Courtroom Characters, Architectural Actors: A Play in Several Acts

by

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on January 15, 2015 in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Architecture

ABSTRACT

This thesis takes aim at several agendas within architectural discourse. On one hand it is a demonstration of the architectural understanding of mask. The mask, as both an object of formal and figural qualities as well as a participant in performative rituals, becomes the source material with which to resituate the current practice of architecture along the lines of narrative performance. Through the study of specific works of architecture, such as Adolf Loos' houses and the development of theater form throughout history, the project defines several qualities of an architectural mask. Primary to this work lies in the mask's ability to reveal and conceal, and to do so both formally and psycho-socially. The proposal begins with a courthouse, a courthouse framed not as programmatic desire but as a site to develop complexity from the canonical instruments of architecture: hierarchy, sequence, and narrative. These instruments, coupled with tools present in both architectural history and masks of traditional societies such as symmetry and anthropomorphism, are used to simultaneously construct and question both the institutions of society and its architectural objects.

Thesis Supervisor: William O'Brien Jr.
Title: Associate Professor of Architecture

Special Acknowledgments

To my parents, Bob and Marthe, for their unending support and love.

To Ana, for your compassion, love, patience and guidance throughout all the stressful times and late nights. I couldn't have done it without you. ILYADH.

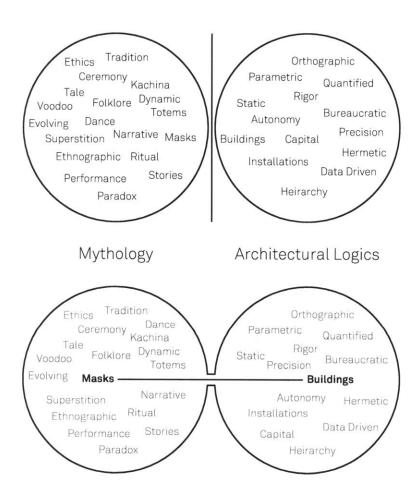


Figure 1: When did these two worlds of thought become distinct? Is this separation necessary and desirable?

Mythology, Masks, and Architecture

The initial drive behind this project was a search for alternatives to counter the tendency for technology to play a role in the conception of architecture. Architecture, although utilizing both science and art, has always existed in the space between these two.

Similar to the discipline of architecture are the mythological projects of societies around the world. If the presupposition of the modern movement was a sort of logical positivism towards a "better" world, myth is grounded in non-rational and culturally specific ways of dealing. It is a coping-with-the-existing whose expanded scope includes paradox, the hypothetical, and the imaginary.

If each historical period adopts a set of objects—
the Corbusian ocean liner, the postwar automobile, the
computer—then understanding and employing the methods of

Mythology, Masks, and Architecture

the mask allows for an understanding of this alternative basis for architectural thinking.

The mask is an object that has a twofold nature. On one hand, the physical qualities of the mask—form, material, color—already exist within architectural design. In this sense, the mask becomes conceptually immediate to an architectural discourse as a potential object of study. At the same time, the mask is implicitly understood as an object with secondary, non-tangible powers. It is a specific object, the product of a particular culture, whose meaning and potency are grounded in a time and place. Yet the mask, as a doubling of the basic anthropomorphic unit of the face, is accessible on some level by all humanity.

The system of the mask provides a framework running in parallel to the architectural logics that we traditionally work

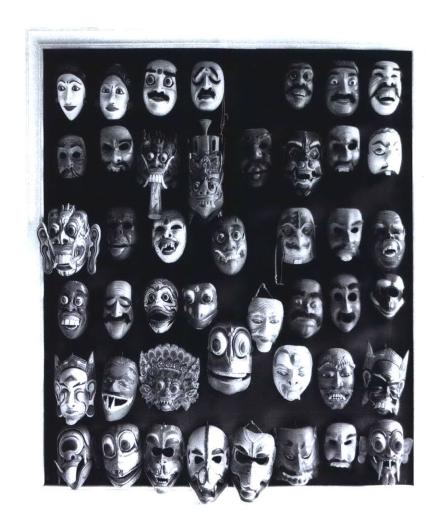


Figure 2: Masks used in a Balinese performances show a diverse relationship between form and narrative function

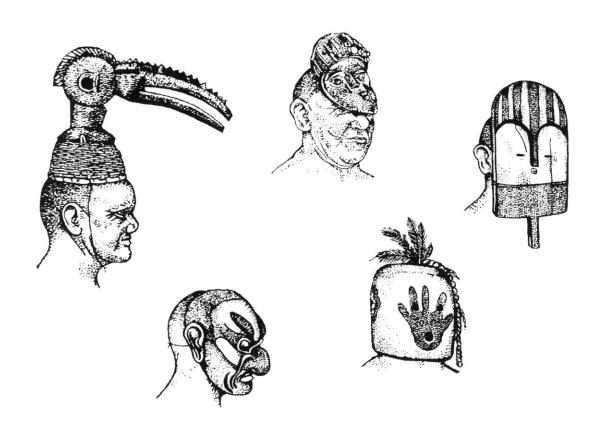


Figure 3: Traditional masks do not hold a fixed relationship to the wearer. Form is dictated by narrative role and always serves to transform its wearer into a specific identity given by a society.

Mythology, Masks, and Architecture
with. Neither right nor wrong, nor the
set solution to a specific problem,
the understanding and use of this
system provides a new vantage
point, allowing us to sidestep our
own tradition and see differently the
neuroses within our own creative
discipline.

The mask and its allies are,
like architecture, hanging delicately
between two worlds. Suspended
uneasily between mythological
narrative and a functioning society,
the mask acts as both a signal of
categorical change while also being

Initial Context and Research

Mythology, Masks, Architecture an object of healing and redress associated with ritual throughout societies and times. Although one might negatively associate the Mask with fictions, I would argue that it is an entirely productive fiction evidencing a productive mode of creation that is able to encompass the paradoxic, the hypothetical, and the illusory. For Claude Levi-Strauss, the mask is the 'functional binding of mythic elements, socio/cultural concepts, and plastic expression". How is this not the definition of Architectural thought itself?

