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### A unit of luminous flux: Mario Botta's Centre Dürrenmatt, Neuchâtel

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# A unit of luminous flux: Mario Botta's Centre Dürrenmatt, Neuchâtel

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This paper examines the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel (CDN), which opened in 2000, as the site of a 'dialogue' between the ideas and practice of Switzerland's best-known Italian-speaking architect and designer, Mario Botta (1943–), and the country's best-known German-speaking playwright, Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921–1990). The CDN becomes a double portrait of two Swiss artists, separated by *parole* but not *Sprache*. Both felt peripheral to Swiss society, yet each was a product of the cantonal principle of strong regionalism aerated by the Federation's facilitation of cosmopolitanism aligned in an environmental ecology that literally and figuratively mixed their respective media: the concrete for the ephemeral (Dürrenmatt) and luminous fluidity for the concrete (Botta).

The central thesis is that the CDN inducts the visitor in a role of active participation and exchange in an atmosphere of transcendental logic and, ultimately, however ironically, optimism. A visitor to the CDN becomes part of a theatrical event in which two actors — one dead, one alive — communicate in physical terms about the metaphysical environment, the relationship between the scenographic and the tectonic, the architecture of the interior. Dürrenmatt, at once Aristotelian, reckless, immoderate, romantic, outraged, engages Botta, a Neo-Rationalist who cannot disguise his passion; a rationalist who honours intuition alongside reason.

## Introduction

The seed for this essay was planted several years ago when I visited the then recently opened Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel (CDN) in Switzerland. The centre was built (1992–2000) with funds provided by the federal Swiss Literary Society. Exhibits and conferences related to the work of the world-renowned author and playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt (Fig. 1) are housed in a building by the Ticinese architect Mario Botta,<sup>1</sup> which exceeds its practical function by providing a double portrait of the two men. Botta had met the author several times and admired him deeply. Word of Dürrenmatt's death in 1990 prompted Botta to sketch plans for a tribute

even before contacting Charlotte Kerr, Dürrenmatt's second wife and director of the building project.

The essay focuses on the material and symbolic worlds created by Dürrenmatt and Botta to maintain and to promote their particular world views, and examines the ways in which their expressive media and autobiographical ideas are by turns harmonious and contradictory. Rather than taking a literary or architectural critical approach, with their emphases on quantities of formal, motivational or chronological knowledge, my approach is impressionistic, interpretive and speculative according to the nature of the persons and the edifice, in the light of certain themes that help to illuminate the material.

Figure 1. Self portrait  
 by Friedrich  
 Dürrenmatt.  
 (Copyright: Charlotte  
 Kerr.)



The first of these themes is the idea of performance and the heightened self-consciousness — both in a deeply philosophical sense, and in the common meaning of becoming aware of how one appears in the eyes of others. Performance is related to the stage, which is both a diffuse 'natural' condition of existence, and a purposeful contrivance. The human body which transmits and expresses this performance is a central metaphor for both Dürrenmatt and Botta. Performance is also connected to the passive and active ways in which both Botta and Dürrenmatt are on display at the CDN. One of Dürrenmatt's themes in his essays, criticism and stage plays is the awareness of watching and being watched. In one of his

collections of essays, *Versuche*, Dürrenmatt relates how he often turns his telescope on to the sightseers who are watching his house through their binoculars down on the promenade in Neuchâtel and follows this up with a disquisition on how we are all being watched — as we watch others — in a computer-ridden world.<sup>2</sup>

The question of performance blends with a second theme. The production of an exhibition is more akin to the production of a theatre piece than any other form of story-telling. Like theatre, exhibitions are formed by a group of people, or in this case by a single person — Botta — whose highly individualised vision and style reveals Dürrenmatt through a tightly focused lens that shows the visitor Botta's particular point of view. Exhibition design, strategies and installation are quite apart from exhibition content and it is interesting to consider the ways in which these two men — stylistically worlds apart — coalesce in a single theatrical experience. The architectural language of exhibition uses Botta's dialect, characterised by rigorous, stoic, astringent control, and Dürrenmatt's, which can only be described as extravagant. For both of them the stage was central as a *genius loci* of the unities of time, place and action. They create both for and with the stage.

Finally, a third theme: interrelationships between these two men, who each felt himself to be alien to mainstream Swiss culture, if there can be such a thing in this federation of cantons whose regional cultures reflect their geographic isolation from one another. While at odds with one another stylistically, they were both deeply ethical in their motivation, and shared political and world views. Perhaps the most interesting of these interactions is a purely



### The Midway

The word 'midway' refers to the middle course of an action or thought. It is also the area of a fair, a carnival, a circus, or an exhibition where sideshows and other amusements are located. Dürrenmatt wrote: '... the event depicted (in a play)...often starts out right *in the middle* ...'<sup>3</sup> and so it is with our visit to the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel. Our arrival in Neuchâtel is just as prescribed in the stage notes of *The Visit*, Dürrenmatt's 1965 play about the economic basis of morality which established him as a major presence on the world literary scene.<sup>4</sup> The play opens with four people (Gülleners) sitting on a bench outside the station, watching the express trains roaring past. Güllen, the town in which the story is set, is a thinly veiled reference to the lakeside town of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, a small city near the French border. In the story, trains never stop here, but on this day an exception has been made and a stop has been scheduled. The four Gülleners (güllen is local vernacular for dung)<sup>5</sup> sit on the bench discussing the event that is soon to occur and the hopes they have for it.

