DR’s foyer plinth and in the smaller salons one is in the thick of things. Yet one is not surrounded in section by singularly focused onlookers nor participating in a singularly proscribed action. The clear positioning of the theater-goer as performer within a hierarchy of social role-play found in Garnier’s Opera is undone in both these works by Nouvel. The clear opposition between performer’s space and spectator’s space is dissolved. In these pre-performance spaces focus is scattered, action multiplied. One is surrounded in layers of space to be fathomed. One moves through an extreme gradient, between exploration and reflection, of near surfaces and far destinations, the constant fluctuation of attention between one’s bodily navigation through space and visual fathoming of its complexity. This actively engages and augments awareness of “movement and the vibration of time.” Awareness and engagement in the making of one’s own experience, I would argue, renders the public as performer, as conscious participant, as emancipated spectator with the “capacity to (find out) and the power to act.”17

The DR’s raised foyer, with the galleries that overlook it and the public that lingers there and moves through it, constructs an interior urban plaza, a distributed and diverse space of engagement, not a focused, differentiated stage. What the Opera de Lyon’s urban site offered as an extension of the theatrical experience,
Nouvel constructed for Copenhagen's colder climate and not-yet-urban site. As in the public squares and arcade wrapping around the Opera de Lyon, the space of the foyer plinth meanders, containing diverse activities distributed across its surface, framing no one in particular, allowing everyone to explore, to observe, to engage in the active making of their own experience, not performed for anyone in particular.

Drawn into the center of their own action, theater-goers traverse the space, experiencing alternating extremes in orientation and dimension, ambiguous reflections and layered depths They are engaged, vertiginously, groping in the darkness of both the Lyon and Danish Radio foyers, employing proprioception to viscerally find their place in space. Independent of the planned performance that occurs in the adjacent performance space, Nouvel's play on the senses in these pre-performance spaces heightens awareness of the immediate participatory performance, the present moment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Stefan Hölsher for introducing me to Jacques Rancière's writing; to Ateliers Jean Nouvel for providing project documentation and for their time answering my questions; to Francoise Rey and Francois Rico at the Opera de Lyon; and to Johanne Østergård, and the DIS faculty, staff and students, for receiving me in Copenhagen; to Thea Brejzek, Dorita Hannah, PSi, Marcia Feuerstein, and Gray Read for the opportunity to present this and earlier versions of this chapter.

NOTES

1 Earlier versions of "Turned Tables," presented at the Performance Studies International Annual Conference (June 2010), the PQ's Expanding Scenography Symposium (July 2010) and the ACSA Annual Meeting (March 2011) contrasted the role of visuality and proprioception in the "pre-performance" spaces of Jean Nouvel and Diller Scofidio + Renfro. While revisiting the theaters discussed here, and others including the Festspielhaus in Hellerau, where choreographer William Forsythe is currently in residence, I discovered dramaturge Freya Vass-Rhee's 2010 essay "Turning the Tables: William Forsythe's Antipodes I/II" on audience perception of Forsythe's performances. The similarity in title and content is purely coincidental, though it is evidence of a network of ideas shuttling between various spatial and performative disciplines.


3 Ibid.


8 Ibid., pp. 12–13. Author’s italics.

9 According to the Michel Millodot, *Dictionary of Optometry and Visual Science*, 6th edition (Edinburgh, 2004), p. 253, proprioception is the “awareness of posture, balance or position due to the reception of stimuli, produced within the organism, which stimulate receptors (called proprioceptors) located within muscles, tendons, joints and the vestibular apparatus of the inner ear.” Other medical dictionaries refer to this as a kinesthetic sense, and thus motion in addition to body posture, balance.


11 The author’s interview and building visit with Opera de Lyon backstage hand François Rico (July 6, 2011) revealed that theater-goers frequently stumble while negotiating the glass bridge between the vessel and historic foyer, and suffer dizziness, vertigo, and other “malaise” negotiating the perforated metal gangways. The author can attest to suffering from vertigo on these gangways.

12 Author’s interview with architect and former Copenhagen resident Jon Mayfield, April 19, 2010. Author’s impromptu interviews with various members of the public during the June 22, 2011 performance intermission.

13 Author’s impromptu interview with one member of the public during the June 22, 2011 performance intermission, who happened to also be an employee of the DR.


16 Ibid., p. 17.

Theatrical Doubles: The Affecting Presence of Oskar Schlemmer’s Wall Designs

Marcia Feuerstein

12.1 Oskar Schlemmer’s one-eyed face painted within the corner of the stair in the Rabe House, its profile corresponding to the form of the handrail while the lower portion of a giant male figure is facing up the stair, its right hand about to grasp the handrail.
Turning the corner to climb the stairs, I confronted a large one-eyed face hidden in the corner. Was it facing me? Unnerved by its intense gaze … it stared at me yet turned to the side looking toward the stairs. Perhaps the painted face belonged to a huge figure, also turning to climb another set of hidden stairs. The face fit within the corner, its profile tracing the sweep of the handrail, seeming to emerge from hidden depths of a colossal world within the walls (Figure 12.1).

The Rabe house, inhabited by painted and constructed figures of the Bauhaus master Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), offers a glimpse into the affecting presence of architecture. The house explicitly invites us to perform with it, play with it, and to imagine ourselves in another world that may exist along with our everyday life.

Buildings “plot” our everyday movements giving structure to daily habits through design, constructing patterns of what we do, what we might do, and what we once did.1 Architecture’s moving parts: doors, windows, and walls that slide, swing, and pivot are silent partners responding to our movements, while its unmoving elements stand as frame and foil to our actions. A stair gives us a place to pause at a landing, a narrow hall has us walk single file, and a floor acts as a sounding board and drum reverberating our rhythmic walk. We live with architecture, creating a partnership that twines us together, each dependent on the other.