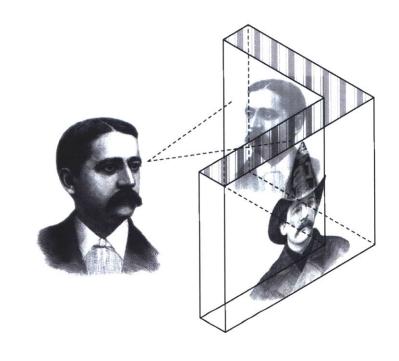




Figure 4: The wall is the thickened surface that has a double role. On one hand, the inhabitant measures himself through his interactions with the interior. At the same time, the external facade presents the mediated individual to others.

Initial Context and Research





Figure 5: A Bembe wooden mask of the early 20th century. Numerous forms and identities embedded within a single mask are all available to the wearer.

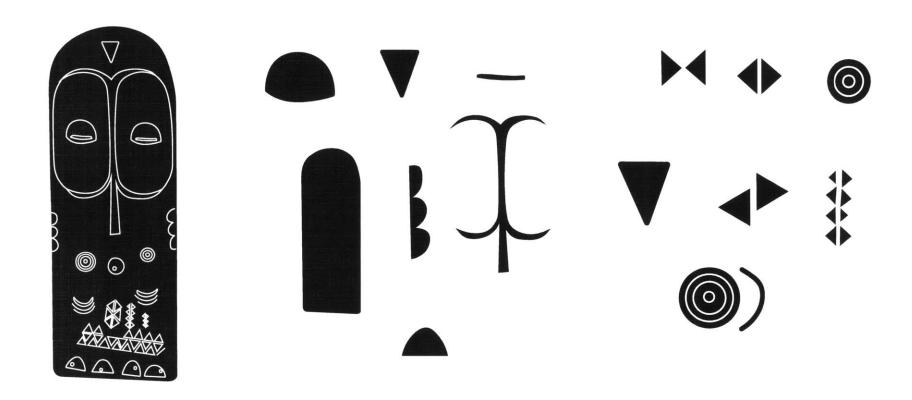
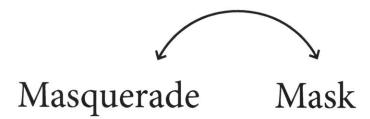


Figure 6: Decomposition of some of the figural formal elements found within a traditional mask. Within traditional socities these simple anthropomorhic and zoomorphic forms have semiotic significance even prior to use within a mask.







Perform | Form

Ritual | Object

Scene | Stage

The Mask and the Masque

Although an object of its own identity, a mask is always seen as part of a larger system of performance. The association with ritual is essential because the mask is the element that signifies the space of the other. Daily activities are not undertaken under the guise of the mask; be it the mask of the cartoon thief, the adornments of masquerade parties, or the zoomorphic masks of the primitive ritual, the mask is only used to set an individual within the head space of the desired performance.

The modern theater functions in a very similar way.

Although there are certainly many theaters that display grand exteriors, the interior performance hall determines its overall

The Mask and the Masque

success. From the first gatherings around a communal fire to the most ornate, elaborate, or technologically advanced performing arts center, the essential function of the theater is to create a space that allows a society to partake in the cultural or artistic rituals that define it. By concretizing these cultural moments, a theater becomes much more than a mere space of entertainment; it serves as the core of a community identity.

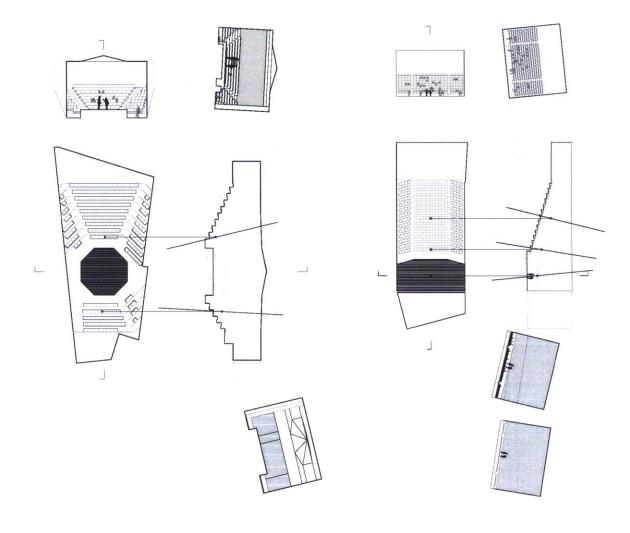


Figure 7: At left, the center stage of the Teatro San Erasmo in Milan; At right, the end stage of the Mermaid Theater in London.

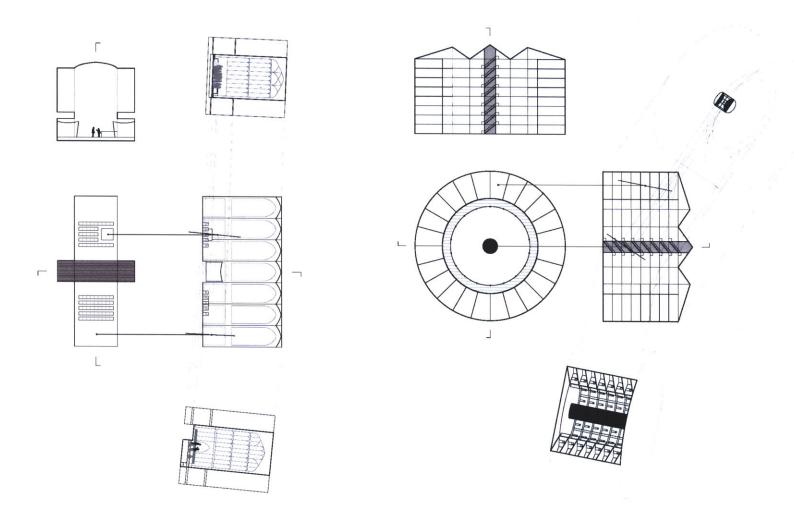


Figure 8: At left, the thrust stage of King's College Chapel in Oxford, UK; At right, the panoptic arragement of Jeremy Bentham's proposal for a jail.

The Mask and the Masque: Loos' Villa Muller

While the theater is the most clear about architecture's role in linking space to performance, its designation as a space of entertainment weakens that link. On the other hand, the work of Adolf Loos displays the theater inherent in domesticity. In his Villa Muller project, a green marble wall divides the salon, men's parlor, and circulation path, framing the various occupants in such a way as to create positions of optical hierarchy. For those seated in either the parlor or salon, the stairway becomes a stage; a space that attracts the gaze of others. The marble wall acts as masking element, revealing the social structuring of the house and reinforcing a hierarchy of inhabitant. Without the object present, the presence of specific social relations would be left undefined, unordered.







