

Anarchic Thinking

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I am a beneficiary and enthusiast, for over the past 25 years, of the “slow thought cuisine” of Marco Frascari, who has endeavored to set architecture education on a path of imaginative self-sufficiency. At this moment, 2013, we pause to assess the richness and flavor of this cuisine, and to see what we may do to insure that it survives into an uncertain future. My perspective is eccentric, which is allowable and even fitting in the intellectual tradition that has connected Frascari to the brilliant innovators of the 18c. Veneto, who themselves were continuing practices begun before Plato and augmented by all ages and cultures. This is nothing less than the *ars topica*, the liberation of thought from ideology of facticity and politics, an art of imagining.

In Italian it is easy to distinguish between *immaginare*, the kind of imagination required simply to extend the known to the adjacent unknown, today to tomorrow, and *fantasia*, the creative modality related to memory and magic. This last word, dangerous in our Positivistic age, is the *technē* at the heart of all constructing (*poesis*), and thus something that relates directly to the *ingegno* that must be employed by artists of all kinds, but especially by architects, whose “performances” are frozen by Medusa’s implacable gaze and silenced by Hermes’ direct orders.

We live in times where it is easier to imagine the catastrophic end of all life on earth than it is to get out of our economies of enjoyment. By converting enjoyment, which is really a disease, into what is natural, we normalize illness under the flag of ideology. Ideological enjoyment is really the anxiety arising out of a condition of excess.

Marco made clear in his book on the slow cooking of architectural thought, our culture of fast food restructures enjoyment to constitute an ideological forced choice. Slow food is a set of practices that combine time and space into a logic of delay and reflection. Ideological enjoyment, commanded from the outside, aims to manage information to maximize consumption. There can be no proper architecture theory without consideration of this ideological condition or its relation to enjoyment, the fantasies that sustain it, and the imagination.

Marco’s inventiveness has an extensive pedigree. His *ars topica* was described in part by Góngora and Gracián, two Mannerist critics who refined the logic of the conceit. Vico, the 18c. Neapolitan philosopher of culture, described it in one of his short works, *The Study Methods of Our Times*. The secret behind *concettismo* is permanently secret. It cannot be paraphrased without misunderstanding, theories about it must necessarily be incomplete, and may decide to falsify key elements to avoid ironic collapse. Lacan discovered this problem in the 1940s with his confrontation with the *mi-dire* of paranoiacs, and internalized this limitation into his own speaking and writing. His famous description of the mirror stage is a diagram of this method of “thinking by halves.” I have combined Vico and Lacan to appropriate the system devised by Harold Bloom to describe the anxiety of poets in the face of strong precursors. Bloom has not been aware of the spatial qualities of his “revisionary ratios” that allow us to put the logic of *mi-dire* into the universal architecture of the “site of exception.”

Our mutual interest in half-things (Frascari: “knowing without knowing,” *muta*, the tell-tale detail; Kunze: partial objects, *askesis*, chiasmus) has allowed us to work independently yet at times seem to duplicate our efforts. I had a rule: if I thought of anything original, I could be sure that Marco had thought of it already. “Already” meant that, even if he hadn’t literally had the same idea, any idea from one of us would serve the function of a *déjà vu* for the other. This proves the Surrealist writer René Daumal’s point about the “proof” of ‘pataphysics, that alternates between radical uncertainty and radical certainty.

Other practitioners of Frascari’s method include the OULIPO writers, such as Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, and Raymond Queneau and their sources and predecessors, Raymond Roussel, Poe, Giulio Camillo, and even Plato. Those who have discovered “no method” have been ruthlessly methodological. Where the poet Robert Frost said that free verse was like playing tennis without a net, Perec (and the others of his kind) played tennis with nets all over the place, as one reviewer has put it. The nets — such as the incorporation of numerical “sigma values” of the number nine, as I cite in my presentation — are concrete and precise. They can be used to trace historical links connecting sources as diverse as Plato, Dante, the performance artist and pickpocket Apollo Robbins, the painter Jasper Johns, and Krazy Kat (another favorite Frascari *topos*). What is amazing about these links is that, despite their stark materiality and practicality, they resist being discovered or even recognized by what we could call the “official intelligencia.” The refusal to admit the practical magic employed by *mi-dire*-speaking artists of *kenosis* has protected those who employ it but it has forced theory into the margins.

