

The Gender of Space in the Forum of Augustus

Lauren Schechtman

AHVC 201

Blueprint:

The Forum of Augustus served in ancient Rome as a highly influential architectural structure that stood to enforce Augustus's image of amplified Roman power and peace. The Forum, grand in size, had strong cultural significance demonstrated through its massive size, yet more prominently shown through the sculptures and inscriptions of great Romans of the past lining the walls. The inclusion of these busts is one of the many ways Augustus used practices of looking to control and dominate the messages and choreography of communication occurring within his Forum. In this essay, I will investigate how the gender of space of the Forum of Augustus affects the individual identity of Roman citizens, and deconstruct how masculinity is conveyed, performed, and a dominating force throughout the Forum of Augustus. I will analyze masculinity in the context of ancient Rome where it was commonly measured by the characteristics of *virtus*. I propose that through application of performativity to the structure of the Forum of Augustus as a body in itself, the space within the Forum performs patriarchal messages of gender and power that work to propagate Augustus's message of Roman masculinity, strength, and justice. Through application of the theories demonstrated by Leach's "Performativity," Pallasmaa's "Architecture and the Senses," and Rösing's "The Gender of Space" to specific elements of the structure of the Forum, I believe that the generalized mindset that structure is purely neutral can be disputed as this structure

demonstrates a culturally specific performativity of gender both as a body in itself and additionally with the messages its body imbues.

The structure of the Forum of Augustus was grand both in dimension and cultural significance. The Forum in its entirety measured 400 by 385 feetⁱ. The tall walls lining the perimeter reached 100 feet, providing a sense of enclosure upon entering, which aligned with the intended experience of the Forum.ⁱⁱ The Temple of Mars, situated on the north side of the Forum, rose fifty-five feet above the eleven-foot podium of its base.ⁱⁱⁱ Alongside the Temple of Mars stood the Hall of Colossus, which contained many precious works of art in addition to a large statue dedicated to Augustus the Genius. Lining the porticoes, nearly one hundred larger-than-life sized statues of the *summi viri* were carved with inscriptions detailing each man's name, honorary accomplishment, and an *elogium* written by Augustus himself. The Forum, described by Neudecker, as buzzing with life, functioned principally as a center for the administration of Augustan justice, but also featured many significant political and civic events.^{iv}

Summi viri as a Monument:

First, when analyzing the function of the Forum of Augustus, it is important to recognize the *summi viri* as a monument within the space. In her essay evaluating the *summi viri*, Josephina Shaya states, "public monuments give the impression of a shared common identity, they create the illusion of unified communal beliefs. Their power lies, in part, in combination of their apparent

permanence with their ongoing ability to shape and direct cultural memory.”^v

Monuments hold a specific power in that they can construct memories. They work to broadcast a “common history” of the people, but through the purposeful placing of prominent Roman figures of the past, the *summi viri* both expand and recreate history to fit to the image that Augustus intended to portray.^{vi} While monuments are often viewed as static figures that sit behind a background of action and movement, the structure of Forum was directly involved in all the happenings that took place within it. Daily occupants of the Forum included jurors, advocates, litigants, and their family, friends, and supporters.^{vii} As the active and crowded Forum served as a central hub for the justice system, individual figures of *summi viri* statues were often identified as meeting points.^{viii} For example, if an individual was meeting their advocate to plead their case, they might agree in advanced to meet the statue of Aeneas. This interplay between the structure and the interactions within it illustrate the Forum’s function as a body of performance as various elements relate with one another in addition to the participants within the hustle and bustle of everyday Roman judiciary affairs.

The *summi viri* statues ranged from Romulus and ancestors of Augustus’s Julian clan to other more modern predecessors of Augustus and represented both the magnitude of greatness that Rome had held and the establishment of Roman Peace under the rule of Augustus.^{ix} Augustus’s revamped past now intermingled with the present in the Forum. As daily practices continued,

stationary past stood in the Forum as it had in history, serving as anchors for Roman morality and character. The *summi viri* palimpsested the past with the present under the watchful eye of great Roman men.

Gendered Performativity within the Forum

Leach describes performativity as the outward and repetitive presentation of identity.^x He states that place is merely a stage upon which performativity is projected and neutrality is only compromised because of this.^{xi} He states that the space “depends more on the performativities that are articulate than the form itself.”^{xii} I agree on the theory of performativity of gender, but contrary to Leach’s perspective of space as primarily neutral, I assert that the space within the Forum of Augustus performs gender as the structure itself is intricately imbedded with gendered messages through the statues and other functionality. Rather than looking at the Forum as a stage for performativity, I argue that it is a body that performs.

