

FRIDAY, MAY 28, 2021

10:45 - 12:45 (EDT)

# (RE)PLAYING MODERNISM

## PRE-PERFORMANCE — POST-PERFORMANCE

### PRESENTATIONS

**'The Play's the Thing': On Theatricality and Modern Public Space**

Alexandra Stara, Kingston University

**Relations Among Things**

Lily Chi, Cornell University

**A Tale of Two Foyers**

Adam Sharr, Newcastle University

**Theaters of Production: Architect's Offices and the Performative Construction of a Profession**

Aaron Tobey, Yale University

### MODERATOR

Louise Pelletier, UQÀM

3

SESSION #





## WORLD

## 'The Play's the Thing': On Theatricality and Modern Public Space

Alexandra Stara, Kingston University London

The theatricality of architecture is frequently discussed as a matter of *mise en scène*, where the building or urban fabric is tightly composed as scenery for an imagined drama, communicating with great sophistication, though little ambiguity, key elements of the 'plotline' and, thus, directing the visitor to perform in a suitable way. In the context of the Baroque, such theatricality was put to exemplary use supporting the communicative role of architecture. In the significantly more open and fluid world of modernity, where architecture and culture no longer speak to each other with the clarity they did four centuries ago, the relevance of such levels of staging outside of set designs or theme parks is questionable. This paper explores the potential of another reading of theatricality, pertaining less to scenography and more to spatial, embodied experience, through the discussion of two public projects built in the mid-20th century: Dimitris Pikionis' Acropolis Works in Athens (1954-57), and Hans Scharoun's Neue Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (1964-1977).

This paper will argue that, through distinct means and characters, these very different projects invest in a 'modern' theatricality operating as latent mode of engagement, in order to make spaces for structured and meaningful yet open participation. The projects will be explored not only as landscape/architectural spaces inviting engagement with the public through the play of imagination and memory; but also, as processes of commissioning, design, and building, revealing the crucial role played by the *polis*, the sociocultural and political context of each work as part of its 'setting'. Key to the discussion will be Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of 'play', as a hermeneutic device for grasping the intricate balance between openness and structure – or freedom and responsibility – in our late modern world.

**Dr. Alexandra Stara** is Reader and Associate Professor in the history and theory of architecture at Kingston University London and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She is a qualified architect in her native Greece, with Master's degrees from UCL and Cambridge University and a PhD in art history from Oxford University. She has been lecturing and publishing on art and architecture for the past twenty-five years, including three books (*The Edges of Trauma: Explorations in Art & Literature*, 2014; *Killing Art to Make History: The Museum of French Monuments*, 2013; *Curating Architecture and the City*, 2009) and numerous essays and articles. She has been a judge and chair of the Royal Institute of British Architects President's Medals Dissertation panel, a member of the Editorial Board of *The Architectural Review* and is currently on the panel for the Queen's Anniversary Prizes (UK).

## ACTION

**Relations Among Things**

Lily Chi, Cornell University

The city of Seville makes several appearances in Aldo Rossi's *The Architecture of the City* and *A Scientific Autobiography*, two texts in which urban architecture is repeatedly depicted as "the fixed stage for human events." References abound also in his drawings and design work: from the temporary casitas of Seville's Féria, to the *corrales* that figure in his search for architectures of resistance against technocratic urbanism.

What did Rossi see in Seville? And what did he mean in writing of the city's Holy Week and its Féria de Abril as "the greatest works of architecture I have known"? Neither are buildings in the customary sense: Semana Santa, marking the end of Lent, is an intensive week-long affair in which the entire city is engaged in moving feats of *gesamtkunstwerk*. The Féria, following two weeks later, is temporary city built on the edge of the *casco histórico* for decidedly secular festivities that traditionally marked the start of the growing season.

The proposed paper explores the Seville of Rossi's fascination, probing both the source material and the ideas it inspired. The paper begins with a review of Rossi's ideas on architecture and the city, the initial political intent of these ideas, and the ways Seville is invoked therein. A second section presents Seville's distinctive calendar of urban ceremony, focusing on modern-day celebrations of Semana Santa. Of interest will be the different constituencies involved, in particular the lay co-fraternities central to the event. Accounts of laity resistance to both Church and state during the Franco regime hints at complex political fluidities that belie easy assumptions about this event. The section concludes with observations on the role of architecture, both temporal and fixed, in Seville's festive cycle.

How does the exemplary city imagined by Aldo Rossi comport with contemporary Seville? Rossi himself offers the conditions for reflecting on this question in a statement that encapsulates both his vision of urban architecture and the optimism on which it rests: "The emergence of relations among things, more than the things themselves, always gives rise to new meanings." How Seville fares as city officials prepare its relaunch on the world stage--a platform for spectacle in Guy Debord's much less optimistic sense of the term--is a test for both Seville and *The Architecture of the City*.