This counterpoint between daily movements and architectural plans changes from bedroom and office to street and city. As we move, we play off architectural forms in dialogue.2 Buildings set rules that guide our motion like a pre-choreographed dance, such as walking up a stair, with rise, run, and handrail set to specific dimensions and locations. With each move, we trace with our feet, hands, and eyes, the architecturally designed space—caressing handrails while rising via stairs, penetrating walls as we walk through doorways and look through windows toward a framed view. Yet there are many ways of moving or performing on the stair that extend beyond a designer’s intent. At an extreme of interpretive motion, an acrobatic traceur (gymnastic leaper) might test the partnership with architecture in plots of efficient yet elegant movement, inventing and tracing alternative routes—l’art du déplacement or “freerunning.”

While few of us engage in “freerunning,” we are moved by performances and theatrical spaces that take us away from everyday scripted life that, according to Charles Garnier, designer of the Paris Opera, reshape our thinking, acting, speaking, even standing.3 We are removed from a familiar present to another place, whether remaining in the background or joining the action: passive or active as audience or actor through a “theatrical experience.”4 In the first century BCE, Vitruvius described the experience of an audience passively “taking in” a performance by becoming receptive and actively open to performances.5 This active reception also occurs when we occupy ambiguous spaces, that are simultaneously quotidian—of this world—and strange—of another world.

Schlemmer’s “wall designs,” which were inserted into the Rabe House (designed by architect Adolf Rading between 1928 and 1930), heighten the theatrical experience by creating an ambiguity with Schlemmer’s fictional installations that he overlaid throughout the domestic spaces of Rading’s design.6 His wall designs summon a multilayered human presence that populated much of Schlemmer’s
work throughout his life, particularly in his studies and teachings on the human being and the dancer. The figures Schlemmer installed within Rading's architecture have an almost-human charisma that creates an “affective presence” as a force within the space.

Schlemmer had taught at the Bauhaus between 1921 and 1929 where he led the theater workshop from 1923 and developed a course titled Der Mensch [The Human Being], and then at the Breslau Academy of Arts, where his colleagues included Rading and other leading modern architects. His life-long study of the human body in space, which began with his Triadic Ballet (conceived during WWI) and articulated in his theory of “Man as Dancer” (Tänzermensch), intertwined the human body with space, recasting architecture as a performing art. He explored the peculiar and unique dialogues between human motion and space (Raum) in his paintings and performances. Preoccupied with the physicality of moving within architecture and on stage, he designed costumes that allowed unexpected patterns of movement, causing the actor or dancer to explore disruptions of ideal form. His fascination with performance and architecture was evident in a series of 1922 wall designs for the vestibule and entry hall of the Bauhaus Workshop in Weimar (the wall design was destroyed by the Nazis in 1930). In Der Mensch, his interest in the theatrical body was tied to various topics that included life drawing, measurement and proportion, natural sciences, figure drawing, philosophy, and psychology, which in 1928 he brilliantly represented in Der Mensch im Ideenkreis [Man in the Circle of Ideas], locating the human being at the core of the micro- and macro-cosmos. This idea recalls Schlemmer’s diagram of the relationship between a spectator (in the audience) and an actor (on a traditional stage) via a dramatic circle that joined each with the other (Figure 12.2). The Circle of Ideas is playfully implied by Schlemmer’s performance piece, the Circle Dance, which was staged in 1929 by the Bauhaus Theater Workshop. The Circle Dance became one of the Bauhaus Dances series where Bauhaus actor/dancers both demonstrated and performed architecture. They did this while clothed in various forms of costumes and manipulating a variety of props. Both the costumes and props acted as intermediaries between the dancers’ free body movement and architectural space represented on the Bauhaus stage. Schlemmer’s costumes restricted, restructured, and redefined bodily movement out of and into architectural space while the props made the dancers’ movements visual. This interrelation between body and costume/prop is especially evident in Schlemmer’s Triadic Ballet, as well as in the Bauhaus Dances, where bodily and architectural mass, volume, shape, and material were felt by the dancers, and then demonstrated and revealed to the audience. For example, the previously mentioned Circle Dance included a group of black-clad dancers on a black stage. The dancers seemed to disappear from sight while the large wooden hoops they held remained visible while tracing the invisible dancers’ movements: hoops seemingly floating in an eerie human yet non-human dance on the stage. This was similar in the Rod Dance: long inflexible sticks were attached to the black-clad dancers’ extremities: upper arms, forearms, wrists, hands, thighs, and calves, to restrict the dancers’ movements according to the form, shape, material, and measure of the rods. All that was visible were the moving
rods, which traced the invisible dancers’ attempts to dance with their restrictive partners. The rods revealed the jointed movements of each part of the dancers’ extremities, extending the lines of the body beyond the space of the dancers’ own body envelope. Their movements appeared completely detached from the body, floating independently above the stage and tracing intricate forms generated by the interplay between the body’s bending and turning joints (wrists, elbows, knees) and the restrictive “costume” created by the rods. This disruption of free movement in space was at the heart of Schlemmer’s theory of costume and revealed through the various playful performances. His theory of costume was based on four laws of spatial order where the form of the costume itself represented a law and the dancer, whose movements were restricted by the costumes, performed this law. The four laws, constituted by forms of costumes and patterns of movement, signified human existence within space: 1) “surrounding cubical space” (ambulant architecture); 2) “functional laws of the human body and its relationship to space” (the marionette); 3) “motion of the human body in space” (technical organism); and 4) “metaphysical forms of expression” (dematerialization).  

