

Gloom / Invisible Walls As Invisible Hands Scenography As *Geo-Pornographic* Approach To Designing Space

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Although the body's performance on stage has been widely studied with regard to the body's everyday performance, the *spatial performance* of the stage design with respect to the *performance* of everyday built spaces is rather un-explored. Yet a friction of commonality and difference emerge: scenography is architecture and both everyday spaces and the stage have subtexts, dramaturgical directions embedded more or less visibly in their material properties; but scenography strives on perceptual discrepancy (an obsession that comprises cycloramas, flying surfaces and borders, haze machines and floor traps amongst others) and thus proposes a different accommodation and arrangement of the body from everyday spaces. As the scenographic construction is a ramification of larger architectural schemes, it must then be regarded as an empirical and poetic translation and comment on architectural proxemics and affects: having to negotiate between the assertive sublimation and the deregulative critique of human design and management of the space for the body, and of the body in space.

This article is a critical effort towards contextualising the scenographic work and experience within broader frameworks of spatial design. playing with the visible and the invisible, the revealed and the concealed, borders, surfaces and perspectives. Although those predicaments are likely to be the parasites which have prevented such a collusive study, here they constitute the locus of the inquiry.

German architect Ernst Mach suggested in 1906 that the origins of geometry were to be found in the extraction of definite forms out of fuzzy 'space-sensations' during ('primitive') 'man's intercourse with his environment'. Mach recognized that geometry was of an 'idealized kind' which 'power' could be found in its constitution of a domain of *surface-vision* as 'abstraction'. Mach opposed the 'intercourse' to this abstract domain, or rather rejected it from abstraction because its 'powerful associations impel

to imagine to be filled with *matter* the places enclosed by the surface which alone he perceives’.

Typical of any emphasis on surface-vision is a scientific or biological assumption of the primacy of vision. Thus Mach affirms that ‘our sensations of sight and touch are primarily produced only by the *surfaces* of bodies’. Such assumption is echoed in various sociological fields such as Gestalt Theory which, as E.H. Gombrich remarks, relies also on a ‘*simplicity hypothesis*’ of vision as essential mode of being in the world. Jonathan Crary finely demonstrates how such ‘perceptual holism’ is paired with a holistic conception of the body. Crary highlights for instance how Richard Wagner’s decision to hide the orchestra, to extinguish auditorium lighting and to accentuate optical illusion on stage were all strategies to form a unilateral perspective of relationality, what Lefebvre has called ‘brutal techniques of visualisation’, motivated here by a socializing will on Wagner’s part: ‘it was through the collective act of seeing that the semblance of a community would come into being’ (Crary), audio-visual synthesis for a unified society. In his own discussion of Gestalt Theory, Crary unravels the ambivalent and divisive effects of this emphasis on unified vision as ‘the dream of the reciprocal affirmation of the unity of the individual subject and the unified object of perception’ (Crary), the dreams of a body autonomous from spatiality and of a space autonomous from bodily presence which translated into aesthetic and deictic representational domination of bodies losing grip on spaces.

Besides the ideological issues at play, there is a more discreet pragmatic concern: such ‘a particular notion of the autonomy of vision...its all-at-oneness...is founded on the cancellation of the empirical conditions of perception’ (Rosalind Krauss in Foster). Therefore everyday walls, as Sanford Kwinter remarks, can be exposed as ‘an enforced system of enacted openings and closings’ (Kwinter in Acconci). Such concerns of sensory and phenomenal limitations have been raised in architecture in the second half of the 20th century. In 1978, architect Porphyrios critically commented: ‘this is the kingdom of sameness; the region where the landscape is similar; the site where differences are put aside and expansive unities are established’ (cited in Juel-Christiansen). More recently, Robin Evans discussed the ‘geometry of vision’ which he urges architects to avoid as single drive because of its reduced potential for creating spaces, missing on other non-visual aspects of the built environment. Those concerns do not relate just to the built, they unequivocally embrace the body too. With her video-installation *Rapture* (1999) Shirin Neshat exemplifies how the architectural realization can produce a body-built parallelism that supports a normative order of

bodies traversing both public and domestic spaces. Here the autonomy of the body and the built participate in spatial 'de-eroticization [as the] fetishism of space itself' (Jay in Foster) and 'pornography: the body's chaste and unerotic dream of itself' (J.G. Ballard in Cray & Kwinter), the 'reflexive or specular autonomy of self-presence' (Derrida) and self-sameness.

