

## EVIDENCE OF THEATRE

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Evidence might be common or aloof. It is trace proof of a moment in time, an available set of facts that indicate whether a belief is true or valid. From here onwards, matter becomes spongy and porous: information leaks in all directions; it may be wrung out or filled back in, crossed out, appended. Daily extrapolations reposition reality of all kinds into a form of putty that can be abused and stretched. The word is live and dangerous, magical, poetic and full of portent. Dirt is evidence. An ink spill, a thumb mark: a handprint has never been more confused between a location of possible humour and horror. Petals, fleece, fat, coins, text. The grain of a voice is evidence. The composite notes belong to emotion, to the verb curves of song and speech. The dent of a curtain, the time it moved, the direction it was drawn, pulled back, never opened – all are evidence of the choreographed potential of the window to frame and imply. The fundamental structural agenda of evidence is scattered, but it has rhythm and logic. It is a psychic weather that weaves through space like light, like rain, like wind.

Theatre is a blueprint for potential, for literal or lyrical outlines that sketch the intent of a familiar world several elevations removed. Theatre encourages the belief in phantom landmarks: the greenest tree canopy; the most prized gooseberries; a cat of exceptional and glorious lustre. There might be loss, murder, labour, pleasure, crime. There might be animals or piano. Theatre descends like a wide mask with many tiny holes through which an audience may choose where to look or simply close its eyes. The mask of theatre generates and subverts. Both behind it and through it lies a mixture of pleasure and fear, a little piece of new sky that is neither practice, nor theory, but encouragement of a breakdown of meaning. Dust offers theatre, particles of people and their lived activities. The skull is a private stage in which to mope and wring hands. The mind's self-abasement or congratulation is a continual set of notes which inflect tone and physical reception. People twist and flex. They tie themselves into knots, where often the most private, dark or erotic pieces sit encapsulated within the internal curves of the knot itself. The knots accumulate and intent is hidden so translation can only be creative and speculative. Theatre questions the possibility of moral rearmament. Of course, the body is key to the spectacle, but how that figure may be resolved is elastic: parasite or ghost, corpse, toy, machine or lover. Theatre invites such shade only to cast bright electric light down into it.

*Take professional wrestling: what do you read? Signs of emotion, more than emotion itself. The combatants exhibit the state of their souls (pain, joy, rage, vengeance, normality), all their expressions are chosen to present to the masses an immediate and exhaustive reading of their motives. Here there is not the ambiguity of life.*

ROLAND BARTHES, THE WORLD OF WRESTLING; MYTHOLOGIES, 1972

8th floor

Ground floor

Upstairs and downstairs galleries mimic the idea of architectural transcripts – of space as lengths of theoretical sequences that connect via implied lines of narrative.

On the ground floor, ten paintings, five panel dioramas and four floor sculptures fill the newly built space of an exploded but diagrammatic building: four walls and a roof. Each sculpture (one allocated for every wall and in turn for each compass point: North, South, East and West) correlates with a certain trope of performativity involved in evoking the continual comedy and repeated exposing of self: therapy and the anxiety space of elastic self-analysis; the soft space of domestic enclosure and collapse; the civic opportunity of the table, of the politics involved in the possibility of a shared meal; the ludic space of play and chance, and its simulation re-written as common architecture, as roof, as ducting. Formally, each sculpture has one of several common details – windows, bridges, tables, holes – nodes of movement which offer the possibility to instigate a physical change of direction. The five 'theatre' dioramas are evidence of this manipulation and analysis: a Dr Freud advertising surrogate makes pointed behavioural remarks via the banal disguise of promoting a canonised Kellogg's breakfast cereal. The implications are grand and absurd, problematically naïve. Each panel sets an architectural but miniaturised stage for civic activity: the zoo, the market, the factory, the analyst, the cultural centre. Paintings are monumental backdrops. They offset and encourage. They shape and manipulate connectivity, warp expected scale, offer landscapes and corrupt personality. With every visual option presented like a default social mirror, the opportunity for theatre becomes exponential: a play, within a play, within a play; the theatre of theatre, with one thing after another consuming, plagiarising and re-scripting itself.

On the 8th floor, a CGI video – *Writing A Play (dark blue orchard)* – is housed within a structure whose formal qualities once more replicate the classic containment values: four walls and a roof. On one side of this sculpture there are the repeated familiar motifs of houses and bodies, hearts and windows, each lodged at unusual scale, and all things to open or disappear inside. On the other side, the video plays across a seamless and monumental LED screen. The evacuated middle cavity between these two sides is something like the physical evidence of making, a graphic diagram of the scripting of theatre or mechanics of production with all its guts of electronics and deliberate items of debris inserted alongside. The classic walls of theatre are mocked and rearranged, with the formal presence of viewers performing theatre by the very act of consuming it.

The primary video sound is a single voiceover – actor Gwendoline Christie – delivering a script of 36 "tenets" of related but non-chronological narrative. There is no visible human protagonist, rather a cast of recurring animal ciphers who punctuate different chapters of built and natural environments: a deer, an owl, a cat, a drunk frog, a mouse, birds and ants. A refrain in the script is repeated with increasing prophecy or melancholy: *Butter ly, plus elephant, plus cat, plus dead man, plus sailor, plus nun equals deer*. Taken from Roger Caillois's 1958 book *Man, Play and Games*, the phrasing relies on known quantities and co-opts them into simulation, into simple mathematic terms that in turn transform to illustrative metaphor: the animal is both its libidinal innocent self, but also a surrogate number in a wider and more elaborate set of human emotional terms.

