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## Review: Architectural Involutions: Writing, Staging, and Building Space, c. 1435–1650. Mimi Yiu.

Kelly Stage

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*Architectural Involutions: Writing, Staging, and Building Space, c. 1435–1650.*

Mimi Yiu.

Rethinking the Early Modern. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015.

x + 320 pp. \$89.95.

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Mimi Yiu's *Architectural Involutions* is an expansive, impressive, and largely interdisciplinary study. Many recent books have touched on related topics—probably most relevantly Henry Turner's *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial*

*Arts 1580–1630*—but this one reads from architecture and space forward rather than seeks answers about the theater foremost. The book’s main focus is to theorize the “inward journey” made possible by modes of understanding, building, and reading space in early modern Europe, although England is central to much of the work’s concerns. As Yiu explains in her introduction, the book “suggests a method for spatial mapping that crosses academic fields to produce a broader cultural history” (12). Her chapters and overall analysis, while frequently looking to her two key theatrical examples of *Hamlet* and *Epicoene*, are clearly interested in the big picture, so to speak, of the interior.

Yiu’s “involution” is to follow an “inward journey from façades to closets, from physical to psychic space” to show “how the meeting of theater and architecture helped to construct an early modern sense of interiority” (9). This key idea structures the book’s overall discussion, which treats several topics, each in dense but enjoyable detail. Yiu begins with Leon Battista Alberti’s treatises and experiments with the façade as an architectural feature. Although I am not an expert in art history, to my eye Yiu’s reading of architectural styles, treatises, and innovation is insightful and thoroughly researched. She transitions from her work on Alberti to propose a reading of post-Reformation English building in its own right as opposed to Italianate design. She continues by tracing an “inward journey” into the next chapter: from façade to house to interior design and then deeper inward to the space of the closet. Her detailed look at the “country pile” (59) and its closet spaces turns to Gertrude and opens up a reading of *Hamlet* in chapter 3, which delves fully into the problem of psychic space, performance space, and architectural space together.

The chapter that follows, “Corpus, Chora, Crown,” feels at first like a divide, but in retrospect, it actually serves as a necessary and unifying transition. Overall, chapter 4 extends Yiu’s arguments from the previous chapters, but it is also true that the first trio and second trio of chapters each hang together as units. The pinpoint discussions of the two plays in chapters 3 and 5 help to bring together those units. In chapter 4, Yiu’s readings range widely, threading together treatments of Platonic space and English chorography, of Alberti and early modern architectural space, and of theorists like Derrida, Irigaray, Lacan, and Grosz. The discussion and writing are strong, and the analysis carries the reader along—even in its difficulty—to the chapter’s culminating section on Elizabeth I, the *chora*, the womb, and *civitas*. At the end of the chapter, Yiu helpfully previews her next chapter, as she will extend her spatialized, gendered readings of nation to the theater as itself a transitional space.

In chapter 5, “Making the Difference in Jonson’s *Epicoene*,” Yiu swiftly closes in on city comedy as a model of dramatic chorography and queered conceptual space. Jonson’s play keenly fits Yiu’s approach. The discussion of bodies, space, and gender from the previous chapter does—as promised—extend insightfully to reading the play, the house, the city, and the theater together. In particular, Yiu’s discussion of Mrs. Otter’s “clockwork body” (200) and her “evacuated maternity” (201) provides for a fascinating resituation of the play’s treatment of gender (well-trodden academic ground). Yiu wraps up with a final

chapter about perspective boxes, examining optical illusion and the representation of interior selfhood. While this conclusion pulls together key parts of the book, it also feels a little separated from the previous chapters.

The introduction of the book invokes the idea of the platform and a “conceptual slip-page” (4) between architecture and theater in the period. This initial discussion allows for the statement that the book will look at different platforms “where visual, textual, and spatial elements collide to create an architecture of the self” (7). This is indeed the project that Yiu follows—though occasionally the reader may lose sense of some of that wider platform. *Architectural Involutions* is a welcome departure from previous works that Yiu references in her introduction. This book provides a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary discussion, which is impressive in its density and its depth.

Kelly Stage, *University of Nebraska–Lincoln*

*Origins, Invention, Revision: Studying the History of Art and Architecture.*

James S. Ackerman.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. xvii + 178 pp. \$45.

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Published shortly before his death, this volume contains eight essays written by James Ackerman that range greatly in their subject matter. The first outlines the development of sketching in the Renaissance, while another examines the rise of photography in light of picturesque aesthetics. In addition to these, which focus on the relationship between artistic practice and the introduction of new media, he tackles the origins of art history before Vasari. Ackerman also explores the application of biological evolutionary theory to art and the issue of style. This methodology is then partially employed to reevaluate the architecture of Palladio in terms of the idea of magnificence and the question of selection. The book also includes a short essay on Frank Gehry’s Fondation Louis Vuitton; reminiscences of his service during World War II, including personal sketches and watercolors; and musings on a recent transformative trip to India.

Like the essays featured in his earlier *Distance Points* (1991) and *Origins, Imitation, Conventions* (2002), almost all of these pieces derive from previously published material. Yet whereas those volumes included seminal works that reveal Ackerman’s breadth and erudition, the selections within this book are less robust. This is in part because some are abridged. “The *Magnificenza* of Palladio’s Late Works and Its Legacy Abroad,” for example, removes not only the bibliographic notes from his earlier article on *publica magnificentia*, published in *Annali di architettura* (2010), but also simplifies some parts of the text. His argument that differing views on the public and private display of magnificence in Venice and Vicenza shaped the reception of the architect’s work remains convincing, but some examples, such as the various plans for the façade of S. Petronio in Bologna, are made less coherent by means of abbreviation.