In recent years, the consideration of space with relationship to gender has begun to receive attention in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and literary history. More broadly, there has been a sustained interest in what Henri Lefebvre has called the production of space: how human beings use, occupy and manipulate different spaces and how these spaces influence and determine all social interactions and even affect the construction of identity and subjectivity.¹ For his part, Michel Foucault proclaimed that we are living in the ‘epoch of space’;² and, in the past half-century, theorists have formulated methods and categories that attempt to elucidate the function of space in our lives. While most of these theories deal with the postmodern era and tend to be applied primarily to urban spaces, some of these approaches are useful in helping us think about how women have negotiated spaces throughout history. This essay considers the relationship of space and female sovereignty in early modern Habsburg Spain. The notion of sovereignty itself has carried a spatial connotation from the Middle Ages on. Historically, this understanding was consolidated by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 with its recognition of the modern state as constituted by a central polity or authority within a defined set of geographical boundaries, what Daniel Philpott has called ‘supreme authority within a territory’.³ When applied to women in the early modern era, however,
the association between sovereignty and territorial concerns becomes problematic.

The identity of royal women was and continues to be linked to geographical entities: we refer to Ana of Austria, or Isabel of Valois, or Maria Luisa of Orleans. These territorial assignations were variable and at times multiple, determined not only by place of birth but also by dynastic considerations and matrimonial arrangements. Thus, an infanta of Spain such as Ana Mauricia, the daughter of Philip III, could be called ‘Queen of France’ when she was a mere child and had never set foot on French soil on the basis of her anticipated union with the French dauphin, the future Louis XIII. These politico/geographical labels did not carry any real sense of sovereignty, and national boundaries meant little to women who, from birth, were expected to one day cross borders and territories in order to complete the complex marriage negotiations that preserved early modern dynastic power, as also illustrated in the Herdam and Smallwood’s chapter on Eleanor of Aquitaine. When it comes to royal consorts, especially in the early modern era, the body politic was mobile, movable and even interchangeable. After all, geographic associations for these women could disappear with a broken engagement or the death of the future bride or groom. As a notable example, Isabel Clara Eugenia, Philip II’s daughter, became known as the ‘bride of Europe’ because of the multiple betrothals with a series of royal suitors before she finally married Albert, Archduke of Austria at the age of thirty-three and became the ruler of the Netherlands. Any particular geographical nomenclature associated with these queens became permanent only after they were re-territorialized in their adopted countries.

Because their connection to real sovereignty was unstable and ambiguous, Habsburg women had to negotiate spatial practices as a way of achieving or performing their suitability and legitimacy as queens consort and regents. This essay will deal with three spatial considerations: the movement of queens consort from one country to another (called a recorrido) and their entry into Spanish cities; the women’s manipulation of palace spaces, such as the queen’s chamber, where considerable – albeit informal – power was wielded; and finally, their relationship to theatrical space, where performances of female sovereignty were frequently staged to enhance (and, at times, to undermine) their positions at the Habsburg court.

To study the relationship of women to space in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one must begin with a consideration of what can
be called the politics of enclosure that dominated the attitude towards women. Treatises, sermons, conduct books, pamphlets and other types of documents reveal a concerted effort to keep women enclosed: in the paternal or marital home, the convent or even the brothel. Women who were allowed to wander freely – that is, to traverse and appropriate public spaces unencumbered – were particularly suspicious. There was then the need to control women’s movements and their access to public spaces and keep the female body away from the public gaze. Royal women were no exception. This official attitude or ideology regarding women was represented in the writings of several well-known humanists including Juan Luis Vives, Fray Luis de Leon and – beyond Spain – Justus Lipsius.

In 1524, Vives wrote a famous treatise titled *Institutione Foeminae Christianae* or *On the Instruction of Christian Women* (1524). Invited to the court of Henry VIII in England, Vives wrote the tract at the behest of Catherine of Aragon, to serve as a conduct manual for the future Mary Tudor. This remarkable document amply reveals the equivocal discourse and attitudes toward women and sovereignty. The author states more than once that women have no real claim to sociopolitical power: ‘But in a woman, no one requires eloquence or talent or wisdom or professional skills or administration of the republic’. This was a curious position to take considering that his patron was Henry VIII’s consort and the daughter of perhaps the most powerful medieval monarch, Isabel I of Castile. One of the ways in which the humanist emphasizes women’s unsuitability for public and political life is through an insistence on limiting women’s movement and visibility; in other words, their relationship to social spaces. Throughout, Vives asserts that women (including, presumably, the same royal women to whom the book is directed) should seldom be seen in the public sphere. Furthermore, the only legitimate territory afforded to a woman is to be determined first and foremost with relation to her husband, who replaces all loyalties to places and persons: ‘As the companion of her husband, wherever he is, there she has a country, home, hearth, parents, close friends, and wealth’. He provides examples of historic or legendary queens known for their extreme fealty to their husbands:

