of saying that Mao's architects knew that their designs of the square's architecture continued imperial building schemes in new packaging, but he implies this idea in the pictures, if not the text.

Chapter four introduces the fascinating topic of time keeping, whose direct relevance to the square, like the subjects of other chapters, has multiple layers of meaning including inseparability from Beijing's historic past. Bell or drum towers occupied central positions in traditional Chinese cities and towns, as their purposes were to announce the time by the beating of a drum or ringing of a bell. One of each has stood on the main axis of imperial Beijing since the days of Khubilai Khan. Building on past precedent, a massive digital clock was added to Tiananmen Square in 1994 to count down the days and seconds until the return of Hong Kong to China on 1 July 1997. As in the earlier sections of the book, Wu interweaves the politically laden icon with legend, history, and symbolism. Wu's personal narrative includes his nanny's stories, heard on childhood trips with her to the market near the Drum Tower, and the precious watch he received on his fifteenth birthday at the height of the Great Leap Forward. Meanwhile, Wu the art historian discusses the appearance of Western clocks in China, both as gifts to emperors (now in the Western clock rooms of the Forbidden City) and as prominently displayed time-keeping devices on Western-style buildings in China or in Chinese paintings. But Wu misses the opportunity to cite Antonino Forte's pathbreaking book, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the History of the Astronomical Clock* (1988).

The last chapters address contemporary art and urban planning, and the specific subject or backdrop of most of the art reviewed is either Mao or Tiananmen. Through spectacular images and personal anecdotes or experiences with artists, Wu demonstrates how they countered, objectified, and ultimately displaced (or “reframed”) Mao with the intent of emptying the square. The last chapter, a coda, deals first with Beijing's longest street, the east–west axis Chang’anje that cuts through the heart of the old imperial line, then moves to the ring roads, and finally the city's redesign for the Asian Games in 1991 and the Olympics in 2008. He offers the conclusion that Maoist leadership has passed, but Jiang Zemin’s Tiananmen does not signify a transformation from the Maoist era.

*Remaking Beijing* is a powerful book about art, architecture, history, politics, and society, and how through a city square the politically inspired youth challenged the past but could not release themselves from its symbols. With such a strong story and such potent images, it is a credit to Wu that he writes with the scholarly apparatus of notes and bibliography, ensuring that his book will not be yet another journalistic view of the city.

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Note

On Alberti

Branko Mitrovic

*Serene Greed of the Eye: Leon Battista Alberti and the Philosophical Foundations of Renaissance Theory*


Liisa Kanerva

Between Science and Drawings: Renaissance Architects on Vitruvius’s Educational Ideas


Paolo Fiore, editor, in collaboration with Arnold Nesselrath

La Roma di Leon Battista Alberti. Umanisti, architetti e artisti all’uscita dell’antico nella città del Quattrocento


Twenty-five years ago, a senior figure in Renaissance scholarship told me, “Why study Alberti, he has been done.” Indeed at that time, Alberti was a more or less canonic figure already framed by the likes of Ernst Cassirer, Rudolf Wittkower, Cecil Grayson, and Joan Gadol. But Alberti, as it turned out, was more elusive than one thought. Though Anthony Grafton has recently tried to maintain Alberti as the consummate humanist at the core of the development of the modern western mind, others have envisioned more complex possibilities. In fact, it is safe to say that today Alberti has become a thoroughly slippery character, and the age in which he lived was more complex than one might have imagined three decades ago.

The journal *Albertiana*, founded in 1998 under the leadership of Francesco Furlan, and the Fondazione Centro Studi Leon Battista Alberti, with its yearly conferences beginning in 1998, have produced a veritable mini-industry of papers discussing Alberti’s life and work. In the United States, by way of contrast, Alberti scholarship seems to have lost some steam recently, perhaps related to the general demotion of the Renaissance’s importance in American academia, especially in architectural history. This is partly why the most recent publications on Alberti are written outside of the U.S. academic framework: Kanerva is Finnish; Mitrovic is a Serb living and teaching in New Zealand; and *La Roma di Leon Battista Alberti* is a catalog of an Italian exhibition that features such European scholars as Arnold Bruschi, Arturo Calzona, and Christoph L. Frommel. The book by Kanerva, *Between Science and Drawings: Renaissance Architects on Vitruvius’s Educational Ideas*, is a sharply reasoned study of the architect in Renaissance theory. Mitrovic’s book, *Serene Greed of the Eye*, is a mature and carefully reasoned analysis of Alberti’s philosophical system. The catalog *La Roma di Leon Battista Alberti*, beautifully and lavishly illustrated (as one would expect from a Skira publication), tries to frame Alberti in the broader context of fifteenth-century Rome.
Mitrovic is forthright about his belief that underlying Alberti’s thinking is a “logically consistent body of theory” (19). As such, Mitrovic’s book belongs to a genre of scholarship that has its own history as well as its cadre of champions and critics. But unlike Francoise Choay and others who see the progression of the chapters of De re aedificatoria as the key to Alberti’s system, Mitrovic is not interested in how Alberti composed his treatise but in how he thought through the philosophical problems of his time, in particular those deriving from the Aristotelian corpus. Mitrovic aims not to explain Alberti’s writings as merely Aristotelian but to show how Alberti, despite his Aristotelian orientation, reached new territory by trying to connect the claim of universality with visual experience. For Mitrovic, bringing the visual and the philosophical into tension was Alberti’s masterstroke, especially since subsequent Renaissance theorists like Daniele Barbaro and Vincenzo Scamozzi evoked the Aristotelian system to create a theory that was less preeminently “visual.”