Figure 9: Loos' Villa Muller, like many of his projects, creates a rich interiority that contrasts the mute exterior. Architectural elements provoke a theater of the domestic in which social relationships are exposed.

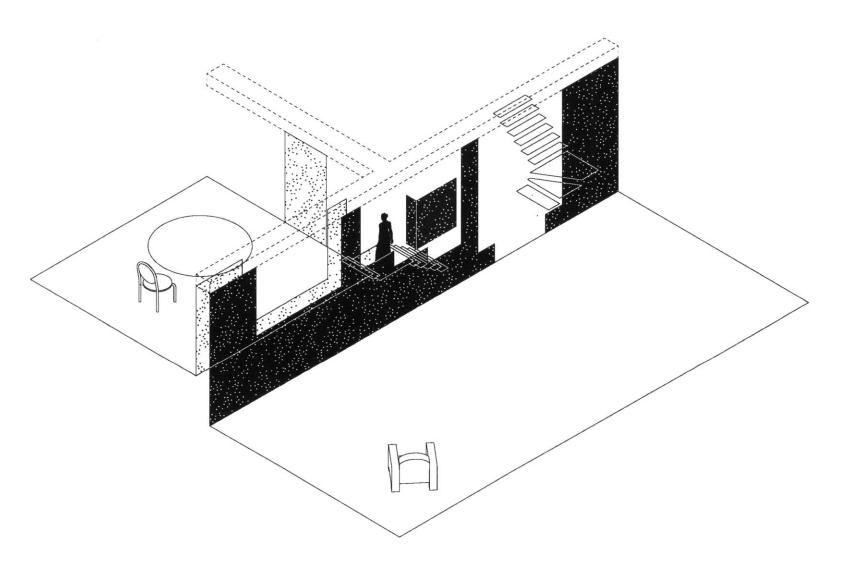


Figure 10: The ornamented wall separates and signs that separation. It is an architectural mask, setting the stage for the performance. The mask for the masque.

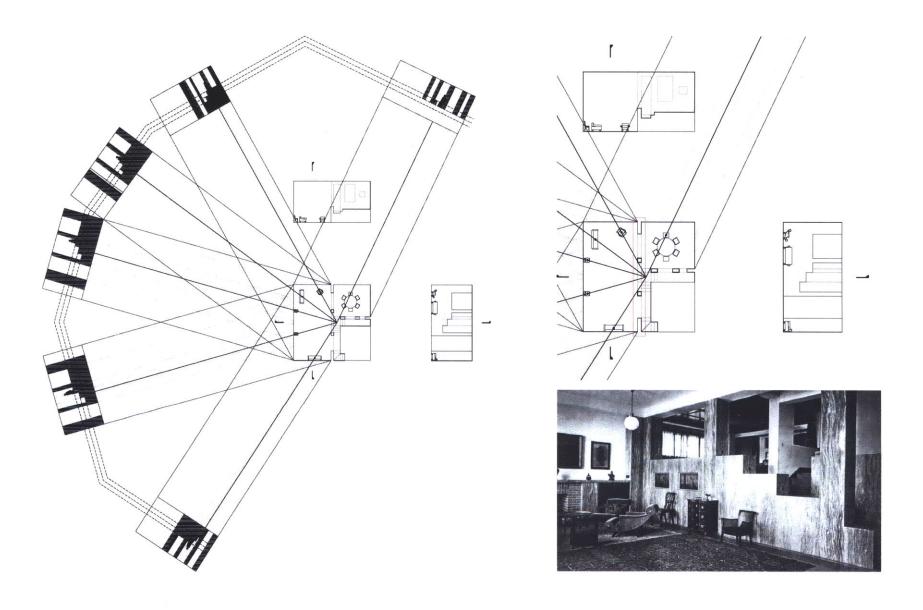


Figure 11: A single wall, two rooms, no shortage of readings. The performance is not restricted to a convention, nor to single point of view.

Performance and narrative is inherent in all built work. It is an inescapable consequence that necessarily separates architecture from sculpture. And yet, whether design chooses to acknowledge and work with a narrative performance is another matter entirely. The work of Loos is important because it takes the understanding and the power of the mask out of the realm of the traditional society and shows its

continued relevance to the modern condition. In her book "Privacy and Publicity", Beatriz Colomina highlights the conscious deployment of a mask throughout the many layers of Loos' domestic buildings. Rather than a mere relic from an earlier time, the Loosian mask, she notes, is essential in modernity because it allows man to conceal his difference, to protect his identity. In the Villa Muller, the mute exterior is the guard against

the "schizophrenia" of Modernity. It is more than a shield however. The interior mask is an ornate flatness implicating the volumes beyond with a specific formal hierarchy, a specific social hierarchy, and ultimately a specific narrative role in domestic theater.

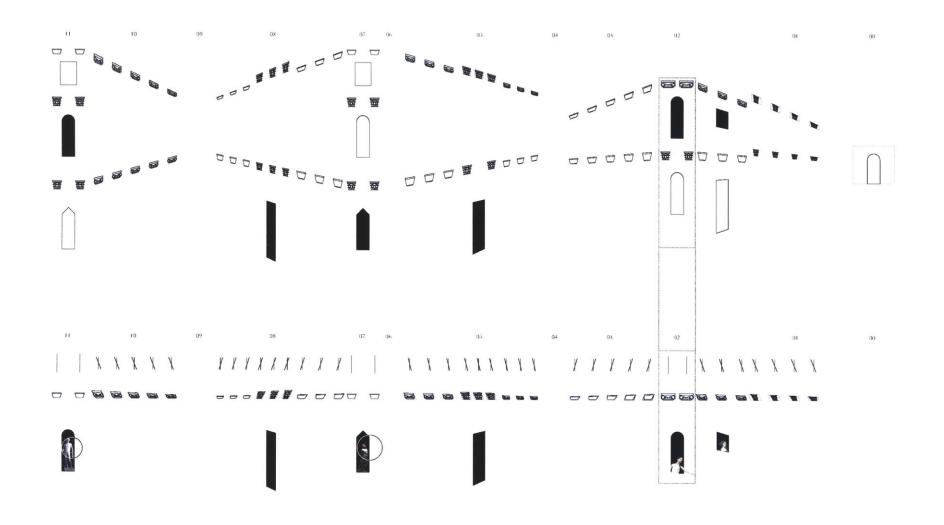


Figure 12: Scamozzi's deep stage foregrounds not through layering but through distortion. The fiction is subversive and hidden, un-noticeable from beyond.





