
The Passage of Time

On Architectural Order and Spatial Sequence:

Le Camus de Mézières and the Times of the Day Theme

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Abstract

What is the shaping agent of such architectural organization of space? Does human has complete control over an order of their everyday conduct, and consequently, over the ordering of architectural space? This paper addresses the notion of certain order of time and sequence in everyday activity which leads to an architectural question of ordering space. It explores some parallel between the architectural treatise of Le Camus de Mézières and the *Times of the Day* theme in seventeenth century Dutch engravings.

If anything can be described by an architectural plan, it might be the nature of human relationship and the sequence of human activities. Elements such as walls, doors, windows and stairs record the traces of such relationship. They are used to divide and re-unite inhabited space. Hidden in the plan is the passage of time. Inhabited spaces are re-united when activities and time merge. In turn, the division of space occurred when different activities inhabited different space at different times. The organization of a plan, the distribution of space, is a portrayal of human figures and their activities at a given place and time. They are the evidence of a way of life and the coupling between everyday conduct and architectural organization. At the heart of is the passage of time.

Attempts of portray the passage of time, with reference to the cyclical change of nature, the various seasons and parts of the day have been made in Western art and literature form antiquity to the present. One such attempt was manifested in the *times of the day* theme. Cycles of the times of day were a specialty in Dutch engraving of the second half of the sixteenth century. Often, in a series on the times of the day, personifications of deities appear on clouds, floating above sprawling landscapes that includes scenes of diurnal activities. It depicts the change of time in relation to the change of human activities and the cyclical character of nature. In other words, it shows a sequence of everyday life.

This similar question of order and spatial sequence in domestic architecture was undertaken by Le Camus de Mézières in *The Genius of Architecture; or, the analogy of that art with our sensations*. Le Camus's study was a handbook on the planning of the French hotel, the town house of a noble family in which he investigated the proper manner of stirring ideas and emotions through architectural means. His analysis emphasized the importance of order and spatial sequence in the planning of the French hotel. Combined with the cultivation of the picturesque vision, it enabled him to see architecture in a new way.

Keywords: Order, Spatial sequence, Time

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Attempts of portray the passage of time, with reference to the cyclical change of nature, the various seasons and parts of the day have been made in Western art and literature from antiquity to the present. One such attempt was manifested in the *times of the day* theme. Cycles of the times of day were a specialty in Dutch engraving of the second half of the sixteenth century. Often, in a series on the times of the day, personifications of deities appear on clouds, floating above sprawling landscapes that includes scenes of diurnal activities. It depicts the change of time in relation to the change of human activities and the cyclical character of nature. In other words, it shows a sequence of everyday life.

For architecture, the traces of the sequence of such diurnal activity are recorded in the spatial sequence of the plan. When Le Camus de Mézières attempted to lay down the rules for the distribution and the decoration of space for the French hotel, he studied the proper manner of planning in terms of spatial sequence and

its character. It is a study of everyday conduct, of both human relationship and the passage of time in relation to architectural organization. Both the *times of the day* theme in Dutch engraving and the study Le Camus can be seen as a narrative, the record of the passage of time.

The *times of the day* is a popular allegorical theme, one of a group that became paradigms of aesthetic expression. It belongs with such rhetorical set piece such as the four ages of man, the four temperaments, and the four seasons. In terms of archetypal and mythical significations, the seasonal cycle of the year is echoed in its poetic representation by the solar cycle of the day. Descriptions of the four seasons are often given in terms of the four parts of the day. Each part of the day corresponds to a particular seasons; spring = morning or sunrise, summer = midday or sun at the zenith, autumn = evening or sunset, winter = night or lunar and stellar sky.¹ Both the seasonal and the diurnal cycles are also symbolically equated with the four ages of man. Such attempt to make sunrise, noon, sunset and night analogous to childhood, youth, manhood and old ages implies the infinite multiplication of resemblances in the order of things. In this case, the order and character associated with each age of man is associated with those of each part of the day.

