Chapter 4

Framing Difference: the Window’s View

While the previous chapters focused on the rhetoric of dimension, this chapter considers the speculative quality of windows, which separate a viewer here from a view there. Windows, or openings that frame a difference between spatial realms are implied by the architecture of the miniature and gigantic, both of which require a threshold to distinguish them from the normal world of the viewer. The cornice-line, which separates wall from roof, as well as the pavement or ground floor, which divides basement from building, are architectural framing devices like windows or doors turned horizontally that define access between realms. The decorative cornice invites a view up, while the pavement limits the view down, creating a difference between those who watch and those who are watched, even if a viewer may pass between. Such frames define the scene by strategic cropping and separate here from there, so the viewer remains detached as if looking into a painting or photograph.

To cross the frame and enter another realm requires a shift of role between spectator and performer. Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver steps between roles several times the course of a journey that took him out of England to the island kingdoms of Lilliput and Brobdignag. Among the Lilliputians, Gulliver is often a spectator, watching miniature courtiers perform, or he plays the role of architecture, above and surrounding them. However, among the giants of Brobdignag, he is kept as a pet and asked to perform for his mountainous hosts so they watch him while his view of them is only partial. Indeed, Gulliver performs as a character in Swift’s story, a work of art separated from a reader’s world and physically framed by the often-ornate covers of a book. Swift invites a reader to peer into another world to spectate and speculate on Gulliver’s situation. In turn, Gulliver tells a story, which, like most stories, involves crossing a threshold to trespass as a visitor in an alien realm who comments on the scene from a position of estrangement. At each level, the dramatic tensions and the fun reside in play across the boundary.

Urban life framed by architecture offers many opportunities for speculation, trespass, and storytelling, often as simple as watching the passing scene through a window, then stepping through a doorway to become part of a scene watched by someone else. A trip up to the rooftop or down under the streets is a minor adventure that, if not observed by someone else, might well be recalled anecdotally to amuse friends over dinner, where one might look out a window into the city or over a garden. Traditionally, urban buildings have defined a delicate spatial tension between positions where one sees and positions where one is seen, between places for speculation and places for performance, particularly in the design of public space.

In the twentieth century, modern artists precipitated a shift in this game by rejecting the picture frame and the illusion of depth. They worked the surface of the canvas so that paintings seemed to turn outward to occupy the space of the viewer, rather than receding inward in perspective. Without a frame to signal the limits of a pictured elsewhere or an illusory space within, modern paintings had no scale independent of the
room they occupied. In this sense, they asserted a real, physical presence and denied the distinction between art and reality. Modern architects sought a similar drama by defining openings as voids rather than windows. They rejected any explicit frame or spatial disjunction between inside and outside or between viewer and scene to define space as continuous.

At the same time however, photography, cinema, and television made the frame of the camera’s image and the illusion of virtual space ubiquitous. While artists and architects resisted dividing here from there spatially, photographic images opened virtual windows to multiple elsewheres and the television screen appeared in living rooms everywhere. Modern architects embraced cinema, yet characteristically chose to design places from which one might look out over a scene, defining the eye as a camera, as if to claim ‘reality’ as the domain of architecture. In designing the place of the viewer, modern architects rejected all illusion, mandating that construction be ‘honest,’ therefore structure must be explicit and materials must reveal their true nature unmasked by paint or plaster. Above all, modern architectural space must be continuous so one never steps through a threshold into another world, one is not an object of someone else’s gaze, and the size of things is experienced objectively within an infinite expanse.

In contrast, the domain of the virtual on the other side of the screen is defined as unreal. Everything is made to be seen, nothing is real, size is defined by context, and the scene is confined within an explicit frame. The viewer watches but can neither enter nor affect the scene, remaining always outside of the story, engaged only vicariously. This tension between the architecture of the viewer and the virtual space of the scene emerges in the design of urban space in the twentieth century, notably in defining a role for historic buildings in downtown revival.