Figure 13: At top, a frontal view of the elaborate proscenium shows the constructed depth beyond. At bottom, the section reveals the distortion necessary to produce the effect.

Distorted Spaces: Teatro Olimpico

Similar to the mask within the Villa Muller, the elaborate proscenium of the Teatro Olimpico is an element that divides a space and asserts the difference between two classes; the actor and the audience. The construction of this stage. however, calls into question the relationship between flatness and volume and presents a difficulty in locating both the physical and metaphoric edge of the mask. The use of forced perpective behind the proscenium gives a narrative bias to certain spaces and the characters that use them and adds to the definition of the architectural mask. As seen here, the mask is not limited to defining the hierarchies that exist in a situation but can actively participate in their distortion.

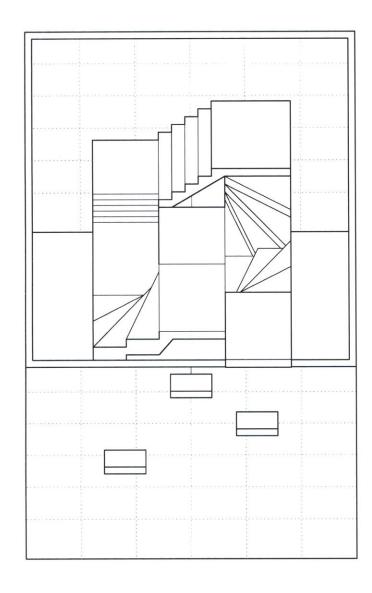
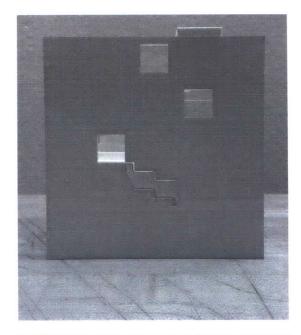
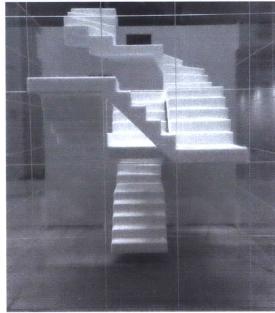
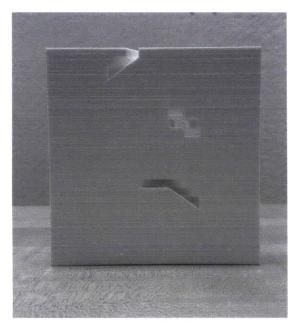
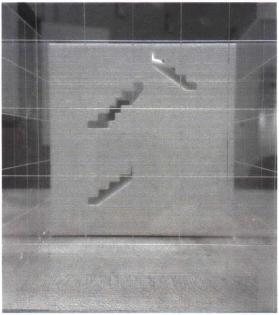


Figure 14: Cube 01. Stagecraft. The flat opaque wall opens onto three stages, concealing all else.









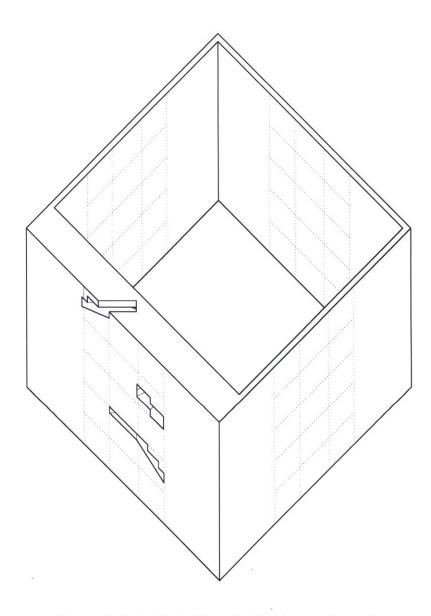


Figure 15: Cube 02. In Absentia. Markings on the wall register the past presence of a system long gone.

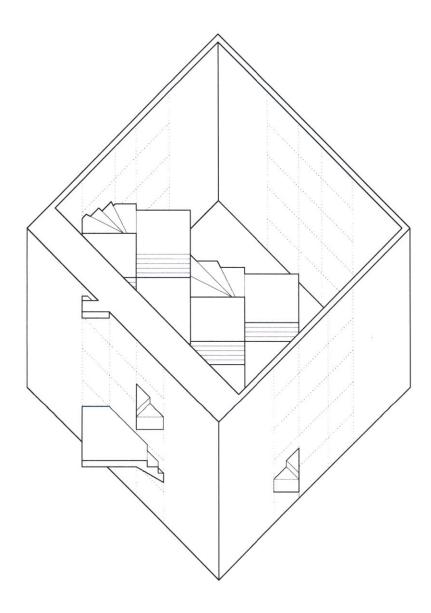
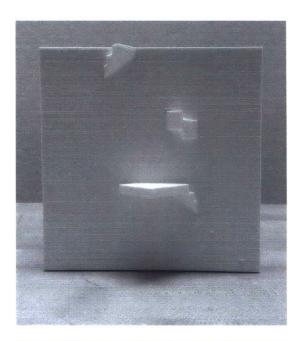
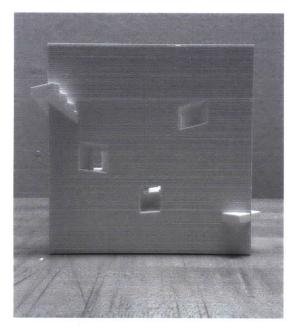
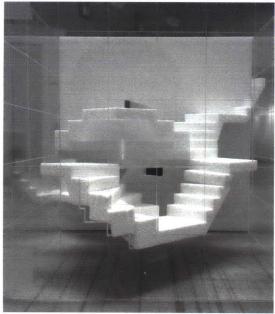


Figure 16: Cube 03. Mutemass. The wall permits passage, or, rather, hints at its possibility.









