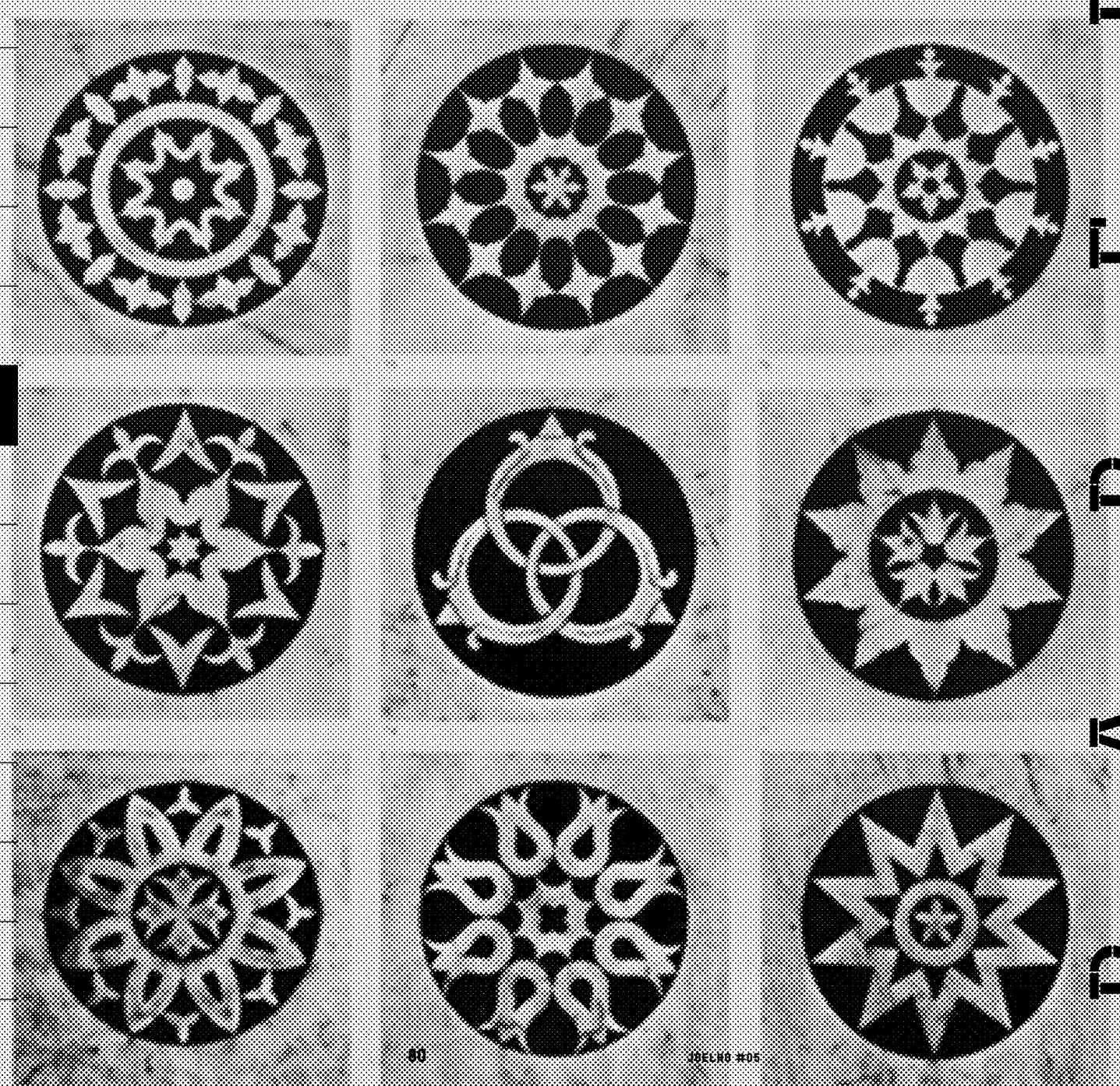


# Ana Raquel Pratas

## Entrance being space, in Siza as in Alberti



S  
R  
E  
P  
A  
P

In *De Re Aedificatoria*, Alberti establishes the modern concept of being an Architect: “who by sure and wonderful reason and method, knows both how to devise through his own mind and energy, and to realize by construction, whatever can be most beautifully fitted out for the noble needs of man, by the movement of weights and the joining and massing of bodies. To do this he must have an understanding and knowledge of all the highest and most noble disciplines. This then is the architect.” (Alberti, 1988, p.3)

