

Maria F. Maurer

Gender, Space and Experience at the Renaissance Court

Performance and Practice at the Palazzo Te

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Cover illustration: Sala dei Giganti, 1530-35. Fresco. Executed by the workshop of Giulio Romano. Palazzo Te, Mantua, Italy.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Newgen/Konvertus

ISBN 978 94 6298 553 7

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 668 9

DOI 10.5117/9789462985537

NUR 685

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The Palace in Cyberspace: A Note on the Virtual Tour

Readers are encouraged to use the virtual tour of the Palazzo Te provided by Google Arts and Culture: <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/palazzo-te>. The tour can also be taken on your smart phone via the Google Arts and Culture app, available in the Google Play Store for free download. This format is superior because it allows one to 'look up' at the ceilings and frescoes.

While I highly recommend the virtual tour, it does not do justice to the fluidity of movement allowed by the plan of the Palazzo Te, nor does it focus on the architecture of the palace. The tour begins in the Loggia di Davide, which was rarely the point through which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visitors entered the palace. One should rightly begin in the Loggia delle Muse (Fig. 5). Navigation can be difficult, especially because Google's plan of the palace does not accurately record walls between rooms. Finally, while one can enter the gardens, and thus see the eastern façade, many of the other façades are difficult, if not impossible to access. The secret garden is not included in the virtual tour. With those caveats in place, the virtual tour is the best way to experience the spaces of the Palazzo Te outside of Mantua, and I consider it to be a valuable research tool.

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Acknowledgements

This book is indebted to many friends, colleagues, and institutions. I am profoundly grateful for the formal and informal conversations, advice, and support that I have received since I first conceptualized this project in the summer of 2008. The thoughtful questions and suggestions of mentors and colleagues at Indiana University and The University of Tulsa have prodded me forward, and their continued support has been invaluable. I am particularly indebted to Giles Knox, whose insistence that I anchor my methodological approach in the frescoes, stuccoes, and architecture of the Palazzo Te has kept this book metaphorically and literally grounded in the artwork.

Several institutions have supported the research necessary for this project. The Samuel H. Kress Dissertation Fellowship awarded by the Society of Architectural Historians funded a nearly year-long stay in Mantua during which I performed much of the archival research on which this study is based. The Kress Fellowship also allowed me to engage with the Palazzo Te in a variety of social and physical circumstances. Further generous support from the Friends of Art at Indiana University and The University of Tulsa funded additional archival and visual research and the cost of illustrations. The Oklahoma Humanities Council and the Oklahoma Center for the Humanities have provided additional assistance, as well as a forum for feedback from scholars in diverse disciplines.

Preliminary ideas for this project were presented at conferences organized by the College Art Association, the Renaissance Society of America, at the Feminist Art History Conference, and at the multidisciplinary Technologies of Experience conference organized at Indiana University in spring of 2013. I am thankful for the many conference participants whose feedback and suggestions helped me to shape and hone this project.

I am also deeply grateful to the staff of the Archivio di Stato in Mantua. Their unfailing kindness and support was invaluable as I negotiated roughly 100 years of documents and records. Likewise, the staff at the Palazzo Te afforded me views of the building rarely granted to outsiders. Staff at the Biblioteca Teresiana in Mantua, the Archivio di Stato in Modena, the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf, the British Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art also helped me locate and analyze important archival and visual sources.

This book would not have come to fruition with the support of Erika Gaffney and Allison Levy at Amsterdam University Press. Their enthusiasm and expertise on both Early Modern art and society and the editorial process has been invaluable.

1. The Performative Palace

Abstract:

This chapter outlines the concept of performative space as something constructed through the relationships between corporeality, gender roles, and the built environment. It draws on the work of Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel de Certeau in order to demonstrate that gender and space are inextricably intertwined, and uses early modern courtesy literature and works of art to investigate the construction and performance of gender at court. Chapter one also argues that the Palazzo Te in particular, and early modern spaces in general, were active agents in the construction of the Renaissance self. Gender was produced and performed through the interplay of spaces, discourses, and bodies.

Keywords: Corporeality, Courtesy Literature, Identity, Performativity

On 1 April 1530 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V arrived at the Palazzo Te, located on an island just outside the boundaries of Renaissance Mantua (Fig. 1). Upon entering the Camera di Psiche 'he stood completely awestruck, and there he remained for more than half an hour contemplating it and praising everything immensely'.¹ As he moved around the room, the unfolding story of Psyche on the ceiling and the images of mythological lovers and sensuous banquets on the wall invited Charles to take up varying positions and identities. A fresco of *Jupiter and Olympia* depicting the pair mid-coitus allowed the Emperor to see himself as the robust and virile King of the gods, and as Philip of Macedon, whose illicit gaze cost him his sight. Charles could even identify with Olympia, who grasps the fictive frame of the painting, penetrating the picture plane and entering into the physical space of the room (Pl. 1). Charles was triumphant, condemned, and sexualized.

This book examines the dynamic relationships between gender, space, and experience at the Renaissance court, using the Palazzo Te as a case study to analyze interactions between buildings and their inhabitants. It is my contention that the built environment is an active agent in the construction and performance of gendered and sexual identities.² The Palazzo Te is thus a place composed of constantly shifting

1 '[S]ua Maestà restò tutta maravigliosa, et ivi stette più di mezz'hora a contemplare, ogni cosa laudando sommamente'. Giacinto Romano (ed.), *Cronaca*, 262. Unless noted otherwise, all translations are my own.

2 For the agency of objects, see Alfred Gell's controversial and somewhat problematic *Art and Agency*, 524–551; Matthew Rampley, "Alfred Gell's Anthropology of Art." To my mind, Gell's approach overstates the cultural and historical uniformity of objects and their beholders, and does not take experience into account.

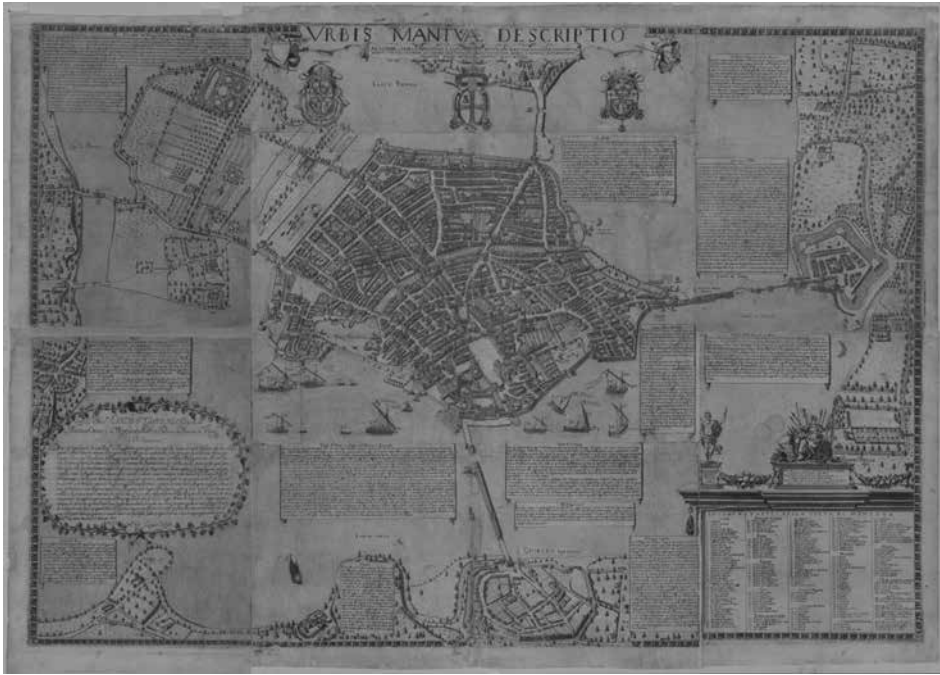


Fig. 1: Gabriele Bertazzolo, *Urbis Mantua Descriptio*, 1628. Engraving, 76 x 116 cm. Biblioteca Teresiana, Mantua. Isola del Te in upper left corner.

physical and signifying surfaces that provoke the production and negotiation of gender identities. Rather than a monolithic monument with a unified iconography and stable interpretive framework, the Palazzo Te is open, polyvalent, and, at times, troubling. Renaissance princes, courtiers, and ladies dynamically engaged with the palace in order to enact identities that were similarly unsettled and unsettling.

I therefore aim to treat Renaissance courtly space in general, and the Palazzo Te in particular, as integral to a social and cultural environment in which the performance of gender took center stage.³ By analyzing discourses of gender and space in tandem, I hope to provide a model for analyzing the ways in which buildings are constituted by the gendered interactions that take place within them, and at the same time incite performances of gender. Moreover, I hope that uniting archival evidence concerning the palace's use and reception with critical theory will reveal intersections between social discourses on gender and personal agency within the built environment. In

For more nuanced approaches to object-based agency, see Charles Burroughs, *Palace Facade*, 121–127; Carolyn Springer, *Armour and Masculinity*; Adrian W.B. Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 1–15; 231–237; Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*.

³ Cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*. I elaborate upon my methodological approach below.

other words, I propose to examine the ways in which discourses of gender and space intersect with buildings and the bodies that inhabited them.⁴

On one level, this book aims to illuminate the use and reception of the Palazzo Te throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. From its inauguration in 1530 until the Sack of Mantua in 1630 the Palazzo Te played a pivotal role in welcoming foreign dignitaries to the Gonzaga court, and it was therefore central to the dynasty's reputation as urbane patrons and magnificent princes. Through copies and appropriations, the palace and the dynasty that constructed it were celebrated in Italy and abroad. The Palazzo Te served as a point of contact between the Gonzaga family and its guests, and set the stage for interactions amongst courtiers from throughout Europe. Through entertainments arranged for visiting royalty, triumphal entries produced for newly-wedded brides, and the circulation of its images throughout European courts, the Palazzo Te participated in the construction and negotiation of gendered identities in Mantua and abroad.