Figure 2. *Labyrinth I: Der entwürdigte Minotaurus* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt; Gouache, 1962. (©Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel/Swiss Confederation.)

speculative one. There is a predictable unity and almost solipsistic remoteness to Botta's design which is starkly opposite to Dürrenmatt's messy vitality. A major theme in Dürrenmatt's work is the *Minotaur and the Labyrinth* (Fig. 2). In Dürrenmatt's mythology, the Minotaur was conceptualised not as a fearsome, destructive creature, but as an innocent unjustly trapped in an isolated, incomprehensible prison. While the Centre Dürrenmatt is not particularly labyrinthine, one can imagine the Minotaur (Dürrenmatt) having some ambivalence toward the efforts of any Daedalus (Botta) to capture him in a permanent stage.

Today we are here not to conspire in murder for profit as are the characters in the Dürrenmatt play. We are here instead to make our way to the author's home situated in a paradoxical valley on the mountain, high above Neuchâtel, to see an exhibition of Dürrenmatt's drawings and paintings in a purpose-built exhibition pavilion designed by Mario Botta incorporating the playwright's home. Our train pulls into Neuchâtel at 700 metres (2,300 feet) on the 1,087 metres (3,566 feet) slope of Chaumont, a steep ridge in the Juras.<sup>6</sup> Windswept, privately minded villages, nurse a weather-beaten

Figure 3. Exterior view from the Vallon de l'Ermitage. (Source: author.)

Galic culture, cut off for centuries from both France and Switzerland, by rounded hilltops and deep parallel valleys. For a Rabelaisian like Dürrenmatt, this locale marks not only a linguistic but also a gastronomic divide. This is the 'Röstigraben' — literally, the ditch of the Swiss Röstli, a version of home-fried potatoes which is close to being their national home dish.<sup>7</sup>

The landscape of Chaumont throws the architectural visitor into a poetic dilemma. A decision must be made: to ascend or to descend? Like the tectonic plates that shaped the topography of the region, elevation and sub-duction coexist in Neuchâtel. This condition of inversion and exchange runs through every aspect of the town, and, as we shall see, runs as well through the relationship between Dürrenmatt and Botta. If we wish to dip our toes in the icy glacial waters of the Lac de Neuchâtel or to visit the university or any of the numerous museums or wine cellars in the city, a subterranean gondola deposits us far down the slope. We become underground aerialists.<sup>8</sup> If instead we journey directly up to the Centre Dürrenmatt, at Vallon de l'Ermitage, the mountain valley half way further up the side of Chaumont, we must make our way through the Old Town — remnants of twelfth-century Neuchâtel. Dürrenmatt described it as buried by a 'stone carpet of towers and walls.'<sup>9</sup> Ascending the steep and seemingly endless series of narrow stairways which run between shops and domiciles, we are provided with glimpses into small verandahs behind iron gates and glances through lace-covered or partially shuttered windows. The major outline of the development of the theatrical stage comes to mind: the temporality of a procession or pageant on the way to the



permanence of a stage. The physical exertion required by the climb begins to make the ascent feel like a pilgrimage on a Sacre Monte. This is the manner in which the impression of the Centre Dürrenmatt accrues: with the imprint of a thousand steps experienced over time and communally — no accident, considering that for both the architect (Botta) and the playwright (Dürrenmatt) active participation as opposed to passive spectatorship was key.

The amount of extra oxygen required by muscle tissue during recovery from vigorous exercise leaves us searching for the reward of the effort. Our physical need is answered by the sight of an industrial-scaled ventilation pipe (Fig. 3). A black slate wall provides the background to the pipe. These are the first parts of a vertically arranged and mostly subterranean Centre Dürrenmatt (Fig. 4). The ventilation pipe can be seen as a

