Review Essay

The View from the Concave Stair: Recent Literature on Renaissance Architecture and Architectural Writing

by CHARLES BURROUGHS

Ennio Concina. *A History of Venetian Architecture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 362 pp. illus, bibl, index. $75. ISBN: 0-521-57338-6.

David Cowling. *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France.* (Oxford Modern Languages and Literature Monographs.) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. ix + 245 pp. append, bibl, index. $75. ISBN: 0-19-815959-5.

Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks, eds. *Paper Palaces: The Rise of the Renaissance Architectural Treatise.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. xii + 441 pp. append, bibl, index. $45. ISBN: 0-300-07530-8.

Liisa Kanerva. *Defining the Architect in Fifteenth-Century Italy: Exemplary Architects in L.B. Alberti's* De Re aedificatoria. (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, 294.) Helsinki: SuomalainenTiedeakatemia, 1998. 166 pp. bibl. n.p. ISBN: 951-41-0845-0.

Michael Lingohr. *Der Florentiner Palastbau der Hochrenaissance: Der Palazzo Bartolini Salimbeni im seinem historischen und architekturgeschichtlichen Kontext.* Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1997. 160 pls. + 311 pp. append, bibl, index. DM 159. ISBN: 3-88462-137-8.

Alina A. Payne. *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. xv + 343 pp. illus, bibl, index. $75. ISBN: 0-521-62266-2.

Sebastiano Serlio. *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture.* Vol 1. Books 1-5 of *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva.* Trans.Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996. xxxv + 524 pp. illus, bibl, index. $70. ISBN 0-300-06286-9.

Robert Tavernor. *On Alberti and the Art of Building*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. xv + 278 pp. illus, append, bibl, index. $60. ISBN: 0-300-07615-0.

The cathedral of Quito, capital city of Ecuador, stands at the head of an incline articulated by a circular stair, in which a lower, convex hemicycle gives access to a concave hemicycle above. This motif is familiar to any student of Renaissance Roman architecture as a signal feature of Bramante's design for the Belvedere courtyard in the papal palace in Rome, where it led to a famed collection of ancient, pagan statues. The architect of the Quito stair, however, doubtless knew the motif from its appearance in the famous architectural treatise by Sebastiano Serlio (the stair itself was replaced ca. 1561). The ascent to Quito cathedral, then, demonstrates the global reach of the new architecture and the vastly expanded diffusion of architectural motifs, secured through advances in architectural representation and through the new medium of the printed book or, more specifically, the recently established genre of the printed architectural treatise.

Serlio notes the original context of the circular stair motif, but the emphasis in his treatise on graphic representation encouraged the availability of this and other motifs for diverse contexts and functions. In Quito, the stair leading to the cathedral performs a specific functional or urbanistic and symbolic task as an emphatic threshold between the realm of commerce (embodied in the shops sheltered beneath the terrace through which the stair ascends) and that of the sacred, marked conspicuously through the twin towers favored in Counter-Reformation ecclesiastical architecture.[1] *In nuce*, then, the Quito stair illustrates the phenomenon of the self-conscious appropriation of architectural forms, along with their deployment in a new context, that characterizes European architecture in general, but never more so than in the Renaissance. It also draws attention to the complex question of the relations between book and building, theory and practice.

These issues are central in the books reviewed for this paper, which as a group demonstrate both the variety and vitality of scholarship on European architecture of the Renaissance. They range from a new edition and translation of a major treatise (that of Serlio, already mentioned) to accounts of Renaissance treatises and architectural discourse in general, both as a literary phenomenon and in relation to the rise of the architectural profession. A monograph on a great architect and theorist contrasts with a work on a prominent designer, as famous for his paintings as for his architecture, who

[1] I owe all I know about Quito cathedral to a lecture, as yet unpublished, by Tom Cummins.

wrote not a word of theory. The study of a palace in its urban and architectural context contrasts, in turn, with the account of the millennial history of a major city. Two books, finally, focus on the role of architectural references or metaphors within literary texts. Most of these works have been reviewed in specialist journals; I will eschew detailed commentary here, therefore, in favor of more general observations.

