THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO SCENOGRAPHY

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STAGE AND AUDIENCE

Constructing relations and opportunities

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You head to a place designed for performance in order to attend an event. After crossing a threshold, you enter the space of the event – an amphitheatre in a landscape, the horseshoe-shaped balconies of an opera house, a black box. The architecture of this place conditions relations between *you*, as a member of an audience, and the *action*, in relation to *others* in the audience, and in relation to itself as *spatial construct*. This space constructs, contains, and controls relations between the audience and action, between audience member and audience member, and it may also suggest alternative inhabitations, and afford the shifting of these relations over time.

How does this theatre architecture *construct relations* through the siting of the audience in space in relation to action and to other audience members? How does this theatre architecture, and its construction of relations, condition the seeing and sensing of the performed event? How do the designed spatial relations of the theatre prescribe, suggest, or perhaps inadvertently offer alternative staging opportunities and, through that, contribute to the experience of the event?

As an architect interested in the performance in and of space, I come to understand performances of a given space through the analytic drawing out, literally and conceptually, of the spatial and relational, or formal, structure of the architecture and its link to an architectural type and the performance-event type with which it is affiliated. As a designer, rather than historian, I am interested in *potentials* latent within space, and therefore the purpose of my analysis is to identify and understand the conventions of relations between space and event in order to go beyond that to uncover potentials for other spatial performances that the theatre architecture affords.

What follows is a discussion of stage and audience space, first through the lens of theatre architecture and the conventions that are associated with dominant types, and second through alternative propositions to the conventions of stage–audience relations through both unbuilt speculative works and built works. The chapter concludes with several examples in which conventions of stage, auditorium, or the relation between them, were critically re-interpreted through designs for theatre buildings or the contribution of the architecture to particular performances.[1] As such this chapter is concerned with how the architecture of stage and auditorium contributes in a leading or supporting

role to the event. It is concerned with scenographic designing that consciously works *with* and pushes up *against* the conventions of theatre architecture types. It is concerned with taking advantage of what a work of theatre architecture has to offer to augmenting consciousness of the performance with the aim of creating a truly eventful spatial experience.

In architectural terms, buildings may be categorized and discussed through the framework of *program* – the uses and activities intended to occur there. For instance, we might discuss performing arts buildings in terms of programs such as opera houses, play houses, chamber music halls, and so on. As a counterpoint to *program* one may examine works of architecture according to *type* described as "a group of objects characterized by the same formal structure . . . It is neither a spatial diagram nor the average of a serial list." (Moneo 1978, 23).

Within the programmatic subcategory of theatre we commonly group these architectural objects according to the qualities of stage or stage–audience relations, such as arena, proscenium or thrust, or by the absence of a structured relationship within a spatial container as found in black box spaces. In discussing theatre architecture, many authors of theatre histories intertwine specific performance genres (programs) with their affiliated formal structures (types), such as associating Shakespearian drama with a thrust stage (particularly in a circular courtyard) (see Brewster and Shafer 2011; Mitchley and Spalding 1982). While this approach is useful for identifying conventional links of performance type to architectural type, it may obscure other performances latent within spatial relations. Another model for discussing theatre architecture is through conceptual frameworks such as the *cave* (for projection and illusion) and *cosmic circle* (participatory ritual) (Wiles 2003).[2] Still others focus in on the details of space that are of pragmatic concern to scenographers, such as viewing distance and intimacy,[3] while others focus attention on ambiance or the symbolism of theatre décor. At a level more diagrammatic than architectural type as defined above, Ned Bowman, in his article "The Ideal Theatre: Emerging Tendencies in Its Architecture" (Bowman 1964), homed in on the topic of "Space Relationships" – proscenium, central, peripheral, thrust and
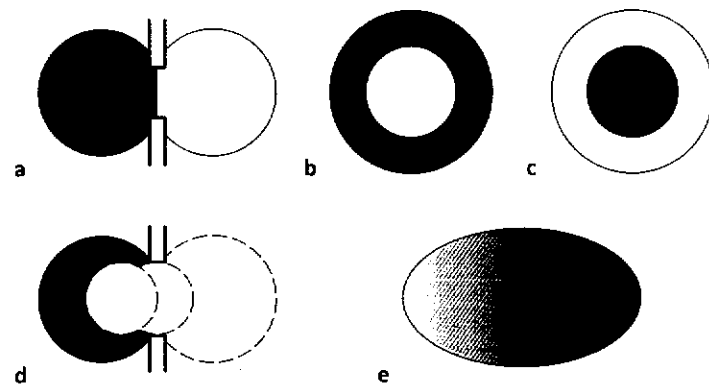

Figure 1.1   "Space Relationships," after Bowman. Above, left to right: (a) proscenium, (b) central, (c) peripheral. Below: (d) thrust and (e) open. (Drawings: Beth Weinstein.)

open – captured in a diagram redrawn here (Figure 1.1). We may gain a more critical perspective on constructed-relations by adopting theatre-neutral language such as *split*, *surrounding, surrounded, projecting*, and *interspersed*.

