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# From Text to Theatre: An Architectural Reading of Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595, 1609)

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## ABSTRACT

The author looks at Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595, 1609) and the use of metaphor in the title of this book. A theosophical treatise without parallel, Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* is probably most famous for its copperplate engravings combining word and image in circular form. The text, on the other hand, is notorious for its highly idiosyncratic and largely impenetrable use of language. The title—*Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*—seems comparatively straightforward in this respect. Yet, it is this title that raises an important question: Why does Khunrath refer to a work that is published as an “Amphitheatre”? This essay aims to answer this question by examining the spatial and material aspect of the book, or what we might call its architecture, as well as the historical context in which Khunrath published his *magnum opus*. In so doing, attention is shifted from the purely literary qualities of Khunrath's writing (which have already been highlighted by others) to the architectural qualities that define the book as an “analogous space.” In addition, the author speculates on the role of drawing as a means to literally draw forth and visualize these qualities that allow the book to be viewed, beyond a mere metaphorical understanding of the term, as an amphitheatre in the medium of print.

## INTRODUCTION

In an essay titled *Typographic Rhapsody: Ravisius Textor, Zwinger, and Shakespeare*, cultural theorist Walter Ong draws attention to the frequent use of the word “theatre” in titles of books published during the second half of the sixteenth century (1977). In a footnote, Ong mentions that he “accumulated, incidentally, a collection of several dozen such titles: theatres of botany, of chemistry, of celestial wisdom, of universal nature, of peace, of

consumption (diseases), of God's judgments, of hydrotechnic machines, of politics, of poetry, etc." (p. 174). According to Ong, these titles with the word "theatre" in them are indicative of an epistemological shift in European culture whereby the transmission, communication, and storage of knowledge came to rely increasingly on vision: "An older primary oral world is dying out," he writes, "and a new visual-verbal world is gaining credibility" (p. 166). Let us remind ourselves here in passing that the word "theatre" is derived from the Greek *theatron*, meaning "a place for viewing." A book with the word "theatre" in its title can be understood, in other words, to present the book, first and foremost, as a place for viewing—not for "reading," whether out loud or in silence. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say "as well as" reading, because the aural aspect of the word had not altogether been supplanted by its visual aspect. However, the titles that Ong lists clearly seem to signal a shift "from the aural to the visual," as he calls it, that was at once perceptual, conceptual, and technical in kind.

Indeed, Ong argues that the advent of print played a key role in this shift "from the aural to the visual" because it made the storage of knowledge in textual form much easier and more efficient than ever before. As Ong explains, print is far more effective than writing "in fixing verbalized material in space for widespread storage and ready visual access" (1977, p. 163). Yet, in facilitating (and intensifying) the visual storage and retrieval of textual knowledge, the medium of print also allowed the "noetic store" (as Ong calls it) to grow into psychologically almost unmanageable proportions: witness the first modern encyclopedias, such as Theodor Zwinger's *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* (1565), which went through five progressively enlarged editions between 1565 and 1604 and ran to more than 5000 double-column folio pages in the posthumous 1604 edition (Ong, 1977, p. 171). What Ong seems to suggest through his study of this particular example (to which I shall return later) is that the storage and retrieval of such large quantities of textual material came to rely on architectural metaphors such as the "theatre" to remain, in some sense, psychologically manageable. But this raises a question with regard to the relation between architecture and the book: do the "theatre" titles only perform as metaphors, that is, as mere figurative uses of speech, or do they indicate that the books really *are* theatres—in as literal a way as possible? This question remains largely unanswered in Ong's essay because Ong is primarily concerned with understanding how the book performs as a text. Here I want to push Ong's observations further to suggest that the "theatre" titles must be understood with reference to architecture as a material construction that happens to take the form of a book but could equally well have taken another form (i.e., that of a conventional building or a scale model). Hence, I invoked an "architectural reading" in the subtitle of this essay, because architecture is here understood as being

concerned, primarily, with a literal means of thinking the theatre metaphor—both in and beyond the specific, historical moment of its emergence and use.

### KHUNRATH'S "AMPHITHEATRE"

To investigate the theoretical problem raised earlier, I will focus on a particular case study of a book with the word "amphitheatre" in its title: the *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* or *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*, first published in 1595 by the author, a German physician named Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605). Khunrath, whose portrait was drawn in 1602 (fig. 1), has been described as "one of the most remarkable theosophists and alchemists of the late Sixteenth Century" (Grillot de Givry, 1971, p. 209). Yet, who Khunrath was remains a bit of a mystery due to the fact that his life is poorly documented. According to his biographer, James Craven, Khunrath studied medicine in Basel and then moved to Hamburg, where he conducted alchemical experiments in his own private laboratory (1997, p. 57). Craven further mentions that Khunrath may have met the famous English physician and astrologer John Dee, on either June 6 or 27, 1589, in Bremen, when the latter was on his way home from a visit to Prague (p. 1). Two years after his alleged meeting with Dee, Khunrath travelled to Prague and became associated there with the court of Emperor Rudolph II, which attracted alchemists from all over Europe (Gouk, 1997, p. 233; Dauvois, 1996). By the mid-1590s, Khunrath was back in Hamburg and later resided in Magdeburg. Little else is known about Khunrath, except that he died in 1605 at either Leipzig or Dresden.

The *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* can be considered, in true alchemical fashion, to be Khunrath's *magnum opus*, or "great work." The first edition, which appears to have been published by Khunrath himself while he resided in Hamburg, is now very rare: only four extant copies are known to be in existence today (in Wisconsin, Basel, Darmstadt, and Rostock). A revised edition, which had been in preparation during Khunrath's lifetime, was published four years after Khunrath's death in 1609. I shall be discussing both editions in greater detail and try to show how they might be understood as the architectural manifestation of an amphitheatre in book form.

Today, Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* is probably best known for the four highly enigmatic copperplate engravings in circular form, which Khunrath refers to as "Theosophical figures" and which can be found at the very end of the book, presented on two double-page spreads, like a pair of spectacles (figs. 2 and 3). Each plate, measuring approximately 48 × 42.5 cm, is hand-colored and highlighted with touches of silver and gold. The engravings, which are the work of an artist from Antwerp named Paulus van der Doort, have drawn much attention for their curious layout, whereby Khunrath's text is arranged in a concentric or radial manner



Figure 1. Johann Diricks van Campen, Portrait of Heinrich Khunrath, dated 1602 (Reproduced with permission from The Wellcome Library, London).

around a central circular image. The fourth and most famous of the theosophical figures contains a perspectival image figuring Khunrath himself (or so it seems) in the act of prayer before an altar inside a hall or studio, which is divided into an “Oratory” on the left and a “Laboratory” on the right. This image has often been reproduced in popular accounts of alchemy, although generally without the radiating text, which is how the image appears in the posthumously published 1609 edition (fig. 4). An inscription in the engraving (“H. F. Vriese pinxit”) indicates that the engraving was made after a painting (now lost) by the Dutch architect Hans Vredeman de Vries (1527–1606), who lived in Hamburg at the time and who is best known for his treatises on perspective and architectural designs in print (Borggreffe, Fusenig, & Uppenkamp, 2002).

