



Alice Thomine-Berrada et Barry Bergdol (dir.)

Repenser les limites : l'architecture à travers l'espace, le temps et les disciplines

31 août - 4 septembre 2005

Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art

Introduction

Caroline Van Eck

DOI : 10.4000/books.inha.1776

Éditeur : Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art

Lieu d'édition : Paris

Année d'édition : 2005

Date de mise en ligne : 5 décembre 2017

Collection : Actes de colloques

ISBN électronique : 9782917902646



<http://books.openedition.org>

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 4 septembre 2005

Référence électronique

VAN ECK, Caroline. *Introduction* In : *Repenser les limites : l'architecture à travers l'espace, le temps et les disciplines : 31 août - 4 septembre 2005* [en ligne]. Paris : Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2005 (généré le 18 décembre 2020). Disponible sur Internet : <<http://books.openedition.org/inha/1776>>. ISBN : 9782917902646. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.inha.1776>.

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 18 décembre 2020.

Introduction

Caroline Van Eck

- 1 This session is devoted to a reconsideration of the way disciplines are defined, and their boundaries established, with regard to early modern architecture in Italy and the ways its history is written. So why did Maarten Delbeke and I as session chairs decide to tackle this issue by inviting scholars who are specialists on Vitruvius, Jesuit architecture, or architectural thought at the court of Cosimo I? What, you may very well ask, is the relation between a paper on Jesuit historiography of the Christian church, Vitruvius' *Ten Books on Architecture* and discussions whether architecture is an art based on *disegno* held at the court of Cosimo I in cinquecento Florence?
- 2 Put briefly, the starting point for this session is the conviction that history writing never begins *ex nihilo*, as the neutral and transparent registration of how it was. All history writing is a construction of the past it records; all historical inquiry is predicated on a delineation of its subject matter or object under investigation, demarcating it from other subjects; all historical inquiry also sets out with an agenda. Hence this session focuses on a series of very telling definitions of the object of historical inquiry, to encourage a reconsideration of standard ways of defining the disciplinary boundaries on which the architectural historiography of early modern Italy is based.
- 3 In the case of the historiography of Renaissance architecture the constructive character of history writing is particularly clear: when Raphael was commissioned by Pope Leo X in 1514 to record all remains of Roman architecture, draw and describe them, restore them, and edit a new, reliable and comprehensive edition of Vitruvius, the birth of modern architectural history was not a value-free attempt to record all remains of the past. Instead, it was driven by an aesthetic, by theoretical convictions, and by a design program. Raphael's letter to Leo X, probably written with the important assistance of Angelo Colocci, and one of the few actual results of this ambitious program, is one of the first attempts to write a history of Western architecture that is not simply a record of architectural remains or a simple list of marvelous buildings, but also an attempt at a reasoned periodization and a conceptualization of what happened.¹ It makes a division between Greek and Roman or

good architecture, and the bad architecture of the Goths who put an end to the Roman Empire. Raphael suggests a connection between political development and architectural developments; and he introduces the concept of the architectural order, or “*ordine*,” where Vitruvius and Alberti had spoken of genus and species. Raphael’s letter is not a long document. At first sight it is simply a brief sketch of the history of Western architecture with a few surprisingly accurate judgments (he noted for instance that some of the tondi in the Arch of Constantine were spolia from earlier monuments). But in all its succinctness it is exemplary for the way in which architectural history is not simply the written account of impartial and non-selective historical inquiry for the sake of keeping the knowledge of the past alive.

- 4 Instead, architectural history as it was started by Raphael’s text narrowly defined its object of investigation, and thereby what is to be included under the term “architecture”: not medieval or vernacular building, but only the remains of Roman architecture; interest in it is not fueled by antiquarian or religious interests, or by civic pride in the Roman past, but above all by considerations of design. The ancient splendors of Rome are to be restored for Leo X as part of his ambition to be the true inheritor and continuator of the Roman Empire. Restored Roman buildings were to be the tangible and built signs this continuity or, as Indra Kagis McEwen will describe this in her paper, they will be the *auctoritates*, or testimonies, that legitimize a statement. For Raphael and his colleagues, the reconstruction of Roman architecture will be the chief means through which they can learn and appropriate the principles of architecture *all’antica*. And through his introduction of the concept of *ordine* and all the notions of order, regularity, norms, and undesired deviations that term implies, he gave a very definite direction to historical inquiry: from Raphael onwards, investigation of the typology, design principles, use, and meaning of the architectural orders would become a core issue of Western architectural history. Raphael’s letter thus defined the subject of architectural history, ancient Roman architecture, and its method: the visual study of remains through measurement and drawing. But he also set out its agenda: reconstructing the Roman past to re-use it for the political, architectonic and aesthetic concerns of his own day. And we might say, he even formulated its grammar of enquiry, in which research questions are very much determined by considerations of design, theory, and aesthetic preference of the historian himself. Design is the main focus of inquiry, and the object of inquiry is selected on aesthetic grounds. Only the good architecture of the Roman Republic and Empire is worthy of detailed scrutiny.
- 5 Raphael was not entirely original with this; in his method he very much used the work of humanists such as Alberti or Colocci when they applied humanist methods of textual criticism to the study of the material remains of classical antiquity.² His cyclical view of the development of art and culture leans heavily on Pliny and Quintilian. But this first essay in architectural history was prophetic of the mainstream of architectural history for a long time, from Vasari to Wittkower. Not only in the actual content, or the interpretation of historical development, but in the way design agendas, aesthetical convictions, and theoretical concerns interacted in defining the object of historical inquiry, its grammar of enquiry, and the way answers are presented. Until very recently, the architectural historian was also, or had at least been trained as, an architect. In this intense and complex relationship with architectural practice, architectural history differs profoundly from the history of the visual arts. Whereas in art history design, theory, and historiography have gone their separate ways from the