Virtus, or manliness, was a highly regarded trait in Rome.^{xiii} Behaving like a “true” man, especially by demonstrating courage on the battlefield or in the public sphere, was a necessary virtue to garner respect.^{xiv} The Forum displayed these gendered Roman virtues in the Forum of Augustus, resulting in a gendered choreography of the space. While beginning as a broadly termed definition of manliness, the attributes eventually expanded to include other desirable traits associated with manliness such as justice, self-control, and courage.^{xv}

Initially it was used to describe the ideal warrior, but the shift in definition evolved to describe the ultimate leader.

During Augustus's reign there was a strong movement calling for the strengthening of Roman morals. A primary example of this reawakening of Roman morality was the use of the Temple of Mars Ultor as a literal embodiment of virtue as Mars is the Roman god of war.^{xvi} The temple served as a dedication from Augustus in avenging the death of his adoptive father, Julius Caesar. Before the dedication a temple to Mars within the Roman Forum, Mars served a different purpose. As described by Stamper in his essay on the Temple of Mars Ultor, the god was originally worshipped "not in the city, but rather at the edge of the wilderness where dangers lurked."^{xvii} In war, Mars primarily served to symbolize the battle itself, and after military victories other gods were selected to be honored.^{xviii} When Augustus adding a temple in his Forum dedicated to Mars, he ascribed new meaning to Mars and introduced the power of war within the walls of his Forum. The virtue of virtue became associated with manliness and courage on the battlefield. Military virtue was consistently perpetuated and applauded through Roman triumph ceremonies, making it an attribute to which every Roman male aspired.^{xix} As Augustus added the battlefield symbol of war into his Forum, he brought the precepts of manliness and courage into the daily lives of Romans citizens, created a strongly gendered environment for the Forum goers.

Virtus was a crucial quality of any leader in ancient Rome and was additionally associated with the concept of *gloria*. *Gloria*, as defined by Cicero, is “praise given to right actions and the reputation for great merits in the service of the Republic which is approved not merely by the testimony of the multitude but by the witness of all the best men.”^{xx} *Gloria* was dependent on a combination of one’s public image and one’s standing within society. All the deified great men in the Forum of Augustus possessed *virtus* and *gloria* and the attainment of these two attributes were what made them the “best men.” The sheer number of statues lining the porticoes further strengthens the Roman quest for masculinity by representing the historical embodiment of successful *virtus* and *gloria*. The men who were selected to be represented by statues were revered by the public because of their military achievements through the successfully continuation of Rome as a dominating force in the world, and further shaping and strengthening the notion of masculinity as a desired trait of character. The porticoes functioned as a monument that simultaneously commemorated and recreated the past by bringing it into the present. Augustus surrounded any who entered the Forum with the tangible representation of *virtus* and *gloria*, and perpetuated idealized masculinity throughout.

The masculinity associated with *virtus* and the embodiment of this idea throughout the Forum expresses the performativity of gender as the structure serves as a body within itself. In his analysis of performativity and belonging,

Leach states that “identity is the effect of performance,” and that “performativity is not a singular act, for it is always a reiteration of a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals and dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repletion.”^{xxi} He argues that identity is not innately given within an individual, and is therefore “exterior.”^{xxii} The exterior identity of the Forum of Augustus was conveyed through the many gendered aspects it contains, such as the *summi viri* and the Temple of Mars Ultor. The Forum served as a body that performed and as its components interact, they create a space that held an identity within itself. While Leach asserts that space is merely a stage onto which identity is projected, I assert that by viewing the Forum of Augustus as a body with an originally neutral identity in its structure, identity is performed and created through the enhanced representations accessorizing the Forum. The accessorized identity that is performed, in turn, consistently reinforces ideals of Roman masculinity.^{xxiii}

Practices of Looking

Practices of looking served as an important experience for the Forum goer viewing the *summi viri* lining the porticoes. The purpose of the statues was to portray a message of Roman power, further perpetuated by the dominant masculine figures lining the walls and watching those who walked through the Forum. As citizens entered, they were instantly be enclosed by the tall walls and, as they moved, they became surrounded by over one hundred larger-than-life

statues of great men from the past lining the porticoes. Practices of looking were fluid and constant as individuals engaged in activities within the structure by looking for a specific statue of their meeting, looking at that particular statue to read the inscription of the accomplishments of that man, looking around at other meetings taking place at other statues within the busy Forum, all the while under constant gaze of the larger-than-life great men who stood watching the happenings of the day.