In a detailed discussion of Khunrath’s Oratory-Laboratory engraving, art historian Urszula Szulakowksa argues that the use of perspective shows the unmistakable influence of contemporary stage-set designs, particularly those of the Italian architect Sebastiano Serlio, whose work Vredeman de Vries would have been intimately familiar with (2000, p. 115). Serlio’s designs for the three classical stage sceneries (Tragic, Comic, and Satiric) first appeared in book 2 of his book *Architettura* (1537–1551), which was translated into German and Dutch by Pieter Coecke van Aelst and thus readily available to a Northern European audience (Hart & Hicks, 1996). The similarity between Khunrath’s studio and Serlio’s design for the Tragic Stage is particularly striking (fig. 5). I shall return to Khunrath’s interest in perspective and architecture when taking a closer look at the role of geometry in the design of Khunrath’s plates. First, let us consider the work in its entirety, because the plates form only part of the book.

Preceding the plates is a “Prologue” containing biblical verses attributed to King Solomon, who, in a particular hermetic tradition dating to the Middle Ages, is identified as an adept of alchemy (de Jong, 1969, p. 14). The verses, which originate in the Old Testament book of Proverbs and the Apocrypha’s book of Wisdom, are accompanied, surrounded in fact, by Khunrath’s commentaries. These commentaries are notorious for their highly esoteric use of language. One scholar describes Khunrath’s text as consisting “largely of a fevered sequence of mystical pronouncements and adjurations, interlarded with bizarre exclamations in various tongues,” including Latin, German, Hebrew, and Greek (Read, 1936, p. 82). Literary historian Peter Forshaw, who translated Khunrath’s text, mentions that the *Amphitheatrum* was condemned by the Sorbonne in 1625 as “a very pernicious book,” “swarming with impieties, errors and heresies and the continuous sacrilegious profanation of passages from Holy Scripture” (Forshaw, 2006, p. 110; Kahn, 2007, pp. 569–593). The *Amphitheatrum* enjoyed a more favorable reception in Lutheran circles in Germany (Montgomery, 1973, p. 18).



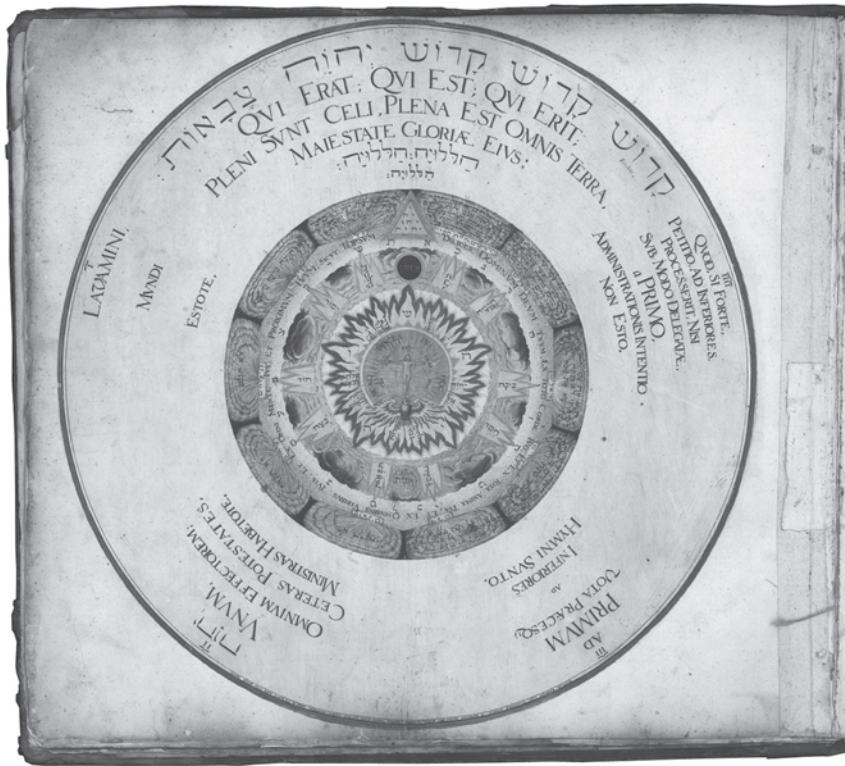


Figure 2. First pair of theosophical figures in Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphi-theatrum* (1595). (Reproduced with permission from Basel University Library. Basel UB, Handschriftenmagazin. Sign.: JG 10 Folio.)

As an object of more recent scholarship, Khunrath's *Amphi-theatrum* seems to have won over more than one academician and thus given rise to a greater understanding of the theosophical and alchemical foundations of Khunrath's discourse (Forshaw, 2003; Töllner, 1991). Despite these studies, little effort has been made to understand the simple but complex analogy between the book and the amphitheatre invoked by the title. And yet, as Forshaw's translation makes clear, Khunrath keeps referring to "this Amphitheatre" throughout the text:

Good God! With how many and what great schemes of hindrance . . . has not the devil, enemy of TRUTH, assailed me for many years, by which I might have been deterred from my so pious project, from my laboriously and expensively undertaken work, so that, of course, I might not build this AMPHITHEATRE, and that I might not set up in it a distinguished Monument of honour, praise and glory to the WISDOM,

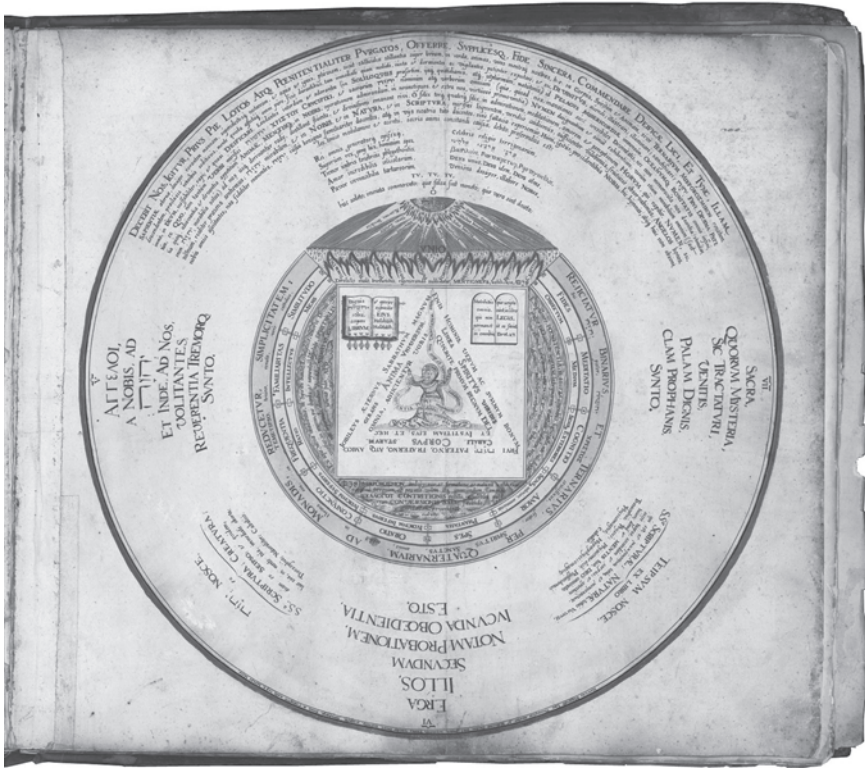


Figure 2. (continued)