This trend of surface-vision holism is often traced back to Modernism, 19th century Pictorialism, Cartesian perspectivalism and Renaissance Art. Perez-Gomez and Pelletier have highlighted how linear perspective, the agency of spatiality around a single viewpoint, 'one-eyed static vision' (Gombrich) has been a driving force in the history of architecture from its technical discovery and validation by Brunelleschi and Alberti from the Renaissance onwards. As the 'intercourse' was being suppressed by a dominant uniperspectival abstract conception of spatiality, the body came to be aligned accordingly as a static and distinct point in space. Thus, as Grosz puts it, 'Bodies are absent in architecture', calling for 'architecture to think its own in investments in corporeality', that is to re-establish the spatio-corporeal 'intercourse' through the built.

While Mach was trying to discriminate the fuzzy space-sensations against abstraction, Antonio Gaudi's *Guell Park* (1900-1914) was being constructed in Barcelona from ground plans which convulsed with fuzziness: few straight lines, no right-angular corners, difficultly calculable surfaces and no flat vertical walls. Drawing from all sorts of fuzzy motifs found in nature, Gaudi offered a built environment which incorporated both the fragmentation and continuity of the landscape it is located at. As a result the built components of the park merge phenomenally with nature, the outlines overlap and blur with the content. Because the landscape and the built are quasi undifferentiated they offer themselves as playful and interactive materials. Arguably Gaudi's architecture diverges radically from Mach's surface-vision, (if not opposes it by cultivating '*matter*') it does constitute a kind of abstraction: Guell Park is composed of forms which are reductions from their original pattern, only the simplification of the original motif is slight and does not cancel textures, uncertain borders/volumes and other gloomy discrepancies. Consequently perspectivalism is multiple and undifferentiated. This type of built abstraction recovers the contingent and multilateral condition of its natural location, of a Baroque 'nature as uninhibited polyphenomenality of display' (Rabinow in Cray & Kwinter).

Four hundred years before Gaudi, a similarly *naturalistic drive* led Leonardo Da Vinci to develop new perspectival modalities, unsatisfied as he was with the dominant and singular Albertian linear perspective. As a

result of one of those innovative perspectives Da Vinci invented a painterly technique he named *sfumato*, foggy or gloomy. 'Hovering between the seen and the unseen' (Vasari in Gombrich) *sfumato* would be applied by Da Vinci on two levels: first the rendering of the bodily outlines, creating a softer look which in *Mona Lisa* (1503-1506) participates in the mysterious quality of the portrait while enhancing its naturalism (*sfumato* suggests discreet movements, or the trace of a movement, the transience of presence). Secondly Da Vinci pushed the technique further to create gloomy landscapes such as the one behind *Mona Lisa*. Again this blur participates in both the naturalism of the landscape (the distance of the horizon line) and its surreal quality as a quasi moon-like landscape.

The use of the technique on both the body and its surrounding landscape makes the borders of both overlap, in effect reducing the distance between them and thus initiating a phenomenal friction/assimilation. At the same period, Michelangelo applied a similar idea in sculpture. Michelangelo's *non-finito* focused on the blurring of the edges of the sculpted figure with respect to its material left quasi untouched all around the outlines of the body. More precisely, *non-finito* retains and highlights the volume of the block of stone Michelangelo was so fond of, a block of stone which is not rough as such but partially carved in an indeterminate block. Again this provides a slight kinetic quality to the figure. As importantly, *non-finito* disturbs the boundary between the sculpture and its space of exhibition, thus titillating the fixity of aesthetic distance between the object and its observer. In a short discussion of *sfumato* E.H. Gombrich mentioned that the technique 'cuts down the information on the canvas and thereby stimulates the mechanism of projection'. The phenomenal gaps or fault lines in *sfumato* and *non-finito* activate its observer to invest into it and its recipient (Jonathan Crary analyzes such a mechanism in the pointillist paintings of Seurat)

However, linear perspective and its attached perceptual holism of surface-vision remained hegemonic historically, hence *sfumato* and *non-finito* have, until the 20th century, been recycled as unified modalities of surface-vision (see the German paintings of the romantic period). Even in the late 20th century, those techniques found unified expressions of an absolute kind with the wooden sculptures of George Baselitz & the photographic paintings of Gerhard Richter. In all those cases Da Vinci and Michelangelo's propositions of a pulse between clarity and gloom is lost. But since the emergence of modernism, sporadic experiments, up until now (and maybe more so now) revived *sfumato* and *non-finito* as pulsating and interactive forms of spatial representation. I have already

mentioned Antonio Gaudi as he is the most radical in his approach. Other examples can be found whereby the strict trend of surface-vision is not quite rejected all at once, but rather disturbed, disrupted, towards unfinished gloomy formed from within holistic surface-vision. Stage design which was attached to architecture's obedience to perspective also made propositions of a gloomy kind at the same time as Gaudi. Edward Gordon Craig set design for Stanislavski's production of *Hamlet* in 1909 is emblematic of an attempt at finding equivocal and unresolved conflicts within definite surfaces and shapes: the end of the environment is unclear, and its very *surfacy* components (the 'portable screens') overlaps and render the volume of space unevenly arranged. Furthermore Craig placed a lot of importance on lighting, for *Hamlet's* set a variety of lighting could activate an interplay of surfaces, volumes, levels and depths.