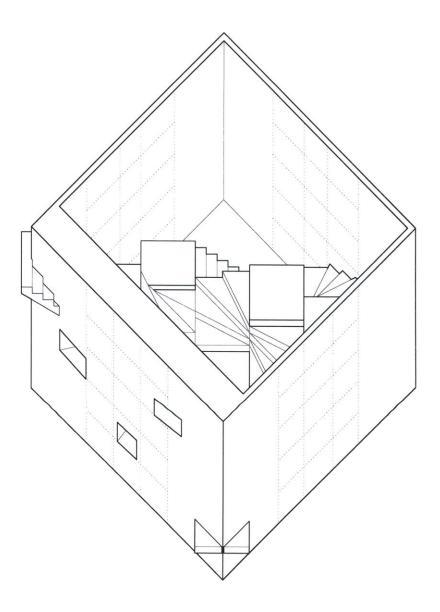


Figure 17: Cube 04. Oh the Games We Play. Knowledge of the internal systems is embedded into the wall. The wall plays back.

Architectural Proposal: The Mask, The Courthouse

The Proposal: A Courthouse

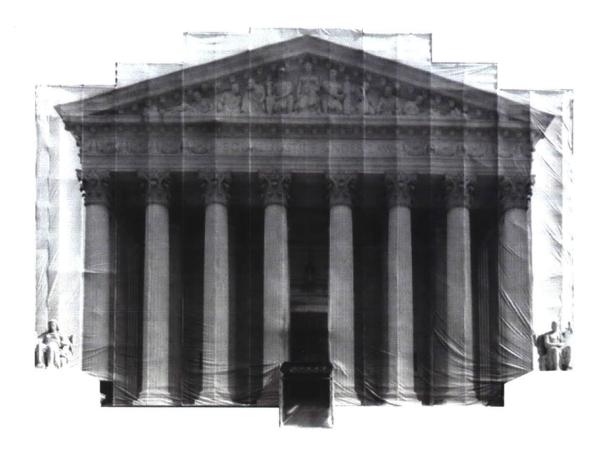


Figure 18: The setting, a courthouse. An image of institutionality that is built on social hierarchies. Neither fact nor fiction, it is a space that is grounded in the tension between actors.

The Institution

The courthouse. An institution and an image. Whether it be the imposing facade of the Supreme Court or the more humble building of a small town, the courthouse-perhaps more than any other contemporary building-embodies the relationship between the function of a public institution and the image of the institutionality. With facades of marble and stone, the unshakable legitimacy of the judicial system is

The Proposal: A Courthouse

The Institution

presented while the performance within is concealed. But what if the building acts in a more complex manner? What if the building functions on one hand like a typical courthouse and obeys the social hierarchies of the users while also highlighting the fact that those hierarchies are constructions. not givens? What happens when a courthouse undermines the rigidity of social status and shows that the justice system, like many other institutions, is a performance, a show?

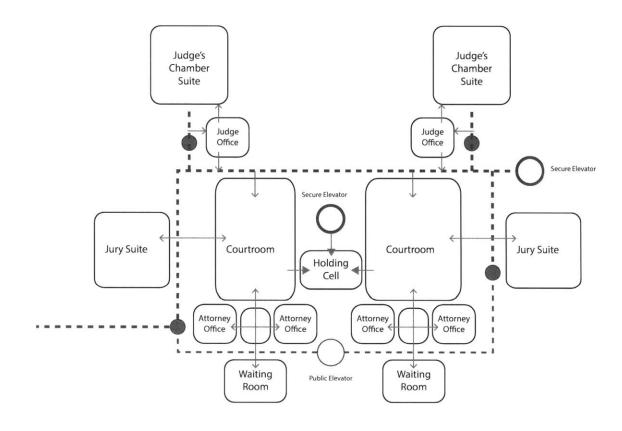
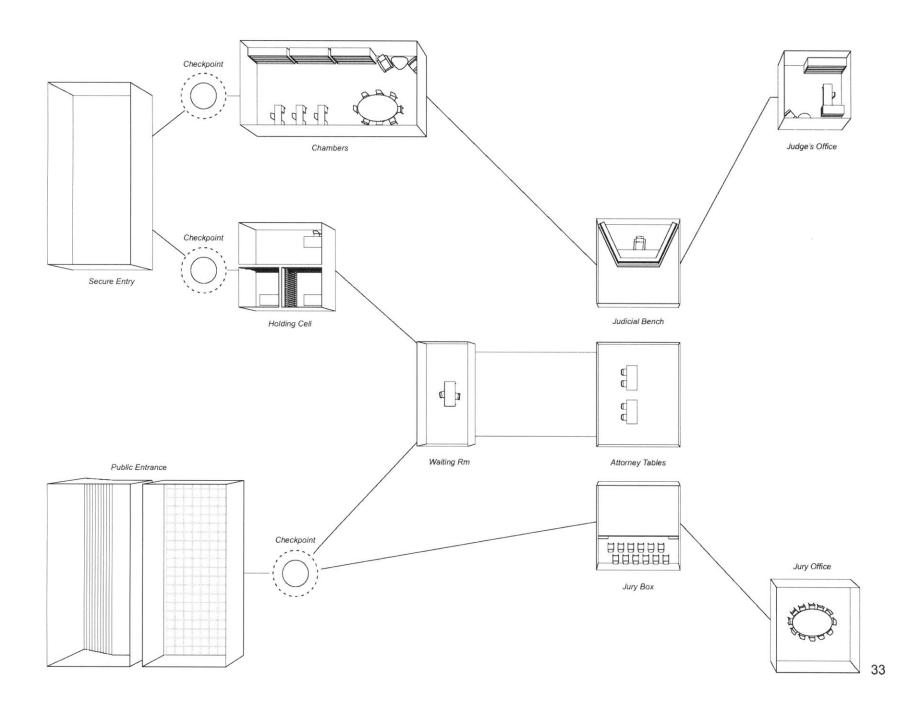


Figure 19: As much a space of judicial regulation, the courthouse type follows a judicial regulation of spaces. The sequence of spaces and their respective hierarchy must be maintained. At right, the simplified version of a basic courthouse.



