

Day at the Office, Night at the Opera with Karl Friedrich Schinkel

Kurt W. Forster

Karl Friedrich Schinkel did not become an architect, painter, and designer of stage sets by following a predictable career path. The son of a Protestant pastor in Neu-Ruppin whose widow moved her family to the city of Berlin in 1794, Schinkel grew up in somewhat unstable circumstances, and as he matured, began to lead a life of restless activity. At barely 17 years of age, he coaxed a self-portrait from his pen, a crude but compelling image of a rebellious youth. He proudly sealed his likeness with the classical formula “*Schinkel se ipse fecit*,” suggesting perhaps the more literal meaning, “Schinkel the man who made himself.” In retrospect, it may be claimed that he was truly a self-made man among his eminent contemporaries.

In the words of his earliest biographer Gustav Waagen, Schinkel’s restlessness was simply another manifestation of his dazzling versatility. Schinkel was originally drawn to architecture by a stirring experience: He discovered his “calling” through an encounter with a work by the young Friedrich Gilly (Fig. 1). It was an almost religious conversion, so intense as to move him to leave school prematurely and seek encouragement from his idol. Schinkel apprenticed himself to the Gillys, Friedrich and his father David, who together represented the best of two worlds: the elder Gilly, professor of architecture and a seasoned practitioner, no doubt assumed a paternal role *vis-à-vis* the young Schinkel, while his son Friedrich, recently returned from an extended sojourn in France, carried with him the new fervor of an architectural revolution-in-the-making.

Schinkel’s entry into a field for which he lacked both the social connections and the technical skills was no easy matter. However his

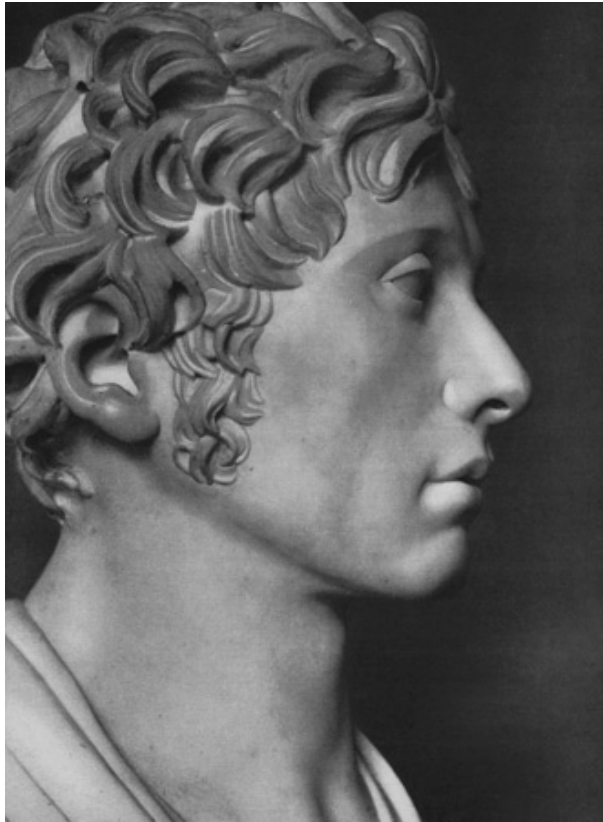


Fig. 1 Johann Gottfried Schadow. Bust of Friedrich Gilly, 1801. Marble, height 65 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

professional struggles were soon overshadowed by the loss of his mother and the fateful experience of Friedrich Gilly's own premature death in 1800. So bound up with the conduct of his life was the decision to become an architect that Schinkel sought from the beginning to turn architecture into the arena of his own exceptional capacities. Chief among them was a talent for poetic imagination.

During Schinkel's adolescence in Berlin, a circle of philosophers, poets, and literati began to envision a new purpose for works of poetry. They greatly expanded the category of the poetic, and in the process endowed it with a transcendent significance. Moving between Berlin salons and the university at Jena, the Schlegel brothers August and Friedrich, Novalis, and Ludwig Tieck all fell under the spell of the Berlin philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte before inaugurating their own arena of debate in the journals *Athenäum* and *Europa*. Here, Friedrich Schlegel not only spelled out the new "Romantic" concepts, but also named names: "The French Revolution, Fichte's doctrine of knowledge, and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* are the major tendencies of the age." Schinkel, too, had taken an interest in all of this: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* was the only book he carried along on his journey to Italy. After the War of Liberation, he worked in theater, pursuing a "*theatralische Sendung* (theatrical mission)" of his own. In this context, his unconventional rise as a "professional" gave testimony to new careers opening up in the wake of the French Revolution.

In their personal lives, the young Romantics turned the heady mixture of political enthusiasm and a newly felt power of the emotions from a purely literary program into something of a philosophy of existence. Theirs was a youthful literary movement, whose protagonists Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Tieck were all born within a few years of Schinkel. The premature death of Novalis in 1801 caused a rupture in this mingling of poetic and philosophical ideas akin to the loss Schinkel had experienced at the death of the equally youthful Friedrich Gilly.

As a consequence of Gilly's death, Schinkel assumed responsibility for the execution of some of his mentor's modest commissions, and then departed for Italy in order to round off his education. In 1804 he returned to Berlin by way of Paris, only to find himself trapped in most unpromising circumstances. The threat of French expansion was everywhere apparent, and in 1806, Prussia's hasty declaration of war against France brought



Fig. 2 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Panoramic View of Rome, With Rooftops in the Foreground*, c. 1803-04. Watercolor over base or underlying color, 33.1 x 52.6 cm. Schinkel Archive inventory 54.5



Fig. 3 Franz Ludwig Catel. *Karl Friedrich Schinkel (the Architect) in Naples*, 1824. Oil painting, 62 x 49 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

on a resounding defeat. With Napoleonic troops occupying Berlin, for nearly a decade the city offered almost no work for a fledgling architect, and Schinkel feared that his professional future would be further stalled by unfavorable circumstances. When Prussia regained its independence with the Congress of Vienna and the re-establishment of the new order of Europe in 1815, Schinkel had only 26 more years to live. Still, he was able to compress a lifetime's worth of building into the years between 1816 and 1840, assuming, in rapid succession, ever-larger responsibilities in the administration of public building projects, executing numerous commissions at home and abroad, teaching architecture in Berlin, and publishing his ever-expanding work.