Here 'the screen not only dissolves a classical notion of the façade but is also part of a multidirectional field of stimuli' (Crary, 367). Volumetric dislocation, disorientation, dispersion and decentering explode perspective further. Although this constellatory abstraction will appear almost in synchronicity in fine arts (Seurat), architecture (Gaudi) and stage design (Craig, Appia) it will most clearly take hold in the fine arts. From the emergence of so-called installation art works such as Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donne...* and *The Large Glass* to the more ambiguous *Merzbau* of Kurt Schwitters. Those constantly-evolving hand-made constructions Schwitters undertook in his own flats offered myriads of clear-cut surfaces, protruding attacks on the domestic volume that cancel horizontality and verticality and any organization of a vantage point. Schwitters would paint them all white so that a certain unity remained, though again with lighting the *Merzbau* could appear to some extent homogenic or drastically fragmented: whole and parts are re-arranged phenomenally throughout the day. The abstract constellation continued developing in the fine arts with arte povera and Michelangelo Pistoletto's walls Of rags, the discrepant minimalism of Eva Hesse's walls of strings and Robert Morris' walls of felt, up to the contemporary, larger, spatial compositions of Ann Hamilton's crying walls and Rebecca Horn's spitting walls and Anthony McCall's walls of light.

In architecture, the constellation offered by the fine arts can only be found again, after Gaudi, much later on with Austrian painter and architect Friedrich Hundertwasser Somewhere between Gaudi's radical rejection and Schwitters', Appia's and Craig's subversion of surface-vision, the architectural work of Hundertwasser is another case of an abstraction that does not settle the eye with the clarity of borders and surfaces, but instead explore dis-unified and uncertain motifs between surface and volume. Like

Gaudi, Hundertwasser's architecture flirts literally and phenomenally with nature and the landscape, pulsating between division and assimilation, order and contingency. Unlike Gaudi, Hundertwasser utilizes rather flat and clear-cut surfaces and shapes. In *Waldspirale* (1998) the exterior walls are commonly flat and the overall shape of the building is also simple and definite. However the treatment of the walls, Hundertwasser being a painter, is the major agent of surface disruption: colourful painting is used to define further virtual surfaces within the empirical one, in a similar fashion to Gaudi's mosaics, creating a phenomenal effect of stratification without a central point of ramification.

With Hundertwasser, Schwitters, Craig and Gaudi, we see the possibility of a domain of abstraction in spatial design which is not limited to surface-vision and thus conducive of the spatio-corporeal intercourse in a sense that the built mediates (through its gaps) oscillating/unsettled relationships between corporeality and spatiality. This modality of abstraction is, in Kobena Mercer's words, a 'discrepant abstraction': that is 'both a reflection of the forms of social experience in developed capitalist societies and a specific artistic strategy to express such experience (alienation) through its distance from and dissonance with established aesthetic norms' (Peter Osbourne, in Mercer). Such an abstract dissonance appeared in architecture, within architecture's own terms, long after Gaudi. First with an urban experiment, the Danish capital: Copenhagen..... Those discrepant built abstractions 'think their own investment in corporeality' by first of all reflecting empirically bodies' contingencies. They constitute an 'interface... mutually defining... fundamentally disunified series of systems, a series of disparate flows, energies, events, or entities, bringing together or drawing apart their more or less temporary alignments» (Grosz). Like Elizabeth Grosz, architect Carsten Juel-Christiansen considers architecture around the stratified complexities of bodies' mobility: their 'flux and flex'. Addressing the city of Copenhagen, which has been continuously developed since 1947 as a hand shape (see the 'finger plan'), Juel-Christiansen analyzes the benefits of an urban model which focus on 'transitoriness effectively dissolves any insistent perspective from the city's space'. Thus «the city delineates itself as a manifestation of a spatial community situated amidst a number of widely divergent social praxes.» (Juel-Christiansen): a multilateral and reciprocal relation can take place between the countryside and the city, the built and the body, flesh and the landscape. To do so, the built technically presents a certain gloom (here in the topographic hand) that allows for the rhythmic and aleatoric movement of bodies.

Other technical devices have been found to produce similar phenomenal incorporations. The embedding of artificial intelligence in the built through sensor technologies is one of them. In *LightHive* (2007) Alex Haw set up sensors throughout the AA School of Architecture in London. The sensors were simply capturing whether there is human activity in the rooms or not, then each sent the information to a separate little star-shaped light suspended to the ceiling of one room. That room becomes a live and abstract topographic volume, the heart/lungs of the building. And as the built engages further with the body, it also promotes further transit and kinetics.

