

# Chapter 4

## Mise-en-Scène



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**Abstract** Contemporary solid-state lighting combined with advanced networked control systems means that scenic effects, once contained within theatrical and cinematic production, have infiltrated urban space. Mise-en-scène provides a method to articulate the urban atmospheres that have emerged through the new relationships between media interfaces and the construction of urban space. At night, the techniques of ambient lighting, surveillance systems, media surfaces and architectural feature lighting coagulate with physical space. These processes amplify the spectacle of the nocturnal nightscape's 'total work' through overdetermined, embodied subjective urban experiences. The tension between the analytic and productive dimensions of mise-en-scène is expressed in and through bodies. As an urban practitioner, I am implicated in the production of these nocturnal atmospheres. In attempting to locate an urban subject through mise-en-scène, this paper starts by turning a light on in the city of Kingston upon Hull; subsequently, it takes a walk along a fictional street, pauses by a wall in Whitehall and reflects an opera and a movie.

**Keywords** Urban · Lighting · Installation · Media · Corporeal

### 4.1 Light on

There are three layers of urban lighting in the city of Kingston upon Hull. The underlying layer is that of the streetlights, providing even uniform illumination: a ground. The second layer is more associated with the production of a civic atmosphere. This could be characterised by tree uplighting, seat lighting and the static illumination of significant building façades. The language of the latter would tend towards the framing of and emphasis to building outlines. As much a product of practicality, this illumination tends to either hang on the building or come from the ground, much as you would expect to see from the effects of stage footlights. This approach reinforces the proscenium nature of the city where the door and façade are emphasised

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and framed.<sup>1</sup> Intercutting this quite familiar approach to urban lighting is a network of light instruments that deploy a theatrical mode of illumination through the technique of the profile and spotlight. These light systems precisely frame architectural elements, control colour and tint and create extremely precise modelling of shadow.

I will start by turning one light on and dimming some down. To change the mood, I will shift the tint in Queen Victoria Square towards a cool colour and, to add a little drama, shift a sculpture high on a distant rooftop from darkness into a beam of blue light (Fig. 4.1). As the electronic protocol enables me to communicate with the

**Fig. 4.1** *The Golden Hour.*  
Kingston upon Hull.  
Production detail. 2017




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<sup>1</sup>At least since the Baroque period, the proscenium theatre arranges the audience on one side of a frame, the stage on the other. The frame loosely correlates to the front elevation of a building. Often the ghost of the ancient Greek temple structures the scenic architecture with the applied image of columns and entablature.

*Golden Hour* controller from anywhere, I do this from the comfort of my studio.<sup>2</sup> This installation is the result of my vision for a connected lighting infrastructure that enables ambient, accent and architectural lighting to perform in much the same way as a contemporary theatre or cinematic sound stage. The artwork was conceived at the level of infrastructure in order to have an impact on the retinal experience. Underpinning this logic of space is the ability to make significant changes to the lit environment. In other words, the *Golden Hour* is the morphology of the lit city image. It proposes that stable ambient street lighting should be considered as simply one nocturnal scene amongst many. Any shift in the emphasis of light exposes the urban infrastructure; it brings it to the sensible.

The visibility of the sources is this artworks crystallisation. If an observer fails to look up then they are in an 'iconic' work. As soon as they do look up and observe the lights they move into a 'crystalline' work.<sup>3</sup> It appears that to see something in the urban contemporary it first needs to be removed. If a system of experience, in this case a system of illumination, is stable, unchanging, then it tends towards a disappearance, and it becomes normative. When this atmosphere, or scene, is turned off or changed to another scene, then the artifice of the atmosphere is also exposed. But the atmosphere generated also makes an image of its own production. The important distinction that the work in Hull makes is that the sources of light are mostly located in plain sight, a refutation of cinemas removal of technical elements from the frame.

## 4.2 An Optical Street

Cinema requires an extreme degree of organization of its material and extreme regular work on the part of the model actor [naturshchik], and these are arranged in the plastic category for single point of view (the lens) and in the temporal category for the rhythm of a single projector. In the theatre things are arranged for a hundred eyes and a hundred ears. Theatrical measure for us, would mean chaos, theatrical artificiality, death. (Kuleshov 1922)

As an artist concerned with the effects of the cinematographic imaginary on the built environment, the application of mise-en-scène as an analytic method is a repurposing

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<sup>2</sup>The title refers to the hours where the sun is low over the horizon creating raking shadows and a redder and softer quality of light. The articulation of shadow and the angle of light are much favoured by cinematographers and photographers alike.

