

shape of those we know well. This is odd, because most of us could not draw a recognizable picture of our closest friends and relatives, and we even find it hard to describe them sufficiently accurately for a total stranger to recognize them reliably. However, if we meet them after years of absence we might still suddenly notice all the changes that to them may have been gradual. 'My, haven't you grown!' is the most common greeting of an aunt or uncle to a nephew or niece! The growing in size signals the maturing of the child at the normal rate so important to us psychologically as well as physically, and thus the child is quite likely to be flattered and pleased with the remark.

So it is the features of buildings that appear to be provided specifically to accommodate our shape and size that also attract our attention. If these features seem rather too small or unnecessarily large, we notice it immediately. It is the door, then, above all else, that speaks to us of scale. The door is there exclusively for the purpose of allowing the standing human form to pass through – it is a sort of image of ourselves printed on the façade of architecture. Next as cues of scale come the apparent floor to ceiling heights of a building, being the most obvious indicators of the size of the people who might inhabit the spaces inside. The vertical rhythm of fenestration on the elevation of a building shows just how generous is the accommodation for its occupants. Windows, and specifically the heights of their sills, provide other important clues to scale.

Scale then is not some abstract architectural concept at all, but a meaningful and very human and social idea that even has commercial and political value. It is one of the most fundamental components of the language of space. Scale is in a way as much about people as it is about buildings. Of course Garnier and his clients wanted the Paris Opera to be grand – it was, after all, built to perform grand opera! But there was much more to it than that; it was a social idea. People were not simply going to arrive, sit down and watch the opera and then leave. They were going to be a part of the higher strata of Paris society. They were going there to see others and to be seen by others. The great staircase is not so much for getting up to the higher levels of the auditorium as it is an excuse to process grandly. Later it was to produce the dramatic central setting for the Phantom of the Opera.

Of course, to be effective within this huge scale environment the people needed to be large too! They needed to wear grand clothes, including high shoes, wide dresses and tall wigs, which enabled them to occupy more space. So everything about this works: it creates the excuse, if not even the need, for dressing up grandly; it parades its occupants before each other through clever changes of level in space; and it makes its occupants feel like actors themselves on some great stage. By the time the curtain finally goes up, the emotions have already been heightened to almost fever pitch. No wonder much opera of the