Conventions

How do these space-relationships control, contain and construct the event and the audience experience? While the theatre, the *theatron* as the spectator area was called in ancient Greece, is literally a viewing place, the space and what it contains is not necessarily limited to a singular sense (vision) perceiving a singular action (on a stage behind a frame) within a narrow perceptual field. The stage–audience relationship can be shaped and inhabited so that it is focused or it can be a multi-sensory experience. It may construct focused attention or facilitate distraction; it may offer comfortable relaxation or oblige energetic engagement.

Each theatre architecture type carries with it assumed conventions about the site for the action, scenographic contribution to the performance, and the place of the audience; as well as the audience members' sensory and spatial awareness of the action, other audience members and the building itself. By unpacking the conventional and specific relationships through case studies we can speculate about the audience experience – whether audience members experience the work as a distant image; as visual environment, or through an embodied, multi-sensory experience; as a static and isolated body, a dynamic or mobile body, or as a body within a collective; or as an observer or a participant with agency.

To start we must first analyze the relationship of stage to audience. These generally fall into two categories – those in which the audience and performers share an undivided volume of space and those in which performers and audience occupy a space cleft, by the proscenium arch, into performatively and architectonically separate spaces. All conventionally contain a single stage, either split off from the audience, projecting into the audience (thrust) or surrounded by the audience (arena). A second level of relationships that we must consider is the three-dimensional organization of the audience in the house – in plan (horizontal) and in section (vertical). One should ask how the scene will be seen and sensed. Is the audience clustered in one place as a singular body? Or are they split or distributed, either along the horizontal plane or vertically within the theatre volume? If in a single horizontal plane, is the arrangement of audience members in parallel rows facing forward, or in a fanning shape that allows sideward, oblique glances? If divided into balconies, or "circles," are these parallel to the stage front or wrapping, affording views across to other audience members? Or is there no view anywhere but to one's box-neighbors? How different is the view from balconies, which privileges the planimetric experience of movement patterns on the stage floor, to the view from the orchestra, privileging the elevation, or vertical surfaces, and perspective? Are balconies a continuous space or divided into private boxes? Do audience members sit on individual fixed seats or mobile chairs, shared benches, or in a recumbent position on pillows? Depending upon the spatial arrangement of the audience and audience member's situation (seated, standing or reclining), the design may assist in focusing the audience attention on the action occurring on stage or may draw awareness towards other members of the audience seated across the house or stage, to the company within one's box, the shared bench beneath one's behind or the room that holds all of this in tension.

I want to examine stage–audience relationships in a few examples of well-known theatre architecture types in order to reveal the conventional assumptions about space relationships that we might overlook out of familiarity, drawing from both first-hand, embodied experiences of performances in theatres as well as understanding of spaces through drawings. After addressing a number of dominant space-relationship types, I will consider experiments that took on or deviated from these conventional space relationships, exploiting plan, section, and volume in ways that yielded new arrangements of audiences in relationship to stage(s). I will consider the impact of theatre architecture space on the audience experience, how spaces construct intimate engagement or distanced overview, establish potentials for participation, and shape perception as image-dominated or multisensory and immersive. To convey the relations between performer-spaces and audience-spaces, the case studies are presented in parallel projection drawings, a form that communicates overall volumetric relations rather than an embodied view from a singular vantage point.

The first example is an amphitheatre in a landscape, in which the audience, along a single, sloped and fanning surface, nearly surrounds a stage.[4] Some obvious points: this space is outdoors, unconditioned, and thus without the controlled environments to which we are generally accustomed today. The physical comfort of audience members is contingent on physical wellbeing and garments worn in relation to constantly changing weather conditions, and contingent on the cushioning (or lack thereof) beneath one's seat. Wind and rain, daylight and darkness, heat of day and cool of night all inform who and what performs, detracts, and distracts attention, or adds to and augments the experience. We, the audience, are undeniably bodies exposed to elements of time and weather, tempo and tempus, while following the unfolding events on stage before us. Within this open space, the fan-shaped configuration of the audience space points us towards the orchestra and stage while keeping the collective audience within view. The scale of physical and visual gestures on stage aim to overcome the distance that may lie between us. The continuity between the environment as image and context for the action, and that which envelops us as audience members, assists in bridging between the time and space of theatre and life. Beyond the *skene* we perceive the connection to and distance between ourselves in this theatre space and the city where we conduct our lives. Does this bring to our attention this moment dis-placed from our habitual space of action? These exterior spaces, due to their siting and unconditioned environments, augment, rather than suppress, the embodied full-sensory attendance at the event. The shifting time and tempos call attention to fleetingness. The containing or continuity of space connects or severs this moment from the space-time around us.