The times of the day theme receives its most popular treatment in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch painting. Its subject is time. The interpretive possibilities of time appear in the variations on temporal themes within the times of day: the transitoriness of earthly existence, the cyclical character of man's and nature's lives and the moments of abiding significance in the daily life of men and women of all classes.²

In the series of engraving by Marten de Vos,

¹ The reference of seasons with the four temperaments and the four elements was also made:

Spring	= Sanguine temperament	= Air
Summer	= Choleric temperament	= Fire
Autumn	= Melancholy temperament	= Earth
Winter	= Phlegmatic temperament	= Water

² Sean Shesgreen, *Hogarth and the Times of the Day Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 26.

Carl van Mander and Tobias Verhaecht, the formula of counterpointing the monumental allegory and the many-faceted landscape is borrowed from a series of depictions called the *planet pictures*. They are visual codifications of astrological lore which show the deities of the heavens riding chariots across the skies and, below them, the people whose destinies they govern and whose temperaments, callings and social circumstances they determine.³ The engraved prints are accompanied by verses filled with literary abstractions to match the dominant visual personifications. These texts offer explications of the prints' actions and themes. Often they juxtapose didactic statements about work and duty in relation to the day's different part.

The natural day can be divided into any number of parts but the two most common are four and seven. Be it four or seven, the purpose is to personify diurnal time. Each period of the day becomes specialized. The description below shows such characterization of each time by depicting the god's governance of the sevenfold designation of human time, the parts of the day and human activities.

Luna governs the first part of the day and those compelled to rise early to work or play. Mercury presides over the day's second part; his energetic progeny, intellectuals and scholars, rise just after Luna's peasants. Venus controls the third part of the day; her adepts – lover of pleasure – are the next to make their appearance. Sol rules the forth part of the day. Those whom the sunshine on the wealthy and fortunate, are the very last to start their activities. Mars rules the fifth part of the day; his progeny are associated with the division of diurnal time requiring endurance. The day's sixth part is Jupiter's; his children belong to the hour in which wisdom and judgment are in demand.

The last part is Saturn's. The disciples of this planetary god are the revelers preparing for the saturnalia and the people who limited their lives or whose lives are limited for them⁴.

While these engravings are conventionalized, ideogrammatic works of art in which symbolic and allegorical meanings abound, they also offer a direct transcript of reality, a plain account of recurring duties and tasks. Their sequence can be seen as a chronicle of everyday life.

On the one hand, human activities depicted in the prints have a direct connection to the sequence of everyday conduct. On the other hand, the gods governing each time impose a sense of order. It suggests an order of human activities and a question of human control, or rather lack of control, over them. Appearance of the gods implies that everyday conduct has its order defined by the different times of the day. Works and duties, the sequence of human behaviors as well as human temperaments are destined by the hidden force of time. In other words, by this order, each of human everyday conduct has its irrefutable place along the passage of time.

The notion of certain order of time and sequence in everyday activity leads to architectural question of ordering space. What is the shaping agent of such architectural organization of space? Does human has complete control over an order of their everyday conduct, and consequently, over the ordering of architectural space.

This question of order and spatial sequence in domestic architecture was undertaken by Le Camus de Mézières in *The Genius of Architecture; or, the analogy of that art with our sensations*. Le Camus's study was a handbook on the planning of the French hotel, the town house of a noble family in which he investigated the proper manner of stirring ideas and emotions through architectural means.⁵ The treatise laid down the rules for the distribution

³ E Panofsky, R. Klibansky and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 205-207.

⁴ Shesgreen, 32-33.

⁵ Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture: or, the Analogy of that Art with Our Sensations*. Trans. D. Britt. Introd. R. Middleton. (Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Center, 1992), 17.

and the decoration of space. In other words, it is a study of the proper manners of planning in terms of spatial sequence and character.

The plan of the French hotel was based on the organization of groups of four or five rooms to form apartments of a distinctive character. Each suit or rooms was intended for the use of a particular person. Many different types of apartments made up the hotel. The enfilade serves as a mean of organizing and linking a series of horizontal spaces. It consists of a sequence of openings set on a common axis. The enfilade is integral to the organization of the apartment.

Though the notion of room sequence making up an apartment was addressed earlier by Sebastiano Serlio in his Sixth book of architecture, Le Camus's study was concerned for almost the first time in an architectural treatise with movement through a sequence of space and their orders.⁶ The great achievement of Le Camus's art of planning was the creation of a perfect sequence of spaces to produce comfort and intimacy. His treatise followed the format of presenting the apartment as a sequence of spaces. The room by room format of his analysis emphasized the importance of order and spatial sequence in the planning of the French hotel. Combined with the cultivation of the picturesque vision, it enabled him to see architecture in a new way.