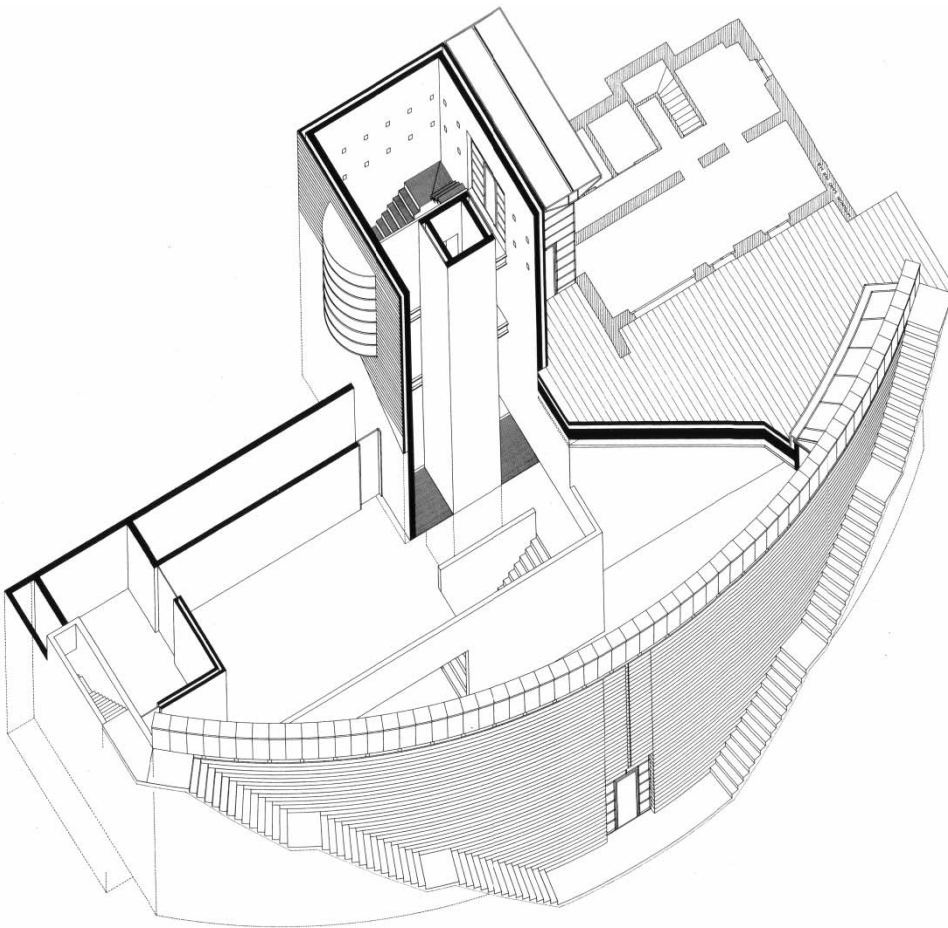


Figure 4. Axonometric projection. (Source: Mario Botta Architetto.)

lumen. In anatomy, the lumen is the tube that connects the mouth to the digestive tract through which raw material is incorporated and digested, where enzymes expose substrates which create the

generative dynamics of the relationship between opposites. In physics, the term lumen refers to a unit of luminous flux. Both definitions signal to the visitor that like so many of Dürrenmatt's characters,

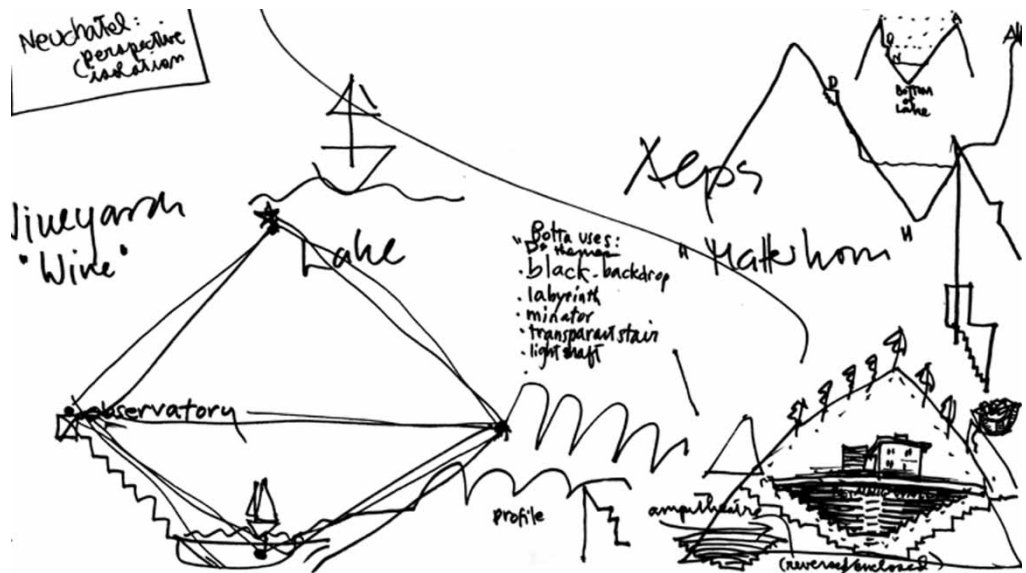


Figure 5. Site studies and notes. (Source: author.)

we will be ingested and descend, like a bollus of food, or a unit of light energy, physically and metaphorically, through a literal and metaphorical interior.

### *Swallowing/breathing*

The Centre is made up of three parts: an orthogonal prism-like circulation tower; an arched exhibition hall, the top of which serves as a large balcony; and the first of Dürrenmatt's two houses, including a swimming pool. We enter the building on a bridge which connects Dürrenmatt's old house and the tower. This entry at the horizontal and vertical centre of the 'stage' parallels our arrival mid-slope when we disembarked from the train mid-way between the water and Dürrenmatt's 'lost crater'

as he referred to his mountain valley (Fig. 5).<sup>10</sup> The small mouth of a lobby receives us. What becomes important is the process of entering, of moving from the outside to the inside, of moving down to the lower part where the precious drawings are kept. Botta's CDN will swallow us in much the same way that it incorporates, like a phagocyte, the house in which Dürrenmatt lived and worked for the last thirty years of his life. In 1952 he moved with his first wife Lotti Geissler (1922–1983) and his three children to the house which he describes as the 'ugliest house in the region when he bought it'.<sup>11</sup> The location at the top of Vallon de l'Ermitage was remote, which suited his temperament perfectly, and it provided a

spectacular view over the Lac de Neuchâtel to the distant Alps.<sup>12</sup> Over the years, Dürrenmatt cultivated a large garden over and over again by planting trees which became a part of the forest. Dürrenmatt was a Swiss-German in a French majority. He lived almost completely apart from the life of the town here — in a house that, like the man, imposed upon a cultural and geological landscape.