<sup>3</sup>I am taking Matthew Wilson Smiths simple formulation of the iconic and crystalline. The iconic work conceals its production mechanisms. Conversely, the crystalline work 'exposes and celebrates its technology' (Smith 2007: 47).

of practice in the field to the studio.<sup>4</sup> In theatrical and cinematic production *mise-en-scène* is placing what might be required for work onto the stage, or into the frame. As an analytic tool, it can help us to see beyond the narrative and through the sensually effective embedded in the image, in order to see how it is fabricated and which mechanisms are working and to what ends. The value of a *mise-en-scène* is that it can include all production items: sets, lighting, framing, actors and the script. The analytical movement from stage and screen to public space is as fluid as turning one's head away from the action on stage, standing up and walking into the street whilst continuing, in my case, to hold the same question in mind: how is this image I inhabit controlling me?

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of the images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. [...] We are neither in the amphitheater, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism. (Foucault 1977: 217)

As my feet hit an imagined pavement Michel Foucault echoes in each step reminding me that even though the pavement's stable footing allows movement, the image of the street trembles as it unfolds in front of me. I have to concede that as a practitioner I am inculcated in the production of this image in a number of ways. Sometimes I have been directly involved in the corporate decisions that shape the pavement or light the street.<sup>5</sup> At other times the night-time city provides me with a found sound stage or film set for the production of other kinds of works. I use the urban contemporary as material putting it to work again. Underlying this is Foucault's demand that I see my willing participation as a mechanism in the panoptic machine. I must look through the comforts of architectural typologies, the assurances of accepted practices, the multiplicity of statutory regulations, the banal apocrypha that public space is an amphitheatre or stage, in order to radicalise my relationship to the images that I inhabit.

Foucault then allows me to steer this *mise-en-scène* from a formal analysis towards something more divisive. Setting its limits is also to set my own. Understanding my

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<sup>4</sup>Mise-en-scène is summarised by John Gibbs as the interpretation of cinematic visual style through analysis of a scene's contents and its framing (Gibbs 2002: 5). In cinematic analysis less attention is brought to bear on what is excluded from the frame, out of shot in the space of the sound stage. The individual elements which form the composition and potential meanings of the city are not homogenous, neither do they arrive in space at the same time. Cities are compiled in layers of time and material. Instances of image making in the city are unable to hide production equipment in the occluded space of a sound stage. Rather, framing is constructed spatially, the production equipment de-emphasised with techniques of distraction, covering and amplification. Enveloped in the radiance of the night, the physical and the immaterial fold are together into images that, like in cinema, arrive to experience through the exposure of the urban subject to light. In this way light frames the scene, animates its contents and functions as actor and object.

<sup>5</sup>City Councils, Private corporations, Housing Associations, etc.

investment, I have to state with him (after him) that each element in this image is fully loaded. As I ponder the street light above me, the bench that I am sitting on is a device of power, which absolutely positions my body in space. Then following a slow panning gaze across the street I find myself to be at an apex of a triangle; my head, the street light, a surveillance camera. In this three-shot sequence the pavement, the bench, the street light, the surveillance camera and my head are all that have been brought to the *mise-en-scène*. There are no place in mind and no particular image; these objects inhabit a kind of emptiness. In this apocryphal image the qualities of the place remain hidden. It would appear to have no outside; the surveillance camera is producing the final shot, the light enabling its production and the bench situates this subject in relation to a light and a lens.

Morals reformed—health preserved—industry invigorated—instruction diffused—public burdens lightened—economy seated, as it were, upon a rock—the gordian knot of the Poor Laws not cut but untied—all by a simple idea in Architecture! (Bentham 1791)

‘Is not prevention better than punishment?’ (Bentham 1791, Sect. 15.) ripples through history from Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon to Thomas Mathieson’s *poliopticon* [my phrasing] (Mathieson 2013: 47). Bentham’s architecture is one that has an optical centre around which prisoners are arranged in ‘cells [that] are divided from one another [...] in the form of radii issuing from the circumference to the centre’ (1791, letter 2.). An eye is at the centre of a vortex described by Foucault as ‘visibility [is] trap’ (Foucault 1977: 200), the presence and non-presence of a constant observer guaranteeing ‘that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary’ (1977: 201). The panoptic architecture arranges the prisoners—actual bodies—around the occluded uncertainty of the warden at its fulcrum. A may or may not be present eye is surrounded by the must be present prisoners’ eyes (1791, letter 6.).<sup>6</sup> These lines of sight are individuated in the direct vector between the centre and the cell, these lines between one and many are all lines between a one and a one. The panopticon functions just as well with only one prisoner and no present warden, as it would if it held an infinite population and one present warden.<sup>7</sup> The force of these gazes is centripetal, each subject locked in place, in isolation. Each cell is isolated from the others. There is no potential for a prison community to emerge; however, morally reformed they might become.