During the early seventeenth century, even in the grandest mansions, rooms had been used indiscriminately by members of the family and by passing servants.⁷ But the eighteenth century, privacy took in a new value. Each room became specialized and was often set aside for personal use. Masters were increasingly separated from servants. Not only were service stairs used to provide separate access to rooms but whole networks of corridors as well.

According to Robin Evans, in his study of the figures, doors and passages, these changes of internal arrangement became evident after 1630.

⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁸ Robin Evans, "Figures, Doors and Passages." *Architectural Design*, 4 (1978), 267-278.

⁹ Le Camus, 89.

Entrance hall, grand open stairs, passages and service stairs joined to form a network of circulation space connecting every major room of the household.⁸ Every room had a door into the passage or into the hall. The introduction of the through passage into domestic architecture imprinted a division between the upper and lower ranks of society by maintaining direct sequential access for privileged family members while relegating servants to a limited territory. The system was to prevent interference, and the clash of movement through place and time.

These adjustments in both attitudes and in patterns of living led to a specialization in the use of rooms. Le Camus's principles of distribution and decoration of space, both aimed at spatial differentiation. The use and purpose of each room was determined from the start. In turn, such use and purpose determined the order of the room in terms of its position and its decor so that both could more reflect character and use.

Interiors were the principal subject of Le Camus's treatise. He combined the concept of manners, the patterns of everyday conduct concerning habit, work and duty in relation to place and time. His principles of space distribution were determined by the sequence of activities, timing and schedule in relation to the use of space. In other words, the different activity, work and duty for each time the day determined the arrangement of space. This notion of space distribution was intended to provide convenience to the succession of activities at the different times, while the decoration created a different character for each specific space. Le Camus wrote:

An Apartment is not like a cabinet or gallery of pictures; every room has its own particular purpose, and from its appearance, one must be able to deduce its use. The expression, the imprint of character, is decisive; let delicacy hold the scales, taste try the weight and good sense determine.⁹

In such creation of spatial character, both the distribution and decoration of space are inseparable. They represent an index to the sequence of everyday conduct, habit, work, duty and their timing.

Consider the *times of the day* theme, the *planet pictures*, if all the pictures were sequentially juxtaposed, they could provide the complete schedule of activities during the day. Moreover, the sequence of places in which each activity occurred could provide a rough outline for the distribution of space, if every space that appeared in the planet pictures was assembled in one building. The order of each picture is determined by the gods governing each time of the day. By order means the nature and sequence of human activity, work and duty along with human temperament all of which constituted specific character of each picture. This specific character of each *time of the day* picture is comparable to the character of each room that is designated according to its use in Le Camus's study.

The question of order many arise again. On the surface it can be seen that Le Camus's treatise attempted to impose the order for spatial design when he laid down the rules for both the distribution and decoration of space. This architectural question of ordering space in Le Camus may come to light when being considered in parallel to the planet pictures. We may find the question of human control presence in Le Camus's study.

In the system of the *planet pictures*, the gods of time control human activity and temperament. Human, in turn, take control over the way they execute their tasks in the eyes of the gods. At first glance this may seem to be the question of human's lack of control over their every conduct. But it is also an issue concerning order rather than control. For the appearance of the gods governing each time, it implies that time itself is an imposing order upon human activity. The sequence of daily activity falls within the order of time. Likewise, in the treatise, it cannot be considered that the rules of ordering space suggest human control. Rather, they follow the irrefutable order of time. The different gods