Attending an event in the reconstructed Globe in London today situates the audience in a relationship that is slightly more focused and protected from natural elements than the amphitheatre. Standing in the yard one is exposed to rain and jostling by fellow theatre-goers. The circular courtyard and wrapping galleries in section set up an intimate and contained space, and unavoidable gazes across from one side of the yard to the other. The galleries, each one gently cantilevering out over the level below, bring audience members closer to the action on the raised stage that projects into the courtyard. The sense of proximity is furthered by actors crossing the yard, literally rubbing elbows with the audience, blurring the lines of division between the audience's space and performers' space. The heavy timber structure that contains the yard and holds the balconies flexes with the audience movement; wooden bleachers register and dissipate

vibrations of laugher between those seated in the gallery. Though hierarchy of place in society is articulated through the distinction between yard and gallery, the collective experience is inscribed and contained in the space relationships of the architecture.

How different are the space relationships in these exterior theatres from those of fully enclosed, interior theatres? The proscenium theatre, with its picture frame, supported the construction of illusory images of city streets or pastoral landscapes beyond, within a controlled setting. Parallel flats or forced perspectives of converging street facades leveraged what were then new understandings of optics and geometrically constructed perspectives, and new concepts of the viewing subject. The perspectival illusion was constructed from and for a singular, privileged point in space, creating a hierarchy and gradient of experiences from an illusion of "truth" from one central point to undeniable distortion from all other audience locations. Yet at times illusion and reality were at play in ways other than the position of the audience member within the house. Margarete Baur-Heinhold suggests that the Schlosstheater at Schwetzingen, Germany (1753), not only presented perspectives of formal gardens on its painted flats, but also overlooked a formal garden lying just beyond the rear wall of the theatre (Baur-Heinhold 1967, 182–3). Plans of the theatre reveal the stage as having an even greater depth than the house, which must have been useful in blurring lines between painted sets and reality off in the distance. Entangled with the development of the proscenium or picture frame is the fly tower and other stage machinery, facilitating the hoisting away and lowering of design elements and performers. The traps and pit allow the emerging of performers from below. The proscenium frame frames the perspectival image beyond; borders crop the image. The illusion depends on the directionality of our looking through the aperture in the wall that divides audience from where the action occurs. In traversing the fourth wall performers break and call attention to this illusion. The architecture of the stage has its own construction and logic, and the architectural volume and spatial arrangement of the audience in the house is separate yet in correspondence to the apparatus of view through this picture frame into the depth of the stage.

Taking the specific example of the house of Garnier's Paris Opera, we acknowledge that these environs are constructed, contained and controlled, including lighting, cooling and heating, and cushioned seats in boxes to offer individual comfort. Partitioning of the boxes and balconies and parterre seating have been developed to support our attentiveness to events, be they ones occurring in our box or ones on stage. The horseshoe shape of the balconies constructs opportunities for lateral glances across the house. The balcony experience is distinct from that in the more frontally focused seats in the orchestra. A still more restricted visual access is offered to those in the rear of the boxes. Audience members glimpse what happens on stage over the heads of others, but their perceptual realm is predominantly contained within the private space of the box. The house holds heterogeneous audience–audience and audience–action relations. This house is a spatial structure constructed to make evident the distinction of privilege and social class through the space relationships.

The undifferentiated space of the black box as type wipes the slate clean of such hierarchies and scripted relations. These unified spaces are intended to be flexible laboratories, neutral canvases, into which diverse space relationships can be inserted and onto which other visions may be projected. Audience may surround or be surrounded, face and confront or intermingle with the performance. In theory, the black box can contain the most formal, frontal and visually oriented experience, or afford informal, multiple,

distributed performances and an embodied, multi-sensory experience. The alternatives to formal, frontal space-relationships between stage and audience that we now take for granted in black box spaces have their origins in the early twentieth century, as structures and hierarchies outside of theatre were being challenged and overturned.

Works challenging the conventions

Architects, artists, performers, and theatre directors in the early twentieth century sought to question these spatial conventions, hierarchies, and divisions between audience and action, integrating new modes of presentation, interaction, and engagement. Heinrich Tessenau and Adolphe Appia in Hellerau, Walter Gropius with Erwin Piscator, El Lissitzky with Vsevolod Meyerhold, as well as Frederick Kiesler and many others proposed radically different configurations of stage and audience from those found in historical amphitheatre, thrust, and proscenium types. In their proposed (and occasionally built) theatres, stages mechanically rotated causing audience and performer to switch places during the course of the performance. Stages developed vertically on multiple levels linked by elevator platforms. Stages multiplied and publics were divided; screens and performer action surrounded the audience.[5] Under the heading of the *Spatial Stage* there was an

> effort of modern theatre directors and architects to reunite the auditorium and stage constructionally and spatially into a single whole, . . . free of circle and gallery levels, that overcome the directional nature of the proscenium-arch form and that avoided the tiers of boxes of the Baroque theatres . . . 'Open forms of stage performance call for open forms of theatre construction,' and 'variability instead of monumentality.'
>
> *(Wimmer and Schelle 2009, 248)*