From Old to Historic

In the 1950s, Philadelphia’s ambitious program of urban renewal aimed at transforming an old city into a modern metropolis. One of the most influential models for modern urbanism was the 1942 Athens Charter, issued by the Congrès Internationale des Architects Moderns (CIAM), which laid out specific guidelines for the design of cities. Largely written by Le Corbusier drawing on ideas he had published earlier, it informed much of the American effort to rebuild cities under federal programs for urban renewal. The Athens Charter favored high-rise apartment towers that gave every resident air, light, and a view outward to the horizon, three qualities that many found lacking in traditional urban streets and buildings. The charter recommended that old cities be taken down and rebuilt according to the modern model, yet Article six specified preserving significant historic buildings, such as cathedrals and monuments. One of Le Corbusier’s sketches shows Notre Dame Cathedral and the Arc de Triomphe in a reconstructed Paris surrounded by a green park and overlooked by skyscrapers.

Together, the proscriptive models laid out by the Athen’s Charter and Le Corbusier’s sketch suggest that new and old buildings should take complementary roles as the viewer and the scene. Modern high-rise towers would house citizens in a field of identical, non-figurative, gridded buildings, where they could look out toward a green landscape to experience the exhilaration of infinite space. Selected monuments would remain as objects in the field to receive the gaze, like actors on a stage. In the new role, preserved buildings would no longer command the physical space and movement of the
city but would tell stories of the past in the figurative details of their design, transformed from old to historic.

Philadelphia’s principal monument, the Pennsylvania Statehouse, has been honored as historic at least since the visit of the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824, when it was saved from demolition and given the title of Independence Hall. In the twentieth century, discussion over how to present the monument in a suitably dignified setting resulted in increasingly ambitious demolition schemes that marked a transition toward modernity. In 1915 inspired by the same architects that designed the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, the city removed an adjacent courthouse to create Independence Square, a park that surrounded the hall with foliage and linked with one of William Penn’s original five squares. In 1926, a similar scheme envisioned demolishing buildings, which faced Independence Hall across Chestnut Street, to open a classical forecourt to the north. After World War II, this proposal was embraced by Philadelphia’s modern architects, who radically expanded the scope of demolition to condemn three blocks of buildings in a swath that reached North to Franklin Square, another of Penn’s original five. This shift redefined the scheme from a distinct, bounded forecourt into a large field reminiscent of Washington’s National Mall, opening a long vista toward Independence Hall. In 1948, the United States Congress established Independence National Historical Park to encompass several blocks and multiple buildings considered to be of national importance.

The long open mall that now frames Independence Hall is both classical and modern, isolating the building from its surroundings so it appears as an historical object in a field. Dwarfed by the expanse and without adjacent buildings to connect it with the
city, Independence Hall is presented as a figure, like a miniature temple in a garden, which tells a story of heroic deeds in a past or mythic time that is distinctly removed from the present. Similarly, staged settings on the interior allow costumed guides to enact scenes for an audience of tourists who arrive from the modern city to watch.

In 1950, while buildings were still being demolished for Independence Mall, Edmund Bacon began his work on the renovation of the Society Hill neighborhood. Using federal urban renewal funds, Bacon chose to rebuild most of the district as a representation of the city’s history that one could enter and experience as a feature of the modern city. Society Hill Towers in part were designed to house modern families who could survey the city from above, while the historic buildings such as the market Headhouse provided picturesque objects for their gaze and a pleasant place to stroll (Figure 1). Framed in the view and in images designed to promote Philadelphia, the historic city was marketed as an alternative to suburban sprawl.6