With Vaughan Hart's and Peter Hicks's edition of the most important components of Sebastiano Serlio's projected seven-part treatise (a second volume will follow), all the major architectural treatises of antiquity and the Renaissance have become available in accessible, accurate, and well-annotated English translations. The cultural importance in the Renaissance of published architectural discourse and prescription is well known; we may wonder, however, about the contemporary cultural significance, beyond the restricted circle of academic specialists, of the new editions. After all, the "printing revolution" has given way to the cyber-revolution, with the development of new graphic protocols and techniques (recalling a key aspect of the Renaissance) and the appropriation of forms and motifs from other domains, though not, on the whole, from antiquity. Frank Gehry's office, with its teams of aerospace engineers and CAD specialists, is an especially conspicuous example of this.

A further striking aspect of these books is the extent to which they represent collective or at least collaborative scholarship. Two volumes comprise essays by various scholars. In its original Italian version, the book on Giulio Romano accompanied a major exhibition. Such an occasion often stimulates or even requires a collaborative project. In this case, however, the volume represents an installment in, or perhaps a culmination of, a series of collaborative projects concerned with major Renaissance architects (for example the *Raffaello architetto* volume, which was never published in English, indicating a relative evaluation of Raphael and Giulio that would have raised eyebrows in the sixteenth century).[2] As in the Raphael volume, the Giulio volume brings together scholars of highly disparate ideological horizons and scholarly interests. In particular, it is the final appearance in such a context of Manfredo Tafuri, who died in 1994,

[2]C. L. Frommel, S. Ray, and Manfredo Tafuri, eds., *Raffaello architetto* (Milan: Electa, 1984). Other important recent and continuing collaborative efforts, often involving some of the same scholars, are the series of proceedings of thematic conferences of the Centre d'études supérieures de la Renaissance at Tours organized (and the volumes edited) by Jean Guillaume; exhibitions organized by Henry Millon and others on Renaissance and baroque architecture, with particular attention to architectural representation and design methods; and the study of the drawings of Antonio da Sangallo conducted by C. L. Frommel, N. Adams, and others.

whose remarkable article dominates the volume and, perhaps, had much to do with the production of an English language version.

An important recent focus of collaborative activity has been the preparation of new English language editions of important treatises, like that of Serlio in the group of books under review. A crucial, if not inaugural, moment in this development was the appearance of Joseph Rykwert's edition of Alberti's treatise, the first architectural treatise of the Renaissance.[3] Rykwert's former students and associates have been prominently involved in subsequent translation projects and research associated with them, as the present group of books shows. Robert Tavernor, author of the new study of Alberti, collaborated with Rykwert on the Alberti treatise and went on to produce, again collaboratively, a new English edition of Palladio's *Four Books*.[4] Apart from the Serlio volume, Vaughan Hart is chiefly responsible for *Paper Palaces*, a collection of essays including four by Hart himself (two on Serlio), one by Rykwert, and many others by scholars associated with Rykwert, including Tavernor, a colleague of Hart's at the Architecture School at Bath University, an important emerging center of architectural research.

If Alberti's treatise on architecture and urbanism, the *De re aedificatoria* (first published in 1485), is by far the most intellectually impressive of the period, Serlio's treatise had the greatest impact on architectural practice. Indeed, it was designed to be accessible to professionals, not least through the innovation of using drawings consistently as the main vehicle of information (Alberti's treatise had lacked illustrations). Serlio's career was unprecedented; enjoying indifferent success as a practicing architect, he devoted much of his life to the preparation of a seven-part treatise (the Hart and Hicks volume contains the first five "books"), as well as two other "extraordinary" books. Hart's introduction clarifies the complicated publication history of the various components, some of which remained in manuscript until the twentieth century. A native of Bologna, Serlio sojourned in Rome and Venice at a crucial period in the architectural history of both cities, but he spent his last years in France, where he had entered the service of the king. He was in person, therefore, a vehicle of the diffusion, both in and beyond Italy, of revolutionary new protocols of architectural design. The nature and implications of Serlio's achievement recur as important themes of many of the books under review, and provide useful points of comparison.

[3]Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1988).

[4]Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture*, trans. Robert Tavernor and Richard Schofield (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1997).

