

In- Between House and Home

Passage

This paper explores the role everyday activities and gestures play in producing certain ways of being or placing. Its point of departure is a passage in-between exhibition / symposium, architecture / gesture, art / knowledge, moving / thinking. This passage addresses both the performative content of the symposium / exhibition, *A Question(ing) of Gesture* and the architectural context of the Opera House in which this paper was first enacted as performative lecture in the form of a walk and series of readings. However, at the time of writing, its author had never been to an Opera. To find a way into this house this paper focuses instead on the actions of others who in their everyday gestures are also located in-between and whose gestures intimately connect them to a similar place of performance. Architecture's habitual representation in public is the complete and distinct object,¹ this

1. For a discussion of the representation of architecture as objects see TOM HOLBROOK: *The Commonplace*, an essay forming part of the catalogue published on the occasion of *Presences*, an exhibition at The Architecture Foundation from 29 March-13 May 2001.

paper explores a story of making that challenges this representation. Drawing on personal research conducted at The Arts Theatre in the City of Cambridge, it unravels the daily cleaning and maintenance activities involved in maintaining a place of performance. In-between audience and stage, viewer and viewed, a multitude of maintenance activities are deemed necessary to preserve the public representation and reception of performance. In exploring these hidden rhythms and routines this paper investigates the gestures contingent in these activities and how they interact with and produce the subject and place of their location.

The Voice of Maintenance. In *Unsung Voices* Carolyn Abbate refers to the operatic voice as »a sense of certain isolated and rare gestures that may be perceived as modes of subjects' enunciations« - »music as embodied within the live performance of a work.«² What modes of enunciation can be perceived from gestures of maintenance? What music is embodied in this live performance? Further, can the rhythmic gestures of cleaning like certain operas for Abatte also have moments that ›speak across‹ their prescribed routine?

Like the Opera House in Leipzig, the Arts Theatre in Cambridge looks to traditional conventions of performance for its form and layout. Its auditorium comprises a stage facing raked seating, in the form of stalls, circle and two boxes. A bridge, fly tower and projection room, along with associated rehearsal and dressing rooms, form back of house areas, while front of house is composed of box offices, public foyers and bars. Drawing on material gathered through observing and experiencing gestures and duration of maintenance activities at the Arts Theatre, this talk is an investigation into the processes and practices that constitute creative production.³

2. ABBATE, CAROLYN: *Unsung Voices*, Princeton / New Jersey 1991, pp. ix-xii // 3. This investigation stems from earlier research which explored the practical work of artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles through the theoretical lenses of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Rosi Bradotti and Moira Gatens. See STRATFORD, HELEN: *Collective Assemblages, Embodiment and Enunciations*, in: Rugg, Judith / Hinchcliffe, Daniel (eds.): *Recoveries and Reclamations: Advances in Art and Urban Futures Volume 2*, Bristol 2002, pp.107-117

Within traditional assumptions of artistic / architectural production, creation and maintenance are seen as very different activities: One involves the creation of a new work or space and one is simply the restoration of an existing one. This assumption forms the starting point of the following sections of this paper. Four sections combine directions from a performance get-in, instructions from cleaning manuals, comments from maintenance staff and quotes from critical theory sources with selected images from the Opera House to position the space of performance alongside maintenance activities. As they progress they uncover similarities and overlaps in the processes and practices that go into creating a performance and those that maintain its public reception.

This paper builds on previous research exploring maintenance activities required to maintain the representation of architecture.⁴ However, it extends that research by rethinking space itself as composed of gestures, focusing on the specific movements and actions produced by the activities of maintenance and the translations they infer on the building. By exploring the space produced through gestures it asks what is at stake in architecture when actions provoke place to be re-thought as an assemblage of physical and temporal dynamics.

Housework / Hausarbeit. Location 1: entrance stairs to public foyer (Images 1a & 1b).