Alberti perceives architecture – that he considers the art closest to Man, “mirror of the intern harmony of his mind and of his body” (Grayson, 1994, p.34) – as the built result of the balance between principles that “should never be overlooked (...): their individual parts should be well suited to the task for which they are designed and, above all, should be very commodious; as regards strength and endurance, they should be sound, firm, and quite permanent; yet in terms of grace and elegance, they should be groomed, ordered, garlanded, as it were, in every part.” (Alberti, 1988, p.9), so he says.

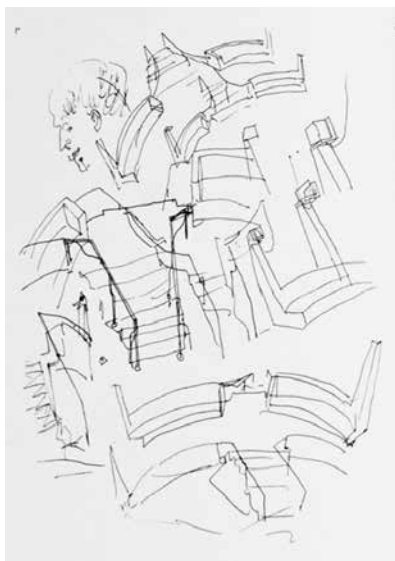
Taking Vitruvian postulates – *firmitas, utilitas* and *venustas* – Alberti reconverts them and establishes *necessitas, commoditas* and *voluptas* (necessity, comfort and pleasure) as the pillars upon which architectonic work should be established. According to Mário Krüger, “Alberti intentionally qualifies” (Krüger, 2011, p.24) Vitruvian principles, what “suggests that, in Alberti’s way of thinking, construction finds its sense if resolved on the level of necessity, utility if providing comfort and beauty if giving pleasure. (...) These dimensions are not interchangeable” (Krüger, 2011, p.24) in their relative position.

Giving hierarchy to the dimensions that structure architectonic work, Alberti enhances *voluptas* – the pleasant beauty – as the crucial one. He declares that: “Of the three conditions that apply to every form of construction – that what we construct should be appropriate to its use, lasting in structure, and graceful and pleasing in appearance – the first two have been dealt with, and there remains the third, the noblest and most necessary of all.” (Alberti, 1988, p.155)

Five centuries later, Álvaro Siza displaces loads and gathers volumes, “skilled workman fashioning the material according to lineaments.”<sup>1</sup> (Alberti, 1988, p. 5). He also provides hierarchies to the dimensions of the architectonic piece, placing beauty as corollary of a constructive and functional process that conduces to a final whole, unifying and beautiful: “Without the awareness of the necessary complementary knowledge it is not possible to answer to a particular social need, that includes and on which depend the others: Beauty. That is the main responsibility of the architect, never a whim.” (Siza, 1997, p. 196)

Alberti is one of the basis upon which occidental architectonic culture is built. His work is inscribed on the deep and rooted knowledge that constitutes the raw material that gives birth to contemporary architecture. “So much strength have his writings among the erudite speech, that he overcame all those whose practice had exceeded his”, said Vasari. (Vasari, 1550, as quoted in Krüger, 2011, p.18)

1. Tempietto del Santo Sepolcro, Capella Rucellai – Leon Battista Alberti (in Rykwert, J., Engel, A. Leon Battista Alberti. Milan: Olivetti/Electa)



2. Pavilhão Carlos Ramos, esquiço — Álvaro Siza (in *Edifício da Faculdade de arquitectura da Universidade do Porto: percursos do projecto*, Porto: Faup Publicações, 2003)