Sitting here in the line of site of the camera one is at least notionally within a physical space, Bentham’s walls and cells, grills and partitions, dissolving into the fabric of the urban contemporary. The paradigmatic architectural shift has more than inverted or turned inside out: the spatial relations between the two subjects; prisoner now at centre, warden as multiplied satellite/s. The movement is one from

<sup>6</sup> ‘I flatter myself, there can now be little doubt of the plan possessing the fundamental advantages I have been attributing to it: I mean, the apparent omnipresence of the inspector [...] combined with the extreme facility of his real presence’.

<sup>7</sup> Bentham does concede in letter 5 that the prisoner should be under actual inspection as much as is possible. ‘[...] but the greater chance there is, of a given person’s being at any given time actually under inspection, the more strong will be the persuasion—the more intense, if I may say so, the feeling, he has of his being so’.

the centripetal to the centrifugal, the prisoner subjected to a dance of observation and communication. In this morphology what was once a cell is now a screen, camera, prosaic public realm surface, devices of exchange: skein surfaces. This surveillance camera is connected, the optical centre atomised, dispersed into a ‘polyoptical profile’ (2013: 47) that inverts Bentham’s logic by hiding the optic nerves of this distributed eye within its own digital apparatus. It is the skein that sits just below the pavement in ducts or passes through the air (and our bodies) in electromagnetic waves. I who sit under the street light is aggregated by this one/many eye, archived in order to be commodified for the few, to the many. The ordering of space is now conceptualised and concretised around an image, a composite image, where the signs that I carry (embody) are ordered, sorted, distributed, multiply aggregated in order to be put to other kinds of work.

The urban subject finds its body in this atmosphere. Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos’ (2015) Deleuzean apocalyptic conception of *Spatial Justice* situates the rupture of atmosphere as a necessary force to break the enclosure of the law. His use of the term ‘Landscape’ (a tautology between space and law) proposes a totality of law within which everything is contained. The interplay between the landscape’s invisibilisation in atmospheres, the matter of space itself, provides a neat triad of terms within which the embodied image of this wall can be articulated: landscape, atmosphere and spatial justice. Atmospheres are emergent spaces produced through the fluid relations between everything that can come into contact with anything else: bodies. In a multidirectional flow of sensory, emotional and informational events, these bodies circulate and construct atmospheres. This formulation of atmosphere is useful because it points us towards the thing that directs us away: the landscape seeks to become atmosphere, seeks to be naturalised, to become eternal, fixed. *Spatial Justice* is the rupture, a possibility of withdrawal from the compelling manipulations and securities of atmospherics.

I am atomised, aggregated elsewhere and then re-aggregated in the street. In one step I am here and everywhere. As Jameson (2012) observes ‘spatial distance is now translated into a virtual temporal simultaneity, and in which, in other words, here too space abolishes time’, [and] ‘the passage of time has been virtually eliminated’ in our postmodern temporality. The explicit temporality of architecture of power has apparently coalesced with its infrastructure, the prosaic town square disabused of its time, its material and its finitude.

### 4.3 Building Interface

In 2010 works were completed in Whitehall to create a ‘cleaner, safer and brighter environment for all users’ (Westminster.gov. 2010) resulting in widened pedestrian spaces in the environs of the Cabinet Office. The proportions of road to pavement and the relationship of building front to street changed. This more generous approach created a larger pedestrian platform and an improved interface with the building’s neoclassical façade making the spaces more open and accessible. In between the



**Fig. 4.2** The Cabinet Office. 2017. Whitehall. London

road edge and the facade sits a long low wall and a series of bollards (Fig. 4.2). This wall is not so low that it can be comfortably sat upon, but certainly low enough to see across and detailed in order to be able to be seen through. This slightly too tall wall is installed immediately above one of the main fibre-optic channels that make up Whitehall's data infrastructure. There is no surface detailing that would point the casual observer towards this conduit.<sup>8</sup>

European Parliament, Article 1 in the Framework Decision of 13th June 2002 on Combating Terrorism: each member state shall take the necessary measures to ensure that intentional acts referred to below from (a) to (i), as defined as offences under national law, which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation where committed with the aim of: seriously intimidating a population, or unduly compelling a Government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation, shall be deemed to be terrorist offences: (d) causing extensive destruction to government or public facility, a transport system, an infrastructure facility, including an information system, [...]; (2013: 89)

The wall then addresses the law of the framework decision and the street through a partial dissimulation, seeming to be landscape architecture even as it covers its other defensive qualities.<sup>9</sup> It is a soft and hard defence. The wall is soft in respect to its

<sup>8</sup>However, if you walk regularly in and around Whitehall eventually a service maintenance engineer will turn up and expose the concealment.

<sup>9</sup>Partial because, after all, a wall is always a means of defining an edge, separating a space, it can still also be simply prosaic. This seems to map in an approximate way to the successive 'radical

spatial separation of the building edge to the main thrust of the street, it is permeable to the pedestrian. It is hard in respect to the countermeasure that it provides against the truck repurposed to deliver an explosive package.<sup>10</sup> This is a wall at least twice. The manner and style in which it stitches the pavement together, ordering the long linear spaces, speaks of conviviality, walkability, of street furniture and urban landscape design in the context of a contemporary street: placemaking.