In *Paper Palaces*, Hart contributes a useful essay on Serlio and architectural representation — a matter of broad cultural interest in the Renaissance, in view of the close links between the ordering and exploration of virtual space through perspective, the rendering of real or imagined architecture, and the developing interest in the space of the theater. Serlio supplies various models of buildings designed for spectacle, as well as, in a famous section of his volume on perspective, ideas for the sets ("scenes") for the three kinds of ancient drama, as filtered through Vitruvius. The social distance between the scenes of tragedy and comedy relates to the issue of decorum, emphasized by Hart, as a principle governing the assignment of architectural form to varying social content, that is, to different building types and, in the case of domestic architecture, different classes.

Such limiting mechanisms are necessary in view of the lure of license, that is, a range of excessive and possibly transgressive formal possibilities variously departing from the newly established orthodoxy of classicism. Serlio in fact is not only the first to institute the canonical set of five classical orders; he is also, on occasion, a leading proponent of architectural license (at times, needless to say, he presents himself as a strict adherent of orthodoxy). Hart reconciles these positions by arguing that, for Serlio, the "mask" of licentious ornament can be stripped away to leave an essential and perfectly normative underlying architecture of "hidden lines." Further, Hart sees Pythagorean architectural form as inherent in the very drafting process, when the designer uses "hidden lines" — guidelines — as an armature for more complex solutions. Hart's concern with the ideal and universal in cultural process locates Hart firmly in a line of descent from Rudolf Wittkower and Frances Yates, whose insistence on the centrality of Platonist-Pythagorean ideas in the culture of the Renaissance Hart develops, implicitly placing Serlio as a kind of missing link between Alberti and Palladio, the heroes of Wittkower's classic account. Not surprisingly, then, in his own articles in *Paper Palaces*, Hart hardly explores the social dimension of the conflict, registered acutely by Serlio, between ideas of transcendent architectural value and the requirement for specific devices of self-representation and promotion.

Nevertheless, the interest in placing the production and reception of treatises within determinate social and intellectual worlds pervades *Paper Palaces*. The largest group of essays, in a section entitled "Emulating Vitruvius," is more or less focussed on a particular treatise or group of treatises (three deal mainly with Serlio) and oriented more towards internal structure and character, as are the two essays in a final section entitled "Beyond Vitruvius." Three essays are included in a section on "The treatise in context," and deal with issues of the reception and, to a degree, production of architectural theory in Venice, the Netherlands, and England. Hart himself

addresses the situation in England, tracking the accommodation of Italian theory to new political or religious contexts, notably Protestantism.

The most explicitly thematic essay in the volume appears in the first section, however. Mario Carpo's essay on the "typographic architect" (largely dealing, needless to say, with Serlio) is a distillation of an important larger, less accessible book,[5] which brings the discussion of architecture into relation with the debates about "print culture" and attendant processes of standardization and "vulgarization" among historians of mentalities. Indeed, the span of the essays, from Alberti, a pioneer humanist, to the break-up of the Vitruvian tradition in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France makes the volume as a whole an important resource for the history of modernization and attendant epistemologies. As a group, the papers document the erosion of the association of architectural form with transcendent values, especially the idea of universal harmony, culminating, at least on paper, in the radical rewriting of Vitruvius by Charles Perrault in the era of Louis XIV, the subject of an impressive discussion by Indra McEwen. Jean Guillaume's essay on the sixteenth-century French architect Philibert de l'Orme is especially interesting in this context, with its stress on De l'Orme's self-conscious originality, not least through his insistent use of the first person, and his preoccupation with geometrical projection and construction technology. Though De l'Orme sought to establish "divine proportion," Guillaume notes a transfer of interest from proportion to measurement. Such concerns perhaps link De l'Orme with the Gothic inheritance and suggest the latter's importance in the development and eventual subversion of the Vitruvian system.[6]

Thirteen of the nineteen papers in *Paper Palaces* deal with the work of particular architectural writers, most of them also major architects. A neophyte reader might receive the impression that all major architects wrote treatises. Many did, but there were conspicuous exceptions, including Giulio Romano, whose bravura projects, often playfully ironicizing the boundaries of classical orthodoxy, as most liberally defined, made him a byword throughout Renaissance Europe. The major essays in the volume on his architecture — by Tafuri, Frommel, Howard Burns, and Kurt Forster with Amedeo Belluzzi — contextualize Giulio's work in Rome and Mantua, emphasize its theatrical character, and elucidate Giulio's particular relation-

[5]M. Carpo, *L'architettura dell'età della stampa: oralità, scrittura, libro stampato e riproduzione meccanica dell'immagine nella storia delle teorie architettoniche* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998).