3. Pavilhão Carlos Ramos — Álvaro Siza (fotografia © Patrick Monteiro)

As Alberti states in *De Re Aedificatoria*: “Through the example of our ancestors, therefore, and through the advice of experts and constant practice on our part, thorough understanding may be gained on how to construct marvelous buildings, and from that understanding well-proven principles may be deduced; rules that should not be ignored by anyone eager – as we all should be – not to appear inept in what he builds.” (Alberti, 1988, p.159)

Five centuries later, Álvaro Siza still carries Alberti’s lessons, as they are inscribed in our common architectonic conscience. Siza refers, on the theme of the absorbed and internalized architectonic culture, that “the apprenticeship in architecture means exactly an enlargement of the reference area. (...) The articulation of those influences is an unrepeatable creation act. The architect works handling memory, there is no doubt on that, sometimes consciously but mostly subconsciously. Knowledge, information, the study of architects and of architecture history tend to be assimilated, until they get lost in each person’s unconscious or subconscious.” (Siza, 2000, p. 37)

Although not finding clear references to Alberti in Siza’s texts, it is certainly an implicit reference, eventually “lost in the unconscious” but rejoined in the pencil that, on paper, gives birth to building.

According to Rudolf Wittkower, to Alberti “the aesthetics appearance of a building consists of two elements: Beauty and Ornament. He defines Beauty (...) as «the harmony and concord of all parts achieved in such a manner that nothing could be added or taken away or altered except for the worse». Ornament is «a kind of additional brightness and improvement to Beauty. Beauty is something lovely which is proper and innate and diffused throughout the whole, whilst Ornament is something added and fastened on, rather than proper and innate.»” (Wittkower, 1988, p. 41)

Five centuries later, contemporaneity separated buildings from ornamentation. The Albertian idea that “nudity must be considered transitory, at least in public constructions and sacred buildings, since no person would allow such a building to remain deprived of ornament.” no longer takes place (Tavernor, 1994, p.305) Although the conditions attributed to Beauty persist, maintaining its absolute validity. Five centuries later, Álvaro Siza continues using geometry, number and measure on construction of harmonious wholes, composed of consonant parts that, being removed, would impoverish the whole.

Additionally we can see that, already in Alberti’s reasoning, Beauty would come down, from the mathematic and abstract ideal, to corporeous and constructive materiality. Geometry, number and measure are, according to Robert Tavernor, “the basis of architectonic Beauty in Alberti’s thought”; although he adds that “conceiving process will be concluded when the «ideal» is adapted to local context and conformable to committer desire. In this way, «universal» drawing is particularized and subsequently characterized by the use of local materials and ornaments.” (Tavernor, 1994, p.312) In a similar way

S

also Álvaro Siza’s uses the local characters on the shaping of the conceptual idea, bringing to daylight a design that has an enormous sense of universality and, at the same time, is full of specificities.

Observing Leon Battista Alberti and Álvaro Siza’s architectures other resemblances become evident.

Constructively stable and solid, adapted to specific user needs and shaping dazzling and beautiful architectonic moments, buildings designed by Siza seem to materialize Albertian legacy.

Observing particularly the entrance spaces of both architectures, we find that Albertian *concinnitas* can be read as “harmonious refinement”<sup>2</sup> (Krüger, 2011, p.27) on the threshold of the buildings designed by Siza, five centuries later.

In his projects, Álvaro Siza repeatedly reinvents the problem of entering the building. Responding to programmatic, formal or symbolic motivations, Siza formally and conceptually reshapes the entrance space, dissolving exterior and interior either through distension or through articulated spaces. He has a sort of a lexicon of variations that he associates and adapts according to the specific demands of each project.

In the Communication School of Santiago de Compostela, for instance, a volume is projected over the entrance space, defining it, while in the Santiago de Compostela Contemporary Art Centre, the atrium is subtracted to the building.

In the Expo98 Portuguese Pavilion it is a leaf that lays over the entrance, welcoming visitors.