The give and take between body and non-body (walls, floors, costumes, props, etc.) is evident throughout Schlemmer’s projects as he experimented with abstracting human forms and places that populated his paintings, sculptures, set designs, performances, and installations. This form of play engaged people directly—the audience and actor—as they looked across the seats, onto the stage, and back into the audience (Figure 12.2).
In Bauhaus stage workshops Schlemmer used theatrical magic to enact architectural concepts, but in dwellings he developed _wall designs_ as backdrops to daily life—juxtaposing quotidian life with an abstract world inhabited by well-proportioned figures. His wall designs re-cast characters from previous sculptural, painting, and performance pieces—fitting them into multiple settings—both public buildings (the Bauhaus in Weimar) and private homes. His compositions repeated a personal symbolic language that carried mysterious, playful, and even sinister messages to the inhabitants (owners, visitors, etc.). Some argue that the Bauhaus stage workshop created virtual spaces that contrasted with quotidian spaces of everyday life represented in his paintings. I suggest that Schlemmer’s wall designs insert another world into the reality of private homes. In the Rabe house, Schlemmer’s wall designs imparted new and different insights to Rading’s architectural spaces. While working on the Rabe house project, he wrote: “… I believe I will find my way to new forms of abstraction because of ideas of architects, no longer painting in its own sense but a composition of materials, adapted to a given architectonic situation.” The wall figures in the Rabe House introduce another population that affects the space of the house and the experience of its residents by re-casting and re-conceiving the architecture itself.

Schlemmer engaged in wall design (Wandgestaltung) rather than mural painting (Wandmalerei), a term that conveys the architectural quality of works that affect and engage three-dimensional space. He painted murals as early as 1911 but ceased defining himself purely as a muralist by 1919, when he aligned his work with architecture, writing:

> As to my pictures: “pictures” in the usual sense they are not, that is, canvases on which a piece of nature, or the world, is captured using all the illusions of space and light in order they might live out their particular existence in salons and museums, compressed into their gold frames. Rather, they are surfaces that break (or burst) open the frame and join to the wall becoming part of a larger surface, part of a larger space than themselves, an actual part of the envisioned architecture …

His wall designs establish an alternate architecture that emerges from the existing building. As “surfaces that break open the frame” Schlemmer’s work reveals a previously unseen architectural world. His wall designs expand the existing architecture to demonstrate other ways of viewing and experiencing space. The wall designs move across an ambiguous threshold of the house itself to immerse us into a world of the figures, revealing other possible realities within or beyond the wall: a small piece of a larger world filled by giants or a second population silently watching over the rooms created by the wall. This emerging and merging denies traditional frames that “capture” a slice of nature from outside. Schlemmer uses architecture, composed of structure, column, beam, stair, window, door, or window, which becomes its own frame, to draw us into an illusory and ambiguous world of the wall and disrupting the aesthetic distance created by the frame.

As Schlemmer explained: “The secret of a wall is what is behind it. From it is born corridors and passages, as well as energies that cross them, go along them, in
Schlemmer described walls as architectural elements that create spaces for movement and act as a backdrop for moving “energies,” their “secret” contained within the word **Wand**—the German word for wall. When **Wand** is found in the verb **wandeln**, it means to change, walk, or stroll—and in the German verb **wandern**, it means to wander, roam, travel, move, shift, drift, and even hike. When embedded within these verbs, wall changes from a fixed architectural element to imply an element with the potential to move. We understand the Rabe house through Schlemmer’s words: it is designed as dramatic action with Schlemmer becoming its dramaturge by re-structuring the house into a performance space.

Rading’s design for the Rabe house was based on a cube cut by a two-story living space that opened the main (2) and top (3) floors south toward the rear yard, through a glass winter-garden/window-wall. One enters the house from the east side on the ground floor, where Dr. Rabe had his office, and immediately turns to face the rear (south), climbing a straight flight of stairs that run up the east wall to the main floor (living/dining space, library, kitchen, play area), and then up again to the top floor (private bedrooms), which wraps the two-story living space on three sides (Figures 12.4). The circulation spaces (stair and upper hall) are distinct volumes joined with each other, yet separated from the rest of the building by doors (Figure 12.5).
The stairwell and upper hall are distinct volumes, combined with each other, and separate from the rest of the house.
This simple plan creates two two-story spaces: one, with the continuous vertical wall surface on the west wall of the main living space and another with the east wall of the stairway, which we have just encountered. The two-story living space continues into a one-story library on the street (north) side of the house. Above the library is the enclosed corridor that connects the stair to the bedrooms with two interior windows overlooking the main space (Figure 12.4).