The mechanics of theatre reinforce in image-terms that there are two kinds of light: the light of the sun, and the light of the moon. The stage again draws itself between audience and actor, between sound and silence, gloss and shadow. Gesture is something like the moment at the top of breath where language teeters, and performance is made. The experience of live theatre exposes the limitations of language and rationality in expressing human identity; daily and incidental actions also create billions of transcripts of theatrical consequence. Being and meaning is no accident. The restaurant, doctor, factory, zoo, plaza – all could be witnessed with conventions of choreography in mind. Perhaps then, the body and how it moves through these contexts is the irreducible difference between architecture and spectacle.

Writing a play is like building a house and vice versa. The process is collective, but defaults subjectively to the inclination and style of the individual, the builder, the author, the politician. Patience and knowledge are categories. Time and economy are others. Possession and access are sometimes granted to an audience or inhabitant. The elemental home might be represented by four walls and a roof. The theoretical theatre mimics this formal equation: four walls and a roof, meaning both house and theatre share the same fundamental containment values. They each also possess hearts and bodies in continually shifting quantities. Both are model reflections of our classic traits and narcissisms: social structures as elaborate forms of games, and behaviour as a form of play. They are reciprocal vessels through which visitors or viewers as embodied subjects ceaselessly generate writing or speech. The word *theatre* contains *there* and *at*; the word *home* contains *me* and *oh*: each basic incidental scraps of exclamation and location. Through theatre, the domestic sphere of family dramas is concealed or revealed behind curtains. The stage, choreographed with furniture, is the focus of voyeuristic acts. It is a shelf on which to place and scrutinise contemporary questions. The omnipotent hand of the scriptwriter reaches in to shuffle things about. In the bed or bath of one's private home, anything might happen: figures combine and isolate with infinite variation. Bodies love and eat. They bump heads and gain weight, leave partners or birth children. They bleed and spit and fall to pieces.

In both house and theatre, the walls – literal and metaphorical – contain and obfuscate. But they can also be rearranged, superimposed, broken down, knocked into windows, or rigged into extra rooms. All surfaces present the possibility to act as a screen, to diagram stories both told and enacted where the rhythm and focus on moment or duration provokes a very human kind of anxiety: watching the watcher, critiquing the critic and so on, with maximum variation. Theatre undermines the apparent solidity of objects and bodies in the present, whilst its deliberate and collective space underscores the individual privacy of the home. Both are sites for negotiation of a social identity. Perhaps psychology and emotion in acting are just another form of daily commodified exchange, facilitated through easily digestible stereotypes in return for the price of a simple ticket.

The flow of a building is circulatory, like blood. The corridors and openings mimic the structural lines of a body's rational functionality. The kitchen is the colloquial heart of the home. A heart, too, has walls and cavities; substances move via osmosis, pressure, hormonal instigation. The heart fills and empties with continual commitment; brains mobilise the action. The articulations of bone joint and building mortar are also not so dissimilar. If love is involved, the initial directions are those of pleasure and movement. There is always speech between the lines. And between the set and the script, there is type and program, physics, power, objects and events in all sizes.

## 8th floor

100g puno.5

Following a singular voice — 'I' — the script is aware of its complicity in a theatrical event. This voice occasionally splits into 'we' and the control is relinquished, but disembodied. The voice is melancholic and solipsistic, but it *performs* too: the audience is thus privy to and must engage with both the images of performance and the mechanics of it. The theatre of theatre!

A floor plan of the built walls on the ground floor, is replicated in cast aluminium lines on the 8th floor. These plates map a ghost trace of mimicked space, but they also house fragmented texts like stage directions that offer poetical suggestion of what is happening in an identical position downstairs. Aluminium mice populate throughout. Their intent is to diagram, but also to mirror and disorient. Laid out on the tiled floor, logically they represent how space might transpose vertically through a building, giving notational evidence of mapping at sky level: North, East, South and West, but engaged with new vertigo.

A fifth and final sculptural counterpart to the four floor-based works downstairs proposes what happens in the aftermath wreckage of a conceptual theatre space: two characters, women, lie deserted, widows or lovers, *Women Counting*. Faceless on their soft cushioned base, the lovers list and organise major and minor helping terms. Their apparatus is one of scripting and exit, innuendo and poise – they are writing their own alternate play, a deviated end refrain. Like a degraded umbrella shipwreck, *Women Counting* is the final structural counterpart to complete the obsessively replicated motif: a single roof above four walls.

The ground and 8th floor are deliberate continuations of one another: separate, but intertwined, like the mobius circuitry of inhalation. The protagonists of each exist between the works: as characters in the video or directly extracted images. There is the frenzy of vermin, and the exquisite elegance of the natural world. All animals – mice, deer, birds, ants – are also universal ciphers, units of currency that might be vehicles for default human fears, for the literal low-level streaming of anxiety that interweaves through daily lives. There are complicated and fanatic systems of quantifying pleasure via the social function of games and performance, the corruption of intoxication, of chance and competition. Perhaps this consistent tautology of theatre implies that architecture, rather than being about functional standards, is composed instead by love and death. And people, like puppets or masks or the audience, are predisposed to the corruption of living, vessels of permanent reciprocity and conflict.

The video soundtrack is composed by Beatrice Dillon. The animation is by Adam Sinclair. With great thanks to LG Electronics and Visualization.