Sanford Kwinter, discussing the contemporary architecture of former performance artist Vito Acconci, discloses this powerful architectural paradox when invested in corporeality: 'almost everything opens to reveal an interior and to reveal or complete a *desire*, to make the heat of bodies transit from here to there.' (Acconci). In *Island On The Mur* (2001), Acconci used another technical apparatus which is inherently bodily-oriented. The building is a theatre made according to the principle of tensegrity which allows the engineering of its curves and transparency: the formation of two irregular and integrated domes partially suspended above water (as most of its weight is distributed across the nodal points of its compressed bars). Tensegrity is the principle behind geodes and other similar form of domes. The structures it creates, as in one of its discoverer's work Kenneth Snelson's *Needle Tower* (1968), prevent the emergence of clear surfaces, borders, walls or corners, and somehow imply transparency, the blurring of boundaries between outside and inside 'where the outside is a fold of the inside' (Harris in Buchanan & Lambert). With tensegrity, the built offers itself as 'the borderline of a spatiality exposed to the outside, offered – precisely – on its running border' (Derrida). Those aspects of the tensegrity principle makes it one of the most accommodating structure for bodily kinetics in terms of its three-dimensional flexibility of spacing and dwelling. Furthermore this flexibility allows for the integration of intelligent interfaces such as sensor technologies (see actuated tensegrity). This two-fold intelligence allows the built to encapsulate its own transformative scope: the predicaments of its inhabiting bodies' virtuality as well as its own. As Grosz puts it: 'The capacity of walls, boxes, windows, and corners to function in more than one way, to serve not only present functions but others as well, is already part of the ingenuity and innovation of the virtual in the real.' But as Negroponte critically asserted in the 1970s under his notion of 'responsive architecture': 'walls that move to the touch-relevant to the function of support or moving back in retreat-that change color and form:

streamlining themselves to the wind or shrinking down when unoccupied, are all possible' and would demand 'a dramatically different relationship between ourselves and our houses, one characterized by **intimate interaction**. Tensegrity's borders flirt with the contours of its neighbouring volumes, they produce a phenomenal connectedness body-built-landscape. Those flirtatious relations are in fact supported by the *anti-gravitational* character of tensegrity: structurally curvilinear spacing is allowed by preventing the gravitational convergence and displacement of the built's weight to the ground. Yet again, and similarly to the borderless quality of the practical works I have discussed previously whereby borders have not completely disappeared but been gnawed (as indeed everything has some kind of border), the anti-gravitational edge of tensegrity structures is of course not the actual absence of gravity but its partial suspension/release.

Architects Diller & Scofidio realized a built environment which maximised the anti-gravitational fantasmatic edge of the tensegrity principle through some form of architectural intelligence. The *Blur Building* (2001) set on Neuchatel Lake, drained water from it, transforming it into fog and distributing it across the volume of the built structure.

Sensor technologies are embedded in the built to calculate the force of the wind and activate the production of fog accordingly so that the cloud never gets smaller or larger than the building itself. *Blur's* volume is materialized then as textural modulation between opacity and transparency. However the structure, materials and forms were not intended as such, they simply emerged as the most effective devices to achieve spatial properties conducive of a bodily orientation Diller and Scofidio wanted to incite architecturally through their 'Dramaturgy Of Seduction':

'Seduction and tension to accentuate the power of the sense: being in close proximity; foreplay; having a loss of orientation; succumbing to desire; acting out passions to the point of exhaustion and seeking the next adventure'.

Inside *Blur*, the absence of walls flexes the space and in fact secures it with respect to the fog's visual disabling. The volume of the building offers itself as a playground for hide and seek games, where bodies flirt and bump. Hands and fingers rise to the challenge of replacing the eyes while unsettled proprioception looks for acclimation: an active grasping from the whole body is called upon as last resource to cross and dwell in the environment. But bodies' tactile training, undermined by the prevailing visual training, is not sufficient for a completely settled adjustment. As a result the body's perceptual experience is a 'process of errors and trials' (Gombrich). Gombrich defined perception as such a process under his conception of the 'beholder's share': an active '**sharing**' between stimulus

and observer. Further, as perceptual errors and trials settle down into a non-problematic whole the body is no longer in a state of perception, but in a state of 'illusion' (Gombrich). In pushing the anti-gravitational fantasy further, *Blur* proposes an unsettled and unsettling volumetric space which maintains the sharing: 'the body is marked by the interdependence with its environment through a structure of mutual flows and data transfer that is best configured by the notion of viral contamination'. (Ansell-Pearson cited in Braidotti). *Blur's* physical properties are conducive of an interactive merging as the Deleuzian 'becoming-imperceptible', 'to merge with one's environment' (Braidotti). But this is not some kind of total immediacy. The fault or gap in the visual field makes the built space 'not a good form, not a good gestalt' thus creating a 'pulse', 'a kind of throb of on/off on/off on/off...'(Krauss) therefore proposing 'a contamination or contagion that would have the peculiarity of putting in contact (without contact) contact *and* non-contact' (Derrida), an enactive navigation between confused and rested states, 'the alternating charge and discharge of pleasure' (Krauss in Foster) similar to the aleatoric 'intimacy as between the strand and the sea' (Merleau-Ponty).

