

CALL FOR PAPERS & *ENTR'ACTES*



Marco Frascari, *Occasio*, c.2010

FRASCARI SYMPOSIUM V

THEATRES OF ARCHITECTURAL IMAGINATION

A hybrid online / in-person event at the Centre de design, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM)

Co-chaired by Lisa Landrum, University of Manitoba and Sam Ridgway, University of Adelaide,
in collaboration with Louise Pelletier, UQÀM, and Alberto Pérez-Gómez, McGill University

May 27-29, 2021

“Architecture is protean. If asked directly to reveal herself, she will offer instead some disguise, a personification by which to elude us. However, if we remember that the role of the architect is to make tangible what is intangible, we can solve the puzzle and rediscover the image embodied in it, the corporeality of theater and the theater of corporeality.”

Marco Frascari¹

In theatre, as in architecture, meaning is construed through situated, shared and embodied experience. Both theatre and architecture gather community in shared settings to experience events simultaneously familiar and strange, prosaic and profound, anticipated and unexpected, mantic and mnemonic. These shared encounters – involving complicity, conflict and change – open renewed understandings of the human condition and humanity’s interdependence with the world.

Theatrical and architectural representation have intertwined origins in ancient Greek performance. In spite of some significant changes, their essential modes of bodily enactment and social exchange have remained fundamentally unchanged over the last 2500 years. The present-day pandemic and lingering mandates for social distancing, pose serious challenges for both public theatre and public architecture.

Yet, these ancient artforms have endured past pandemics and the human desire for in-person collective transformative experience will resume – potentially with renewed vigour.

Marco Frascari's lyrical drawing entitled *Occasio*, the Latin god of Opportunity (in Greek *Kairos*), depicts this youthful god in a magical rolling landscape presiding over an open-air theatre. *Occasio's* long red hair blows forward across his face, representing his fast-moving fugitive nature, as well as the challenge of catching him by the hair; for once he is past, opportunity is lost (the back of his head is shaved, with nothing to grab). The drawing suggests that fleeting possibilities might be manifested and grasped in the theatre's revelatory *chōra*.

This symposium seizes the present opportunity to renew theatrical and architectural modes of imagination. Our present and persistent task, as Alberto Pérez-Gómez has argued, consists in rediscovering places of genuine participatory performance, creating theatres for cultural memory and action capable of embodying life-affirming truths.²

The Frascari V symposium will explore the mnemonic, performative and participatory aspects of architecture through creative scholarship and poetic expression. The symposium will assemble participants from architectural and theatrical disciplines to discuss and enact shared modes of dramatic representation via a hybrid online and in-person event in Montreal, May 27-29, 2021. We also expect to produce an edited book of essays, where works selected from the event will be included along with invited contributions.

We specifically invite paper proposals and *Entr'actes* exploring theatres of architectural imagination through the creative lens of three themes: Memory, World, Action.

MEMORY

The shadowy, occult philosopher Giulio Camillo (ca. 1480–1544) spent most of his life and a small fortune on his memory theatre. There are accounts of a wooden scaled model large enough to accommodate two people and Camillo described the theatre in a short treatise he dictated to his friend Girolamo Muzo over seven mornings shortly before he died. Only the treatise survived, but his work influenced the design of Renaissance villas, gardens and the first two permanent theatres built in Northern Italy after the fall of Rome. Arranged in a heptagonal geometry, the stepped memory theatre, was based on classical theatres described by Vitruvius and incorporated ancient mnemonic techniques. Reputedly, the tiered steps contained an arrangement of text fragments and images selected to represent an encyclopaedia of human knowledge. Moving among and contemplating the contents of this theatre of wisdom in an endless variation of encounters, the spectator/theorist gained comprehension and, through the power of fantasia, could imagine and invent new combinations of knowledge. Frascari writes that “the mnemonic powers of images would activate the imagination... It was to be a kind of corporeal time machine where the past, the present and the future were architecturally related through memory.”³

Camillo's anthropomorphic and revelatory memory theatre provides innumerable lessons on the intertwined relationships between memory, knowledge and imagination. How can reconsiderations of his work generate new insights for architectural pedagogy and production? In what ways can embodied mnemonics revive our comprehension and creation of microcosmic constructs and universal worlds?

