

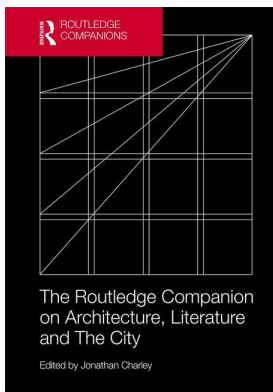
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 21 Jan 2019

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## **The Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature and The City**

Jonathan Charley

### **Magic mirrors**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613154-15>

Ed Hollis

**Published online on: 17 Aug 2018**

**How to cite :-** Ed Hollis. 17 Aug 2018, *Magic mirrors from: The Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature and The City* Routledge

Accessed on: 21 Jan 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613154-15>

**PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT**

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Magic mirrors

## Reconstructing lost interiors from instructional and constructional writing

*Ed Hollis*

---

### Introduction

Every story must begin with ‘once upon a time’, and histories, fictional or factual, are usually written in the past tense, referring to things and places, real or imagined, that are ostensibly anterior. What happens, however, if we write stories of the future? In architectural literature, if writing precedes building, which one represents which? This is not an essay on utopian architectural writing. Adolf Loos wrote: ‘I do not need to draw my designs. A good architectural concept of how something is to be built can be written down. The Parthenon can be written down.’<sup>1</sup> This chapter will address what is more literally creative writing: the specifications and instructions that generate buildings and their occupation.

As Thomas Markus and Deborah Cameron describe in *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*:

Making a building is a collaborative process, which involves continual dialogue – with clients, with colleagues, with other professionals like engineers and landscapers, with building contractors. [Dana] Cuff aptly describes what goes on in these interactions as ‘constructing a word-and-sketch building’<sup>2</sup>

They continue to argue that this sort of writing is a mode of representation quite distinct from buildings themselves:

Buildings themselves are not representations. They are material objects, which enclose and organise space. However, it is one of our arguments in this book that buildings often do this (or more exactly, their designers do it) on the basis of texts, which are representations.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast in this chapter I will argue that ‘word-and-sketch’ buildings, far from existing only in the realm of representation, possess lives of their own, quite independently of the ‘real’ buildings they purport merely to describe. Not only that but as Beatriz Colomina comments, buildings themselves are as representational as the texts that are written ‘about’ them.

In order to explore these issues, this essay will attempt to use a fragment of instructional/constructional text, to reconstruct a room in a building that has long ceased to exist, and that may, as we see, never have existed. It is by no means a modern space: this room is the *Chrysotriklinos* the ‘Golden Hall’ of the Sacred Palace of Constantinople. The text to which I shall be referring is the *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogenitos, written in the tenth century A.D.<sup>4</sup> However, it is a sort of domestic advice; and engagement with this text, this paper will argue, can offer, insight into the ways in which instructional text can operate in many different times and places, including our own. This is not, therefore, an historical exercise, though some historical background may help us to interpret the text. Rather it is an enquiry into the ways in which such a text can fulfill Loos’ assertion that ‘a good architectural concept of how something is to be built can be written down’.

The first section of this chapter will outline a context for this enquiry by examining debates between word and image (notably the architectural drawing) in the construction of buildings and the occupation of the interiors they contain. The second will consider a short passage from the *De Ceremoniis* in several dimensions. First, the chapter will simply examine what is being commanded or instructed within the text itself and will explore the ways in which this text shares with specifications, blueprints, and scripts the burden of reproducibility. Second, it will explore what is NOT said within the text, and notably how the sphere of interior occupation is demarcated against the sphere of architecture. Third, it will explore the games the text can play with truth, tense and time, reconciling past, present, and future.

The third section will conclude by outlining some of the insights that can be gained from this quixotic diversion into the halls of ancient Byzantium, so as to think about how writing and the interior interact more generally.

## Context: writing and drawing buildings and interiors

### *Writing buildings*

Markus and Cameron identify different types of writing with differing stages in the process of designing, building, and occupying a building.

Step 1 is the writing of a general discursive text about a building to be designed, which embodies aspirations, intentions, visions, objectives, and expressions of purpose...

Step 2 is to establish the categories of people, ideas, activities, processes, or objects which will be instrumental in achieving the aims set out in step 1. When these categories are grouped and put into a hierarchical order we have a classification.

Step 3 consists of constructing a set of labels for spaces to accommodate the categories established in step 2...usually briefs contain a schedule of accommodation...