Hypsicratea, wife of Mithradates, king of Pontus, followed her husband in male disguise when he was defeated and put to flight, wherever he sought refuge, even in the most remote solitude. *She considered that wherever her husband, there she would find her kingdom.* (my emphasis)
At times, he is forced to accept the political reality of medieval and early Renaissance Europe and alludes to powerful women rulers such as the Holy Roman Empress, Mary of Burgundy, who reigned from 1477 until her death in 1482. Nevertheless, in Vives’s view, even a remarkable stateswoman like Mary could not claim sovereignty over territory solely on her own merits:

Maria, wife of the emperor Maximilian, inherited this region of Flanders from her father Charles, but the Flemish had little respect for the simple and meek character of Maximilian and referred all decisions concerning their governance to Maria, as if she were their leader. However, as Vives reports, she never decided anything that was within her power without consulting her husband Maximilian, whose will she regarded as law. And she had the authority to administer everything according to her own wishes without incurring the ill will of her husband, since Maximilian refused nothing to his beloved and prudent wife, owing both to his own mild disposition and her integrity of character. In this way, Vives argues, Maria added much to his authority in a short time, enhancing his power.8

Feminist historians such as Regina Schulte have asserted that the political strength of queens in the early modern period always seemed to require the proximity of a male body, and Vives’s treatise provides ample evidence of this misogynist perspective.9 The assertion that the only legitimate territory for any woman, even one of royal blood, is determined by physical immediacy of her husband – who becomes, in so many words, her ‘nation’ – is a metaphorical exaggeration. The historical reality, as multiple scholarly works and some case studies in this book have demonstrated, was very different.10 Nevertheless, a similar gendered understanding of what nation means in the case of royal consorts was, in fact, not far from the truth.

Journey of Legitimacy

As stated earlier, women elected for royal marriage were expected to abandon any claim to their own national space, family and language so as to fulfil their destiny and identity as consorts to male kings. The journey to their adopted land, their movement through territory over hundreds of miles and across borders, and the ceremonial entries into
cities and villages became an elaborate spatialized ritual to establish their legitimacy. This process of re-territorializing is one example of the manner in which places and spaces help to construct a political identity, and, equally importantly, how their presence in turn helped to transform the places they visited. Among other things, the royal entries of consorts and queens into major cities allowed civil authorities to display their city’s pre-eminence and introduce themselves to the new consort. This was particularly important for communities geographically distant from the centre of power, allowing them to promote themselves and ‘celebrate their history and stake their claim to royal attention’.11

The ceremonial entries into multiple cities as these queens travelled to the Spanish court required meticulous preparation, including the appropriation of public, urban sites – streets, plazas, churches and buildings. We have several relaciones or noticias that describe in great detail these occasions; for example, the extravagant celebrations that took place when Ana of Austria entered the city of Burgos to marry Philip II in 1570, or the complicated itinerary taken by Mariana of Austria, culminating in a procession from the Palace of the Buen Retiro to the Alcazar, to celebrate her wedding to Philip IV in 1659. The ceremonies involved the engagement of architects and choreographers and numerous other technicians of space who created ephemeral architecture – triumphal arches, obelisks and arcades – accompanied by paintings and live tableaux of mythological or historical scenes and characters. The effect was what Mulryne has called ‘a remarkable synergy between ephemeral and permanent architecture’.12 These city spaces temporarily lose their normal functions as places for circulation and daily interactions, and instead acquired a heterotopic dimension, lightly borrowing Foucault’s term, in that they combined actual places with invented utopian spaces.13

We know that these types of ceremonies were quite common throughout early modern Europe and commemorated all manner of events: coronations, the arrivals of foreign dignitaries, the investiture of prelates, even the promotion of commercial interests. Furthermore, these celebrations had a transnational dimension in that they were similarly conceived in various European courts using the same iconographic language through performances, art, music, architecture and literary compositions. In essence, the shared lexicon of spectacle eliminated the specificity of time and space. As I have argued elsewhere, each entry contained echoes of other entries by other queens in other times
and places. In this sense, the ritual acquired a gendered significance missing in other similar festivities.