end of the eighteenth century onwards, architectural history is quite unique in that this mixture of design considerations, theory, and history has continued well into the twentieth century.

- 6 In the twentieth century these complex interrelations have become even more complicated because practically all founding fathers of twentieth-century scholarly and academic architecture history were either Modernist architects or were profoundly influenced by Modernism: Edgar Kaufmann, Rudolf Wittkower, Nikolaus Pevsner, Siegfried Giedion, and Sir John Summerson all either trained to be an architect, were educated in Modernist milieus, and besides their work on the Renaissance produced histories or pedigrees of Modernism. To cite but one example, Alina Payne has recently shown that Wittkower's approach to the Renaissance as formulated in his *Architectural Principles* was intensely Modernist. In his focus on design and the architectural object, his concentration on underlying abstract geometrical shapes and patterns, his preference for mathematical explanations and understandings of design, and his neglect of ornament, his approach to Renaissance architecture reflects the Modernist view of architectural design with which he grew up in prewar Germany: the white cube, devoid of ornament, the scientific, mathematical approach to design, and the concentration on the object instead of the user or the viewer.³
- 7 The success of this school of historiography is partly based on the fact that it corresponds to the way Vitruvius, and most Renaissance theorists after him, defined the main focus of architectural theory: not, as one might expect in this most public of all the arts, the way architecture functions in, influences and is influenced by the society of which it is part, but architectural design. The activity of the architect, not the reception by the public is the central consideration of Vitruvian architectural theory.
- 8 Hence the definitions of architecture, theory, and history in the treatises by Alberti, Serlio, and Vasari have determined for a long time the way architecture was defined in relation to other disciplines and pursuits, as well as the agenda and method of its historiography. In both the prologue to Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* and the introductions to Vasari's *Vite*, architecture is presented as an art, based on design. Vasari presented a history of architecture that was based on a cyclical view of its development, and on the contrast between good, that is classical architecture, and deviant manners of building such as the Gothic. *Disegno*, together with the use of antique architecture, was considered as a defining characteristic of good architecture; theory was the body of knowledge and rules that guides a practice and through its very existence elevates a practice to the status of an art; the history of architecture was the history of the retrieval of the forms and grammar of antique architecture. Design, theory, and history are three, closely related and interdependent, aspects of classical architecture in early modern Europe, just as many architects were historians and theorists as well.
- 9 Modern academic architectural history has followed these conceptual and methodological foundations. Its disciplinary definition, agenda, and grammar of enquiry are closely modeled on this classical doctrine: architectural history began as the study of classical architecture's fate, employed a methodology based on *disegno*, and for a long time conceived the history of architecture outside Italy and after the Renaissance as a history of the dissemination and more or less successful imitation of superior models evolved in Italy.