In Whitehall one would seem to be, if only potentially, a subject that appears without a trace; Mathieson's (2013) 'lone wolf'. In the 82 s on 22 March 2017 when Khalid Masood indiscriminately targeted pedestrians on Westminster Bridge, we witnessed two things: The horror of murder, and simultaneously, more evidence that integrated global control systems, coupled with distributed networks of surveillance and extra-state intelligence, cannot make up for the problem that predictive algorithms (2013: 99) are not yet time machines, or crystal balls.<sup>11</sup> It is of no consolation to the victims on the bridge that this attack failed to penetrate the physical heart of the Palace of Westminster. Anecdotally, it is possible to glean that through the defense measure of the 'polyoptical profile', most subjects appear with a trace; they appear through and in their digital archival materials. This of course means the traces gleaned in advance of an effect cocoon the surveillant society with the promise that most do not get through. The extra-state stacks the odds in our favour. It remains to be seen what this 'our' might become as the global—horizontal—integration of systems, Mathieson's *Lex Vigilatoria*, 'looses its grip on knowledge of the practical and the concrete, it looses touch with the happenings of the real world' (2013: 201).

If we are now free to allow the atmosphere of Whitehall to bombard us knowing that most corporeal threats do not get through, is it then possible to reintegrate our eyes into our bodies? And 'is not prevention better than punishment?'; minded that it is an 'I' who might be punished, as it is 'I' who might just be 'plausibly' guilty (2013: 201).<sup>12</sup> The 'we' that constitutes a public, formed in advance by their traces, remains stable as long as it performs predictably. The reveal (apocalypse) is the moment of judgement (justice), the choice to accept the atmosphere and participate in it, or to renegotiate one's terms of engagement with it. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos's formulation flattens the relationships between human agents and plastic spaces, atmospheres are produced by bodies and in bodies. The moment of

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negation of the sign as value' in Baudrillard's (1998) successive phases of the image, the movement between 'evil appearance: of the order of malice. In the third, it plays at being an appearance: it is the order of sorcery'.

<sup>10</sup>The devices I am concerned with are not aimed at pedestrians. Rather, this mode of attack is aimed at buildings and their occupants, communication cables, the spatial and technical supports of the political infrastructure.

<sup>11</sup>'New norms are being established inside the systems—norms that emphasise a future-orientation involving control patterns over whole categories of people and which develop risk profiles for entire groups' (Mathieson 2013).

<sup>12</sup>Mathieson situates this 'probably guilty' directly within inbuilt error or uncertainty in the systems of surveillance and interpretation. In this sense the surveilled subject can produce the evidence of their own guilt, as Chamayou (2011) argues in 'Drone Theory', is erased in the moment of their own extra-judicial destruction, both subject and evidence erased in the 'probable'.



withdrawal is a resistance to the atmospheric synthesis of the lawscape. For us, it is a means to see under the surface of Foucault's lawscape, rendered in the image of the panopticon, to see through this wall.

Seeing through the wall is the moment of spatial justice that reveals the lawscape. The wall's Portland Stone heritage skin conceals its engineering logic which constitutes a moment in the invisibilisation of the tactics of defence and the normalisation of globally distributed terror. The defensive measure that is at first temporary, seen throughout London in the form of mobile barriers placed after attacks, becomes stable within the image of Whitehall as a polite space of civility. As the wall civilises, its constituting logic renders 'being' into 'seeming'. This is 'being' predicated on immanent death arriving in the form of a van at speed. The wall is an infinitesimally small materialisation of a new biopolitics, described by Mbembe (2003) as the 'death-worlds' of a *necropolitics*. In Whitehall, it arrives as a folly in stone: a *necroimage*. Here the technological construction and structuring of social relations in the public realm is not that of a digital morphology dissolving built surfaces into a play of images. Rather, it is a play of form and surface as defense constructed as a permanent physical element of the street, the 'lone wolf' eternalised in stone: a memorial made in advance of its event.

