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Making Space for Festival, 1400-1700.
Interactions of Architecture and Performance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Festivals

International PALATIUM-SEFR Conference

21-24 March 2013
Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, Venice

(report)

The purpose of my visit to Venice (20/03-24/03/2013) was to participate in the “Making Space for Festival, 1400-1700. Interactions of Architecture and Performance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Festivals” International PALATIUM-SEFR Conference, organised both by the University of Warwick and the University of Leuven in the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava. I presented a short paper titled “*Les Réjouissances de la Paix*”: *Constructing the Temple of Peace in Lyon, the 20th of March 1660*, the transcription of which can be found as an annexe to this report.

My particular interest in the conference was raised by the subject of my PhD thesis in History of Art *Mercury, the Painter and the Humanist. Eloquence and Pictorial Rhetorics in North European Painting from the 17th century* conducted under the supervision of Mrs. Prof. Colette Nativel in the University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne. During my research, I encountered numerous occurrences of Mercury in ephemeral decorations, which are a still underestimated and widely new area of study in traditional History of Art mainly because of the fact that their *ekphrasei* constitute a borderline domain between history, literature and arts. Also, my Master's degree was focused on the work of the Jesuit friar Claude-François Ménestrier as iconographer and inventor of ephemeral decorations, fireworks and allegorical designs for the courts of France and Savoy with emphasis on image-texte correlation and hieroglyphical reappropriation in French painting during the reign of Louis XIV.

Therefore, I was glad to profit from the assembly of internationally renowned specialists in order to investigate the very meaning of ephemeral decoration which completes and explains to an extent the appearance and the theory of permanent ones. I was particularly interested in the papers of Mrs Margaret McGowan *Space for dancing: accommodating performer and spectator in Renaissance France*, which reveals the importance of feasts and ballroom performance for the development of French interior decoration in the 16th century; Pauline Lemaigre-Gaffier *From props to sets: the Menus Plaisirs and french court space conversions (1660s-1700s)*, which explains the economical difference between iconographers and painters; Robert Knight, *The Banquet at the Bastille, 1518*, which explains the tradition of astrological ceilings in French decoration throughout the Ancien Régime, a tradition that I am currently studying in the Château de Fontainebleau (Salle de Bal) and in the Château de Versailles (Salon de Mercure); Mario Damen *The city as a stage. Tournaments as*

urban festivals in the late medieval Low Countries, which underlines the interactions between chevalresque culture and the Renaissance idea of allegorical decoration, an interaction that I am also currently studying, namely the progressive transformation of coats-of-arms language into the humanists idea of hieroglyphical writing and pictorial rhetorics.

Furthermore, the PALATIUM-SEFR Conference proposed several methodological enquiries on the study of ephemeral decorations as a late medieval and early modern phenomenon : the reliability of the sources (Chantal Grell and Robert Halleaux, *Ernest of Bavaria's Joyous Entry into Liège, 15 June 1581*), the question of public and private interferences in the publishing and the meaning of personalizing public spaces (Joanna Norman, *In "public" and "private": study of Festival in 17th-century Rome*), the economical implications of a decoration (Paul Schuster, *Schloss Eggenberg in Graz and the imperial wedding of 1673*), the connection between ephemeral events and permanent decoration (Martina Frank, *From ephemeral to permanent architecture : the Venitian palace in the second half of the 17th century*), the audience of the festivities, the lisibility of the allegorical decorations, the discordance between description and facts. These questions, raised by the study of examples, formed an instructive grid and a general reflexion on how ephemeral decorations and urban reappropriation can be interpreted.

Finally, the PALATIUM-SEFR Conference proposed an occasion for young researchers to approach and exchange ideas with experienced scholars. By the convenient choice of its location, it also provided an environment for research and an opportunity to discover collections and decorations difficult to access for foreign students. Indeed, the PALATIUM-SEFR Conference dedicated an afternoon (Saturday 23 March) to excursions and museum visits. Instead of profiting from the conference's proposals, I took the opportunity to explore the collections of Galleria dell'Academia, Palazzo Ducale, Museo Correr and Ca' d'Oro, thus joining to the experience of the scientific event a research travel. I was able to find occurrences of Mercury and mercurial iconography in Biblioteca Sansovina, the Logetta and in Palazzo Ducale, as well as a non-documented by Giambologna specialists copy of the famous Bargello statue of Mercury in Ca' d'Oro. The antique collection of Museo Correr provided me with several roman examples, which explain the form and meaning of Mercury in the Venitian engraving tradition. These findings, generated mainly by the fact that italian research databases are often icomplete or in work of progress, not only provided my PhD project with new materials and objects, but also with the general realisation that Venice is an important 16th century source of inspiration for mercurial iconography for the North Countries – an aspect that was not yet revealed by current studies.

In conclusion, the “Making Space for Festival, 1400-1700. Interactions of Architecture and Performance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Festivals” International PALATIUM-SEFR Conference was an occasion to grasp and apprehend in a whole new manner the definition of ephemeral decorations. It was also an opportunity to find several factual or methodological questions raised by my own studies, namely the audience adressed by such manifestations and public-private interactions. At last, the PALATIUM-SEFR Conference provided me, by its location, with rich iconographical sources and actual material for my PhD project.