Step 4 the transformation from languages to space and form consists of designing and producing the building in accordance with step 3. The drawings will usually carry the labels from step 3, and in the finished building one will often find the same labels inscribed onto walls or doors at floor levels, wings, blocks, lift directories and individual spaces.

Step 5 is the management of the building’s programme, by explicit or implicit rules...<sup>5</sup>

This framework, while useful, omits a key use of writing in the process of construction: notably the technics of the construction process itself. Buildings are rarely built from drawings alone. Drawings are not just drawn; they must also be labelled, and accompanied by bills of

quantities and technical specifications. Ranging from the UK NBS system to God's biblical commands to Noah or Solomon, these verbal instructions contain information that can only be verbal or numeric: the moisture content of timber, for example, the proportions of sand and cement in a mortar mix, or the manner in which one object should be fixed to another (screwed, bolted, nailed, welded, or glued). These are essential parts of the construction process, but they refer to aspects of building that cannot be seen or drawn.

Non-visual as they are, such specifications are a key element in the construction process because (rather like the title deeds used to translate the haptic realities of plots of land or parts of buildings, into the abstract verities of the law) they enjoy the status of legal contracts. Once they are written, it becomes the builder's obligation to supply and fix materials in the manner specified. The 'word and sketch' building, has a contractual existence all of its own, of which the material building itself is merely the earthly product or shadow, itself, without words, a legal nonentity.

### *Instructing interiors*

In no other area of the process of making buildings is this divergence between what can be seen and must be done more keenly felt than the final stage: that of occupation. As Markus and Cameron observe:

There may be a gap between step 1 and step 2 in that the intentions of the former, general discourse are not borne out by the categories of the latter....Gaps between steps 2 and 3, and 3 and 4 are quite rare...on the other hand, the gap between step 5, use, and all the previous steps is often large; people and organisations simply do not behave in the intended or predicted way.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will concentrate on this final stage, in which, as Markus and Cameron observe, the 'contract' between what the buildings are like, and what they are used for, can so often unravel.

Writing for occupation may not initially seem to possess the technical precision of the material specification but this essay will show it constitutes a form of material and spatial making quite as tangible as the act of physical construction. By way of illustration, this passage from *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*<sup>7</sup> describing the spring clean, has all the qualities of a technical specification:

Winter curtains should be replaced by summer white ones and furs and woollen cloths also carefully laid by....included under the general description of housecleaning, must be understood turning out all the nooks and corners of drawers, cupboards, lumber rooms, lofts etc. with a view of getting rid of all unnecessary articles, which only create dirt and attract vermin; sweeping of chimneys, taking up carpets, painting and white-washing the kitchen and offices, papering rooms, when needed, and, generally speaking, the house putting on, with the approaching summer, a bright appearance and a new face, in unison with nature.<sup>8</sup>

Try to draw what Mrs Beeton is describing, and it will soon become apparent that the occupation of buildings is a mode of making that lends itself to writing in ways that the generation of architectural form does not. By way of reinforcement, Adolf Loos' famous tale of the poor little rich man, who commissions an architect to design him the perfect home,

(and then finds himself unable to live in it correctly) illustrates with wry comedy the ways in which occupation cannot entirely be instructed through visual or material means:

From now on, he [the rich man] spent a large part of his time studying his home. And he soon realized that living it needed practice. Every object had its own particular place. The architect had done more than could be expected, he had thought of everything. The tiniest box had its special place, which was just made for it. Comfortable his apartment certainly was, but it did tax the brain. For that reason, during the first few weeks the architect supervised the rich man, so that no errors should creep in. The rich man did his best, but it still happened that when he was finished with a book he would be so preoccupied he put it into the compartment designed for newspapers. Or he would tap off the ash from his cigar into the depression in the table designed for the candelabra. Once he had picked up an object it took no end of puzzling and searching to find the place it had come from, sometimes even the architect had to unroll the detail drawings to find where the matchbox belonged.<sup>9</sup>

The idea, in particular, of the architect searching through the detailed drawings to discover where to leave bric-a-brac makes the point particularly acutely. The two procedures of drawing and writing meet one another in the arts of interior design. In discussing his interior practice, Richard Neutra recalled how Loos

...started a revolt against the practice of indicating dimensions in figures or measured drawings. He felt, as he often told me, that such a procedure dehumanises design. 'If I want a wood panelling or wainscot to be of a certain height, I stand there, hold my hand at that certain height, and the carpenter makes his pencil mark. Then I step back and look at it from one point and from another, visualising the finished result with all my powers. This is the only human way to decide on the height of a wainscot, or the width of a window.'<sup>10</sup>

