

David Cotterrell: Stairwell VI

Date: 16th April 2000

Materials:

Data projector, tinted glass screen, Apple Macintosh computer, Macromedia Director software.

An artwork proposal commissioned by Jubilee Arts for the Will Alsop art centre originally entitled the c/Plex. Later to become infamous as The Public. Due to budget and management changes the artwork was never realised.

The Exterior is in fact the site of nontragedy; it contains three kinds of space: that of death, that of escape, that of the event.

Roland Barthes, On Racine, 1960

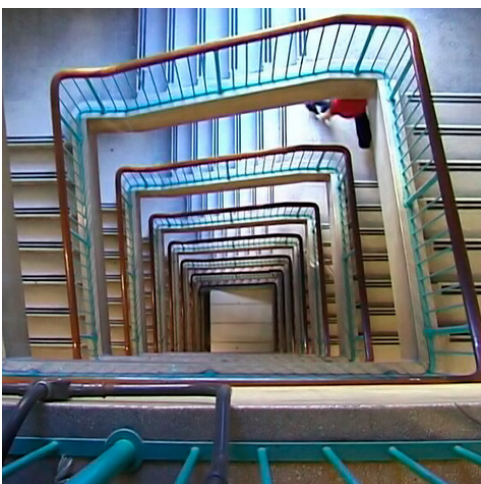
Proposed to be integrated into the floor of a new arts centre in West Bromwich in 2005, Stairwell VI references the building itself, which will contain five stairwells. Cotterrell's sixth staircase, as unexpected as the wardrobe leading into an enchanted world, is a plane of fantasy where exchanges are acted out by a host of characters.

The use of stairs as a point of dramatic tension calls to mind Barthes' observations on the structures of classical theatre. A host of rules accompanies tragedy: characters never die on stage, they are too busy talking (usually about their suffering). The movement of the play must not extend beyond a 24 hour period. And the real action must take place out of sight. It is only when a messenger enters to tell of an event that it becomes real in the play's unreal world.

So Cotterrell's actors inhabit an exterior space which serves no other purpose than that of moving bodies from one location to the next. Here then, according to the principles of the classical stage, is where real action, as opposed to drama, is to be found.

Scurrying from floor to floor, dragging suitcases and pushchairs up and down, Cotterrell's hired actors will interact with one another and the objects they transport. Some will actively avoid others, some will attempt contact; all will be filmed by the artist from the top of a large staircase.

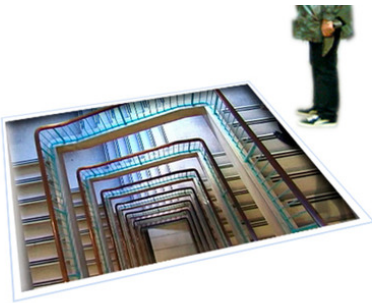
Equipment necessary for the projection will be concealed beneath a smoked glass panel in the floor of an interior corridor. When operating, the panel will light up to reveal action on the stairs in a series of clips daily selected and edited by computer. Cotterrell is working to ensure he builds a programme that can enable his computer to select clips based on its own internal logic. Part of a larger project, which pushes the parameters of democracy of thought to include machinery, Stairwell VI follows a similar logic to works like *The Debating Society* and *fortydays*.



Still from test footage Credit: David Cotterrell (2000)



The inactive view of the stairwell Credit: David Cotterrell (2000)



The active view of the stairwell Credit: David Cotterrell (2000)