Schlemmer inserted several figural wall pieces into these interlocking spatial volumes that one encounters at specific moments while moving through the house. The vertical stairway holds three large figures that take their form, scale, and size from the architecture (Figure 12.3). We come upon these figures only after reaching the main floor of the home and continuing up to the private top floor where only the residents of the house experience all of them. On the main floor, turning to take the first steps up, one comes face-to-face with a large gray one-eyed triangular human profile (Figure 12.1). Slipped into a low corner of the stairway created by the leap from a one-story to a two-story space, at first glance the face seems to be a shadowy corner, but then becomes a ghostly interloper or an interlocutor, perhaps a column capital, or a caryatid balancing the upper floor on its head. The diagonal of its profile, formed by the curve of the stair’s handrail, defines and traces one’s movement, direction, structure, and stability within the stair. The profile faces down the steps while its single eye looks straight out. Next one encounters a large standing male figure, also in profile. Painted ochre on a white background, and without feet (cut off by the steps) or forehead (cut by the upper ceiling), it fits between a tall window and the north wall of the stair. Perhaps he is standing on a lower window that lights the lower run of steps, his ochre feet hidden by the ochre wall below. Eyeless, his right arm with bent elbow, outlined against the body, merges into the ochre end wall while his head, cut off at the forehead, disappears into the ochre ceiling (Figure 12.6).
Continuing up the stairs, passing another window one finds a third figure, clearly male, also ochre, leaping across the wall. The top of his head, cut horizontally to align with the top of the window, and his upper body, cut vertically by the window edge, fit within the space of the wall between the window and south end wall: head and body transformed by the window. His fingertips and toes align with each other and end at the edge of the top landing. The curve of the figure’s body mirrors and rotates the slope of the stair. The figure leaps up where the stair angles down. At first glance, all of these figures could be projections—like gigantic human shadows of beings who live within or beyond the wall (Figure 12.7).

Returning to the main floor of the house and opening a door from the stairway into the main living/dining space, one is immediately confronted by the “Composition in Metal,” which takes up the entire west wall of the two-story living area (Figure 12.8). Schlemmer described it as:

\[\text{(A wire sculpture, or better, }\]
\[\text{Composition in Metal, a figural composition made of different kinds of metal wire, consists of three figures: the large figure carries a smaller one in its hand; to the right of the wall in relation to the first figure is the metal profile of a face, over fifteen feet high. The figures stand out three inches from the wall, and the changing light creates interesting shifting shadows (on the sundial principle).}\]
Unlike the figures on the stair, much of the “Composition” is out of reach and viewed from below at a distance, recalling a spectator watching an actor from the audience (Figure 12.2). Each figure seems still and posed. A giant profile faces south out toward the rear yard. Constructed as an outline in metal, it extends 6” (15cm) out from the wall and casts shadows throughout the day. Its lips line up with the top of the doorframes, the bottom of the nose with the ceiling height of the adjacent library. The single eye faces both out at the level of an upper window and forward, toward the wire figure.

The large figure of copper, brass, and nickel wire sits over one of the two doors while facing both into the room and back toward the giant profile, their eyes aligned. Set out from the wall by brackets, with highly reflective balls at the center lines of its joints, its leg, minus a foot, extends to a doorframe. The smallest figure, held in the wire figure’s open hand, is faceless and ambiguously faces either into the wall or out toward the room. Set next to this figure is a bull’s eye creating a single point between wire figure and profile, vertically aligned with a doorframe and horizontally with the middle of the wire figure’s torso.

The measured drawing of this composition, which fit within Rading’s interior elevation, reveals odd yet telling proportional and axial alignments between the figures and the architectural elements. A dashed line of sight drawn between the eye of the large wire figure and the eye of the profile across the neck of the small figure establishes a powerful link between them. A foot touches the door, the large profile is proportioned to correspond with the upper hall and lower library, where the nose steps back at the same location as well as the same distance as the profile of the wall (Figure 12.9).
Schlemmer’s theatrical play within this house affected its inhabitants directly, casting them as both audience and actor. When I visited the house, I expected to be a spectator, looking at the painted figures and metal installation as works of art. Yet when I found myself face to face with these figures while moving through the house, I no longer maintained a speculative distance. I was transformed from audience to actor. As Emmanual Levinas writes:

*The conjuncture of the same and the other … is the direct and full face welcome of the other by me. … the “face to face” position is not a modification of the “along side of …”. Even when I shall have linked the Other to myself with the conjunction “and” the Other continues to face me, to reveal himself in his face. … Reflection can … become aware of this face to face … It involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in the face of the other and under authority.*

Standing in the upper hallway, looking out of the window and across the surface of the wall, I discovered that my eye-level was the same as that of the figures: my line of sight followed the dashed line on the drawing, as if I were looking through the eye of the large profile and the wire figure was looking back at me. From that position, there were three lines of sight: that of the large profile, the metal figure, and my own (Figure 12.10).

At this moment I turned around and saw the large painted wall figure that had just been my companion on the stair while now framed by the upper corridor (Figure 12.11a). From this vantage point, I saw that this figure had the same
profile as giant metal figure whose eye I had just followed—but with a head disappearing into the ceiling and body frozen on the stair. My gaze was slightly below his neck: if I were taller—closer to Schlemmer’s height?—the dashed line of my eye-level, my visual horizon, would have cut across his neck just like the dashed line of sight on the living room wall cut across the neck of the smallest figure (Figure 12.11b). In that place, I became part of the intersection between two giants whose full bodies extended beyond the constraints of the walls they seemed to inhabit. Schlemmer transformed the spatial intersection originally designed by Rabe into a moment of theatrical ambiguity. In an instance, I moved from being spectator to becoming actor—joining Schlemmer’s installation and his world of the giants. Through the line of sight, he established a link between inhabitants (the Rabe family, me), who step into or out of the most private spaces, the bedrooms, to look through the window, possibly to check the weather outside, with the characters who occupy both the intimate space of the stair and the more open living space of the house. This unique point of intersection provided a place of affect in the rapport between Schlemmer’s figures and the inhabitants of the house that transformed a quotidian event into a dramatic situation and the family into players.
The line of sight that connected my eye with that of the large profile and wire figure recalls Schlemmer’s drawing of a large spectator gazing upon the action of a small figure on stage, eyes and ears aligned (Figure 12.2).\(^\text{27}\) At this curious juncture of figures, I felt myself moving back and forth between being the observer, large and impassive, then becoming the one observed, small and active. The hallway, window, and double axis where I stood at the corner intersection magically enveloped me, while simultaneously revealing the undeniable distance that remained between my life and Schlemmer’s larger-than-life cosmic beings.