#### 4.4 Back to the Street

Returning to the imagined bench that positions me in the cross hairs of a distributed optic. I look back again at the street light, it is night (Fig. 4.3). The street lights combine to create an undulating lit surface of concrete, stone and tarmac. These lights are in a line, they open up the nocturnal urban contemporary and entice me to walk into it. They create a space of activity in an image of light. In this production of an image that slips almost seamlessly into the production of space, we can glean something of what Adorno (2005: 80) observed in Richard Wagner's operatic productions: '[that] inside the illusion dwells disillusionment'. Adorno's critique of Wagner's conception of a cosmos is that in the production of its enclosing totality—the total work of art—is also a 'radical alienation' from the natural (2005: 86). The Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* sought to unify production fragments into a 'second nature'. In spatial terms, this helps us to see a movement from an origin, the place of transmission, towards an enclosure or the directional to the omnidirectional. This proliferation of production fragments needs a 'radical process of integration, which assiduously draws attention to itself, [it] is already no more than a cover for the underlying fragmentation'. This is a 'cosmos [that] has no reality' (2005: 93). It is an enclosing atmosphere that demands our trust. In order to produce this unified mise-en-scène, the production mechanisms have to remain hidden. This cosmos can suffer no evidence of its making. It seeks to negate analysis.

Matthew Wilson Smith offers the concept of the *estrangement device* that is 'not ultimately reincorporated back into the totality of the work' (Smith 2007: 186). It is as if an Adorno fragment has the potential to resist its total synthesis. A device



Fig. 4.3 Ropemakers fields. East London. 2015

that both propagates the cosmos and acts as a mode of resistance to it incorporated into its own infrastructure. After all, it is the infrastructure that binds and connects. However, Smith's analysis of the 'total work of art' problematises the efficacy of any potent critical reflection within the 'organic spectacle', that is, the process of the re-absorption of the medium into the 'organic' totality of the work itself. In the end, Adorno's integration is only tempered by Wilson Smith's re-integration, a 'being' transforming into a 'seeming'. Any moment that a fragment resists, or is revealed, is simply the moment when it becomes recombined in the 'total work'. As we have seen in Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, the lawscape is always becoming atmosphere: the 'total work'. This suggests that the possibility of critical reflection can only be found fleetingly in the transition of the *estrangement device* into the totality.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> At the root of this formulation we find a trace of Marx's Grundrisse, where he marks a 'pure loss' in the temporal moment in the circulation of capital; the time that passes 'before the commodity makes its transition into money; or the time during which it remains a commodity, only a potential but not a real value'. As long as the value remains suspended in commodity it cannot be realised: 'Capital

‘Piccadilly Lights’, central London, is a massive advertising panel that has recently replaced an array of smaller screens.<sup>14</sup> It lights up much more than itself and the circus. It has its *brightness*, as Böhme (2017: 206) asserts, this is the fundamental phenomenological fact of light. This form of screen arrays constitutes a culmination of architectural hoardings that through successive stages of technological development skin cities. ‘Piccadilly Lights’ is not integrated into the façade, it is applied crudely. The intense radiance makes no distinction between architectural surfaces and human bodies. It does not matter what is on the screen or what product plays in its moment in light. Products disappear in the power of light, colour and change. Screen is real estate, each of the 11,858,400 pixels a space for rent. Time on screen is a pure income stream, the highest bidder occupies the largest territory for the longest time. Hidden sensors log the date, time and climatic conditions, a look up chart is referred to, an algorithm of product applicability through a function of rent/time chooses the product scene, makes the cut from one to another.

*Phototropia* is a way of framing the causal relationship between the production of a ‘total work’ and the suppression of a withdrawal from it. Urban media interfaces are aimed at the subject, lurking within them is an occluded distributed optic and the self-propelling logic of late capitalism that seeks to commercialise every square metre of the city, there can be no unused surface, no dead space.<sup>15</sup>

## 4.5 Stage to Screen

In the theatre, at the ‘fiery frontier between fantasy and reality’ (Bazin 1967: 101), footlights remain as a trace from the Baroque period (Schivelbush 1995). This thin wall of light is a marker of the transition between a space of viewing and a space of activity. As the house lights dim the corpus of the audience, a metonym for the external social world congeals into a *scopic crowd*. This theatre crowd was distinguished by Bazin through two modes of ‘mass mentality’: the cinematic and theatrical (1967: 99). The theatrical is an ‘active individual consciousness’ and the cinematic is a ‘passive adhesion’, or, a shift between the effects of a theatrical excitation and a cinematic

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by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier. Thus, the creation of the physical conditions of exchange—of the means of communication and transport—the annihilation of space by time—becomes an extraordinary necessity for it.’

<sup>14</sup>Landsec, the owner of Piccadilly Lights, has replaced the original patchwork of screens with a single state-of-the-art 4 K LED digital screen and live technology hub, which allows the screen to react to certain external factors, such as the weather or temperature. This feature enables brands to display creative and innovative content, such as weather-appropriate clothing ([piccadillylights.co.uk](http://piccadillylights.co.uk)).

