

# eScholarship

## California Italian Studies

### Title

Ayn Rand, Alberti and the Authorial Figure of the Architect

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6ff2m22p>

### Journal

California Italian Studies, 2(1)

### Author

Trachtenberg, Marvin

### Publication Date

2011

### DOI

10.5070/C321008972

### Copyright Information

Copyright 2011 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

## Ayn Rand, Alberti and the Authorial Figure of the Architect

### Marvin Trachtenberg

What could Ayn Rand and Leon Battista Alberti possibly have in common?  
More than you might think.

The best-selling book of all time on architecture is not about Palladio or Frank Lloyd Wright, nor was it written by an architect, historian, or critic. In 1943 the aspiring middle-aged Russian émigré writer, Ayn Rand (*née* Alisa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum) published *The Fountainhead*. It eventually sold over 6.5 million copies and was made into a 1949 movie starring Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal with blockbuster success. Rand, reacting against the harsh collectivism of Soviet Russia that had tainted her early years, wrote from the perspective of extreme right-wing American libertarianism. She insisted that in the book she was not “an advocate of capitalism, but egoism...and the supremacy of reason” whose agent was the unfettered and autonomous individual. Her “Fountainhead” emanates overtones of “Godhead.” The voice of Rand in the book is Howard Roark, an aspiring architect who, echoing the megalomania of modernists such as Wright and Le Corbusier, believes himself to be a “prime mover.” His vision of architecture as “pure art” uncompromised by any collective procedure is thwarted until finally an inspired project is accepted. His perfect plan, however, is sabotaged by the developer-builder while the architect is not looking. Unable to tolerate any deviation from his perfect concept, Roark dynamites the building.

His courtroom speech in his own defense, a classic manifesto of the American individual as the Modern Man, touches the deepest nerve. Whether as the 3,678 word rant of the novel or the abridged 5:40 minute harangue of the film, the core message of Rand/Roark/Cooper is the same:

I designed Cortlandt. I gave it to you. I destroyed it.

I destroyed it because I did not choose to let it exist.... The form was mutilated by two second-handers who assumed the right to improve upon that which they had not made. They were permitted to do it by the general implication that the altruistic purpose of the building superseded all rights .... I agreed to design Cortlandt for the purpose of seeing it erected as I designed it and for no other reason. That was the price I set for my work. I was not paid.

In its ravings about the wickedness and evils of collective altruism of any kind and trumpeting of the pure autonomous individual, the speech delivered by the charismatic Gary Cooper remained so cult-famous that it is viewable on youtube. Not surprisingly, in the end Roark triumphs, goes on to architectural greatness, and wins the fellow-traveling woman of his dreams.

Alberti would probably have loved the story, in essence a parable of an architect's virtue rewarded. He wrote moralizing tales himself, including his first work, *Philodoxus* (1424; *Lover of Fame*) and the dark allegorical satire of his later career, *Momus* (1450). None were about architecture, however, although a follower penned a hallucinatory architectural fable, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Yet the message and ethos of *The Fountainhead* were aligned in an uncanny manner with certain of Alberti's central ideas about architecture in his magnum opus, *De Re Aedificatoria* (ca. 1450).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, just as Rand's message is rooted in contemporary ideological currents, so Alberti's model of architectural practice is framed by the episteme of his literary and social worlds. Grasping this coincidence one may better appreciate the passionate attachment of modern architecture culture to Alberti and his architectural program.<sup>2</sup>

Alberti's treatise has become the most important historical theory-book for modern architectural culture, and sometimes one wonders why. Like much modern theoretical writing in the field, it is long and dense, laden with abstruse allusion and self-promotional inflections, but these cannot be the main reasons for its current celebrity. Its central message, we will observe, is hidden in plain sight. The book is driven by a singular vision that directly underlies its ostensible main theme.

As is well-known, Alberti describes in erudite (if often recondite) detail how to design and build a perfect work of architecture, from choosing the site to fashioning the plan, gathering materials and funding, and finally the order of construction (and even restoration). Yet his practical expertise in building is undocumented and was probably non-existent at the time of writing (despite his later somewhat amateurish design activity), and it is unlikely that anyone untrained in architectural practice (or even trained) could have used the lengthy humanistic Latin treatise as a how-to manual (no more than s/he could have painted a perspectively correct and visually effective picture from reading *De Pictura*). Nevertheless, the net result of the dense text on readers (then and now) is the production of an overpowering *reality effect* of architectural expertise and *savoir faire*.

It does not matter that this aura of technical mastery was a fiction, not any more than with Ayn Rand, who knew not much more about architectural design and construction than most Hollywood film writers (a career to which she aspired). Regarding the underlying aim of the book, fictive mastery was all that mattered. The aura of expertise enabled both writers to convincingly embed the real message in the text. In both, the message in question was much the same – at this level, the relationship between designing and building, or thinking and making architecture. Explicitly for Alberti, and implicitly for Rand, designing and building were separate processes, to be kept rigidly separated. Alberti explains in exhaustive detail the many laborious stages in the crafting of a design, which must be aesthetically correct in every detail, ensured by an elaborate process of repetitive reviews to make certain that all aspects are perfect. Only then does construction begin. After this point no alteration of the design is possible. Like Roark, in Alberti's mind the completed design is final, having attained a state of perfect beauty wherein (to cite his famous formula) “nothing may be added, taken away, or altered but

---

<sup>1</sup> All citations of *De Re* are (with some emendation) from the translated and edited edition of Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (1988). This edition, however, mistranslates the title (a common error), which should read something like, “On the matter/thing/subject of building” – nothing about “art.”

<sup>2</sup> On Albertianism in modern architecture culture, Trachtenberg (2010), esp. chs. 1, 3, and Afterword.

for the worse.” Thus frozen into immutability, the design is as brittle as glass, and to change it in any way would irrevocably shatter its perfection. Second thoughts are not permitted, even less any changes wrought by the actual builder or a replacement architect, which would aesthetically devastate the work (Trachtenberg 2010, Ch. 3).

But what happens when reality intrudes, and unforeseen circumstances arise during construction, which especially in Alberti’s day could be a long process in which material conditions changed, new needs arose, the original architect was replaced, etc.? Alberti is very clear about this: the original design must remain unaltered, lest its perfection be ruined – “corrupted and finished badly.” At all costs, the “intentions of the (designing) architect...must be upheld” (IX, 11). Alberti’s remedy stops here – his is always a strictly theoretical voice – but Ayn Rand has no such compunctions about taking more drastic action. Through Howard Roark, she acts out the murderous rage of the designer upon seeing his work “corrupted and finished badly.” At the risk of financial ruin and imprisonment, he simply blows up the building.