OMNIPOTENCE and GOODNESS of JEHOVAH; a record of Love towards my NEIGHBOUR, and a Memorial for MYSELF, attending to my fleeing memory; a Testimony of public hatred, and everlasting defiance, for the DEVIL. (Forshaw, 2003, v. 2, p. 509)

Ignoring the “feverish” language, we readily understand that by “this Amphitheatre” Khunrath means the book that we have in front of us. So, how should we understand this analogy? And, to keep with the theme of the conference: is this analogy in any way *spatial*? What I want to suggest here is that the title of Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum* implies a way of conceptualizing the book that is architectural as well as textual. It is signaled here most poignantly by the use of the term “building” for the combined activities of writing, drawing, and publishing, all of which were undertaken under Khunrath’s supervision. In my introduction I have pointed to Walter Ong’s work to indicate that there is a historical basis for this mode of thinking: it arises at a particular moment in time and within a specific cultural context. Let us address this moment in greater detail, for the word “amphitheatre” could, in Khunrath’s time, refer to many things, includ-

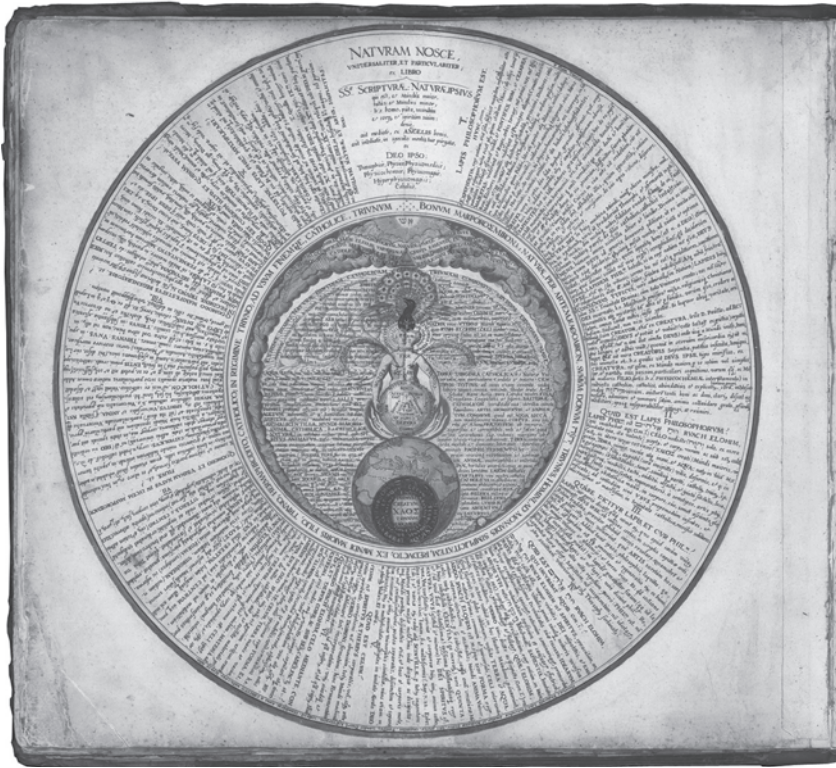


Figure 3. Second pair of theosophical figures in Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* (1595). (Reproduced with permission from Basel University Library. Basel UB, Handschriftenmagazin. Sign.: JG 10 Folio.)

ing ancient structures, such the amphitheatres of Rome and Greece, but also contemporary structures, such as the famous playhouses erected in London (the first of which, James Burbage's "The Theatre," was built in 1576) or the equally famous anatomy theatres of Padua and Leiden (constructed in 1594 and 1596, respectively). Curiously, Khunrath does not mention any of these structures explicitly in his text. Yet, there seems to be a correlation between the circular design of his "Theosophical figures" and the architectural idea of "a place for seeing from all sides" (*amphitheatron* in Greek). It is also clear that this circular design prioritizes the act of viewing over mere reading (as from left to right) insofar as it is virtually impossible to read the text without turning one's head and body around the book or turning the book upside down (a thing made difficult due to the very size of the volume, each page measuring  $48 \times 42.5$  cm). Although it is hard to find a precedent for Khunrath's endeavor, we must consider a possible influence in the so-called memory theatre.



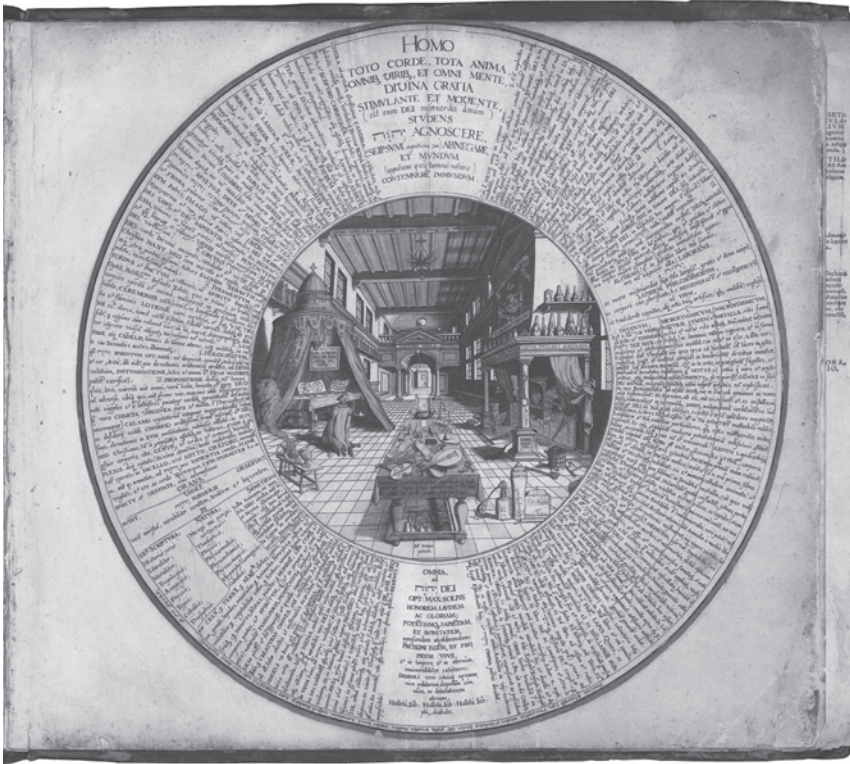


Figure 3. (continued)

### CAMILLO'S THEATRO

In her book *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, cultural historian Frances Yates briefly discusses the title of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* and suggests "that Khunrath may have had in mind in this title some thought of an occult memory system through which he was visually presenting his ideas" (2002, p. 51). Earlier, in *The Art of Memory*, Yates had argued that during the Renaissance, the classical art of memory was "transformed into a Hermetic or occult art, and in this form, it continued to take a central place in a central European tradition" (1992, p. 134). According to Yates, the key figure in this transformation was the Italian occultist Giulio Camillo (1480–1544), who was reported to have constructed an "Amphitheatre" in the early 1530s for Francis I, King of France (1992, chap. 6).