One such built work is the *Festspielhaus* in the garden city of Hellerau designed by Heinrich Tessenau (1911–12, Dresden, Germany) (Figure 1.2). The venue originally served as home for Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's dance explorations of Eurythmics in conjunction with Adolphe Appia's scenographic experiments (Tallon 1984 and Jaques-Dalcroze 1933). The performance space, an elongated rectangular volume, had no proscenium subdivision. The design of the stage–auditorium continuum unified public and performers in a perceivably undifferentiated space. Audience members experienced the same view from parallel rows of seating that could be retracted. An imperceptible separation between audience and action is the small orchestra pit that can be made to disappear into the floor of the space, leaving a fairly neutral volume. As a counterpoint to the design of Bayreuth's orchestra pit and repetitive parallel framing in service to the creation of mysteries emerging from darkness, Hellerau was designed as a light-box. A dense array of lamps in the grid above was used to explore the play of light upon the fabric scrims that originally wrapped the entire ceiling and walls of the space, around both audience and action. The abstract, almost featureless white volume of space in many ways anticipated the flexibility and laboratory quality of contemporary black box spaces. Today, although Hellerau's array of lights and scrims are gone, the space still serves as a white-box lab for contemporary companies.

Walter Gropius's design for Erwin Piscator is an important, unbuilt theatre building that proposed to overturn stage–audience relations. Their *Total Theater* (1926) sought to
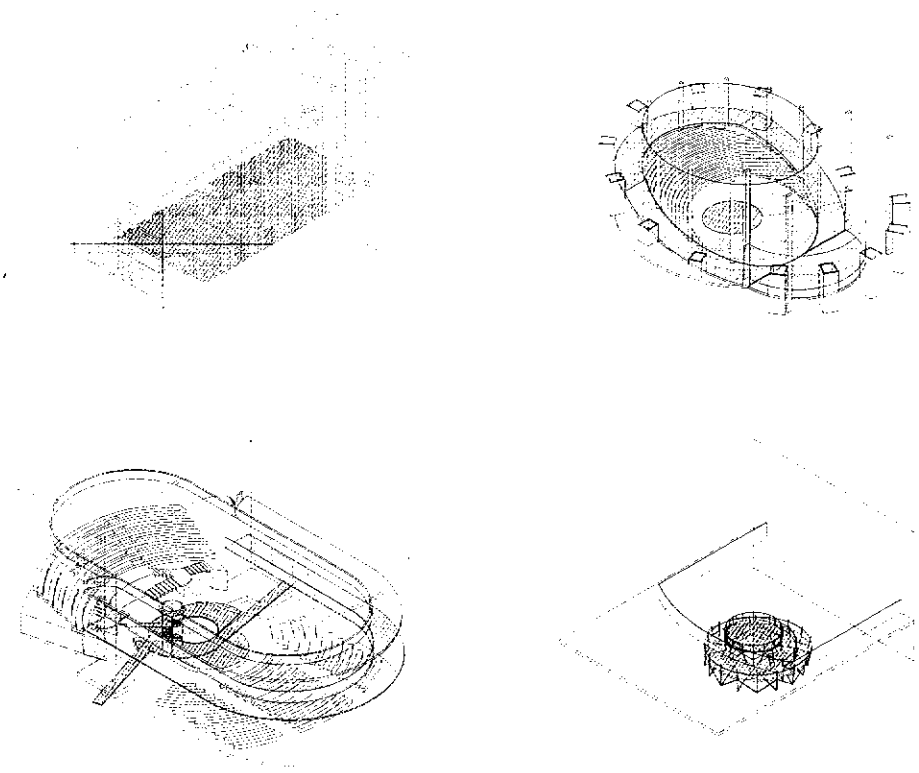

Figure 1.2 Above, left to right: Heinrich Tessenow, Hellerau; Walter Gropius, Total Theatre. Below, left to right: El Lissitzky set for Meyerhold Theatre, Kiesler Space Stage. (Drawings: Beth Weinstein with Masoud Sharikzadeh.)

surround the audience with action and projection and through all spatial means available "rouse the spectator from his intellectual apathy, . . . (and) coerce him into participation in the play" (Gropius quoted in Moholy-Nagy 1969, 53). Actors would be able to perform along an outer ring of the oval-shaped space; here screens for film projections would have been stretched between the columns. During the course of a performance, the architecture of stage–audience relations transformed through the mechanical revolving of a disc platform. This disc contained a small circular performing area (similar to the orchestra of ancient Greek theatres) and a sloping section of seating. Revolving this disc would have allowed the orchestra to move from a position directly in front of the elevated stage platform at one end (if a frontal theatre arrangement was needed) to a location embedding this stage between the main expanse of seating and the rise of seats that share this same revolving disc. When rotated into this position, Gropius' design created an undivided space animated by live, human action in the center, two groups of audience members each perceived as background or "extras" in the performance for the other and projected film surrounding stage and audience.

