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 DESIGNING BY NARRATIVE.  
 AN INQUIRY INTO ARCHITECTURE AFTER  
 DE RE AEDIFICATORIA

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Narratives within material culture, as personal interpretations of experiences, can be structured in a complex logic. Either we perceive its narrative meaning (Carr, 1986) as we perceive actions and events narratively structured and our experience a part of those pre-conceived narratives — ‘narrative realism’, or they have only the narrative meaning imposed by our interpretations (White, 1981) with the imposition of our idiosyncrasy and narrative significance into the experience — ‘narrative constructivism’, which has no essential narrative meaning.

When we look at Alberti, as an orator or a designer with words, as proposed by (Eriksen, 2001) following the purpose of the latin text meant to be read for patrons, and we try to research the underlying narratives in the treatise, the ‘imitatio’ and the overcoming of previous orders of scholastic culture to neoplatonic metaphysics conception of creation arise, in the form of references to ancient authors and in the use of a narrative form to enhance communication, to captivate and to educate. In this narrative transformation, considering the emotional response to beauty, we must advocate a connection between the persuasive effect of oratory and architecture, going from ‘narrative realism’ knowledge, embodying our previous experience, to ‘narrative constructivism’, with the imposition of our idiosyncrasy. Our research on his writings values an implied reader, in order to ensure the impact on the audience, captivated by a visual writing that allows seeing as drawing would allow comprehension, channeling the reader’s attention to the ‘plot’ or framing in the limits of literature and visual arts, immersed in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). The reader’s imagination is in this way conducted in the act of reading and experiencing the whole enclosed in well determined limits. Alberti’s dominantly spatial writing concept, rather than linear literary plot, approaches previous knowledge accessible in the mind, pre-conceived as Cusa defended in ‘De docta ignorantis’ (Cusa, De La Docte Ignorance, 1930) and disciplines (Eriksen, 2001), drawing, mathematic, music, as if rhetoric narrative form used by the implied author in the creation of a fiction and ordering particularities, could unify theoretic thought and practice methodology, being hidden as a structure to give sense to the theory of a ‘divine mind’.

Architecture and rhetorical features

The relation between the conception of architecture and the texts prior to that architecture is understudied, mainly how the essential ideals of renaissance expression intertwine building design (‘lineamenta’) and writing in similar compositional and grammatical analogies. Commonly considered ‘literary architecture’, architecture as a well crafted text rooted in ancient rhetorical features, in the sense of Horacio’s ‘ut pictura poeisis’ by establishing the relation between rhetoric discipline and art, through emulation Alberti grasped a broader field of knowledge into architecture (Herman, 2003), and at the same time, valued the architecture of the text reinventing composition ideals with formal

properties of figures of repetition as ‘antitheses’, ‘parallelismus’, ‘epanalepsis’, ‘epanados’, and ‘antimetabole’ (Eriksen, 2001). Repetition became the structure of a composed whole, on order to resemble the textual description and to pursue harmony and elocution of a Ciceronean discourse when language became a form of architecture. The strangeness of this resemblance can be read in Alberti’s text, as he wrote in the opening of the Prologue about ‘Many and various arts, which help to make (...) life more agreeable and cheerful’ (Alberti, On the Art of Bulding in Ten Books, 1988, [1485], Prologue), as he follows Aristotle and other’s advice (Alberti, On the Art of Bulding in Ten Books, 1988 [1485], Book II 4. 23-24V) to further comprehend architecture making and develop rhetorical ornament in composition, auxiliary and complement to inner structure (Alberti, On the Art of Bulding in Ten Books, 1988 [1485], Book VI 2. 93-94). Furthermore, Alberti’s text, a proto-scientific work (Eriksen, 2001), and a conceptual abstraction (Kruft, 1994), favours the understanding trough investigation and experiment while quoting ancient authors to evoke what was known, as ‘narrative realism’, like Vitruvius did in ‘De Architectura libri decem’.