We can take as a specific example the experiences of Mariana of Austria and the preparations leading up to her official welcome in Madrid as Philip IV’s wife. She had been betrothed to her cousin Baltazar Carlos, Philip’s son, but upon the boy’s untimely death, the fifteen-year-old Mariana was promptly betrothed to his forty-four-year-old father, who was also her uncle. Not only was there a substitute groom, she herself was replacing the king’s first wife, Isabel of Bourbon, who had died five years earlier. On 8 November 1648, Mariana married Philip by proxy in Vienna and, a few days later, would undertake an arduous trip by land and sea from Vienna to Spain, crossing Italy and stopping at various cities along the way. Some nine months later, she would arrive in Spain at the Mediterranean port of Denia in Valencia to undertake the final leg of the journey by land. On 7 October 1649, almost a full year after leaving Vienna, she reached the village of Navalcarnero, outside of Madrid, where she finally met her husband Philip for the first time. The royal couple and their large retinue proceeded to Madrid, where an elaborate welcome had been organized. In the document ‘Noticia del recibimiento i entrada de la Reyna nuestra Señora Doña MARIA de Austria en la muy noble y leal coronada villa de Madrid’, we find detailed descriptions of the transformation of the cityscape for her ceremonial procession through the city, on 19 November 1649:

This was the setting, majesty, apparatus and magnificence, with which Madrid woke, Illustrious and adorned, from the entrance of the Buen Retiro to the doors of the Palace, and the splendor of her houses and intersections; the former were decorated with fabrics, brocades and embroidered hangings and tapestries; and in the variety of their colors, every place [resembled] hanging gardens, where roses fell from high on down, imitating spring; [the streets were] bursting with masques and dances, and everywhere one could experience, whether in the ingenuity of their finery or the variety of their costumes and instruments, a great mixture of wonderment and admiration.

Different city spaces – buildings, streets, parks and plazas of the city – were transformed at enormous expense into heterotopic spaces that were simultaneously real and utopian. All was meant to serve as a setting for the carefully planned procession of the queen and her
entourage. Her progress through the city represented the culmination of her transmutation from Austrian princess into Queen of Spain. Simultaneously, the city’s urban spaces were transformed into a vast stage for an intricate performance of sovereignty.

At prominent stops in her journey, Mariana would be greeted by triumphal arches representing the temporal and spatial reach of Spain’s empire through the invocation of its history and of places both near and far. The main arches, for example, each represented a continent, alluding to the territories controlled by the empire. Performances, such as the twenty-four dances that had been commissioned for the occasion, contained references to the New World. Many of these dances had been paid for by guilds and nearby villages that were under the jurisdiction of the city; in this manner, rural spaces were also incorporated into the urban centre. We therefore have a proliferation and multiplication of space – continents, cities, villages, plazas, houses, doors, not to mention the reconstruction of historical and mythical sites – all implicated in this ostentatious ritual. The local became national and the national became international, which in turn acquired transhistorical and global dimensions. At the centre of all this pomp and circumstance, there was the body of a nubile woman who represented the perpetuation of a dynasty and who embodied a political entity that was eternal. In these spectacles of power, the royal female body that was the protagonist was viewed by the populace both as an individual but also as a symbol of continuity. As suggested above, the woman processing through transformed urban setting represented an echo of other previous entries by previous queens, both in Spain and other parts of Europe. At every step, she herself is reminded of her role in perpetuating and promoting both national and imperial interests.

We have no indication of how Mariana or any of the other Habsburg queens reacted to this ritual, and it could be argued that they were nothing more than mere players, decorative movable statues, in a feast minutely choreographed by officials in charge of ceremonial protocol. Nevertheless, in the interaction with the various spaces and with the populace, the queens absorbed lessons on the importance of pageantry and their central role in these spatial displays, lessons that, in the case of Mariana, for example, would prove particularly useful in her many years at the court.
Courtly Architecture and Gender

The court itself was strictly regulated with rules and protocols that determined even the architecture of the palace itself. Since the reign of Emperor Carlos V, the Alcazar Real had been divided architecturally into two separate parts – more or less symmetrical – with living quarters built around two courtyards, the king’s and the queen’s. There were in fact two distinct royal households: the casa del rey and the casa de la reina. The casa de la reina was both a physical configuration of rooms where royal women resided and also a hierarchical and independent political organization, parallel to that of the king although not necessarily equal in authority. Silvia Mitchell provides a description of the complicated arrangement of the court during Mariana’s time:

[T]he Spanish court was one of the most elaborate in Europe. It was spatially segregated according to several principles: (1) sections, which corresponded to specific functions to serve the ruler (house, chamber, stables, and chapel); (2) gendered areas (separate households for the queen and the king with female and male attendants respectively); and (3) bureaucratic areas and living spaces (council chambers and personal quarters).18