This practice is not viable at the scale of skyscraper or city but in occupying a building that already exists, lines can be drawn upon walls, paint colours tested and discarded, furniture moved around, the levels of lighting adjusted, and so on, in any number of cheap, quick, ephemeral ways, most of which, like Mrs Beeton's spring clean, are both difficult to visualise and draw, and probably not worth the effort. This means that, whether in retrospect or in anticipation, the interior has always possessed a slippery relationship with the visual. Charles Rice, writing in the *Emergence of the Interior*, argues that the very idea of the 'interior' as a work of domestic art only comes into existence in parallel with its own image:

The Oxford English Dictionary records that 'interior' has come into use from the late fifteenth century to mean inside as divided from outside, and to describe the spiritual and inner nature of the soul. From the early eighteenth century 'interiority' was used to designate inner character and a sense of individual subjectivity, and from the middle of the eighteenth century the interior came to designate the domestic affairs of the state, as well as the sense of territory that belongs to a country or region. It was only from the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, that the interior came to mean 'the inside of a building or room, esp. in reference to the artistic effect; also, a picture of representation of the inside of a building or room. Also, in the theatre, a 'set' consisting of the inside of a building or room....the interior thus emerged with significance as a physical, three dimensional space, as well as an image...'<sup>11</sup>

But, discussing the effects of the transparent marriage between buildings and their interiors effected by modernism, he also comments that 'In Benjamin's terms, at the moment of its total capture by architecture as art, the interior as a space of inhabitation is liquidated....'<sup>12</sup> That is to say that, ironically, at the moment of its apotheosis, once the interior became the image, rather than a process, of inhabitation, it ceased to be. The modernist space, in which everything has been designed by one man (and he was usually a man) is, while it may be both domestic, and inside, not an interior *per se*, but merely the inward extension or consequence of architecture.

Additionally, the idea of the interior as a performative process rather than a visual product has become a key concern in current thinking around the interior, and its occupations. Susie Attiwill's writing on the interior – born partly out of an impatience with the turf wars between interior architecture, design and decoration in the 1990s – has rejected those categories in favour of what she calls 'interiorization':

.... Occupation becomes a process of transformation, of making relations. Interior design shifts from a practice necessarily equated with the design of inside space to a practice of interiorization. This introduces time as a dynamic and provokes a re-conceptualization of interior as temporal framing as distinct from a spatial enclosure.<sup>13</sup>

This process cannot be reduced to a static image. Rather it may better be represented through the dynamics of language unfolding over time. Mrs Beeton's spring clean, for example, or the hundreds of recipes for chicken soup or floor cleaner that accompany it, the directions for how to pay a social call, or take a cold bath in the morning, may be regarded as instructions for 'interiorization' which can only be bodily enacted.

## Section 2: text

### *What is said: choreographing the kiss of peace*

The *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogenitos may not, on the face of it, read like domestic advice, but domestic advice it is: indicating how the emperor and his household should occupy their home: the Sacred Palace of Constantinople, in the tenth century A.D.

Its author introduced *De Ceremoniis* by claiming that it would be 'like a mirror, clear and razor sharp that we shall place the centre of the palace, in the place where the emperor meets the senate'<sup>14</sup> and in it, almost every day of the year is listed, and the ritual of each day is minutely described. Here, for example, is the entry for Easter Thursday, in which the Patriarch of Constantinople visits the emperor to exchange the kiss of peace:

Once he [the patriarch] is seated there, the praepositor goes in and alerts the emperor, who takes up his Divitison, and Tzitzakion; and at a sign from the emperor, the praepositor comes out and calls the patriarch. Taken by the hand, the patriarch enters the Chrysotriklinos and the Emperor receives him there. They bow deeply, and embrace, and sit down. When the time comes to give the kiss of peace, the staff of the chamber enter in order. The dignitaries take their places on either side of the table near the golden vases. The grooms of the chamber stand behind the vases, to make way for the priests who have come to witness the kiss of peace. The emperor sits on a golden throne in front of the Pentapyrgion, and the patriarch sits on a throne placed to his left, but not in the same line. The eunuchs and the first spear-carriers line up behind the Emperor according to their rank. At a sign from the Emperor, the praepositor beckons the ostiarios, who comes out holding in his hand the golden wand adorned with precious stones...<sup>15</sup>