David Freedberg describes the powerful effect that images have on us. They arouse us, incite feelings, and provoke emotions “that we prefer not to acknowledge.”\(^\text{28}\) He discusses the “contagiousness of the gaze” in relation to the power we find in the eyes of painted or sculpted figures: “the last stage of making an image, and the first stage of making it operative, is … the painting in of the eyes.”\(^\text{29}\) Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti addressed the power of images when describing the appropriate subject and location of paintings for homes, that portraits of handsome and dignified men should occupy matrimonial bedrooms and images of refreshing streams and springs might soothe the sick and feverish, each affecting occupants by their presence.\(^\text{30}\)

Freedberg’s ideas of affect suggest the concept of “Affecting Presence,” an idea from folklore and cultural anthropology, which has a performative aspect enmeshed with cultural and aesthetic traditions of a society. This presence/ performance has a profound impact on the participants of the traditions, including rituals.\(^\text{31}\) The idea of “affecting presence” prepares a stage for the participants to have strong feelings for their unique artifacts. These artifacts, such as art, are honored not just as symbols of the culture or for the aesthetic nature of things, but also for their unique place among the people and places. Robert Plant Armstrong argues that most powerful objects do not stand for anything other
than themselves, “they are whatever they are … things as ‘works of affecting presence’ dominating thereby the fact that they are special kinds of things … which own certain characteristics that cause them to be treated more like persons than like things.” This aesthetic-behavioral phenomenon endows an object with personhood, so that it assumes the power of a subject—we are affected by that “thing.”

Schlemmer’s works were affecting by his placement of figures and sculptures throughout the house to engage the inhabitants directly. Over-scaled incomplete figures framed and interrupted by the architecture silently live within the Rabe House, imparting a feeling that the world of these giants exists parallel to the human-scaled domestic space. We meet their gaze through a play of position and motion.

The wall designs in the Rabe house were not unique. Schlemmer reused his cast of characters in other houses as well as in his paintings, sculptures, and costumed characters who performed in the Bauhaus Theater workshop. His set of figural hieroglyphs appeared and re-appeared in a variety of situations to fit specific spaces. They wandered from place to place, inhabiting multiple homes: in a painting, on another wall, another house, with or without the others (Figure 12.12).

As the Rabe family moved through their house they lived parallel to the figures on the wall, their domestic life juxtaposed with a separate yet always-present world of giants. The metal composition silently presents itself above the main living space, in the “sky” of the room, casting shadows above the heads of the family. The figures on the stairs are like cast shadows without bodies, silent, halting in mid-movement, caught peeking from a corner. Unlike a traditional performance that ends when the final curtain closes and we depart to return to our own lives, there is no escape from these characters, rather we submit to what Karsten Harries calls “enraptured beholding.”

12.12 Schlemmer’s figural hieroglyphs appeared in a variety of situations, inhabiting multiple homes. His small female figure (viewed from the rear in the Rabe house) is a central sculptural figure of the wall painting/sculpture he created in the Hermann Mattern house, completed in 1937 (Bornim near Potsdam).
The architecture of the Rabe House gives location to the implied motion of the figures and the actual movement of the residents, yet the walls limit only the residents. Schlemmer’s figures move in and out of the frame of the spaces and walls. The large figure on the stair, initially unframed and expanding beyond the ceiling and the stairs, is also contained by the upper corridor, which frames the figure into alignment with the bedroom door and me. Harries writes, “If the frame … invites us to become absorbed in the picture, it also shadows such absorption with an awareness of the illusory character of the world of the picture, of its distance from the real world …”

Just as Schlemmer used the theater and stage to explore the human body in space, the figures in the Rabe House create an ambiguous yet charged stage for Doctor Rabe and his family to carry out their everyday lives. The figures are silent spectators to the daily life of the family and conversely the family watches them. This theatrical doubleness within the house provides a dramatic situation through which the Rabe family coexisted with Schlemmer’s characters, becoming accustomed to their ubiquitous presence. At the same time, their daily habits contrast with the characters that remained fixed in their positions and oblivious to the family, yet interacting with them as an affective presence in their domestic world.

NOTES


5 “For at the play citizens … remain seated …; their bodies motionless with pleasure have the pores opened.” Vitruvius, On Architecture, translated by Frank Granger, vol. 1, Book V, Chapter III (Cambridge, MA, 1931), p. 263.

6 The Rabe house was a modern steel-framed house/medical practice designed in Zwenkau near Leipzig, Germany for Dr. Erich Rabe and his family. Local authorities delayed construction for two years, opposing the modern design due to a “lack of adaptation to regional conditions.” Opposition came from the mayor, local planning commission and Dresden’s homeland security committee. Regina Göckede, Adolf Rading (1888–1957) Exedus des Neuen Bauens und Uberschreitungen des Exils (Berlin, 2005), p. 142. See also Vladimir Slapeta, “Casa Rabe, 1928–1930,” Domus, 704 (April 1989): 74–84, XXII.

8 Selections from Schlemmer’s course are included in Oskar Schlemmer, Man, Teaching Notes from the Bauhaus, Heimo Kuchling (ed.), trans. Janet Seligman (London, 1971).

9 The choreography of the circle dance was developed with Mandav Kreibig. From Dirk Scheper, Oskar Schlemmer—Das Triadisch Ballett und die Bauhausbühne (Berlin, 1988), pp. 197–9.