It is difficult to imagine, for example, that film theorists extolling the theories of Lacan would, for over 30 years, mistakenly characterize the directionality of the Lacanian gaze. It is equally difficult to imagine how Michel

Foucault, who wrote a book on Raymond Roussel's method, would not mention the technique of "*procédé*" that Mark Ford rescued from obscurity. It is astounding that the art historians who wrote a book specifically about Jasper Johns' numbers paintings would claim that Johns did not intend the numbers to mean anything, despite the obvious employment of the sigma values of the number nine. It is just as remarkable that the commentary about the art of artificial memory makes no mention of the chiasmic structure of the story about the invention of this technique, or the relation of this to the strange displacement of the Sun from the row of his memory theater devoted to the planets. The silence of the establishment follows the forced-choice pattern of Hegelian *Verneinung* (denial), *Verleugnung* (renunciation, disqualification), and *Verwerfung* (foreclosure) that accompanied the invasion of Iraq: "There are weapons of mass destruction"; "we haven't found WMDs but they must exist"; "even though they didn't exist, getting rid of Saddam was a good thing." Ideology's lock on theory at the level of pedagogy (the curriculum) assures that *mi-dire* will be permanently classified as "idiotic."

To make this point visible, I employ diagrams, which are idiotic by their very nature, and analogies of our "Cartesian mentality" to the Lucretian model of space-time that James Joyce liked to call "Eve and Adam's." The even flow of *space itself* reveals the phenomenon of architecture as exception and allows identification of specific *sites of exception*: (1) origins, (2) festivals, and (3) catastrophe and ruin. These constitute "anachronisms" where negation *as negation* is materialized in ways that, I argue, can be mapped by employing the idea of a "horizontal atlas." Where Cartesian logic follows "zenithal authority," the horizontal atlas finds zones of *poché* where it is possible to move quickly between visibility and invisibility — the essence of the Lacanian phallic function, the \neg — and an analog for Bergson's dynamic time section.

The horizontal atlas runs on the fuel of the uncanny "detached virtuality," which in contrast to the contiguous virtuality of computer representation, uses what the professional pick-pocket Apollo Robbins calls "body loading." Very few educators or theorists in architecture talk about or even recognize the existence of detached virtuality, without which Jorge Luis Borges' four forms of the fantastic cannot be comprehended. Again, the ideology of academia imposes silence on the subject, but it is theory's duty and charge to resist. Too often, Phenomenology has been deployed to manage the anxiety created by Positivistic reductionism. Instead, it should be directed toward a comprehensive view of subjectivity, adequate to the imagination and memory as functions of *ingegno*.

Supplementary position papers are available for further interests in topics of reversed predication, the horizontal atlas, *ars topica*, the uncanny, etc.

- "The Goldfish Variations: A Cartographic Love Story," <http://art3idea.psu.edu/idiots/goldfish.pdf>. "No one to date has correlated the issue of architecture's inherently political unconscious in a way that connects to matters of perception, virtuality, or sites created by folk ritual, religion, the arts, or popular culture — sites that, on account of their liminality and relation to the uncanny, have resisted theoretical description. The allegory of the atlas as a compendium of human knowledge is well known. Where the ideological function of knowledge corresponds to the atlas's "zenithal authority," the phenomena that are invisible to that authority call for an "orthogonally" shift to a "horizontal" viewpoint able to access phenomena that resist ideology. In the terminology of Mladen Dolar, the ideological subject is succeeded by the "psychoanalytical subject." This essay shows how this subject can be defined cartographically and analogically, combining themes of the uncanny, liminality, the political, and the unconscious within a single notational system."
- "Reversed Predication: A Review," http://art3idea.psu.edu/idiots/reversed_predication.pdf. "The collation of examples (antonomasia, reversed predication, Harold Bloom's revisionary ratios, Pale Fire, enthymeme, sorites, site of exception, ekphrasis, Las Meninas, Mount Analogue, the Cumæan Gates, Vico's *dipintura*, etc.) demonstrates, through diagrams that establish the interchangeability of parts that allows one example to merge with others, the durability of the idea behind reversed predication that allows it many incarnations, thanks to the universality of the screen, the "flesh of the world," that relate predication to desire, fantasy, and the (non-)structure of the Real. There is no idea here, only a network of potentialities, future predications, all reversible."

Other resources: As a part of the "architecture theory and studio for idiots" project, working papers have been posted on <http://art3idea.psu.edu/idiots>. The idea of the horizontal atlas is developed in *Atlas of the Obverse*, <http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/atlas.pdf>. The second edition of *Thought and Place: The Architecture of Imagination in the Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* is in preparation; a review copy is available at <http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/thoughtplace.pdf>.