The text constitutes a sort of verbal choreography. Certain people – the praepositor, for instance, or the staff of the chamber – move or arrange themselves in particular ways in space: the praepositor ‘goes in’, the grooms of the chamber ‘stand behind the vases’, the first spear carriers ‘line up’. In addition, where they stand or sit in the room is dictated by who they are, and how important they are. The staff of the chamber ‘enter in order’; while the grooms of the chamber ‘stand behind the vases to make way for the priests’; the dignitaries take ‘their places on either side of the table near the golden vases’. The eunuchs and the first spear-carriers ‘line up *behind* [my emphasis] the emperor according to their rank’. Most notably, the ‘emperor sits on a golden throne ... and the patriarch sits on a throne placed to his left, but not in the same line.’

Vectors in status are also made clear by who is doing, and who is watching. The Patriarch and the emperor act: they ‘bow deeply, and embrace, and sit down’. Others, like the priests, and the grooms of the chamber (who are standing behind the vases) ‘witness’ the kiss of peace. They are also being watched. The eunuchs and the first spear carriers, lined up behind the emperor, or the dignitaries arranged either side of the table near the golden vases are, like the vases themselves, part of the scenery itself: a human backdrop to the imperial and patriarchal protagonists (Figure 14.1).

The text relates bodies with one another and also with certain objects. The emperor puts on special garments – the *divitison* and the *tzitzakion*. The ostiarios brings out ‘the golden wand adorned with precious stones’. The vases and table, the throne and the *Pentapyrgion* stand static witness to these more mobile protagonistic objects. An act – the kiss of peace – is taking place, but it is, without an audience to watch it, and a supporting cast, and a magnificent scene to lend it sacred majesty, nothing more than a human embrace.

Majestic it might be, but there is a great deal within the choreography of the scene itself that remains unresolved. The patriarch and the emperor are both already seated at the beginning of the ceremony, but half way through it, they, sit down. The ‘sign from the emperor’ that signals the start of the ceremony, is not explained: Is it a wave? A verbal signal? A cough?



Figure 14.1 A golden dining room. Constantine Porphyrogenitos dines with Tsar Simeon of Bulgaria from the ‘History’ of John Skylitzes. Courtesy Biblioteca Nacional de Espana, 13th Century Author Unknown.

The text does not tell us. It is not clear what happens between the initial bow, the embrace, the seating of the emperor and the patriarch, and the moment at which 'the time comes to make the kiss of peace' – is this a long enough interval for a private conversation (in which only the praepositor is present)? Is it a moment? We do not know.

The kiss of peace is a reproducible ritual, intended to happen every Easter Thursday, in the past, the present and the future. The introduction to the *De Ceremoniis* compares the correct conduct of court ritual to the repetitive and predictable motion of the heavens:

The De Ceremoniis will be like flowers gathered in the meadows to beautify the imperial splendour...so that the reigns of power can be held with order and dignity, and that the operations of the state replicate the smooth movement the universe in the hands of the creator...<sup>16</sup>

And it is this reproducibility that can help explain some of the lacunae in the text. For example, the Emperor and the Patriarch are never named, and neither are their officers. In the context of a ritual repeated over decades and centuries, roles might be expected to remain, while the individuals who occupied them would, of course, change. In the same way, the gestures of the Emperor, his habitual signs, the precise numbers of the dignitaries, or the orders of eunuchs are not specified, since these, too, were likely to vary over time.

In this regard, the *De Ceremoniis* possesses the same validity or authority as the script of a Shakespearean play. The entrances and exits of the actors, and the words they must speak are specified, as are some (but not all) of the gestures they must make, but a great deal else is left open: certainly, the specifics of setting, for example. On the one hand, these omissions may be ascribed to the mechanics of the Elizabethan stage, which was essentially an empty platform in a courtyard, with no facilities for elaborate scenery. On the other hand, it has, long since that stage has disappeared, provided an inexhaustible fund of possibility for the performer that more closely written scripts and screenplay do not. Rare is the production of Shakespeare that does not attempt to set it in a 'relevant' or illuminating setting quite unlike anything that could have been imagined by Shakespeare himself.

The dynamic relationship between script and performance may also be noted in the relationship between score and performance in the musical tradition, where we are used to experiencing and comparing wildly diverse performances of, say, a Wagnerian opera or a jazz standard. The same dynamic relationship between a verbalized generic and an unspoken specific may also be observed in Mrs Beeton's instructions to the mistresses of countless similar (but not identical) Victorian houses or indeed, the specifications given to their builders.