Approximate as such a thumbnail sketch of Schinkel's career must be, it may help to recognize some of the conflicts that informed his life. For historical reasons, Schinkel's career was sharply divided between an early period of enforced inactivity in his chosen field, and a later phase of almost frantic professional practice; for psychological reasons, his life is marked by other, even more profound dualities. During Schinkel's lifetime, professionalism was on the rise, ushering in a new bourgeois era with its *Biedermeier* ideals of competence, industry, and growing *Standesbewusstsein* (class-consciousness). It was precisely within this class of professionals that Schinkel both found his destiny and experienced his personal and artistic hardships (Fig. 3). The conflict between his inventive capacities --- those of a free-spirited artist --- and his public responsibilities steadily increased and deepened. He even dared put his travails into words when he petitioned the head of the Prussian ministry of commerce and industry, Count von Bülow to be relieved of some of the more onerous duties of his office: "The sphere of art," Schinkel argued in 1821, "is the one that agrees with me, and it offers, in my view, such immense prospects that a single lifetime is far too short for its exploration. I am dismayed by the feeling that, under different circumstances, I should have been able to accomplish much more than I have, but, instead, I am torn apart by work that prevents me from following my true calling."

Because Schinkel had chosen to take up architecture as a *calling* rather than pursue it simply as a *profession*, he experienced this poignant conflict between his professional responsibilities and the demands of his art. Never less than a professional, he nonetheless longed to be an artist most of all, free to indulge his own imagination rather than accomplish



Fig. 4 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Self-portrait with his wife Suzanne, c. 1810-15. Watercolor and body color, 20.1 x 23.5 cm. Schinkel Archive inventory H.24



Fig. 5 Eduard Gaertner. *Panorama von Berlin vom Dach der Friedrichswerderschen Kirche*, 1834. Oil painting, 91 x 93 cm. Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Schinkel Pavillon



Fig. 6 Eduard Gaertner. *Panorama von Berlin vom Dach der Friedrichswerderschen Kirche*, 1834. Oil painting, 91 x 93 cm. Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Schinkel Pavillon

tasks set before him by others (Figs. 2 & 4). Whenever he expressed serious reservations about his own or anyone else's work, it was a lack of *Phantasie* or *Poesie* – a failure of imaginative or poetic capacity – that disturbed him most.

During Schinkel's lifetime, cities assumed a new importance as the capitals of modern nations and the centers of industry. From his mentor Friedrich Gilly Schinkel first came to know of the new urban *mise-en-scène* in Paris, and his own travels enabled him to gain first-hand impressions of Italian, French, and English cities (where in particular he became aware of the interventions of John Nash and others in London). As a consequence, in the brief span of a quarter century – a particularly short time span with respect to urban renovation projects – Schinkel managed to give new contours to the center of Berlin.

Climbing onto the roof of the Friedrich-Werder-Kirche in the heart of old Berlin, one would have done more than just pay a visit to one of

Schinkel's famous buildings. It would also have been possible to enjoy a spectacular view of the entire city from that vantage point. Just such a picture-in-the-round was painted by Schinkel's friend Eduard Gaertner (Fig. 5 & 6). So proud was Gaertner of his accomplishment that he planted himself on the roof and populated it with visitors enjoying a pastime that was much in vogue during this period, for towns had become something to see, objects of intense new attention, and the subjects of novel kinds of pictorial *representation*. No surprise, then, that there was more than one way to indulge this renewed interest in the townscape. While Gaertner chose a high perch from which to paint a panorama of Berlin, his contemporary Erdmann Hummel crouched in the nearby Lustgarten and investigated its reflections on the surface of a polished granite basin (Fig. 8 & 9). From the rooftop of the church one gained a comprehensive overview of the city, scanning each precinct and

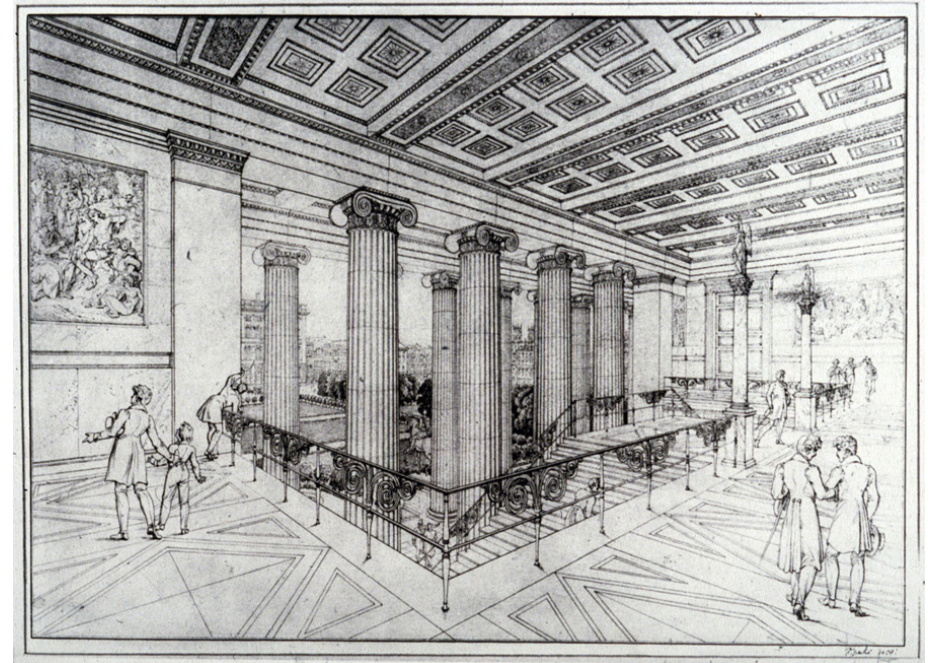


Fig. 7 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view of the upper vestibule, main staircase, and colonnade of the Altes Museum, with a view of the Lustgarten, 1831. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 13. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/ Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal



Fig. 8 Johann Erdmann Hummel. *The Granite Basin in the Lustgarten, Berlin, 1831*. Oil painting, 66 x 89 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Fig. 9 Detail of Johann Erdmann Hummel. *The Granite Basin in the Lustgarten, Berlin, 1831*



identifying with ease the landmarks of the Prussian capital. And on the curvature of the granite basin, the spectators saw themselves among the multiple reflections of their surroundings, as if they were gazing into a new kind of *speculum civitatis*.