Technical clutter:

parcan cp62
2k fresnei
parcan cp61
groundrow
flys live
house blacks
4m drifts
drifted bar⁵

Hygienic clutter:

hand towels
dust
crumbs
ice cream pots
chewing gum
sweet wrappers
cigarette butts
mobile phones

4. See STRATFORD, HELEN: ›*Unpleasant Matters*‹ in *Material Matters: Architecture and Material Practice*, London 2006, pp. 209-224 // 5. Text taken from *Hanging Plot for Amy's View*, The Arts Theatre Cambridge 2006



[1a]



[1b]

[1a] The Opera House, Leipzig, Performative Lecture // [1b] The Arts Theatre, Cambridge, Vacuuming, Auditorium

»One enters the House by ascending a massive staircase, conventionally framed by a traditional arch«, »iconographic references displaying classical conventions: porticos, grand staircases, allegorical sculptures, colour schemes of gold, crimson and blue« combine with hierarchy of »private spaces of boxes and more public foyers.«⁶ A symbolic monument with its »extraordinary richness [...] [that, H.S.] transform the spectator into a character participating [...] as a decorative extra and [a social, H.S.] actor«, »a place of artifice, illusion« and »a collection of pleasures and marvels.«⁷

Like the Opera House, the Theatre as place of performance is both setting and accumulation of artistic creation. In contrast, countless ongoing and mundane activities, including polishing, mopping, scrubbing, wiping, dusting and vacuuming, maintain this place everyday. In Cambridge the maintenance staff of the Arts Theatre consists of three people, whose adherence to a daily cleaning schedule combines with over 22 different implements / machines and 15 types of cleaning fluid, to form the basis of an endless maintenance strategy. At the stage door leaves and cigarette stubs migrate across a tarmac path. Every morning, the path is swept. Whilst in the auditorium every seat must be prised apart, ice cream cartons and gum painstakingly extricated from its folds and carefully disposed of. In the theatre ice-cream cartons are dangerous »unhygienic objects« whose »material presence confronts an alternative use of the spaces that they occupy«.⁸ Maintenance activities remove all traces of this »out of place«⁹ matter, ensuring it does not hinder the reception of performance. In contrast to a performance, its actions are rudimentary and functional, mere restoration, a removal of accretions and a reversion to an original state.

6. BERESON, RUTH: *The Operatic State*, London 2002, pp. 4-5 // 7. CLEMENT, CATHERINE: *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, London 1997, pp. 6-9 // 8. For a discussion of how the practices related to clutter constitute another aspect of the ordering of time and space in the home see CWERNER, S. B. / METCALFE, A: *Storage and Clutter, Discourses and Practices of Order in the Domestic World*, in: *Journal of Design History*, No. 3, 2003 // 9. See DOUGLAS, MARY: *Purity and Danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*, London 1984

Libretto. Location 2: foyer of, auditorium looking in (Images 2a & 2b).

Cleaning Schedule:

Brush: removal of matter: lumps, wrappers, loose debris: stage door: daily

Polish: addition of sheen: door plates and handles auditorium: daily

Vacuum: collection of matter: dust, mud, vomit powder auditorium: daily with carpet cleaner: only during dark weeks

Back of house

Front of house

Green rooms

Rehearsal rooms

Box

Circle

Foyer

»We never clean the stage.«

»I'm gone by the time the performance starts.«

»Here, I'm part of the fixtures.«

»They notice the first day when I'm away.«¹⁰

In the theatre spaces are organised and structured according to distinct binary codes: public / private, audience / actor, front of house / back of house, civic / domestic, expressed through material and spatial treatment. The stage is preserved and bolstered as the place of artistic creation and its clear division from the audience materially manifest in the presence of the fire safety curtain as much as through the practice of theatre managers, stage-hands, artistic directors and actors alike. Likewise cleaning activities are spatially regulated. Relegated off stage to the ›domestic‹ realm of the offices and dressing rooms or to the ›public‹ areas of auditorium and bars, while timetabled outside of ›public‹ hours, they are simultaneously spatially and temporally hidden. Their only trace becomes their occasional non-presence registered by the occurrence of litter and layering of dust. Evidence of

10. Maintenance staff, The Arts Theatre, Cambridge 2006



[2a]



[2b]

[2a] The Opera House, Leipzig, Parkettfoyer // [2b] The Arts Theatre, Cambridge, Safety Curtain

litter becomes a register of absent maintenance staff. It momentarily disturbs the illusory and seamless operation of this public institution. Revealing the presence of maintenance activities in the theatre opens the public institution to the pressures of what it conventionally prohibits or makes invisible. Here, static conceptions of public / private are pushed together in a space to examine the processes of subjectification and the power differentials at work within both conceptions. Their presence unveils the socio-spatial assemblage which supports the utterances of public / private, clean / dirty, acceptable / abject activity, and shows how each ›original‹ ›work of art‹, building, or performance, is, in fact, infected and influenced by ›mundane‹ ›maintenance activities.¹¹

Refrain. Location 3: assembly room, circle foyer (Images 3a & 3b).