To frame history as picturesque, the past must be distinct from the present and it must perform a role that can be watched. By the 1950s, Philadelphia’s eighteenth-century history had already been romanticized to the point that it was considered a golden age of America. Williamsburg had been reconstructed in the 1930s, Mount Vernon and Monticello were open to the public, and the colonial revival style of architecture was enjoying a second wind. Images of heroism and gentility in the stories woven around Independence Hall were available to other structures of similar form, including much of the vernacular fabric of brick row houses if they were scrubbed up to look the part and separated from the more sordid details of their real past. In particular, vestiges of Philadelphia’s airless streets, overcrowded tenements, relentless row houses, and congestion, both physical and spiritual had to be wiped away. Buildings that did not fit the historical scene were demolished, thus removing the evidence of continuity between past and present. The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority described the project at Headhouse Square in their annual report of 1963 as “Colonial-style shops, converted from the battered old store-front buildings now there... harmonizing with 61 new town houses, as well as apartments and restaurant-louges, a swimming pool and off-street parking for 200 cars to accommodate residents, shoppers and visitors to Society Hill. Both the ancient market and the old fire station known as the Head House were restored.
by the city in anticipation of the area’s renewal.\textsuperscript{7} In this description, the form of historic buildings is emphasized, while new elements such as swimming pools and parking, which were often hidden from view, were listed by use. Spruce Street’s residents were also invoked, “At number 217 an old Philadelphia family was occupying a house rehabilitated and handsomely redecorated in the colonial style. Two houses away, at 223, a neighbor behind a colonial shop-window continued to give his customers haircuts as he had done in the same location behind an ordinary store-front window for many years. In between, another neighbor, in a newly built Colonial-style house, was the chairman of the New York Stock Exchange, commuting daily to work. The barber was an old city-boy. The others were converts to city living.” The actors each had a role that insured an interesting scene for a newcomer to watch.

The Redevelopment Authority’s work in Headhouse Square, in particular, depended on creating images that could play within an historical drama (Figure 2). The more a renovated building characterized a story and the more it was different from its surroundings, the more authentic it seemed.\textsuperscript{8} In other words, the more it was framed as a dramatic image, the more it could be accepted as a true story. In this play, a building’s façade, like the made-up face of an actor, had to be particularly expressive, both in photographs and in the view of the street.
The Facades of Headhouse Square

The facades of buildings along the west side of Headhouse Square explicitly played a character in an historical drama. Rebuilt in 1966, they present an image of a picturesque row that is part Philadelphia colonial and part English period costume. The demolition, redesign and rebuilding of the facades details the process of architectural re-framing that took place throughout the redevelopment district. In particular, it points out the lines of cleavage between architecture for watching and architecture for being watched.

Shortly after the Headhouse market had been restored, developers Van Arkel & Moss and architect Frank Weise, under the auspices of the Redevelopment Authority of Philadelphia, demolished the facade of the entire block of buildings facing the market and built a new façade wall designed in part to reproduce the old and in part to create a photogenic image. The specific changes are apparent though survey drawings of the facades that Weise made before demolition. He recorded a row that was probably built in the mid-nineteenth century in sets of two and three buildings with shopfronts of folding wood and glass doors that opened the entire width of the building to the sidewalk (Figure 3).

Under Weise’s direction, the demolition peeled the façade away from the building, following the fault line between the interior and the face or façade wall, as if to scribe the difference between the two (Figure 4). Facades, as surfaces, mediate between building and street, just as a face stands between a person who looks outward and others on the outside that see the face as an image. A façade or face is designed to project an image to a landscape of other façades and other faces as if in conversation. As such, it responds to a social situation and takes a form that is almost independent of the building or body to which is attached.

Before demolition, Weise rendered the façades as survey drawings, abstracting the measured lines without recording their substance, to show the aspect he considered meaningful. The brick as brick was indicated in a note, “Flemish bond” with no indication of color, weight, texture, substance and condition. After salvaging the lines, Weise demolished the facade along Second Street and built a new facade reusing the lines, dimensions (in general), and position of the old.