This ebb and flow of body-built sensations steals the primacy of visual perception in calling upon other senses. Thus when Diller & Scofidio writes 'to accentuate the power of the sense', it is of course not the visual, nor any other single sense, but the undifferentiated entirety of the sensory apparatus, its synaesthetic, *ganzfeld*, condition.

At the beginning of 20th Century scientific experiments called *Ganzfeld* were conducted to unravel those empirical foundations of perception in the human body with the side assumption that the entirety of the sensory apparatus was interwoven as a *total field*. Most *Ganzfeld* looked at the sensory response of the body when suppressing one or more senses. More recent *Ganzfeld* were created by James Turrell as a series of all-built minimal interiors filled with light and accessible to audiences. Here no sense is suppressed, only the light parasites the clarity of spatial visual content, yet the result is similar to the early *Ganzfeld*. Drawing from J. J. Gibson's work based on *Ganzfeld*, Alva Noe highlights this finding: «light is not sufficient for vision». Unlike Gibson, and George Berkeley three centuries before, who derived scientific theories of the primacy of touch, Noe focuses on the triangulation touch-movement-propioception as the primary function of the perceptual act. It remains that as 'visual experience acquires spatial content because we come to understand visual qualities as having *tangible* significance» (Noe) touch comes to ground all other senses in an effort to synaesthetically capture tangibility. It does so under what

Noe calls a 'sensorymotor field': a 'knowledge', or 'skills', that constitutes what Francisco Varela calls our 'readiness-for-action', sensory habits which are learned through reiterations of perceptual acts and allows us to conduct activities in the world. But when the body faces a situation where the required perceptual involvement has very little (if not) been experienced, the body's sensorymotor field goes through a 'breakdown' (Varela in Crary & Kwinter). Original ganzfeld, like Turrell's, produce and maintain a state of breakdown. Yet in Turrell's the cause of the breakdown is not a breach of sensory ramification but the actual unfolding or activation of the whole apparatus, the experiential drift to ganzfeld, to a total field of perception which disrupts safety in vision.

Nonetheless in both cases the breakdown sustains experience: though it allows sensory *movements towards* resolution without an actual resolution, for as long as we can somehow perceptually act we continue to experience. Even in picnolepsy, as Derrida points out, radical perceptual disturbances do not abort experience. What Gombrich presented as 'sharing', and Noe as 'action', are enhanced as they recover their rhizomatic foundations. Perception is an action oriented towards tangibility, the more we physically question the tangible the more perceptual acts are incited. Touch has an ambivalent role in the movement to acquire perceptual content: as touch grounds the synaesthetic linkage, it also poses its very limits to it, and to a larger extent, to the sensorymotor knowledge. 'To touch is to touch a limit, a surface, a border, an outline'. (Derrida) As the built tampers with the limits of its concreteness, and thus with all senses, so does the body.

Turrell's ganzfeld, such as *Spread* (2003), play with the tangible and in doing so cultivates the locus of action in perception. They do not utilize the tensegrity principle but instead produce effects of tensegrity by using lighting to suspend the volumetric aspect of space. Such effect was already present in Alex Haw *LightHive*, and in both cases the spatial treatment can be said to disrupt the tangible frame of the built environment. In *Spread*, although the space is a rectangle (and this is very clearly integrated in one's mind as one enters the space through a clear-cut rectangular opening) the experience one engages with and retains in the end is not one of rectangularity or any kind of surfaces but of volume, depth, density and texture. The environment 'is no longer concerned with framing space but, rather, with a temporal modulation that implies a continual variation of matter' (Eisenman in Crary & Kwinter) as the body's materiality and kinetics are engulfed in light aligned with the inner walls' blur yet temporarily activating their shifting distance. The architectural matter here is no longer understood as a fixed recipient but as a mobile material that stimulates the

body. In *Blur*, like in *Spread*, spatial design looks for 'inventing laws of liquids and gases' (Deleuze in Braidotti) as its ambivalent anti-gravitational foundations. It presents itself as a picnoleptic drift based on the phenomenal delight and dizziness of the synaesthetic trigger: 'sensations of vertigo and disorder as sources of pleasure' (Virilio).