WORLD

Theatres have historically been symbolic representations of the cosmos. Configurations of open-air Greek theatres embodied and revealed both divine and human order, while their stage machines approximated cosmopoetic actions and rhythms of the universe. The architecture of Roman amphitheatres provided artists with a spatial model to envision worldly hierarchies and relations. Shakespeare's Globe Theatre gathered all strata of society into its intimate "Wooden O" to stage grand actions under mortal and celestial watch. Modern theatres continue to experiment with actor-spectator reciprocities and spatial mutabilities in ways that mime tensions between egalitarian ideals, global powers and indeterminate environmental influences.

Cities, too, embody *theatrum mundi*. Architects once configured urban environments to manifest a microcosm of universal order, creating a theatrical machine of the world in which architecture becomes both stage and performer, scenography and protagonist.

Experienced at an immediate level, good theatre (like good architecture) makes life intensely felt in the palpable present by conjuring the full complexity of the world within a delimited space and duration. This intensified living confrontation with the "now," as Peter Brook calls it,⁴ simultaneously opens onto larger alternate realities and possibilities for worldly orientation and a renewed sense of wholeness.

How can a reimagined *theatrum mundi* reinvigorate architecture as both an experiential setting for cultural performances and a dynamic model for synthetic understanding and comprehensive imagination? In what ways does architecture still give durable expression to social order, while incorporating competing dramatic agencies? Rethinking *theatrum mundi* is arguably all the more important for today's vexed world of complex civic agons and global crises.

ACTION

Theatre's mode of disclosure is embodied enactment. While spectacular sets and characters appear on stage, drama properly consists of *actions* and decisions taken by individuals in particular circumstances, together with corresponding complications and consequences made known through language, gesture and ensemble performance. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle described tragedy as a *mimēsis* of action, a representation of what people *do*. Architecture also imitates human action by mirroring dwelling routines, framing practices of everyday life, communal celebrations and improvisatory events.

Conceived as a theatre of action, architecture enables interaction and change in ways that engender social and situational transformation. Such spaces of public performance are where vital cultural discourses are formed, shared and tested, acquiring poetic and political agency.

In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Judith Butler describes the power of individual bodies and the collective body politic to assemble and act in concert and contention. Architecture and the city play crucial roles in providing common ground for these plural bodies to enact differences and collectively constitute new initiatives.

Theatres of action further recall the origins of theatre in both ritual and democratic practices, wherein the regular reenactment of ritual performances propitiated renewal, and collective consideration of dramatized civic crises exercised citizens' deliberative imagination.

How might architectural theatres of action sustain and advance meaningful participation and democratic practices today?

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

We invite proposals for 20-minute paper presentations exploring one or more of the three themes outlined above.

Proposals should be historically and/or theoretically grounded; develop clear and compelling arguments around specific examples based in history, practice and/or pedagogy; and contribute to disciplinary and/or transdisciplinary knowledge. Collaborative proposals and/or submissions from authors in theatrical disciplines are welcome.

Abstract submissions must include the following in pdf format suitable for 'blind' peer-review:

- title;
- identification of theme (Memory, World, Action);
- 300-word abstract
- one image (optional)

Additionally, include in the email (not the abstract): name, contact, affiliation, and 150-word bio.

Due: Friday, December 18, 2020

Submit to both co-chairs: **Lisa Landrum** lisa.landrum@umanitoba.ca and **Sam Ridgway** sam.ridgway@adelaide.edu.au

SCHEDULE:

January 18, 2021 – Authors will be notified of acceptance.