The balance Alberti achieved must not be understood as a negative reflection of Alberti’s looser quattrocento understanding of Aristotle. In fact, Mitrovic wants to show that Alberti was systematic precisely because he broke with the conventions of Aristotle, even though in the process Alberti created a system tortured by its own impossibility. It is Mitrovic’s attempt to trace this torture that marks the energy of his argument and that differentiates his approach from earlier proponents of Alberti who tended to emphasize the majesty of Alberti’s synthetic rationalism as Systemdenker.

To accomplish his goals, Mitrovic patiently and analytically discusses the meaning of critical terms such as linea-menta, forma, figura, species, animus, and concinnitas. His opening discussion of linea-menta, on which so much hangs for Mitrovic, traverses the complex philosophical and art historical literature on the subject to peel back, layer by layer, the likely meaning of the word for Alberti. Mitrovic then moves methodi-cally to the other terms until, at the end, we come to see the cleverness and indeed ingenuity of Alberti’s ambition: to create a system that though philosophically rigorous was also theoretical suited to the man-made world of architecture. The alliance and yet simultaneous incompatibility of philosophy and theory marks a problem that for Mitrovic is in some sense the key to Alberti’s true place in the history of aesthetic speculation.

Forays into Renaissance historiography, classical philosophy, contemporary historical methodology, and even cognitive psychology make Mitrovic’s book an interesting read. Mitrovic is no narrow contextualist, and he does not aim to stir in our imagination the refined aroma of “The Renaissance.” In fact, it is remarkable how infrequently that word appears. Instead, Mitrovic’s book is a type of history of philosophy and, in its deepest part, philosophy itself.

Kanerva’s book is very different in tone from Mitrovic’s in that she paints with broader strokes, discoursing on the writings of a whole range of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century architects. Kanerva, perhaps correctly reticent to unify that period, uses the term architect-writers to describe the dozen or so figures—ranging from Alberti and Filarete to Cesare Cesariano and Gian Domenico Scamozzi—that are the focus of her analysis. Some were trained as painters, others as goldsmiths or masons; four came from upper class families, the rest were artisans; some had engineering backgrounds; some knew Latin, others did not. Yet despite these variations, they all faced the central problem of how to define the role of the architect within a humanist framework, with the main issue being how to frame the architect’s education. This no insignificant concern since it landed anyone interested in the subject into numerous fractious debates touching on interpretations of Aristotle and Cicero as well as on subtle issues of theology, epistemology, and of course, on Vitruvius. The status of the architect was a preeminent philosophical problem of the Renaissance, more so than that of the artist, precisely due to Vitruvius’s dictum regarding the multiple arts that were linked to the science of architecture. The twists and turns of the problem force the scholar to be attentive to mistranslations of Vitruvius, to ways in which ideals of Cicero get woven in, and to changes in the disciplines of physics, medicine, and law during the fifteenth century.