13 See Melissa Trimingham, The Theatre of the Bauhaus: The Modern and Postmodern Stage of Oskar Schlemmer (New York, 2011), p. 90. Schlemmer left the Bauhaus after a change of leadership to teach at Breslau, a progressive and avant-garde art and architecture program like the Bauhaus, which was eventually closed by the National Socialists. He installed his unique constructions in the homes of liberal intellectuals who privately supported avant-garde artists and architects of the time.


15 Ibid., pp. 11–23.


18 Trimingham, Theatre of the Bauhaus, p. 68.


20 Schlemmer, “July 22, 1931 letter to Otto Meyer.” Schlemmer referred to a “wire picture” displayed in Berlin that drew the interest of a number of architects, possibly the “Composition in Metal” installed in the Rabe house. In Oskar Schlemmer, Letters and Diaries, p. 280.
Ibid., p. 282. The composition also includes a bull’s eye.


Part of his “homo” series including “Homo T” from 1919/20 included in his 1923 work in the Bauhaus Werkstattgebäude in Weimar had been destroyed in October, 1930, approximately 10 months earlier.

Herzogenrath, *Oskar Schlemmer*, pp. 98, 100, 104. Schlemmer’s project created a unique rapport between the figures and the architecture. His composition of three metal figures could also be considered Schlemmer’s interpretation of Ricarda Huch’s concept of triads of the cosmos and human being each composed of mind, nature, and soul, which he taught and diagrammed for his course *Der Mensch*. See Schlemmer, *Man, Teaching Notes*, pp. 28–29. See also Ricarda Huch, *Vom Wesen des Menschen Natur und Geist* (Prien a Chiemsee, 1922).


Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure,” p. 18.


The small figure is also found in Haus Mattern. The large profile appeared in Schlemmer’s figural cabinet series, the wire figure in the Bauhaus workshop in Weimar and in numerous paintings, and the stair figures were also in the Weimar Bauhaus workshop building.

Harries, “Broken Frame,” p. 70. The family living in Haus Mattern covered the wall painting with a drape, which can be seen in figure 12.12.

Ibid., p. 68.
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The play preceded the place. In 1932, architect and theater director Edouard Autant, with his wife actress Louise Lara and their troupe Art et Action, presented three performances at the Sorbonne University in Paris intended to frame moral issues for debate among students and professors. They chose topics and devised scenes based on well-known essays, such as “On the Virtue of Moderation” by Michel de Montaigne, from which they developed characters as extreme examples of a type, such as those who always act virtuously and those who always act without virtue. The characters dramatized a dilemma posed by the essay: does virtue lead to its opposite, violence? Following a short enactment, the actors ceded the stage to professors and advanced students who took up the topic in debate, talking back and forth in a public dialogue observed by an audience of younger students. In these events, the play was merely a prologue to the real performance: a discussion of moral issues among scholars in the highest academy in France. Autant and Lara staged the Sorbonne performances at an historic moment when angry voices were rising in Europe, fueling fears of new conflicts. The League of Nations responded by convening the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, where representatives discussed shared moral principles that might lead nations to renounce violence. Autant and Lara were dedicated pacifists and socialists to the extent that they had been obliged to leave France during the First World War because of their beliefs.¹ Their presentation of “University Theater” as a distinct type of participatory and discursive performance can be read as a poignant proposal for a theater of discussion, which might stand parallel to civic discourse at the heart of a free, peaceful, and collective society.

Autant, as the architect, developed the details of staging that placed participants in spatial relationships with each other to heighten the event. The performance, a spatial situation Autant designed, was played out in real time with real people, so that form and action emerged together in creative play. He later extrapolated from the Sorbonne experience to imagine a new type of theater building, a hall for performance and discussion that would be located...
in the university and in the city (Figure 13.1). *Art et Action* published a pamphlet on University Theater with a sketch plan, section, and elevation for a University Theater building accompanied by an extended essay to propose drama and discussion as a means to nurture creative thought among students. The essay, written by Autant, proposed as a model *paideia*, the playful art of dialectical conversation, that Aristotle placed at the heart of a just society.²

University Theater was one of five types of modern performance that Autant, Lara, and the players of *Art et Action* had developed over twenty years of experimental performances intended to spark the fire of creativity among actors and audience alike. They built on the innovations of modern theater directors such as Vsevolod Meyerhold in Moscow and Jacques Copeau in Paris to invent performances and performance spaces that played on the boundary between art and life. Their work, as that of other modern directors, increasingly centered on engaging spectators directly by challenging them to think actively and poetically. Architecturally, modern drama advanced into the space of the audience, eliminated the proscenium arch, and sometimes rejected the theater building entirely to perform outside within the city, thus rediscovering the ancient roots of theater in urban space and urban life.

In 1937, Autant and Lara published the results of their theatrical experiments in *Five Conceptions of Modern Dramatic Structure*, a compilation of the many
pamphlets they had produced over the years. The book defines five genres of modern performance—Choral Theater, Theater of Space, Theater of the Book, Chamber Theater and University Theater (Figure 13.2). The section on each genre includes an explanation of its dramatic intentions, texts of plays, and architectural sketches for a theater building, which reveal strategic spatial relationships between actors and spectators integral to the performances. Only the Theater of Space was built, yet the plans for each theater clearly proposed a distinct dramatic situation. Spectators surround or are surrounded by the action, which often includes multiple parts—scenes, voices, and music—that are either merged or separated spatially. Each of the theaters places spectators so they are included in the performance, either as a communal group or individually according to the genre. Collectively, the five dramatic “structures,” a term that includes both architectural and theatrical structure, propose modern performances as participatory events, rather than spectacles. All spark active, creative response and all place spectators so they retain a specific connection with the real world outside the theater. Each of the five theaters offers an articulate alternative to movie-house disengagement, which carries audiences into the illusion of another world. In addition, each of the theaters seems to parallel and comment on one type of urban experience, for example, the University Theater, which addresses the performance of civic discussion.