Frequently small protection spaces are subtracted to building volume, as in the Avelino Duarte House, in Ovar, and, inversely, prominent volumes that signalize entrance are used, as in the Architecture School, in Porto.

Entrance paths are often present, as in the Serralves Museum, sometimes with sinuous articulations, extending the threshold by crossing meanders with diverse and rich spatialities. It is the case of the Alves Costa House or the Leça da Palmeira Swimming Pool.

In the Marco de Canaveses Church, through the manipulation of scale, the element door appears reconfigured and ceases to be “only a rectangle.”<sup>3</sup>

And in the Architecture Faculty, a small solitary construction is used, lacking a roof, next to the street that, being important in assuring the equilibrium of the whole, also marks symbolically the entrance into the building, even if that is not equivalent, in this case, to entering its interior space.

Traversing those distinct solutions, there is, after all, a common link: the entrance space tends to be stretched. The border between being inside and outside is undefined; the transition area that is no longer performed in one step, but becomes path, is extended. Siza himself says: “these pauses, in some way, dematerialize the house and create a feeling of continuity and of smooth transition between the interior dimension and the exterior complexity.” (Siza, 2000, p. 47)

R

E

P

A

P



4. Casa de Chá da Boa Nova, Piscinas das Marés, Museu de Serralves, Faculdade de Arquitectura do Porto — Álvaro Siza (fotografia © Patrick Monteiro)



5. Sant'Andrea di Mantova — Leon Battista Alberti (in Rykwert, J., Engel, A. *Leon Battista Alberti*. Milan: Olivetti/Electa)



6. Sant'Andrea di Mantova — Leon Battista Alberti (in Rykwert, J., Engel, A. *Leon Battista Alberti*. Millan: Olivetti/Electa)



7. Igreja de Santa Maria de Marco de Canaveses — Álvaro Siza (fotografia © Patrick Monteiro)



8. Igreja de Santa Maria de Marco de Canaveses — Álvaro Siza (fotografia © Patrick Monteiro)

Siza transforms door into space. Just like Alberti had made.

Few are the buildings designed by Alberti, even less the ones that were concluded according to his intentions. Even though, observing Sant'Andrea or San Sebastiano di Mantova, we can also find transition spaces, which extend entrance moment, mediating exterior roughness and interior protection.

Thus, for instance in Sant'Andrea, Alberti designs a narthex on the front façade that extends church volume towards the exterior, composing a sheltered entrance space. This prominent face of the church, permeable through multiple frontal and lateral openings, grants to the space under it the ambiguity of being obviously still exterior but already unequivocal a territory of the building, absolutely dependent on its point of transition to the interior.

San Sebastiano, on the other hand, was incomplete at the time of Alberti's death and, since then, has been the object of interventions that have shifted it from what must have been its original project. Though, even if it is a building whose original project is unknowable, we see that it is also provided with a space that, still being exterior establishes the transition to the interior space. In this case, even more than in Sant'Andrea, the transformation of the threshold into a path is emphasized by the heightening of the level of the interior pavement.

Alberti nourished an “immoderate admiration to Etruscan world.” He states: “the Etruscans, from who (...) we have still the precepts on temples construction, transmitted through writing, extremely old and unsurpassable.” (Hersey, 1994, p. 216)

Being explicit his reference to the Etruscan model in his written work, we find it also in the built work. Among other elements, it is referenced by the existence of the entrance vestibule, a spatial typology that offers gradual transition to interior.

On another side, in formal terms, we find throughout these buildings several allusions to the Triumphal Arch model. On Sant'Andrea, Domingos Tavares says: “The arch that organizes the main façade is the pure expression of the desire for the recovering of the image of the Triumphal Arch.” (Tavares, 2004, p. 134) The volume of the façade, that is detached from the main body of the building and that is marked by the great arch, ends up assuming itself as a great door.