The modern spectator in her worshipful adulation of the artist-architect cheers Roark on, and even Alberti might have secretly smiled at this forbidden remedy. Indeed, steeped in a combative literary culture, Alberti was fully capable of sharp ideological assault, subtly and artfully expressed. His own architectural program, as outlined above, would in fact have been shocking to his contemporaries, for it was conceptually violent in its implicit negation of traditional architectural practice (which did not end with Alberti’s opposition but continued through the Renaissance and beyond as the dominant modality, including in his own eventual building activity). Style was not the issue; Alberti did not write against the Gothic. He never mentioned it in any of his writings, and in fact highly praised the Gothic qualities of Florence’s *duomo*.<sup>3</sup> The issue instead was one of basic procedure (perhaps the legal mind at work, Alberti having been trained as a lawyer), in this case the fundamental relationship of design and construction, or to be exact the sequencing of thinking and making buildings. Although with the exception of a few veiled passages, Alberti does not explicitly oppose the prevalent building practice of his day, his design-build program – in which design was confined to the pre-construction phase – stood nonetheless in absolute opposition to it.

To grasp the radicalism of his proposal, one must understand that in traditional and virtually all contemporary practice (that is, following the uncodified theory and principles of what I have termed “Building-in-Time” in my homonymous recent book) there was no sharp separation of designing and building. The initial design phase of a project generally was limited to those aspects of form critical to convince the clients to build or necessary to the initial phases of fabrication. Strange as it may seem, a comprehensive design did not exist at the beginning of construction any more than did the building itself. This implies that the architect’s intentions were never “complete” even to himself, and certainly were never considered unalterable. What came into being in time was not only the evolving physical structure but quite literally its comprehensive design, *in* the realization of the building itself. At no point in the process was formal change, large or small, ruled out (and indeed it is the identification and explication of such change that our “building histories” of the period tend to focus on). From beginning to end the design-build process remained fluid.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The interior of its Gothic nave, in *De Profugium*, as Christine Smith pointed out (1992 80 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> See Trachtenberg on the methodology and context of *Building-in-Time* (2010, Ch. 4).

The odd thing is that this powerful architectural regime, which produced virtually all the major buildings of medieval and Renaissance Italy from S. Marco in Venice to S. Peter's in Rome (not to mention its coterminous dominance of architecture throughout Europe), seems strange and irrational to us, whereas Alberti's radical program of "Building-outside-Time," impracticable in its own day and rarely followed, appears to be the perfectly rational, natural way to build. This disparity is easily understandable. Alberti's platform seems rational because it is totally familiar to us (and vice versa). It is in effect the one we know and live by architecturally today: a building is designed in final detail by an architect; the comprehensive design is then given to a contractor whose agency is strictly material; any changes invoked by client or architect are punished financially and also ideologically as a lack on the part of the architect. This is why Howard Roark's story resonates strongly with the modern reader, who sympathizes completely with him and not the builder (who had his own reasons for alterations, even if they were "only" financial or whatever else).

Modern architecture, like Alberti, sees the architect-designed building as a perfect and absolute object of desire, an inviolable work of art like a framed masterpiece painting in a museum (such as a Picasso or Rembrandt), for which everything must be sacrificed that it be perfectly realized and never altered. A more comprehensive and thoughtful view might regard architecture instead as radically contingent regarding human needs as they change through time, and treat buildings as complex malleable artifacts whose aesthetic dimension is only one property among many ever-changing parameters: the building not as final, perfected form but instead a living, morphing organism that sustains and enriches human life. This was still the underlying philosophy of traditional practice in Alberti's day and long after. We misrecognize this premodern regime because Albertian hyper-aestheticism is now so ingrained that it has become naturalized, making it difficult for us to see beyond it clearly, if at all. Anything revealed outside this glossy ideological box, such as the traditional praxis of Alberti's day, would seem strange and irrational, at least initially, and requires a certain deliberate effort to comprehend, which is rarely made.

Since these issues regarding thinking and making architecture are ultimately ideological, it is useful to invoke Marx's model of the camera obscura, in which the world is represented upside-down through the ideological lens. In a reinverted perspective, the premodern architectural regime is revealed as anything but irrational, but rather an extremely efficient engine of production grounded in the material, social, ideological and spiritual values and conditions of the age, as vaguely invoked above and explained in detail in *Building-in-Time*. That in our eyes this praxis is generally blighted as having been deeply and darkly *medieval* (in opposition to the bright, newly minted rationality of the Renaissance) only adds to the need for this revisionist assessment. Conversely, just as modern Albertianism may be seen as deeply *irrational* regarding its actual (non)relationship to deep, long-term human needs – and rational mainly in its alignment with late capitalism and modern hyper-individualism – so Alberti's architectural turn, habitually naturalized as a vital component of the Renaissance proto-Enlightenment, was actually a deeply strange, problematic, and impracticable proposal in its time. Although I have suggested why the Albertian design-build program appeals to us moderns, it is not at all obvious why and how Alberti actually invented a platform so alien to the architectural philosophy and procedures of his day. What was his motivation?

What was the context, if any, of his novel ideas? Where was he coming from?

### *Alberti's Motivation*

Alberti's hyper-rationalized program cannot have been merely a reflection of a penchant for clarity and order in things, which in any case is not the tone of most of his writing. His idea required a huge effort to conceive, articulate, and sustain (he famously admits the difficulties of writing *De Re* at the beginning of Book VI). It demanded, moreover, a great gesture of denial. He knew the pragmatic shortcomings of his proposal. A number of passages indicate his awareness of its impracticability given the social and material realities of architecture in his time. Not only did his program fly in the face of this massive, virtually universal practice, but Alberti cannot have been unaware that the current regime had produced many post-classical buildings of extraordinary attainment in the cities that he had lived in and visited. Intense motivation was required to deny this reality. Nor is it likely that such a radical idea as his would have been created in a vacuum: it emerged within a relevant sociocultural context, as part of the circulation of a certain stream of ideas and practices. What then is that context?

This question may be more effectively addressed if we can frame it more specifically and concretely in terms of Alberti's motivation. Let us return to the analysis of the ostensible goals of his architectural program. In *De Re* we have addressed only the inviolably perfect work of architecture that his novel design-build procedure was meant to achieve. But since traditional practice had shown itself capable of that result, or at least of producing quite extraordinary buildings such as Florence's *duomo* that Alberti himself so highly praised, it would seem that something other than the monument itself was at stake. Something stood behind his imagining a perfect building that accurately followed the perfect plan of the virtuous founding architect.

Alberti's thinking becomes clearer when we shift focus from the building to its maker. It thereby can be seen that the inviolable work of perfect beauty that Alberti fictively guides the architect to expeditiously design and complete was *not* the ultimate object of architectural desire as set forth in the book. This goal was something even closer to him. A specular architectural agency was active: the building would mirror its author. For Alberti, the ultimate point of making architecture was not the very fine building itself, valuable though it was for him, but its personal and existential fallout: the *result* of the building regarding the status of its architect in the world, as well as his place in time and history (and the same thinking held ideally for the patron as in much of my analysis, which explicitly addresses only the architect's perspective). With the perfect building executed faithfully according to *his* design, Alberti's architect might not necessarily win the love of a Patricia Neal, but he would gain something even more valuable: glory and fame. Were another builder to alter his design, any claim to authorship would be eroded or lost, and all else with it. Moreover, in order to be ethically sound and credible, the prohibition of post-construction change had to be absolute: not even the founding architect was permitted alterations during construction – to broach this possibility would have been a slippery slope.

