

Figure 1.6 Louis I. Kahn, Mikveh Israel Congregation, Philadelphia, 1963. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

of traces of the subjective viewer in architectural representations is to seek effects that occur only in the presence of a hypothetical viewer. Two-dimensional representation can never simulate experience. Nevertheless, we can perhaps derive from these examples something that is absent in so many others.

As may already be surmised from the above examples of representations that lack an implied, incarnated viewer, one condition that can implicate such a viewer is the presence of a ground plane that makes the subject's location comprehensible. One indication is isocephaly,⁸ or the horizontal alignment (more or less) of the viewer's horizon line and the heads (and therefore eyes) of other humans, indicating that they share a common ground plane. The proto-perspectivalists of the 14th and 15th centuries, such as Giotto, or the painters of the Sienese school, for example, intuitively struggled with this observed phenomenon as they increasingly tried to depict the ideal using the characteristics of the physical world. Karl Freidrich Schinkel frequently composed his perspective views in this way. A typical example is the engraving of his design for Neuen Schauspielhaus (Figure 1.7). It can be seen from this image that the exploitation of this technique depends on a flat ground plane. This image was chosen in particular to contrast the various figures that occupy the two-storey flight of steps and the portico to those that occupy the same ground plane as the viewer/artist. Architectural elements such as doors and windows, which indicate human scale, can also disclose that the viewer occupies the represented ground plane.

Readings of depth, which disclose "the link between the subject and space" (Merleau-Ponty 1996, p. 267), however, are suppressed because of the distance of the viewing subject from the object, the lack of foreground, and

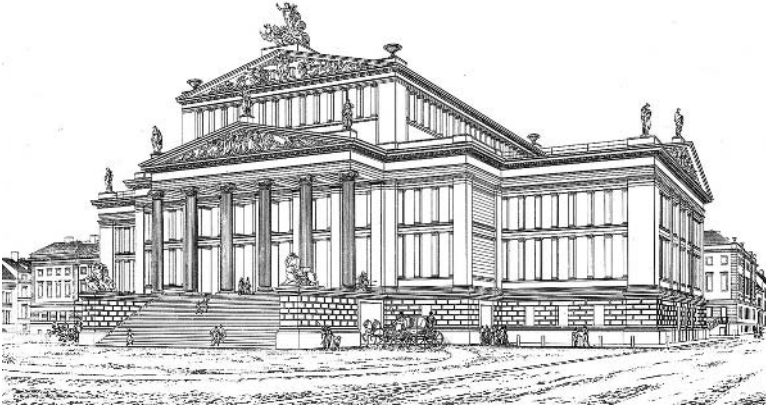


Figure 1.7 Karl Freidrich Schinkel, Neuen Schauspielhaus. Ferdinand Berger, delineator.

the emptiness of middle ground. The human figures in this representation share the background with the edifice, which miniaturizes them in its presence. Nevertheless, the viewer, while forced to remain disjunct from the objects represented, must be struck by the same imposing scale that the depicted figures must experience. Schinkel was certainly more influenced by the emerging ideas of 19th-century Romantic subjectivity, including the contemporary embracing of the sublime, than by any notion of subject-object reconciliation. Isocephaly fixes the viewer's position in the vertical dimension; one's feet are essentially on the ground. It cannot, however, determine the subject's lateral position relative to the object, and there is nothing about Schinkel's engraving that suggests that the station point was determined by a subjective point of view. Indeed, the three-quarter view of the Neuen Schauspielhaus is devised to best "show" the object; its monumental façade appears to "face" some other grand gesture in the objective world, consciously turning itself away from the viewer.

Generally, it would be agreed that, in the first half of the 20th century, architectural classicism finally gave way to modernism, but in recent decades a number of architectural critics have concentrated as much on the continuity as the breach. For example, the latent classicism in the work by Mies van der Rohe, one of the great modernists, has been demonstrated on many occasions. After visiting Mies' reconstructed German Pavilion in Barcelona, Robin Evans observed that "the most striking properties of the pavilion have to do with the *perception* of light and depth" (1997, p. 256) rather than its "sublime rationality" (ibid., p. 244) or the "*transcendent logic of its determining grid*" (ibid., p. 246; emphasis added). Perhaps the most recognizable feature of most of Mies' smaller buildings is the emphasis on the horizontal plane. It is not unusual to see photographs where the sensation of depth is captured by the receding lines of "floating" ceiling planes above and the grid of the floor pavers below. These planes are typically placed at more or less equal distances from the eye level of the average viewer, resulting in a top and bottom symmetry about the horizon line (Figure 1.8). One cannot deny this fact of the design, but was it intended *for the purpose* of the viewer's perception?

According to Evans, the more subtle and, he suggests, probably more deliberate effect at the Barcelona Pavilion is the purely visual *restoration* of