and different group of human depicted in each *planet pictures* show that each group has its own schedule. The principles of space distribution in Le Camus accommodate such difference in the schedule to prevent interference or the clash of activities at a given place and time. The outline of rooms showing their sequence has a direct relation to time. For activities and schedules of each family member was different, Le Camus gave the different outline of planning for each apartment. The relationship of position of each apartment was essential. The lodging of the domestic servants and of officers of the household must provide convenient access to their work places. With the service stairs and corridors added, circulation of the masters and servants were separated. It means that unrelated activities though occurred simultaneously, have no need to share the same space. Le Camus's juxtaposition of rooms is the juxtaposition of each point of time where each related activities occurred. Rooms interconnected when time merged. While element such as walls divide, other elements such as doors and hallway both divide and reunite inhabited space according to the different timing in the use of space. Passing through a room that is not a part of the sequential activity would be unnecessary. Unrelated activities though may occur at the same time, belonged to different order. Hence they do not share the same space. The question of time and the ordering architectural space becomes the question of who does what, when and where. Not only are rooms specialized according to time and activities, so too are circulation spaces such as corridors and stairs. They provide a passage leading to a given activity at a given place and time. In other words, an organization of series of rooms and circulations, all fall into the passage of time.

Martin de Vos, *Aurora*Carl van Mander, *Aurora*

Meridies



Meridies



Vespera



Vesper



Nox



Nox

Figure 1

Figure 2

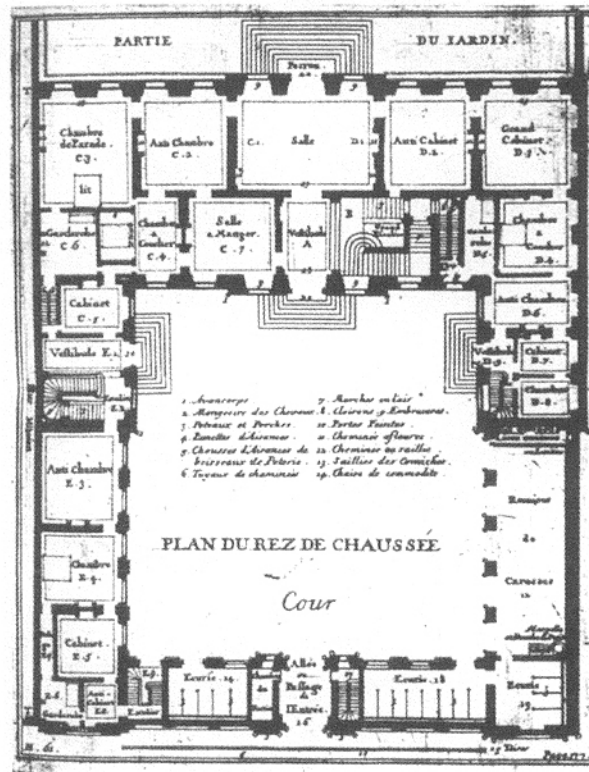
Tobias Verhaecht, *Aurora**Vespera**Meridies**Nox*

Figure 3

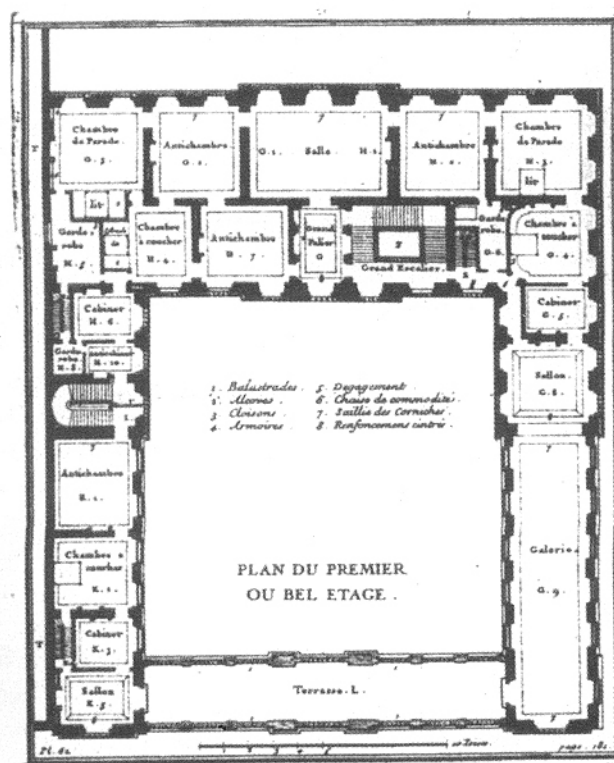
Caption: Figures 1, 2, 3

Figures 1, 2, 3 show three series of engraving entitled *the Times of the Day*, by three different artists, Martin de Vos, Carl van Mander and Tobias Verhaecht. They fall into the same the formula of counterpointing the monumental allegory and the many-faceted which is borrowed from a series of depictions called the *planet pictures*. These three sets of engraving are visual codifications of astrological lore which show the deities of the heavens riding chariots across the skies and, below them, the people whose destinies they govern and whose temperaments, callings and social circumstances they determine.