[6]The Gothic inheritance of Renaissance and baroque French architecture is a key theme of J. M. Pérouse de Montclos, *L'Architecture à la francaise* (Paris: Picard, 1982). Guillaume cites the book in his bibliography but ignores it in the article.

ship to antiquity, one less of self-conscious appropriation than of absorption on the part of a native Roman convinced of the elements of continuity, especially in everyday conduct, between ancient and modern Rome.

Tafuri's article is well known, especially the discussion of architectural license in relation to the licentiousness of the "pornographic" imagery produced by Giulio in Rome, the object of an early case of censorship of visual material.[7] Tafuri connects the incident — for which punishment was reserved for the printmaker, not the author of the imagery — with the Renaissance concern to create a "discourse on the body." At the same time, however, he notes the medievalizing aspect of this and other works by Giulio, for whom the essence of Roman art was contamination. Giulio's own mixing of the high and demotic, or even of ancient and medieval, was therefore effectively classical, however paradoxical this may seem. Tafuri ends by relating Giulio's experimentation both to contemporary theories of language that insisted on the positive value of vernacular forms of speech and to Renaissance discourse about play as manifested explicitly, at least by 1572, in treatises on the topic.

In her exceptional book on Renaissance architectural discourse, Alina Payne notes the hiatus in treatise production in early sixteenth-century Rome (when Giulio was getting started) as a time when theory could exist "locked inside" the buildings themselves, notably those of Bramante, the greatest innovator of the "High Renaissance," who left not a word of reflection on what he had accomplished. In general, her project is to demonstrate the "imbrication" (one of her favorite words), not between architecture and theory, but between architectural and rhetorical/literary discourse, as well as among the "chain of texts" about architecture itself. The first chapters are thematic, lucidly and concisely establishing the major issues around which Renaissance architectural discourse, seen as a whole, revolves, notably the tension between decorum and license. Most of the book consists of a review of the major architectural theorists from the inevitable Alberti to the relatively neglected Vincenzo Scamozzi, whose career takes her into the early seventeenth century. Many of the writers discussed will be very familiar to readers of this journal, though even specialists may meet Giorgio Spini for the first time. Especially compelling is Payne's presentation of Vitruvius as, for the Renaissance, a contemporary author, since his treatise first appeared in print almost in the same year as Alberti, and was constantly reshaped by commentators and interpreters. Indeed, her chapter on Vitruvius serves in part explicitly to provide a basis for determining the nature and degree of de-

[7] See, for example, Daniel Sherer, "Tafuri's Renaissance: architecture, representation, transgression," *Assemblage* 28 (1995): 34-45.

partures on the part of successive authors from Vitruvian doctrine and categories, whatever their professed loyalty to the ancient author.

Payne ends her book with a chapter on Scamozzi in part to approach, with evident relief, an author whose volubility and willingness to engage with theoretical issues contrast with the laconic Palladio, in whose own treatise, with its "exemplum format," illustrations of his own collected works and of other approved buildings effectively carry much of the discourse. Payne has a particular interest in Scamozzi, however, because his treatise explicitly takes up both the visual and verbal traditions of reflection on key issues whose relatedness, in the earlier texts, had to be surmised, often through impressive literary sleuthing. For Payne the span of Scamozzi's intellectual interests and the cogency of his discussions follow from his "position both inside and outside a discourse" (214), a characterization that applies rather well also to Payne's own achievement. As in Tafuri's article on Giulio, the theme of license stands at the center of Payne's discussions, which, for all the emphasis on intertextuality, ultimately propose a psychological inquiry; in her view, a "cultural anxiety" concerning appropriation subtends learned discourse in general in the Renaissance, not just in the domain of architecture. License is only truly possible, she argues, when rules have been established. While demonstrating how reflection on architecture — that is, on Vitruvius's treatise, with its strongly prescriptive character — entered and informed the mainstream of theoretical reflection on the arts in general, she insists that architectural theory in general was crucially shaped by theories of literary and pictorial representation and expression.