Yet this chain of thought, seemingly inexorable to the modern reader, was so

radically new and opposed to the realities of architectural practice that it could only be articulated with great effort. It emerged from within a powerful epistemic framework that prior to Alberti had operated outside the architectural sphere: the world of letters. Therein lies Alberti's inventiveness and, indeed, genius. Despite his eventual material practice, he was first and last not an architect but an erudite, subtle writer deeply embedded in humanistic literary culture. He subscribed intensely to its Petrarchan obsession with literary fame and glory (Trachtenberg 2010, Ch. 8). It cannot be overemphasized that renown was the whole point of writing for Petrarch and his followers. Although to our age of celebrity culture this motivation might seem unremarkable, in Petrarch's time it was a radical and highly contingent epistemic turn of literary practice and ideology. Several aspects of this complex and still incompletely understood turn are relevant to this discussion. The preoccupation with literary fame did not happen spontaneously. It took shape as part of the new time consciousness that emerged together with the invention and proliferation of the mechanical clock in the Trecento, which has been understood ever since Marx as a key to the emergence of modernity.

### *The New Regime of Time Consciousness and the "Human Clock"*

Many historians have been distracted from the intimate connection of humanism with the new time regime by the socioeconomic interpretations exemplified by Jacques Le Goff's celebrated article describing a shift after ca. 1300 from "church time" to "merchants' time," whereby profit-driven commercial and financial interests led the way.<sup>5</sup> To understand how the humanists were even more deeply implicated in the new temporal regime, one needs to grasp not only how much more attentive to the passage of time people became under the regime of the mechanical clock, but implications of another new means of temporal measure, which may be termed the "human clock," that emerged along with the mechanical devices (not only the twenty-four hour bell-ringing and hour-displaying device but the ubiquitous, fearful hour- or sandglass that appeared simultaneously only around 1300).

The phases of a human life had always been a literary and artistic topos, but the plot now thickened. In medieval, Christian usage, the dire concept of time ending was embedded in the universal history of the world and mankind, whose time would run out at the Last Judgment (Sheingorn 1985, 15-58). This collective eschatological perspective did not fade in early modern consciousness. But it now was overlaid by a new set of *personalized* anxieties about the termination of time. A new ultimately chronophobic, existential orientation came into being, in which the individual human life and all the potential pleasure and satisfactions that it might bring were now endowed with a potentially high value. That the life of the individual was thoroughly contingent and time-limited was of course no new discovery, but it was only now that a chain of existential logic was forged, unbreakably linking the new value and potential of individual earthly existence, its unfolding in time, the brevity of this unfolding, and death as the limiting factor. In this tragic perspective death was not a portal to the afterlife but rather a dreaded

---

<sup>5</sup> Le Goff (1980). Cf. Trachtenberg (2010, Ch. 2) on the theory and history of medieval and modern time consciousness and its problematics.

lifelong threat, the absolute termination of existence and passage to nothingness.

That time took on this deadly new personal meaning is evidenced not only by the textual record, but in the changing iconography of art. As Panofsky showed in a celebrated study, time as a figuration of death and destruction was not medieval (or ancient) but a Renaissance invention; although he did not connect his findings with the changing regime of temporality, they are highly relevant here (1972, 69-94).<sup>6</sup> Rare medieval personifications of time tend to be of scholastic, metaphysical neutrality, as in Panofsky's example of a three-headed device looking to the past, present, and future with equanimity (ibid., fig. 50).<sup>7</sup> Nor are medieval allegories of time, such as calendrical illustrations of the zodiac, or representations of the stages of human life slanted towards its destructive agency. Similarly, in illustrated Books of Hours, there is virtually no manifestation of temporal anxiety, or of the ravaging effects of time; workers in the fields are healthy, and an absence of ruins prevails (Henisch 1999, Ch.1; Cohen 1990; Sears 1986).<sup>8</sup>

Against this tradition, the Renaissance personification of time was shocking in its morbidity and violence. Time became a decrepit, aged figure, on crutches or skeletal, sometimes with exaggerated, all-devouring teeth, or wielding a scythe to cut down the living; on occasion this time-figure is attended by black and white rats who gnaw away irresistibly at everything night and day, and he is regularly accompanied by time instruments, especially the sandglass. As "time" took on the imagery of death and destruction, so "death" often borrowed time's negative attributes, with the two tending to become conflated (Panofsky 1972; Cohen 2000).

These developments, not surprisingly, are present not only in personifications of time and death, but also in the representation of the individual. In wheel-like depictions of the stages of life, it is now the end phases of life, the fall into decrepitude, disease, and death that are strongly emphasized (Sears 1986, 144). And whereas the sculpted effigies of medieval tombs generally are wholesome figures representing the deceased as if asleep, the Renaissance invents an alternate type (often accompanying the former as a before/after pair), the *transi* figure: in transit as it were from the fullness of life to the dust of nothingness, in an active, tormented semi-skeletal state of decomposition with rotting flesh crawling with worms and snakes and toads, etc. (Panofsky 1964, 64ff; Binski 1996, 140ff).<sup>9</sup> This morbid type, which emerges in the mid-fourteenth century period of the Black Death, may derive from painting and certainly feeds back into it, most notably in the first great Renaissance fresco, Masaccio's "Trinity" in Santa Maria Novella in Florence (1425/28). The painting marks a turning point not only in the representation of rational space, but of the new temporality. Under the main scene, as if beneath the altar, is painted a recumbent skeleton (of the deceased patron, or everyman), accompanied by the grim inscription, "What you are I once was, what I am you will be."<sup>10</sup> Ominously

---

<sup>6</sup> On death in the medieval imaginary, see Binski (1996).

<sup>7</sup> The four wings of the figure represent the seasons, each feather a month.

<sup>8</sup> Thus, in Jean Pucelle's Belleville Breviary, the Synagogue is not wrecked but dismantled stone by stone to build the Church.

<sup>9</sup> One of the earliest examples is the tomb of Francis de La Serra (died 1362) in the church La Sarruz in Vaud, Switzerland.

<sup>10</sup> The skeleton and inscription were recovered only in 1951, decades after Panofsky's article (Park 1998; Bonnefoy 1998). The inscription in effect seems to condense the inscription above the *transi* of the sculpted tomb of Cardinal La Grange (d.1402) at Saint Martial in Avignon, which reads: "We have been made a



linking past, present, and future with a threat of dire certainty, no message could allude more directly to the individualist perspective on time, existence and death of the new regime of the “human clock.”