Numerous were the structures Schinkel planned and built in the center of Berlin: his Friedrich-Werder-Kirche and his Altes Museum (Fig. 7) with the enormous granite basin were admired no less than the Neue Wache Unter den Linden, the renovated Dom and the new bridge linking Unter den Linden with the Schlossplatz. As the Friedrich-Werder-Kirche and Altes Museum stand within view of each other, Schinkel did not miss the opportunity to emphasize their rapport in the urban setting. In one of the most famous images of 19th-century architecture, which Schinkel exhibited even before the building itself had been completed, we glimpse the twin towers of the Friedrich-Werder-Kirche through the museum's majestic porticus (Fig. 10).

From the rooftop of the Werder-Kirche, one could also observe another prominent building which was then nearing completion: Schinkel's



Fig. 10 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. View of the Friedrich-Werder-Kirche, Berlin, 1825

Fig. 11 Detail: Eduard Gaertner. *Panorama von Berlin vom Dach der Friedrichswerderschen Kirche, 1834*. Oil painting, 91 x 93 cm. Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Schinkel Pavillon



Fig. 12 Eduard Gaertner. *Die Bauakademie, 1868*. Oil painting, 63 x 82 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



Bauakademie (Fig. 11 & 12). In 1836, he took up residence in its spacious upper floor, trading his narrow Berlin flat for a grand office and adjacent living quarters which enjoyed a view along the embankments of the river Spree. His final move to new quarters confirmed Schinkel's unique standing among Berlin architects, as director of the Prussian *Oberbaudeputation*, essentially the superintendency of all state-sponsored construction, and as director of the Bauakademie itself. The way Schinkel transformed Berlin into a modern city also reveals his exceptional talents as an urban scenographer. By the late 1830s, he had given new contours to the central island of the city, opened up extended vistas, and lending new cadence and character to major streets.

Some 30 years earlier, Schinkel had returned to Berlin from an extended sojourn in Italy. Penniless and without prospects of employment, he was



Fig. 13 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Panoramic von Palermo*, ca. 1808. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

in urgent need of commissions – any sort of commissions – to make ends meet. Not finding them in architecture, given the scarcity of construction on the eve of Napoleon's invasion of Prussian territories, and even less during the French occupation, Schinkel employed his talents as a painter and draftsman, making designs for ceramic ovens, cast iron ornament, and furniture. Above all, he exploited the fruits of his experience in Italy and France in the creation of popular window displays and panoramas (Fig. 13). Ephemeral as most of these efforts were, Schinkel's drawings and paintings have come down to us in fair number, telling the story of another potential career altogether, for it was this private wellspring he tapped for his imaginative work as a stage designer (Fig. 14). The particular qualities and limitations of his talent as a painter can be gauged by looking briefly at one of his canvasses of 1817: "The Spree near Stralau." (Fig. 15) For Schinkel, who practiced drawing and painting

almost daily and rarely dropped his pencil even at social gatherings, images held the key to the realm of the poetic. The word “*Fantasie*” had begun to appear everywhere, in the titles of stories, poems, musical compositions, and in captions to drawings and paintings. In these “*Fantasien*” or “*Fantasiestücke*,” poets abandoned merely descriptive tasks and soared above the familiar. This blurring of boundaries between genres, this infraction of rules about aesthetic thresholds drew encouragement from Friedrich Schlegel’s theories of the poetic. Schlegel ranked imagination ahead of reason, rejecting Kant’s notion of the work of art as a form of “understanding” or cognition in favor of artistic fantasy or imagination.

Instead of inscribing their works into the category of intelligible ideas, artists were to “fantasize the music of life.” Schlegel’s poetic ideas had their counterpart in Caspar David Friedrich’s painterly fantasies, and neither remained disembodied propositions for Schinkel. He and his associates pursued them along the borders that separate the various arts and genres. Why else would Schinkel have captioned one of his earliest experiments in lithography, precisely one of the mixed-media, “An essay to express the sweet melancholy, replete with yearning, which fills the heart upon hearing the sounds of worship ringing out from the church”?

For his painting of the banks of “The River Spree” at sunset, Schinkel sought out terrain that Caspar David Friedrich had already “cultivated” in his landscapes. Almost in the manner of variations on familiar musical themes, Schinkel gave a theatrical emphasis to the internalized *Stimmung* of Friedrich’s lyrical images. His transposition of the great painter’s imagery betrays more than the general conviction that “only things which stir the imagination” ought to be the subject of art. Schinkel eagerly responded to poetic ideas he had encountered in his adolescence. The young poet Novalis characterized poetry as “*Gemütsregungskunst*,” the art of stirring the soul and exciting the mind. What such poetry conjures forth is an inner image, an unheard-of music, the stuff of Novalis’s poetry: “moods, pictures, and visions.”

Painters, poets, and musicians aspired to create a common instrument that would enable them to trigger sounds by colors, to echo words in visionary images, and paint in musical tones and rhythms. This universal poetry Novalis believed “to consist in an active association of ideas – a spontaneous, intentional, ideal *Zufallsproduction* (production of

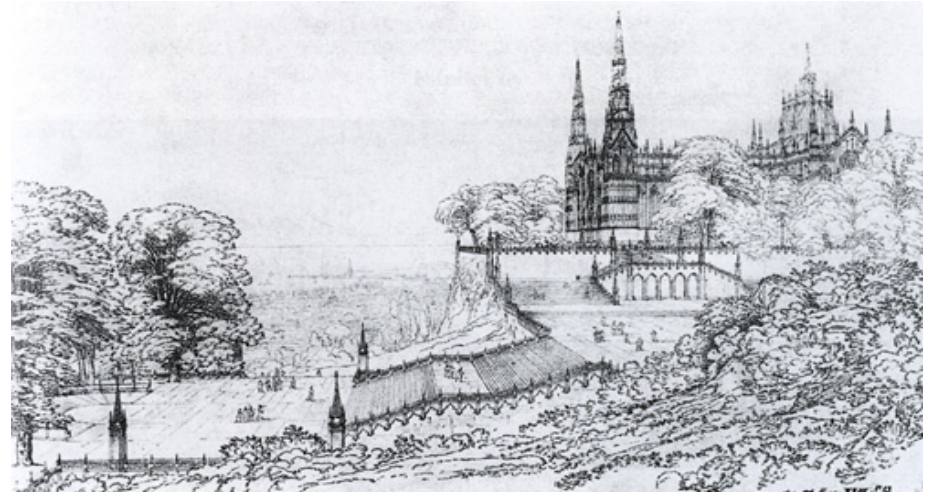


Fig. 14 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Design for a Theatre Set, a Cathedral on an Eminence Above a Large Town by the Sea*, after 1804. Pen and black and grey ink and pencil, 33.6 x 57.2 cm.