Frederick Kiesler's Endless Theater (1923–5) also proposed a unified space with action in the round. His drawings show a massive ellipsoidal volume choreographing an

"interplay of ramp, platform and elevator, . . . a continuous intertwining of vast ramps, (where) the players and the audience can intertwine anywhere in space" (Aronson 1981, 60). Where ramps spiraled around the edges of the theatre volume, at the center actors moved vertically from platform to platform within elevator towers. Although unbuilt, many spatial qualities and relations were realized through the *Raumbühne* or Space Stage that Kiesler presented within the exhibition of the Music and Theater Festival (1924, Vienna). Intended to be seen and approached by the audience from all sides, the Space Stage ultimately was installed on the orchestra floor of the Vienna Konzerthaus, with seats removed, well away from the existing stage which was hidden behind a projection screen. Audience members viewed performances on this construction – including ramps, platforms and an elevator cage vertically linking levels – from the existing concert hall balconies that offered views from 300° around the Space Stage. It modeled new opportunities for actors in the vertical dimension, revealing what traps and rigging hide on conventional stages, celebrating the dynamics of performance. It situated audience members surrounding the action and in visual dialogue with each other.

El Lissitzky proposed a similar re-ordering of relations within the Vsevolod Meyerhold Theatre for the intended production (1926–8) of Sergei Tretyakov's *I Want a Child*. Action was to be displaced from the conventional location on the elevated stage at one end of the theatre to a space mounted in the center of the auditorium. In this central location action was to be distributed vertically, spiraling along a double ramp from floor to elevated platforms and branching out to connect with an even higher elliptical balcony – a suspended running track for performers. The new stage that El Lissitzky proposed inserting within the theatre, similar to that of Lyubov Popova's 1922 set for *Magnanimous Cuckold*, drew more from the language of *agitprop* pavilions in public squares. It was "not a set, but a construction . . . not intended to decorate anything" [it was] separate . . . that could exist anywhere – on the street, on a square" (Marcadé and Petrova 2005, 63).

On the platform normally intended as the stage Lissitzky introduced a second area of seating, creating a split audience. The combination of these interventions would have resulted in a performance environment in which the architecture created opportunities for performers to both surround the audience, with action on the track above, and to divide, by their actions on the ramps and platforms mid-space, the audience into two sections – one section on the parterre and, facing them, the other seated on the stage. While respecting territories of actor and audience, this proposal would have resulted in a spatially immersive environment akin to urban life.

In relation to the upheavals taking place politically and socially in these early decades of the twentieth century, all four of these proposed theatre architectures aspired to overturn the class stratification physically manifest in stage–audience relations of the past. As Chris Salter reflects,

> Theatre artists problematized the cultural divide between stage and street, audience and event, with stage action invading the sacredness of audience space, suspending the passive role usually attributed to spectators and placing them in an oscillating position between observer and performer.
>
> *(Salter 2010, 16)*

In the above unrealized and partially realized projects, stage and audience shared the same volume and a continuous or connected ground (no hierarchical tiers). The arrangement of the audience (surrounding the action or split by it and facing each other) would

have constructed relations such that a spectator would always be aware of participating in a collective event, witnessing fellow audience members sharing the experience all around. Despite the interest at the time in developing immersive theatre architectures, such experimental works were rarely implemented. The theatre architectures of the avant-garde proposed space relationships of immersion and participation, blurring boundaries between action and audience by shifting physical and visual relations to the action and to each other. These unbuilt visionary theatre architectures modeled aspirations for new relationships that would be realized in other ways decades later.

What the spatial container affords

In more recent times, several theatre spaces have been realized that re-imagined stage–audience relations by adapting existing buildings or building types into places of performance. I will discuss just two examples briefly before turning to projects that critically play upon and push against conventions of purpose-built theatre buildings. In the two following works, the volumetric container of space deformed and thereby questioned and afforded new relations between audience and action.

The Spiral Theatre (1991, Prague) at first glance fools us (Figure 1.3). The drum-shape of its building form, its structure and material logic all suggest that it is a repurposed gasholder tank. Yet it is a purpose-built theatre that upsets expectations. Jindrich Smetana's *Laterna Animata* uses the "principle of continuous film projection from above the stage onto a stage floor/projection surface" as the generator of the theatre architecture and scenographic starting point (Firman 1992, 44). The audience, after descending a cut into the earth to enter the building from below, would have ascended two spiral ramps to reach viewing balconies around the full height of a cylinder of scaffolding. This cylinder performs as a vertically stretched arena, a well of space gathering flickering images at its base, a drum across which to view one's fellow theatre-goers. The original 1991 stage, perforated with traps, was a shallow convex surface acting as both screen for cinema and stage for live action. It recalls the early courtyard theatres, yet shielded from the elements, light and sound controlled, and with all of the audience arrayed around the cylindrical space, clearing the entire ground for the spectacle.