Dürrenmatt's theatrical and mythological leitmotifs are staged in this building which, in plan, looks like nothing so much as an ancient Greek stage: semicircular, built on the side of a hill, high tiers of seats, open to the air. Dürrenmatt's original house is one of the flanking ramps, with the skene, proscenium and orchestra found in Botta's entry core of the new building. In elevation, the relationship of the parts is inverted: the orchestra still commands as the centre with 'the house' delineated by the elevation lines of the downward slope of Chaumont.

Once inside the Centre we find a cloakroom, a small kitchen and part of Dürrenmatt's library. We walk several steps to our right, passing from the house into the circulation tower of the new building. A receptionist sits at the top of the stairway. The stark light coming in from the skylights at the top of the tower casts deep shadows on her features. Sensory metaphors sweep us to the stairs as we start to descend underground, where so many of Dürrenmatt's characters go, both physically and metaphorically.<sup>13</sup> The light in this well signals that we — unlike most of Dürrenmatt's characters — can return to the surface, enlightened by what we have experienced. We will not be trapped forever in ignorance or error like Dürrenmatt's Minotaur, who stares at the reflective walls of



Figure 6. Interior view of the staircase.  
(Source: author.)

his maze trying to fathom what is real while succumbing to illusion. Then we are led via the spacious stainless steel staircase, Escher-like in its movement, like the flooring and like an exterior fire escape, to the next level down (Fig. 6). The tower carries light — through the skylights — right down to the bottom level.<sup>14</sup> We are going from the light into Dürrenmatt's creative darkness as it lives in the metabolic system. The interplay of light and darkness is a creative activity that takes place continually, literally and figuratively, in both Botta's and Dürrenmatt's work.<sup>15</sup> In Dürrenmatt's metaphorical language, lightness and dark give impulse for growth and development. It is an interrelationship that is never fixed, but always hanging. Darkness is first, all-enveloping, formless, with no centre or circumference; is suspiration or breath, referenced by the ventilation tower we first encounter as we approach the Centre.

Figure 7. View towards the Alps from the terrace. (Source: author.)

There is nothing on display in the stairwell except for Dürrenmatt's literary aphorisms presented in white neon tubes on the white plaster wall. In Dürrenmatt's early staged works he included many sensational effects, scene changes, and written 'titles' flashed before each scene. Botta's characteristic hand-crafted approach to detail means that the white plaster becomes *stucco lucido*, containing microscopic particles of light-reflecting material.<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the corporeal likeness of the building and its subject, the stairway in the tower can also be seen as the alimentary canal. Eating was for Dürrenmatt a positive, life-affirming, hedonistic act. The author himself was a *gourmand* for whom cooking was a serious hobby. However, the processes of eating and digestion were for Dürrenmatt, also a lifelong *gourmet*, compromised by his diabetes. Therefore he indulged much of his *Schlemmereitrieb* vicariously through his fictional characters. Bärlach in *The Judge and his Hangman*; Traps and the lawyers in *Traps (Die Panne)*; Romulus in *Romulus the Great*; Möbius, Newton and Einstein in *The Physicists* are among Dürrenmatt's famous life-affirming eaters. Of course, some of these eaters were cannibals, so their victims certainly wouldn't describe them thus! Digestion in Dürrenmatt's work stands for experience entering the mind as a basic nutriment for the creative process, and then converted by imagination into something else entirely.<sup>17</sup>

On the entrance on the second level down, we find a small café with an adjoining book shop, and an astonishing first glimpse of Dürrenmatt's painted works inside a small water closet, original to the house, and on a terrace. The entire interior



surface of the water closet was painted by Dürrenmatt. Painting the rooms in his various homes from floor to ceiling was something he always did.<sup>18</sup> A woman straddles the water tank, the walls are crowded with characters staring at any occupant who can tolerate the intensity of this crush of personas — alternately amusing and intimidating — in the confines of an already claustrophobically small room. The message seems to be: discharge copiously or forcibly or not at all!

The terrace offers a sensational view across the Lac de Neuchâtel into the distance.<sup>19</sup> The terrace is the element that links the landscape to the tower and the old house, and follows one of Botta's principles which renders exterior terraces in such a way as to fuse with interior volumes. Botta considers the terrace to be an empty space with a cosmic view of the sky and the earth (Figs 7 and 8). He writes: 'It is the public space... It's like a rather metaphysical stage setting, because it's empty. And the visitor becomes the protagonist.'<sup>20</sup> The terrace