Unfortunately, no trace survives of Camillo's "Amphitheatre," which, according to Yates, "was talked of in all Italy and France" (1992, p. 135). The only thing that has survived is Camillo's description of its structure



Figure 4. The Oratory-Laboratory engraving in Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* (1609). (Reproduced with permission from The Wellcome Library, London.)

and content in *L'Idée del Theatro*, which was published posthumously in 1550 in Venice (Yates, 1992, p. 135). Here, Camillo explains the structure of his Theatro, which, if we accept Yates's interpretation, consisted of a semicircular structure rising in seven grades or steps, divided by seven gangways representing the seven planets. According to Yates, the student who enters Camillo's Theatro "is as it were the spectator before whom are placed the seven measures of the world *in spettacolo*, or in a theatre" (1992, p. 141).

Whether Camillo's Theatro was ever built remains unclear. Yates believes that the Theatro "was more than a small model" and "large enough to be entered by at least two people at once" (i.e., the King of France and Camillo himself) (1992, p. 131). Literary scholar Lu Beery Wenneker,

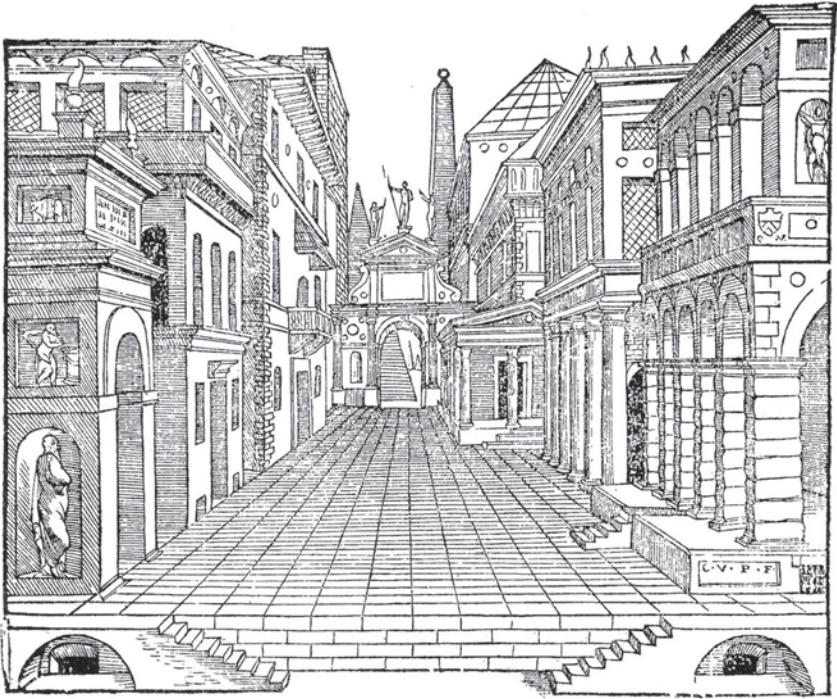


Figure 5. The Tragic Stage, from Book II of Sebastiano Serlio's *Five Books on Architecture* (1569). (Reproduced with permission from UCL Special Collections, London.)

on the other hand, does not believe that Camillo's *Theatro* ever existed: "The Theatre was not a full-scale architectural model," but primarily a literary work, for which the "term, 'Theatre' or 'amphitheatre' is used metaphorically" (1970, chap. 2). When Camillo's contemporaries spoke of his work as an "Amphitheatre," they did so, according to Wencker, "because generically speaking, the word was often used at the time to describe any sort of structure designed for the presentation of spectacle" (p. 71). Whatever the case, there are strong indications that Khunrath was familiar with Camillo's *L'Idée del Theatro*, for the *Amphitheatrum* presents a number of overlaps with Camillo's text, including references to the Cabalists, to Solomon, to Hermes Trismegistus (the mythical founder of alchemy), and to the symbolic number seven (Yates, 1992, pp. 141–42).<sup>1</sup> There is a crucial difference, however, between Khunrath's and Camillo's conception of the book. As Wencker observes, Camillo's *L'Idée del Theatro* presents us with an "idea" or "model" of the *Theatro* and not the theatre itself (p. 54). By contrast, Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* refers to the



thing itself (the book). I have not found any earlier examples of such practice. Prior to the publication of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum*, the presence of the word "amphitheatre" in a title most often indicates that the book is *about* amphitheatres (those of ancient Rome in particular).<sup>2</sup> Having said this, there is reason to reconsider the work of the Swiss physician and polymath Theodor Zwinger the Elder (1533–1588) in this context.

### ZWINGER'S *THEATRUM*

A true polymath, Zwinger was one of the central figures in the academic world of Basel (Kircher, 1956). He may even have been Khunrath's tutor at Basel University, as Forshaw suggests (2003, v. 2, p. 529). Zwinger was one of the first (if not the first) to use the term "theatre" in a title with reference to the book itself, namely, his *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* (Theatre of Human Life), which was first published in Basel in 1565 (thus pre-dating the building of any of the "contemporary structures" mentioned earlier).

In his discussion of this early modern encyclopedia, Ong states that, in publishing the *Theatrum*, Zwinger "undertook what was in many ways certainly the most comprehensively ambitious compilation of commonplace excerpts up to his time" (1977, p. 171). According to Ong, the title of the book advertises what he calls a "visualist noetics," that is, a management of the growing store of knowledge that relies primarily on vision (p. 174). Ong suggests that "by collecting in snippets everything everyone has said with a view to arranging all the snippets in proper, visually retrievable, order," Zwinger must have felt that "his text represented in some vague way the 'structure' of the human lifeworld, the microcosm, and thus in some fashion, no doubt, the macrocosm as well" (pp. 176–177). In a more recent discussion of the relation between theatre and book, cultural historian Julie Stone Peters also mentions Zwinger's *Theatrum*, arguing that the printed book, like the theatre, was instrumental in the visualization of knowledge: "Both theatre and printed book were vehicles of artificial memory: mechanisms for visualizing images interacting in space and structures for mapping objects of knowledge onto a fixed set of vertical and horizontal planes. This shared conceptual work was reflected in the metaphoric interchangeability of book and theatre" (2004, p. 190).

According to Stone Peters, the use of the theatre metaphor in the titles of printed books "reinvigorated the etymological sense of the word *theatre* as a 'seeing place,' both transferring this into the sphere of the book and drawing on its currency there" (2004, p. 190). But this raises a question: Was the "interchangeability" between book and theatre purely metaphorical? A closer look at the preface of Zwinger's *Theatrum* calls this interpretation into question, I argue. In the preface to the first edition of his *Theatrum*, Zwinger explains that the nineteen "Books," which comprise



the *Theatrum*, are in fact nineteen “Acts”: “Just as the stories of comic actors are first divided into acts, then into scenes, so we (if you consider its arrangement and form) have divided this whole work (which contains the general story of human life) into its Acts, that is into nineteen books. Then the individual books [are divided] into chapters, as if into scenes”<sup>3</sup> (1565, p. 19).