Spread like *Blur* do not present or represent anything seductive or pleasurable. Their subtext, if any, has no narrative, no order. Further, as objects they resist the settling of their form. In that sense they qualify for what Deleuze called a 'fold', an 'object-event' or 'objectile...where form is seen as continuous even as it articulates possible new relationships between vertical and horizontal, figure and ground' (Eisenman in Crary & Kwinter). Their meaninglessness, their lack of intelligibility, is not some kind of chaos but precisely the necessary requirements for the built to propose a pulsating and heuristic spatio-corporeality turning it into a pleasurable event. Therefore, 'although the event is always something that takes place in a global disorder devoid of meaning', it nonetheless constitutes 'a polyphonic chord in a situation of permanent transition' (de Sola-Morales).

Those considerations of such an architectural object-event are resonant with the scenographic space's ephemeral and eventful nature as well as its inherent border-clouding. As spatial comment on architecture, such built object-event was implied in Gordon Craig's understanding of the word *architectonic* when affirming his will 'to remove the Pictorial Scene but leave in its place the Architectonic Scene'. Craig's radical set for Stanislavski's *Hamlet* paralleled Fortuny's scenographic developments of the cyclorama and its 'infinity-of-space' that quickly spread in Europe (Baugh). Craig's spatial tactic is to collide multiple movable cycloramas (or are they multiplications of the negative space of the fourth wall?) dispersed throughout the volume of the stage, thus creating an unsettling friction between the scenographic architecture and the theatre's own architecture. The architectonic scene's pulsating interplay of three-dimensionality disturbs its monolithic architectural shell.

Adolphe Appia's dissatisfaction with Wagner's directorial application of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, led him to invent similar tactics of three-dimensional concrete pulsation. In the *Sketches for Parzifal* (1896), Appia reproduces an uneven and *semi-architectural* proscenium arch at the back of the stage which is traversed (as parasited) by a landscape. The scenographic formation again echoes in a disruptive manner the architectural presence accommodating it. Differently, but with the same intention, in his *Ryth-*

mic Spaces (1909), Appia proposes geometric back walls that drive the back lighting to truncate and dis-unify the volume of space. This kinetic fragmentation is pushed forward with the sketches of right-angular low and mid-level staircases which, again, in relation to lighting could have modulated the volumetric impression, but also and maybe more importantly were conceived as movable set pieces as Craig's screens for *Hamlet*. Appia's stairs, echoed by Craig's steps, came to become prominent in Hellerau where Delcroze experimented with eurythmics. Here again Appia looks for volumetric decomposition and pulsation to cancel any singular perspective, working towards a crucial 'multiplicity of focus'. Appia and Craig initiated scenography as a labyrinthine and fragmentary conception of the built for bodily kinetics: a perceptual hinge in the sense that 'the hinge doesn't just connect; it provokes a total modulation of openness and closedness' (Kwinter in Acconci)

Such an understanding of the scenographic built has been widely influential in stage design and has led to reformulation of the theatre-house itself leading to theatrical spaces such as laboratories and black boxes. From the Futurist experiments such as Balla's 'light ballet' (*Fireworks* 1917) and the Bauhaus innovations of 'felt volume' of Oskar Schlemmer, Walter Gropius's 'Total Theatre' and Frederick Kiesler's '*space-stage*', to the mid-century scenographic complications of Josef Svoboda, the major scenographers have been those who have found ways of technically engineering further phenomenal confusion on stage. Josef Svoboda first picked up on Appia and Craig's stairs and screens as well as Gropius' mechanical and spherical 'Total Theatre'. Svoboda quickly moved on to applying technologies of his time to those basic scenographic parameters, particularly with respect to filmic projections: on isolated large screens at the Universal Expo 1958 (*Laterna Magika*), or as multiscreen aggregates (*Polyekran*). Svoboda persisted further with exploring the semi-materialization of non-concrete elements such as projections (*August Sunday*) and light itself (his patented *walls of light*, '*La Contra-Luce*'). Svoboda never stopped looking for the technological enhancement of architectonics and their anti-and-multi-perspectival character: either merging together some of the discussed innovations or looking for new ambiguous membranes/surfaces such as mirrors (*Waiting For Godot*, 1970). As Svoboda considered that 'scenography is responsible for the ebb and flow of the action on stage' (Burian), the need for stage design to propose malleable spatial layers indeed makes complete sense.