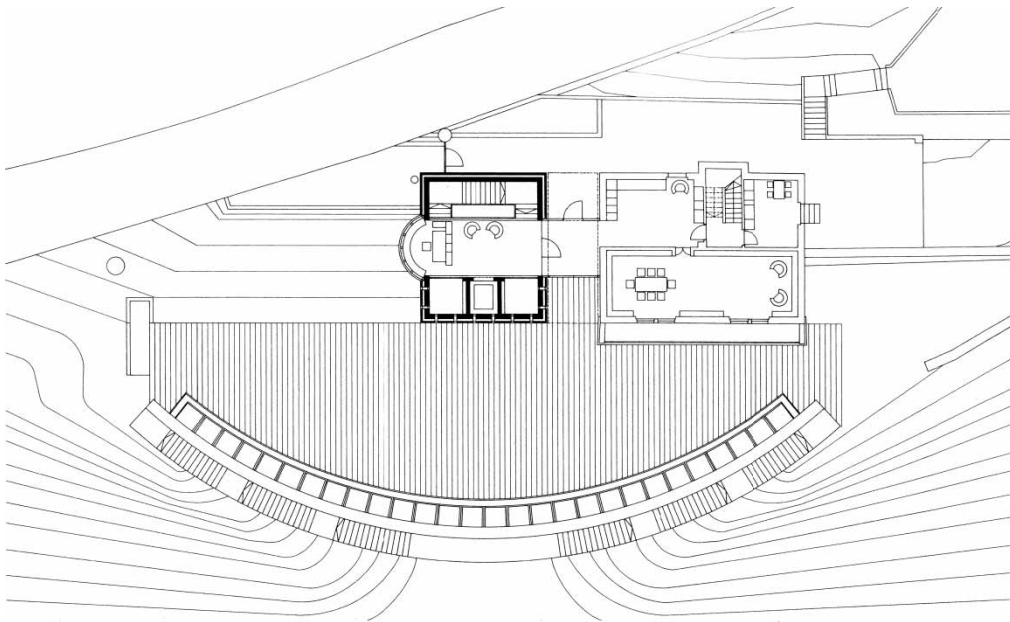


Figure 8. Floor plan  
+0.00. (Source: Mario  
Botta Architetto.)

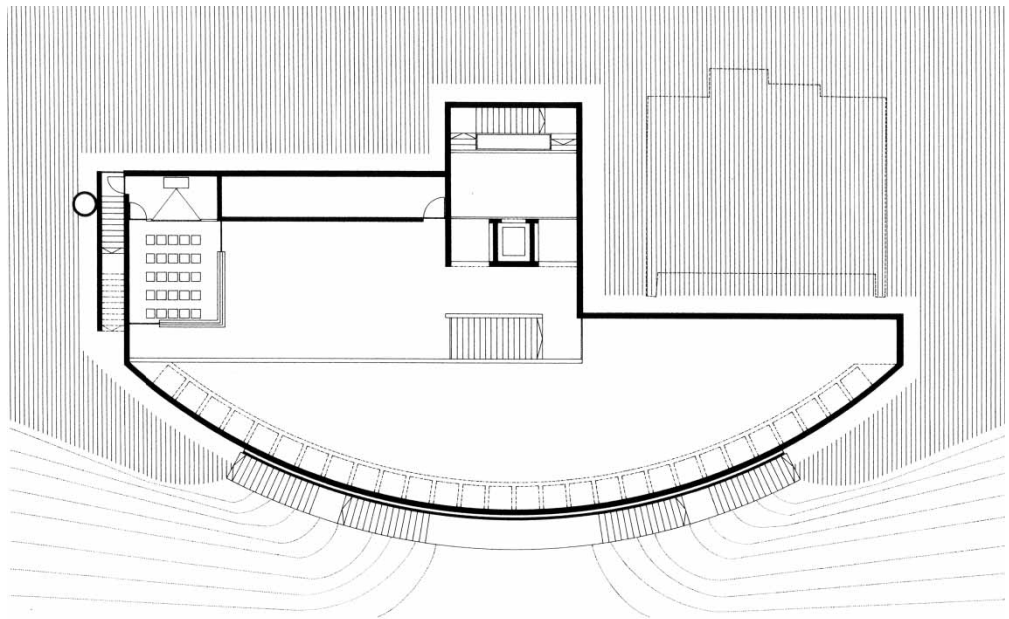
was already there, although it was smaller and more modest, outside the old house. Dürrenmatt always thought that this balcony overlooking the lake was very beautiful.<sup>21</sup> Anatomically, one can see the terrace railing as being like a belt drawn in too tightly around the belly of a corpulent man. Dürrenmatt was a physically imposing man at almost 2 metres (6'4") tall and over 100 kilograms (225 pounds) in weight; he smoked cigars despite the heart disease to which he succumbed just short of his seventieth birthday.

Coming back in from the terrace we continue our descent to an interior loggia, part of the new building. Here we find photographs linked to

Dürrenmatt's life, a mural-sized collage that Dürrenmatt made for the theatre and maquettes of stage sets; also, a darkened screening room in which an interview with Dürrenmatt conducted by Charlotte Kerr, his second wife, plays on a repeating loop. The only furniture in this section of the complex are Botta's own iconic *Seconda* chairs (1982) which are as challenging conceptually as they are uncomfortable.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, we descend the last flight of stairs and arrive in the large empty volume of the 'belly,' as Botta refers to the main exhibition space (Fig. 9). This double-height camera or room, around 35 metres (115 feet) across and 7 metres (23 feet)

Figure 9. Floor plan -  
 6.70. (Source: Mario  
 Botta Architetto.)



high, is partially embedded in the earth. Here, double-height galleries are situated, the terrace illuminated somatically by apertures on the perimeter of the terrace above. The light through these pores creates an ever-changing pattern of streaks and diffuse areas of light and dark that move across the curving wall and the floor as the clouds outside reveal and obscure the sun (Fig. 10). The light has a specific source, radiating from the centre to the circumference, pushing aside darkness. The peculiar feature of Dürrenmatt's style of drama resides in the vital pleasure he displays in things comical and grotesque set against the dark background of the world.