As intently as this theatre building sought to keep the exterior world out and create a new incarnation of the cave, a new theatre of projection, the architecture of the
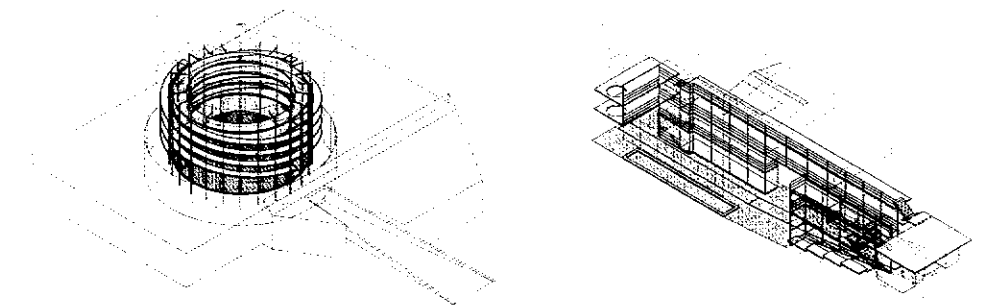

Figure 1.3 Left to right: Spiral Theatre, Teatro Oficina. (Drawings: Beth Weinstein with Masoud Sharikzadeh.)

Teatro Oficina invites in the interruption of nature and the complexity, mutability, and chaos of life and creative process. The *Teatro Oficina* (1991, Sao Paulo, Brazil), developed between Director Ze Celso and architects Lina Bo Bardi and Edson Elito, works within the constraints of an existing structure of narrow and tall proportions. The combination of site constraints and of the philosophical positions of both director and architect lead to nearly all theatre conventions being questioned, if not outright discarded. Similar to other works with which Bardi was involved, the fit-out of the theatre manifests a social and creative position of incompleteness, open-endedness, inviting ongoing experimentation. A scaffolding – a building system that in itself is intended to be impermanent and transformed – runs the length of the main wall. The audience could sit here, or not. No front or back of house is evident; in fact, it is the top of house that holds most of the actor support functions. No frame. No curtains. No enclosure: natural light and night sky enter through an expanse of glass that runs nearly the length of the space. This skylight slides open to connect interior to the stars. Nature invades with the kind of force that is unavoidable in Brazil; a tree, tropical plants and water interrupt the space. Action runs the length and height of this theatre workshop. After participating in a collective danced and sung procession taking one from a pre-show gathering in the garden outside, audience members enter the theatre through an opening in the rear wall. Everyone present is invited to move around throughout the performance, and is explicitly invited to join in at times. Action moves from one end to another, from ground to air, and down into habitable cuts in the ground. It is not a cave of illusions; it is a space for collective transformation akin to carnival time and space.[6]

What stage and house afford

Several performances and performance spaces in recent years have explored the blurring of interior and exterior. Contemporary concert halls in particular, and OMA's *Casa da Musica* (2005, Porto, Portugal) as one example, make use of landscape or sky as live backdrop.[7] Another space, the OMA-Rex-designed *Wyly Theatre* (2009, Dallas, TX), although conceived as a hyper-versatile black-box with a "superfly" tower, is glazed on three of the four elevations of the theatre, allowing the interior performance space to connect to the developing urban context around it. Sky or landscape are invited into spaces that are normally contained and controlled interiors.

Noh Performance, however, originated in open fields and, in modernizing during the Meiji period, moved indoors, taking with it its exterior architecture – roof, handrails, and (images of) trees. Kengo Kuma returned Noh to its space under the sky in his *Noh Theatre in the Forest* (Miyagi, Japan, 1996). Here he gathers around a stepping exterior courtyard a traditional stage structure and bridge for the performers and a minimalist loggia from which the audience can enjoy the event as well as the forest beyond. Kuma's theatre opens up to and co-exists with its environs with grace and discretion, being a building that is *of, in* and *representing* the forest all at once.

Yet regardless of whether one has occasion to work in exceptional theatres such as these or a seemingly neutral theatre architecture, one can critically reflect upon the spatial container as constructor of relations or opportunities and for the potential of this to contribute to the performed event. One of the most eventful spatial performances I recall occurred during a dance performance at the Opera de Paris. All of a sudden the wall at the rear of the stage opened up to reveal the ornate rehearsal room behind the stage where dancers were performing another section of the work. Literally, a window opened up, resituating the event onstage that we had been experiencing up until that point as just a fragment of a larger phenomenon. Here the specific theatre conditions created opportunities.

