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Pannill Camp, *The First Frame: Theatre Space in Enlightenment France*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xii + 288pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781107079168.

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Aesthetically, socio-politically, and philosophically, the eighteenth century in France was a troublingly complex and turbulent period, with new ideas and grand projects forever jostling with more conservative impulses. Among the most tangible and anachronistic cultural remnants of the past in Enlightenment France were surely the poor quality playhouses inherited from the previous century, whose basic structures continued to inform theatre construction in the early eighteenth century. Even under Louis XIV, intellectuals had been aware—and ashamed—of the discrepancy between the supposed aesthetic superiority of French theatre and the awkward, poorly designed theatres—often converted real-tennis courts—in which plays were actually staged. Pannill Camp's wide-ranging and ambitious monograph explores how mounting dissatisfaction with existing playhouses culminated in a movement of radical reform in late eighteenth-century theatre architecture that both reflected and contributed to far wider developments in the understanding of lived and represented space. Accordingly, as Camp puts it, the book offers above all “an interpretation of the evolving spatial ideology beneath a profound mutation in theatrical aesthetics, not a descriptive history of French theatre architecture” (p. 6).

Camp's approach is highly interdisciplinary, as befits both the multifaceted nature of his core topic and the wide-ranging intellectual inquisitiveness of his chosen period. Exploring theatre space in “a targeted and non-comprehensive fashion,” it aims to “trace crucial lines of thought that established modern ways of thinking about and creating theatre space, without observing the boundaries that separate discrete areas of knowledge any more than eighteenth-century thinkers were inclined to do” (p. 7). As Camp points out, traditional studies have remained unhelpfully entrenched within disciplinary boundaries (of architectural history, theatre history, literary history, and so forth). Situated at the intersections of these different disciplines, Camp's study certainly promises to enrich them all. The amount of diverse historical material that Camp has managed to sift through and synthesize here is staggering. The study brings together contemporary material from various disciplines, from dramatic theory to epistemology, from aesthetics to architectural history, and from metatheatrical drama to natural philosophy. At times, and especially in the introduction, the juxtaposition of different disciplinary paradigms can make things a little bewildering for the first-time reader, not least when Camp also throws into the mix terminology of his own that will be defined and explored only later; in retrospect, however, these soon become considerably clearer.

The breadth of this study is not simply disciplinary in nature. Indeed, its somewhat misleading subtitle, “Theatre Space in Enlightenment France,” scarcely does justice to its impressive historical span. Whereas the primary focus of the study, and the implicit end-point of its individual chapters, is indeed the second half of the eighteenth century, there are many lengthy, rich and well-informed excursions on seventeenth-century practices and theoretical attitudes, and occasional dips still further back into the Renaissance. The study encompasses five chapters that follow a broad historical sweep from the seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, when serious ventures of theatrical reform were first theorized and sometimes introduced. The first, “The divided scene of theatre space in the neo-classical era,” introduces the fraught and multivalent question of theatre space with reference above all to the real-tennis courts or *jeu de paume* halls that had served as makeshift playhouses for so many

performances across the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. As Camp argues, two forms of space are effectively superimposed in theatre, “space that is a symbolic referent” and “another kind of space that is somatic and not restricted by a representational boundary” (p. 28). These two conceptions were not always easily reconcilable, however, and pre-reform theatres displayed an “unstable spatial composite” of conflicting paradigms (p. 31). For example, although the use of perspective scenery was designed to produce the illusion of spatial extension beyond the back of the stage, this illusion was in fact often broken by practical matters, as when relative sizes shifted when actors walked to the back of the stage. Camp argues that “a primordial conceptual affinity” (p. 39) between the illusory depth of perspective scenery and that evoked by mirrors meant that perspective scenery was inextricably linked to the dominant neo-classical paradigm of the stage as a “mirror” of reality, the primary focus of his second chapter.

This chapter, “The theatrical frame in French neo-classical dramatic theory,” explores how the paradigm of the “theatre as mirror” was evoked, adapted and eventually abandoned by a succession of thinkers and practitioners from the mid-seventeenth century up to the advent of the bourgeois *drame*. “Dramatic theory” is understood here in a rather broad sense, and includes reflections on and of theatrical practices in metatheatrical plays by Baro, Scudéry, Corneille, and others. Much of this chapter involves discussion of three key dramatic theoreticians: d’Aubignac, Dubos, and Diderot. Camp is one of very few recent commentators to recognize the important but complex contribution that the early eighteenth-century aesthete Dubos brought to dramatic theory, and he is sensitive to the curious position Dubos occupies between paradigms. In this chapter in particular, Camp situates dramatic theory in a more general philosophical and intellectual context, tracing parallels between developments in theatrical theory and epistemology without reducing the one to the other. He argues, quite persuasively, that seventeenth century theatre “shared certain manners of thinking with rationalist metaphysics and natural philosophy” (p. 62), not least in the appeal of both to reason as a founding principle and their concurrent concern with hypothesising unified “worlds.” As he demonstrates, however, with the general movement from rationalism to empiricism, what the theatre was understood to offer shifted from self-contained fictional “worlds” for spectators to process cognitively, to individual objects for spectators to apprehend primarily through sense-perception, a move which saw theatre increasingly conceptualized as a window what framed aspects of a shared reality, rather than as a neo-classical mirror that presented a self-contained and virtual onstage world.