### *What is not said*

Despite the claim that the *De Ceremoniis* would be a 'mirror, clear and razor sharp, placed at the centre of the palace' the greatest absence from the *De Ceremoniis*, is the architecture of the very palace the text was supposedly written to mirror. In the *Chrysotriklinos* there is a table, and there are vases. There are two thrones, though one not in line with one another. We know that the *Pentapyrgion* was a sort of domed canopy or baldacchino. There is no architecture, as traditionally conceived, or described at all.

On the one hand, it could be argued that, like the relationship between script, score, and performance, this absence allows for a certain flexibility. By not specifying the architecture of the space in which the ritual could happen, it is made possible for the ritual itself to happen



anywhere. But, in the text describing the kiss of peace on Easter Thursday, the *De Ceremoniis* refers quite specifically to a particular room: the *Chrysotriklinos*, in a specific building: the Sacred Palace. This ritual, while being reproducible in time, could not be reproduced in space, for it could only happen in one room in the world.

Instructions are always selective. In the text of the *De Ceremoniis*, attention is directed towards things, gestures, bodies, words rather than walls, floors, or domes. It is the inverse, in this sense, of architectural drawings that, while they can delineate the visual accurately, are incapable of representing precisely those intimate choreographies by which space is occupied (the generic ergonome on the plan being a poor substitute for the gestures of the emperor). And just how selective the *De Ceremoniis* is may be illustrated by another account of the same room, written at almost exactly the same time:

A certain tree, bronze, but covered over with gold, stood in front of the emperor's throne, and birds of various types, likewise made of gilded bronze, filled its branches and uttered the cries of real birds, each according to its species. The Emperor's throne was constructed in such a way that that at one moment it appeared to be very low, then higher, and at another moment it seemed very lofty. The throne was of immense size, made either of bronze or of wood. Lions covered with gold stood as if guarding it, and, beating the ground with their tails, they produced a roar with their mouths open and tongues moving. Then, leaning on the shoulders of two eunuchs, I was led into the presence of the emperor. When, at my approach the lions roared and the bird called in the manner of their species, I was moved by neither terror nor admiration, since I had learned much about these things from men who knew them well. Then prostrating myself...three times before the emperor, I raised my head, and saw him whom I had just seen sitting elevated only a little off the ground I now saw with his clothing changed, and seated just below the level of the ceiling.<sup>17</sup>

Why would this account of the *Chrysotriklinos* reveal so much about its visual appearance, when the one text designed to reproduce it, the *De Ceremoniis*, does not?

The author of this text, Liutprand, Bishop of Cremona, had been sent to Constantinople on a diplomatic mission by the King of Lombardy in northern Italy. Liutprand was an outsider, who never having seen the *Chrysotriklinos* before, was impressed (if not moved by terror or admiration) by an interior so overwhelming that what the Emperor who sat at its heart might have said, or who else might have been in the room, was rendered insignificant to the narrative. Indeed, Liutprand recalled that, during his interview with the Emperor, the two of them never spoke directly to one another at all. The author of the *De Ceremoniis* on the other hand, needed to undertake no such scene setting, for Constantine Porphyrogenitos, as the suffix to his name (born in the purple) attests, had been born in the palace and lived there, for he was the very Emperor whom Liutprand had come to see. And Constantine's readers – the functionaries of the court, whose work it was to maintain court ritual – would also have worked, if not lived, in the palace. A description of the building itself would have been superfluous to them, too. As Mario Praz was to write, eight hundred years later:

The precision of miniaturists of interiors...has something disturbing about it. For who, in ordinary life, ever observes with such minute attention the decoration of a room? Who doesn't limit himself to embracing the whole with a general glance, deriving vague and sometimes quite illusory impressions from it?<sup>18</sup>

For Constantine, habituated as he was to the palace, it deserved no more than the ‘general glance’. For outsiders like Liutprand, it was new and strange enough to deserve the precision of a miniaturist.

### *Unreliable narrators?*

Liutprand’s diplomatic mission was to secure a Byzantine princess as a bride for the king of Lombardy; and it was a mission in which he singularly failed, twice. The first time, Constantine Porphyrogenitos refused to make an immediate decision, and sent Liutprand home with gifts to wait until he had made up his mind. The second time, his successor, the emperor Niceophorus, rejected the request outright. Liutprand left Constantinople in disgrace, and his account may be read as an exercise in self-justification to his master. In it, he decries the poor hospitality he received at the court, for example, and gleefully recounts how he bested the emperor in an argument comparing the absolutism of Byzantine imperial power with the democratic institutions of the Lombards.