Fig. 15 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Banks of the Spree River near Stralau*, 1817. Oil painting, 36 x 44.5 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



Fig. 16 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Gothic Cathedral Behind a Massive Tree*, signed 1810. Lithograph, 48.7 x 34.3 cm. Schinkel Archive inventory 54.1



Fig. 17 Caspar David Friedrich. *Morning*, 1821. Oil painting, 22 x 30.5 cm. Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover

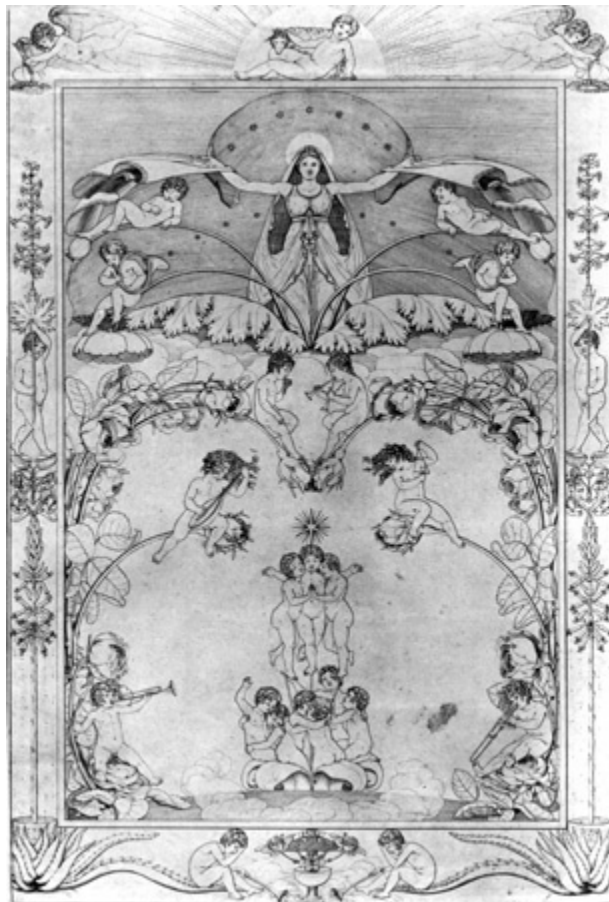


Fig. 18 Philipp Otto Runge. *Times of Day: Evening*, 1805. Copper engraving, 71.2 x 47.5 cm. Staatliches Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden

contingencies).” The most accomplished examples of this kind of evocative poetry came from Joseph von Eichendorff and Clemens Brentano, whose writings preceded pictorial attempts to realize its poetic potential. As *Stimmungsbilder*, or evocative images, the paintings of Philipp Otto Runge and Caspar David Friedrich (Fig. 17) established the models for this novel kind of picture. Like the young Romantic poets, who were the first to seek out the waning hours of the day, the penumbra and darkness of night, the floating mist and mysterious stillness of winter, Runge’s visionary etching of “Evening,” (Fig. 18 & 19) one of a cycle evoking the times of day and night, would ideally have been accompanied by music, so as to supplement its wispy lines with the sounds of precisely those instruments Runge included in his picture. As the light of day dies down and is eclipsed by the night, the far-off call of horns would have reverberated gently, as if light spent itself in sound before being silenced by darkness.

Listen: Carl Maria von Weber, “Oberon” overture, in which the “*Naturtöne* (natural sound)” and archaic temperament of the horn carry



Fig. 19 Detail of Philipp Otto Runge. *Times of Day: Evening*

an echo of yearning and loss, as Eichendorff recalled it in his poem “Sehnsucht”:

*Es schienen so golden die Sterne
Am Fenster ich einsam stand
Und hörte aus weiter Ferne
Ein Posthorn im stillen Land.*

*Das Herz mir im Leib entbrannte
Da hab ich mir heimlich gedacht:
Ach, wer da mitreisen könnte
In der prächtigen Sommernacht.*

Such a poem is not only incantatory, due to the utter simplicity of its diction (a simplicity which is precisely its artifice), but also has the power to transport readers to a distant region, to dis-locate them and set their minds wandering in unfamiliar directions, just as the travelers it describes respond to the coachman’s call. A vast number of poems and songs of this time turn on the idea of “*Wanderlust*” as an emotive state.

Listen: No surprise, then, that Robert Schumann captioned his “Fantasy in C-major,” (Op. 17) of 1839, with a motto from Friedrich Schlegel:



Fig. 20



Fig. 21 Andreas Nesselthaler. *Moonlit Landscape*, c. 1875. Transparent image with moon cut out. Oil on paper, 48 x 66.5 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

*Durch alle Töne tönet
Im bunten Erdentraum
Ein leiser Ton gezogen
Für den der heimlich lauschet*

[In the colors of an earthly dream
A quiet tone resounds
Heard only softly
By a secret listener.]

All poetic devices conspire to achieve a magic transposition, as a particular scene is simultaneously conjured up for the reader and held beyond his reach. One dreamy passage in a letter Novalis wrote to Schiller in October 1791 puts it quite well:

The beautiful scenery and a good-natured innocuousness... captivate me in the blossoming realms of fantasy which are surrounded by the same magic and mist as the distant landscape at my feet.