In the new temporal regime, death becomes the tolling of a bell that marks the turn of the “human clock,” which effectively becomes a new standard temporal sequence running from birth through childhood and youth to adulthood to life’s passing away, a sequence by which all aspects of earthly existence are “timed” and within which all desired things are to be grasped for. It is perhaps a telling coincidence that the first known reference to the striking of an hour in an urban space is the notice of 1334 that Azzo Visconti, the ruler of Milan, died “in the 20th hour” as sounded on the public clock (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996, 109) – a death-notice henceforth developed into a discursive theme that would resonate morbidly through the trans-European Renaissance to culminate in the final line of John Donne’s haunting 17th Meditation (1623; “never send to ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee”).

This personal turn in the reckoning of lived-time was an integral part of the new temporal regime of the mechanical clocks. Paradoxically, even as this regime became sedimented in multiple layers of public life, in the temporal existence of the community as a whole, and in the newly time-“attentive” consciousness of individuals as part of that community, it *also* served as a transformational force in the emergence of self-reflective time-consciousness of the individual who now was in the very process of defining him or herself as an individual, striving to live fully within newly appreciated mortal limits: a development at the very heart of the emergence of modernity. The clocks resonated at the innermost reaches of the attentive private consciousness. They permitted the *timing* of human action with a new freedom, flexibility, and precision, and this very act of timing and self-timing by the individual was an enabling factor in the emergence of a new sense of selfhood and all its salubrious and threatening consequences.

### *The New Temporality and Petrarchan Humanism: Writing Fame*

This brings us back to Petrarch and the humanistic movement – and ultimately to Alberti as architectural theorist. Whereas the merchants and bankers made financial gain with newly measured time, transforming temporal into monetary value, the humanists interpreted the value of limited human time in explicitly personal, existential terms of individual literary study, achievement, and fame, in a powerful discursive current that vied with early capitalism in dynamic energy. More imaginatively and certainly *explicitly* than members of any other group, the humanist saw his own time running, claimed it, wanted to gain dominion over it, use it for himself, as well as attain knowledge, pleasure and fame through it. He was haunted by the awareness that his time to do all this was short and constantly slipping away, at an unknown rate, all of which redoubled his efforts to produce at least a degree of fame that might for a time survive his death (Dohrn-van

---

spectacle for the world so that the older and the younger may look clearly upon us, in order that they might see to what state they will be reduced. No-one is excluded regardless of estate, sex or age; therefore, miserable one, why are you proud? You are only ash, and you will revert, as we have done, to a fetid cadaver, food and tidbits for worms and ashes” (Binski 1996, 143).

Rossum 1996, 270-72; Quinones 1972, 7-25).

In their self-involved, conflicted hypervaluation of time the humanists took their cue from the ancient writers whom they were so deeply engaged in recuperating. In many Christian and particularly classical sources, including Homer, the Bible, Lucretius and Ovid, life is seen, as Quinones has aptly put it, “as a process of natural succession, comings, goings, ripening, rot, growth and decay” (1972, 13). In two words, Horace’s famous exhortation to “seize the day” (*carpe diem*) encapsulated a menacing, yet liberating sense of urgency in making the most of human temporal limitations. Stoic philosophy was particularly resonant, especially Seneca’s argument in the essay, “On the Brevity of Life,” that even a short, human life can be made to seem long and meaningful through intellectual work when informed by an understanding of time – that life is not short if we are not wasteful of it.

The ancient notion of time as a precious and fleeting personal possession to be prudently managed fell on receptive ears among humanists, who beginning with Petrarch advocated the efficient use of time through precise allocation of the daily hours for time-worthy activities. Numerous writers from the mid-fourteenth century onwards not only urged temporal efficiency but gave extensive advice on the economical personal use of time – ranging from the hours in a day to the phases of a lifetime – often in moralizing terms stressing accountability (including written accounting of one’s activities, at a time when merchants were inventing double-entry book-keeping). Among these voices was Alberti, who in *Della famiglia* (1434) explicitly pronounced that together with body and soul “time is your most valuable possession,” never to be wasted, and recommended various methods of time management including a domestic regime detailed down to the nightly chronicling of the day’s hourly use (1960, 119).<sup>11</sup>

But the key to the humanists’ temporal thought concerned literary production. Their time strategy seems at a deep cognitive level to have paralleled that of their fellow merchants (who were often from the same family). That is, considered as a personal possession, time was a wasting asset; to maximize its potential value the best strategy was a form of exchange, to attempt its conversion into knowledge of antiquity and, most crucially, into fame through worthy *all’antica* literary production (silver thalers into gold ducats, as it were). To maximize this possibility, temporal focus and discipline were required, and permitted by the new time-instruments. In all this, one grasps how the precision of scheduling quanta of time to be devoted to the reading of various ancient authors, philological production, and writing, avoiding unused gaps in time, came to depend (at least *ideally*) on the use of the hourglass. The attentiveness to this literary temporal regime was perhaps most explicitly recorded in 1404 by the noted humanist and pedagogical model, Petrus Paulus Vergerius, who recommended that devices “with which one measures the hours and the time” (the sandglass) be set up visibly in libraries “so that we can see time itself flowing and fading away, as it were” (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996, 252).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Alberti’s valorization of time as at least equally important as one’s very soul and body, to be guarded and regulated with utmost diligence, occurs repeatedly in Book 3 (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996, 228).

<sup>12</sup> Possibly the privatization of the monastic hours, in effect, behind the rising production of the “Book of Hours” beginning in the thirteenth century, occasioned by increasing private devotional habits among upper class laity, could be seen as a practice transitional to the secular, humanist parsing of the hours: in effect, a silent move toward Petrarchism, converting hopes for a better fate in the spiritual hereafter (especially in the newly minted version Purgatory) to a determination to achieve a measure of earthly fame that might, for

Although this program has its roots in Seneca and other ancient texts (and also covertly in the temporal discipline of monasticism), Petrarch was its effective originator, having provided in the mid-Trecento decades its guiding operative model for succeeding generations of humanists who would embellish it (Siegel 1968, section II; Nollhac 1907; Quinones, 106ff). He took up the ancient idealization of intellectual life, epitomized in Cicero, and developed it into an articulated program for the modern humanist, comprising proper mental attitudes and conditions of interiority as well the appropriate physical setting for study and writing, down to furnishing the study (or *studiolo*), which came *de rigueur* to incorporate the representation of time not only for timing but as a reminder of death, or *memento mori* (including skulls as well as the sandglass) (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996, 270).<sup>13</sup> Such passages as the following incandescent lines communicate the extraordinary new intensity and immediacy of Petrarch's sense – as if a virtual discovery – of the incessant escape of the time of one's life and its entanglement with humanist study and writing, evoking the constant performative pressure of this tragic modernist vision (in which a dipping pen can become a clock):

I had got this far, and was thinking of what to say next, and as is my habit,  
I was pricking the paper idly with my pen. And I thought how, between  
one dip of the pen and the next, time goes on, and I hurry, drive myself,  
and speed toward death. We are always dying. I while I write, you while  
you read, and others while they listen or stop their ears, they are all dying.  
(Bishop 1961, 14)

Petrarch also gave his world the *Triumph*, an extraordinary literary invention that was the final metacritical component of the temporal structuring of his humanist program: a chain of “triumphs” in which the defeat of death by fame was only one link. This dazzling machine, cast as a long, quasi-epic poetic procession of six allegorical figures, is set into motion by human desire. Love, however, is triumphed over by chastity, which then is vanquished by death (*not* time), over which fame triumphs, over which time triumphs (making fame a “second death”). Until in the end, the eternity of God triumphs over time and all that exists in the condition of temporality. This magisterial vision of human existence – humanity caught in an inexorable temporal processing, of becoming and being and ceasing to be, in and through time (which plays more than one role in the chain) – encompasses desire, morality, death, fame and the afterlife outside of the time-dimension that is the unifying thread of the entire tragic story. It transcendently comprehends the nascent humanist model of life, and this humanist enterprise is framed within and limited by the system of premodern Christian eschatology. Most importantly, it put all things temporal in their place.