Liutprand’s account of the *Chrysotriklinos* plays its part in this exercise, creating a vision of almost absurd magnificence: a forest of mechanical birds, and roaring lions, and best of all, a throne that shoots up into the air changing the clothing of its inhabitant. As Liutprand slyly adds to his account: ‘I was moved by neither terror nor admiration, since I had learned much about these things from men who knew them well.’ And well he may have, for a throne room filled with a golden forest, mechanical lions, and tweeting metallic birds was the standard fare of traveller’s tales in the eleventh century. For example, the Flemish Friar, William of Rubruck described the throne room of Mongke Khan at Karakoram as possessing a similar silver tree full of avian automata that sang as supplicants approached the royal throne:

In the entry of this great palace, it being unseemly to bring in there skins of milk and other drinks, master William the Parisian had made for him a great silver tree, and at its roots are four lions of silver, each with a conduit through it, and all belching forth white milk of mares. And four conduits are led inside the tree to its tops, which are bent downward, and on each of these is also a gilded serpent, whose tail twines round the tree. And from one of these pipes flows wine, from another cara cosmos, or clarified mare’s milk, from another ball, a drink made with honey, and from another rice mead, which is called terracina; and for each liquor there is a special silver bowl at the foot of the tree to receive it. Between these four conduits in the top, he made an angel holding a trumpet, and underneath the tree he made a vault in which a man can be hid. And pipes go up through the heart of the tree to the angel. In the first place he made bellows, but they did not give enough wind.<sup>19</sup>

And so the *Chrysotriklinos* described by Liutprand may never have existed at all, for all the detail with which it has been delineated.

Liutprand’s account is, like most stories, written in the past tense. By contrast with such an historically delineated story – and indeed in contrast with the imperative voice of much instructional writing, the *De Ceremoniis* is written in a continuous present. The kiss of peace on Easter Thursday is, on the face of it, like all the rituals described in the *De Ceremoniis*, set in an eternal timeframe. Indeed, the introduction to the text describes it as such:

The *De Ceremoniis* will be like flowers gathered in the meadows to beautify the imperial splendour...so that the reigns of power can be held with order and dignity, and that

the operations of the state replicate the smooth movement of the universe in the hands of the creator...<sup>20</sup>

But this tone of calm inevitability is deceptive. Just before he makes his statement about razor sharp mirrors, beautiful flowers, and the smooth motion of the stars, the author adds to his introduction an aside that paints quite a different picture of the Sacred Palace of Constantinople:

Many things disappear of their nature over time and are exhausted through use, and among them is the great and precious performance and codification of imperial ceremonial. Because it has been neglected, and is, as it were, dead, the empire is unadorned and without beauty. It has become like a body badly constituted, whose members are met pell-mell, without order.<sup>21</sup>

That is, in writing the manual he is NOT describing the ceremonies of the palace, nor just commanding that what is already happening should be repeated. Rather, he is trying to recover, or remember, what those ceremonies are, since they have fallen into desuetude. What is apparently, a work of cosmic confidence in the present, is, in fact, an elegy for a world that is already lost. And in this sense, the *De Ceremoniis* is more closely allied to the self-congratulating traveller's tale of Liutprand than it may at first appear. Both of them are elegies for a palace that has either already disappeared – or may never even have existed.

## Conclusion

Incomplete as it is, the solemn prose of the *De Ceremoniis* invites us to re-imagine, at the distance of nearly a thousand years, a lost interior. It is, as Markus and Cameron suggest of architectural literature, the abstracted representation of a 'real' space. The text itself is what it claims to be, a magic mirror, placed at the heart of the palace. But it is a mirror that does not reflect visual appearances. Rather, it invites us to join the Emperor and his spear carriers and eunuchs in occupying the *Chrysotriklinos*; and that means that there is another level of representation present in the text – that created by the occupation itself.