In the University Theater, the last of the five dramatic structures that Art et Action developed and the topic of this chapter, the play and the public discussion or debate that follow is clearly a performance—some people watch other people perform. Yet the event is not a spectacle in the sense that the performance does not separate those who act from those who listen, rather it activates the audience. Stories are told, but there is no plot. The words can be poetic, but they address the audience directly. And most pointedly, discussions and debates are real in the sense that the speakers do not assume fictional roles. They speak spontaneously and may take the conversation in any direction. A broad public discussion can move from person to person in a widening circle from the immediate participants outward to include the audience.
Far from rendering an audience passive, this kind of public discussion or debate requires “auditors” to participate as active listeners who form opinions, even if they are not voiced. Debates can be completely facetious exercises in the art of persuasion, or explore issues of deep moral significance. They can proceed along a line of logical argument, or delve into the history and “character” of the person making assertions. And all seek personal, face-to-face engagement rather than the dramatic distance of once-upon-a-time.

With the League of Nations conference as background, Art et Action’s University theater performances and the architectural qualities of the building that Autant sketched for them established a form of theater that paralleled a part of urban life and proposed a model for the social practice of civic dialogue (Figure 13.3).

Autant’s philosophical essay that accompanied the University Theater sketches placed dialogic theater at the heart of education. He cited Aristotle to cast performances as paideia, a practice based on Plato’s academy, where leading citizens could engage each other in open conversation on matters of common interest, and young men could learn the art of dialectic as a method of both rhetorical debate and intellectual inquiry. To listen, to consider, and to speak in debate was a skill central to becoming a full citizen in the civic life of the polis. Autant, however, injected playacting as a crucial part of dialogue. He wrote that when students take roles they enter into the themes or ideas physically and mentally, experiencing them from within, rather than remaining on the outside to argue in abstract terms. He noted that Plato’s dialogue “The Symposium” came to life when the narrator, Socrates, stepped back to allow other characters at the banquet to argue their opinions, thus opening the discussion to multiple voices. Autant took the next step to propose that students could feel the exhilarating friction of ideas more directly by entering the characters in voice and action. He summoned the philosophy of Henri Bergson who held that each person is made up of many characters and this
inner multiplicity liberates us to make sympathetic connections with others, both real and fictional. Bergson called this practice “intuition,” a form of knowledge (in French, savoir), which he contrasted to intellectual knowledge (connaître) derived from an objective position on the outside, looking in. Autant built on Bergson’s ideas to argue that intuition equaled intellect as a mental skill and thus should have an equal place in university curricula. He went on to argue that intuition was developed specifically through theater.

At the Sorbonne, Art et Action presented Les essais de Montaigne, in which lines from Montaigne’s essays are spoken by characters of Autant and Lara’s invention (Figure 13.4.). In one essay, “On the Virtue of Moderation,” three crazed convicts—representing violence—and three unmarried women—representing virtue—engage in a discussion of whether excessive virtue can lead to violence and whether moderation itself, as a virtue, might also lead to aggression. Each character presented portions of Montaigne’s argument; for example one of the convicts related the story of the emperor Posthumius who had his son killed for excessive ardor in running ahead of his battalion to attack an enemy. In response one of the women spoke of the emperor Aelius Verus, who answered his wife’s complaint about his mistresses by arguing that a virtuous marriage is to be honored with dignity, while folly and lust belong elsewhere. During the dialogue, important phrases were projected onto pages of a giant book behind the characters, so spectators could read as well as listen to Montaigne’s words (Figure 13.4). At points of emphasis, the character of Montaigne himself stepped out from the pages of the book to walk across the scene, then disappear again into the book. When the dramatized essay drew to a close, Montaigne took center stage, facing the audience to perhaps take a new role as moderator of the discussion that ensued among colleagues at the Sorbonne.

Autant wrote that the fragile connections between actor, character, and idea, and between speakers could only flourish in a conducive atmosphere, which must be taken to include the entire physical, social, and poetic situation of the event. More specifically, he wrote “mental contact cannot take place but as a function of the atmosphere. Physical reactions progressively intervene and in the end dominate until one senses the ideas of the author.” Thus he suggests that the architectural situation acts subtly through the body to slowly open one’s sensibilities to receive ideas through intuition.

If the Montaigne scene were played in the University Theater building sketched by Autant, the convicts and unmarried women would rise onto the stage through trap doors in the floor, play their parts, then retreat the same way when discussion took over the performance (Figure 13.5). On the left side of the stage, university professors would sit in a domed alcove framed by an archway. Their position recalled that of nobility in medieval theater, who had a position of honor on stage to watch the play and be watched by the audience. On the right side, advanced students would face their professors from the other side of the scene, on stage but without the grandeur of an arch or dome. Behind the stage a raised library would represent the source of wisdom and words. In Autant’s design, perhaps Montaigne would emerge from the library as he did from the book backdrop at the Sorbonne, or he might walk along its balcony. Finally, the stage and the library would be seen by an audience of students and visitors in a hall covered by a half-dome.