Architectural theorist Catherine Ingraham writes that the double line of the wall in a building plan is like a double track of footprints that records the material presence of a building. In this sense architectural lines are sensuous, like lines in an artist’s figure drawing, which lock up and at the same time reveal a sexual, willful body that cannot be entirely disciplined by the pencil. Analogously, an architect’s straightedge cannot entirely contain the weight of stone or brick, nor can it describe the physical presence of building. She describes materiality as trapped within the lines to constitute “an anatomy - something fleshy or animal.” This built flesh is killed in demolition not to be revived except as a ghost of a past form that lingers in reconstituted lines separated from their body.
Vitruvius tells similar story of substitution and haunting to explain the detailing of stone temples as an imitation of earlier wood construction. He explains that the stone mimic the lines of wooden temples to recall their form and dimensions so the memory of wood construction remained but not the substance. Vitruvius wrote that stone sculptors who built the temples followed the lines of the carpenters who preceded them. He assumed Plato’s definition of art as imitation, in which fixing on the appropriate model was an intellectual choice that preceded the work of the artisan. In order that art tell a story, line must be separated from material and intellect from craftsmanship in order to create an image separate from the object it represents.

For Second Street, Weise designed a new facade that was more a picture of an historic city than anything that might have survived in Philadelphia. The ground floor shopfronts in particular betrayed a model not in historical evidence but in fictional images (Figure 5). In design, they resemble a stage set, which represented London in a 1938 screen version of Charles Dickens’ story “A Christmas Carol.” The film, made in Hollywood with American actors, became a Christmas classic shown on television in the 1960s that popularized an image of old London to the point of stereotype. True to Dickens’ novels, the film relies on architectural settings to portray social position and character. A London street setting is portrayed with architectural details that mix Palladian Classicism with early industrial vernacular. In particular, bay window shop fronts appear in several scenes as a nostalgic image of mid-nineteenth century London at Christmastime nestled in the white snow and populated with well-dressed ladies and picturesque urchins. In an early scene, Scrooge strides by a row of shops that bustles with Christmas treats and Christmas shoppers that, for all its overtones of social injustice, is happy (Figure 6). In the film, Dickens’ tale of personal redemption was told so sweetly and stands now at such a distance from our world that the sting of poignancy is replaced with wistful sentimentality, rendering even poverty warm.

Dicken’s London had been reimagined three or four times in stage productions before it appeared in the film directed by Edwin Marin. The image and its story have leapt from place to place, from author to author, each time remade, each time further distanced from their source and mixed with images lifted from other places. The leap to Headhouse Square joined the image with the local architecture of Philadelphia row houses, in the block under the pencil of Weise, already distanced from its original state as a survey drawing. The renovated Headhouse Square developed the Dickensian theme in decorative details and the names of shops: Artful Dodger and the Curiosity Shoppe. Across Second Street, the Dickens Inn serves a holiday dinner inspired by ‘A Christmas Carol’ and based on a cookbook that Dickens’ wife, Catherine, published under the name of Lady Clutterbuck.
Landscape and Story

In a state of multiple removes, the shopfronts rewrote the history of Headhouse Square in terms of Dickens’ story, mixing an image of “olde London” with “olde Philadelphia,” setting the city at a distance from itself, as if it were a fiction. Ironically, the images furthest away from any material anchorage become a new base to which corresponding elements relate. From the cinematic image of London, the buildings of Society Hill are reread, taking new positions as participants in the Dickens story (rather than their own past or present), and their details compared as more or less dickensian. Facing a fictional London by way of Marin and Weise, the existing buildings of Philadelphia are reread in terms of the story.

In a modern, historic city, many buildings both old and new carry stories, which are juxtaposed with one another, rendering the landscape into a souvenir shop. Authenticating multiple mythic pasts, they seem to discredit the present as too alienating, placing it as a distance while they embrace an image of elsewhere. The body of the past remains as a comforting substrate on which images of history are projected, like Weise’s façade was projected onto the structure of the old row houses. These images are thin and ghostly, like the lines of a drawing uneasily lodged in architecture.

Vitruvius’ story of ancient stone detailing derived from wood is relevant here as well. In response to Vitruvius, Gottfried Semper argued in 1851 that Hellenic culture grew out of a “humus of past traditions long since dead and decayed, and from alien motives brought over from without and no longer intelligible in their original meaning.” Classical art based on imitation required the artist to stand at some distance from the original and in some ignorance. Only so estranged may the artist properly worship a lost perfection to the point that they might invent a new ritual or making up stories, without risk of direct knowledge or comparison. In this process, art detaches the past from corporeal aging, so it may return in the imagination, more new than it was in its time.
At the cost of materiality, art subverts chronological aging such that it not only deals in ghosts but also requires them to be creatively misunderstood.