Laura Oliván Santaliestra provides a detailed account of the queen’s household itself:

The Queen’s Household was divided into the same branches as that of the King’s: the Queen’s chamber, the Queen’s house itself, the Queen’s stables. The Queen’s Chamber was composed of the chief lady in waiting, the governess, the ladies in waiting, the ladies of the privy chamber, the governesses [...] a myriad of female offices; women who worked in the palace and received stipends, rations and certain privileges depending on their position in the hierarchy of the Queen’s household.19

Clearly, the Queen’s household was primarily a feminine space. María del Carmen Simon Palmer tells us, for example, that the number of women working in the casa de la reina increased significantly, from some 178 in Isabel of Valois’s time to more than 300 during Mariana’s time.20 This uniquely feminine realm constituted an interior society parallel to that of the king. Within this gendered space, both symbolic
and physical, queens were no doubt compelled to develop mechanisms and strategies to establish, exercise and maintain a viable degree of authority. Magdalena Sánchez and Clarissa Campbell, among others, have demonstrated that the royal palace was not a unitary or centralized space, nor was the power of the court limited to the king. Sanchez’s work on three women in Philip III’s reign – the Empress María, his grandmother; Margarita of Austria, his wife; and Margarita de la Cruz, his aunt – has been particularly influential in transforming how we view royal women and their presence at the court. While they were proscribed from participating in central activities related to governance, they would nevertheless manage to wield influence in areas where their presence was not prohibited. Sánchez specifically identifies gendered spheres of influence within which women were able to exercise considerable authority. In particular, she analyzes the spatial exchange between the palace and the Royal Convent of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid, a place that, according to Sánchez, ‘was vitally connected to court life’. Interestingly, the convent had been founded by Philip II’s sister, the formidable Juana de Austria, when she served as regent while Philip was sojourning in England as Mary Tudor’s consort.

Juana is a fascinating figure in her own right. Although she herself never became queen, her relationship to places and spaces is in many ways emblematic of the complicated spatial negotiations so many queens were forced to make. When she was seventeen, she had travelled to Lisbon to marry Juan Manuel, the heir to the Portuguese throne. He died a year later, shortly after she had become pregnant. After giving birth to the future King of Portugal, Sebastian I, thus fulfilling her duty to produce an heir, her father, the Emperor Charles V, and her brother, Philip II, saw fit to re-territorialize her back to Spain so that she could become regent in Philip’s absence. She was forced to leave her infant son behind and would never see him again. Hers is an instructive example of how women in the Habsburg dynasty were placed and re-placed strategically as a means of maintaining dynastic power in the service of male rulers. As regent of Spain, she exerted considerable power and proved to be a capable head of state, but she found herself sidelined from Court politics when Philip II resumed the throne. According to Annemarie Jordan, Juana may have meant the foundation of the Descalzas Reales convent to be a way to rival her brother’s construction of the famous palace of El Escorial. Through the appropriation of a specific architectural site that would in fact play an important role in
imperial politics, she found one way of maintaining political influence and visibility for years to come.

This convent founded by Juana provided an alternative feminine locus where soft but significant power could be exercised. Sánchez describes in detail the continuous back and forth movement between the palace and the convent where the royal women had their own apartments. They took confession and attended Mass (often more than once a day) and would perform other devotional acts at the Descalzas. According to Sánchez, the place would become a refuge to generations of royal women who ‘either had lost their valuable role within the dynasty or who had rejected their procreative duties’. In such a space, temporarily protected from the watchful eyes of ambitious courtiers, all vying for physical proximity to the king, queens would be able to offer counsel and make their (perhaps dissenting) views known. While Sánchez limited herself to three women in the court of Philip III, there is no reason to suppose that the situation was different for other queens. When Isabel of Bourbon, Philip IV’s first wife, became regent (while he was fighting a war in Catalonia), she would strengthen her stature and assuage the fears of those who did not trust her ability to rule by visiting public religious establishments and participating in ritual pilgrimages to the shrine of the Virgin of Atocha, for example. This performance of piety necessitated the physical manipulation and occupation of space before the watchful eyes of courtiers and the populace alike.