Yet, what is at stake here is not merely a reevaluation of the Palazzo Te and its continued use following the death of Federico II in 1540. I also want to demonstrate that architectural space was and remains vital to the production and performance of gender. This book is therefore framed by three interrelated discourses: those of gender, space, and corporeal experience. While I will treat them somewhat separately in the pages that follow, I ultimately believe that they can and should be joined together into what I am calling a performative approach to space. Through the conjunction of gender, space, and experience historians of the built environment can analyze the production of more abstract discourses and identities while also situating them within particular places and bodies.

Gender

The Early Modern period was a time of changing social and gender roles: the growth of cities and the merchant class that inhabited them, as well as shifting religious roles and the discovery of supposedly new worlds, created discursive spaces that writers, artists, and theorists rushed to fill. Texts and images produced gender ideologies attuned to class, religion, and place.⁵ This book focuses on the performance of gender at the Renaissance court, a space that allowed for individual agency, but that also had carefully articulated social codes and structures. In many ways, the

4 The question of the relationships between discourses of gender and the sexed body was taken up, but not fully resolved, in Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. For a critique of Butler, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*. For a nuanced analysis of the challenges in confronting both discourses and bodies, see Iris Marion Young, "Lived Body," 12–26.

5 Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine*; Ann R. Jones, *Currency of Eros*; David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit*; Douglas Biow, *Importance of Being an Individual*.

rules of gender appear to be less strictly enforced at court, especially where the experiences of women are concerned.⁶ Yet, there was an abundance of discourse concerning gender at court.⁷ From Baldassare Castiglione to Pietro Aretino, and Titian to Giulio Romano, texts and images that produced and regulated gender roles proliferated in the sixteenth century. One could almost say that Renaissance courtiers were caught in a web of discourses. Yet, as this book demonstrates, the multiple overlapping and conflicting approaches to gender created areas of slip-page in which adept courtiers could negotiate individual identities that differed from prescribed social practice.

Renaissance courtesy literature was one of the primary ways that discourses of gender were produced and maintained. The *Book of the Courtier* (1528), written by the Mantuan ambassador and courtier Baldassare Castiglione is perhaps most concerned with attitudes towards gender. *Il Galateo overo de' costumi* (1558) penned by the Florentine prelate and writer Giovanni della Casa, and *La civil conversazione* (1574) composed by Stefano Guazzo, who, like Castiglione, worked as a diplomat for the Gonzaga family, also take up the question of appropriate gendered comportment. In describing male and female roles, these authors attempted to represent gender as the God-given product of nature, but in claiming to form perfect courtiers and their ladies Castiglione and his companions revealed that men and women could be fashioned and molded to fit changing expectations.⁸

The fashioning of men and women in the *Book of the Courtier* is decidedly gendered. In Books I and II the company set themselves the task of 'forming in words a perfect Courtier, setting forth all conditions and particular qualities that are required.'⁹ They debate the virtues that the male courtier should possess and the ways in which he is to acquire and demonstrate them. In Book III the conversation turns toward the *donna di palazzo* ('court lady'). Il Magnifico Giuliano de' Medici claims that he will describe a perfect lady, and 'when I have fashioned her to my taste [...] like Pygmalion I will take her for my own'.¹⁰ As Valeria Finucci and Ann R. Jones have argued, Giuliano/Castiglione constructs a discourse in which woman is produced and controlled by men.¹¹ While I differ from Finucci and Jones in that I see this discourse as a product of male homosocial bonding, rather than masculine anxiety,

6 Federico II's mother, Isabella d'Este, was a woman famed for collecting antiquities and commissioning mythological works of art for her *studiolo*, activities that were usually gendered masculine. For an analysis of the relationship between gender and Isabella's collecting activities, see Rose Marie San Juan, "The Court Lady's Dilemma," 67–78.

7 Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 12.

8 Jones, "Nets and Bridles," 40–41.

9 Baldassare Castiglione, *Courtier*, 19 (I.12). Unless otherwise stated all translations of Castiglione are from the 2002 edition of the Singleton translation.

10 Ibid., 150 (III.4).

11 Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes*, 57–59; Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 12. It is, however, problematic to seek the historical Castiglione's viewpoint in the words of particular literary characters.

the *Book of the Courtier* does set up oppositions between masculine and feminine performance, particularly in the realm of *sprezzatura*.¹²

In Book I, Count Lodovico Canossa advises the courtier to 'practice in all things a certain *sprezzatura* which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless'.¹³ *Sprezzatura*, or the carefully constructed façade of indifference, is at the heart of Castiglione's courtier, for it imbues everything he does with the appearance of grace and ensures that he delights everyone around him. The ideal courtier described in Castiglione's text is not a person born with grace, but one who must create its semblance through *sprezzatura*.¹⁴ Despite the Neoplatonic tenor of Book IV, *sprezzatura* and the grace it seeks to evoke are not expressions of the courtier's nobility or character. Rather, the courtier must enact a 'staged authenticity'.¹⁵ *Sprezzatura* is an art that imitates nature so closely that the audience has difficulty distinguishing between the two. Castiglione's courtier is enjoined to enact an unending series of effortless performances that leave spectators free to appreciate the skill involved.¹⁶ The courtier's character manifests itself through words, actions, and movements, but that character is a carefully constructed work of art designed to elicit praise from the courtly audience.

In contrast to the male courtier, the court lady is never expressly directed to practice *sprezzatura*. Yet, in a passage disparaging women's affected attempts to appear beautiful, Count Lodovico praises women who eschew cosmetics and elaborate hairstyles as evincing a *sprezzata purità* ('careless purity') which is all the more pleasing to men who are 'ever fearful of being deceived by art'.¹⁷ He continues with examples of teeth, hands, and ankles, all body parts that are generally concealed by lips, gloves, and skirts, but that, when revealed through seemingly natural gestures, 'leave one with a great desire to see them more'.¹⁸ Like masculine *sprezzatura*, feminine *sprezzata purità* aims to avoid affection by producing the illusion of effortless grace. Lodovico urges court ladies to practice such seeming carelessness precisely because men will find it more alluring, yet at the same time he rouses the specter of deception. The lady must elicit desire through a performance that is so artless that it avoids all suspicion.

12 On the problems with anxious masculinity in the Early Modern period, see Patricia Simons, *Sex of Men*, 17. For the ways in which textual depictions of women facilitated homosocial bonding, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*.

13 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 32 (I.26). Although it is traditionally translated as 'nonchalance', I have left the word *sprezzatura* untranslated. In Castiglione's writing and thought *sprezzatura* does not simply denote the indifference implied in nonchalance; it also signifies 'scorn for normal, human limitations, physical necessities, and the restrictions of most forms of behavior'. Wayne A. Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*, 35.

14 Harry Berger, Jr., *Absence of Grace*, 9–25.

15 Springer, *Armour and Masculinity*, 20.

16 Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*, 25; 38–39.

17 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 48 (I.40). My analysis of *sprezzata purità* is indebted to Berger, *Absence of Grace*, 91–95.

18 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 49 (I.40).

The Count's examples of *sprezzata purità* relate to the veiling and unveiling of the female body, and he admires the calculation of bodily gestures as much as he celebrates their apparent spontaneity.¹⁹ Ann R. Jones has demonstrated that courtesy literature, especially that written by Castiglione and Guazzo, manifests a tension between the need for the court lady to speak, specifically to speak of and arouse desire, and social discourses that equated access to women's speech with access to their bodies. The court lady is enjoined to speak of sex while also maintaining her chaste reputation, a paradox that requires the same carefully constructed façade as that created by the male courtier.²⁰ The lady therefore participates in the seemingly natural artifice of *sprezzatura*, but her performance of *sprezzata purità* must at once allow and deny access to her sexualized body. Masculine *sprezzatura* is also linked to the bodily movements of the courtier: when dancing or participating in the exercise of arms the courtier's every step and movement should appear natural, graceful, and elegant.²¹ The courtier's performance should 'feed his spectator's eyes' and elicit *maraviglia* ('wonder') from the audience, who will simultaneously admire and desire him.²²

However, the courtier's body is not the only site of *sprezzatura*, which may also be exercised through oratory, letters, languages, and even humor, and the desire that he elicits is not only, and perhaps not primarily, sexual. In contrast, the court lady's *sprezzata purità* is enacted through a deployment of the female body such that it is both sexual and chaste, and both open and closed to the male beholder. In Book III Giuliano de' Medici concedes the difficulty of such a feat, for the court lady 'must observe a certain mean (difficult to achieve and, as it were, composed of contraries) and must strictly observe certain limits and not exceed them'.²³ *Sprezzata purità* requires a constant balancing act between inciting desire and denying it, a requirement not outlined for the male courtier. Both men and women were expected to produce the effect of nature via consummate acts of artifice, yet the lady's performance was irrevocably intertwined with her sexualized body.

The performances of male and female courtiers created a tension between nature and artifice that echoed developments in sixteenth-century art and architecture. In his treatise *On Painting* (1435), Leon Battista Alberti advises would-be artists that 'all the steps of learning should be sought from Nature'.²⁴ Yet, artists should also follow the model of the ancient painter Zeuxis by selecting the most pleasing features from a number of bodies and assembling them in one beautiful figure.²⁵ Like the courtier,

19 At the end of Book III, Chapter 40, Lodovico states that 'everyone thinks that such elegance [...] must be natural and instinctive with the lady, rather than calculated', thereby betraying that such movements are the product of artifice. *Ibid.*, 49.

20 Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 15–17.

21 Cf., Castiglione, *Courtier*, 34–35 (I.28) and 72–73 (II.8).

22 *Ibid.*, 73 (II.8) and 99 (III.37).

23 *Ibid.*, 151 (III.5).

24 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, 89 (III.55).