The gender of space in the Forum of Augustus plays an additional role experience of the viewer. In his essay on “Architecture and the Senses,” Juhani Pallasmaa investigates how sight and our senses are processed and their influence within our submersion in environment.^{xxiv} His theories draw upon a fluidity of body and space, as they are intertwined and consistently moving through time and place together. As Pallasmaa argues that body and space are inherently one, the context of the structure should hold reflexivity in how the perception of self is effected by the gender of space.^{xxv} As citizens interacted with one another within the Forum and with the structure itself, the identities of the individuals evolved to align with Augustus’s idea of Roman justice, morality, and strength. The gendered performativity of *virtus* and *gloria* within the structure influenced the identity and gender performance of those engaging with the Forum. As patrons are constantly immersed in their environments, the identity of both the structure and the individual becomes intertwined in similar meaning.

The *summi viri* that lined the Forum and surrounded the patrons with the ideals of masculinity played a large role in shaping the identity of both Forum goers and the structure itself. The identity of the *summi viri* were already established as the best men from Roman history and the intentionality of the placement of these statues in a central forum of Rome worked to influence the identity of the patrons in the present. Augustus hoped for his forum to be a center where justice was practiced and the glory of Rome to be admired. The best way to integrate justice and Roman solidarity into the identities of the Roman citizens in his Forum was to have it be the dominating force in the space that was demonstrated by *virtus*.

The Gender of Space and Spatial Practices:

I am not arguing that the Forum of Augustus is masculine because of the physicality of its large appearance but rather because of its masculine representation and function in Roman society. The idea of *virtus* was grounded in the functionality and performativity of the architectural space created by Augustus, making it a space that embodied gendered masculinity. Ina Rösing argues that the “gender of space is a product of symbolization.”^{xxvi} She explains place as defined through the combination of space with the representations, practices, and ideals that occur within it.^{xxvii} The literal space was the area within the Forum and the representations it held enhanced the power of Augustan rule and the importance of Roman *virtus*.

The symbolization of *virtus* was grounded in the architectural construction of the Forum and the cultural significance of the components it includes. The gender here was symbolic gender, associated with hegemonic ideals, not biological gender.^{xxviii} The symbolization the Forum holds is understood through a combination of imagery, iconography, and choreography. Imagery, the abstract ideals in the Forum, is reflected in concepts of justice and *virtus*. This is the foundation on which performativity of gender is based. Iconography, the “visual representations,” are the Temple of Mars Ultor and the *Summi viri* lining the Forum, visually inviting the inhabitants of the Forum to look and reflect upon ideals of *virtus* and power that the architecture conveys.^{xxix} Choreography is the behavioral consequences of imagery and iconography.^{xxx} These can be seen through the daily behaviors and practices in the Forum and mostly show the effect of gendering of the space. Magistrates met at the Forum prior to going off to battle; afterwards, the senate met at the Temple of Mars Ultor to dedicate the spoils of victory from war to Mars.^{xxxi} The *toga virilis*, a coming of age ceremony when young boys became men, was performed on the steps of the Temple of Mars Ultor^{xxxii}. Through this ceremony the boys became fully participating members in Roman society who had the ability to own property and vote and the *toga virilis* further established their place within society. This ceremony was a center point in the lives of young Romans, as those who participated became the future patrons and leaders in Rome. The *toga*

virillis was an opportunity for young men to gain individual freedom, but also it was an overt expression of masculine ideals and power that was bestowed upon the newly initiated in the middle of the Forum of Augustus. Connecting this ceremony to the Forum itself further illustrates the masculine tone the Forum conveyed, as on the very steps of the temple future generations gained power attributed to them because of their masculine identity.

Another important element of choreography was the manner in which dress affected the purpose and perception of one's business in the Forum. As described by Neudecker, magistrates and judges wore togas and because of the type of fabric used, one had to move "slowly and calmly, so the togatus would appear unexcited."^{xxxiii} The class of the toga and the movement it required worked to propagate the virtue of self-control, the omniscient type of masculinity that is an integral attribute of political *virtus*. The non-elite who had legal business in the Forum wore *togati*, a garment that was more formal than Roman daily wear but required attire for an advocate to plead a case.^{xxxiv} Those not wearing togas, called *vadimoniusum vestimentum*, meaning bail clothing, were not be allowed in the Forum by order of Augustus.^{xxxv} The dress of the patrons of the Forum served as a literal symbol of their status, their business, and their masculinity, and the practices that occurred dictated a gendered tone, which colored the space.