Mariana of Austria, Isabel’s successor, would have a much-expanded opportunity to skilfully negotiate places and spaces at the Court. For one thing, she occupied – both literally and symbolically – the space of the court during some fifty years: as queen consort (1649–1665), queen-regent (1665–1675) and queen dowager (1675–1696). We are fortunate to have first- and second-hand accounts that provide an inkling of what her life was like at the palace. One important source is Jerónimo de Barrionuevo’s Avisos, a compendium of letters written to a correspondent in Zaragoza, notifying him of news at the Court. Some of his reports suggest that the young queen may have had a difficult time initially adjusting to her circumstances and new environs. Since her primary role was to provide an heir, it seems she was under constant surveillance for any signs of pregnancy. Barrionuevo tells us:

It is reported that she already feels the child moving, and that is a boy since she feels him so early on [in the pregnancy] […] There is no way to get her out of the Retiro Park because she is unhappy at the
Palace, where she spends the early morning picking flowers, the days in banquets, and the evenings watching plays.\textsuperscript{25}

Mariana’s life was far from full of pleasure, of course. For one thing, she would frequently find herself confined to her quarters recovering from difficult pregnancies, most of which ended in miscarriages, and painful childbirths. She gave birth to five children, only three of whom survived beyond infancy. The same Barrionuevo who criticizes her alleged frivolity and pursuit of leisure provides harrowing accounts of the suffering that she endured during her repeated confinements. When Mariana gave birth to Felipe Próspero – who died before reaching puberty – Barrionuevo provides the following description:

Wednesday night, the 28\textsuperscript{th} of this past month, the queen lost consciousness three times having suffered great convulsions after giving birth. They bled her that night twice... She was so seriously ill, that they gave her last rites, fearing that she would die in their arms attended by seven court physicians.\textsuperscript{26}

At the same time, there is evidence that from within this place of difficult confinement and physical suffering, Mariana never stopped wielding influence throughout the court and beyond. In fact, her quarters would become what Michel de Certeau calls a ‘practiced place’:\textsuperscript{27} that is, a space for movement, encounters and political exchanges where she dictated letters, received ambassadors and exercised her patronage, thereby overcoming spatial and physical limitations. This chamber became the place where she carried out a fundamental diplomatic function that consisted in mediating two political spaces separated by geography: the Spanish court and that of her father, Holy Roman Emperor Fernando III. She would continue to carry out the same function after Fernando’s death and her brother, Leopold, ascended to the imperial throne in 1658.

After King Philip died, Mariana, aged 31, became regent of Spain until her son Carlos was old enough to assume the throne. The King’s death profoundly altered her spatial relationship to the Court at large. His last will and testament names her tutor, governor and curator, thus allowing her to exercise what Mitchell calls a ‘unified regency’.\textsuperscript{28} As Mitchell has pointed out, something remarkable happens: the household of the king – that central site of monarchical power – in essence disappears when Philip dies, and all of its functions became
subsumed under the feminine auspices of the queen’s house. For a full ten years, during Carlos’s minority, the gendered space of the casa de la reina became the real locus of power. It was a situation that had never occurred in the Habsburg court before, as Mariana acquired *potestad absoluta*, or supreme authority. Previously, other regencies by queen consorts had been temporary arrangements while the king was forced away from the court for diplomatic or military reasons. This unheard-of arrangement created serious problems, and a struggle for power at the Court ensued, notably between the queen and her supporters on the one hand and those of Philip’s bastard son, Don Juan José, on the other. Juan José demanded a prominent role in government and, among other things, aspired to become his half-brother’s chief advisor, thus assuming greater powers for himself. The struggle nearly precipitated a civil war.

Threatened by different and opposing political factions, a situation no doubt exacerbated by the inherent misogyny of the times, Mariana is forced to appropriate and negotiate spaces differently. She becomes known for her strict adherence to protocol, and it is clear that she finds it necessary to control her image, including the ways she occupied space within the palace. María Victoria López Cordón tells us that:

She met every day [with her ministers] in the so-called Ruby Room in the Alcázar, according to a ceremonial very similar to that of the Council of State. The queen would appear seated, with a desk covered in black velvet, on which a small silver bell and a writing case were placed, all of this was on a rug also made of black velvet.29

This is the pose in which we see her in the famous painting by Juan Carreño, dressed in widow’s weeds ‘projecting an austere, majestic, and, at the same time sumptuous image’ (Mitchell 97). Like her predecessors, she would determine etiquette and manage her and her son’s connections to public spaces. She is seen making frequent visits to the convent of the Descalzas Reales and to the Church of the Virgin of Atocha, publicly performing her devotion as a way of mitigating the vicious criticism that surrounded her. As Carlos’s majority approaches, according to Mitchell:

[i]t is no coincidence that Madrid witnessed a whirlwind of elaborate entertainments, a major building program that began in the palace and soon extended into public spaces, and extravagant journeys that created yet more spectacles. It appears that Mariana had adopted
a policy reminiscent of bread and circuses to achieve her political goals.  