More recent scenographers and directors have continued to explore Svoboda's concerns and achievements. In his *neo-gesamtkunstwerk* Heiner

Goebbels powerfully invests into all aspects of the performance while leaving them independent from one another, non-aligned/non-unified. Conflicts and discrepancies emerge between all the elements present on stage. In *Hashirigaki* (2002), Goebbels creates effects of tensegrity by using lighting (from pure light sources to actual video projections) to implement this oscillating body-built co-existence. In a similar fashion, William Kentridge projects his own drawings as lighting that fragments volumetric spatiality and flex its borders and corners (see *Magic Flute*, 2005).

Less concerned with projection, and more interested with achieving effects of tensegrity through the concrete subversion of concreteness, Ralph Koltai has made extensive use of ambivalent elements and ambiguous materials which are fine and complex inheritances from Svoboda's original experiments.

More radical in his approach, Romeo Castellucci and his company *Societas Raffaello Sanzio* play with the ambivalent spectrum of transparent concreteness by materially investing into the fourth wall, providing it with more or less translucent layers, mirrors, surfaces and other objects. The tensegrity effects's convex/concave uncertainty engulfs the body. Castellucci says that he is not interested in 'our insertion into space, but in space's insertion into us' (present author's translation). With Castellucci's work *non-finito* is produced through *sfumato*, itself vibrating from the proscenium arch's now materialized fourth wall and its enhancement through extreme diffusion of light that originates from non-theatrical lighting apparatuses. The volumetric densities and qualities of space are such that they absorb the bodies texturally, gnaw on their borders and modulate their phenomenal disintegration according to added clear cut directional theatrical lights.

Again, and in the likes of Koltai, Kentridge and Goebbels, a throb of clarity/obscurity, visibility/invisibility, as well as gravity/antigravity, is driven primarily by the scenographic conditions. Although the disturbance they provoke in their architectural containers is not always explicit, those scenographic strategies are nevertheless critically investing into possibilities of mobile and vaporous architectural landscapes at the heart of static built containers: they poetically challenge the everyday politics of space.

One might then consider the notion of *site-specificity* as it resonates in scenographic terms as a more direct and obvious challenge to the everyday politics of space. For instance, in *Hotel Pro Forma's Algebra Of Place 1* (2006), the scenographic response to the site wrestles with the construction and understanding of the body as a linear and geometric presence. Multiple perspectives are overlapped within a conflictual and non-frontal perspective of observation as vertical deviation offered by the site itself.

Like perspective, scale is made variable too by the use of the intersection of the site's distancing options and the added scenographic elements such as video projections. The scenography takes the site as first material, turning the overall built environment into a multi-perspectival hinge in which corporeality is framed/unframed, unleashed from its autonomous fantasy and offered as active and transient presence.

Vertical deviation again, but with a switch to an upward gaze, in Station House Opera's *Piranesi In New York*, the most basic architectural element, the brick, is the focus of all bodily movements. Located on the Brooklyn Bridge the piece presents the single physical activity of picking up and transporting bricks repeated and progressively elevated in space. Nothing is actually constructed, only the concrete aggregates of bricks vary in quantity and volumes throughout a vertical arrangement of space. The scenography is the material of the performance and as such it is constantly transformed by the body.

In a radical twist of what is considered site-specific, Bert Neumann has realized various set designs he calls '*Neustadt*': quite literally 'new cities' built at the heart of Volksbühne in Berlin, overlapping, even cancelling, stage and auditorium and where sometimes audience members can wander around as the performers. In Frank Castorf's production of *The Idiot*, Neumann had multiple buildings constructed in the auditorium, while the stage is supporting scaffolding structures for audience to seat. The division is further blurred as the performers physically invest the scaffolds. In Neumann's *Neustadt* recorded and projected media are the principal tool to exacerbate the absence of a single viewpoint in the empirical and quite literal built confusion. Both projected and lighting elements, as well as concrete structures, co-exist to unravel a phenomenal multiplicity of focus: different level of imagery and perception arise from multiple perspectives, scales, surfaces, depths and borders, and propose a rhizomatic spatial distribution aligned with bodies social and physical realities. The magnified and subversive multidimensionality of the urban geography here formulates a built yet unfixed 'pornographic dimension' (Castorf cited in Van Den Berg) that compels audiences to further 'examine the fault lines in their own fields of perception' (Van Den Berg).

In all those staged examples, the scenography offers itself as a *body*, an extension of and extended in the performer's body, as a re-invention of its built container. Thus I want to expose the scenographic space's first and foremost subtext as the tampering with tangibility through emphatic techniques of gloomy visualisation such as tensegrity effects. Those techniques look to unravel their own visual impact through the tectonic

subversion of their architectural frames. This is then the critical comment embedded in the static/mobile paradoxical situation of the scenographic space within architecture. It looms spatio-corporeal modalities of experience as oscillating departures from architectural gestalt foundations towards the broader and scattered empirical foundations of human perception, the difficultly conceivable *ganzfeld*. This built hinges on all possible aspects of spatio-corporeality flirting with yet never resolving into any single, whole, form. As it is 'activated, completed, turned on, only with human energy and effort', the built as event or pulse 'hinges like the rolling heat of sex itself seeking the exquisite maximal state between frenzy and control' (Kwinter in Acconci).