Conclusion:

While the gendering of space is a consistently debated topic, I believe that the Forum of Augustus was a gendered structure due to intentional placement of powerful figures strongly associated with masculinity. Through analysis and interpretation of the Forum of Augustus using the theoretical lenses of Leach, Rösing, and Pallasmaa, the gender of the space can be seen and demonstrated as an existing influence in the daily practices of Roman interactions in the Forum. The marble and other components that comprise the structure do not cause it to be gendered, but rather the accessories that adorn the Forum hold loaded messages of Roman past and present, promoting *virtus* as the ideal characteristic any individual can possess. Performativity is the main outlet of gender projection, as the structure performs characteristics and ideals that are assigned as masculine in ancient Rome. The experience of the patrons who occupied the Forum aided in defining the masculinity of the structure as practices of looking were heavily imbedded throughout the busy daily occurrences within the space. The fluidity of identity between self and structure provided a stepping-stone for the people occupying the space to feel the gendered power of the messages. The effects that the gendering of the space had on the choreography of practices were substantial as one's place in the Forum could easily be decoded by one's dress. Ritual gendered practices were common before war and for young men, contributing a further gendered tone to the Forum. While space containing

gender within itself is a controversial theory, I believe that the deconstruction of the Forum of Augustus's form and function demonstrates that the structure projected gendered messages which worked to propagate Augustan ideals and strengthen Roman identity.

ⁱ Neudecker, Richard. "The Forum of Augustus in Rome: Law and Order in Sacred Spaces." In *Spaces of Justice in the Roman World*, edited by Francesco de Angelis, Ziest, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} *ibid*

^v Shaya, Josephine. "The Public Life of Monuments: The *Summi viri* of the Forum of Augustus." *American Journal of Archaeology* 117, no. 1 (2013). 83-110

^{vi} *ibid*

^{vii} Stamper, John. "Augustus and the Temple of Mars." In *The Architecture of Roman Temples: The Republic to the Middle Empire*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 130-147.

^{viii} Neudecker, *Forum of Augustus*

^{ix} Shaya, *Public Life*

^x Leach, Neil. "Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Place," *Prospecta*, 3, 2002, pp.

^{xi} *ibid*

^{xii} *ibid*

^{xiii} Adams, John P. "The Roman Concept of Fides." California State University Northridge Website. 2009.

^{xiv} *ibid*

^{xv} *ibid*

^{xvi} Stamper, *Temple of Mars*

^{xvii} *ibid*

^{xviii} *ibid*

xix Adams, *Concept of Fides*

xx Cicero

xxi Leach, *Belonging*

xxii *ibid*

xxiii *ibid*

xxiv Pallasma, Juhani. "Part 1." In *The Eyes of the Skins: Architecture and the Senses*, Sussex, UK: Wiley-Academy, 2005. 15-37.

xxv *ibid*

xxvi Rösing, Ina. "The gender of space." *Philosophy & Geography* 6, no. 2 (2003). 191

xxvii *ibid*

xxviii *ibid*

xxix *ibid*

xxx *ibid*

xxxi Neudecker, *Forum of Augustus*

xxxii Dolansky, Fanny. "Coming of Age in Rome: The History and Social Significance of Assuming the Toga Virilis." Trent State University, 1997.

xxxiii Neudecker, *Forum of Augustus*

xxxiv *ibid*

xxxv *ibid*

Works Cited:

Pallasma, Juhani. "Part 1." In *The Eyes of the Skins: Architecture and the Senses*, Sussex, UK: Wiley-Academy, 2005. 15-37.

Stamper, John. "Augustus and the Temple of Mars." In *The Architecture of Roman Temples: The Republic to the Middle Empire*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 130-147.

Adams, John P. "The Roman Concept of Fides." California State University Northridge Website. 2009.

Dolansky, Fanny. "Coming of Age in Rome: The History and Social Significance of Assuming the Toga Virilis." Trent State University, 1997.

Neudecker, Richard. "The Forum of Augustus in Rome: Law and Order in Sacred Spaces." In *Spaces of Justice in the Roman World*, edited by Franceso de Angelis, 161-179. Ziest, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010.

Shaya, Josephine. "The Public Life of Monuments: The *Summi viri* of the Forum of Augustus." *American Journal of Archaeology* 117, no. 1 (2013). 83-110

Leach, Neil. "Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Place," *Prospecta*, 3, 2002, pp.126-133.

Rösing, Ina. "The gender of space." *Philosophy & Geography* 6, no. 2 (2003). 189-211

Massey, Doreen B. "Space, Place, and Gender." In *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 1999. 177-190