Similar to the plot in the literary text and Aristotle’s rhetorical ornament and verbal harmony, topomorphology (according to (Eriksen, 2001), the distribution in text of places and themes, shaped in terms of symmetry, ‘sequentia’, frame, plot and speech figures, apart from architectural metaphors) emerges within the structure of spatial relationships to shape the experience as an interpretation of text, articulating the beginning with the end, the part with the Aristotelian formula of wholeness, and to give sense to experience with ‘comprehension’ as a text allows ‘seeing’ as we can read in (Alberti, On the Art of Bulding in Ten Books, 1988) [1485], Book I, 9.13v-15) – ‘the city is like some large house, and the house is in turn like some small city’. The symmetry and repetition (within different processes, comprehension and seeing) creates a pattern that strengths the unity of the whole, like a composition with laws and systems of signification to communicate the creator’s idea. This actual practice introduces new knowledge into architecture, a ‘narrative constructivism’ from plot to space, which makes necessary to identify text architecture as a common ground to impose order into composition, in order to make the discordant appear concordant. It also compares the temporal logic of narrative projections, in the text, with our temporal experience of space, our phenomenological experience (Ricoeur, 1998) in an attempt to connect space where we move our bodies in and time.

Alberti’s highly visual configuration unifying different knowledge, with emphasis in creating a strong argument to grasp a vast comprehension into the unknown summed in the title of Alberti’s text, a doorway to ‘poiesis’ and to know ‘why we build’. Alberti’s visual writing, to be read, allowing seeing, translating aesthetics literary concepts to architecture, is in this sense, a strong root for the prevailing memory artefacts of what’s known (Carruthers, 2006).

## Structures of knowledge

Alberti was commissioned an annotated revision of Vitruvius, ‘De Architectura’ recently discovered, but instead of focusing on Vitruvius’s how to build, he wrote in latin the corpus of the theory of why to build in such manner, he wrote *De re aedificatoria*. This text, meant to be read for the patrons, follows the form of a narrative, with the references of prior knowledge, as Vitruvius did. It had no drawings but, instead, it presents a ‘typotecture’ with letters and symbols applied to architecture, integrating the graphic expression on architecture, between the ideal, making sense, and the abstract way of giving a way to ‘see’ founded in rhetoric. See, for example (Alberti, On the Art of Bulding in Ten Books, 1988) [1485], Book VII, 7. 118-120) the description of the column system based on a vocabulary formed by the letters ‘L’, ‘C’, and ‘S’.

His crucial concept of ‘lineamentum’ values the ‘disegno interno’ in early renaissance, explained later by Vasari, and idea as ‘natura naturans’, compared with the corporality of natural creation with bones and panels. It is opposed to model, an abstract pattern, simultaneously figure and mental symmetry founded in the immateriality of perfect architecture, and follows Cusa’s creation plan of God ‘in terris’ imitating and surpassing a metaphysical aesthetical idea, bringing together ‘lineamenta’ and matter, a fiction of what appears to exist but doesn’t exist in place. The renaissance idea of the analogy between the arts and architecture as an artificial creation, emulating God’s creation in musical proportions, is therefore rooted in the reflexion of the harmony, from the creator as God ‘in terris’ working from a model In this creation plan, when we make judgments on beauty, we follow a reasoning faculty ‘inborn in the mind’, and beauty is the result of a consonance of the parts dictated by ‘concinnitas’, the absolute and fundamental rule in ‘nature’ (Alberti, On the Art of Bulding in Ten Books, 1988) [1485]. Book IX.5.164-167). Thus, creation links ‘ratio’ and ‘oratio’ (Eriksen, 2001), reasoning and discourse, the lineamentum’ conceived in the mind, the inner design in a certain order, and the expression without the recourse to material.