Payne's book, like *Paper Palaces*, can be read as a study of modernization. The earlier chapters examine the connections between architectural discourse and rhetorical and literary theory, as well as the theory of the visual arts. Central in this web of ideas is the metaphor of the body, well known as a key theme in Vitruvian theory, but now demonstrated to be no less important in rhetoric, that is, in relation to conceptions of the well-articulated oration. Payne also tracks the concern with imitation as a key element in the effort to give legitimacy and meaning to architectural forms, again within a Vitruvian framework but through the integration of elements (notably narratives such as the famous stories of the caryatids or Dinocrates) into the argument in a way that is unprecedented in the ancient model. Certainly, Payne explores connections between theoretical and archaeological study, noting that the reconstruction of mostly fragmentary buildings sets difficulties greater than those contained in the study of statues: since the latter were generally representations of the human body, the target configuration was known, as was not the case with buildings. She emphasizes, however, the place of both the

nascent science of archaeology and the explication of Vitruvius within a range of generally literary and philological intellectual activities.

In later chapters, Payne notes the impact within architectural discourse of different intellectual paradigms. Her argument in her chapter on Palladio for the lessening intensity of the engagement with Vitruvius may come as a surprise, given Palladio's own involvement with the great Vitruvius edition of his friend Daniele Barbaro, to which, she suggests, Palladio's *Four Books* should be seen as a companion volume. But Payne argues that Vitruvius was now absorbed into the discourse, and that Palladio was more concerned with the relation of architecture to nature, as a realm of necessity that buildings should echo and even instantiate as much as possible. By the mid-sixteenth century, such references to nature resonate with the developing study of the natural world, in particular the taxonomic effort elicited, not least (though Payne does not mention this), by the discovery of the "New World" with its plethora of unknown and unsuspected species. Payne tracks the concern with taxonomy and species theory through a number of texts, among which, again, Serlio plays a key role, though his basic framework is still Vitruvian and literary.

In the subsequent chapter on Spini, a now little-known functionary at the late-sixteenth-century Medicean court and an associate of the Florentine academy, Payne notes the encyclopedic interest — or even method — driving his unprecedentedly coherent and explicit account of discourses on ornament, license, and imitation that run through much of the earlier treatise literature. Novel, in Spini, is the search for the basic logic from which the forms of architecture can be derived, a concern closely linked to natural scientists' search for underlying principles, the *cagioni delle cose*. Further, Spini's interest in imitation leads him to engage with the Vitruvian account of the descent of temple architecture from timber technology, which in turn involves reflection on the importance in late Renaissance culture of the study of the physics of load-bearing structures. In relation to earlier theorists, Payne notes the strain caused by the ancient author's rival legitimizations of architectural form, one in terms of the human body, the other in terms of the primitive house; through proportion theory, Spini reconciles these aspects of Vitruvian doctrine.

In her final chapter on Scamozzi, a generally neglected figure, Payne emphasizes further the importance for architectural discourse of both the natural sciences (that is, classificatory method) and technology. She argues that the body analogy remains important, but that the earlier concern with human body types (as in Serlio) gives way to that with sequence, the body as machine. This implies a shift from a metaphoric to a metonymic dimension that presages the abandonment of analogy in western high culture, the pro-

cess charted in the work of Perrault by McEwen in *Paper Palaces*. The latter volume also contains an essay on Scamozzi, by Marco Frascari, which is startlingly different in its point of view from Payne. In a discussion much indebted to Frances Yates, a figure entirely missing from Payne's book, Frascari explores the evidence for links between Scamozzi and such key figures of sixteenth-century Italian intellectual history as Giulio Camillo, inventor of the famous memory theater, and Giordano Bruno. Here too, needless to say, the progress to modernization is in question, in this case through new paradigms of authoriality and the acquisition and mobilization of knowledge.

Payne's intertextual approach is developed with supple brilliance, though her appeal to literary paradigms curiously neglects key discussions of the tension in Renaissance culture between inventiveness and excess, on the one hand, and the legitimating appeal to ancient models, on the other.[8] The often repeated insistence on a "chain of texts," needless to say, leaves little opportunity for engagement with the social, still less political, aspect of the phenomena under discussion. Certainly, for instance, Payne notes Alberti's concern with use, rather than norms, and his vision of a transfigured city-wide environment; she gives little emphasis, however, to the Aristotelian-Ciceronian political theory that informs Alberti's treatise. She does not comment on the disappearance of political or social analysis from the later treatises, though this shift of focus was surely a key factor in the relative neglect of Alberti in the sixteenth century, as Payne notes. Indeed, a key absence in the intertextual network of the sixteenth century is any explicit reflection on politics or allusion to political theory; Machiavelli, for instance, does not show up in Payne's book.