Fig. 22 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Perspective Study of Proposed Mausoleum for Queen Luise*, 1810. Pen and ink with watercolor on an underlying base color, 71.5 x 51.5 cm. Schinkel Archive inventory 54.3



Fig. 23 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. View of the Roman Bath in the Court Gardener's House, Schloss Charlottenhof Park, Potsdam, 1829-1832

This poetic magic has its own apparatus of imagery, its own techniques of diction, and finally, its own *Zufallsproduktion*. Today, its lingering power has become cliché, its legacy a form of *Kitsch* which is itself only the industrialized form of poetic invention. In his time, Schinkel experimented with his own methods of producing instant magic as a decorator of shop-windows and a designer of panoramas and other optical displays. By backlighting semi-transparent images and superposing diaphanous layers of scenery, Schinkel employed every trick of the trade in the creation of optical sensations. Technical craft was rendered invisible precisely because it proved indispensable to poetic effect. Naively persuasive sensations were produced with clever engineering, and became increasingly dependent on one another, to the point that their very conjunction acquired its own emotional charge. The apparent cleavage between technology and sensation also marks the locus of their psychology: The realm of feelings, astounding as it may sound, is most immediately susceptible to technical manipulation, be it through the pair of glasses that induces a character in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Tales of Hoffmann" to fall in love with an automaton, or merely the melancholy call of a horn plunging the reader into a state of yearning and *Wanderlust*.

Optical sensations were immensely popular in Berlin and elsewhere in the early years of the 19th century, and their *mise-en-scène* was by no means limited to the stage. Before he actually gained experience with the design of stage sets, Schinkel gave a comparably "stagy" treatment to his project for a mausoleum for Queen Luise of Prussia (Fig. 22), who died in 1810. He blurred the conventional distinction between architectural rendering and pictorial illusion, trading the former's technical legibility for the latter's suggestive atmosphere. To his magnificent view of the mausoleum, Schinkel added a description that further dramatizes its intended effect: He guides the visitors to "a porticus, shadowed by the darkest trees," before leading them up a flight of steps to the threshold, where, "entering with a feeling of mild dread," they step into "its darkness, where they behold the recumbent effigy of the queen, surrounded by heavenly figures, resplendent in the clear light of the morning." With these words Schinkel invoked the atmospheric effect of his project once over, entreating observers to an experience of poetic transport.

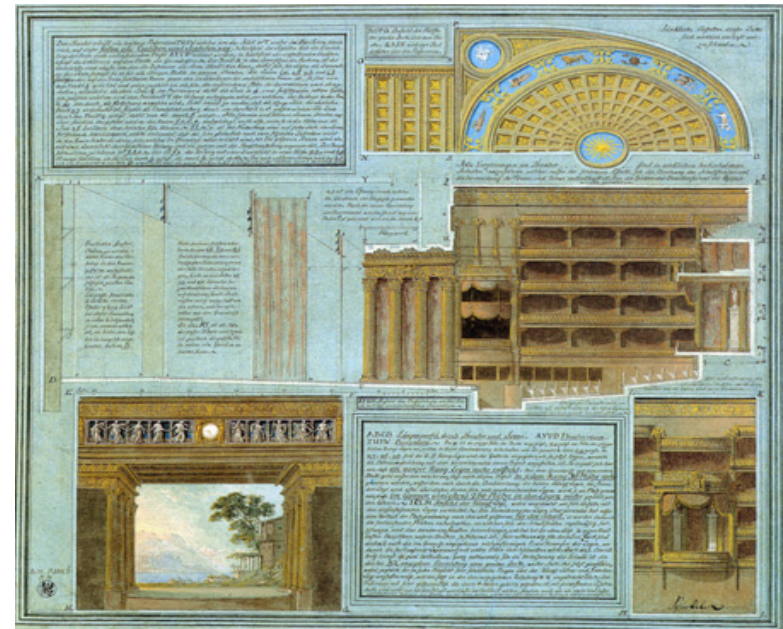


Fig. 24 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective views, elevations, details, and sections of a proposed national theatre, 1813. Pen and ink with pencil and underlying base color, 49.3 x 54.2 cm. Schinkel Archive inventory 23B.63



Fig. 25 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. View of the Schauspielhaus in Berlin, 1819-1821



Fig. 26 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view of the Schauspielhaus in Berlin. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 90. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

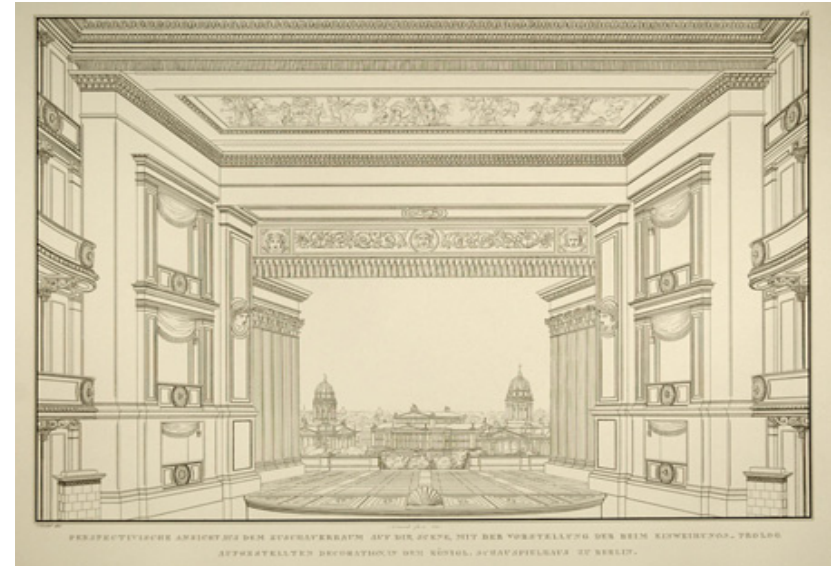


Fig. 28 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view of the theatre within the Schauspielhaus looking toward the stage, 1821. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 97. Call no.170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/ Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal



Fig. 27 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view of the side facade of the Schauspielhaus in Berlin. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 94. Call no.170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