She takes a direct hand in the ritual of appropriating public spaces and making sure that she remained visible and influential through a close physical proximity to her son.

Mariana suffered several defeats in the endless machinations and intrigues at the court. She was forced to leave Madrid and ‘retire’ in Toledo (1677–1679), but she refused to remain marginalized. Mitchell describes how she shrewdly used the spatial distance from the court to continue to influence her son. Importantly, during her exile, she took a decisive role in the negotiations surrounding her son’s marriage. Ultimately, she was able to return in triumph to the court, reprising in a minor key the original entry many decades earlier as Philip’s young bride. Mitchell quotes a gazetteer at the time: “the queen made her entry received by the hearts of everyone with such acclamations and general applause that it is hard to comprehend or explain”. The Venetian ambassador described Mariana’s return to court as ‘a triumph and a very rare lesson in Divine Justice’.

**Court Theatre**

The last significant space to be considered here is the singularly privileged space of representation: court theatre. Myriad studies over the last decades have amply demonstrated the central importance of theatre and spectacle in consolidating and sustaining absolutist rule. It is not surprising, then, that countless Spanish plays (called *comedias*) of the time engage overtly and indirectly with conceptions and representations of kingship and power. What is surprising, as I have studied at length elsewhere, is the early modern stage’s obsession with powerful women who exercise political authority. Gynocracy, or the rule of women, both historical and imagined, was staged repeatedly. Ana Zúñiga Lacruz has published an encyclopedic work in which she identifies over 300 seventeenth-century Spanish plays that deal in one way or another with feminine rulers: queens, consorts, infantas, princesses and other women who aspire to or directly exert political power. This thematic obsession in the *comedia* is extraordinary and has no parallel in any other national theatre of the early modern era; it is a testament to a deep social preoccupation with gender and sovereignty.
The theatre of the time provides an important counter-discourse to what we find in treatises such as that of Juan Luis Vives. Whereas these promoted the invisibility of women in their ideology of enclosure, the theatre of the time did precisely the opposite: it made powerful women visible, albeit on a theatrical stage.

Theatrical activity at the palace served several functions. In addition to providing entertainment and a way of temporarily escaping the travails, intrigues and tedium of life at the court, it was a vehicle for the continued performance of power, meant to impress visitors from other European courts. Performances of all types – masques, dances and tableaux, in addition to full-length plays – may have also provided someone like Mariana with another tool for promoting authority. Indeed, one of the most important political players in her court, Fernando Valenzuela – who would eventually become prime minister – rose in prominence in part because of his brilliant ability to choreograph spectacles during her regency. With his help, Mariana set about transforming the physical configuration of the palace, as Mitchell tells us:

In a short time, Mariana and Valenzuela changed the face of the court with a flurry of entertainments, royal trips [jornadas], and a series of measures intended to keep the price of basic commodities in check. They also undertook some key renovation projects, not only in the royal palace but in public spaces as well. One major venture consisted in remodeling the so-called Queen’s Gallery, which surrounded the internal plazas of the Alcazar and connected them with the royal stables. This large project required the importation of at least two hundred marble sculptures. The other major renovation involved the façade of the palace.35

The Queen would also oversee multiple public works and remodelling projects throughout the city, engaging with and transforming urban spaces.

In her fifty years at the court, Mariana had a profound influence on the production of the comedia. She could decide when theatres could operate or not, as she did after Philip IV died, claiming that they should remain shuttered until her son Carlos was able to enjoy the performances. She became the patron of various theatrical troupes who would perform privately for her and her retinue, many of the same plays that were popularly acclaimed by the populace beyond the palace walls. In 1676 alone, when Mariana was still, for all intents and purposes,
regent of Spain (although Charles had officially assumed the throne the year before), there were some ninety-six private performances in the royal apartments, many of them in the Queen’s quarters. In fact, sometimes her own ladies-in-waiting (and perhaps even she herself) performed dramatic roles in these palace plays. In at least one occasion, her daughter-in-law, María Luisa of Orleans surprised the court by taking a leading role, apparently much to Mariana’s delight:

On 12 June 1688, María Luisa and her ladies bring to life an entertaining comedy, on the occasion of Mariana of Austria’s birthday. To everyone’s surprise, the queen appears on stage dressed as a knight. The anticipation and success of the play, showing a sovereign queen in this guise, makes it necessary to perform the play twice, before Charles II and his mother, the top officials of the court and the grandees of Spain.36