25 *Ibid.*, 90–91 (III.55–56).

painters should create works of art that simulate nature, while at the same time improving upon it. In the preface to the third part of his *Lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors and architects* (1568), Giorgio Vasari likewise advises artists to imitate Nature by selective copying of limbs and forms that would be joined together 'so as to make a figure of the greatest possible beauty'.²⁶ Both courtiers and paintings are assemblages of parts that appear natural, but which are actually artful. Moreover, it is telling that as art began to develop a discourse and theoretical framework, the tension between nature and artifice was articulated via the careful copying and idealization of the human body.

Renaissance beholders understood that gender was enacted through the routine and stylized movements of the body. Like the artists, dancers, and performers to which Castiglione compares them, courtiers enacted their identities and aimed to convince their beholders that the act was natural.²⁷ Renaissance courtiers therefore recognized that gender identity was performative. Judith Butler has written that gender is constructed through mundane bodily acts and gestures which seem to reveal an essential identity that is, in fact, lacking. Gender is a constant performance and an unceasing enactment of both personal and social experiences that seems natural, but that is actually manufactured by the collective acts of many individuals.²⁸ Butler sees normative gender performance as largely unconscious on the part of individuals who are caught up in the maintenance and reproduction of existing power structures. As we will see, many of the individuals who inhabited the Palazzo Te followed the social script without much reflection. But, it is also my contention that Renaissance court culture posited the self as malleable, and that performative identity could therefore be purposefully and self-consciously produced.

Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* and della Casa's *Galateo* constructed the court as a culture of surveillance, a place where one was constantly watching and being watched for cracks in the performative façade, and where the audience's approbation was required for the performance to be judged successful.²⁹ Castiglione's courtier is advised to 'consider well what he does or says, the place where he does it, in whose presence, its timeliness, the reason for doing it, his own age, his profession, the end at which he aims, and the means by which he can reach it'.³⁰ Likewise, della Casa's attention to the minutiae of table manners in Chapter 29 of the *Galateo* speaks to a culture in which each movement is noted and judged.³¹

26 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives*, 1.618. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of Vasari are from the 1996 edition of the du Vere translation.

27 Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*, 16.

28 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175–193.

29 Frank Whigham, "Interpretation," 623–639; Berger, *Absence of Grace*, 11–25.

30 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 72 (II.7).

31 Giovanni della Casa, *Galateo*, 61–64. See also, Berger, *Absence of Grace*, 49–51.



Fig. 2: Northern courtyard façade, detail with exterior frescoes, 1525–28. Palazzo Te. Photo by author.

Art at the Renaissance court also betrays a preoccupation with seeing and being seen. Jennifer Webb has argued that the figures of illustrious men and intarsia panels in the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino subject the visitor to multiple gazes, at once engaging him and making her the subject of a system of surveillance.³² Andrea Mantegna's *Camera Picta*, located in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua and completed in 1475, is perhaps best known for its oculus, which features women of the court and *spiritelli*, or mischievous spirits, who lean over the balustrade to look down upon visitors (Fig. 30).³³ Mantegna's oculus playfully reverses the act of looking: the spectator is watched from above, becoming the object of the gaze he once thought to control.³⁴ Giulio Romano similarly referenced the gendered nature of visibility in the courtyard of the Palazzo Te. Above the entrance to the Loggia delle Muse fictive windows open inward, revealing women within the palace or architectural vistas beyond.³⁵ In one

32 Jennifer D. Webb, "All is not fun and games," 438.

33 Charles Dempsey, *Renaissance Putto*. Dempsey has demonstrated that what art historians have come to refer to as 'putti' were known as *spiritelli* in fifteenth and sixteenth-century documents.

34 Randolph Starn and Loren W. Partridge, *Arts of Power*, 119.

35 Five of these figures were added in 1533–1534 by Luca da Faenza. Daniela Ferrari, *Giulio Romano*, 1.638–639. Only two of the scenes above the Loggia delle Muse are still identifiable; in one additional scene a painted window can just barely be discerned.

scene a woman holds a jug and looks down as if checking for the presence of people before emptying its contents into the courtyard (Fig. 2). In both the Camera Picta and the courtyard of the Palazzo Te female spectators comment upon and subtly subvert gendered relationships by granting women the evaluating gaze normally reserved for men.

Much of the culture of surveillance was directed toward policing the boundaries of gender.³⁶ Indeed, the *Book of the Courtier* fashions an image of the ideal courtier based in large part upon the correct performance of normative feminine and masculine gender roles. Although Castiglione has Gaspare Pallavicino argue that the court lady ought to obey the same rules as the male courtier, Giuliano counters that, although they have some things in common, men and women should comport themselves differently.³⁷ Moreover, just as men should refrain from appearing feminine, the court lady's movements 'shall always make her appear the woman without any resemblance to a man'.³⁸ Stefano Guazzo goes one step further, writing that 'the sight of a young girl portraying the gestures, expressions, and freedom of speech and that boldness which is proper to a man is a monstrous thing'.³⁹ While neither Castiglione, della Casa, nor Guazzo outline the consequences for feminine men or masculine women, each author warns against a failed performance.

Despite injunctions to enact gender roles that conformed to biological sex, Renaissance beholders also recognized that the performative nature of gender meant that it was not necessarily tied to sex. Castiglione and della Casa take great pains to warn men against walking, standing, or moving in any way which might be perceived as feminine. Count Lodovico cautions the male courtier against appearing,

[S]oft and feminine as so many attempt to who not only curl their hair and pluck their eyebrows, but preen themselves in all those ways that the most wanton and dissolute women in the world adopt; and in walking, in posture, and in every act, appear so tender and languid that their limbs seem to be on the verge of falling apart; and utter their words so limply that it seems they are about to expire on the spot.⁴⁰

Lodovico and his audience are concerned that in appearing feminine the male courtier will fail to perform the gender role that they have assigned to him. Likewise, della Casa warns his male reader against appearing in the guise of a woman, 'such

36 Butler argues that recognizable gender roles humanize individuals within a culture, and thus failure to appropriately perform leads to punishment for those 'who fail to do their gender right'. *Gender Trouble*, 178.

37 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 149 and following (III.3–4).

38 Ibid., 150 (III.4).

39 '[P]erché il vedere una giovane rappresentare ne' gesti, ne' sembianti e nel parlare quelle libertà e quell'ardire che è proprio dell'uomo è cosa mostruosa'. Stefano Guazzo, *La civil conversazione*, 239.

40 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 27 (I.19).

that the ornament is not one thing and the person another'.⁴¹ In stating that the person and his appearance should be the same, della Casa seems to be defining gender as an essential substance that cannot be differentiated from sex. However, in cautioning men not to create differences between ornaments, or appearances, and the person, or body, Guazzo in fact admits that gendered comportment can be separated from, and even opposite of, the sexed body. By pointing out areas of potential gender slippage Castiglione, della Casa, and Guazzo highlight the performative nature of gender. Moreover, in their warnings to men and women to avoid walking, standing, speaking, or appearing as the opposite gender, the authors recognize that gender is enacted through the routine, stylized movements of the body.

In the Renaissance, the performance of gender occurred on the surfaces of sexed bodies that were largely categorized as either male or female.⁴² The masculine body was idealized as a unified whole that was as impenetrable as the ceremonial armor men wore; the feminine body was at once open and accessible, as well as mysterious, and thus in need of investigation.⁴³ Patricia Simons has demonstrated that in medical literature and popular culture the male body and its genitalia were understood as projecting outward, while the female body and its womb were seen as receptive. Because women required and desired male sexual action and semen, they were dependent and inferior. What Simons identifies as 'the unequal two-see theory' reinforced patriarchal attitudes; yet it also admitted female sexual desire.⁴⁴ Simons' analysis of the sexed body dovetails with literary discourses surrounding gender and its performance. Castiglione, della Casa, Guazzo, and their readers enjoined the court lady to act as an attentive, receptive audience for the courtier's performances of wit and physical prowess, while at the same time expecting her to possess and elicit sexual desire. Moreover, as Count Lodovico's discussion of *sprezzata purità* demonstrates, the primary way that the lady could elicit praise and desire was through corporeal signs.

The visual arts similarly reveal the ways in which the body and its gestures could be mobilized to negotiate gender roles. In her well-known essay on Lorenzo Lotto's *Portrait of a Woman Inspired by Lucretia*, Rona Goffen argued that Lotto and his sitter used forceful, masculine gestures and utterances to communicate the lady's vigorous defense of her chastity (Fig. 3). Like the Roman matron Lucretia, this sixteenth-century

41 '[A] guisa di femina; acciò che l'ornamento non sia uno e la persona un altro'. della Casa, *Galateo*, 59 (XXVIII). For ornament as a necessary embellishment to artifice, see Clare Lapraik Guest, *Ornament*, 67–119.

42 Early Modern popular culture, philosophy, and medical literature recognized the existence of androgynous persons, hermaphrodites, and the possibility of spontaneous sex change. However, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries medical and legal establishments often forced people that we might today call intersex into one of two binaries. Authorities used a combination of physical and performative factors to assign sex. Israel Burshatin, "Interrogating Hermaphroditism," 3–18; Simons, *Sex of Men*, 25–38.

43 Springer, *Armour and Masculinity*, 13–21.

44 Simons, *Sex of Men*, 191–218.



Fig. 3: Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of a Woman Inspired by Lucretia*, c. 1530–32. Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 110.6 cm. © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY.

woman is ready to die before dishonoring herself or her family.⁴⁵ She has successfully negotiated Giuliano's difficult mean by speaking of and eliciting desire even as she defends her chastity. On one level, this lady is re-inscribed into a patriarchal discourse in which her chastity is her defining feature, but she enacts that chastity through an appeal to masculine vigor rather than through feminine modesty. By manipulating the interstices between socially mandated gender roles the new Lucretia occupies a performative space somewhat different from the demure beauty fashioned by Lodovico and Giuliano in the *Book of the Courtier*.