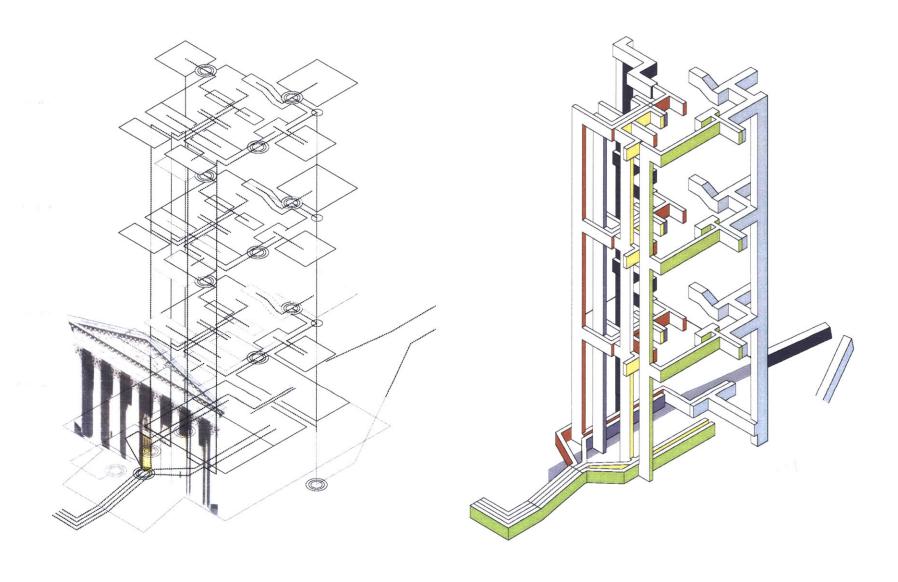


Figure 20: At left, the interiority of the courthouse is masked by a facade that communicates a supposed judicial ideal. At right, the interior as governed to produce spatial separation turns into labyrinth.

The Proposal: A Courthouse



The Characters

At its core, a justice system is not a building but a system of negotiation among several different parties.

From judge and jury to attorney and accused each person has a specific series of spaces, rooms, and passages that he is permitted access to or restricted from.

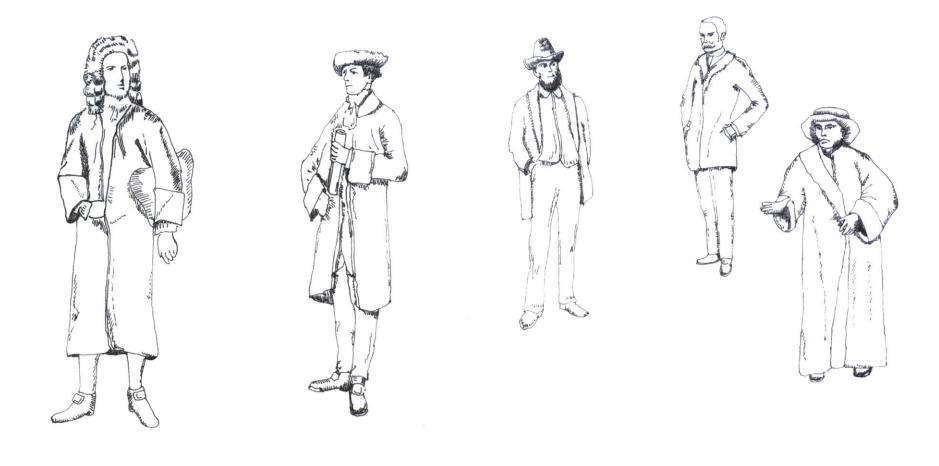
Figure 21: The judge meets with the attorneys in this scene from the movie, "Anatomy of a Murder".

The Characters

At its start, the interior logic of any courthouse is embedded with the social hierarchy of these characters. The monolithic facade of the government building (Fig.18), does nothing to make explicit this internal condition. Instead, it acts as a wrapping that presents a single image of the judicial institution and neglects the richness and complexity that is ultimately grounded in the relationship between people. It is this obscuring of the social framework of our modern institutions that requires a revealing, that requires the mask. This thesis proposes a more explicit manner of developing an architecture that strengthens the relationship between the flatness of the facade-the image of the institution-and the volume behind, in which justice is performed as a system of negotiation.



The Inmate

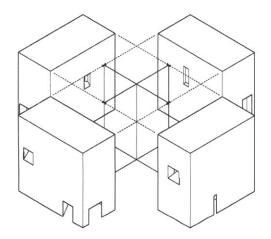


The Judge

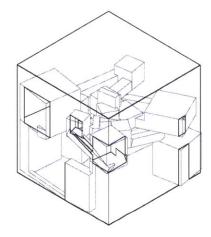
The Attorney

The Jury

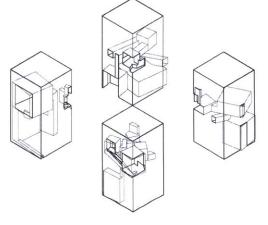
The Proposal: A Courthouse



The contention of four independent characters...



...requires logics of negotiation based on narrative hierarchies...



...that in turn produce new conditions of hierarchy that challenge the original.

Figure 22: A diagram of formal generation.

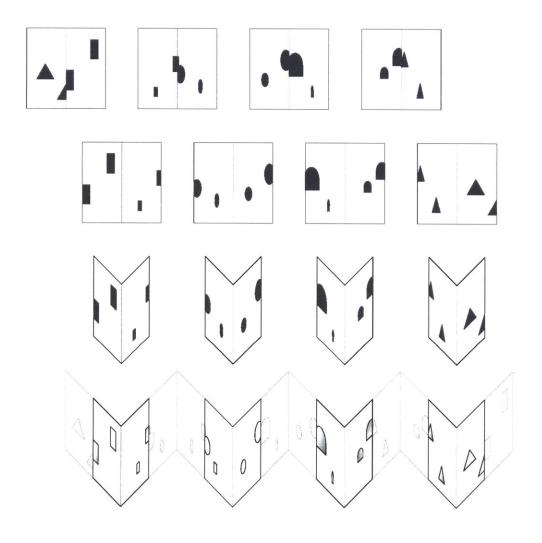
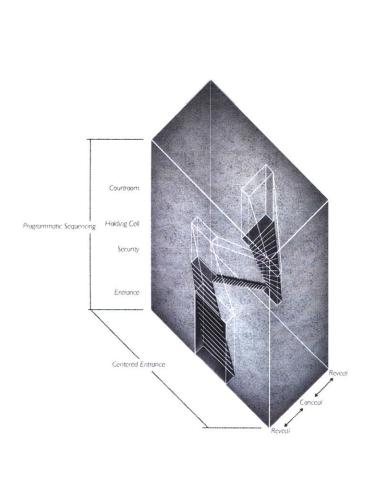


Figure 23: A diagram of: Contentious form, Anthropomorphic Oddities, Characters of the Corner.