The size of the hall and of the group was crucial to creating an atmosphere that would be conducive to intuitive contact. Autant wrote that the stage for the participants must approximate the size of a normal classroom (not including the hall for auditors), for neither large classes nor individual lessons could support open discussion. In Autant’s scheme, the question of size was also charged with ideological significance. One of the purposes of education in the collective society that he envisioned was to move students from thinking of themselves as individuals to identifying with the group, “to pass systematically from the individual to the crowd.” Autant wrote that this transition was more spiritual
than political for he saw true immersion in the collective as a manifestation of individual enlightenment, a recognition of the immensity of life, and a desire to enter the ongoing conversation that extends from the deep past into the present. “Individual pride is extinguished in the realization that one’s effort is only an affirmation of the persistent study of many previous generations.” He argued that theater invites students into the conversation by taking the role of a character and speaking the words of an author, words Autant described as “radiant.” In Bergson’s terms, the conversation on stage contains multiple voices, including those present and those speaking out from the past, as well as the collective wisdom represented by the library. This expansive, yet intimate conversation could only take place among a group that was small enough to allow each individual to speak and large enough to represent a community.

If scale was crucial to the physical atmosphere for such a conversation, light contributed to its spirit. Autant’s section of the University Theater shows skylights above the stage and a view to the outside—presumably the city. The skylights suggest that performances would be held in daylight, without artifice, so performers, professors, and students would be equally visible to each other. The changing light from morning to afternoon would mark the passage of time, giving measure to a discussion and a link to the natural world. Autant’s section also shows an apparently unobstructed opening to the outside behind the stage and underneath the library, so the view would fall away into the surrounding landscape. Together these details create a position for discourse that is architecturally grounded in the city and under the sky.

Autant’s elevation of the University Theater shows a dome that gives the small building a monumental demeanor, suggesting that it should be an urban landmark, embedded in the structure of the city. In these architectural clues Autant proposed an urban role for a theater of discussion parallel to that of courtrooms and town halls, prominent institutions that regulated collective civic life. In particular, the building seems to speak to a tradition of civic debate in France, the parlement, which has served since the thirteenth century as a quasi-independent body for both legislative and judicial decisions. The architectural space for parlement places delegates around a central floor, where evidence is presented and speakers expound before their peers. A ruling officer, whether judge, chairman, or king, presides to keep order and spectators may watch from a gallery (Figure 13.6). The theater of debate in parlement is based on law and logic, which lead to weighty decisions with real consequences made by vote.

Autant’s University Theater presents a similar situation, with opposing opinions voiced from a central floor overseen by all, yet it has neither judge nor jury and is unshackled from the imperative to decide. Discussions arose out of speculative essays that drew examples from literature, personal experience, and anecdote to build arguments that might be persuasive in the full sense of Aristotelian rhetoric. The library, as the cumulative voice of the past presided over the discussion, yet more as provocateur than judge, offering authors who raise questions rather than offer or demand answers. In this way, the
University Theater debates might parallel the talk of government and courts of law, yet in a realm of free, creative discourse based on Bergsonian intuition.

Performances by *Art et Action* at the Sorbonne, held in the same years as the League of Nations conference on disarmament, hold a mirror position proper to theater. In the play of talk, University Theater discussions explored principles and speculated on ideas from an artistic distance, in the university rather than in the town hall, and focused on literature rather than politics. Autant and Lara recognized the fragility of open conversation that the League of Nations was attempting to foster even under the growing threat of war. They proposed University Theater in a parallel world, to draw out the intuitive part of thought that they felt was essential to humanity.

The architectural elements of the atmosphere that Autant proposed for the University Theater can also be read as a commentary on the design of courtrooms and parliamentary halls. The calibrated size of the theater, the central stage, the collegial groups facing each other as both observers and performers, the audience as witness, the commanding presence of the library that recedes into depth, and the openness of the hall to the city and sky set up the physical conditions for *paideia*. Aristotle's *Paideia*, the playful celebration of the art of rhetoric opened the techniques of logic and persuasion to view and to innovation, such that a young man could learn the game. It was serious play. Similarly, Autant's design for the University Theater exposes and proposes architectural principles for spaces of discussion in the bracketed world of the university and of theater, to open questions of design as it plays out in action.

In 1937, the League of Nations opened a new building in Geneva designed by an international team of architects (Figure 13.7). The main hall of the Palace of Nations shows many of the architectural qualities that Autant designed into the University Theater: an open floor surrounded by seating for delegates lit by lofty windows that offer a view to the city and the sky. Hierarchy is muted. The hall has no imposing dais for the presiding officers, simply step up to a simple desk and row of chairs. The layout places delegates so they face one another at a distance that allows them to see each other well. A delegate's view of a presentation on the floor would include either a view through the windows behind or of other delegates on the opposite side, so their reactions would be easily seen. Discussion would then proceed among the group as they faced each other.

The architects of the Palace of Nations probably did not know of Autant's work, but they may have shared a set of values centered on cooperation, equality, and diplomacy, which were broadly held at the time. With the onset of the Second World War, the League of Nations ceased operations, leaving its new building...
shuttered for the duration. Autant and Lara dissolved *Art et Action* shortly after the Sorbonne performances, participated in the Paris Exposition of 1937, and published their collected theatrical work the same year. This historical closure brackets Autant and Lara’s University Theater proposal as a spark of optimism or perhaps a plea to restore moral discussion to civic life at a critical moment when it was probably already too late.

**NOTES**


8  Art et Action, “Le théâtre universitaire,” unnumbered pages preceding the text for the play *Les Essais de Montaigne*. In the description of the set, the screen is described as a device to lead the public to participate.

9  Ibid., p. 9.

10 Ibid., p. 9.

11 Ibid., p. 10.

12 The Popular Front, representing a particularly French interpretation of Socialism, gained power in 1936.
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