Both courtesy literature and art define a subject that is constructed through carefully calculated performances of nonchalance, and the specific nature of these performances is gendered. This is perhaps obvious. Yet, it seems to me that both men and women were rhetorically imbued with the power to self-consciously construct their own personalities, or to self-fashion their identities.⁴⁶ Castiglione, Guazzo, and

45 Rona Goffen, "Lotto's Lucretia," 742–781.

46 My use of Stephen Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning focuses on the discursive agency granted to Renaissance men and women. However, as Greenblatt himself suggests, any self-fashioned identity is always constructed amidst and embedded within larger cultural and social systems. I disagree with Greenblatt's

other male writers circumscribe femininity and masculinity within a patriarchal discourse, but, ultimately, individuals could perform the social script in ways that reframed, rewrote, and transgressed gendered expectations.⁴⁷ Artifice, subterfuge, and misrepresentation were expected and even praised at the Renaissance court, suggesting that gender roles were seen as similarly malleable and unstable. Rather than something that was actively imposed by authors and artists upon passive readers and beholders, discourses concerning gender arose out of the negotiation between overlapping and competing frames of reference.⁴⁸ Renaissance authors and artists and their audiences realized that gender performance could both reinforce and destabilize social norms. In combination with Renaissance visual and ceremonial culture, courtesy literature demonstrates that gender was a never-ending series of performative acts that took place on the surfaces of the body.

Experience

As today, Renaissance gendered performance took place through physical engagement with things, whether they were buildings, objects, or people. I therefore invoke experience, in part, as a call to examine the uses and functions of Early Modern buildings. We need to think beyond the plan, the façade, and the furnishing or decoration of the built environment in order to integrate the presence, interactions, and interpretations of inhabitants and visitors. I take Ernst Gombrich's formulation of the 'beholder's share', and John Shearman's conception of art as transitive, or coming to completion through the presence of an engaged spectator, as points of departure for complicating the ways in which people interacted with art and architecture.⁴⁹ Historians of religious architecture have provided models for investigating the ways in which liturgy and ceremony both give structure to buildings and are structured by them.⁵⁰ In the realm of secular architecture and urbanism there has also been a

assertion that self-fashioning must always occur in opposition to some threatening or alien Other. I therefore see self-fashioning as more closely connected to Berger's argument that 'if others can fashion them [men and women], they can fashion themselves'. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; Berger, *Absence of Grace*, 67. My position is also contrary to that of Joan Kelly-Gadol, among others, who maintained that women were only ever objects and were not afforded the same individuality as men. Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"

47 I take a cue here from Berger, who suggests that Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* contains a critique of the very society it represents. While I am not wholly convinced by his argument, he does point to the ways in which the text contradicts and subverts itself, which I believe opens the way for individual agency. Berger, *Absence of Grace*.

48 Christine Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations." See also, Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 2.

49 Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*; John Shearman, *Only Connect*. Sherman himself called for a history of the spectator's engagement with architecture.

50 Among the classic studies are Thomas Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*; and William Tronzo, "Medieval Object-Enigma," 197–228.

growing interest in the relationships between inhabitants and architectural space.⁵¹ We can now build upon that work in order to interrogate the lived experiences of buildings.

Experience is culturally mediated and historically contingent. I rely on archival documents in order to analyze the ways in which Gonzaga family members and their guests interacted with the Palazzo Te. The dynasty's approach to the palace was not uniform throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and it served many functions at once. From stables to fruit orchard and recreational site to alchemical laboratory, the Palazzo Te was embedded within the daily life of the Mantuan court. At the same time, the palace was instrumental in the ceremonial life of the dynasty, particularly during the reigns of Federico II (1519–1540) and Vincenzo I (1587–1612). Records concerning the palace's role in courtly entertainments and triumphal entries demonstrate the ways in which the Gonzaga dynasty self-consciously deployed the palace in order to enhance their social and political prestige. They also reveal the extent to which the Gonzaga attempted to re-frame and reconstruct the palace to fit their changing circumstances, as well as the ways in which the building resisted such efforts. I also attempt to invoke something of the fluctuating circumstances in which inhabitants encounter the built environment by including some figures with people, cars, signs, and shadows (for example, Figs. 7, 21, and 40). Beholders rarely experience buildings in isolation or in ideal circumstances. I hope to have captured the way that light, furnishings (both Modern and Early Modern), and people relate to the structures and surfaces around them.

I propose that we treat the built environment as a dynamic agent that forms and is formed by the bodies, actions, and identities of its inhabitants. Thus, my use of the term experience is also a call to reconstitute the viewer as an embodied beholder.⁵² In doing so, I appeal not to the ocular-centric experience of Michael Baxandall, but to phenomenological experience as conceptualized by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and read through feminist and queer approaches.⁵³ Merleau-Ponty argued that bodies and space are interdependent. The body is not in space, rather 'it *inhabits* space'.⁵⁴ Conceptual and physical spaces do not exist separate from the body; instead, space is predicated upon and defined by the body. Similarly, identity and consciousness are

51 Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*; David R. Coffin, *Villa in Renaissance Rome*; Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces*; Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space*, 39–173; James R. Lindow, *Renaissance Palace in Florence*, 77–184; Deborah Howard and Laura Moretti, *Sound and Space*; and Niall Atkinson, *Noisy Renaissance*.

52 I am especially indebted to recent work by Elina Gertsman and Adrian Randolph on the tactile and performative experience of objects and to Patricia Simons's call for an 'embodied history'. Elina Gertsman, *Worlds Within*; Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 1–15; 169–203; Simons, *Sex of Men*, 18 and following.

53 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*; Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*; Judith Butler, "Performative Acts."; Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*; Iris Marion Young, *Female Body Experience*. For the applications of phenomenology in the study of art, see Amelia Jones, "Meaning, Identity, Embodiment," 71–90.

54 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 140. Emphasis in original.

bound up with the body and its spaces. Just as there can be no concept of space without the body, there can be no constitution of the subject separate from the body.⁵⁵ While Merleau-Ponty posits that the body is always a subject, Iris Marion Young argues that the body is both subject and object, or 'a thing that exists as *looked at and acted upon*'.⁵⁶ In framing the Palazzo Te as both subject and object, I therefore examine the ways in which buildings and bodies act upon one another.

Early Modern bodies were subject to a culture of surveillance that produced them as both looking and looked at, both acting and acted upon, and thus as both subjects and objects. Moreover, beholders were attuned to the ways that objects and spaces could impose upon them, making identity something that was produced in the negotiation between beholder and beheld.⁵⁷ Buildings were not empty objects divorced from the body; rather, architectural spaces made possible certain kinds of physical and social relationships, and were, in turn, transformed by the uses and experiences of their inhabitants.⁵⁸ Beholders did not come to works of art or architecture with already determined identities; instead, subjectivity was formed and reformed as they encountered, experienced, and interpreted the physical world around them.

At the same time, it would be inaccurate to say that gendered and corporeal subjectivity is formed solely through individual agency. Castiglione, della Cassa, and Guazzo wrote a body that was under the control of the mind, a docile body that could be crafted, honed, and performed by its subject.⁵⁹ While Renaissance authors therefore stress the autonomy of self-fashioning, social and cultural forces could and did impinge upon, and, at times, override individual determinacy. As Pierre Bourdieu and Elizabeth Grosz have noted, ideas of corporeality are created through the inscription of social practices upon the body, such that the body becomes a style one inhabits rather than a self-consciously constructed edifice.⁶⁰ Renaissance courtiers described and envisioned their bodies and their selves as under control, disciplined, and unified, yet many of their decisions and actions were governed by external social and cultural forces. Precisely because the spaces of the Palazzo Te are unstable, dynamic, and unbounded they allow us to explore the tensions between self-conscious constructions of gender and the ways in which spaces imposed upon their inhabitants.

55 Ibid., 142–153. See also, Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," 145–148.

56 "Throwing Like a Girl," 148. Emphasis in original. Merleau-Ponty's later work also tends in this direction, as he explores the embodied subject as one who 'cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it'. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," 134–135.

57 Several recent publications have explored that ways in which objects are constitutive of identity and how objects and spaces can co-opt the spectator and collapse subject-object distinctions: Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros*, 29–57; Anne Dunlop, *Painted Palaces*, 114–121; Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 169–179; and Giancarla Periti, *Courts of Religious Ladies*, 196–203.

58 Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, 92.

59 I am thinking here of Foucault's concept of the docile body, disciplined not by institutions, but by individual will and social monitoring. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135–169.

60 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72–91; Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 138–158.

Architectural historians have tended to focus on the ways in which Renaissance architectural theory divorced the body from the eye and transformed buildings into objects to be seen, rather than spaces to be inhabited.⁶¹ Classical and Renaissance writers allowed for the corporeality of the built environment and conceived of buildings as bodies. In his influential treatise on architecture, Vitruvius cited the human form as a model for symmetry and proportion, stating that a building should mimic 'the components of the human body'.⁶² Vitruvius also asserted that the Doric and Ionic orders were based upon the proportions of men and women, respectively.⁶³ Following Vitruvius, Renaissance architects such as Alberti, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, and Sebastiano Serlio conceived of a dialectic relationship between their buildings and the body.⁶⁴ Francesco di Giorgio's illustrations in his *Trattato di architettura* (c. 1490) perhaps best illustrate that Renaissance architects envisioned the human body not only as a source of proportion, but also a source of invention and imitation (Fig. 4).⁶⁵ In his drawings for the plan and façade of a church, the male body provides the proportions of the structure and defines it as a space inhabited by the body. For Renaissance architects the building was a body, and, I would argue, an embodied subject that acted on inhabitants even as they acted on its structures and surfaces.