- 10 It is a quite recent development in historiography that this entanglement of agendas and concerns has been the subject of scholarly enquiry. Architectural historians of Modernist architecture such as Mallgrave, Van Zanten, Bergdoll, or Van der Woud have begun to question the relations between views on design, theory and historiography. Although Alina Payne and Lucy Gent have shown in various ways how the study of early modern architecture was determined by Modernist aesthetics and grammars of enquiry, few historians have followed their analysis. Architectural history as an academic discipline is relatively young: the first university chair in architectural history was that occupied by Alois Hirt in Berlin in 1809. The historiography of architectural history is even younger. Whereas the historiography of art history is now a flourishing specialism, architectural historiography is still relatively neglected, as is witnessed for instance by the virtual absence of architectural history from Donald Preziosi's landmark anthology *The Art of Art History*.⁴ Also, histories of our discipline have concentrated mainly on the historiography of Modernism. David Watkin's *The Rise of Architectural History*, first published in 1980, was a landmark in that it extended its investigation beyond Modernism, but suffers from an anti-Modernist, or rather anti-Modern bias. Last year's joint meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians and the Mellon Centre for the Study of British Art in London was a significant advance in that it singled out two major architectural historians, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Sir John Summerson, for two days of intense scrutiny and debate.⁵ One of the results of these reconsiderations of architectural history is that the terms in which Renaissance architects, historians, and theorists defined their own projects are no longer taken for granted, or used as the conceptual framework or the parameters of inquiry.
- 11 In this session therefore we want to question the close, apparently transparent and impartial relations between historiography, theory, and design by investigating two key aspects of early modern architecture and historiography: 1) definitions and demarcations of architecture and architectural theory in Vitruvius and in Renaissance Italy in relation to other bodies of knowledge, disciplines and pursuits; 2) alternative varieties of history writing practiced in early modern Italy.
- 12 In 2003 Indra Kagis McEwen published *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture*. This was a highly original and compelling new interpretation of the *Ten Books on Architecture*. For our session today perhaps the most far-reaching of the reconsiderations McEwen offers is to differentiate sharply between Renaissance humanism and Roman *humanitas*; or in other words, to remove Vitruvius from the Renaissance perspective of the revival of classical art and learning as a civilizing project, and instead to locate his book firmly in the culture and politics of the late Roman Republic and early empire. As a result of this new reading the *Ten Books* emerge not as a book whose primary aim was to offer instruction in classical design. Instead, it turns out to be a philosophical treatise in which architecture is presented in such a way that it becomes the topos, the bodily and spatial manifestation, of the new imperial world order Augustus inaugurated. Writing the corpus or body of architecture therefore was not simply an act of systematizing available scattered knowledge on how to build; instead, the book was meant to be the visible and legible evidence of how architecture was the embodiment of the order imposed on the known world through the Roman Empire by its emperor Augustus.
- 13 In her talk, Professor McEwen will focus on the event that triggered off the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire, and how it relates to Vitruvius: Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon. In doing so she will highlight the intensely and

profoundly political character of Vitruvius' treatise, and the ways in which its presentation, content and purpose do not fit at all with Renaissance—or present-day!—expectations about what a manual about classical architecture should be or do.

- 14 We next move to another founding moment in Western architecture and architectural history, the presentation by Giorgio Vasari of architecture as an *arte del disegno*, on a par with painting and sculpture. Architecture's definition as a fine art, based on the intellectual activity of *disegno*, both helped to support the claims of architects that they were artists not artisans, and ultimately led to the inclusion of architecture at the end of the eighteenth century among the fine arts. Architecture is a utilitarian art, of course, of practical use; but precisely because it is based on *disegno*, on free intellectual and artistic activity, it is also an art, and buildings can also be the object of aesthetic, that is purely formal, appreciation. Vasari's definition of architecture as an art based on *disegno* therefore had very far-reaching consequences for the way its history was written: architectural history from Vasari through Winckelmann to its German nineteenth-century academic pioneers took classical architecture as its norm, incorporated the Vitruvian concentration on the architect and his design, and only reluctantly took into consideration other varieties of architecture, from the Gothic to the Baroque or the non-Western. But was Vasari's definition of architecture as an art based on *disegno* really that straightforward and unambiguous as subsequent art-historical developments have made it out to be? That is the issue which Dr. Devlieger's paper, "De-Constructing the Doctrine of *Disegno*," will address. He will argue in his paper that the theory of *disegno*, especially when applied to architecture, is pseudo-consensual. When analyzed from close by it emerges instead as a strategic tool devised by one, now well-known faction of the court of the Florentine Duke Cosimo I de' Medici to augment its grasp on the ducal artistic policy.
- 15 In the second part of our session another foundational aspect of the practice of the architectural history of early modern Italy is singled out: the way Christianity played a part in defining the object of inquiry and thereby also shaped the method of historiography. To return a moment to Raphael's letter: it is addressed to the Pope, but its treatment of Christianity in the fortunes of Roman architecture is to say the least parsimonious. He describes the reversal of fortune Rome and her architecture suffered as the result of barbarian invasion; as a change from liberty to slavery, and a sharp decline from good method and *maniera* to a "manner without craftsmanship, proportion or any grace whatsoever." What this passage does not mention of course, is the advent of Christian architecture; in its silence and refusal to address how architecture developed from the reign of Constantine onwards (whose triumphal arch Raphael mentions as an example of architecture being the "last of the arts to be lost"), Raphael's letter silently points to the conflict that plagued Renaissance architects, theorists, and historians: how to deal with the fact that the good architecture of the Greeks and Romans was pagan, whereas the bad architecture of late antiquity and the Middle Ages was Christian? Alberti sought a solution through an appeal to decorum in the use of pagan forms; Palladio was the first to integrate successfully the temple front with the rectangular church shape derived from the basilica. But the historiography of architecture was a different matter, as the next two papers will show. Usually this issue is presented as an issue of syncretism: of the reuse, and adaptation, of earlier forms into a new system of forms and meanings. But that description focuses on design issues. Another issue involved here is that of definition: what can be considered as good pagan

architecture, to be kept and reused. There is also the related issue of how these pagan monuments should be studied; in what way their history should be reconstructed.