Dürrenmatt, who died on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1990, drew and painted throughout his life. His output was prolific. He always considered his drawing and painting activities to be 'associative', an integral part of his work. His first major intellectual decision was whether to take up painting or writing: 'Es was die Lösung irgenwie meines Dilemmas zwischen Malen und Schreiben.'<sup>23</sup> About his oil painting and gouaches, Dürrenmatt said: 'I'm not a painter. Technically, I paint like a child. But I don't think like a child. I paint for the same reason that I write, because I think.' Botta 'understood Dürrenmatt more through his drawings and his artistic endeavours than through his literature', which he always read in translation.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 10. Under-ground exhibition hall illuminated by skylights on the terrace. (Source: author.)

For the CDN exhibition, Botta expanded strategies he had used in a small exhibition of Dürrenmatt's work in 1993–4 at the Kunsthaus in Zürich. Stage left is filled with Dürrenmatt's drawings, lithographs

and engravings of political themes. Stage right contains paintings of great themes of religion displayed free-standing, like sculpture, on small iron pedestals. In between we find gouaches of Dürrenmatt's most

personal theme: the Labyrinth and the Minotaur.<sup>25</sup> Centre stage is dominated by a black frame of enormous proportions, within which one very small painting, *The Bankers*, is displayed. About this painting, Botta writes: '...in my opinion [*The Bankers*] summarises the political programme of all Dürrenmatt's paintings.'<sup>26</sup>

Botta calls the enormous black frame a 'screen' because of its duty as visual and physical disguise for an emergency exit door at the centre of the curved exhibition wall. This dam-like retaining wall of the belly is an over-scaled architectural element covered with glossy black plaster. The 'screen' resembles the interior of an enormous telescoping bellows on a large-format view camera and as such seems an appropriate metaphor for Botta's tightly-focused lens that shows the visitor a particular point of view.<sup>27</sup> The 'screen' also looks like the inside of a ziggurat, and, further still, like a simplified maze or labyrinth. This 'screen' holds in the energy of the room — an introverted space whose inside needs no interference from the outside. The screened door might offer a pore or escape valve for the visual intensity of the artwork.

The exit door and its dissimulation is enigmatic because of the striking treatment of the door on the building's exterior, a view which is withheld from the visitor. If we were allowed to exit we would see the dash-marked vector of human metabolism with the door as the final exit. Through this door we would be able to appreciate what Botta has celebrated: a grassy, sloping landscape into which the belly is implanted and from which it protrudes. We would also be able to enjoy the area where Dürrenmatt cultivated his 'labyrinthine' gardens.

It is a matter of record that Dürrenmatt's pictorial vision was influenced by the Swiss Jean Varlin (né Guggenheim) about whom Dürrenmatt wrote several essays. The playwright especially admired Varlin's sturdy independence, both in art and in politics. But Dürrenmatt's work also paralleled something of the intensity and scorching black humour and emotion found in the paintings and graphic works of George Grosz (1893 –1956). Grosz was one of the leading figures in the movement called *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new realism) or 'New Objectivity',<sup>28</sup> Grosz's vehement form of realism distorted appearances to emphasise the ugly, as ugliness was the reality he wished to expose. This art was raw, provocative and harshly satirical.

Outside stairs flank and accentuate the expanse of the curve, resembling routes to the great ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia, one of which was in Babylon, another great theme of Dürrenmatt. Botta's usual schema is one in which buildings are never simply contoured into a site, but instead declare themselves as clear primary forms set against the topography and the sky. The only exceptions to this are cases where he adds to an existing building by digging below ground. The CDN is one such. The view of it is largely hidden. Our experience is, therefore, physical, not visual. It is underground architecture. Botta thought that building underground was especially appropriate here, because: 'There are no façades. It is a hypogeal space. He [Dürrenmatt] is a writer that explores the human soul. This is why I felt that the idea of burying into the ground was right.'<sup>29</sup>

The yellow of the Neuchâtel sandstone which composed the hull of Dürrenmatt's house matches

his irascibility, like the yellow bile of mediaeval physiology. Botta's CDN grows out and around this house, which he purified from a bilious yellow to a white cubic volume. Botta's additions are clad in grey ten-centimetre-thick (4-inch) slate — an anthracite or non-volatile carbon that burns with a clean light — with dichromatic cladding, a primary element of Botta's decorative vocabulary, the acknowledged source of which is the Romanesque Pisa Cathedral (begun c. 1063, to 1350). An earlier and perhaps more significant predecessor is exemplified by the Great Mosque of Cordoba (785 – c. 1000) in the Moorish tradition, in which a multitude of round arches made of alternating black and white stones mark out an arresting graphic diagram of movement. Chromatic striation is also typical of nineteenth century Ticinese masonry.

Most of Botta's buildings can be said to follow a principle of standing forth from the surrounding landscape, just as Dürrenmatt wants his work to stand out against the (darkness) of life. Dürrenmatt shows humanity's actions somehow disengaged from the gravity of earth, in a light in which the lines are more distinct and less blurred, and in which the forms rise in clean contrast from the background.<sup>30</sup> Interesting, then, is the fact that in the CDN Botta reverses his usual inclination towards a strong building profile. Botta and Dürrenmatt each mine for the unchanging condition of humanity, combining the past, present and future in an active continuum and not presenting artifacts without temporal depth or associative perspective. For Dürrenmatt, the stage was 'not a battle field for theories, philosophies, and manifesto, but rather an instrument whose possibilities I seek to know by playing

with it... My plays are not for what people have to say: what is said is there because my plays deal with people, and thinking and believing and philosophising are all, to some extent at least, a part of human behaviour.'<sup>31</sup> There exists in the *oeuvres* of both Botta and Dürrenmatt something akin to conservation of matter. For both, themes are recycled and recombined; metaphors reappear often enough to be considered leitmotifs.<sup>32</sup> Botta's moves to abandon the stone of his early building to try out 'common' materials, like his use of lightweight concrete blocks, are paralleled in Dürrenmatt's ideas of necessary expulsion and of waste material, as necessary parts of the metabolic process and necessary components of new growth.<sup>33</sup> The architect's intention seems to have been to show that new beauty can be created from the waste materials of industrial society.<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion

The enduring strength of both theatre and architecture are essential elements of the experience of the CDN — its physical presence and the power of the relationship between living spectator and living performer, set within the boundaries of a specific physical framework. For Botta, the strength of architecture also lies in its ability to use finite elements to talk about other things, as in 'architecture is rather like painting.'<sup>35</sup> For Dürrenmatt 'the task of art, insofar as art can have a task at all, and hence also the task of drama today is to create something concrete, something that has form.'<sup>36</sup>

Botta claims that the foundation of good architecture is ethical even before it is aesthetic. Persistent in his effort to create beauty in architecture out of

elementary relationships without cynicism, Botta has always sought a sensual and earthbound architecture: an architecture compounded of enclosures, an architecture laid into the earth and vegetation, an architecture that has feeling for rooted and mythic beginnings. Similar feelings and concerns are evident in Dürrenmatt's excavation to the centre of his soul. Both exploit the power of substrates to dissolve and to expose, to communicate directly, to act on the barrier between speculation and participation. Dürrenmatt would make the concrete out of ephemera, while Botta would exchange the solidity of building materials for luminous fluidity. Dürrenmatt wrote: 'The real pessimism is the inability or unwillingness to face things as they are.'<sup>37</sup> Botta as well challenges pessimism in the contemporary critique of architecture 'as widespread as it is unjustified — which denies the possibility of constructing quality buildings in this "bad" age of ours.'<sup>38</sup> A visitor to the CDN becomes part of a theatrical event in which two actors — one dead, one alive — communicated in physical terms about the metaphysical environment, the relationship between the scenographic and the tectonic, the architecture of the interior.

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### Notes and references

1. A parson's son and an atheist, Dürrenmatt wrote with a passion for justice and attacked many of the sacred cows of modern society, but never won the Nobel Prize some felt he deserved. Dürrenmatt was much more than the regional author that he was once considered to be, certainly in comparison with his compatriot Max Frisch, who left Switzerland to live abroad.

2. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Versuche* (Zürich, Diogenes-Verlag, 1988), p. 15.
3. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 'Problems of the Theatre', *Tulane Drama Review*, 3, no. 1 (October, 1958), p. 19. This version of 'Problems of the Theatre' was prepared for publication (Zurich, Verlag der Arche, 1955) and translated by Gerhard Nellhaus, from the manuscript of a lecture delivered by Friedrich Dürrenmatt in the Autumn of 1954 and the Spring of 1955 in different cities of Switzerland and West Germany.
4. In German, *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, regarded by many to be his finest play and one of the most frequently performed; a huge success on Broadway as well as in Germany. He won two awards for it: the Grillparzer-Prize, Austria Academy of Science, 1968 and the Grosse Schiller-Prize, Swiss Foundation, 1969. The play in effect has three major characters: the old lady, Claire Zachanassian; her former lover and object of her ruthless justice, Alfred Ill; and the people of the town of Gullen, who make up a kind of composite representation of society itself.
5. The name Gullen is from Gulle, a Swiss dialect word meaning 'fermented cattle urine' or 'liquid manure'.
6. The town actually has two names: Neuchâtel and Neuenburg; and two official languages: French and German.
7. Röstigraben is the Swiss German expression for the cultural and linguistic divides between the German and French parts of Switzerland. This term was born from the political tensions and the rise of nationalisms that Switzerland lived through in the context of World War I. Basically, potatoes are grated and then grated again before being passed to the frying pan; you can have the Rösti Bernois (potatoes alone), Rösti with bacon and Jurassic Rösti with bacon and cheese.
8. *Fun'ambule* (tightrope walker) is the world's first endless rope haulage system to link the lower part of the town, near the University, to the railway station on the upper part, made possible by the Swiss Expo 2002.
9. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 'Vallon de l'Ermitage' in *Versuche*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–56; first published in the *La Revue Neuchâteloise* (Winter, 1980/81).
10. Dürrenmatt's idea of the lost crater can be referenced in *Der Tunnel* written in 1952: one of the best-known and most anthologised of the early prose works. About twenty minutes out from Bern on the railway line to Zürich, which Dürrenmatt took almost every weekend during this year at the University of Zürich, lies a short tunnel. This once, however, inexplicably, the tunnel does not end. Instead the train full of passengers is sent careening towards the centre of the earth.
11. Peter Erismann, *Mario Botta: Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel* (Basel, Birkhäuser, 2000), pp. 21–22. The house was a yellow cube with a flat roof and known as being the first such in Neuchâtel.
12. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 'Vallon de l'Ermitage' in *Versuche*, *op. cit.*, p.16. Kenneth Whitton notes in his radio play *Episode on an Autumn Evening (Abendstunde im Spätherbst, 1959)* that Korbes's house is an exact replica of Dürrenmatt's house in Neuchâtel. Even the most-photographed and -climbed mountain of the Alps, the Matterhorn, is also visible from an aerial distance of 130 kilometres (80 miles).
13. Dürrenmatt's labyrinthine subterranean prisons occur in the early narrative *The City*; in the tunnel in the existentialist narrative of the same name; in the black caves in which the *Winter War in Tibet* is being fought; in the dungeon in which the monster Polyphemus hunts the female journalist F; in the narrative *The Assignment*; in the sub-basement in which 'Doc' works for the Mob in *The Collaborator*; and in the dungeon in which Abu Chanifa and Anan ben David languish for years before their release and reconciliation.
14. Peter Erismann, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