Zwinger’s analogy between the structuring of a play and the arrangement of his work is almost shockingly literal. I personally find it difficult to think of this passage as a mere figurative use of speech. Dividing a book into “Acts” and then into “scenes” also clearly serves to emphasize the element of spectacle in the act of reading. In the second edition of the *Theatrum*, published in 1571, Zwinger further emphasizes the structural analogy between book and theatre by changing the title of the preface from “Praefatio” to “Proscenium,” a word reserved for the raised stage in front of the scene of a classical theatre (p. 28). This change of wording in the title is significant, I argue, because it points to a conceptual shift whereby, gradually, over a considerable amount of time (six years), Zwinger comes to think of his *Theatrum* less as a written text than as a built theatre. This shift is signaled most clearly in a section of the Proscenium headed “Of the Architects of this Work” (“De Architectis Huius Operis”), where Zwinger presents himself and his collaborators as “architects and contractors” of the work (1571, p. 28).<sup>4</sup> Among Zwinger’s collaborators or “contractors” is his stepfather Conrad Lycosthenes (Wolffhardt), whom Zwinger credits with having done most of the collecting, adding that he himself “endowed with life” the “immature fruit of Lycosthenes” and “transformed it into the shape [*species*] which you see” (1571, pp. 28–29). Zwinger further laments the lack of time remaining, which would have allowed him “to draw [*contraho*] this great Theatre into the shape of a Theatridium—a thing which many people demand, and the spirit also bids—in imitation of the Geometrists, who draw together the working of the Universe into a tiny globe” (1571, pp. 27–28).

It is not entirely clear what Zwinger means here when he envisages to draw his *Theatrum* into “a Theatridium,” but he may have had in mind a small theatre or model of some kind (similar to Camillo’s *Theatro*, perhaps). Yet, what can be deduced from this somewhat mysterious passage is that Zwinger thinks of his *Theatrum* as an object capable of being physically transformed into a “Theatridium,” and we, his readers, are clearly supposed to imagine such a thing to be possible and feasible. All of which suggests that the interchangeability between book and theatre was not just metaphorical, as Stone Peters argues, but material and spatial as well. Interchangeability was matched, as it were, by a potential transformability between book, model, and theatre. More shall be said about this in the conclusion.

## THE “SKILFUL USE OF THE COMPASS”

Based on these findings, I suggest that Zwinger’s conception of himself as an architect of the *Theatrum* opened up a new way of thinking about books that sees them, potentially, as works of architecture in their own right, that is, as objects of a practice of what I call *book building*. Now, Khunrath does not refer to himself as an “architect” of his *Amphitheatrum*, but, as we have seen, he approached one of the most influential architects of his time—Hans Vredeman de Vries—to produce the painting that served as a basis for the famous Oratory-Laboratory engraving. Szulakowska attributes great importance to the use of perspective in this context, arguing that it “drew the viewer optically into a parallel metaphysical world” (2000, p. xv). According to Szulakowska, the use of perspective provided Vredeman de Vries and Khunrath with a means to “establish an indexical relationship between the viewer’s physical world and that of the picture, enabling the viewer to enter the alchemist’s laboratory and to participate in his work” (p. 130). This argument, however attractive as a way of understanding the interaction between reader and book (as a form of alchemy, perhaps), seems to overemphasize the importance of perspective for the *Amphitheatrum* as a whole, especially since it is used in only *one* of the circular engravings that make up the first edition published in 1595.

Let me draw attention to the second “Theosophical figure,” which depicts the Theosopher seated in the center of a geometrical space formed of a triangle, a square, and several concentric circles, all made up of words.<sup>5</sup> Without entering into much further detail, I would simply like to point to the fact that the composition that governs the distribution of the text, itself not uncommon in alchemical imagery, closely resembles (in plan) the geometrical basis of a classical (amphi)theatre as described and illustrated in contemporary architectural publications. Of particular interest in this context is *Vitruvius Teutsch*, the German translation of the *Ten Books on Architecture* by the Roman architect Vitruvius, which was first published in Nuremberg in 1548. In chapter 6 of book 5 of *Vitruvius Teutsch*, we find the following description of the design of a Roman theatre, which defines its structure as a composition of such basic geometric figures: “This is how to make the configuration of the theatre itself. Whatever the size of the lower perimeter, locate a center point and draw a circle around it, and in this circle draw four triangles with equal sides and at equal intervals. These should just touch the circumference of the circle. By these same triangles, astrologers calculate the harmonies of the stars of the twelve heavenly signs in musical terms” ([Vitruvius], 1999, pp. 68–69).

Although no square is mentioned in this passage, it is present in the plan as the center stage and orchestra of the theatre. Vitruvius indicates that his description of the plan of the theatre is similar to that of an astrological diagram, constructed with the help of a compass and rule. The

importance of these two instruments—the compass and the rule—is emphasized on the title page of *Vitruvius Teutsch*, where we read that the book “will be useful in multiple ways . . . to all skilled craftsmen, foremen, stonemasons, master builders, gunsmiths, hydraulic engineers, miners, painters, sculptors, goldsmiths, cabinet makers and all those who make skilful use of the compass and level” (Ryff, 1973, f. A1r).<sup>6</sup>

As we can see from the portrait engraved by Johann Diricks van Campen, our alchemist Khunrath is among those who make skillful use of the compass (see fig. 1). In his right hand, Khunrath holds a compass, with which he traces an arch carrying the inscription *Deo Duce* (“with God as guide”), a clear sign of the author’s religious piety. But what are the compasses really used for (in an alchemist’s practice)? Forshaw considers it “plausible to suggest that the compasses used to describe circles are a direct allusion to the creation of the four circular engravings of the 1595 edition, on which much of Khunrath’s contemporary reputation was founded” (2003, v. 1, p. 35). The portrait, in other words, presents Khunrath as a draughtsman of the *Amphitheatrum*, which amounts to saying that his authorship is based on a command of drawing as well as writing. Without the compasses, the circular engravings could certainly not have been drawn. More important, however, the compasses account for an actual interchangeability, or virtual transformability, between the *Amphitheatrum* and a built amphitheatre as described by Vitruvius. This interchangeability, then, is physical as well as metaphorical; for it is based on geometrical relationships set out in space and embodied in the skillful use of the compass. To be sure, I am not suggesting here that Khunrath himself was familiar with *Vitruvius Teutsch*, but it is worth noting that its author, Walther Hermann Ryff (or Rivius), was not an architect but a practicing physician, like Khunrath, and that the book was published a second time in Basle in 1575, all of which may attest to the popularity of classical architecture in the medically oriented humanist circles in Basel.