- 16 The paper by Professor Herklotz addresses one of the most problematic issues in Renaissance church design and its interpretation: that of circular temples surviving from antiquity and their Christian reappropriation. In his paper he traces the evolution of a Christian historiography of religious architecture from antiquity and the Middle Ages from guidebooks on Christian Rome published in the 1560s, and more in particular how the understanding of specific early Christian building types evolved. While the predilection of these authors for the longitudinal structure of the basilica, which they saw routed in the ancient royal basilica, and hence in a secular building type, seems obvious, there were considerable polemics against centralized church buildings, which were continuously associated with pagan temples. This aversion led to Catholic historiography of ancient and medieval architecture, which did not focus on design, but on use, meaning, and attribution. It ignored stylistic issues, most tellingly the issue of what should be deemed to be “good architecture,” or a good manner of building, and it was not concerned, as Raphael’s letter was, with reviving ancient architecture, but with keeping alive Christianity in and through its churches.
- 17 At the same time, as Dr. Delbeke’s paper will show, this religiously motivated investigation of Roman temples and early Christian churches developed into a specifically Catholic variety of Christian archaeology which defined its object not as architecture *all’antica*, its agenda as its revival, and its method as an architectural variety of humanist philology. Instead, it focused on the church building itself as a physical object, representing in stone the main Christian dogmas, and in particular the Christian view of the history of humanity as a history of salvation. At the same time, in every celebration of the Mass the history of human salvation through the sacrifice of Christ was reenacted, and the church building was the sole stage-setting for this reenactment. Church historians considered church architecture therefore essentially as built history. Drawing on the old reservoir of analogies between text and building allowed church historians to employ religious architecture itself as a highly specific model for history writing. This practice clearly transpires from the numerous monographs on churches produced in Italy from the late sixteenth century onwards that deeply intertwine the genres of architectural description and biography: the church building becomes the vehicle to narrate the life of its titular saint; conversely, the saint’s life serves as a unifying structure for the architectural description. Dr. Delbeke will argue that that seventeenth-century church history represents an underused historical source for architectural history, and that it also represents an understudied practice of architectural history writing that was as highly, if not better developed and conceptualized than the fledgling architectural history emerging in artists’ biographies and guidebooks.
- 18 Taken together, these four papers all throw new light on the ways the boundaries of our discipline have been defined, and how these boundaries may be reconsidered with profit. They also show that, from Vitruvius to the almost forgotten Sicilian bishops who wrote about their churches discussed in the last paper, the Vitruvian treatise, the buildings that are part of the Vitruvian tradition and the ways in which their history was written in early modern Italy, all in their own way functioned as the repository of their culture’s most central convictions. The Vitruvian tradition of classical architecture, its theory and historiography, is not simply a tradition of design. Its texts

are monuments of knowledge and convictions about culture, religion, and the state, and are reminders of architecture's continuing role in shaping civilization.

NOTES DE FIN

1. Cf. I. ROWLAND, *The Culture of the High Renaissance. Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 226–30.
2. L. B. ALBERTI, *On the Art of Building*, N. Leach, J. Rykwert, and R. Tavernor, trans., Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1991, p. 155, book 6, chapter 1); *De re aedificatoria*, G. Orlandi and P. Portoghesi, eds. Milan, 1965, vol. 2, p. 443: “Ergo rimari omnia, considerare, metiri, lineamentis picturae colligere nusquam intermittebam, quoad funditus, quid quisque attulisset ingenii aut artis, prehenderem atque pernoscerem. . . . Et profectotam varias res, tam dispersas, tam ab usu et cognitione scriptorum alienas colligere in unum et digno recensere modo et apto locare ordine et ratione tractare accurata et certa ratione monstrare.”
3. A. A. PAYNE, “Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53 (1994), pp. 322–342.
4. Donald PREZIOSI, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1998.
5. The proceedings have been published by Frank Salmon, ed., Sir John Summerson and Henry-Russell HITCHCOCK: *Studies in Historiography*, New Haven and London, 2006.

INDEX

Index chronologique : XVI^e siècle, époque moderne

Mots-clés : historiographie

AUTEURS

CAROLINE VAN ECK

Universiteit Groningen, Pays Bas