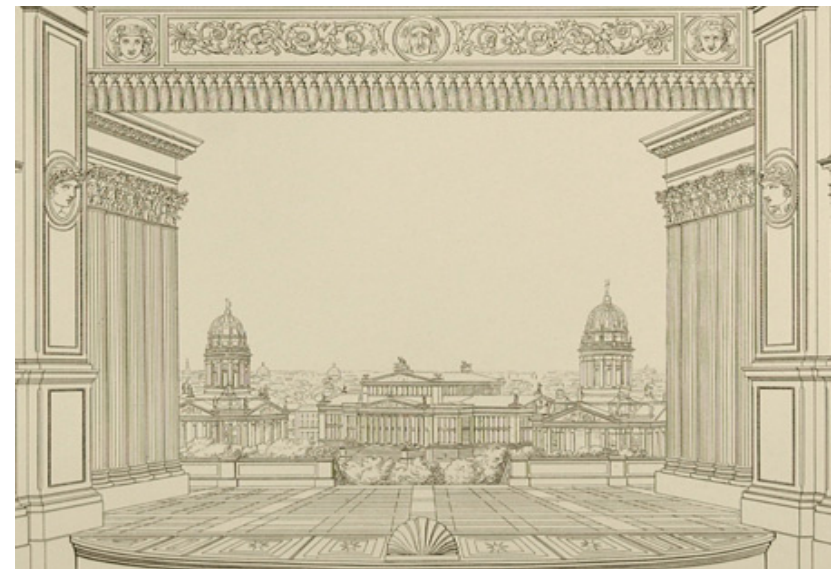


Fig. 29 Detail of Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view of the theatre within the Schauspielhaus looking toward the stage, 1821

He never tired of conjuring up such “filtered” experiences. I use the term “filtered” because they were derived – extracted, as it were – from a fusion of technology and imagination. Schinkel associated the notion of poetic transport with liminal boundaries and their transgression, with thresholds separating one sphere of experience from another. That is why the mausoleum project, or a later example like his Römische Bäder at Charlottenhof (Fig. 23) is so effective in conveying sudden as well as subtle transitions among their differently lit and variously colored spaces. Across all differences of medium and purpose, these projects have in common the means by which they induce sentiment. To put it in the words of Novalis, they “consist in an active association of ideas,” conjoined to stir “*Gemütsregung*.” Image and building alike seek to trigger the senses all at once, carrying the spectator along a carefully laid path to the threshold of poetic experience and across it into the baseless edifice of fantasy.

When Schinkel finally obtained commissions for the stage, he had already mastered much of the new poetic technology of his day. He was justly critical of the dowdy tradition of the Berlin stage, with its pompous staging conventions, and came forward with an unsolicited but comprehensive proposal to August Wilhelm Iffland, then director of the Royal Theatre. Schinkel’s program for reform envisioned nothing less than a new aesthetic, detailing the technical requirements, and even arguing for its financial advantages. Based on a montage of drawings and texts, he argued in favor of an extended proscenium for the actors, lighting from the sides as well as from above, a unifying pictorial backdrop, and an orchestra sunk to near-invisibility in the pit (Fig. 24). Gone were the creaky machinery and the many complex coulisses that had to be moved up and down on the Baroque stage. In their place, Schinkel devised a backdrop that restored the calm focus of the ancient theater, where, he explained, “the stage was nothing but a lens, gathering the image of action in one place and thereby removing it from the surroundings.” As we might expect, he opposed blatant illusionism and found the psychological effect of poetic *Stimmungsbilder* far more successful than the fragmented sets of the traditional stage. The key to his concept lay in a small gouache he submitted to Iffland: a prealpine landscape with a humble building shaded by a tree on the shore of a lake, an idyllic scene suffused with light in the manner of Claude Lorrain.



Fig. 30 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Perspective View of an Egyptian Temple*, a set design for Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, 1815. Hand-colored aquatint etching, 23.7 x 36.7 cm.



Fig. 31 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *The Hall of Stars in the Palace of the Queen of the Night*, a set design for Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, 1815. Hand-colored aquatint etching, 22.8 x 34.9 cm.

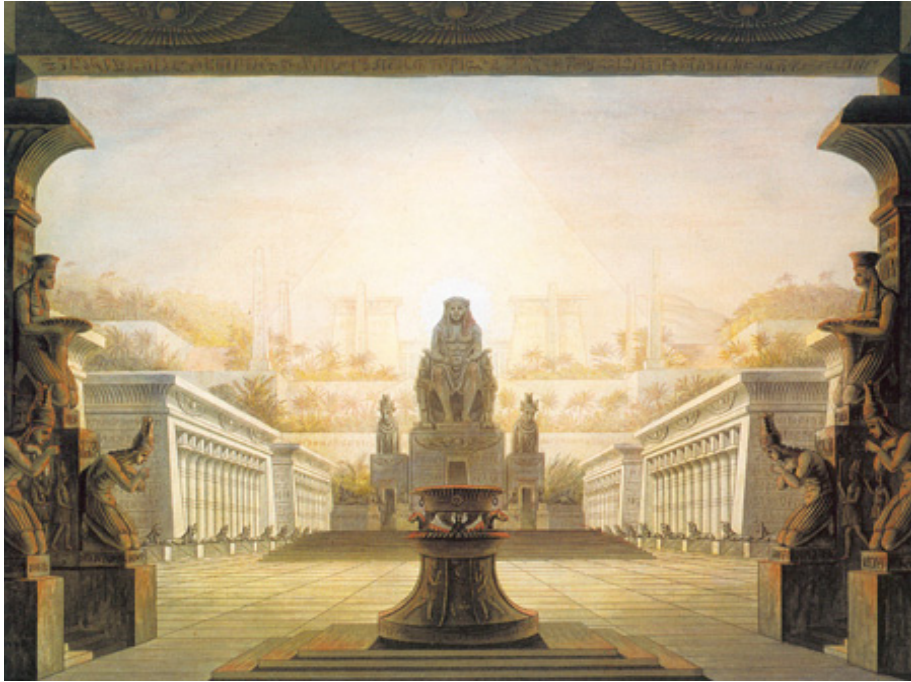


Fig. 32 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Perspective View of the Temple of the Sun with a statue of Osiris*, the final scene in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, 1815. Gouache, 54.6 x 62.5 cm.