In portraying history, the façades of Second Street locate a pedestrian twice, once in real time in Philadelphia contained within the street, and secondly as a viewer of an immaterial place and time. The buildings embrace the street while their imagery alienates it, holding viewers at a distance where they might read the building as a two-dimensional picture rather than a three-dimensional space. Two systems are at work, a physical measure that engages the body of the viewer, and the second, a measure of the scene, which is detached, often miniaturized, and separated by the frame of fiction. In this sense, the rebuildings on Second Street embody a tension between two readings of the old city, of revitalization and estrangement that express the hopefulness of renovation and its underlying despair.

**Facade and Landscape**

The modern reconstruction of Headhouse Square also changed the physical space to reinforce the modern distinction between viewer and scene. Before work began, each shop had full-width wood sash doors that folded back to open the entire width of the building to the street, so on market days, shoppers entered the interior freely. The activity at the ground level was separated from the floors above by an awning or at least a heavy cornice (Figure 7). At the ground floor level, stores were experienced as extensions of the market, answering the press of shoppers. The interior of the street

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*Figure 7. Sectional cut through Second Street before renovation (above) and after (below)*
opened to the interior of stores lined with shelves offering goods for sale, making the street physically larger. The continuous first floor cornice and its awnings matched the roofline of the market building across the street, which also carried extensive awnings reaching over the sidewalk. Facing one another, they defined space horizontally and framed an opening to a patch of sky, a blue ceiling. The open market in Second Street was also sectioned into stalls so the space of the market, street, and surrounding shops was a series of rooms, which opened to other rooms, some open to the sky, to define places where shoppers and vendors bargained.

The new facade of 1966, reversed this spatial move by removing the low cornice and metal awnings that stretched over the sidewalk so the wall above, which had been separated from the market spatially, was drawn back into the composition. The new façade wall firmly limits the street horizontally but extends the space of the street vertically (Figure 8). On the ground floor, the folding doors were replaced with bay windows cut into the wall as if into a two dimensional surface. The new façade asks a viewer to stand back in order to read the design rather than giving way to the corporeal press of shoppers. As a patterned surface like a drawing, the façade both limits the street and presents a face that must be seen head on.

Similarly, the headhouse was cleaned, pointed and redefined as an object in space identified by a marker, which offers a narrative of its history. The headhouse, market, and the façades are attractions in a city of display, like pieces in an art museum through which tourists and residents wander at their leisure. Situationist Ivan Chtcheglav imagined such a city set apart for free play, an assemblage of castles, grottos, and lakes

Figure 8. Sketch of old and new shopfronts on Headhouse Square
arranged so a visitor would become delightfully disoriented. This modern territory of wandering is effectively dimensionless, defined only in relation to objects on view, like a darkened audience space from which to see yet not be seen (or at least not noticed).

The new facades of Headhouse Square thus performed two acts of removal -- one a reconstruction that replaced old brick with new, saving only ghost lines which tell a story of an imagined past, and the second a refashioning of the façade as a surface for display. Both served to remeasure the street so a shopper’s course in the nineteenth century through a series of linked rooms was fundamentally different from a twentieth-century tourist’s stroll in free space, wandering among objects and surfaces.

Return of the Material City

Through this spatial change, the facades of Headhouse Square offer a series of tableaux: Dickensian London, Colonial Philadelphia, or polished modern in a landscape that addresses a detached and objective viewer. The analytical eye, often peering though the lens of a camera as through the window of a building, enframes the object of study, drawing it into a separate space of scrutiny. This look, which has been extensively analyzed as the eye of desire and of surveillance defines two distinct architectural positions, that of seer and that of seen. Yet in a city street, both viewer and view roam the same space as objects in a spectacle that Guy Debord called the material objectification of an alienated society. The tourist city of detached objects seen by wanderers, who are told a story unconnected to the place or time that they occupy, has become common everywhere.