Yet again we find Siza and his Santa Maria Church, in Marco de Canaveses, where the façade is also shaped as a great door. Two turrets flank the entrance and conform the approaching movement; between them a stoned pavement aligned with its frontal side is defined, distinct in texture and level from the flooring surrounding the church. In that space, axially to a tripartite façade (that also on this recalls Sant'Andrea), is carved, the great slender door, 10 meters in height.

From all his projects, the Marco de Canaveses Church may be the one where the door is more declaredly assumed as a symbolic and affirmative element; entering is, in this case, an axial movement, fulfilled by the crossing of the building exterior limit. Even if the distinction

S

R

E

P

A

P

between interior and exterior is clearly delimited and the door is assumed as a mediation element, Siza works ambiguity in both sides, contaminating them with that indetermination, also searching for that extension of the threshold. The approaching space to the building, between the two turrets, is already the transition space, resulting from the threshold but also a builder of that moment. We do not enter only when crossing the door but we begin entering when we step on this exterior floor. And this paved floor extends beyond the door, penetrating the interior wooden floor, imposing an area still concerted with the exterior, articulating the main entrance with the everyday one and with the other functions there placed.

Once the door is traversed, entering the liturgical space, the believer is “conducted by the strength of the movement in direction to a point, symbol or reference to his emotions, introducing the dynamics of the observer as support to the creation with time. This notion of time uses the believer’s memory as a composing instrument, articulating the parts built as notes of an harmony similar to the one that is obtained playing with sounds, creating to sight a music able to emotion the predisposed pilgrims. That is when the luminous intensity coming from the windows (...) overflows (...) in a true hymn to religious feeling.” (Tavares, 2004, p. 136)

We quoted Domingos Tavares about Alberti’s Sant'Andrea. But couldn’t this end up being a description of Siza’s Santa Maria?

- 1 → “let lineaments be the precise and correct outline, conceived in mind, made up of lines and angles, and perfected in the learned intellect and imagination” (Alberti, 1988, p. 7)
- 2 → Synonymous hipotesis identified in (Krüger, 2011, p.27)
- 3 → Reference to Van Eyck, A. (1962) Team 10 Primer, *Architectural Design*, 12, December 1962, p.598

#### Bibliography

Alberti, L. B. (1988). *On the art of building in ten books* (J. Rykwert, R. Tavernor and N. Leach, Trans.). Cambridge: The MIT Press (Original work published 1485)

—

Alberti, L. B. (2011). *Da Arte Edificatória* (M. Krüger, Trans.). Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, (Original work published 1485)

—

Grayson, C. (1994). Leon Battista Alberti: vita e opera. In Rykwert, J., Engel, A. *Leon Battista Alberti*. Millan: Olivetti/Electa, p. 28–37

Hersey, G. L. (1994). Alberti e il tempio etrusco. Postille a Richard Krautheimer, In Rykwert, J., Engel, A. *Leon Battista Alberti*. Millan: Olivetti / Electa, p. 216–223

—

Krüger, M. (2011). As Leituras da Arte Edificatória. In Alberti, L.B. (2011) *Da Arte Edificatória* (M. Krüger, Trans.). Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, p. 17–73

—

Siza, A. (1997). Discurso Doutorado Honoris Causa em Coimbra. In Siza A., *01 textos*. (2009). Porto: Civilização Editora., p. 195–196



9. Igreja de Santa Maria de Marco de Canaveses — Álvaro Siza (fotografia © Patrick Monteiro)



10. Sant'Andrea di Mantova — Leon Battista Alberti (in Rykwert, J., Engel, A. *Leon Battista Alberti*. Millan: Olivetti/Electa)

Siza, A. (2000). *Imaginar a Evidência*. Lisboa: edições 70

—

Tavares, D. (2004). *Leon Baptista Alberti, Teoria da arquitectura*. Porto: Dafne Editora

—

Tavernor, R. (1994). Concinnitas, o la formulazione della bellezza. In Rykwert, J., Engel, A. *Leon Battista Alberti*. Milão: Olivetti / Electa, p. 300–315

—

Wittkower, R. (1988). *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*. London: Academy Editions