In a work explicitly concerned with a "string of texts," that argues for the relative unity of a body of writing, certain omissions inevitably occur. The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a famous erotic architectural romance, gets short shrift, though it receives prominence in *Paper Palaces* as the subject of a fascinating article by Alberto Perez-Gomez (it is important to note, however, that Payne is attentive to the theme of pleasure as a factor in architectural theory). Nor is it Payne's concern to detail the sociopolitical context of the treatises, nor to situate them in relation to concerns that do not mark the treatise literature as a whole. In this respect it is instructive to consider her approach in relation to that of David Cowling, a literary scholar who, in a book on architectural allegories in French literary production of the Renaissance, emphasizes the role of architectural metaphors

[8]Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

in a literary tradition increasingly tied both to the glorification of the emerging nation state and to the conceptualization of the profound political and institutional shifts that were underway. Cowling considers the metaphors respectively of the human body, the state, memory, and the text as a building, drawing on a wide command of ancient and medieval sources; his book is likely to be of great interest to scholars of the actual Renaissance built environment, though the texts studied by Cowling are remarkable for their inattention to built architecture.

The shift from corporatist to a monarchic and bureaucratic state was nowhere more striking than in Florence. Symptomatic of Payne's disciplined perspective is her discussion of Spini, editor, as she notes, of the works of Giovanni della Casa, including the Galateo, a conduct manual that would be crucial in the formalization of social behavior typical of the early modern period, not least within Spini's own Florentine milieu. Payne leaves it to the reader to ponder the implications of such connections. Indeed, she insists that "architecture's unique reference point was antiquity" (66). This was certainly not true of architectural practice, however, as the case of Giulio Romano indicates, while it was certainly mainly in his architectural work that Michelangelo developed a link between new possibilities of invention — or inventiveness — and the idea of the grotesque. And any anxiety in architectural theory about the appropriation of antiquity was surely matched by anxiety arising from tension between the "internal" norms of architecture, as established in the treatise literature (see especially Richard Tuttle's essay on Vignola in *Paper Palaces*), and the interest within the "external" social world in self-representation and projection, not least through strictly non-architectural communicative systems like heraldry and emblematics. Certainly, Payne brings up the issue of the iconographical, informational dimension of architecture, pushed to its limits by Serlio, but without looking beyond the limits of discourse imposed by the treatise writers.

If Payne largely leaves out the sociopolitical resonance of architectural theory, therefore, it is a reflection of perspectives within the texts themselves, as well as the undoubted "blind spots" — the neglect of key issues by Renaissance authors — that occasionally draw her comment. No author can do everything; Payne's fine analyses of the contributions of particular authors to an evolving architectural discourse can be well complemented by reflections on the wider context of both theory and practice. A fine example of this in relation to an individual architect and treatise writer is Robert Tavernor's monograph on Alberti. This is a beautifully produced volume that immediately strikes the eye as a visual record not only of Alberti's extant buildings and other buildings relevant to their analysis, but also of projects and design ideas, reconstructed through models and computer imaging. The book

draws, once again, on a collaborative effort, that of the "Alberti group," organized by Tavernor and Joseph Rykwert in successive architecture schools and drawing on state-of-the art imaging procedures in the modern discipline of architecture (reminding us of the importance for later developments of Alberti's own recommendations about architectural drawing). An architect himself, Tavernor approaches Alberti almost as a colleague, judiciously weighing the evidence for the often very complex questions about patronage and design, and producing a highly integrated portrait of his multi-talented subject. This accords with the image of Alberti conveyed in Rykwert's lucid article in *Paper Palaces*, emphasizing the intense involvement of Alberti, the elegant courtier-intellectual, with the often "messy world of building."