In conclusion, scenography shows aesthetic predicaments for a re-conception of the built now invested in corporeality. A 're-appropriation of space with a re-appropriation of the body' (Lefebvre) that demands a re-evaluation of structure and properties of construction. As the structural principle of tensegrity is open to multiple possibilities of development and engineering which can be further experimented with, innovations in reflective and transparent materials as well as light and lighting are necessary components to the future of the kind of spatio-corporeal pulse I have discussed throughout this article. This is fleshed out in contemporary architecture in Zaha Hadid's work based on the recently engineered innovations of laminated glass and its curvilinear flexibility which allows Hadid to conceive built environments as floating landscapes, echoing Frank O'Ghery. This is also present in Rem Koolhaas's research in the engineering of solid *pixellisation* integrated within smooth and flat built surfaces thus bringing inside the built splashes of natural light and organic fragments of landscapes, a concern shared by Norman Foster, Renzo Piano and Jean Nouvel's buildings whose fundamental orientation towards natural/exterior light is most harmoniously unequivocal.

All those strategies propose spatial designs which flirt with their own exteriority and with anti-gravitational fantasy, at some phenomenal level, by fragmenting and flexing the content and outline of rigid surfaces. In embedding gloomy natural properties those architectures affirm a certain spatial unintelligibility where 'the conceptual and perceptual become increasingly indiscernible' (Harris in Buchanan & Lambert), or what Ignasi de Sola-Morales has termed 'weak architecture' as 'a discreet folding back to a perhaps secondary function, a pulling back to a function that projects beyond the hypothetical ground of things'. It is also possible to conceive of non-rigid materials as foundation for an even *weaker* built environment.

For the dance piece *Vanilla Space* (2003) Herbert Stattler created the set out of large silicone sheets spread across the volume of a gallery space, undulating from floor to ceiling. His set makes us appreciate the basic inherent qualities of silicone: its light weight, flexibility, undulation, and its stickiness (indeed silicone attaches itself ephemerally to most materials as well as itself). Those properties confronted with human bodies are activated and cause the rubbing off of the boundaries of the location as well as of the sheets' own surfaces and territory. The performance consists then in a friction between bodies and spatial volume as between 'frenzy and control', producing 'a body *touching* as much as *touched*, as flesh that is touched-touching' (Derrida). Arguably the built space itself is also touching as much as it is touched. As indeed an architecture that is touched-touching is 'a promiscuous and articulated fold, a magically flexible erotic device that grows and contracts and slips and slides, assembling and disassembling in a perpetual act of play and tumescence, involution, connection, and humor'.(Kwinter in Acconci)

I understand geography and pornography as gestalts: self-referential optic domains constructed from the prevailing static abstraction of surfacing. They constitute the two ends of a spectrum that divides the body and space by turning them into a deictic built paired up (and dependant upon) a deictic flesh: distinct and autonomous territories of experience. In contrast to such conceptions, the gloomy spatial abstractions I have discussed in this article look for trajectories of body-built relationality and commonality. They rewrite the folding/unfolding of the *body-landscape*: nomadic topographies of spatio-corporeality where the body and the built share an economy of intelligibility. As they gloom over the limits of perception as we know it, they electrify the undifferentiated embracing of body-built matters and *physicalise* experience further (in a sense that they stimulate innovative perceptual training, or re-training), they are conducive (rather than coercive) of what I here want to call a *geo-pornographic* understanding of spatial design, which I take to be a paradigmatic condition of the scenographic experience as integrated architectural comment.

The sensual abstractions generated from *geo-pornographic* approaches to designing space look for 'all the ways in which matter manners or articulates itself' (Colebrook in Buchanan & Lambert). Thus they modulate phenomenal harmony and dizziness, throbbing between the finite agents of unified aesthetics norms and the probably infinite landscape of human perception. Drifting between gestalt and ganzfeld, they confront the body to the contingency of the world's solidity and its own virtualities: 'attuning ourselves to life-as-becoming requires disorienting ourselves

from established spatial norms in order to attend to spaces unfolded in the play of movement' (Lorraine in Buchanan & Lambert). In this sense, and to 'prepare us to act upon, to sense as best we can, the solidity and non-solidity of indeterminate boundaries on earth itself' (Wilson Harris cited in Mercer), the geo-pornographic ethos incorporates 'the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of' (Braidotti), inciting us tactfully as Merleau-Ponty urged us:

'Not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.'

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