« Les Réjouissances de la Paix » :

Constructing the Temple of Peace in Lyon, the 20th of march 1660

Friday 22 March 2013
Palazzo Pesaro, Papafava, Venice

(short paper)

The Pyrénées Peace Treaty was signed on november the 7th 1659. A consequence of the 30-years War, it had great significance as it ended a conflict that was opposing the Bourbon and the Habsbourg Dynasties since 1635. Its clauses stated not only territorial changes but also a political alliance embodied by the marriage of Louis XIV with the Spanish Infanta Maria Teresa. Since its proclamation, the Treaty was celebrated all over Europe. It was indeed regarded as a prolongation of the Münster Peace (1648) and as a final end to the wars that the continent has experienced throughout the first half of the XVIIth century.

One of those celebrations was conducted in Lyon on the 20th of march 1660. The main allegorical machine was commissioned by the city's government and was presumably elaborated by the Jesuit Claude-François Ménestrier whose *ekpharsis* is the only document attesting of its meaning and existence. The painter Thomas Blanchet provided the *modello* for the machine and his collaboration with the Jesuit friar was a choice of prestige : the same specialists were engaged simultaneously for the decoration of the City Hall's Chambers and their very implication showed the importance of the occasion.

The device was built on the river Saône's bridge. "Hart of the city", this bridge was the only link between the river banks and it was an important part of the commercial road between Paris and Italy. Moreover, the road was connected with yet another bridge, this time on the river Rhône, *Le Pont de la Guillotière*. In medieval times it marked the border between the Holy Empire and the French Kingdom. It is therefore possible that choosing this very road was a matter of political decorum and that the location was invested with a symbolic meaning : a bridge on the road from the Habsbourg's to the Bourbon's domain as a metaphor for the new alliance between France and Spain.

The ephemeral decoration figured a triumphal arch dedicated to the element of Fire. A "Fire of Joy" (a firework) was supposed to counter the flames of War, a metaphor driven from the phenix resurrecting eternally from its ashes. A well-calculated rhetorical discourse on memory, this metaphor is further developed by the *ekpharsis* where Ménestrier underlines that it is not the war but the peace that makes the monarch worthy. He compares the miraculously wise negotiation of the young prince to the accomplishments of Saint Louis and Charlemagne and insists that "les marbres le diront à la postérité". The ephemeral firework was thus paradoxically viewed as an eternal celebration, a canonisation that would inscribe in fire letters the name of Louis XIV in the memory of mankind.

The historical subject was also very carefully chosen. Adapted from Ovidius' *Fasti*, it related the *Closing of the Temple of Janus*, the pagan God of doors, whose alter on the Capitol personified the state of peace. Its gates were closed when peace was brought to the Empire and were opened when war was announced, which was usually done in the month of march during the Republic. So, Louis XIV instead of choosing war, chose peace in the month of Mars and it was that rightful decision that was allegorically celebrated.

The subject was also an elaborate rhetorical enigma. For, Janus gave his name to January, the first month of the new calendar. January being the new March, Ménéstrier intended the firework as the beginning of a new era where peace will reign over war and were the gates of Janus' Temple will be closed forever.

This abstract elaboration was conveyed by the first order of the triumphal arch : a *quadrifrons*, supposedly derived from the Pamphilio Tati's description of what was considered at that time the actual temple of Janus in Rome, near the meat market. At its centre, the statue of Janus was holding the keys of the Year, personified by the Four Seasons figured on the tympani. On the statue's pedestal an Ouroboros was painted, symbolising that this new and particular Year will last eternally.

Four inscriptions on the entablatures clarified that idea. Two latin ones convey the general understanding of the Peace. But the other two, the one opposite Saint Nizier Church and the one opposite the Stock Exchange, were in french and their accessibility can be taken as a sign that they introduced a public message that should mean something in particular to both sides :

Opposite Saint Nizier :

*Si jadis un César ferma l'Auguste temple
Du démon de la guerre, et fit naistre la Paix
Du flambeau de l'amour un prince sans exemple
Le brvle maintenant pour ne l'ouvvrir iamais*

If once Cesar had closed this great temple
Of the deamon of War and thus bestowed Peace,
By the fire of love a prince like no other
Burns it to ashes and will never open in again.

Opposite the Stock Exchange :

*Quittons le souvenir de nos travaux soufferts,
Et pres d'un fev si beav sechons tovttes nos larmes :
Vulcan arreste Mars, il le tient dans ses fers
Et ne travaille plvs a luy faire des armes.
Louys brvle son Temple, et ce Roy glorieuvx
Ne vevt plvs pour Avtels que nos coeurs et nos yeux.*

Lets forget our painful enterprises,
And lets dry our tears next to this beautiful fire :
Vulcan stops Mars and holds him prisoner
And no longers produces for him weapons.
Louis burns his Temple and thus this glorious King
Instead of an alter requires but our hearts and our eyes.