As Constantine pointed out in the introduction to the *De Ceremoniis*, the ceremonies of the Sacred Palace were acts of memory, of representation or the construction of an image in the present of something the Emperor Constantine supposed to have been lost in the past. The *Chrysotriklinos*, during the kiss of peace with the Patriarch, on Easter Thursday becomes, for a moment, a representation on the one hand of a lost past, and on the other, of its own eternal self. And from these layers of representation, more general lessons can be drawn. As Beatriz Colomina comments: 'Architecture in all its possible manifestations – drawing, photograph, text, or building – is, after all, only a practice of representation'<sup>22</sup>; and to that list of possible representations one might add the occupation of the space it creates as another.

And this returns to Charles Rice's notion of the interior as both occupied space *and* image. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur<sup>23</sup> uses a debate between Plato and Aristotle to discuss two modes of memory. On the one hand, he argues, memory is the act of recollection – the retrieval of things that already exist in the mind. Such an art of memory is backward looking, and, ostensibly, transparent. On the other hand, memory involves the imagination.

When we remember things, we construct, in our minds, images of the past. We like to tell ourselves that such images are mere reconstructions, but are in fact images with a life of their own, independent of the 'thing that has been 're-membered.'

Ricoeur notes, in the tension between these two conceptions of memory, a paradox about truth:

The constant danger of confusing remembering and imagining, resulting from memories becoming images in this way, affects the goal of the faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory. And yet...And yet, we have nothing better than memory to guarantee that something has taken place before we call to mind a memory of it...<sup>24</sup>

The ceremonies of the Sacred Palace are both recollected: that is, retrieved from the past, and re-imagined – both within the text itself (a creative act) and in the repetitive re-enactions prescribed by the text. The instruction looks towards both the past, and the future, both equally, as Ricoeur suggests, imaginary.

In her paper *Between representation and the Mirror*<sup>25</sup> Susie Attiwill tells another story about a magic mirror, in which the Caliph of Baghdad invites two painters, a Chinese and Greek painter to compete to paint the most beautiful painting in the world. A curtain is set up down the middle of the room to divide the two, and they set to work. On the day of the unveiling of the paintings, the court arrive to see them:

A magnificent cortege in which nothing could be seen but embroidered robes, plumes of waving feathers, jewels of gold, engraved weapons. Everyone first assembles on the side of the wall painted by the Chinese. A unanimous cry of admiration went up. The fresco represented the garden of everyone's dreams, with trees in blossom and little bean shaped lakes spanned graceful footbridges. A vision of paradise that no-one tired of looking at. So great was their delight that some wanted the Chinese to be declared the winner of the contest without so much as a glance at the work of the Greek. Soon, however, the Caliph ordered that the curtain dividing the room should be drawn aside, and the crowd turned round. As they turned, an exclamation of amazement escaped them. What had the Greek done, then? He had painted nothing at all. He had contented himself with covering the entire surface of the wall, from floor to ceiling with a vast mirror. And naturally this mirror reflected the Chinese painter's garden in the most minute detail. But then you will say, what made this image more beautiful and stirring than its model? It was the fact that the Chinese painted garden was deserted and uninhabited, whereas the Greeks garden was alive with a magnificent throng in embroidered robes, plumes of waving feathers, jewels of gold, and engraved weapons. And all these people were moving and gesticulating and recognized themselves with great delight.<sup>26</sup>

Commenting on the story, Attiwill observes that the two paintings create very different relationships between the viewer and the thing viewed:

Different kinds of surfaces are used to distinguish. There is the surface of representation [the Chinese garden], which places the viewer at the centre of the world, a rational and self reflexive Cartesian subject ('I think therefore I am'). The other – a reflection, a mirror which locates the viewer as the site of embodied perception...<sup>27</sup>

And she goes on to locate in this distinction what she calls the process of interiorisation – the creation of moments in which we are *in* the sensual world, rather than *looking at* it with the eyes of abstraction:

....The shift to processes of interiorisation involves surfaces, materials, light and movement; there is a sense of relation ‘in’ as distinct from ‘to’. There is not something to have a relation to – which needs things to exist before the relation; rather we are already in the world.<sup>28</sup>

The unveiling of the painting is one such moment, for in the moment that the Caliph and his court see themselves, they also see themselves in the room in which the mirror has been set up, and in seeing themselves in the room, just as Charles Rice alludes to in *The Emergence of the Interior*, an interior has been brought into being, in the sense of both an occupied space, and its image.