As (Wittkower, 1949) demonstrated, rhetoric is the discipline that informs various arts in early renaissance, reinventing medieval scholastic merits of a formal artefact to memory preservation, developed to the perfection of an architectural structure, mostly by means of the rhythm from music modulations. In Alberti’s plot and plan, the concept of ‘lineamentum’, traces in lines and angles the rhythm and the limits of a space-system as a continuous, in the continuous of corps, shared by Cusa (1401-1464) in his mathematic and philosophical speculations (Cusa, De La Docte Ignorance, 1930) and valued by (Panofsky, 1969) as necessary to the uprising of renaissance architectonic space of a social art. The limits of Alberti’s abstract design, in the distribution of the parts and the whole of a

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building, arguing to a reasoning on the relation perceived bodies to make sense of the conception, are similar to actual structural semantics present in (Greimas, 1995), meaning that today, like in renaissance, we as actants interpret transformations, perceive spatial units, timely connections in order to draw, to ‘build’ a plot to make sense of our living ‘topos’.

Narrative thinking

As a rule, Alberti does not describe or refer to his contemporary architecture like examples, but refers solely to ancient authors as mentioned by Vitruvius. In this way, reading and interpretation of the text allows seeing and prevents the reader from the use of external prior influences that could compromise comprehension. In the creator’s mind was only the formal implication of a discourse, a well ordered and proportioned rhetorical built form intended to seduce the senses and the spirit while constructed in an ethical foundation, an architectural anthropomorphism, formulated in the Vitruvian man, to introduce man as a master and measure of art creation, emulating God ‘in Terris’, by means of the idea conceived in the mind of the divine architect.

The apparent contradiction between sensible and intelligible visual beauty are two complementary aspects of the ‘ars divina’ addressed by renaissance humanism, when recovering formal implications of written and building, from medieval memory artifacts. To this ‘ars divina’, the creator as God ‘in Terris’ emulates God (conceived as an architectonic art, (Cusa, De la Pensée [De Mente], 1983, XIII)), with a similarity between the form of all things, as they are and as they are in thought, apprehended by the power of reason, of imagination and the senses, as we can read in (Cusa, De la Pensée [De Mente], 1983, VIII), closely to the model of infinity art, beginning and end, measure, truth, perfection according the divine beauty paradigm, what isn’t but has been. In this sense, language and narrative, doesn’t only empower a new world vision, but carries it with the new world, in its form and structure, as knowledge and ‘ars’.

Alberti’s recovery of metaphorical thinking was more than a decorative or pleasant aesthetic procedure. The relation between metaphors and principles of composition in renaissance focus on textual and architectural plotting, imposes literary structure into architecture, an analogous literary sense and a series of events consisting in a sequence between limits of built space to create a narrative drama. Alberti’s use of metaphors, like the complete body, to achieve the purpose of the relation between the part and the whole, can be experienced as being in place, in situation, experiencing space in the condition of an actant in a conceived and built space where various heterogeneous senses and logics are constructed by making sense of what is experienced, of ‘dispositio’ and rhetorical ornament.

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conclusions  
Alberti’s text on architecture does not describe or prescribe building but bears a process of a mental planning for action, supported on analogies. This planning is expressed as a repetition, interpretation of a previous, pre-planned architectural design, as architecture becomes the work of thought, building the knowledge in the mind firmly rooted in fifteenth century humanism theories of education and training.

The similarity of Alberti’s concept of ‘lineamentum’, with the concept of narrative thinking, ordering particularities, is relevant in contemporary conception and investigation of material culture. The analogy allows the filling of the gap, from reading or telling Alberti’s treatise, to ordering the known by means of a story, eluding memory lost by maintaining the effects in the form of prior knowledge of what existed, but in a less complex form, without the source.

The transmission and transposition of knowledge can also be rooted in a form of narrative inquiry relevant to today’s amount of sources, stories like Alberti’s, to make sense of what was known and give sense to the birth of a new creation theory, in philosophy of stories, bringing closer ‘lineamentum’ and ‘to narrate’.

The narrative thinking encompasses examples and the importance of some links between the text in architectural conception in renaissance, and the communication and persuasion method to address the public. This body of discursive strategies also induces a way to research and perceive the material culture. Alberti’s similarities between sketching a text and a building, share a common theoretical basis in rhetorical theory and practice. The first is prolonged after a pre-existent one, while the second prolongs itself into a new artefact. In this sense, architectural terminology is employed in poetic creation, compared to the construction of an edifice or architectural analogies, ‘congettare’ as ‘literary architecture’.

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