**Dr. Lily Chi** is associate professor of architectural design, theory and history, and Director of Graduate Studies at Cornell University. She received her B.Arch in Canada and her M.Phil and Ph.D in architectural history and theory at Cambridge and McGill Universities, respectively. Interested in the ways in which architecture construes and constructs temporality, Chi has written on filmic and literary spaces, on formulations of architectural 'use,' and on informality in contemporary urbanism. The agency of architecture as remote artefacts, destined to increasingly indeterminate futures and distant contexts, is the focus of her current projects, including a collaborative book project with Sarosh Anklesaria on Le Corbusier's City Museum in Ahmedabad.

### ACTION

#### A Tale of Two Foyers

Adam Sharr, Newcastle University, UK

This paper argues that the foyers adjoining auditoria are every bit as potent – as laden with meaning, memory, and world-making – as auditoria themselves. They are sites of comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, and melodrama, enacted through the attending audience’s collective performance to itself.

Mediaeval European auditoria – such as Shakespeare’s Rose Theatre in London – were often entered directly from the street. Foyers emerged in the eighteenth century and grew in size and importance into the twentieth – practically, as a space for circulation as auditoria grew, and as fire regulations emerged – but also for the performance of social distinction, power, class and gender.

This paper explores the theatrical and performative character of the foyer through two examples from post-war Europe. First is the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall opened in 1951 in bomb-damaged London, designed by the London County Council architect’s department, becoming a symbol of the UK’s emergence from wartime privations into a newly reimagined society and culture. Second is the foyer of the Berlin Philharmonie, opened in 1963 in the freshly divided city of Berlin, designed by Hans Scharoun, equally redolent in the ideas of democracy and liberal culture that it presented.

Through a history, and experiential accounts, of the foyers of the Festival Hall and the Philharmonie, the character of the foyer is addressed as: a stage set; a microcosm of the city; an embodied display in which the whole audience performs; a set of habits, values and rituals which are simultaneously pre-determined and re-invented; and ultimately as a space of social and cultural transformation.

The audience performs the two foyers of the Festival Hall and the Philharmonie. But the foyers also perform, through their audiences, distinctive ideas of culture and society. The lessons of these spaces remain instructive and vital today.

**Dr. Adam Sharr** is Professor of Architecture and Head of the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape at Newcastle University, UK. He is Editor-in-Chief of *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly* (Cambridge University Press) and Series Editor of *Thinkers for Architects* (Routledge). He practices with Design Office, a design research consultancy at Newcastle University, listed in the prestigious *Architect’s Journal* 40 Under 40 in 2020. He is author or editor of seven books on architecture, most recently *Modern Architecture: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018).



## ACTION

## Theaters of Production: Architect's Offices and the Performative Construction of a Profession

Aaron Tobey, Yale University

There is a long tradition of American architects using their own buildings as simultaneous office and advertisement: the Architects' Building in Manhattan, designed and occupied by a group of twelve firms including McKim, Mead, and White, a penthouse leased by Adler & Sullivan in their Chicago Auditorium, Hellmuth Obata Kassabaum's centering of its national operations in the Boatman's Tower in Saint Louis, etc. The attention architects have paid to designing not only the exteriors of these buildings but also the interiors of the offices within them makes such spaces a rich chronicle of the ways in which architects have consciously and unconsciously imagined themselves and their work across vastly changing social and technical conditions. As they physically and rhetorically fashioned their offices, these architects fashioned themselves and an image of architectural practice to their imagined clientele, peers, and public. Consequently, the spaces served not only as places in which the production of architecture took place, but also theaters in which knowledge and production was and is staged for audience and performer in distinct manners according to real and imagined social relationships. Extending from the drawing library in H.H. Richardson's Sommerville, Massachusetts home studio to the contractor's room of George Post's New York office, and from Albert Kahn's precisely arrayed divisions of design and production in Detroit to SOM offering tours of its nascent Chicago Computer Group, this paper examines a collection of American architects' offices as well as the everyday practices and rituals of architectural production these offices support. In doing so, the paper tracks the transitions in American architectural practice from primarily sole proprietorships based in artistic traditions to increasingly collective, if not necessarily collaborative business-like undertakings dramatized and embodied in the organization of modern and technologized corporate firms while also speculating on the future of architecture design offices.

**Aaron Tobey** is a PhD candidate and designer living in New York. His dissertation research focuses on an analysis of the interrelated construction of computer use, corporate structure, and international practice within American architectural firms beginning in the 1960s drawing on methods from media theory, organization theory, and science and technology studies. His previous work has explored how information technologies, forms of representation, and political agency in architecture inform collective social imaginations of space and processes of subjectivization, and has been included in *Thresholds*, the *Journal of Architectural Education*, and *Architecture and Culture*. Aaron received a Master of Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design and a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the University of Cincinnati. He has worked professionally at firms throughout the US including the rendering consultancy, Studio AMD, in Providence, Rhode Island, Fougerson Architecture in San Francisco, California, and Studio LUZ Architects in Boston, Massachusetts.