The concept of buildings and people as embodied subjects is particularly important for understanding Renaissance approaches to and negotiations of gender. With the exceptions of the Orders, treatises on architecture commonly equate the male body with ideal architectural proportion, suggesting that the subject or identity of churches, palaces, civic buildings, and the city itself might be masculine. Indeed, a long exegetical tradition described the Catholic Church and its members as the body of Christ, and man as a microcosm of the world.⁶⁶ If the proportions of the ideal building were masculine, the matter being shaped was feminine.⁶⁷ In contrast to masculine corporeal control, authors and artists constructed women as subject to and controlled by their bodies.⁶⁸ At the same time, the Virgin Mary was portrayed as *ecclesia*, or the Church, both as a building and a body.⁶⁹ Various parts of the city and

61 Mark Wigley, "Untitled," 327–389. Wigley argued that Alberti's white surface produced an eye/body that was detached from what it saw, thereby creating a disciplinary approach to architecture in which buildings became objects to be looked at and inhabited by detached viewers. My thinking regarding embodiment and space is deeply indebted to Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*.

62 Vitruvius, *Architecture*, 47 (III.1.5). See also, Joseph Rykwert, *Dancing Column*, 96–115.

63 Vitruvius, *Architecture*, 54–55 (IV.1.1–6).

64 Rykwert, *Dancing Column*, 43–67.

65 Lawrence Lowic, "The Human Analogy in Francesco di Giorgio's *Trattato*," 360–370; Francesco Paolo Fiore, "Trattati," 66–85.

66 Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 1–32; Rykwert, *Dancing Column*, 61–66; 73–85.

67 Wigley, "Untitled," 357. Wigley is here referring to Aristotelian concepts of masculine form and feminine matter. Cf., Aristotle, *De generatione*, 1.20–1.22.

68 Simons, *Sex of Men*, 125–128.

69 Mary Garrard, *Brunelleschi's Egg*, 36–41.

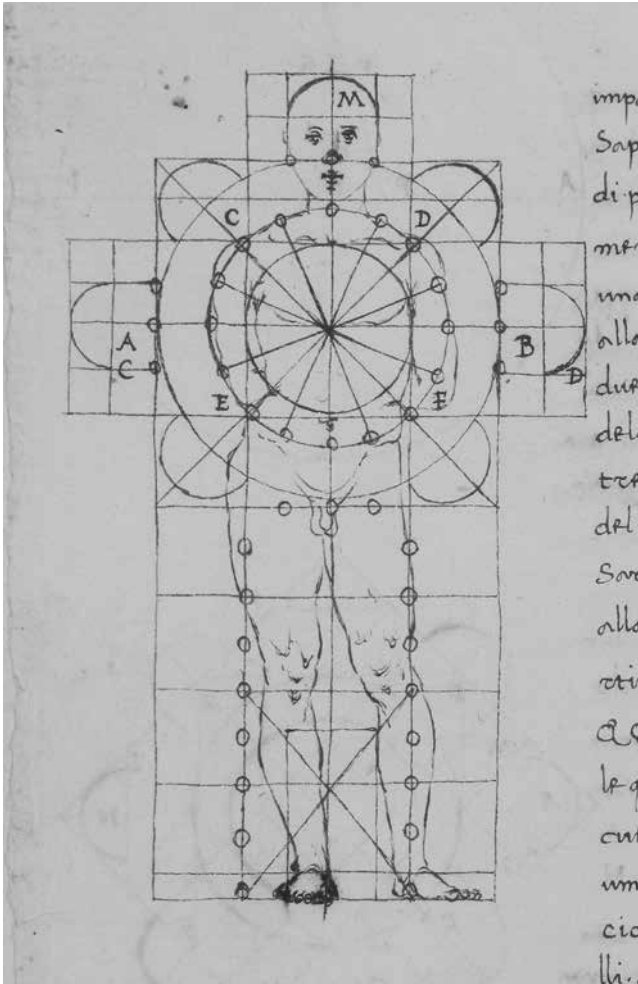


Fig. 4: Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Plan of a Church According to the Proportions of the Human Body*, from *Trattato di architettura e macchine*, c. 1490. Pen and ink. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Ms.II.1141.

its civic, religious, and domestic buildings could also be gendered through rituals and practices that claimed spaces as masculine or feminine.⁷⁰

Rather than seeing buildings or spaces as abstractly masculine or feminine, a phenomenological approach acknowledges the ways in which individuals produced gender identities in and through the built environment.⁷¹ In treating buildings and individuals as acting subjects, or agents, phenomenology allows us to approach the built

⁷⁰ Robert C. Davis, "The Geography of Gender in the Renaissance," 19–38.

⁷¹ I am drawing upon Elizabeth Grosz's body-city model in which the body and the built environment are mutually defining. The physical body and its social discourses produce and transform the built environment, but architecture also plays an active role in constituting bodies. *Space, Time, and Perversion*, 103–110.

environment as a space that could resist the intentions of its makers and inhabitants. The Palazzo Te becomes more than a place in which women and men fashioned and performed their gendered subjectivity; it is also a material subject that shaped its inhabitants, leaving traces upon their bodies and their identities.⁷² Moreover, as I argue at greater length in Chapter Four, Renaissance space did not always posit an intact, stable body. Instead, the building's body, and the bodies that inhabited it, could be open, unstable, and polysemous.

Space

The study of space has become ubiquitous in recent years, and numerous articles, essays and books attest to a spatial turn in social history.⁷³ While there seems to be broad agreement that space is socially constructed and activated, and that space and time are inextricably intertwined, just what constitutes space is a nebulous question. Is space physical, abstract, geographical, theoretical, lived, mapped, or made?

This study considers space from three interwoven methodological points of view: social, experiential, and material.⁷⁴ Henri Lefebvre famously conceived of space as something that is constructed, imagined, and lived through societal interactions.⁷⁵ For Lefebvre, social space is primarily conceptual. Yet, feminist theorists have argued for an understanding of social space as a place of material and corporeal interactions and practices.⁷⁶ Social space is therefore created by the relationships between bodies and objects. At the same time, space is not simply produced by overarching social forces. The second way that I approach space is as something that is formed and re-formed by the actions and movements of its inhabitants. Michel de Certeau writes of 'spatial practices', in which space is dynamic, experiential, and polyvalent.⁷⁷ While social space is at least nominally dependent upon boundaries, experiential space is not geographically fixed and opens outward.⁷⁸ Space is continually in the process of being built, imagined, and remembered; it is always in the process of becoming.

72 Ibid., 17.

73 In 2006 Peter Stearns recognized the 'spatial question' as one of the fundamental issues shaping the future of social history. "Social History and Spatial Scope," 613–614. Indeed, the spatial turn has been so successful that it is not possible to survey the full literature here. In forming my own approach, the following studies of Medieval and Early Modern spaces have been particularly helpful: Megan Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces*; Flather, *Gender and Space*; Matthew P. Romaniello and Charles Lipp, *Contested Spaces*; Merri E. Weisner, *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces*. For an overview of critical approaches to space, see Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, *Thinking Space*.

74 The three frameworks described below are deeply indebted to Megan Cassidy-Welch, "Space and Place," 1–12.

75 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

76 Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, 83–101; Doreen Massey, *For Space*, 90–98.

77 Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

78 Massey, *For Space*.

The approaches to space outlined above can be rather abstract because they often lack grounding in the material realm. I would therefore like to propose a third way to understand space: as the two- and three-dimensional planes and voids that make up the built environment. Art and architectural historians are uniquely equipped to bridge the gap between theory and objects. If space is an abstract, fluid, socially constructed concept, it is also something that exists in the physical world. The bricks, walls, and vaults of the Palazzo Te enclose and form space, even as its frescoes often open onto seemingly infinite vistas. At the same time, the placement of frescoed walls and physical doors framed corporeal and visual experience, offering tantalizing glimpses of gigantic bodies or brightly lit outdoor spaces that propelled the inhabitant's body through the palace. Even the abstract spaces of linear perspective could impinge upon the spaces of the beholder. In the Camera di Psiche, frescoed figures reach around and over their painted frames (Pl. 4), and in the Sala dei Giganti, walls are painted away, collapsing pictorial and physical space (Pl. 9).

In thinking of the Palazzo Te as an environment, I also seek to enliven its structures and circumstances. Architectural history has tended to see buildings as inert, and as closed and perfected objects. I propose, instead, that we approach the palace as an assemblage of practices and processes that are continually being realized.⁷⁹ The spaces of the Palazzo Te are not simply physical, they are also social, experiential, and performative. As Helen Hills has argued, buildings do not merely perpetuate or express existing social relationships; rather, they make it possible for inhabitants to imagine and enact new identities and associations.⁸⁰ The Palazzo Te is a building constructed in court society and used as a ceremonial center, and thus a space experienced through dances, banquets, and processions, as well as everyday leisure activities such as horseback riding and picnicking. Its use and even its fabric changed over time as the Gonzaga dynasty deployed it under changing political and social circumstances, added onto it, and refurbished it. To separate the Palazzo Te, or any building, from the society that produced it, the activities that occurred there, and the people that passed through it is to empty the building render it passive. In order to more fully understand the Renaissance built environment, we must first re-vitalize it.

This is therefore not a book about the ways in which spaces and buildings were gendered or about gendered patronage, subjects that have been admirably explored by Katherine McIver, Giancarla Peritti, and Anabel Thomas and in collections of essays edited by Helen Hills and Sheryl E. Reiss and David Wilkins, to name only a few.⁸¹

79 Helen Stratford, "Unpleasant Matters," 209–224.

80 *Invisible City*, 3–18.

81 Katherine McIver, *Women, Art, and Architecture*; Peritti, *Courts of Religious Ladies*; Anabel Thomas, *Art and Piety*; Helen Hills, *Architecture*; Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, *Beyond Isabella*. Studies of the domestic interior have also dealt with gendered space. See, Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*; Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*; Erin J. Campbell, Stephanie R. Miller, and Elizabeth Carroll Consavari, *Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior*.