Fig. 33 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. *Perspective View of a Mausoleum on an Island in the Nile River*, a set design for Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, 1815. Hand-colored aquatint etching, 22.7 x 34.7 cm.

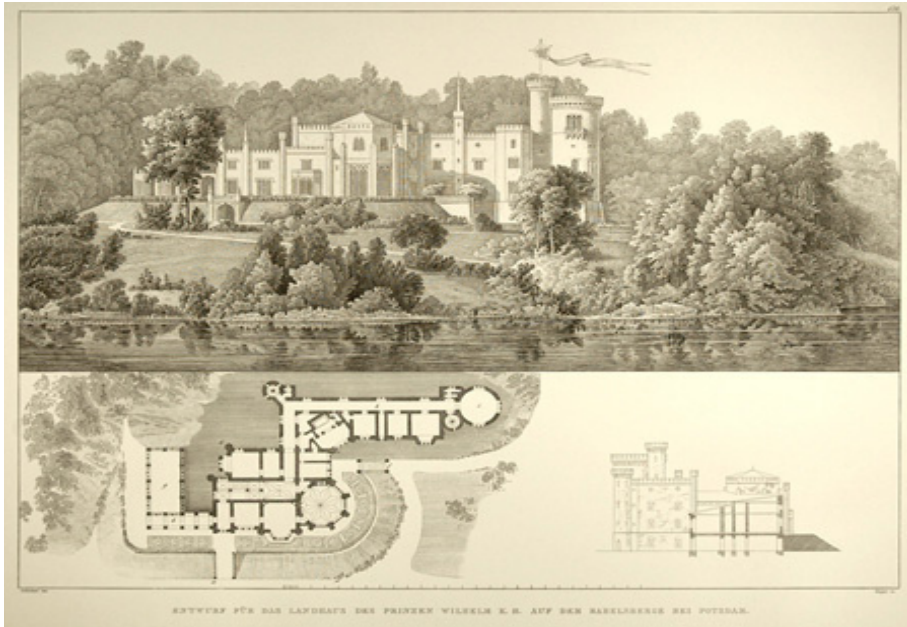


Fig. 34 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view, plan, and section of Schloss Babelsberg, Potsdam, c. 1838. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 126. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

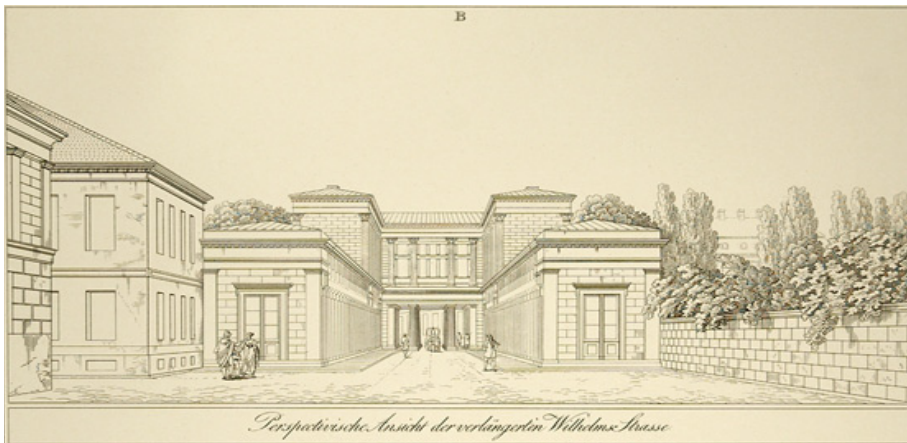


Fig. 35 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view, verlaengerten Wilhelms Strasse. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 108. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

The proposal met with icy silence from Iffland, but his successor Count Karl von Brühl was eager to avail himself of Schinkel's talents. However, what finally enabled Schinkel to put his ideas to the test was less the enthusiasm of a patron than sheer calamity. On July 19, 1817, the old theater on the Gendarmenmarkt caught fire during rehearsals, and after burning all day long, was transformed into a heap of rubble by nightfall.

Four years after the disastrous fire, the new building was completed (Fig. 25). When Schinkel prepared the plates of the theater for publication in his *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe und Bauten* (Fig. 26-29), he literally circled the building, highlighting its urban prominence and internal complexity. All renderings of the exterior strictly maintain a pedestrian's point of view, and thus give full play to the building's urban *mise-en-scène*. With his famous view from the royal box, Schinkel drastically changed the optic of representation and delivered a panoramic view of the city as only privilege could have commanded it.

Schinkel's debut as a set designer, however slow in the making, had thrust him onto the Berlin stage during the coronation festivities of January 1816 with a sensational production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. It may be unfair to the dozens of other productions Schinkel designed in less than a decade, but it is surely justified to single this one out for its inventiveness and poetic cunning. Teeming with ideas he had tested many times before, and masterful in their cadence of images and contrasting moods, the backdrops for the scenes of *Die Zauberflöte* remain the capstone of Schinkel's accomplishment, not only as designer, but as *inventor* of theatrical imagery (Figs. 30-33).

The opera opens with a view of a misshapen temple, grotesquely adorned with chimeras, lying in the shadow of an immense cliff (Fig. 30). Through an arched opening in the natural rock, spectators already catch a glimpse of the star-studded firmament beneath which the Queen of the Night will appear in the next scene (Fig. 31). The opera's closing set leaves such lugubrious sites behind and radiates with the eternal harmony of an imaginary city of the sun. It was this clever handling of theatrical effects that helped Schinkel achieve popular success with his inaugural sets and secure a series of future commissions.

Schinkel's stage sets, suffused with the spirit of Romantic poets and painters, offer a key to his imagination and his poetic technique.