Although there are few extant descriptions of how private performances were staged in the queen’s quarters, one aspect to be considered is the spatial configuration of these presentations. The seating arrangements, even in private quarters, were rigidly regimented by palace protocol. Margaret Greer and J.E. Varey have speculated that the actors would have performed at the same level as the spectators, with the queen sitting directly in front of the ‘stage’ area and, since only royal personages were allowed to sit on chairs, the queen’s ladies would sit on the floors on carpets along either side.37 Despite the strictly arranged seating, it is not hard to imagine that the cuarto de la reina would have provided a more intimate space of performance than that of palace theatres like the Salón Dorado, and this must have affected the experience of the plays. Because many of the plays dealt specifically with the rule of women, there would have been, in effect, an erasure of the boundaries between performers and audience. That is, there is an implicit double performance as real-life queens repeatedly witnessed dramatizations of fictional sovereigns; and at another level, the rest of the audience (often consisting of mostly women) would be watching a queen who was watching other female monarchs. This spatial mirroring of sovereignty assumed a propagandistic and didactic function that often takes a misogynist turn. Indeed, many of these plays dealt with the chaos that ensues when a woman assumes political power on her own and rejects male proximity and guidance; hence, for example the oft-repeated presentation of the mujer esquiva (‘disdainful woman’) who rejects
marriage only to be ‘domesticated’ at the end. The ultimate message of so many of these plays was a reminder that the legitimate role of a queen was to be defined by her relationship to a male ruler: whether as consort, mother of future sovereigns or discreet widowed queen mother. At the same time, one can only wonder what it might have meant for women like Mariana to be repeatedly exposed to works that depicted women in positions of power, reigning sometimes despotically, sometimes wisely. The space of the theatre within the palace was one where the queen was both privileged spectator and spectacle at the same time, and one that repeatedly represented a contrast between the actual queen stiffly seated directly in front of a ‘stage’ and the freedom of movement of fictional queens such as Semiramis waging war in Calderón de la Barca’s La hija del aire (‘The Daughter of the Air’), or a fictionalized version of Christina of Sweden ultimately abandoning the throne to pursue her own destiny in Francisco Bances Candamo’s ¿Quién es quien premia al amor? (‘Who is it who rewards love?’). These performances would have provided a doubling and contrasting spectacle of queenly sovereignty. Even within the restrictions imposed in the palace, queens like Mariana must have accessed some temporary imaginative freedom within the heterotopic space of theatre.

Modern theorists tell us that space is not neutral. It is a social and political product that is also frequently gendered. The spaces considered here no doubt helped shape the formation of female sovereignty in early modern Spain. Queens and their movements as manifested in their itineraries across borders and entries are representative of a specific type of cultural and political transfer and translation. These women brought their own tastes in art, theatre and music, in addition to their particular political education, to the space of the court. Likewise, the spatial divisions and configurations of the palace, while often restricting, became sites for negotiating and even contesting the gendered power dynamics within the Habsburg monarchy. Finally, the imaginative space of the theatre allowed for a heterotopic space in which lessons of female sovereignty were performed and mirrored. The consideration of these practised places and spaces allow us to understand royal women as much more than decorative (and easily interchangeable) helpmates to the male monarch, and to recognize them as the important sociopolitical players they really were.
Notes

4 Their situation was different from that of proprietary queens – i.e. those who inherited the throne in their own right, such as Isabel of Castile or her daughter, Juana of Castile – during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. They were women who possessed significant political power independent of their association with men. Recent scholarship has challenged the notion that women holding positions of power were the exception to the norm in the medieval period. See, for example, *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100-1400: Moving Beyond the Exceptionalist Debate* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). My essay deals more with the special circumstances and limitations of, specifically, the queens consort of the Spanish Habsburg dynasty (1516–1700). Because they were not proprietary queens, their access to power was more circumscribed and complicated than that of female antecedents in the Middle Ages.
7 *The Education*, p. 187.
8 *The Education*, p. 218.
10 In recent decades, there has been an explosion of scholarly interest in queens and other women in positions of authority in the early modern world. See, for example: Clarissa Campbell Orr, *Queenship in Europe, 1660-1815. The Role of the Consort* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Grace E. Coolidge, *Guardianship, Gender, and the Nobility in Early Modern Spain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010); Anne J. Cruz and Maria Galli Stampino, eds., *Early Modern Habsburg Women. Transnational Contexts, Cultural Conflicts, Dynastic Continuities* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2013); Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki, eds., *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Theresa Earenfight, *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005); Martha


13 Foucault famously proposes a tripartite category of space: real space, utopias and heterotopias. He describes the latter as ‘something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all other real sites that be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’. Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p. 24.