The following chapter, “Enlightenment spectators and the theatre of experiment,” develops the new concern with the spectator (both in and outside the theatre) as an epistemological agent. In particular, Camp explores what he calls the “para-theatrical” nature (p. 95) of the Enlightenment craze for experimental science. He draws out some intriguing and convincing parallels between staged eighteenth-century physics experiments and theatrical performance, not least in their popularity with audiences, their supposed powers of instruction, and their heavily structured narratives leading from initial suspense, via surprise, to an eventual clarification and explanation of underlying natural principles. Yet, the comparison also works the other way, most notably in plays such as Marivaux’s *La Dispute* (1744), where a complicated and highly contrived social science experiment is played out for the entertainment and education of its observers. Above all, Camp suggests, pioneers of the bourgeois *drame* “came to view the playwright as a figure akin to the experimental scientist, albeit one who demonstrated the truths of moral rather than physical nature” (p. 121). Practitioners and theorists of the *drame* attempted to bring about “certain types of narrative results” involving the uncovering of hidden natural laws (p. 124), either within the plays themselves (by finally guiding characters away from such unnatural acts as incest or murder), or in audiences (by provoking natural human responses in spectators).

The final two chapters trace the different ways in which the architecture of playhouses was increasingly rethought in terms of the sensory capacities of the spectator. Over the previous century, the status of the spectator had shifted radically, from being a mere afterthought of much dramatic theory to being a prized, broadly autonomous agent of cognition and critique. Indeed, by the time of the major theatre reform movement, “spectatorship had come to signify such an expansive category of experience that it came close to encompassing consciousness itself” (pp. 130-310). Camp’s

contention that, during this period, “the conceived spaces of optics and theatre architecture effectively fused with each other” (p. 131), is well illustrated, quite literally, by certain architectural plans he offers (for example, figures 18, 20 and 28) that mimic quite explicitly the structure of the human eye (figures 21-24). Chapter four, “Theatre architecture reform and the spectator as sense function,” unearths the new spectator-centred paradigms underlying critiques of existing theatres in France and elsewhere. As Camp demonstrates, the dominant paradigm throughout was the eye: architects sought to avoid such visual obstacles as onstage benches and *petites loges* and to produce wider stages to expand the spectator’s field of vision, to cater to an increasingly abstracted conception of the spectator as the agent of “a momentary, and largely visual act of perception” (p. 143). Although frequently remarked upon, problems of acoustics typically took second place to visual concerns, and were often understood along lines derived from studies into light and optics. Chapter five, “Optics and stage space in Enlightenment theatre design,” returns to the curious 1804 image that opens the study, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux’s “Coup d’oeil du théâtre de Besançon,” which depicts a close-up of a human eye in (or through) whose pupil and iris one sees the auditorium of the Besançon theatre (figure 1); Camp deftly unpicks its various possible—and sometimes conflicting—meanings and implications in the light of a wealth of documents from architectural theory, optics, and theatre designs.

Camp’s excellent and wide-ranging study offers a clear, broad, and persuasive historical narrative without resorting to simplistic or reductive paradigms. He remains attentive to the continuities across the period, and to the complex and fraught relationship of the reformers to the old theatrical models they had inherited. Above all, Camp shows a remarkable talent for assimilating vast amounts of very disparate material, homing in on the key aspects, and summing them up with concision and clarity. His arguments are not always fully demonstrated (a certainly laborious and potentially infinite task given the breadth of his primary material), but I can certainly vouch for the validity and astuteness of his conclusions about my own particular field, early modern theatrical aesthetics. The only criticisms I have are minor quibbles, mostly concerning presentation. Above all, a few of the reproduced images are quite murky, and there are also numerous minor typos, especially with French terms. Some of these slips can be attributed to early modern French’s somewhat slapdash attitude towards accents, but others are more jarring. Just sticking to names and play titles, we find “Desmaret’s” for “Desmarets’s” (p. 33), “Caeser” for “Caesar” (p. 77), “*Britannicus*” for “*Britannicus*” (p. 77), and “Fontelle” for “Fontenelle” (p. 106). A few homophones also emerge, notably “principle” for “principal” (p. 87 and elsewhere) and “flare” for “flair” (p. 106), the latter, though, being perhaps quite appropriate in a discussion of experimental physics! Yet these are really only surface blemishes in a work which, like the scientific demonstrations it discusses in chapter three, takes its audiences through an engaging and persuasive narrative with a compelling combination of rigor, intriguing demonstrations, and intellectual flair. Or perhaps “flare.”

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