May 27-29, 2021 – Hybrid Symposium at UQAM, Montréal and online

July 30, 2021 – Invited authors to submit full 5000-7000-word essays for consideration in the book

CALL FOR *ENTR'ACTES*

As part of the Theatres of Architectural Imagination symposium, we invite submissions of 2-minute *Entr'actes* in multimedia digital-video-audio-graphic-performative format (mp4 or mov).

An *Entr'acte*, literally meaning “between the acts,” refers to the interval between two acts of a play which may be filled by a diverting and enriching entertainment with live performers. *Entr'actes* were popularized in the early modern theatre to entertain audiences when stage curtains closed to allow for scene changes.

Providing a practical pause, these live interludes also served a variety of purposes by their contrast to the main action: offering comic relief or aesthetic indulgence; giving historical context to the featured

story or making a contemporary allusion; representing the primary plot in a different media or provoking an alternative interpretation.

This call for *Entr'actes* invites participants to address the Memory, World or Action themes described above in a creative multi-media format. Video submissions may feature original drawings and animations, or new interpretations of historical works or contemporary settings.

Entr'actes may be conceived as one 121-second video, or as 11 consecutive 11-second episodes composed into one format with voice-over and/or subtitle captions. Any musical accompaniment must have copyright permissions, or be openly useable under a Creative Commons license.

A selection of *Entr'actes* will be posted online and “performed” as interludes in between paper sessions during the hybrid in-person/online symposium in May 2021. Select *Entr'actes* may be considered for inclusion in the proposed book and/or a future exhibition.

***Entr'actes* submissions must include the following:**

- one digital video file (mp4, mov) – the last scene must include a slide of all relevant credits.
- one square thumbnail image (1200 x 1200 pixels) (JPG)
- an accompanying word or pdf file with the following information:
 - *Entr'acte* Title;
 - identification of primary theme (Memory, World, Action);
 - 300-word abstract summary of the submission;
 - any special technical instructions for display;
 - credits for all content (artistic, literary, musical and technical, as appropriate);
 - music permissions and/or Creative Commons license (as applicable);
 - 150-word max. author biography.

Due: Monday, February 15, 2021

Submit to Lisa Landrum lisa.landrum@umanitoba.ca (use WeTransfer or similar for video files).

Note on the Symposium Format:

The Theatres of Architectural Imagination symposium was originally conceived as a full in-person scholarly event to be accompanied by in-situ theatrical performances and an exhibition of poetic artifacts and miniature theatres. Regrettably, the global pandemic compelled the organizers to alter these plans. The present call for *Entr'actes* aims to retain a creative-performative complement to the scholarly paper exchange and may form the basis of an exhibition for a future Frascari symposium.

At this point, the symposium is planned as a very limited in-person seminar-style exchange at the UQÀM Design Centre in Montréal, coupled with live online broadcasting. Presenters may deliver papers in-person or virtually. *Entr'acte* presentations will only be online. More details on the symposium format and in-person limitations will be forthcoming in 2021.

¹ Marco Frascari, "A Heroic and Admirable Machine: The Theater of the Architecture of Carlo Scarpa, *Architetto Veneto*," *Poetics Today* 10.1 (Spring 1989): 124.

² See especially, Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Architecture as a Performing Art: Two Analogical Reflections," in *Architecture as a Performing Art*, ed. Marcia Feuerstein and Gray Read (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate [now Routledge, 2013], 15-25; and "The Architecture of Richard Henriquez: A Praxis of Personal Memory," in *Richard Henriquez: Memory Theatre*, ed. Howard Shubert (Montreal, Quebec: Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture and Vancouver Art Gallery, 1993), esp. 9.

³ Frascari, "A Heroic and Admirable Machine," 124. See also, Marco Frascari, "The Body and Architecture in the Drawings of Carlo Scarpa," *Res* 14 (1987): 123-142; and *Monsters of Architecture: Anthropomorphism in Architectural Theory* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991).

⁴ See especially, Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1968).