

Review by Marc Peschke of the book *The Drama of Space* by Holger Kleine

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The Drama of Space – Spatial Sequences and Compositions in Architecture

A passionate study of spatial drama by Holger Kleine

“The Drama of Space” is the modest title of this magnificently opulent book by the architect Holger Kleine, but one that belies the complexity of its subject. The drama of space is a topic dear to the architect’s heart, both in his own work and his teaching as professor of interior architecture and artistic-conceptual design at RheinMain University of Applied Sciences. It is interesting to note that in addition to studying architecture at the TU Berlin and Cooper Union in New York, Kleine also studied musicology before going on to work at the offices of Eisenman Architects and Sauerbruch Hutton Architects. In 1999, he founded his own office Holger Kleine Architekten in Berlin, which he now runs together with Jens Metz as Kleine Metz Architekten.

The book approaches the compositional dramaturgy of space in four distinct sections. Part 1 examines historical archetypes – three “Scuole Grandi” in Venice – that illustrate the principles of spatial dramaturgy. These Venetian complexes served as assembly halls and meeting rooms for religious and charitable brotherhoods, tradesmen and countrymen that by the 16th century had acquired considerable prominence. This part opens with a quote by Le Corbusier – “Passion can create drama out of inert stone” – and Kleine describes in detail the passion of the Venetian architects, illustrating the spatial principles with numerous, well-chosen photographs and architectural drawings. The book is, as the author says, not just for architects or interior architects but for all those “who have at some time felt gripped by passion”, for those who have “a passion for interesting spaces”.

Kleine is interested in the effect spaces have on people and draws on examples not just from architecture but also from music, theatre, film and the performing arts. The second section is, therefore, dedicated to dramaturgical models and the dramaturgical principles that underlie and influence the different arts. Kleine, for example, discusses the principle of “montage” not just as a cinematic device but also in the context of architecture. According to Kleine, all the arts – architecture included – involve directing our “attention” using a variety of means to focus and steer our perception: points, circles, spirals, channels, perambulations, pyramids, arcs – devices that one finds in Venetian architecture, and also in the films of Robert Altman or in the works of Chekhov and Beckett. Kleine provides us here with an instructive but succinct history of dramaturgy in art and culture, tracing its origins in historical architectural discourse from the likes of Vitruvius, Leon Battista Alberti, Andrea Palladio and Le Corbusier as well as contemporary theorists.

Part 3 turns its attention to dramaturgies of space in contemporary architecture and features detailed studies of 18 contemporary buildings from the 1960s to the present day, each described in turn and illustrated by photographs and explanatory drawings. The author’s selection is by his own admission subjective but among them are iconic works such

as Hans Scharoun's Philharmonie in Berlin, the IIT Student Center in Chicago by Rem Koolhaas or Peter Zumthor's thermal baths in Vals, Switzerland.

The fourth part of the book looks at ways to put this into practice and elaborates a series of parameters and dimensions of spatial dramaturgy as tools for architectural design. The 20 parameters that Kleine classifies and presents include concepts such as "Proportion", "Rhythm", "Sequence" and "Configuration".

With "The Drama of Space" the author has succeeded in creating a definitive reference work that – in the German context at least – is unparalleled; I know of no other book like it. At the same time, it is by no means solely of interest to architects but to readers from many backgrounds – and this is a thread that runs through the book as a whole: as the pianist Alfred Brendel says, "it's always about composition, proportion, about consistency and its counterpoint, i.e. the beauty of the moment of surprise; it's about contrast and unity." Kleine's reflection on spatial dramaturgy acknowledges that architecture is not an isolated discipline and can enrich and be enriched by parallel artistic spheres.

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