Yet when appropriated images are returned to steady materiality in building, they are situated in place, even if not the same material or same places as those they left. As real buildings, they are no longer pure images. In the city, residents and tourists alike appropriate the street for their own purposes paying only cursory attention to the images projected or stories told. They use the city to create their own stories and make it fit their purposes. Residents remeasure old places in the dimensions of everyday activities, running errands, talking with neighbors, and making a living. Inhabiting the city, kids prowl and tourists stroll, crossing the horizon of fictional distancing easily, without pausing to contemplate its razor edge.

Similarly, Vitruvius’ story of the origin of classical architecture was also reread yet again in the late nineteenth century. Viollet-le-Duc argued point by point that the details of ancient temples were developed from the process of stone construction, not from wood technology. Columns are round for rolling, not in imitation of tree trunks. The projection of the abacus at the top of a column was necessary to support scaffolding, not in memory of a wood cushion on top of the tree shaft. His purpose was to establish Greek art as a model of clarity and honesty in construction that could serve to guide modern architects to create a new architecture that would not merely copy forms borrowed from the past. That he could make such an argument, taking on the most ancient and respected of authorities, suggests that the physical evidence is open to interpretation. The lines incised in stone leave a gap between the object and the story that has been imaginatively filled by a continuing succession of architects, scholars and tourists. By measuring the details of the temples again and again, new stories are invented to tell each successive audience.
Dregs of meaning and the ghosts of stories haunt buildings, while the gap between physical presence and story leaves room for new images, appropriation and reinterpretation. The slippage between body, face, landscape, and story allows a complexity that would be suppressed if any one of them dominated as good design dictates. Because of their incompleteness, such places are open to interpretation and inhabitation. Recalling Semper, Michel de Certeau called stories about places “makeshift things” composed of the world’s debris. “The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order.” Only animal materiality runs continuously among the images returning them in place, time and flesh. Material resists mutation, reproduction, and shifts in scale, grounding images in wood, stone, and plaster, which stand open to be appropriated for unforeseen uses. The façade is reclaimed by the body and the view by the landscape. Several different systems of measure order this negotiation: the dimensions salvaged from the old facades in Frank Weise’s survey drawings that preserve an underlying scale for rebuilding, new material dimensions that flatten the surfaces, frames that detach one realm from another, narrative, which brings distant worlds into contact, and bodily dimensions, which are reasserted through use. Each measures the street and relocates us within it and each carries a story or several that merge, and compete with one another, yet we skip between with little notice.

Today, the tensions and separations embodied in the rebuildings of Second Street have aged. Peeling paint and rotting wood blur the lines of composition, and weak details override crisp images, so even nostalgia seems old. Tourists now bypass the market for newer versions of history, or they visit South Street where the facades are explicitly theatrical, remade by every tenant. South Second Street has been reclaimed by the city and resituated in time. The historical storytelling is no longer new and thus no longer separable from stories that other buildings tell throughout the city. Over time, the street has acquired a physical history of its own on this side of the historical frame -- one of ice cream parlors and jazz clubs. The distance between material and story has allowed new readings and new memories to take hold, as a frame demands a picture.

5 Judge Edwin O. Lewis first proposed to demolish buildings around Independence Hall to protect it from fire. After WWII, the project grew in scope and shifted in purpose See John L. Cotter, Daniel Roberts, and Michael Parrington, The Buried Past, Barra Foundation Book (Phila.: University of Penna. Press, 1992), 74.
6 Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority Annual Report, 1962, p.5 “a large part of the problem was to convince people that the city provided attractive and more convenient living conditions than the suburbs - in cultural opportunity, in ease of living, and comfort.”
8 Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 140.

10 Ibid. 170.


16 Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 135. Stewart describes souvenirs as speaking "in a language of longing, for it is an object arising not out of need but out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.


21 Ibid. 427.


26 Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.107

27 Ibid.107