This play of disorientation is one of the ways in which Diller Scofidio + Renfro, as architects and as designers for performance, problematize conditions, of both the specifics of place and the conventions of type. In one of their earliest designs for stage, *The Rotary Notary and his Hotplate* (1988, La Mama, NYC), Diller + Scofidio explored an interrupting and reflecting plane, a hinge, a contingent condition; in this instance a reflective surface, hinged 45° from the vertical, revealed what was hidden behind another concealing plane. Though set in a space without proscenium or curtain, the set constructed a wall-curtain to be subverted. This idea, of rotating/re-orienting reality through the device of concealing/revealing planes, reappeared almost a decade later as the *inter-scenium* they designed for *Moving Target* (Charleroi 1996). This dance performance, created with Frédéric Flamand, employed a gigantic reflective surface that descended into the stage space similar to a garage-door stuck mid-way. The depth of field of the stage was interrupted. The spectators' vision of performers' actions was reflected and redirected by the inclined plane. Action occurring in plan (on the ground), through the reflecting plane, was rotated 90° into an elevated, floating image. In both conditions the audience faced directly forwards, to look into this reflecting surface (Weinstein 2008). In their Institute of Contemporary Art (2006, Boston, MA), the building as a whole, as well as performance space, draws from these earlier explorations of theatre as viewing machine. The architects describe the project: "A choreographed passage through the building dispenses the visual context in small doses. Upon entry the view is compressed, . . . (the view is) used as a variable backdrop in the theatre" (DS+R). The architects seat the audience in this theatre, facing forward, on a folded surface (set of bleachers) that flattens to create the performance area before extending, through a glass curtain-wall, down another two stories of steps, to form the grandstand overlooking the waterfront. Whereas earlier designs for performance interrupted the view of the on-stage action, in this architectural space for performance the performance interrupted the view. The ICA theatre also plays to the public outside, as vitrine at the top of the grandstand that the public can approach but not enter.

An opportunistic experiment with the specifics of a theatre building and stage as site, and with pushing the conventions of the stage, occurred in the production of *DQ in Barcelona* (2000, Liceu, Barcelona) (Figure 1.4). The architecture of the performance took advantage of the sophisticated stage machinery and its space within the Liceu Theatre. Although the hall itself and proscenium arch reveal nothing out of the ordinary, the theatre, rebuilt and significantly modernized after a fire in 1994, includes a mobile platform that descends five stories below stage level and also includes vast lateral subterranean spaces, fly tower and wing space. In this collaboration with La Fura dels Baus, architects Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue took advantage of these spaces. The stage platform was lowered to the bottom of this well, an abyss of space below the stage level. The extension upward into the height of the fly tower and laterally into wings was integral to performance and its perception. Performance action and space was at times evident, and at others invisible or distorted. The opera's events took place in three times and places: "now," the thirty-first century, and the near future; Geneva,
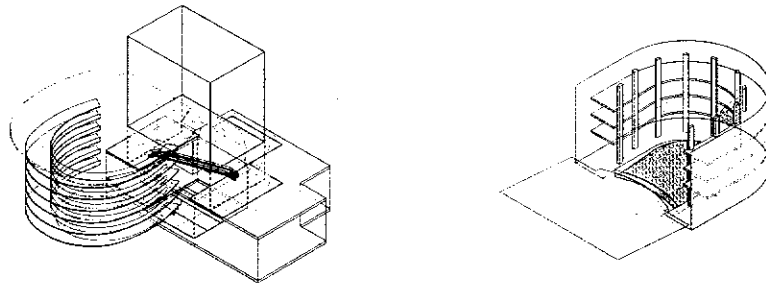
Figure 1.4 Left to right: DQ at the Liceu; Le Balcon at the Odeon. (Drawings: Beth Weinstein with Masoud Sharikzadeh.)

Hong Kong, and "here." Thus displacement and distortion were integral to the work. Drawing parallels to the mythic chasm of the Bayreuth orchestra pit, the scenographic concept located the chorus of singers at the bottom of this five-story pit. Above this pit floated a slew of physical constructions (a bridge, a zeppelin), and immaterial images (projection screens and reflective surfaces), that confound understandings of what was real versus illusion. The specific architecture of the Liceu stage undeniably gave rise to these decisions, making for a work specific to its theatre architecture.

When the architecture of the hall encourages us to turn our heads away from the picture frame and stage, across the house, our gaze might preferentially fall upon our co-spectators and all that is between and separates us. What are the opportunities for experimentation that these afford? How might this space shift our experience of the action? As mentioned earlier, Friederich Kiesler made use of the house in the Vienna Konzerthaus to test the stage–audience relations for his Endless Theater. The orchestra floor became the ground for his new *Spatial Stage*, while the audience overlooked from balconies. El Lissitzky proposed placing the audience on stage, and stage, as agit-prop, in the center of the orchestra. Spatial performance and relations between proscenium, thrust and arena intermingled in ambiguous ways. Similar to Kiesler and El Lissitzky, Lluis Pasqual sought to critically reimagine the stage–audience space relationships within the conventional, purpose-built Odeon Theatre in Paris, calling into question who and what performs. Jean Genet's *Le Balcon* demanded breaking conventions, leading Lluis Pasqual in his production of *Le Balcon* (1991) to shift the performance from stage to the orchestra floor of this horseshoe theatre. The audience was also shifted out of their conventional place in the house; they slipped in through the curtains and found their place on the stage platform. The boxes and balconies of the house, draped in scarlet and gold fabric, served as stage and scenery for the performance. The inhabitation of existing space-relationships was inverted, creating a backwards world that reflected onto itself, down to the gestures of actors who applied their makeup as if the audience was their mirror (Antle 1992). Though not seeing themselves or their fellow spectators across the horseshoe, the shift of audience from balcony to stage and performers from stage to orchestra floor and balcony, in its strange reversal of places, augmented the perceived relation, spatial and conceptual, to the event taking place.