15 ‘Account of the Reception and Entry of Our Queen, Mariana of Austria in the most noble and loyal royal city of Madrid’.

16 ‘Esta era la Posicion, Magestad, Aparato, i Grandeza, con que amanecio MADRID, ilustrada i adornada, desde las Puertas d’el BVEN RETIRO, hasta las del PALACIO, siendo no menor la Riqueza de sus Casas, y Boca-Calles; pues aquellas se vieron cubiertas de Telas, Brocados, i Colgaduras bordadas, i Tapicerias; i en la variedad de sus colores,à todas partes admirables Pensiles, i desde sus alturas, hasta el suelo, se desojaban Rosas, i se esparcían Primaveras, ocupadas de otras de Mascaras,i Danças, hallando la Vista a cada paso, ya en la Novedad de Galas, in ya en la Variedad de Trages, i Instrumentos, una confusión de Pasmos i admiraciones’, Francisco Rizi, *Noticia del recibimiento i entrada de la Reyna nuestra Señora Doña MARIA-ANA de Austria en la muy noble y leal coronada villa de Madrid*, 1650. Biblioteca Nacional de España, http:/bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000053740&page=1. My translation.


19 ‘La Casa de la Reina [...] estaba dividida en los mismos departamentos de la Casa del Rey: la Cámara de la Reina, la Casa de la Reina propiamente dicha y las Caballerizas de la Reina. La Cámara de la Reina estaba compuesta por la Camarera Mayor, el Aya, las damas, las dueñas de retrete, guardadamas [...] una miríada de cargos femeninos; mujeres que trabajaban en palacio y recibían gajes, raciones y ciertas gratificaciones en función de su posición en la jerarquía de puestos de la Casa de la Reina’. Laura Oliván Santaliestra, ‘Mariana de Austria en la encrucijada política del Siglo XVII’ (PhD dissertation, Universidad Complutense Madrid, 2006), p. 82. Available online: https://eprints.ucm.es/8054/1/T29305.pdf.


21 Magdalena Sánchez, The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun. Women and Power at the Court of Philip III of Spain (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).


25 ‘Dícese que siente ya la Reina la criatura, y que es hijo, por sentirse pronto […] No hay que sacarla del Retiro, que se aflige en Palacio, donde gasta las mañanas frescas en monterías de flores, los días in festines y las noches en farsas. Todo esto incesantemente, que no sé como no le empalagan tantos placeres’, quoted in Manuel Ríos Mazcarelle, Mariana de Austria: Esposa de Felipe IV, 1635-1696 (Madrid: Alderabán Ediciones, 1997), p. 42.

26 ‘Miércoles en la noche, 28 del pasado, le dieron a la Reina tres desmayos y con ellos una grande alferécia de sobreparto, y no evacuar bien. Sangróronla aquella noche dos veces [...] estuvo tan apretada, que le dieron el Santísimo por Viático, temiendo no se les quedara muerte entre los brazos, asistiéndola siete médicos de Cámara’, quoted in Mazcarelle, Mariana, p. 47.


29 ‘Se reunía esta diariamente en el salón del Alcázar llamado del Rubí, de acuerdo con un ceremonial muy similar al del Consejo de Estado. La reina aparecía sentada, con un bufete de terciopelo negro delante, sobre el que se colocaba una campanilla de plata y una escribanía, todo ello sobre una alfombra también de terciopelo negro’. María Victoria López-Cordón, ‘Mujer, poder y apariencia o las vicisitudes de una regencia’, *Studia Historica: Historia Moderna* 19, no. 1 (December 2009), p. 51.

30 Mitchell, ‘Mariana of Austria’, p. 278.


33 See María Cristina Quintero, *Gendering the Crown in the Spanish Baroque Comedia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).


36 ‘El 12 de junio de 1688 María Luisa y sus damas dan vida a una divertida comedia, con motivo del cumpleaños de Mariana de Austria. Para sorpresa de todos, la reina sale al escenario vestida de caballero. La expectación y el éxito de la obra, que muestra a una soberana nunca vista de esta guisa, hace que tenga que representarse dos veces, ante Carlos II y su madre, los altos cargos de palacio y los grandes de España.’ María José Rubio, *Reinas de España: Las Austrias. Siglos XV-XVII de Isabel la Católica a Mariana de Neoburgo* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2010), p. 409. Rubio does not provide the name of title of the play.