From Social Hierarchies to Form

As a space of negotiation, the proposal begins with four walls. Each thickened wall belongs to a specific character identity: only those spaces specific to that identity are contained within. Each wall has a centered entrance on the exterior face, and a piece of courtroom space on the interior face. These two points are the starting condition. All other chambers shift vertically depending on their place within the programmatic



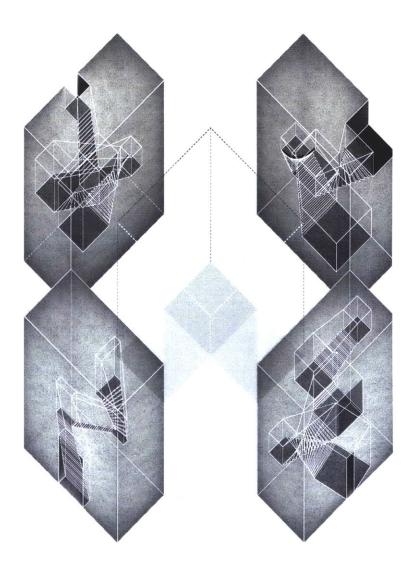
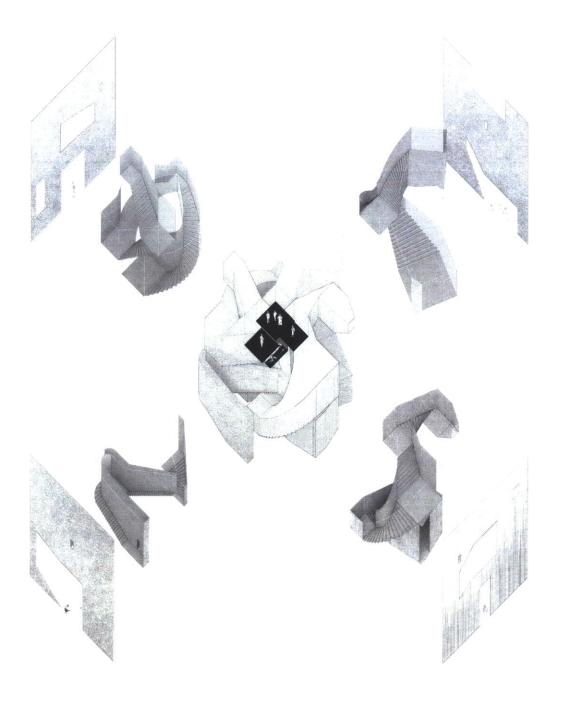


Figure 24: Left: The logic of the four walls. Right: The intersection of independent characters relies on rules of narrative hierarchy to resolve formal conditions.



sequence and shift towards the center of the mass for concealment within the poche (holding cells) or towards an face to be revealed to exterior (jury office). (Fig. 28)

With the four walls embedding the logic of the four characters, the next layer to the design of the courthouse is the intersection of these masses. Four walls of equal dimension produce a single cube when brought together, a new object whose internal condition is the intersected, overlapping conflicted spaces of the four. Spatial negotiation

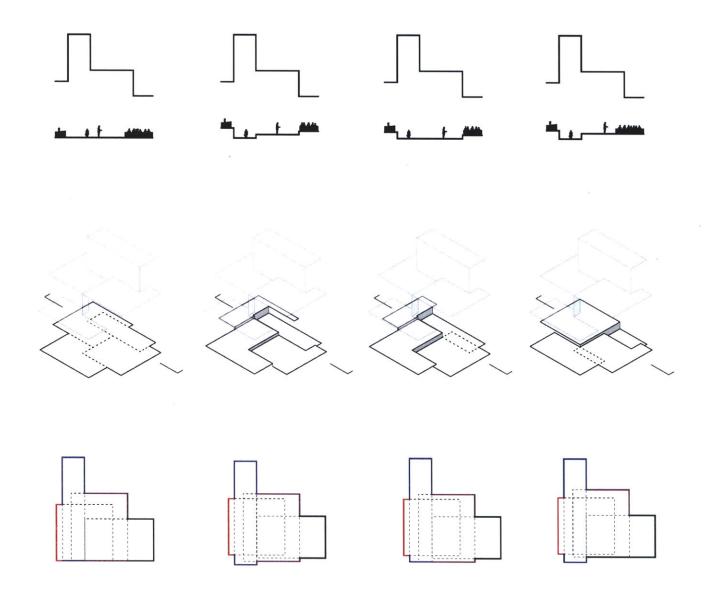


Figure 25: The single determined space is the courtroom. As a space of the four characters coming together it reads as a unity while preserving the logic of the individual.

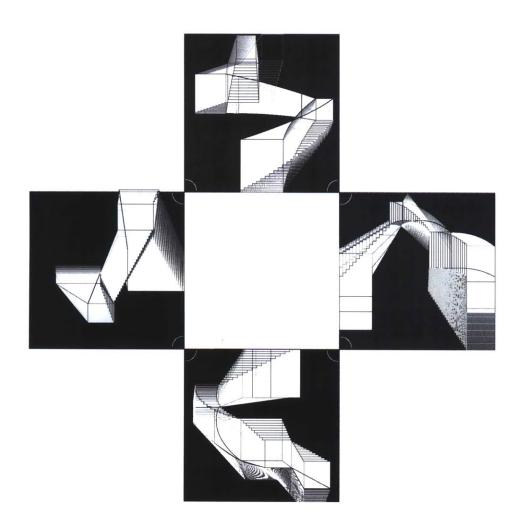


Figure 26: Although always happening in three dimensions, the formal negotiation of the four characters is here shown in the internal elevations folded flat.

based upon the social hierachies of each of the characters is brought into play. The holding cell of the inmate bends and twists to accomodate the judge's chamber office, while the judge's personal office forces the jury room beyond the exterior face of the building. The new courthouse is a single architectural object; a composite in which the social basis of the institute forms its interior and whose exterior is a palimsest registering and questioning the heirarchies at work inside.

The Inmate

The inmate arrives, hands shackled, ankles bound. A moment for rest, A moment distressed; With back to the wall, a moment is found.

"My name...it matters not. I am no one.

Here today, no power in my hands, my back to the wall,
I stand condemned.

The only freedom, the thoughts and dreams of a time before
my fall."





The Attorney

A public defender, advocate for the accused. With legal knowledge full, little of the crime, none of the man behind. He too enters, an innocence to be proved.