#### THE *AMPHITHEATRUM* 1609: A FEW ADDITIONAL REMARKS

The second edition of Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum* was published posthumously in 1609 in Hanau (“Hanoviae”) under the supervision of a friend of Khunrath named Erasmus Wolfart.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the 1595 edition, the 1609 edition of Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum* is not a rare book. It was printed in a smaller folio format and augmented with additional engravings, including a frontispiece, Khunrath’s portrait, and five double-page size rectangular engravings (McLean, 1981). Due to a reduction in size of the *Amphitheatrum*, the commentaries to the circular engravings were printed separately as introductions (*isagoges*) to the figures. Scholars who have examined the 1609 edition have noted that the order of the plates in the 1609 edition varies from one copy to another, suggesting that the plates were sold separately from the main text and bound in with the main text by indi-

vidual binders (Forshaw, 2003, v. 2, p. 8; Szulakowska, 2000, p. 105). The few remarks that I want to make here concern the way in which a binder of the 1609 edition might install conditions for a spectacle of reading and thus reinforce the reciprocity between book and theatre.

One of the first things that can be noted with regard to the 1609 edition of the *Amphitheatrum* is that it contains a number of gratulatory verses in praise of Khunrath's work that playfully engage with the theatre metaphor invoked by the title. In an encomium by Theophilus Aretius, for example, the author congratulates Khunrath for "bringing wonders to light with this new Amphitheatre / Scarcely seen in all the Theatres of the ancients" (Forshaw, 2003, v. 2, p. 43). In another encomium, Johannes Sessius writes that there is no need for the reader "to go to the ruined Theatres of the ancients, / Or to new ones, rendered vain with their spectacles" because he can "take seat, oh Khunrath, in your Theatre" (Forshaw, 2003, v. 2, p. 45). Gratulatory verses such as these form part of what Stone Peters refers to as an "elaborate scheme of prefatory material" preceding the main text (in this case the prologue), by which contemporary publications incorporate into the work elements belonging to the presentation of dramatic texts in the theatre (2004, p. 193). Khunrath himself plays a part in this dramatization of the text, as Szulakowska in turn observes: "On the dedication page, Khunrath presents a 'theosophical oration' addressed to Jesus Christ, thereby, from the outset, he is conceptualised as an actor taking part in a staged performance directed at a community of pious, Christian theosophists" (2000, p. 114).

The inclusion of a frontispiece containing a small portrait of Khunrath further emphasizes this idea of a staged performance at a visual level (fig. 6). Here we see the title of the book flanked by two obelisks inscribed with the words "Ora" and "Labora" (in reference to Khunrath's motto *Ora et labora*). Obelisks formed part of a visual repertoire associated with theatrical stage scenery, such as can be seen in Serlio's woodcut of the Tragic Stage (see fig. 5), and in particular with the performance of triumphal entries that took place during the late sixteenth century. According to Stone Peters, the presence of such architectural motifs on the title pages of books "habitually reminded readers of the connection between spatial-visual display in scenes and in books" (2004, p. 106). Yet, the analogy between book and theatre does not end here; it extends beyond the confines of the text. For, just as the sceneries in the theatre incorporated feigned marble surfaces (wood painted to look like marble), some of the bindings of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* (1609) incorporate marbled paper for the end leaves of the book (fig. 7).

Marbled paper was first introduced to Western Europe around 1600 and imported from Turkey and Persia, where marbling originated in the fifteenth century (Wolfe, 1991, p. 1). It was used for a variety of purposes,



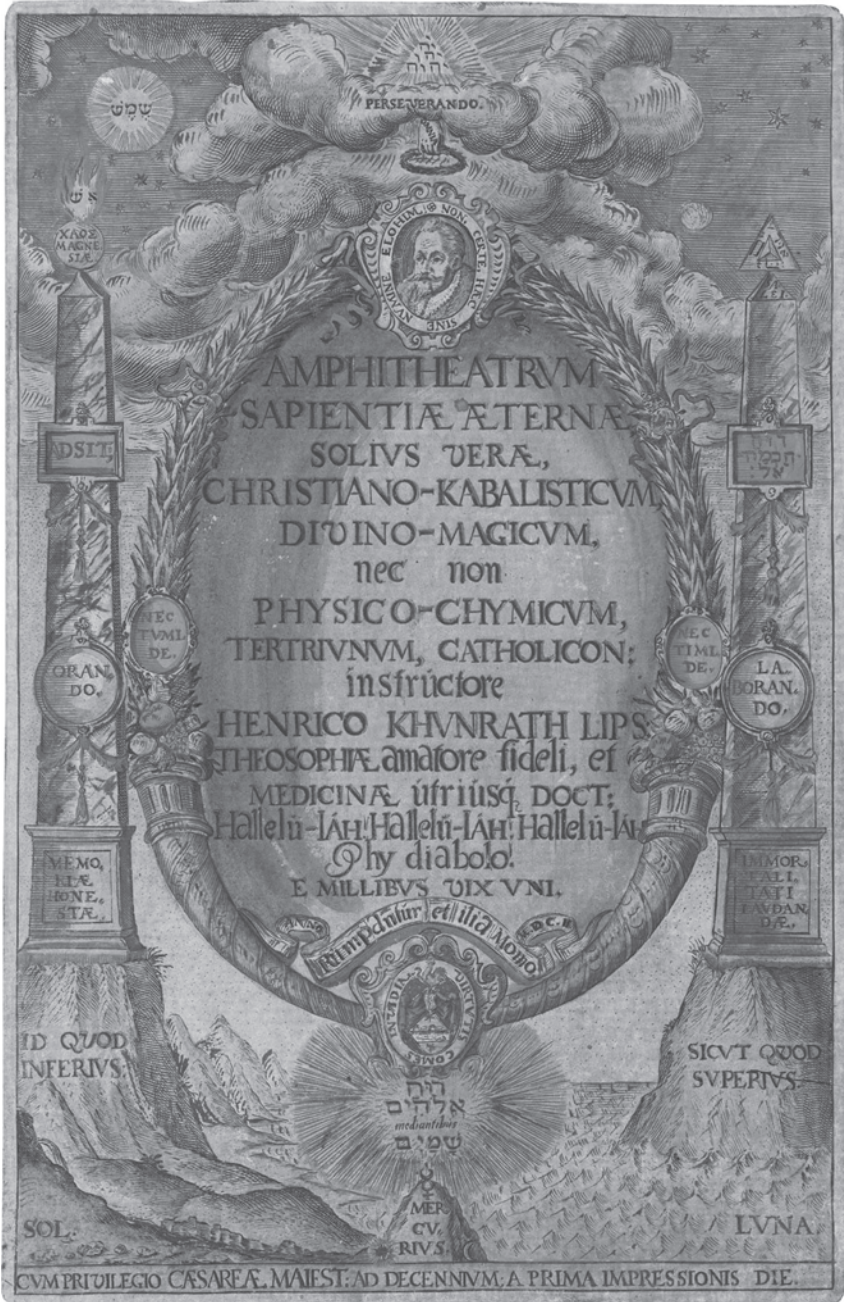


Figure 6. Title page of Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* (1609). (Reproduced with permission from The Wellcome Library, London.)

including the lining of the interior of trunks, the covering of boxes, and the wrapping of toys and other consumer goods. Bookbinders reserved the use of marbled paper mostly for special bindings and most often for the purpose of attaching the text block to the covers, that is, as endpapers (Wolfe, 1991, p. 14). It has to be said that although many copies of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* contain marbled endpapers and even marbled edges, the bindings are not always contemporary with the date of publication. This does not detract, however, from the fact that the introduction of marbled paper enabled binders of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries to add an element of theatricality at the level of the book as object. This is important in view of understanding how the theatre metaphor materialized in the "building" of the book. It goes without saying, perhaps, that marbled endpapers tend to be overlooked, both literally and figuratively, in studies of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum*. After all, these studies are primarily text-based and endpapers are not usually perceived to form part of the text (i.e., the author's work). Endpapers are, at any rate, perceived fleetingly, in a moment of distraction, as the reader opens and closes the book. Yet, in this moment, the marbled paper offers a brief spectacle of color, which is purely *visual*. This is important to emphasize, because in stimulating vision, marbled paper becomes instrumental in presenting the book as a "place for viewing" (*theatron* in Greek).