Such an account contrasts, needless to say, with recent studies of Alberti informed by poststructuralist concerns, and emphasizing the bizarre aspect of Alberti's character and literary production, which indeed he himself noted.[9] Certainly no single reading is possible of Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, as Liisa Kanerva reminds us with her emphasis on the anecdotal aspect of the book, with its frequent references to important, mostly ancient patrons and builders, among whom Kanerva includes, in an imaginative move, Nature herself. In Tavernor's monograph, Alberti's theory and literary activity — even so biting a satire as the *Momus* — appear entirely consonant with his architectural career. A notorious crux in Alberti studies is the original conception for the church of San Sebastiano in Mantua, certainly a bizarre building in its extant form and already baffling to contemporaries. Tavernor addresses the project through a range of evidence, situating it in relation to the context of church architecture in Mantua and to the physical expressions of a key pilgrimage cult, as well as to the interests of the patron and to a concern shared by other major architects at the time with the shaping and proportioning of central-plan sacred buildings. He successfully demonstrates the effect on the progress of the project of problems caused by the marshy site, as well as pressure from the patron, and he reconstructs Alberti's eminently practical and flexible response to both kinds of problem.

Tavernor's contextualization of Alberti's career stages and projects necessarily dwells on Florence in the period of Medicean domination from Cosimo to Lorenzo the Magnificent. For the successive period Michael Lingohr provides an essential point of reference, framing a monographic treatment of a striking Florentine elite residence of the 1520s, the Palazzo Bartolini-Salimbeni, in discussions of the production of the residential hab-

[9]Notably A. Grafton, "Panofsky, Alberti, and the ancient world," *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Views from the Outside*, ed. I. Lavin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 123-30. See also Mark Jarzombek, *On Leon Baptista Alberti: His Literary and Aesthetic Theories* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1989).

itat, at least that of the elite, in the years following the fall of the Medici in 1494. He gives a useful account of the very important ongoing debate about the relationship between palace architecture (or, more generally, social space) and kinship structure. In terms of style, a major feature of the period in question is the emergence of a relatively plain palace architecture, at least on the exterior; Lingohr provides a judicious discussion of the ideological aspect of this tendency, i.e., its connection with religious pietism and republican politics. The volume contains a useful list of Florentine Renaissance palaces with bibliographical information, indicating the wealth of extant material as well as the often provisional state of research.

Lingohr's approach is necessarily largely synchronic; as such it contrasts with Ennio Concina's diachronic account of the built environment of Venice. As an expert, in particular, on Venice's early history, Concina is especially well qualified to provide an account of a *longue durée*, within which innovations can stand out in full profile. Whereas most accounts of Venice stress its status as a post-ancient foundation, Concina emphasizes Venetian conceptions of the city's late-Roman origins, and he traces the history of stylistic preferences, Roman or Byzantine, in relation to Venice's changing fortunes and political responses to such shifts. Concina's book is also the first study of the total span of Venetian history to integrate — indeed to develop — Tafuri's studies of the ideological dimension of architectural fashion, and the occasional strategic recourse to architectural innovation or conservatism. Concina frames such shifts in a wider context, not only historical but also geographical, noting, for example, the coincidence in the sixteenth century of a conservative, plain palace style and the programmatic selection of palace sites at the margins of the city, reflecting a concern with the embellishment of the whole. And he gives due attention to the various social, institutional, and regulatory factors in urban and environmental change.

This group of studies of Italian architecture encompasses, then, the vast range from theoretical reflection to concrete urban history. A common thread, as we have seen, is the concern with "license," an inventiveness in the accommodation of semantically powerful forms to new purposes and situations, which is variously in tension with a countervailing impulse to discipline and order. Nowhere is this more evident than in Serlio's figuring of architecture as an arena of contrast and occasional conflict between art and nature, and Serlio's own vacillation between Vitruvian orthodoxy and license, and between metropolitan paradigms and accommodation to local conditions (the relationship between these antinomies still requires exploration).

Antinomies also haunt the world of Renaissance architecture studies (and not least the study of Serlio, now rescued from the disdain apparent in much earlier scholarship), notably between a rising interest in the history of

mentalities and ideological formations and a relatively conservative intellectual history. We can see Tafuri as a representative, if not patron saint, of the former, and Hart as a representative of the latter, though he includes in *Paper Palaces* an essay on Venice by a close former associate of Tafuri, Manuela Morresi. The interest in reception, including that of Serlio, in Morresi's and other contributions points the way toward scholarly projects exceeding the exclusive focus on Europe of the books under review. After all, the diffusion of Serlio's work was not only rapid but also global; the current boom in Serlio studies may therefore hopefully stimulate research, necessarily collaborative and interdisciplinary, on built environments in an early modern world in which, by the end of the sixteenth century, the South American mining center of Potosì was perhaps the largest city ruled by Europeans.

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