Nor is this, strictly speaking, a book about architecture and its histories. Instead, this book treats gender, experience, and space as intertwined discourses wherein identity is constructed, enacted, and reproduced through the constant play between surfaces, whether those are the surfaces of the built environment or of the body. Individuals' ideas of themselves and their representations of those selves were constantly forming, shifting, and fragmenting in response to the physical and conceptual spaces in which they lived.⁸² Space, and especially architecture, may seem to be static and immutable, but it is in fact continually in the process of production by individuals interacting within a society. Simply put space, like gender, is performative.

Renaissance spaces such as the Palazzo Te were places in which identity was constituted and enacted, rather than simply presented. They were also places in which individuals could negotiate socially prescribed gender roles while engaging in self-fashioning. Performative spaces are thus sites of 'conflict, contradiction, negotiation, and transformation'.⁸³ Through its multivalent form and ceremonial function the palace was an active participant in the construction and perception of femininity and masculinity at the Gonzaga court. The Palazzo Te was a fellow performer, acting upon its inhabitants even as their actions, movements, gestures, and utterances worked upon the palace and its environs.

The Performative Palace

Giulio Romano's Palazzo Te was designed and constructed over a roughly ten-year period from 1525 until 1535.⁸⁴ Giulio Romano was often occupied with several projects at once, and his tightly organized workshop was responsible for executing much of the structure and its decoration according to his models.⁸⁵ His vision of the palace accommodated the desires of his rather demanding patron, Federico II Gonzaga, his own artistic and courtly identity, and shifting ideas concerning the roles of imitation

82 Flather, *Gender and Space*, 1–16.

83 Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*, 18. This book's approach to performance as a communal and cultural instance (rather than simply social) has had a deep impact on my thinking.

84 Kurt W. Forster and Richard J. Tuttle, "The Palazzo Te." The earliest structures on the island were stables, but around 1525 Federico II Gonzaga had Giulio construct the initial phase of the villa, which included walls from the original stables and likely encompassed the Sala dei Cavalli through the Camera di Ovidio. The second building phase, which likely commenced in 1527, transformed the villa into a palace by adding the northern and western wings and probably half of the eastern wing. The third phase, which began after April 1530, comprised the eastern façade and Loggia di Davide and completed the eastern and southern wings. The southern loggia and exterior façade remained undecorated. Verheyen argues that Giulio's first building phase also included the Camera di Psiche; see Egon Verheyen, "In Defense of Jacopo Strada," 134–135.

85 For the attribution and dating of the interior frescoes and stuccoes, see Piera Carpi, "Giulio Romano," 3–31; Frederick Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, 1105–160; Egon Verheyen, "Die Malereien in der Sala di Psiche des Palazzo del Te," 33–68; Konrad Oberhuber, "L'apparato decorativo," 336–379; Amedeo Belluzzi, *Palazzo Te*, 1193–206; Ugo Bazzotti, "Osservazioni," 65–108.

and innovation in art.⁸⁶ As both architect and artist Giulio Romano also had unprecedented control over the spatial and visual forms of the palace.⁸⁷ Through both architecture and decoration, Giulio created a dynamic environment that encouraged multiple interpretations and incited the production and performance of gendered identities.

When completed, the plan of the Palazzo Te corresponded to that of an ancient Roman villa with rooms arranged around a central courtyard and airy loggias opening onto lush gardens. In addition to the secret garden and its accompanying apartment, the Palazzo Te comprises nineteen rooms that were decorated with frescoes, stuccoes, woodwork, and gilded leather hangings, as well as several service rooms and the famed Gonzaga stables (Fig. 5). Due to its focus on performative space, this book will discuss several rooms of the palace only briefly, or not at all, among them the Camera di Ovidio, Camera delle Imprese, the small rooms west of the Sala dei Giganti, and the Garden Apartment. This is not to suggest that these are not important rooms. Contemporary documents rarely mention them, and because the spatial mechanics of each are generally straightforward they posit a less dynamic relationship with their inhabitants.

86 The Palazzo Te has supported shifting interpretations of Federico II's personality, Giulio Romano's identity, and the definition of Mannerism. For an overview of the scholarship, see Paolo Carpeggiani, "La fortuna critica," 13–33; Ernst H. Gombrich, "Il palazzo del Te," 17–21. The palace has long been regarded as an example of Federico's hedonism and sexual libertinism, particularly by Egon Verheyen, *The Palazzo del Te*. Verheyen's biographical interpretation of the palace remains prevalent in recent publications: Ugo Bazzotti, *Palazzo Te*; Sally Hickson, *Women, Art and Architectural Patronage*. For a broader examination of Federico's patronage strategies, see the essays in Francesca Mattei, *Federico II Gonzaga*. Scholarship has also approached the palace as evidence of Giulio's artistic genius and intemperance: Johann Dominik Fiorillo, *Geschichte der Mahlerei*; Stefano Davari, *Descrizione del palazzo del Te*; Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Architecture of Mannerism*; Hartt, *Giulio Romano*. More recently, the palace has been interpreted in light of Giulio's fashioning of an artistic identity based on an intimate familiarity with and ironic approach to the art of ancient Rome: Bob Allies, "Palazzo del Te," 59–65; Volker Hoffmann, "Giulios Ironie," 543–558. Until the term Mannerism went out of fashion around 1980, the Palazzo Te was used as a definitive example of the style. Gombrich used the palace as an example of the anxiety-laden, anti-classical nature of Mannerism, Ernst H. Gombrich, "Zum Werke Giulio Romanos. I," 81–89. He later admitted that he overstated the anxiety of the Palazzo Te. In contrast, the palace has also been seen as characteristic of Mannerism's courtly wit and erudition. See especially, Giusta Nicco Fasola, "Giulio Romano e il Manierismo," 60–73; John Shearman, *Mannerism*, 140–158.

87 The subject of Giulio's artistic control at the Palazzo del Te has been much debated, especially in reference to the asymmetrical nature of the façades. Gombrich and Hartt initially believed that the Palazzo del Te was constructed *ex novo*, and that its irregularities were the product of his artistic license. Gombrich, "Zum Werke Giulio Romanos. I," 79–104; "Zum Werke Giulio Romanos. II," 121–150; Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, 1.91. However, John Shearman brought attention to Giorgio Vasari's *vita* of Giulio Romano, which states that the artist was instructed to make use of pre-existing structures. John Shearman, "Giulio Romano," 354–368. The architectural study of Forster and Tuttle confirmed that Giulio incorporated an earlier structure into the palace, which led the authors to almost wholly reject the notion of artistic freedom at the Palazzo Te. Forster and Tuttle, "The Palazzo Te," 267–293. Forster later admitted that he had overstated his previous claims, and current scholarship moderates between the two extremes. Amedeo Belluzzi and Kurt W. Forster, "Giulio Romano architetto," 177–225.

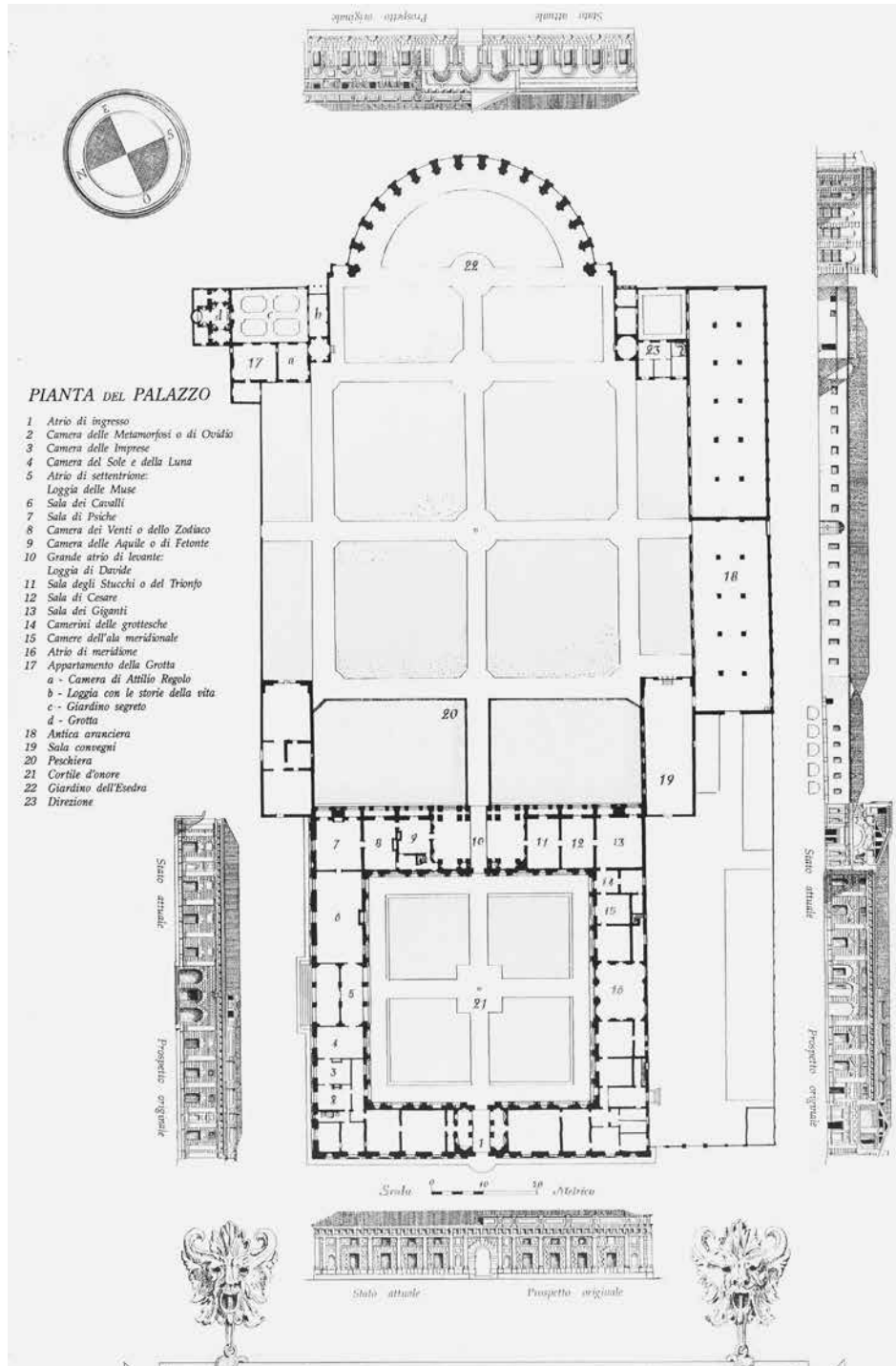


Fig. 5: Plan of the Palazzo Te Complex. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.