Serlio, in his description of the Tragic Stage Scenery, mentions that statues and other objects, which are cut out of board, are often "painted to simulate marble" (Hart & Hicks, 1996, p. 88). Being part of the background or scenery on the stage, these simulated marble surfaces do not attract the kind of concentrated attention reserved for the actors on stage. They effectively escape the interpreting faculty of our eyes. Having said this, our eyes never fail to register the fact that counterfeit marble is pure imitation. The same is even truer for marbled paper. For, while marbled paper may bear a resemblance to real marble, the patterns usually betray a high degree of "dissemblance" to the eye.<sup>8</sup> This degree of dissemblance calls for a suspension of disbelief from the part of the viewer. And this suspension of disbelief is there, ultimately, to facilitate a passage into the realm of fiction and artifice that theatre is. In truly scrambling our view, the varied patterns that marble and marbled surfaces produce force us to lose all touch with the visible world around us, such that we may leave one reality behind and exchange it for another. Book building and theatre building can therefore be seen as analogous with respect to each other, based on craft-related techniques (such as marbling, but also typesetting and carpentry, to name but a few) that place reader and spectator before a scene associated with the performance of dramatic texts on stage.

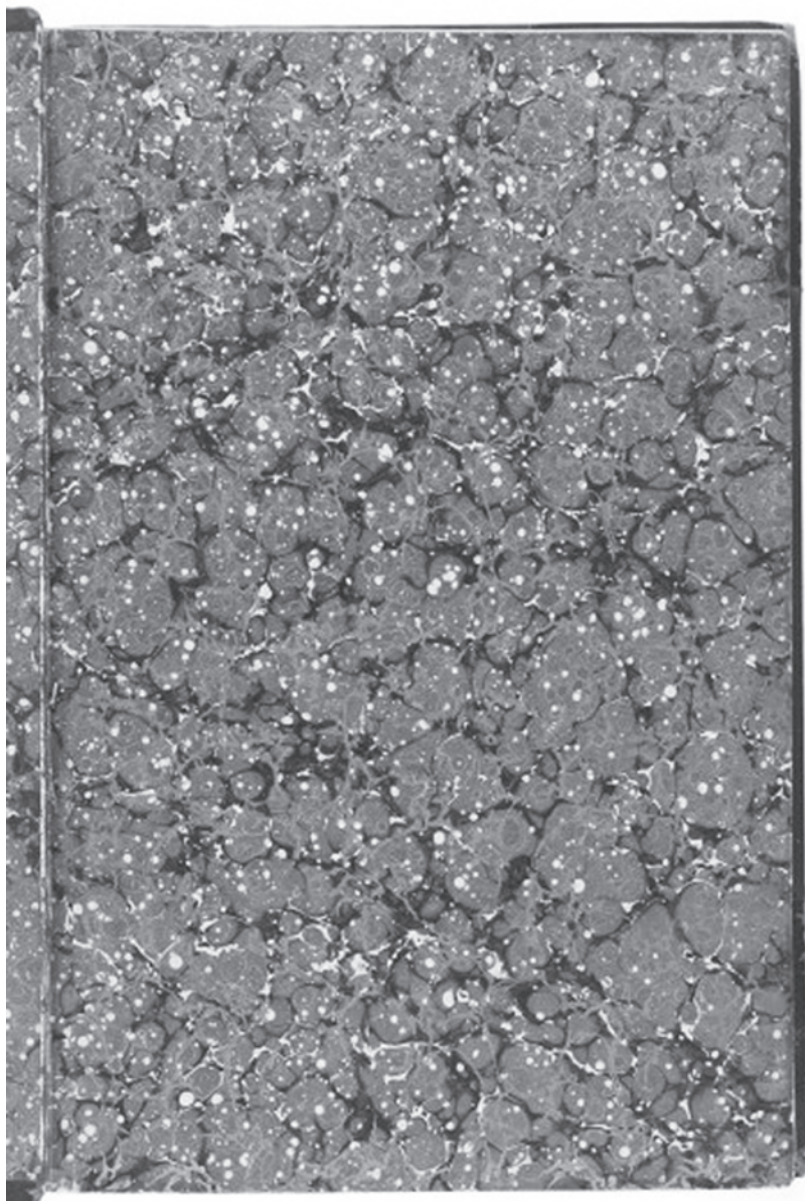


Figure 7. Marbled endpaper in Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* (1609). (Reproduced with permission from The Wellcome Library, London.)