---

a time, triumph over death.

<sup>13</sup> Dohrn-van Rossum writes, “Beginning in the late 15th century, pictures of studies that include a sandglass are almost too numerous to count”; according to W. Liebenwein (1977, 134), the prototype may have been the “St. Jerome in his Study” by Jan van Eyck and Petrus Christis, originally in the Medici palace (now in the Detroit Institute of Arts).

*Alberti and the Humanist Invention of the Living Author (auctor)*

If Petrarch was the humanists' inspiration and stage director, he also provided their quest for fame, which he himself had done so much to incite, with a viable strategy and a conceptual framework that established the scope and limits of the entire enterprise. With respect specifically to the new temporality of writing – the area that will lead us to Alberti's architectural enterprise – this framework had a complex structure. Perhaps its most fundamental component was the construction of the living (or recently deceased) "author" (*auctor*) as a figure of quasi-autonomous, self-reflective creative selfhood and literary "authority" (*auctoritas*). Although intellectual and literary historians from Foucault to Greenblatt and beyond have debated the place, time, and conditions of the emergence of this primal figure of modernity, there is little doubt that Petrarch (and certainly his age) meets the most critical criteria for at least sharing a good part of credit for its invention (or post-classical reinvention), which is not to exclude the role of Dante in the emergence of the "author" (Ascoli 2008).

Alberti took Petrarch and his followers, as well as Dante, to heart in his architectural program: indeed, his revolutionary protocol of time-management in architecture, strictly separating designing from building, cannot be imagined apart from his participation in this discourse. Although he eventually became an architect and perhaps an amateur painter (and even sculptor), and wrote extensively about the visual arts, it was as a humanist that he was actively engaged all his professional life and certainly up to the time of the writing of *De Re*. The center of his intellect and imagination was always the written text, specifically the theoretically closed literary work (even much if not most of his architectural practice was conducted through letters, it seems, nor was his architecture treatise illustrated).

The point of this iteration of well-established facts is to raise the possibility that Alberti's reconceptualization of the architectural process was deeply dependent on, entangled with, and dominated at its core by ideas and factors concerning the nature of written texts (regardless of subject) and their authorship as these subjects were construed at the time. It is not that Alberti automatically treats the architect as author and the building as text (although the question of this authorial construction is central to Alberti's enterprise). Nor do I refer here to the often noted tendency in Alberti's writings on the visual arts to transpose or metaphorically employ Ciceronian and other antique rhetorical strategies, poetics, and linguistic structures (such as Baxandall's brilliant derivation of Alberti's theory of pictorial composition from the *compositio* of rhetorical theory [1971],<sup>14</sup> not to mention Panofsky's analogous connection). Something perhaps even more basic to his mentality and episteme is at work.

What I am getting at here involves several historical points concerning authorship, textually produced fame, and the integrity of texts. First, according to contemporary literary theory virtually all *worthy* texts have (or were believed to have) single authors,<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> "The institution of comparing writing with painting became a humanist game" (1971, 39; see also 130f.),

<sup>15</sup> From God as author of the Bible (much of it through various sub-authorial voices) through the Greco-Roman authors, to the evangelists of the gospels, and into the works of medieval theology, philosophy, and science, virtually all texts have – or were *believed* to have – single authors (co-authorship being a modern

which “made” them, *authorized them* as worthy; and conversely, one could only be an “author” by virtue of having produced a complete, worthy and enduring text. Even today one does not claim author-status from writing just anything, and in Alberti’s world “author” was a highly valorized term of restricted, closely defined, and pointed usage. In the literary regime of the period (as understood by Minnis and, more recently, Ascoli) the “author” largely functioned as a text-legitimizing agent, whether as a constructed signifier of certain ideas as in medieval author-theory (such as authenticity, achievement, and truth) or, *also*, in the new mode of Dante and Petrarch, as a historical individual literary personage, ancient or – now increasingly – modern, even contemporary.<sup>16</sup> I will return to this issue, but the essential point for the moment is the circular “author”-text bond in literature and humanist culture.<sup>17</sup>

Second – an obvious but necessary point – whereas in Alberti’s day few artists and even fewer architects were famous, a great many *writers* from antiquity to the present were. Moreover, no visual artist, not even Apelles or Giotto, or quite yet Brunelleschi in Florence, could begin to vie with Herodotus, Virgil, St. Augustine, or now Dante and Petrarch, just to mention a preeminent few of the innumerable luminous literary figures known throughout the Christian world (that God was both ultimate world-author and world-architect, the absolute archetype, I leave off the table here). It is apparent in many textual statements as well as his behavior and career that gaining fame was as crucial to Alberti as it had been to Petrarch, and not only through letters.<sup>18</sup>

Third, as a humanist Alberti was inculcated with the ideal of the sanctity and integrity of the original text. The *auctoritas* of the ancient texts – and of the “*auctores*” themselves – depended literally on their having endured intact through the centuries. When not, restoration was considered difficult but possible and in any case necessary. At the philological core of the humanist enterprise – indeed one of the main things for which time was being regulated and instrumentalized – was the intensive labor of restoring these texts to their authentic, original *authoritative* state.<sup>19</sup> As Giovanni Lamola writes in 1428 – with wording echoed in Alberti – regarding a recently discovered oratorical text of Cicero, “This venerable relic of extraordinary age has been treated quite disgracefully by the people who have handled it.... Failures of understanding, erasures, alterations, additions – they have many to answer for.... For my part, I applied all the care, intelligence and skill that I...could muster to bringing everything back into line with the original text” (cited in Reeve 1996, 28).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the big excitement about the Vitruvius

---

invention). One notable and extremely popular medieval text composed by successive writers was the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris, c. 1230 (4058 lines) and Jean de Meun, c. 1275 (17,724 additional lines), neither being *auctores*, however.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Minnis (1984, Introduction, Chs. 3, 5, Epilogue); Ascoli (2008, 3-44); Brownlee and Stephens (1989, 1-19).

<sup>17</sup> Minnis aptly describes this “circular thinking: the work of an *auctor* was a book worth reading; a book worth reading had to be work of an *auctor*” (1984, 12).

<sup>18</sup> On Alberti and fame, see Trachtenberg (2010, Ch. 8).