<sup>15</sup>‘Concentrated’ spectacle is characterised by Debord (1998: 31–33) as the mode of bureaucratic capitalism that ‘imposes an image which subsumes everything that officially exists, an image [...] concentrated in a single individual, the guarantor of the system’s totalitarian control.’ ‘Diffuse’ spectacle seeks to articulate the ‘undisturbed development of modern capitalism’ in which commodities will always fall short of the ‘qualities attributed to the whole’. Each commodity instance (fragment) is ‘irreconcilable’ with the ‘absolute realisation’ of the ‘general commodity form’.

calming.<sup>16</sup> The difference between illusion and objectivity is propped up by the architectural relations of stage, auditorium to the preferred ocular subject that is inscribed into the arrangement, ‘because, without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, [...] it gives power of mind over mind’ (Foucault 1977: 206).

Over the 3 h that *Don Giovanni* unfolded around a slowly rotating stage at the Royal Opera House, all the contemporary modes of stage lighting were mobilised producing a clear model of the contemporary image space of a media architecture.<sup>17</sup> Keeping time with a kinetic architecture, the dynamism of the projected and spatially mapped animations framed, reconstituted and morphed the physical structure of the space. Not one element had to disappear for this image to work. Whether the machines are stage left, right or high in the fly tower, or stacked in with the audience, they are included in so far as they are peripheral, outside of the frame of the image; the audience’s attention is the masking; this *scopic crowd* is spatial and spatialised. Somewhere in this barrage, through an act of profound bodily excess, Dorothea Röschmann reasserted her voice, its resonance cut through both the light and dark, rending space, penetrating us.

This stage should be understood as an optical architecture predicated on lens morphologies and projection that were fully integrated into the production *mise-en-scène*. The optics were the producers of the effects, active agents in the performance and the means of their own capture and redistribution. Luminous power was used to spin *Don Giovanni* into a vortex of light and voice. The lenses’ mutability and mobility are architectures that constantly re-aggregate the *scopic crowd*. It was a manifestation of the troubling phantasmal desire of a completed media architecture. One that seeks the full transmission and display of the immanent text of a city’s human participants upon its surfaces. Each message, extracted from a ‘polyoptical’ aggregation (Leporello’s notebook containing the names of Don Giovanni’s victims) individuated for each civic subject, returning to us that which we desire, or at least can afford.

More than 1,200 sweating spectators had squeezed into the humid, marble-walled caucus room of the Senate Office Building. Before them klieg lights glared; six movie cameras were trained on one vacant chair. Michigan’s Senator Homer Ferguson, a man with a reputation as a prosecutor, stood behind a little forest of microphones and an underbrush of wires, and kept his eyes trained on the main door. [...]. Sensing the crowd’s restiveness, Homer Ferguson announced reassuringly: “Mr. Hughes will be here.” (Time Magazine. 18/08/1947)

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<sup>16</sup>Bazin provides a basic formulation of *seeming* and *being*. For the cinematic and theatrical which locates for us the problem of a palpable and an empathic body. On stage, the real body acts as bar to the desiring male gaze; there is a desiring body on stage, it desires so I can only observe the desiring. The cinematic body conversely provides a geometry of gaze that allows an imaginative replacement, a space of empathy, I desire through the projected gaze, the physical bar of the actor’s body (an impediment to my fulfilment) is removed and thus I am calmed.

<sup>17</sup>Seen by the author, live at the Royal Opera House and again on a large projection screen. Amphitheatre H-59, 25th June 2015. Music: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; Libretto: Lorenzo da Ponte; Director: Kasper Holten; Set designer: Es Devlin; Video designer: Luke Halls; Costume designer: Anja Vang Kragh; Lighting designer: Bruno Poet; Choreographer: Signe Fabricius.

A Klieg Light produces and signs a powerful observation. It is a light made for a camera. It might well be the case that in contemporary cinematic production nothing rendered as an image needs to have anything to do with the palpable. Digital compositing can both replace the physical space of action and even, in some *Avatarian* spectacle (Cameron 2009), the removal of any necessity for a camera at all. With modern production infrastructures, the technical assets and actors can morph in perfect focus across the time and space of the image. The point of view is now another mutable element that can seemingly fly, liberated from the problematics of gravity. At a time when this was not possible the Klieg carbon-arc lamp offered to cinematographers an intense controllable beam of light that extended the possibilities of depth of field. However, two figures are not yet present under these Klieg lights: Howard Hughes and not Howard Hughes, *Citizen Kane*.

The vacant chair is structured by the apparatus of broadcast and distribution, the chair is in the Senate Office and also already outside of it. Their visibility, inclusion in the frame, points to the ‘crystalline’ *gesamtkunstwerk*; a total work that exposes its means of technical production. The inquisition in light through a camera in this televisual image is metonymical of the judicial state apparatus. An empty chair is only empty in so far as it frames the architecture of the inquisitorial machine. Lights and cameras are at least as prosecutorial as Senator Ferguson, the ‘forest of microphones’ amplifying and distributing justice, guaranteeing through media a full transmission of evidence. The reality, or at least a story of justice, is then an effect of this crystalline image, which in turn is propelled into the repeatability of a generic mise-en-scène: a style of justice, the atmosphere of a state. There is always one more camera included, it is the camera that frames all the cameras, a point of view that purports to see it all, the aggregator of a ‘reality effect’.