Little of Kanerva’s argument might be called new, but the book is eminently useful and occasionally exciting in the way it covers the material by following the trajectories of the various disciplines associated—in practice or in theory—with architecture, whether it be history, philosophy, medicine, law, or optics. The result is a simple but certainly brilliant solution to the question of the history of architecture’s disciplinary status. Though the author intended, as expressed in the conclusion, to clarify and resolve certain conflicts in the interpretation of Renaissance architecture, one wonders if more powerful conclusions could not be asserted, to follow the lead from Mitrovic’s book, regarding the tension between philosophy and theory in Renaissance and post-Renaissance speculation. For example, with the creation of the more formalized academies for the arts, the end of the sixteenth century saw the birth of the modern notion of architectural education, and it seems that it is against this development that Kanerva posits the complex history of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century architect-writers; she hesitates to call them theorists. This begs the question, on a more historiographic note, about the interrelationship between writing and theory. In the end, there seems to be embedded in Kanerva’s view of the Renaissance a quasi-utopian moment in which the leading philosophical-aesthetic problem of the age developed outside of an institutional mandate and, one could almost add, outside of the framework of history itself. The transition into the modern was relatively long—two hundred years—but it was very much dependent on imagined possibilities of architecture, and it is this fundamental thesis that drives the book.
Compared to the highly focused, but not always easily transparent, positions of Mitrovic and Kanerva, the exhibition catalog *La Roma di Leon Battista*, with its subtitle *Umanisti, architetti e artisti all’opera nell’antico nella città del Quattrocento*, at first glance seems to be a grab bag of odds and ends. However, with a few exceptions, the essays are quite excellent, even if Alberti serves as little more than a convenient prop for the underlying issue of the exhibition: the cultural struggle in Rome in the quattrocento as artists, patrons, and intellectuals began to accommodate themselves not only to new representational possibilities in the arts, but also to the new ideological claims of the papacy and the continued and unsettled novelty of the antique. The potential to critically frame these issues—and thus to bring life into the subject matter of quattrocento Rome—is lost somewhat with so many authors pointing in different directions, but the tone is set by Arnold Nesselrath who shows that, despite the famous discovery of perspective and the quattrocento architect’s familiarity with its potential, perspective was only slowly integrated into an architectural practice that favored orthogonal projection. In fact, Nesselrath seems to argue that the perfecting of the medieval conventions of orthogonal projection and its synthesis with perspective was just as important to the history of Renaissance representation as the discovery of perspective itself.

The theme of the fluidity of quattrocento humanism in Rome is carried forward by Arnaldo Bruschi, who explores the design history of Palazzo Venezia and its associated church of San Marco, build- ings important to the history of architecture as the first major humanist-inspired designs and the first major architectural commission in Rome in several centuries. Scholars long ago suggested that Alberti had a hand in the design, but Bruschi goes as far as one can with the limited documents to prove Alberti’s role as a type of consultant to the project, noting certain correspondences between statements in *De re aedificatoria* and the layout of the building and the articulation of its detailing. In select cases, Alberti might have provided drawings, but in other cases, he might have corrected someone else’s plans. The question of authorship that Bruschi pursues is significant not because Bruschi wants to prove an attribution to Alberti, but because he aims to give insight into humanism’s transition—and translation—from an intellectual and ideological pursuit into the realm of architectural form.

Arturo Calzona looks with fresh eyes at the situation in Mantua, where Alberti arrived in 1459 to design the Basilica of San Andrea; and Christoph Frommel analyzes again the early design history and problems of attribution of the new St. Peter’s. On a more conceptual note, Massimo Miglio discusses the political situation—and the political imaginary—in quattrocento Rome, whereas Paolo Fancelli discusses the crisis of meaning that the Roman ruins posed, tracing the tension in attitudes toward the *spolia* between admiring their antiquity and seeing them as models for contemporary design.

While the quattrocento certainly had its great artists and patrons, it is clear from this book that there was a vibrant layer of secondary and tertiary artists whose life and work, still relatively underappreciated, are enmeshed in the life and work of the more famous. The result is not a convenient story line, but it goes to the credit of the exhibition organizers that they held their ground. The title of the exhibition could easily have been “The Rome of Jacopo di Cristoforo da Pietrasanta, Bernardo Rossellino, Giuliano da Sangallo, Benozzo Gozzoli, Jacopo Bellini, Giannozzo Manetti, and others, including Leon Battista Alberti.” Such a title would not have attracted much of an audience, and probably not much in the way of funding either, but it would have provided a clearer image of what to expect.

The three books discussed are not incompatible. With Mitrovic’s book, we imagine Alberti pacing back and forth in his studio writing and rewriting certain key sentences. With the exhibition on Rome, we can immerse ourselves in the complex social and cultural world of quattrocento Rome with its cadres of masons, architects, painters, and carpenters intermingling with humanists and bishops. With Kanerva, we get a sense of the intellectual issues that these very same architects, carpenters, and patrons—the writers among them at least—were debating. Taken together these books make an important contribution to quattrocento studies and to a better understanding of the foundations of the modern world.

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**Notes**
1. There were other lineages, but a particularly dominant one ended with Joan Kelly, *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance* (Chicago, 1969).

**Gülrü Necipoğlu**
*The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*

Sinan is without doubt the most famous architect of the Islamic world and probably the only one mentioned by name in any survey class on Islamic art. He is responsible for establishing the classical Ottoman architectural style and for the magnificent skylines of Istanbul and other cities. Even Istanbul’s splendid mosques, such as its popular tourist attraction the Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed I, built by a later architect, adheres closely to the standards established by Sinan. While a good deal has been written on Sinan, much of it treating him as a misunderstood genius, in general only the formal qualities of his architectural evolution are addressed. By contrast, Gülrü Necipoğlu deals with Sinan’s work in a far more contextualized manner. This weighty volume will long serve as the definitive work on this remarkable architect and the cultural milieu of sixteenth-century Ottoman society. Necipoğlu’s arguments are rein-

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