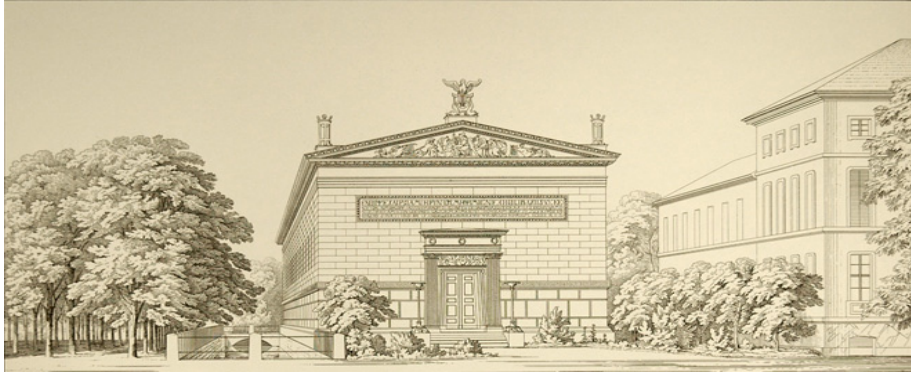


Fig. 36 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Entwuerfe für ein Gebäude der Singacademie in Berlin. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwuerfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 110. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

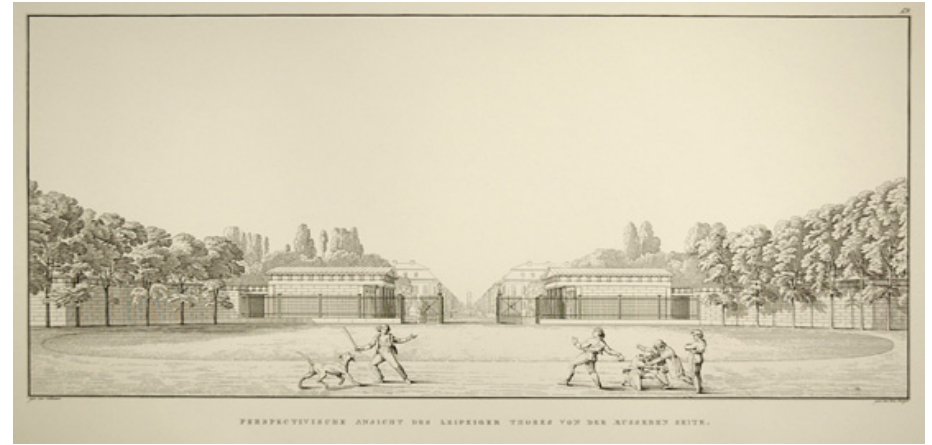


Fig. 38 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view, Leipziger Thores von der Aeusseren Seite. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwuerfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 110. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal



Fig. 37 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view, Aeussern der Kirche auf Dem Werderschen Markt in Berlin. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwuerfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 108. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

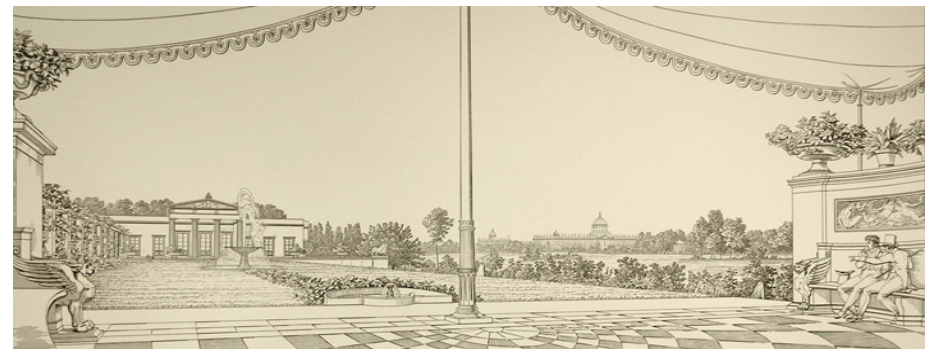


Fig. 39 Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Perspective view of Charlottenhof, Potsdam, 1831. *Sammlung architektonischer Entwuerfe* (Berlin, 1866; reprint Noerdlingen, 2005), plate 108. Call no. 170371, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

But there is more to the magic alloy of emotion and illusion than its technology or its practice. Schinkel did not reserve his poetic ideas only for the theater, but rather pursued them with comparable ingenuity in the domain of architecture. His architectural renderings speak the same language, and the descriptions that accompany them, often tantalizingly brief but always highly evocative, hint at the same poetic effects with which he infused his theatrical designs. Like the phenomenon of the panorama, the stage played a key role in Schinkel's artistic formation as a painter-architect. Far from leaving the world of illusions and optical devices behind, when he abandoned the stage, Schinkel continued to seek a fusion of architectural reality and poetic imagery.

If the painted panorama had been the proving ground for Schinkel's talents during his lean years in Berlin, the city itself became the staging ground of his architecture in the second and third decades of the century. He took from novel techniques of visualization what he needed to expand the associations among his limited architectural and urban interventions within the vast scope of the city. With his designs for the stage, Schinkel gained a fresh sense of architecture as a set of objects ceaselessly exposed to the flux of human experience. The dynamics of urban experience, in particular the rapid succession of fragmented impressions, prompted Schinkel to inscribe his building projects ever-more tightly into the visual nexus of the city. His own buildings served to focus or frame vistas and to calibrate the perspectival sequencing of distinct and often discontinuous elements. With his characteristic mode of pictorial representation, Schinkel suggested more than merely "calculated" vistas: He set the visual experience of pedestrians in motion, and from their perspective, calibrated the sudden appearance and disappearance of buildings within the urban setting.

Minute details incorporated into his drawings and many of the figures that animate the plates of his *Sammlung architectonischer Entwürfe* speak of Schinkel's interest in establishing architecture as the object of poetic interest, and hence the subject of intense reactions (Figs. 34-39). Two male figures seated in the exedra of his villa at Charlottenhof dramatize their reactions to the building that stands before their very eyes by means of their expressive demeanor and gestures (Fig. 39). Schinkel's plates are replete with such scenes. The figures do not belong to the conventional category of *Staffagefiguren*, staple characters that add a touch of life to an otherwise inanimate setting, but rather stand as

visible proof that Schinkel conceptualized architecture as the *plein-air* theater of culture.

In fact, there were two distinct "venues" in Schinkel's professional life: on the one hand, the mundane plane on which architecture had to be conceived and built within the limitations of use and purpose, patronage and budget; on the other hand, the theater of imagination and poetic invention, in which *Stimmung* reigned supreme. It was in this latter sphere that every object was made to resonate with allusions. This was the stage on which Schinkel experimented with architecture, and where he learned, in Schlegel's words, "to fantasize the music of life."