If a ‘normal’ visual reality is formed through the mental aggregation of peripheral vision and optical fragments, *Citizen Kane* asserts a perspectival architecture of vision that allows Pallasmaa’s (2014: 29) ‘hectic eye’ a space in which to roam. Pallasmaa’s conception of the ‘hectic eye’ correlates to the lens of a mobile camera. In 1940, the eye that moves was still embodied in the audience. In rendering the proscenium image with a maximally resolved depth of field the audience is invited to flit through a space where the expression on a distant actor’s face—distant in the space of the frame—is granted the authority of legibility. *Citizen Kane*’s ‘reality effect’ is a point of view that purports to see it all, and in doing so shows only what Wells wants us to see.

Stage 19 is the definition of an optically determined architecture, where complex points of view and deep focus could be constructed to make *Citizen Kane*’s new form of cinematic representation.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the infrastructure remained invisible the whole set could be rendered in the plane of focus. Wells’ and Tolland’s notion of realism had nothing to do with a lived reality or even any kind of cinematic naturalism.<sup>19</sup> The movie provides a rendered other place that is predicated on Wells’s conception of a

<sup>18</sup>*Citizen Kane*’s sound stage and set: Stage 19, Paramount Pictures, Hollywood, USA, 1940.

<sup>19</sup>In his article in *American Cinematographer* Tolland writes of a cinematographic ‘reality’ as an analogue to the world outside.

space which Kane would first conquer then to another to which he would inevitably retreat: Xanadu, a media architecture formed through the collection of signs of power.

It does not end well for Susan Kane. In *Don Giovanni*, it was Dorothea Röschmann's voice that broke through the scenic effects and cut through the play of images. Through *Citizen Kane*, we experience another kind of cutting, also in the mode of a female's singing voice. Kane's will to control his image extended to the control over all images and to transform the nature of the other—in this case his wife Susan—into an object that reproduces his self-image. The turning point in the narrative is the moment when Susan Kane failed to sing convincingly in the opera staged expensively, lavishly and precisely in order to re-make her as image. In a single screech Susan shatters the illusion of Kane's control, his compelling blindness is exposed providing a limit to the plausibility of his image. In Susan failing to sing the image fails revealing its incomplete power over her body. Under the glare of the Klieg Lights, Susan is disaggregated and metonymically so is Kane's world.

Then what of rupturing these atmospheres through willful acts of seeing? The piercing of civil ambience with an aberrant voice? The subject who appears without a trace sets a diabolical limit to *phototropic* potency, but their destructive force repropels *phototropia*.<sup>20</sup> It is in *Citizen Kane* that we find a clue to what a rupture could be: a discordant gesture. Being unable to sing is fortunate because then, with Susan Kane, there is a possibility of our withdrawal from atmosphere; but only at the expense of our veracity. But the wall remains a wall; its limit is set by a skin of stone.

## 4.6 Urban Lighting: A Media Interface

[...] actions and opportunities highlight steps towards a more human-centred night-time design: 4. Design inclusive environments for a wide demographic profile, including strategies to foster positive behavior and minimise anti-social actions. (Lam 2015: 48)

I return to the complicity announced at the commencement of this text: as a practitioner I am inculcated. That is 'not guilty', perhaps a witness, or rather the one that seeks to turn on a light, or the oscillation between *mise-en-scène* as production and analysis, to bring both into play. Accepting that we are neither in the amphitheatre nor on the stage but in the *panoptic machine*, what instruments might help us to see through the image that 'pervades all appearing', as Jonathan Beller formulates it? An image that the 'denizens of capital labour to maintain [themselves] as image' and 'we labour in the image' (Beller 2006: 1). For Beller, we are folded into an image space that is both for us to make and made in advance to enable this making.

Urban light is an assemblage of many lamps strung along and across space; bolted down, connected, labelled, registered. It is a distributed singular, an entity that is

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<sup>20</sup>The heliotropic is the tendency of organisms to respond to natural light, this can be seen dramatically in *mimosa pudica*'s furling and unfurling as it changes. The phototropic is a generalisation of the phenomena, the same effect but with an attraction to any light source.

best observed from above, a glowing lattice, an image of its own structure. The multiplication of lamps too easily obscures its singularity, its physical manifestation masking a body. It might well be a network; it might even illuminate networks, but it is a singular expanding object. This is a luminous body, a siphonophore; a multicellular-codependent colony of elements floating through time, but not through space.<sup>21</sup> As this siphonophore feeds, its nocturnal supping seeps into our experience through light. The siphonophore is a total light work. A work so banal and ubiquitous that it barely registers as a work at all, its ‘second nature’ so complete that it replaces first nature.