15. Adam Hubertus, 'Museum in Hanglage: Mario Botta: Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel, 1992–2000', *Archithese*, 31, no. 1 (January-February, 2001), pp. 16–19.
16. *Stucco lucido* is plaster mixed with grains of light-reflective material.
17. As a poor student in Zürich, Dürrenmatt would starve all week, then take the train home to Bern so that he could eat well, if only at the weekend. As a struggling newlywed playwright, theatre critic and cabaret sketch writer before his first big break, with the detective novel *The Judge and his Hangman*, Dürrenmatt was literally a starving artist. When he finally could afford to eat well, it remained a lifelong passion mirrored again and again in his writings.
18. Peter Wyrsch, 'Die Dürrenmatt-Story', *Schweizer Illustrierte Zeitung* (18th and 23rd March, and 1st, 7th, 15th and 22nd April, 1963; all on pp. 23–5, except 15th and 22nd April, on pp. 37–9). *Die Stadt* (The City, 1952) is told in the first person, who is described as a hungry young painter with an absurd life and a room in the eastern suburb, whose walls he had decorated from top to bottom. As his first wife, Lotti Dürrenmatt, told the Swiss public in an interview in 1963, he pictured a labyrinthine town full of strange, mysterious and unnamed people.
19. Peter Erismann, *op. cit.*, p. 86. In 2002, one could overlook the portion of the Swiss Expo located on Lake Neuchâtel and appreciate the UFO-like objects on the platform of the Neuchâtel arteplage (a neologism combining the French words for 'art' and 'beach'-shore), directly over the lake so that they could be dismantled later without leaving any trace, and speculate on Dürrenmatt's reception of the spectacle.
20. Peter Erismann, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 88. The reclusive Dürrenmatt was a 'self-made' astronomer and physicist, who spent a great many of his sleepless nights star-watching on the patio of his house.
22. Pierluigi Nicolin, *Mario Botta: Buildings and Projects 1961–1982* (New York, Rizzoli, 1984), p. 134. 'Designing a chair, like designing a house, means pursuing a new image capable of representing the needs of the day, capable of responding to contemporary sensitivity, capable of suggesting new hope. Even a chair becomes an opportunity for confrontation with our knowledge and, as always, in every project, it becomes a moment of awareness and verification of our problems, our doubts and our hopes.'
23. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Rollenspiele* (Zürich, Diogenes-Verlag, 1986), p. 86; see also Kenneth Whitton, *The Theatre of Friedrich Dürrenmatt: A Study in the Possibility of Freedom* (London, O. Wolff, 1980), p. 210. For a time in the early 1940s he tried to establish a career for himself in the graphic arts, but in the meantime he had begun writing and gradually reached the decision to make his living as a writer.
24. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 'Persönliche Anmerkung', *Dürrenmatt Bilder und Zeichnungen* (Zürich, Diogenes-Verlag, 1978; Peter Erismann, *op. cit.*, p. 82).
25. There are stories in *Stoffe I-III* and in *Turmbau* about Dürrenmatt's childhood, surrounded by the tall trees in the Emmenthaler woods. In the tales, and in his ballad *Minotaurus* and all the narratives that contain labyrinths, the author explains the origins of his fascination with the Minotaur theme, telling how he found the old town centre of arcades and plazas in Berne, where he lived for years before moving to Neuchâtel, to be a labyrinth.
26. Peter Erismann, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
27. The terminology *camera lucida* (Latin, 'light chamber') refers to an optical device used as an aid in drawing or copying, and here it is being used as an aid to the architectural grammar.
28. Dürrenmatt's last appreciative essay about Varlin can be found in *Versuche*, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–8; see also, Whitton, *The Theatre of Friedrich Dürrenmatt*, *op.*

- cit.*, pp. 213–14. The term *Neue Sachlichkeit* was coined in 1923 by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, former director of the Kunsthalle in Mannheim.
29. Peter Erismann, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
  30. Adolf D. Klarmann, 'Friedrich Dürrenmatt and the Tragic Sense of Comedy', *Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism*, Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver, eds (New York, Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 99–133; first published in the *Tulane Drama Review* (IV, 8).
  31. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 'Problems of the Theatre,' *op. cit.*, p. 19.
  32. Roger Crockett, *Understanding Friedrich Dürrenmatt* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 18.
  33. BKS is a Swiss German masonry company that produces Sichtmauersteine, which is lightweight concrete block made out of sand, and fine gravel with significant hydrogeological pores. It is produced in colour too.
  34. Mario Botta, *The Ethics of Building* (Basel, Birkhäuser, 1997), p. 17.
  35. Peter Erismann, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
  36. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 'Problems of the Theatre,' *op. cit.*, p. 19.
  37. Kurt Fickert, *To Heaven and Back: The New Morality in the Plays of Friedrich Dürrenmatt* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1972), p. 43.
  38. Mario Botta, *The Ethics of Building*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.