In many of the other rooms Giulio set up multi-layered relationships between the physical spaces of inhabitants and the fictive spaces depicted on the walls. The Camera delle Aquile derives its name from the four giant stucco eagles that spread their wings in the corners of the room (Pl. 2). The composition of the Camera delle Aquile implicates the beholder in the action of the ceiling fresco where Phaeton's plunge to earth will soon bring him into the room. The architecture recedes in a series of niches, while decorative elements forcefully assert themselves; stucco busts protrude outward from the walls and Phaeton's fall physically assaults beholders. The architecture therefore seems to vigorously thrust the painting into the physical space of the room. Vasari, who thought that the fresco depicted the fall of Icarus, nevertheless noted its impact, writing that 'it seems to be real and true, for in it one sees the fierce heat of the sun burning the wretched youth's wings, the flaming fire gives out smoke, and one almost hears the crackling of burning plumes'.⁸⁸ The Camera delle Aquile implicates visitors in Phaeton's plunge to earth, yet also calls upon inhabitants to recognize the frescoed artifice above them. Phaeton is physically assertive, but he is not the room's only subject. Each niche contains six mythological frescoes surrounded by smaller tondi depicting *spiritelli*, Classical gods, and other mythical figures; four stucco plaques with narrative scenes lie between the niches; harpies rest on corbels; and more *spiritelli* wend their way through the ceiling on grape vines. The beholder is caught up in Phaeton's tragic fall, but the sense of pathos is disrupted by the overabundance of images in the room.⁸⁹

The concepts of dramatic tension and dynamism have long been recognized at the Palazzo del Te, specifically in the façades. Rusticated blocks on the outer façades appear to shift in and out of the building, creating a sense of depth and a syncopated rhythm that encourages visitors to look more closely (Fig. 9).⁹⁰ The instability of moving masonry is intensified in the courtyard, where triglyphs slip downward as if they are about to fall out of place and a keystone ruptures the pediment it is supposed to support (Fig. 6). On the eastern garden façade, Giulio used a series of columns, pilasters, and colonettes combined with windows, archways, and niches to create movement along the façade, but also in and between its elements (Fig. 55). Giulio's lively deconstruction of the façade has also been linked to *sprezzatura*, here expressed as a deliberate disdain for the rules of Classical architecture.⁹¹ The introduction of

88 Vasari, *Lives*, 2:129.

89 Sally Hickson has made a similar comment on the sensory impact of the *Fall of Phaeton*. However, she does not discuss the other images in the room or the way that they mitigate the beholder's perception of physical involvement in the fresco. See, "More Than Meets the Eye," 48–49.

90 Manfredo Tafuri, "Linguaggio, mentalità, committenti," 20–25.

91 The term *sprezzatura* was first applied to architecture of the Palazzo Te by Amedeo Belluzzi and Walter Capezzali, *Il palazzo dei lucidi inganni*, 58. More recently, Tafuri identified *sprezzatura* as a motivating theme in Giulio Romano's oeuvre, see Tafuri, "Linguaggio, mentalità, committenti," 20–49. For a re-evaluation of the role of classicism in Giulio's oeuvre, see Ernst H. Gombrich, "Architecture and Rhetoric," 167; Allies, "Palazzo del Te," 59–65.



Fig. 6: Western courtyard façade, 1525–27. Palazzo Te. Photo by author.

unfinished elements, such as the columns in the western loggia (Fig. 7), mirrors the intentional negligence of the courtier.⁹² Beholders attuned to the nuances of courtly theater and spectacle would have recognized and appreciated the emotional and dramatic registers of the Palazzo Te.⁹³ The artifice of the façades – mere stucco pretending to be stone – reminded courtiers that their performances were also a pretense.

In the very sophistication of its artifice the Palazzo Te provided an ideal space for the performance of gender. Like Castiglione's ideal courtier, Giulio Romano's palace activates self-conscious nonchalance and delights its beholders through a studied exhibition of marvels that appeared natural and effortless. The courtier's nonchalance is made manifest through actions and utterances; the *sprezzatura* of the Palazzo Te is seen in the easy way in which Giulio combines seemingly disparate elements in a deliberate attempt to astound visitors. No two façades of the palace are exactly alike, and only the eastern façade is perfectly symmetrical. The appearance of symmetry is maintained through the rhythmic placement of architectural elements such as windows and columns; yet that rhythm is disrupted by purposefully incongruous elements such as rusticated portals and dropped triglyphs.⁹⁴ The combination of contrasting elements found on the façade is mirrored on the interior. The tranquility

92 Gombrich, "Architecture and Rhetoric."

93 Howard Burns, "Giulio Romano, il teatro, l'antico," 237; Amedeo Belluzzi and Kurt W. Forster, "Giulio Romano architetto," 77. The affective potential of the palace has also been explored in relation to its frescoes. See, Paula Carabell, "Breaking the Frame," 87–100; Hickson, "More Than Meets the Eye," 41–59.

94 For syncopated rhythm in Giulio's architecture, see Tafuri, "Linguaggio, mentalità, committenti," 20–23.



Fig. 7: 'Unfinished' columns, western loggia, 1525–27. Palazzo Te. Photo by author.

of the Sala dei Cavalli is followed by the opulence of the Camera di Psiche, and the overwhelming *terribilità* of the Sala dei Giganti is preceded by the austerity of the Camera degli Imperatori.

The palace also obscures its form behind pictorial and physical layers. At times, these veils are swept aside, exposing tantalizing glimpses of the building's flesh, a performance akin to the lady's *sprezzata purità*. In the western loggia, seemingly unfinished columns and pilasters appear almost naked when topped by finished capitals (Fig. 7). In the Camera degli Imperatori, winged victories and *spiritelli* push

back the curtain of the ceiling to reveal a glistening realm beyond (Fig. 29). In other instances, the curtain remains closed, inviting penetration, but never quite granting it. A small landscape scene in the Camera di Ovidio appears to depict the Palazzo Te in the midst of construction. The palace's body is seemingly laid open for the beholder, and the image has even been used to trace the chronology of the building's production.⁹⁵ Rather than a document of completed work, the fresco is a representation that seems to grant access, but instead further shrouds the form and genesis of the Palazzo Te.

Through its displays of *sprezzatura* and *sprezzata purità* the Palazzo Te drew praise similar to that of Castiglione's courtier, and should therefore be regarded as akin to a fellow performer. The ideal courtier should elicit reactions of *maraviglia* ('awe' or 'wonder') from the audience.⁹⁶ The beholder's awed response signifies both delight at being presented with something unexpected, and an admiration for ingenuity and wit.⁹⁷ This is exactly the reaction that the Palazzo Te elicited from its beholders. When he visited the palace in 1530, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was 'completely awestruck (*tutta maravigliosa*)' by the frescoes in the Camera di Psiche.⁹⁸ And Giorgio Vasari wrote that the Sala dei Giganti was a marvelous work because 'the whole painting has neither beginning nor end'.⁹⁹ The awe that the Sala dei Giganti elicited from Vasari was due to its surprising inventiveness: the fact that the entire room was covered in one continuous narrative fresco was both a new development in painting and an unexpected visual delight.

Male and female courtiers lived in a theatrical society based on the seeming naturalness of their constructed personas. Similarly, the Palazzo Te is constructed around a theatrical approach to architecture and an apparently easy balance between artifice and artlessness. Giulio's innovative treatment of the façade, especially his use of rustication, caused the architect and theoretician Sebastiano Serlio to characterize the Palazzo Te as 'partly the work of nature, and partly the work of artifice'.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Vasari called Giulio's frescoes in the Camera di Psiche 'abundant in invention and artifice'.¹⁰¹ The themes of artifice and theatricality are incorporated into the very fabric of the palace itself. While at first glance the building may seem to be constructed out of marble, it is in fact comprised of brick overlaid with stucco. The underlying core of the palace is hidden beneath a sculpted, almost painterly façade. The façade

95 Egon Verheyen, "Die Sala di Ovidio im Palazzo Te," 161–170; Forster and Tuttle, "The Palazzo Te," 268–274.

96 Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*, 47. Cf. Castiglione, *Courtier*, 99, (II.38).

97 Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*, 48.

98 Romano, *Cronaca*, 262.

99 Vasari, *Lives*, 2.132.

100 '[P]arte opera di natura, e parte opera di artefice'. Sebastiano Serlio, *Tutte le opere*, Book IV, 11v.

101 '[C]opioso d'invenzion e d'artificio'. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite*, 3.331. *Artificio* is sometimes translated as 'craftsmanship', as in *Lives*, 2.128. I have translated it as 'artifice' in order to retain a sense of the visual trickery implicit in Giulio's compositions. See n. 102 below, where Vasari refers to Giulio's ability to counterfeit materials.

is an act, for it pretends to be what it is not; yet it is an act intended to be found out. A mere touch reveals not cool marble, but sun-warmed stucco. Half-finished columns in the entrance loggia and heavily rusticated portals similarly destabilize the façade. Inhabitants could therefore see as well as feel the pretense underlying Giulio's structure, revealing the instability beneath their own constructed identities. The dissimulation seen in the materials revealed the performative nature of *sprezzatura* and the persons and spaces that enacted it.