Instead of light on–light off Sean Cubit proposes an *infinite gradation*, a spatial and temporal dialectic of light and dark providing the space for us to ask, ‘what might it be to witness in our time?’ (Cubit 2014: 267–269). For Cubit we have to recognise the slavery of our ancestors in the ‘systems that are even now designed to preserve privilege, hide the virtual future and deny the potential that lies ready to realise it’ (2014: 270). For us the systems are the control, not the effects that they have in space, these effects simply sensual outcomes of a technical procedure. The *infinite gradation* causes us to doubt the certainty of a figure and a ground, a civic subject in space, civilised in the sense that the pavement is lit and upon it we can perform and continue to labour.

The journey back from a theory to a practice of urban light then is simply to re-see, that is, to render in light, to draw attention to space, again and again. This is to point, to direct the gaze at the familiar object and pull it from relative obscurity. Even if only for a while, the light joins a wondering eye to the relative immutability of matter. At this very moment in the scene change, in the light shifting, dimming, brightening and tinting, the siphonophore city starts to break up and dissolve; the single-cell rears forwards and starts to assert the possibility of autonomy. It breaks off. In the infinite gradation there is only emphasis not ascendance. The dissolution of, disruption to, the total work is a procedure of another total work, the iconic and the crystalline. That is two total works operating in the same space, a phase shift within the infrastructure, an infrastructure designed and maintained to allow two modes of aggregated stability, one unmoving and the other dynamic.

I theorise cinema light and theatre light as a city’s light. Objections: unpredictable; non-uniform; too dark; too complicated; too unmaintainable; too subjective; too partial; too authored. Who asked for our light work to be exposed? It is not a plaything, it is our identity, our stability, our Law. Tolland’s technical apparatus coupled with Welles’s conception of *Citizen Kane* correlate to the more prosaic technical desire for an adequate ambient urban lighting. This demands that we create a nocturnal ambiance, which is convivial to human economic production; protects real bodies from harm; ensures facial recognition at certain distances and guarantees that surveillance cameras have adequate light to work effectively. Urban lighting is a profound

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<sup>21</sup>Most famously an Atlantic Portuguese Man O’War: Although a siphonophore may appear to be a single organism, each specimen is in fact a colonial organism composed of small individual animals called zooids that have their own special function for survival (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siphonophorae>).



**Fig. 4.4** *The Golden Hour*. 2018. Kingston upon Hull. Production detail

expression of the polis and the civis, it is temporal only in so far as it seeks to de-temporalise the city. In the replacement of celestial time with ‘shades of night’ (Lam 2015) modes of labour fold into images of civility that grant each subject the authority of optical legibility.

The low wall in Whitehall presents a particularly blank face to the pedestrian. This is an interface that, even in receding from attention, continues to communicate. Stone is slow and fixed, but it also functions as an image. *Don Giovanni*’s spectacular textural projections, skinning both stage and singer, reinforce the narrative and in doing so fold architecture into a vortex of moving light. The audiences’ eyes are captivated. In the rapidly developing field of media façades and responsive light architectures, the fantasy is that, even as pedestrians tear their gazes away from portable screens, the fabric of the built city can respond and become screen: flat.<sup>22</sup> The speed of image

<sup>22</sup>This can be seen in many recent design briefs for public realm projects. In the outline brief for Strand-Aldwiche Public Realm Improvements specific references are made to these themes. The designer is tasked to consider: ‘developing new ideas for how the space is navigated by different users groups thinking primarily through light or sound; Interventions that cater for primarily for night time users of the space, creating an environment that feels safe and inviting to all user groups; Technologies that enhance opportunities for participation and contribution to the physical and visual environment with users somehow leaving a digital shadow or footprint in the space’ (LDA. Strand-Aldwiche Artist Brief\_Final, Appendix 2). The fixed surfaces of the public realm are proposed as the site for a responsive interactive media interface.



is only limited by the speed of the material conduit; a morphology of built surface. Whether abstract or loaded with product, the dancing screens of media architectures dissimulate their fixity through the play of light and image (Fig. 4.4). Digital signage may well flood space in moving coloured light but changes space only in so far as the urban mise-en-scène is rendered through the aura of advertising, so bright that space perceptually recedes, and bodies become screens.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>As the cost of large array external media surfaces decreases, we can observe that static passively illuminated advertising hoardings are rapidly being replaced with extremely large and bright screens. As the economics of media surfaces develop, we can speculate that entire building technologies could become simply the frames upon which media is served to the urban spectator. In this way the outward face of cities propel the luminous economy. This would mark a transition from signage that is added to built surfaces to forms of total surface signage in light where glass and concrete are replaced with embedded responsive technologies: all surfaces can dance.

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