In fact, Saint Nizier was in the XVIIth century the assembly hall of the city's governors, called *échevins*. Its façade was indeed rebuilt in a secular style. We can arguably suggest that the very political message of the first inscription was intended not for the population but for the the city authorities whose houses and administrative buildings were on that side of the river. On the other hand, a sentimental ode was addressed to the city's main market, the domain of the citizens, who were given an example of how they should understand the peace treaty.

The second level of the triumphal arch showed Mercury coming from the skies and bringing the order to close the Temple's doors. A messenger of Jupiter, Mercury is here the legate of Louis XIV, a new Jupiter. In a strictly french context, Mercury personifies the foreign relations of the Kingdom : he will be depicted slightly later in that position on the ceiling of *Galerie des Glaces* in Versailles, standing in the middle of the design without us being able to tell if he is flying to the Hall of War, on the one end, or to the Hall of Peace, on the opposite one. Also, Mercury is here the personification of Peace itself. According to Piero Valeriano, the bringers of peace being called *caduceatores*, his caduceus should be hieroglyphically interpreted as instrument and emblem of peace. As its embodiment, he is also opposed to Mars in the famous *quadro riportato* of Gianfrancesco Romanelli's *The Pyrénées Peace Treaty* painted in 1658 for the Queen's Chambers in the Louvre Palace.

At last, on top of the construction Amalthea holding the Cornucopia and an olive branch personified the sweetness of the peace. At a time of peace, as the latin writers explain, the arms were melted and instruments of agriculture were forged from them. A very popular theme in Dutch engravings from the XVIth century onwards, this topic opposed to the destructive forces of war the benefits of agriculture, development and industry brought by alliances.

This elaborate allegorical machine was burnt to ashes after one hour of fireworks. According to Ménestrier's report it resembled more to an actual theatrical performance. Starting with a great noise, symbolising the war, a flying and enflamed Mercury arrived to the machine and on his approach the temple's gates collapsed. Then the fireworks were fired from the top to the bottom progressively.

After this public display of celebration, the next two days were dedicated to private ones. On monday 21 and tuesday 22 there were no less than 38 of them, some nearly as elaborate and expensive as the public machine. There were all kinds of inventions : from triumphal arches to statues, from simple banners to fireworks. Also, lanterns were suspended from the windows and windows themselves were decorated with flowers, crowns, coats of arms and other *insignia*. The cathedral's *westwerk* and the City hall's façade were illuminated by arranged candles displaying figures. In addition to that, Ménestrier suggests that there were day-time activities including banquets, horse competitions and even a liturgy.

So for the *Joys of Peace* the whole city of Lyon was animated and transformed. Every quarter and every personality was supposed to provide a piece of a 3-day celebration where the public and private contributions played an equally important role. Thus, Lyon itself was metamorphosed into

the city of Peace with Méneſtrier's design as crowning jewel and temple.

In addition to the *ekphrasis* of the festivities, Méneſtrier published a short treaty on fireworks and ephemeral decorations. He theorises the firework as the flame of love that ignites the heart by the visual pleasure in order to convey the Idea to the mind. Méneſtrier also suggests that ephemeral decorations have the greatest impact only when associated with a firework because the viewer's attention is attached in the night to the sole bright object. Moreover, the Jesuit defines the machine as a composite work of art where engineering, pyrotechnics, design and painting are all conducted by the inventor's mind whose role is equivalent to a theatrical director. As such, the inventor should have in mind all the rules of the dramaturgy : decorum, subject, play and ornament.

The decorum is supposed to render the subject convenient. It is the location and the event that should naturally bring the subject to convenience so a subject must never be adapted to a location or an event. For example, it is impossible to render the Ship of Argos in a place where there is no river but even if there is, it should be somehow attached symbolically to the location. Méneſtrier states indeed that such a choice will be convenient only for Paris because there is a ship in the city's coats of arms.

The firework is the equivalent of the role play. It should be well timed and carefully designed as the different kinds of fire signify different kinds of emotions and ideas. So actually the fire itself had, according to Méneſtrier, a rhetorical meaning. Furthermore, the fire should be decorously adapted to the machine. Burning figures and emblems seems to be a very symbolic action and Méneſtrier advises against putting effigies of saints, monarchs and virtues which is not only “ridiculous” but also politicly dangerous.

At last, the ornament. All figures should have a meaning and have to be composed by enigmatic images : either hieroglyphics, emblems, inscriptions or personifications. The inventor must choose carefully when designing the ornaments because they do not have the same value. Inscriptions are there to explain the occasion. Emblems to moralise it. Hieroglyphics and personifications to convey abstract ideas that are the true meaning of the poetical invention.



Claude François Ménéstrier (design), Thomas Blanchet (composition), Nicolas Auroux (engraving) Claude François Ménéstrier [?] (conduct), Anonymous (pyrotechnics), *Arc de triomphe sur le pont du Change*, etching in *Les Réjouissances de la paix faites dans la ville de Lyon le 20 mars 1660*, Lyon : Par Guillaume Barbier Imprimeur ordinaire du Roy, en la Place de Confort : Jacques Iustet aussi Imprimeur, 1660 ; Rés 148776, BM Lyon