Aurora, or morning, depicts places and people who starts their activities early in the day. It demonstrates both groups and classes of people who must rise at dawn to begin their daily shores or begin serving others, such as shepherds, hunters and servants. *Meridies*, or midday, shows the places, as well as groups of people whose main activities are conducted at midday, which is considered the time of pleasure and relaxation for some, and the time of practical productivity for others. Thus, it depicts the kinds of activities that are often done around noontime, as well as the places and architectural settings appropriate for such activities. *Vespers*, on the other hand, refers to the evening time, which rules certain activities and groups of people. Therefore, it also offers a glimpse of places, both interior and exterior that provide ideal architectural settings for those evening activities. *Nox*, or night, depicts people who dressed in masquerade costumes, representing the fashionable world now engaged in their nightly entertainments. The *Times of the Day*, thus offer the landscape of not only social but also spatial and temporal differentiation.



Ground-floor plan of a town house. Illustrated in Augustin-Charles Daviler, Cour d'architecture (Paris: Jean Mariette, 1738)



First-floor plan of a town house.

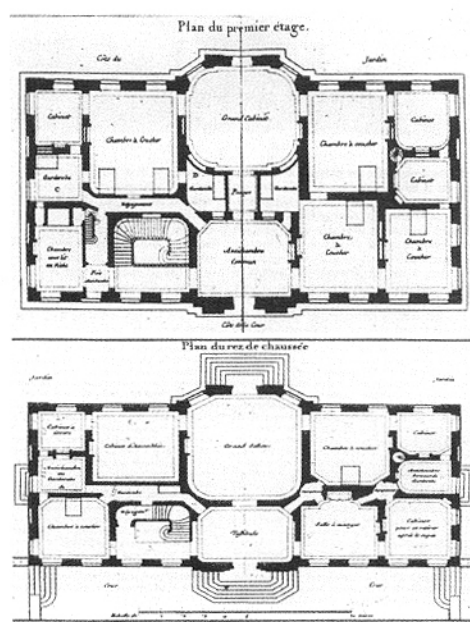


Figure 5

Jacques-François Blondel: Ground floor and first floor plans of a country house. From: *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance*, vol.1 Paris 1737.

Caption: Figures 4, 5

While the above engravings are conventionalized, ideogrammatic works of art in which symbolic and allegorical meanings abound, they also offer a direct transcript of reality, a plain account of recurring duties and tasks. Their sequence can be seen as a chronicle of everyday life which can be translated into domestic architectural plans. Such chronicle of everyday life is evident in the system order and spatial sequence in the planning of the French hotel.

During the seventeenth century, rooms had been used indiscriminately by members of family. But the changes of internal arrangement became evident after 1630. A network of circulation space connecting every major room of the household, as well as the introduction of the through passage into domestic architecture imprinted a division between the upper and lower ranks of society by maintaining direct sequential access for privileged family members while relegating servants to a limited territory. The system was to prevent interference, and the clash of movement through place and time.

These adjustments in both attitudes and in patterns of living led to a specialization in the use of rooms. Analogous to the sequence of the *Planet pictures*, Le Camus's principles of distribution and decoration of space, both aimed at spatial differentiation. The use and purpose of each room was determined from the start. In turn, such use and purpose determined the order of the room in terms of its position and its décor so that both could more reflect character and use.

Comparable to the social and spatial order of the *Planet Pictures*, Le Camus's treatise combined the concept of manners, the patterns of everyday conduct concerning habit, work and duty in relation to place and time. His principles of space distribution were determined by the sequence of activities, timing and schedule in relation to the use of space. In other words, the different activity, work and duty for each time the day determined the arrangement of space. This notion of space distribution was intended to provide convenience to the succession of activities at the different times, while the decoration created a different character for each specific space. In such creation of spatial character, both the distribution and decoration of space are inseparable. They represent an index to the sequence of everyday conduct, habit, work, duty and their timing.

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