Conclusion

Without opening up Pandora's box – of stage–audience relations in site-specific performance or the recognized flexibility and opportunity to critically re-imagine stage–audience relations in a black box space – these presented case studies of built and unbuilt theatres of the early twentieth century and more recent purpose-built and adapted buildings for theatre, such as the Spiral Theatre and Teatro Oficina, are important examples of rethinking stage–audience relations in support of new ways of performing *in* and *with* space. These spaces were conceived as critical reflections upon and opportunities to perform new social, spatial and technological relations as a parallel to the contemporaneous dynamics taking place just beyond the theatre walls. The space-relationships of these theatres re-configured relations between audience and action, and between audience members, between interior and exterior. Space and the redistribution of action within space aligned with more physically dynamic performances and demanded new modalities of attentiveness from the audience. The last series of examples call attention to conventions and opportunities to rethink the performative possibilities of stage and of audience space and the relations between them within existing structures. The questions posed at the outset of the chapter can be tools for becoming more aware of that which we take for granted, the relations and inhabitations that have become habit, convention. Asking these questions is a first step towards interrogating a space in terms of its performances and uncovering others latent in the space-relationships. Drawing and diagramming can also serve as means to reveal the space-relationships, and a means to ask, "What if . . .?" What if this traded places with that? What if this element within the space-relationship was split and re-distributed, or elongated, or moved from the horizontal surface to a vertical relationship? Conventional inhabitations arise from habit and are also habits than may be broken or critically reconsidered. We should not assume; rather we should ask, "What other space-relationships are possible within this and any other space?"

Notes

1 The design of performance spaces within buildings originally intended for other uses (such as factories, warehouses, slaughterhouses, and so on) is an extensive topic on its own that I will not elaborate upon. One could view such projects as durational scenographies of site. Similarly, I will not discuss ephemeral site-specific designs within non-purpose-built theatre buildings, as these too are a genre of their own.
2 In addition to the chapters referred to, Wiles' book discusses Sacred Space, Processional Space, Public Space, and Sympotic Space.
3 See Howard 2009. She addresses issues such as light, costume, sound scape, intimacy and distance, viewing-sound relation.
4 I refer to my own experiences in the Gallo-Roman theatre (15 BCE) on the slopes of Lyon and the modern Theatre Grec (1929) in Barcelona.
5 Arnold Aronson's *The History And Theory of Environmental Scenography* was instrumental to identifying both the conventions of theatre space and both built and unbuilt theatre architectures challenging those conventions (Aronson 1981).
6 These observations are based upon my experience of a performance in the Teatro Oficina and my conversation with Marcelo Suzuki in August 2014 and Sara Rachel (2013) "Citadels of Freedom: Lina Bo Bardi's SESC Pompéia Factory Leisure Centre and Teatro Oficina, São Paulo." *Architectural Design* 83 (6): 52–7; and the lectures affiliated with the exhibition, *Lina Bo Bardi:Together* (available online at: http://linabobarditogether.com/2012/06/08/lectures/ [accessed 20 March 2014]).

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2
SCENERY

Thea Brejzek

In a general understanding, scenery locates the dramatic action on the stage in time and space and provides a physical and symbolic framing of events, thus operating as the driving visual force of the overall performance. Scenery may attempt to replicate reality through landscape elements, architectural structures, and interiors, or it can be comprised entirely of abstract configurations or immaterial elements such as projections.

Scenery has functioned in widely different ways throughout theatre history. Extended towards heaven and the underworld in the Baroque, excessively detailed during nineteenth-century naturalism, and generally held in contempt by the historical avant-garde, scenery has had a recent comeback. The resurgence of practicable rooms, functional detail, and found objects on the stage warrants a new look at the history and present of scenery, its functions and potentialities, its varying relationship to reality and to the spectator, and at the different approaches developed to "read" scenery.

The question of the treatment of reality in the theatre, namely through mimesis or artistic representation, has been heatedly discussed since Plato's denigration of mimetic practices as imitations of reality that are far removed from knowledge and thus inferior (*Republic*, Book 10) and Aristotle's subsequent defense, in his *Poetics*, of mimesis as an inherent human desire enabling catharsis. The attribution of relevance, function, and merit of mimetic realism over abstract expressive or symbolist scenery has moved through several shifts throughout theatre history and can be seen to be one of the leitmotifs of scenographic practice, thought, and innovation.

Scenery and the representation of reality

In the history of scenery in Western theatre, the desire to expand the physical limits of the stage has been and continues to be instrumental for its technological development and artistic innovation. With the rediscovery of Vitruvius's fundamental work, *De Architectura*, in the Cinquecento, the antique Greek stage machinery and scenic elements described by the Roman architect remained seminal well into the nineteenth century. Vitruvius described the painted wooden flats of the theatre (*pinakes*), the three-sided wooden prism with different scenes painted on each side and allowing for