<sup>19</sup> As at the Vatican library, where Alberti produced much of *De Re*, although he appears not to have practiced straight philological recuperation himself, and even is known to have expressed a certain disdain for the actual practice (Grafton 2000, 279). Such self-distancing appears, for example, in “The Dream” in *Dinner Pieces (Intercoenales)*

<sup>20</sup> Lamola goes on to indicate the extreme fidelity of his method, “[I] took pains to reproduce the entire

manuscript that Poggio Bracciolini discovered at the abbey of St. Gall in 1414 was the (false) belief that it represented or was the original, uncorrupted text – Vitruvius had been known in many “corrupted” copies all through the Middle Ages (Krisinsky 1967). To do the opposite and knowingly *alter* the original text of an ancient author would have been a virtually unthinkable transgression for a scholar (although *faking* one, as Alberti did in *Philodoxus*, was fair game). For a humanist like Alberti this was a far more categorical prohibition than warping the physical body of a sculpture or a building. Indeed, what was damaged by such transgression and loss was not only the text, but its author as “author,” as is stressed by Petrarch in his famous “letters” to ancient authors (a communion in which Alberti also partakes).<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, author-status was contingent on textual integrity and survival – even of recently produced work in the new literary regime of the living *auctor*.<sup>22</sup>

### *Alberti's Construction of the Architectural-Auctor*

I suggest that when Alberti came in midlife to formulate his architectural theory, he cast its core essentially in terms of what was most familiar and important to him, that is, in the quintessentially humanistic literary terms of these three points. Thus, beneath his sense of a building as a perspectively viewed body-“like” statue, resided the more basic concept of the building as an author-worthy-text in its unitary, author-produced formal structure and in the circumstances and rules of its fashioning. These included serious consultation with experts during the design process, in parallel to the humanists’ procedure of collective editing and emendation of drafts (stressed by Anthony Grafton [2000, 30, 53ff]). Alberti urges that the builder discuss his advanced design “with experienced advisers” (1988, IX.8), and the context makes clear that a principal motivation here is not just to attain perfection but to avoid criticism: to attend to the judgment of the “eyes...which are particularly critical and fastidious in this matter” (ibid.). Alberti’s emphasis on avoiding the “contempt and hatred” of critics (IX.10) through this design-editing process probably transposed to architecture the relentless, vicious – sometimes deadly – critical game played among humanists over the classical correctness of their Latin, writing, and textual knowledge (Grafton 2000, 51ff).

More fundamentally, like a literary text Alberti’s building-as-text ultimately was created by a single designer/author, whose final draft/design was sacrosanct and inviolable; actual construction effectively was akin to publication, which made the

---

appearance of the old manuscript down to the smallest dot, even where it went off the rails as old manuscripts do, because I would rather go off the rails in such company than share the sanity of our conscious friends” (Reeve 1996, 29).

<sup>21</sup> Petrarch’s letters to ancient authors are in book 24 of his *Rerum familiarium libri*. Alberti wrote to Diogenes and Crates, among others.

<sup>22</sup> This in effect theoretically held for the pre-Petrarchan regime as well, according to Minnis, for in teaching any subject “the scholar did not compete...either with his *auctores* or with the great works which they had left. One’s whole ambition was directed to understanding the authoritative facts, penetrating their depth, assimilating this and, in grammar and rhetoric, imitating them” (1984, 27).

text/design a part of public space and experience. Through this infolded, procedurally protected, epistemically validated and enduring act of creation, the writer/designer/originator might become a veritable author – an agent endowed with *auctoritas* – potentially acquiring influence and fame through the renown and very endurance of the inviolate, perfect text/building, as well as conversely lending the *auctoritas* of his fame to the work.

This interpretation of Alberti's architect-as-author theory leads us to notice what appears to be a telling choice of terms and other newly significant details in a key passage of *De Re* that explicitly prohibits change:

The brevity of human life and the scale of the work ensure that scarcely any large building is ever completed by whoever begins it. While we presumptuous followers strive by all means to make some alteration, and take pride in it, as a result, something begun well by another is corrupted and finished badly. I feel that the intentions of the authors [*auctorum*], the product of mature reflection, must be upheld. Those who began the work might have had some motives that escape you, even though you examine it long and thoroughly, and consider it fairly.<sup>23</sup> (1988, IX, 11)

Alberti could have termed the originator of the pure, perfect design the “architect,” or the “first architect,” etc. Instead – after the reader has waited to learn, as it were, the identity of the undefined “whoever” and “another” of the first two sentences – he is here finally pronounced *auctor*.<sup>24</sup> By actually calling the building's designer *auctor* – a relatively rare usage of the term in *De Re*, where it predominantly refers to the canonical *auctores* (e.g., Themosticles, Josephus)<sup>25</sup> – Alberti would appear here to have been explicitly associating

---

<sup>23</sup> This translation follows Rykwert et al. 1988 except in three places: “presumptuous followers” (rather than the more explicit, yet blander “innovative architects”); “finished badly” (rather than “finished incorrectly,” which flattens the ethical dimension); and “auctorum” is of course plural.

<sup>24</sup> The plural form “auctorum” seems to be constructed in parallel to “followers.” Nowhere in *De Re*, to my knowledge, does Alberti suggest that the final design-authorship of a building be shared in a co-authorship (leaving aside the tricky question of the patron). In the previous sentence, Alberti begins by referring to mortal span of “whoever begins it,” clearly the singular.

<sup>25</sup> In *De Re* Alberti uses this highly charged word seventeen times in various declensions and, more importantly, in its various meanings from the most general to the most specific. His usage is dominated by the eleven times it invokes a writer generically or a specific canonical “auctor,” e.g., VI, 4 (Josephus); VI, 6 (ancient authors); VII, 2 (the “authors say,” translated as “it is said” in Rykwert et al. 1988); VII, 10 (Solinus); IX, 10; X, 15 (reading authors), and five other passages. In two passages *auctor* signifies sheer agency, e.g., V, 9, someone planning mischief; VIII, 7, appearing twice (and translated as “inventors” in Rykwert et al). More unusual are the four instances of a displacement into architecture, not so much in the naming of Solomon and David as “authors” of the Temple (II, 3), but rather the three others which may be said to slide toward the IX, 11 passage in question (not in order of appearance but of meaning). Thus, in VII, 6 Callimachus is the “author” of an architectural detail, the Corinthian order. In II, 1, the term is inserted into the familiar scholastic/Aristotelian trope of the capacities/agencies of architect vs. his workman: the “wise/prudent auctor” (“auctores prudentiam,” translated in Rykwert et al. as “wisdom of the designer”) vs. the “experienced workman” (“opificis peritiam”). Finally, our case in point, IX, 11, regards

him with the literary author and all that pertained to that status. In pointed contrast, successive builders – prohibited from (re)designing, just as the wordsmiths that follow an *auctor* are prohibited from altering his text – are not dignified even as “architect” (let alone “auctor”) but are simply commonplace, nondescript “followers.”