Inside the Palazzo Te, Giulio continues to deploy his materials in masterful ways, as well as to use *di sotto in sù* and illusionistic techniques to break open walls and ceiling vaults. Vasari's remark concerning the inventiveness and artifice employed by Giulio in the Camera di Psiche refers to the credenza on the south wall (Fig. 12), wherein lustrous plates and goblets 'seem to be of real silver and gold', but are in fact 'counterfeited with a simple yellow and other colors'.¹⁰² As in the façade, mundane materials are made to appear rich and vibrant. Similarly, the illusion is broken through architectonic elements: not stucco, in this case, but corbels that intrude upon the frescoed walls. The corbels remind beholders that what they see represented in front of them is just an illusion, as are the identities that they craft. Giulio also integrated the corbels into the narrative structure of the room, suggesting that courtiers should likewise collapse art and nature such that it is difficult for observers to determine the difference.

Giulio similarly blurred the lines between nature and artifice in a fresco located in the Camera del Sole e della Luna. Here, the chariots of the sun and the moon, driven by Apollo and Diana respectively, race across the ceiling (Fig. 8). They are depicted as if seen from below, using steep foreshortening and perspective, such that the inhabitant actually feels as if she is looking upward at the progress of the sun and moon across the sky. As with other *di sotto in sù* works at the Palazzo Te, 'besides seeming be alive', the figures of the gods and their chariots 'deceive the human eyes with a most pleasing illusion'.¹⁰³ Vasari notes that the frescoes are both natural, that is objects modeled after Nature with the potential for lively movement, and artificial, or painted figures that counterfeit the natural world. This tension between nature and artifice created spaces in which courtier-actors performed their roles.

As this book will demonstrate, the palace was a kind of courtly stage that encouraged the performance of gender roles.¹⁰⁴ The spaces of the palace were constructed through these performances; through architecture and decoration which were

102 *Lives*, 2.128. On Giulio's designs for silverware and banquet plate, see Ugo Bazzotti, "Disegni," 454–465; Beth L. Holman, "Giulio Romano," 94–68; Valerie Taylor, "Sketchbook to Princely Table," 137–153.

103 Vasari, *Lives*, 2.127.

104 Howard Burns has previously likened Giulio's treatment of the façade to courtly spectacle and theater. "Giulio Romano, il teatro, l'antico," 227–243.



Fig. 8: Camera del Sole e della Luna, ceiling vault, 1526–27. Fresco and stucco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.

perceived through sight, touch, and sound; through Giulio's Romano's virtuoso handling of materials; and through the lived interactions of the palace's inhabitants. A combination of perception, construction, and corporeal experience, the Palazzo Te facilitated a dynamic relationship between visitors and the spaces and images around them, and encouraged them to take the identities they enacted at the palace beyond its walls.

Gender is performed on the surface of things 'through a play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause'.¹⁰⁵ The surfaces of the Palazzo Te – its façades and walls – are similarly a play of absence and presence that suggest, but never fully reveal, the methods of its construction. Built from brick and mortar, the organizing principle of the Palazzo Te is hidden behind a layer of stucco made to look like marble. Likewise, the surfaces of the interior walls purport to contain depths that conceal the existence of the wall, as in the Camera di Psiche or the Sala dei Giganti. In contrast, stucco figures of Roman triumphs that process around the Camera degli Stuchi do not attempt to create the illusion of depth. Rather, they sit on the surface of the wall, calling attention to its dual role as pictorial and architectural support. Giulio Romano's surfaces are based upon an artifice that is meant to be recognized and appreciated, thereby encouraging the performance of a gender identity that was artificial in its construction and natural in its appearance.

¹⁰⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 185.

The performative spaces of the Palazzo Te allowed inhabitants to take up multiple positions and thereby facilitated the construction of gender identities. As we will see in the next chapter, the sensuous imagery of the Camera di Psiche could produce normative masculinity by inciting desire that courtiers could tame and direct via reasoned discourse. At the same time, images of mythological women depicted female sexual agency and transformed men into passive observers.

In the chapters that follow I analyze the use and reception of the Palazzo Te from the 1530 arrival of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to the Sack of Mantua in 1630. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the palace played a key role at the Gonzaga court as a setting for banquets, dances, triumphal processions, and marriage rituals, and its multivalent spaces accommodated shifting functions and interpretations. Its suburban location meant the palace was a space wherein the strict hierarchies governing court society might be loosened and new possibilities examined. The fact that the palace housed an alchemical laboratory in the late sixteenth century suggests that the Gonzaga were aware of its ability to transform meanings and identities.¹⁰⁶

The Palazzo Te is a place that exists in and through time, and one whose fabric and use changed throughout the years as guests and inhabitants interacted with the building. As this book reveals, the palace could incite the performance of normative gender identities by eliciting the display of *sprezzatura* and projective masculinity on the one hand, and receptive and artfully chaste femininity on the other. During the 1530 visit of Charles V, analyzed in the next chapter, movements of male dancers in the Sala dei Cavalli echoed the jumps and kicks of Federico's famed horses, some of which were depicted on the walls around them. Through their bodily actions the men performed an active and robust masculinity, while female dancers enacted docile femininity through their more measured steps. Inhabitants might not always enact the social script, meaning that the complex images and spaces of the palace might also incite performances of female sexual agency and masculine inaction.

In additions to the palace after 1530 Giulio employed an even more theatrical approach to art and architecture. In Chapter Three I argue that these later additions cited Classical and Renaissance exemplars and monuments in order to create spaces composed of multiple temporal trajectories. The palace and its spaces were not fixed in time, but were, I contend, always coming into being. During a second visit by Charles V in 1532, the palace's images and spaces asked inhabitants to reconstitute imperial and Classical bodies through a series of signifying absences, thus revealing the volatile nature of gendered identity.

106 Two letters from 1592 attest to the construction and operation of an alchemical laboratory on the island. Lists of expenses were submitted as late as 1604. See, ASMn, A.G., b. 2656, fasc. VII, fol. 105r; Ibid., fol. 106r; and Ibid., b. 2687, fasc. IV, f. 54r.

I therefore also contend that individuals negotiated socially prescribed gender roles within and through space, meaning that both the built environment and the identities it provoked were unstable, malleable, and, at times, transgressive. In Chapter Four I explore the ways in which the spaces of the Palazzo Te opened beyond the physical structures of the building. Via prints, drawings, and word of mouth the spaces and experiences of the Palazzo Te reverberated far beyond the confines of Renaissance Mantua. Through an appeal to monstrous corporeality, the built environment could elicit the performance of identities that were similarly open, troubling, and licentious. Moreover, beholders brought their own expectations and experiences to bear on the palace. When Vincenzo I Gonzaga's second bride, Eleonora de' Medici, entered the palace during her wedding procession in 1584, the Gonzaga no doubt intended that she would see its sexually suggestive imagery as an exhortation to conventional marital relations. But, as Chapter Five argues, Eleanora's experience of the Palazzo Te was colored by Vincenzo's disastrous first marriage and rumors surrounding his potency. The horse portraits and passionate encounters between gods and mortals she saw around her pointed to the virility and fidelity that her husband lacked.

My study of the experience and reception of the built environment is indebted to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who posited that works of art invoked and revealed meaning, and that the meanings they produced are temporally conditioned.¹⁰⁷ As this book will demonstrate, the use and interpretation of the Palazzo Te changed substantially throughout the sixteenth century, taking on significances that could not have been imagined by its architect and patron. I hope to avoid some of the pitfalls of reception by focusing, as much as is possible, on the responses of particular individuals rather than those of an ideal spectator or interpreter.¹⁰⁸ However, as any scholar of the archival record will have found, Renaissance observers rarely provide us with the specificity of place, activity, and response that we would like. The problem is only exacerbated when one attempts to consider the receptions of women, whose experiences are often mediated through a male author.

Moreover, I see reception as a dialectical and ongoing relationship between a space and its beholders. As agents, spaces and objects are involved in the making of their own reception. This is especially true of the Palazzo Te, which is dynamic, polyvalent, and engaging, thus engendering similarly unfixed and complex responses. This book seeks to uncover the manifold ways in which the Renaissance built environment produced, and was produced by, the gendered interactions and identities of its inhabitants. Like Castiglione's court lady, I attempt to negotiate a certain difficult mean by examining the written record, the physical and conceptual spaces of the Palazzo Te, discourses of gender, and the lived experiences of Renaissance visitors.

¹⁰⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

¹⁰⁸ For the benefits and challenges of Gadamer's work for feminist scholars, see the essays in Lorraine Code, *Feminist Interpretations*. For problems with reception history in the context of Renaissance gender studies, see Diana Hiller, *Gendered Perceptions*, 4–5.

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Plate 1: Camera di Psiche, detail of the east wall, *Jupiter and Olympia*, 1526–28. Fresco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 2: Camera delle Aquile, ceiling vault, 1527–28. Fresco and stucco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 3: Camera di Psiche, west wall, 1526–28. Fresco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 4: Camera di Psiche, east wall, 1526–1528. Fresco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 5: Sala dei Cavalli, east and south walls, 1526–27. Fresco with gilt wood ceiling. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 6: Loggia di Davide, view looking south, after 1530. Fresco and stucco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 7: Sala dei Giganti, ceiling vault, 1530–32. Fresco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 8: Perino del Vaga, Sala dei Giganti, *Fall of the Giants*, 1530–32. Villa Doria, Genoa. Fresco. © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 9: Sala dei Giganti, north wall, 1532–35. Fresco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.



Plate 10: Loggia delle Muse, 1526–28. Fresco and stucco. Palazzo Te. Courtesy of the Comune di Mantova.