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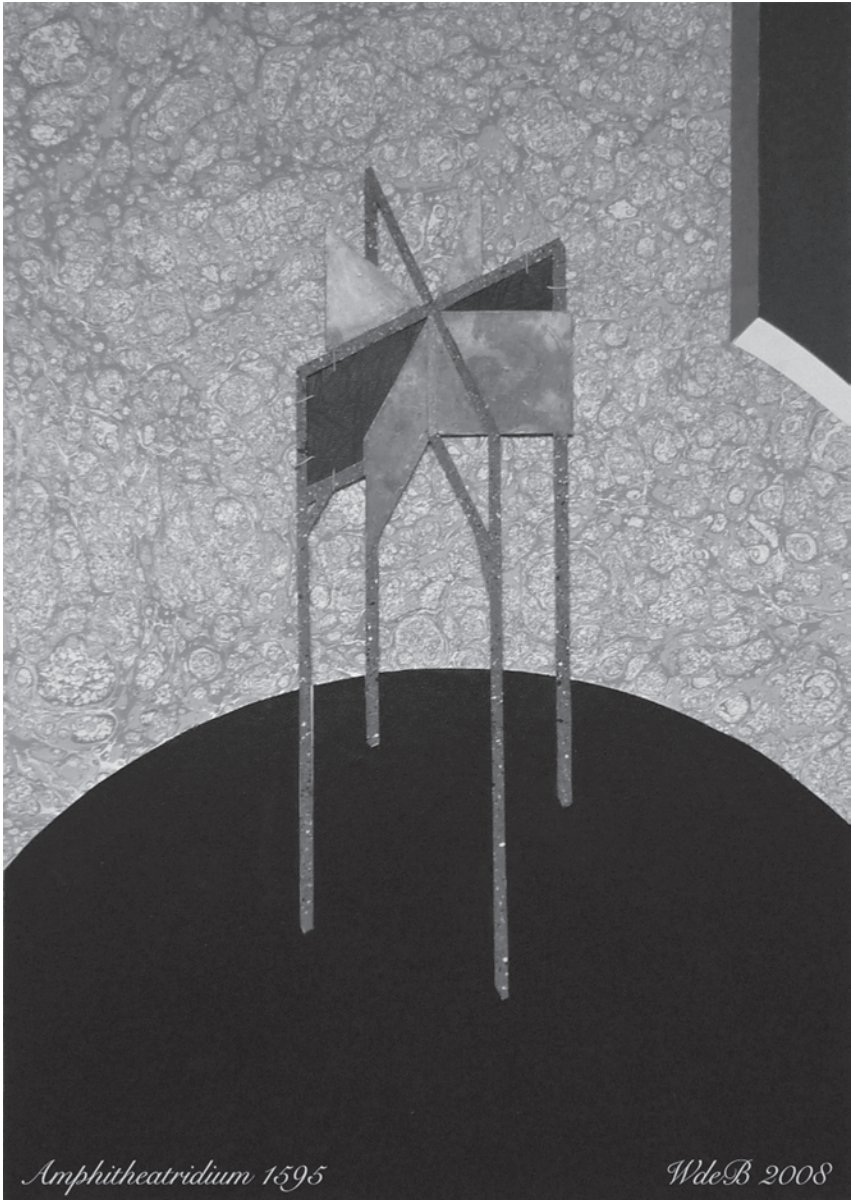


## CONCLUSION

I began this essay by drawing attention to Walter Ong's observation regarding the use of the word "theatre" in titles published during the second half of the sixteenth century. This observation formed the departure for an investigation of a book with the word "amphitheatre" in its title: Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, or *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*, which was first published in 1595. I looked at the first and second (1609) editions of the *Amphitheatrum* to gain a richer understanding of the theatre metaphor in relation to the book as a crafted object. Through a study of sources related to Khunrath's work (including Camillo's "Theatro," Zwinger's *Theatrum*, and Ryff's *Vitruvius Teutsch*), I have tried to show how the title of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* might be understood as referring to a material *and* a metaphorical construction, which reinvigorates the architectural idea of a "theatre" or "amphitheatre" through the book. I have also suggested, in reference to Khunrath's portrait showing the author handling a pair of compasses, that this reinvigoration was accomplished primarily by means of drawing (draughtsmanship being a privileged domain of architectural competence). The fact that Khunrath was an alchemist has received relatively little attention here but may still be considered significant in terms of theorizing Khunrath's book building as an alchemical practice of architecture.<sup>9</sup> What is perhaps more important to emphasize here, however, is that when confronted with a *Theatrum* or *Amphitheatrum* such as Zwinger and Khunrath conceived them, we today sense a remoteness (in time) that reflects our inability to view the book the way they did (i.e., as a space analogous to other spaces). That is, we find it difficult, if not near impossible, to imagine what it was like to be able to think (of) a *Theatrum* or *Amphitheatrum* as potentially transformable (or transmutable, to use an alchemical term), such that, with the help of a pair of compasses, we might adapt its structure and design to build an analogous space (e.g., a model big enough to be entered by a "reader" turned actor and spectator of a play).

Part of my aim has been to articulate a mode of thinking, based on a study of historical sources, which may or may not underlie the design of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum*. All historiography will remain speculative in this respect. Yet, the real challenge, as I see it, is to imagine the *Amphitheatrum* in its capacity to be architecture. We will have to use drawing as well as writing to get there, for the medium of language has its limits. In so doing, we might liberate ourselves from preconceived ideas as to what forms architecture and, by the same token, architectural history (as a practice) takes and can take. If Khunrath never refers to any other "structures" known in his time to be amphitheatres, was it not in order to *insist* that his great metaphor needed to be understood literally—as referring to a physical entity? When Zwinger suggested that his *Theatrum* could be transformed into a "Theatridium," did he not rely blindly, as it were, on his





*Amphitheatridium 1595*

*WdeB 2008*

Figure 8. The *Amphitheatridium 1595* (2008). Axonometric drawing (cardboard, leather, yellow thread, copper leaf, and marbled paper). (By the author.)

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readers' ability to understand the book in mechanical and mathematical terms as a spatial model ("in imitation of the Geometrists")? Zwinger, for sure, considered such a thing *desirable*. In response to this desirability and by way of analogy with Zwinger's "Theatridium," I presented a drawing at the *Analogous Spaces* conference in Ghent that is an attempt to produce the equivalent of an "Amphitheatridium" for Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* (fig. 8). The *Amphitheatridium 1595* (2008), as it is called, presents a means to draw forth and visualize the qualities that characterize Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* as a material and mechanical construction (understood both as a product and as a process) that constitutes "a place for viewing from all sides" (*amphitheatron* in Greek). Not coincidentally, it is these material and mechanical qualities that define Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* as an object most closely related to the category of machines, instruments and mechanical devices, which, since the time of Vitruvius, were designed for the production of spectacles.

## NOTES

1. Camillo describes the structure as resting "upon seven pillars," which represent "the seven pillars of Solomon's House of Wisdom."
2. See, for example, Justus Lipsius's treatise *De amphitheatro liber* (1584), which is a historical account of classical Roman amphitheatres. Here the preposition *De* indicates that we are dealing with a treatise *on* the subject of ancient amphitheatres, not that the book *is* an amphitheatre.
3. I thank Nick Holland for his translation.
4. I thank Lesley Boatwright for her translations of passages from the 1571 edition.
5. For a detailed discussion of the second Theosophical figure, see Forshaw, 2003, v. 1, p. 265.
6. Translations from *Vitruvius Teutsch* are mine.
7. It remains uncertain who this Wolfart was. Forshaw suggests that Wolfart may have been related to the professor of grammar and dialectic Conrad Wolffhart, alias Lycosthenes (1518–1561), whom we know as Theodor Zwinger's stepfather and as contributor to the *Theatrum Vitae Humanae*. See Forshaw, 2003, v. 2, p. 511. There has been some debate as to whether "Hanoviae" denotes the town of Hanau or Hannover. On this note see Eco (1989); Forshaw, 2003, v. 2, p. 9; and Szulakowska, 2000, p. 103. I am here following the bibliographical tradition, which refers to Hanau.
8. I borrow the term "dissemblance" from art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, who uses the term in his study of the work of Fra Angelico to describe and interpret the way in which painted marble surfaces both resemble and dissemble real marble. His claim is that the aspect of dissemblance acted as an index of another world (i.e., the divine incarnated in earthly matter) (1995).
9. For an expansion of this argument, I refer to my Ph.D. thesis (de Bruijn, 2010), which was completed after this essay was written, and which enters into greater detail regarding Khunrath's work. See my chapter 2: "From Text to Theatre: Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595, 1609) and the Spectacle of Reading," pp. 82–145.

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