That Alberti’s choice of terminology here, far from being innocent or unmediated, grounds his ideas about architecture in his intellectual milieu and humanist preoccupation with literature and its authors is also plainly apparent in the way “alteration” here signifies “corruption” (in the second sentence). This detail is key to seeing how, in effect, the passage as a whole appears to transmogrify into architectural terms not only the author-text bond of literary theory but the humanist program for reclaiming the original text. As depicted in the passage, two kinds of architect/builder (actually, “follower”) are present in this process, the “presumptuous” bad one (for whom there is no name) who “corrupts” the original – kin of those shadowy miscreant agents who corrupted ancient texts through the medieval centuries – and the good (humanist-) architect who (persuaded by Alberti) studies the building-text long and hard, working his way back to its “original intentions,” that is, the original form set down by the primary figure, the “author.”

The intrusion of the word “author” to denote “The Architect” in *De Re* (which occurs in a few other lines as well [see again n. 25]) is a key to Alberti’s concept of the role and status of this creative figure, which resonates with Alberti’s architectural doctrine. Even when he does not explicitly use the term – indeed, even had he *not* used it explicitly here – it is evident, from all that we have learned and which the passage reinforces, that it is essentially and almost literally the status and role of the true and veritable literary *auctor* that Alberti has in mind for the architect.

Alberti’s move comes into clearer focus when it is seen as a new stage in the postclassical development of author-theory, which remained vigorous and fluid in Alberti’s time. From the architectural perspective, this discourse in one key respect – qualification for *auctor*-status – can now be seen to have evolved in three phases (in which the term opens and *accumulates new meanings* rather than shedding and replacing them):

- 1) In medieval author-theory, we recall, only ancient or long-dead writers qualify for the canon, a finite list of “The Authors.”<sup>26</sup>
- 2) Then, beginning with Dante and Petrarch, living or recently-deceased writers also can become “authors” (as Dante constructed himself in the *Commedia*, which was reinforced almost immediately after his death, among his many commentators) to form, in effect, a great transhistorical literary community of the living and the (long) dead.<sup>27</sup>

---

the original intention of the architect as author – manifestly an unusual and probably pointed usage.

<sup>26</sup> Ascoli explains that “The *auctores* consisted of a limited number of classic texts that had accrued cultural capital and with it the status of guarantors of truth and models for imitators over centuries” (2008, 7). Or, as Minnis puts it, before the Trecento, “the only good *auctor* was a dead one” (1984, 12).

<sup>27</sup> Minnis explains that Dante first “labels the modern writers Guido Guinicelli and Guido Cavalcanti *auctores* in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* ii, 6,” and that the commentators on Dante first “transferred medieval



3) And now, what Alberti is saying in *De Re* – the position that he constructs with great effort and ingenuity – is that living *architects* as well, by following his design methodology, can become “*auctores*” in a pseudo-literary sense.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, in Alberti’s eyes the architect-author’s production is truly like a literary-author’s, and not just a continuation of the old alternative meaning of *auctor* as founder-builder.<sup>29</sup> He is originator, validator, adjudicator of the entire form and meaning of the work. He is one whose work categorically cannot be altered, and for much the same reason as in literary production: his uncanny access to the same sphere of immaculate “truth” and validity that ancient (and modern) literary *auctores* enjoyed – a truth embodied in his “original intentions,” which, even if one does not fully grasp its foundations and reasoning, is to be taken on faith.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in this perspective the whole point of the extreme ideological and procedural rigor of Alberti’s design program would have been to *justify this faith*, thereby enabling the production of architect-*auctor* status *without* the enablers of literary authorship – divine revelation, antiquity, or a discursive field of validation.

#### *Alberti’s Invention of the Author-Function in Architecture*

These last considerations allow us to see that Alberti’s displacement of literary values to architecture, his literary reformulation and colonization of architecture, his literary recentering of architectural thought, and his *architectural turn of literary theory* raise a further point. When Alberti writes of the supreme status of the author’s “original intentions” and our need to understand and follow them etc., he may be said to have invented not only the “author” but specifically the *author-function for architecture* in *De Re*, in the Barthian and especially the Foucauldian sense (or transferred it from the

---

critical vocabulary developed in exposition of ‘ancient’ *auctores* to their modern *auctores*” (1984, 279). He further describes how “in the writings of Petrarch, one can see the barriers coming down between various kinds of authors, whether between pagan and Christian, or ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ (214); how “if at the end of the Middle Ages, *auctores* became more like men, men became more like *auctores*” (216); and how “By the time of Petrarch and Boccaccio, both “ancients” and “moderns,” and pagans and Christians, could freely be compared in terms of style and structures of authorial roles and degrees of authority, and of shortcomings and sins. The *auctores* are now ‘familiar’ authors – ‘familiar’ to the reader and, as it were, to each other” (217)

<sup>28</sup> Ascoli (2008, Ch. 1) stresses Dante’s inner struggles with his own radical notions regarding the living author, a conflict that, in effect, appears to have been paralleled in Alberti’s difficult invention of the architectural author. And like Petrarch, as observed, Alberti also “writes” to ancient authors as members of the same ever-living literary community.

<sup>29</sup> Alberti follows this alternative in, e.g., II, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ascoli explains that the *auctor* was distinguished by his access to “transpersonal and transhistorical ‘truth’” that demands obedience through time (2008, 5).

literary episteme).<sup>31</sup> That is, not only is Alberti summoning up the authority-power of the original “text,” but he rests his case finally on *intentionality* attributable to an author-construct *behind* the text – and not just on his “nominal” *auctor* status but his “mind.” Much as was the case, *mutatis mutandis*, in current literary theory (most notably of Leonardo Bruni, Alberti’s Florentine nemesis), the successor architect is not yielding merely to the authority of the surface of the text/design but to the imagined, invisible, original authorial *thinking* behind or within it (the author’s “motives that escape you,” analogue of the literary author’s access to “truth”).<sup>32</sup>

This was an important concept in the restoration of authorial texts (as well as their translation). Now, at Alberti’s ideal building site, the project is reified and change is halted as the successor architect is made to obey both the surface and hidden authorial depth of the text/design. He defers not merely to *representation* but to a conjurable, potentially definable originary *presence*, of authentic *intended meaning* attributable to the “author”-figure, who thereby is made to define and legitimize – *authorize* – the “true” authorial character of the work and limit any proliferation of un-“authorized” variation of form/meaning: a core function of any author-construction.<sup>33</sup> As Foucault emphasizes – unintentionally providing a gloss on medieval author-theory – the “author” is the “reverse” of the “traditional idea of the author” (i.e., the way we moderns tend to think rather casually about the term) and is a historically bound phenomenon that serves as

a certain functional principle by which...one limits, excludes, and chooses ...by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.... The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. (Foucault 1984, 118-9)

We need only exchange “architectural design” for “fiction,” and the Foucauldian “functional principle” of the author (which Foucault traces to textual criticism as early as St. Jerome) becomes Alberti’s. Indeed, given the importance of the author-function in contemporary literary theory, it may even be said that the author-function constituted the core of his displacement and adaptation of author theory to architecture. Thus ironically in the final analysis it was not the “real” historical architect-author who acquired the fame

---

<sup>31</sup> I.e., the “author” considered not as the actual flesh-and-blood, historical-biographical person who wrote the book (or designed the building), but an author-construction – a socioculturally fashioned *construct* in whom the meaning of the text is made to reside and which shapes and, above all, which *limits* its possibilities of signification. See Foucault (1984, 101-120). Ascoli upholds the instantiation of Foucault’s “author function” centuries before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when it is often thought first to appear. For a discussion on the state of research on the exceedingly complex question of related late medieval/early modern transformations of author-theory see Ascoli (2008, 25-27, as well as 29-44).