Cleaning contract:

Objectives 1: to maintain a clean, safe and hygienic environment

Objectives 2: to support the theatre in providing a welcoming and supportive attitude

600 seats, 8 aisles, 130 rows, 20 flights of stairs, 40 handrails, 192 steps, 25 landings, 4 public foyers, 2 front of desk areas, 14 toilets: male and female, 28 corridors, 24 door plates, 6 pairs of door handles, 32 bins, 15 cups of tea, 5 plates

1 umbrella, 1 programme, 1 five pence piece

»You can tell what type of a performance it has been and the time of year it is by what is left behind.«

»I never go on the stage, but I think about dancing - about line dancing.«¹²

11. This argument draws upon the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles whose 1969 manifesto for Maintenance art proclaims ›Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials.‹ UKELES, MIERLE LADERMAN: *Maintenance Art Manifesto* (1969), in: Stiles, K. / Selz, P. (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, Berkeley / London 1996. For a discussion of Ukeles' work in relation to the public institution of the museum see MOLESWORTH, HELEN: *House Work and Art Work*, October 92, Spring 2000 // 12. Maintenance staff, The Arts Theatre, Cambridge



[3b]



[3a]

[3a] The Opera House, Leipzig, Chandelier, Konzert Foyer // [3b] The Arts Theatre, Cambridge, Cleaner's Key

Every day, before opening hours, areas of maximum visual impact are carefully selected in the theatre to undergo scrupulous levels of rinsing, polishing and buffing to attain a presentable public face. The stage and the curtain are designated ›technical structures‹ to be cleaned by back of house technical team only and a ticket office is designated a ›public non-food area‹ and has priority to be cleaned before a certain time. Meanwhile the removal of finger print contaminations on the brass plate of the foyer handrails takes priority over those of the back stairs.

Strategic paths are selected by the maintenance staff to negotiate the vast territory of mirrors, make-up, velvet, timber veneer and brass plating. Chosen for their optimum cleaning routes and accessed via dedicated keys, these alternative paths and passages translate the fabric of the building into a series of surfaces each with its own cleaning machine and associated practice. Counter thresholds are established, imperceptible in construction but indicated by tide marks left on the fabric of the building. A stair swept over and over, an arm rest lifted and dusted beneath; the repeated removal of all traces of inhabitation forces a specific and intimate occupation at the level of the detail. Here large scale order and perception becomes connected to minute and local practices.

Ritournello. Location 4: stairs to second public foyer (Images 4a & 4b).
Rig schedule:

Get in will start at 8:00am on Monday 23rd Oct.

Crew call for get in & fit up is 8 stage and 4 Lx

This should go down to a show call from 7:00pm

Show call is 2 stage, 1 flys, Lx board op. & 1 dresser.¹³

6 hours: 3 people:

Top floor 6am – 8am: Elaina: offices, toilets and timber panelling.

Basement 6am – 8am: Vaughan: dressing rooms.

Ground, 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors, 5am – 12am: Steve: auditorium, circle and offices.

13. Text taken from Rig Schedule for Amy's View, The Arts Theatre Cambridge 2006



[4a]



[4b]

[4a] The Opera House, Leipzig, Haupt-Treppe // [4b] The Arts Theatre, Cambridge, Litter collection, Auditorium

»We have our routines.«

»I always start at the top and work my way down.«¹⁴

A path crossed over and over, a floor swept again and again, an aria recited night after night: negotiations of place are conducted through the repetition of tasks and activities. In the theatre while relentless rehearsals ensure word-perfect delivery, the politics of use are continually reproduced by the repetition of the cleaning routine. Yet, the maintenance routine also establishes counter rhythms consistent with the specific maintenance gestures used and the spaces cleaned. The all absorbing drone and solitary practice of the vacuum is ever present, ebbing and flowing according to its spatial proximity, only marked by the alarming silence of its abrupt cessation. On the stairs a slow and methodical march delineates every flight as the brush head repeatedly meets either side of each step, interspersed with a swift staccato of the lead being wound back in. Whilst in the Auditorium, the pianissimo polishing of brass door plates forms prelude and finale to the three time waltz of each chair inspection: Open – brush – close... open – brush – close. Pace by pace, step by step, the building is measured out according to the rhythm of cleaning. The cleaning routine is a work made specifically for the building yet affording it a different scale. Whistling a small repeated tune, moving backwards and forwards between rows of unaddressed audience and without access to the stage, the gestures of maintenance occupy and create a place in-between audience and actor, body and space. A place that speaks across its prescribed function through gestures that re-code this very public arena into a series of personal choreographs and private territories. Here memories of other lives flood in as discrete traces of inhabitation become punctuations in the background hum of the vacuum.