It only happens for a moment. One can imagine the imperial court, having gazed upon their own splendour, dispersing, and carrying on about their business, the image, as well as their apprehension of it, disappearing in the same moment. And thus might it be with the *Chrysotriklinos*. After the kiss of peace, the spear carriers and the grooms of the chamber disperse. The patriarch returns to Hagia Sophia, and the Emperor takes off the *Divitison*. The wand adorned with precious stones is returned to its shelf in the *Pentapyrgion*. The image of the meeting of the powers temporal and spiritual fades on the eye, and all we are left with is the architecture, the table, the urns and the empty throne. If Liutprand of Cremona is to be believed, the mechanical creatures fall silent. Like the Caliph’s picture gallery this room is also a process, rather than the product, of interiorisation.

It is perhaps meaningless to ask whether the text represents the building, or the building the text, since both are created by the other. Interiors, and the lives we lead in them, can never be complete, for they are processes and moments in time, rather than products that can be finished; and for this reason, the instructions for their construction and occupation must always be incomplete.

## Notes

- 1 Quoted in Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1994), 65.
- 2 Tom Markus T. and Deborah Cameron, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), 1.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 4 Constantine Porphyrogenitos (Vogt, Albert tr. French, Hollis tr. English) *Le Livre des Ceremonies* (Paris: Tome 1 Societe D’Edition les Belles Lettres), 1935.
- 5 Markus and Cameron, 46.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 7 Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London, 1861).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 9 Adolf Loos, (Adolf Opel and Daniel Opel eds., tr. Michael Mitchell) *On Architecture* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2002), 49–51.
- 10 Quoted in Colomina, 300.
- 11 Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 2.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 95.
- 13 Suzie Attiwill, ‘Between Representation and the Mirror: Tactics for Interiorization’ in Hollis, Plunkett, Hay, Milligan eds. *Interior Tools, Interior Tactics* (Oxford: Libri Books, 2009).

- 14 Constantine Porphyrogenitos, 1.
- 15 Ibid., 83–85.
- 16 Ibid., 1.
- 17 Liutprand of Cremona, quoted in Safran 1998, 30.
- 18 Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1949) tr. Weaver, W. 1964, 42.
- 19 William of Rubruck tr. Rockhill. W. *The journey of William of Rubruck to the eastern parts of the world, 1253–55, as narrated by himself, with two accounts of the earlier journey of John of Pian de Carpine* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900).
- 20 Constantine Porphyrogenitos, 1.
- 21 Ibid., 1.
- 22 Colomina, 273.
- 23 P. Ricoeur, P. tr. Blarney, K. and Pellauer, D. *Memory, History, Forgetting* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 24 Ibid., 7.
- 25 Attiwill, 2009.
- 26 Michel Tournier 1991 *The Midnight Love Feast* in ibid., 160.
- 27 Ibid., 160.
- 28 Ibid.

## References

- Attiwill, S. “Working Space: Interiors as Provisional Compositions” presented at *Occupations* University of Brighton, Brighton. 2009. [http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/—data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/44811/Suzie-Attiwill\\_Working-Space.pdf](http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/—data/assets/pdf_file/0018/44811/Suzie-Attiwill_Working-Space.pdf) [accessed 2017/03/02].
- Attiwill, S. ‘Between Representation and the Mirror: Tactics for Interiorization’ in Hollis, Plunkett, Hay, Milligan eds. *Interior Tools, Interior Tactics*. Oxford: Libri Books, 2009.
- Beeton, I. *The Book of Household Management*. London, 1861. [www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10136/pg10136.html](http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10136/pg10136.html) [accessed 2017/03/02].
- Colomina, B. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1994.
- Constantine Porphyrogenitos (Vogt, Albert tr. French, Hollis tr. English) *Le Livre des Ceremonies*. Paris: Tome 1 Societe D’Edition les Belles Lettres, 1935.
- Loos, A. (Adolf Opel and Daniel Opel eds., tr. Michael Mitchell) *On Architecture*. Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2002.
- Markus, T. and Cameron, D. *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*. Oxford: Routledge, 2002.
- Praz, M. *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration*. London: Thames and Hudson 1949 tr. Weaver, W. 1964.
- Rice, C. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. Oxford: Routledge, 2007.
- Ricoeur, P. tr. Blarney, K. and Pellauer, D. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Safran, L. *Heaven on Earth: Art and Architecture in Byzantium*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1998.
- William of Rubruck tr. Rockhill. W. *The journey of William of Rubruck to the eastern parts of the world, 1253–55, as narrated by himself, with two accounts of the earlier journey of John of Pian de Carpine*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1900. <https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/rubruck.html> [accessed 2017/03/02].