<sup>32</sup> See texts of Bruni and others in Botley (2004, 5-52). Unfortunately, there is no counterpart of Minnis and Ascoli for the Quattrocento humanists.

<sup>33</sup> As was suggested to me by Heather Horton, this was precisely Leonardo Bruni’s argument regarding the validity of his own translations, as when he writes to Niccolò Niccoli in 1400 regarding Plato, “I, on the other hand, stay close to Plato.... I will call him as a witness to his own translation” (ibid., 51f).

– not the flesh-and-blood fame-desiring mortal human architect – but “only” an ideological device dialectically related to the building.

*“That’s all there ever was”*

Ayn Rand was as far from being an architectural thinker as she was from building practice. Albertian theory was distant from her thoughts (not to mention that Barthes and Foucault had not yet written their author-theory pieces, which she would have hated). She may not even have known clearly who Alberti was, if anything at all about him. She probably did not read Rudolf Wittkower’s *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* when it later appeared in 1949 and overtook the architectural world. That she seemed nevertheless to trumpet the core Albertian valorization of the architect as author, as unchallenged architectural master of his immaculate-idea-in-the-building, did not come from an appreciation of Renaissance theory. Hers was rather a spectacular, singular convergence of personal experience, ambition, and talent; the peculiarly American strain of modernist hyperindividualism and phobia of collectivism; and perhaps the crypto-Albertian glorification of the architect-as-author implanted in popular as well as elite Modernist architecture culture.

Yet there is another level to her story, the most obvious and perhaps most critical of all. In the final analysis, she was as embedded in her literary *métier* as Alberti had been in his. She was a Hollywood screenwriter and, with her architectural fable, a wildly successful and enduringly popular novelist. She knew what she was doing in her writing, and that the core plot was what ultimately drove response and enabled popular success. No architecture-plot, no matter how resonant, would have sufficed. The main option was, as always, obvious: the fall-back, time-tested story of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy wins girl. It is of course this story that drives *The Fountainhead*, especially as a movie: Gary Cooper falls in love with Patricia Neal (in a torrid scene), loses her (repeatedly to a series of lovers and husbands), but in the end wins her with his heroism (in the form of architectural rather than warrior heroics). Rand probably was conscious of the power of this formula in her sleep. Years later she was negotiating with a producer, Al Ruddy (producer of “The Godfather”), about his desire to make a film of her second great success at promoting her existential vision, *Atlas Shrugged* (1200 pages, 1957). It also was shaped around a romantic plot. When he told her he wanted to focus on the love story, she agreed. “That’s all there ever was,” she said (Dowd 2011, 8).

And Alberti’s architect? We know now: authorship and fame, of course, that’s all there ever was (no boys and girls, only boys against other boys). These goals sound more noble and enduring than the Hollywood ethos – so much higher up the food chain of Petrarch’s *Triumph* than Gary Cooper’s “desire.” Yet as Petrarch wrote and Alberti knew, but we have forgotten or deny, fame was equally doomed by the inexorable working of time, paradoxically by its extinction at the end of time and the installation of eternity.

## Bibliography

- Alberti, Leon Battista. 1960. *I libri della famiglia*. In *Opere Volgari*, vol. 1, edited by Cecil Grayson. Scrittori d'Italia, no. 218. Bari: Laterza.
- . 1988. *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, edited and translated by Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ascoli, Albert Russell. 2008. *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Binski, Paul. 1996. *Medieval Death. Ritual and Representation*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Bishop, Morris. 1961. "Petrarch." In *Renaissance Profiles*, edited by J.H. Plumb, 1-17. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bonnefoy, Yves. 1998. "Time and the Timeless in Quattrocento Painting." In *Masaccio's Trinity*, edited by Rona Goffen, 108-118. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Botley, Paul. 2004. *Latin Translation in the Renaissance. The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti and Erasmus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brownlee, Kevin and Walter Stephens, eds. 1989. *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Cohen, Simona. 2000. "The Early Renaissance Personification of Time and Changing Concepts of Temporality." *Renaissance Studies* 14: 301-28.
- Cohen, Simona Cohen. 1990. "The Romanesque Zodiac: Its Symbolic Function on the Church Facade." *Arte Medievale* 4: 43-54.
- de Nolhac, Pierre. 1907. *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*. 2 vols. Paris, Champion.
- Dowd, Maureen. 2011. "Atlas without Angelina." *New York Times*, April 17.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. "What is an Author?" In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 101-120. New York: Pantheon.
- The Fountainhead*. 1949. *Dir.* King Vidor. Screenplay by Ayn Rand. USA/UAE: Warner Brother Pictures.
- Dohrn-van Rossum, Gerhard. 1996. *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*. Translated by Thomas Dunlap. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Grafton, Anthony. 2000. *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Henisch, Bridget Ann. 1999. *The Medieval Calendar Year*. University Park PA, Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Krinsky, Carol Herselle. 1967. "Seventy-eight Vitruvius Manuscripts." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30: 36-70.
- Le Goff, Jacques. 1980. "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages." *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, 29-42. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Liebenwein, Wolfgang. 1977. *Studiolo: Die Entstehung eines Raumtyps und seine Entwicklung bis um 1600*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann.
- Minnis, Alastair J. 1984. *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. London: Scolar Press.

- Panofsky, Erwin. 1972. "Father Time." *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Renaissance*, 69-94. New York: Harper & Row.
- Park, Katharine. 1998. "Art and Anatomy in Early Renaissance Italy." In *Masaccio's Trinity*, edited by Rona Goffen, 119-130. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Quinones, Ricardo J. 1972. *The Renaissance Discovery of Time*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rand, Ayn. 1943. *The Fountainhead*. New York: Bobbs-Merril.
- Reeve, Michael D. 1996. "Classical Scholarship." In *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, edited by Jill Kraye, 20-46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sears, Elizabeth. 1986. *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sheingorn, Pamela. 1985. "'For God is Such a Doomsman': Origins and Development of the Theme of Last Judgment." In *Homo Memento Finis: The Iconography of Just Judgment in Medieval Art and Drama*, edited by David Bevington, 15-58. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications.
- Siegel, Jerrold E. 1968. *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, Christine. 1992. *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism*. New York, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press.
- Trachtenberg, Marvin. 2010. *Building-in-Time from Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press.