Finale: Cleaning Up. In a theatre performance a new assembly of fragments carve out and trace a new work. In contrast, maintenance routines appear quotidian, banal, and repetitive – simply cleaning up – innocent, expedient, and straightforward. This perception of artistic

14. Maintenance staff, The Arts Theatre, Cambridge 2006

versus mundane creation is premised on a series of assumptions that maintain and are maintained by everyday activities and places, what should be done and where. Such conventions do not merely describe or represent, they intervene in the world, functioning to organize its ›social character‹. They instigate a ›framework of intelligibility‹ which maintains explicit propositions about bodies and places, deciding what types of utterances may be ›legitimately‹ extracted from them.¹⁵ The legitimisation of certain actions allocates designations and has material bearing on the way lives are lived.¹⁶

Shifts in assemblages of objects and activities which coagulate certain conventions can make present habitually disregarded places. In its location in-between two stories of making: theatre and the maintenance of its reception, this paper shifts the way both are perceived. Rather than define a rigid boundary between the two, this paper proposes their contiguity. This contamination of the reception of performance by maintenance challenges its public presentation, revealing the plethora of human activities this place depends upon for its production.

For Henry Lefebvre, »the everyday is the theatre for rhythms and processes imposed by socio economic organisation of production, consumption, circulation and habit.«¹⁷ Here »identity is performatively constructed by the very [material, social and temporal, H.S.] expressions that are said to be its results.«¹⁸ However, this materialisation of bodies through assemblages reiterated by rhythmic repetition is not simply a passive inscription. The socio-spatial and temporal assemblage of a human body and its circumstances imp-

15. GATENS, M.: *Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power*, in: P. Patton, (ed.), *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell 1996, p. 178 // 16. For a greater discussion of this idea of spatial perception see KAUFMAN, ELEANOR: *Living Virtually in a Cluttered House*, in: Angelaki, vol. 7 no 3, 2002, p.161 // 17. LEFEBVRE, HENRI / RÉGULIER, CATHERINE: *The Rhythmanalytical Project*, in: Lefebvre, Henri: *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, London 2004, p. 73 // 18. BUTLER, JUDITH: *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, New York / London 1999, p.25, see also GROSZ, ELIZABETH: *Architecture From the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Spaces*, The MIT Press, Cambridge / Massachusetts 2001, p. 23 and BUTLER, JUDITH: *Bodies that Matter: on the discursive limits of »sex«*, New York / London 1993

ly specific conditions regarding the status of maintenance activities in society. Yet, at the same time, in the physical repetition of steps and movement the body engages in a dialogue with its surroundings. Pace is a measure of building that connects a body to its physical environment, and »through the mediation of rhythms an animated space comes into being, which is an extension of the space of bodies.«¹⁹

In the theatre maintenance gestures act as translations. While some translations serve to reinforce the traditional politics of use delineated by stage and audience, front of house / back of house, others propose their own choreographs: parallel paths and activities that set up an exploration of other possibilities. Here, maintenance becomes complicit in the desire to reproduce the place of performance as timeless, yet its very existence, its relentless repetition destroys what it seeks to preserve. In each action, each gesture, an editing process is at work. The activities of cleaning take an editing role in the theatre as a place of public reception, translating it into a series of surfaces for the collection of matter whilst reciting its own performance that re-codes this public arena into a series of personal choreographs.

Ultimately, the assumption of building as a »fixed entity or given stable object« is challenged by the notion of maintenance. The long tending that goes into a building, a constant remaking of it through a plethora of maintenance activities. All the different gestures specific to materials – polishing, sanding, wiping, dusting, vacuuming – some subtracting material and others adding; all the tiny rituals and practices that constitute the daily mechanisms of place. This process of continual remaking of place challenges imposed conventions of identities and places by exploring how subjectivities become manifest through an assemblage of everyday activities and performed places. Building here is presented less as an object than an unfolding series of performative processes; moments in every day lives measured out, productive of and produced by daily rhythms, routines and practices.

19. LEFEBVRE, HENRI: *The Production of Space*, Oxford 1991, p. 207

- ABBATE, CAROLYN: *Unsung Voices*, Princeton / New Jersey 1991
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- IMAGES 1a, 1b, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4b: Helen Stratford
- IMAGES 2a & 4a: Alba D'Urbano