"For many years I have served this court.

A more faithful and true defender none have known.

Justice for each man is my call.

With logic and reason, this case will be shown."

The Judge

His court, his castle, his throne. The judge begins to ascend, the law his alone to tend. No time to postpone.

"To whom am I beholden? Both all and none. I am master of this place and servant too. My only task to ensure justice is done."





The Jury

A group of strangers have entered. Plainclothed and plainspoken, So too are their emotions censored.

"For whom are we here?
What words of innocence, words of guilt may be spoken within?
To sway our thoughts, to seek the sin?
Or perhaps, a man his freedom win?"

Final Representations

Key to this project is the manner of representation. Beginning with the idea that the institution is based upon internal relationships and negotiations, a single point source of light is used throughout the renderings. As each character carries a candle from chamber to chamber, the light falling on the walls of the labyrinthian space show both location as well as the connection and overlap between his space and the space of

the others. With no exterior lighting, the illumination emanates from the interior and higlights both the activity taking place within as well as the figuration of the four faces. All exterior rendering is orthographic and flat, where the edges of the building fade to darkness. In this way, any reference to a world outside to the project is removed and must be, as the courthouse is not program but site for the deployment of ideas core

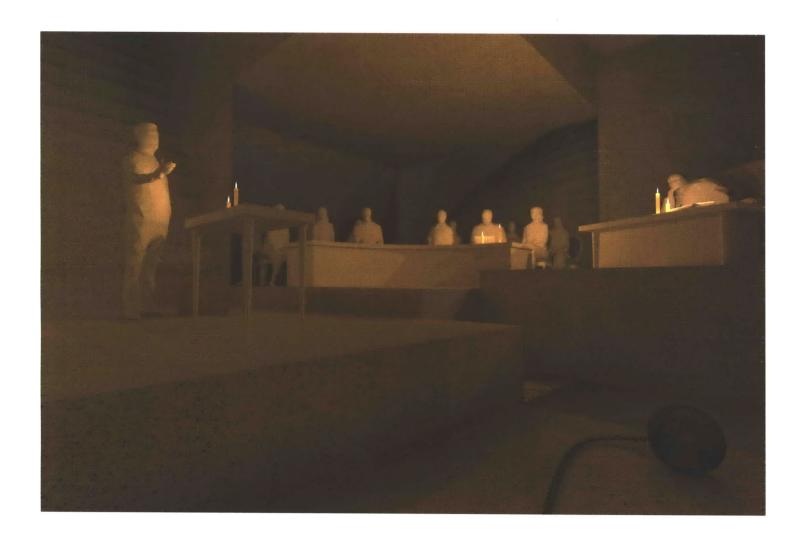
to the thesis. All activity happens within; consequently all perspective is deployed to show the internal chambers. Finally, as a register of the formal and social connectivity paramount to this project is the relationship of spaces within each internal render. All space is shown from the vantage point of another character and shows both the prior or next space within a characters own sequence.



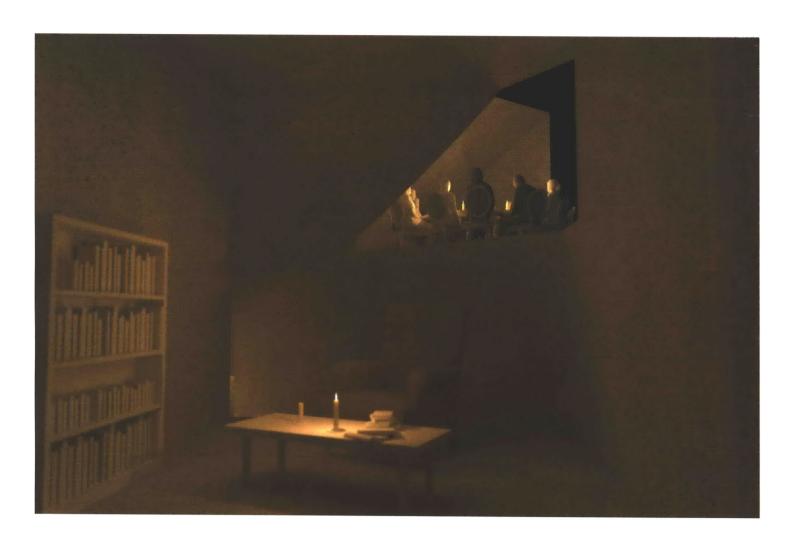
The Judge's Chambers.



The attorney's gather before the trial.



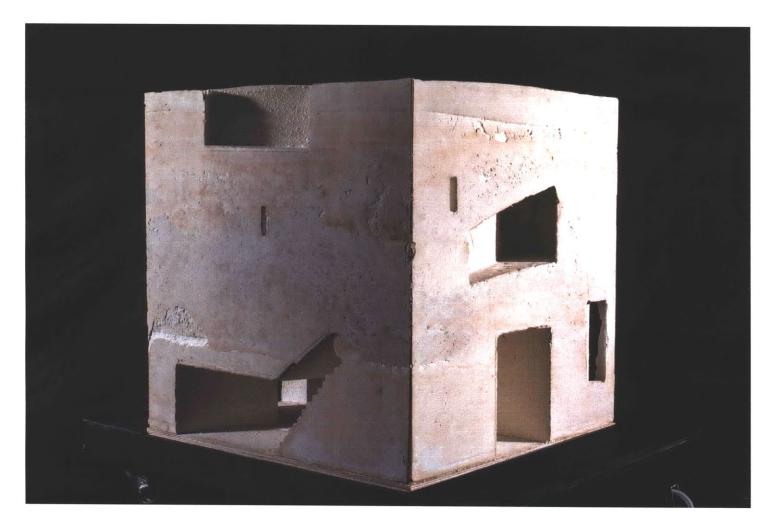
The courtroom in session.



The attorney's gather before the trial.



The final model



The final model

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Fig.03: Edson, Gary.

Page 13: "No. 69 Hahoe byeolsingut talnori" by Ian Sewell, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/85/Hahoefolk-village-mask-dance.jpg

Fig. 08: Photos from Duzer and Klienman, "Villa Muller"

Fig. 09: Photos from Duzer and Klienman, "Villa Muller"

Fig. 13: Drawing from Ottavio Bertotti Scamozzi, 1776

Fig. 21: Scene from "Anatomy of a Murder"

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