

[251]

LUIGI VAGNETTI, ed. *2000 anni di Vitruvio* (Studi e documenti di architettura, No. 8), Florence: Edizione della Cattedra di Composizione Architettonica IA della Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze, 1978, 208 pp., 76 figs.

LUIGI VAGNETTI, *Prospettiva: De naturali et artificiali perspectiva — bibliografia ragionata delle fonti teoriche e delle ricerche di storia della prospettiva* (Studi e documenti di architettura, No. 9-10), Florence: Edizione della Cattedra di Composizione Architettonica IA della Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze e della Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1979, 520 pp., 157 figs.

Professor Vagnetti's book affords an effective aerial view of 2000 years of Vitruvius as we are about to enter, or have just crossed the threshold into, the third millennium since Vitruvius completed his *De Architectura Libri X*. Vagnetti's publication represents only a fragment of a far vaster program of Vitruvian studies originally envisioned, the largest part of which had to be renounced owing to the familiar problems that afflict collaborative scholarly enterprises dependent upon public support. The *JSAH* carries on its cover a monogram invoking a Vitruvian triad (UTILITAS, FIRMITAS, VENUSTAS), and its readers will, I hope, welcome Vagnetti's book, even if it is only a torso of his dashed hopes for a complete re-examination of the Vitruvian phenomenon and for a critical re-edition of his treatise.

It may come as a surprise to learn that Vagnetti considers Vitruvius the whipping boy of present day anticlassical architectural journalism in Italy, where architectural writers find a large public and where the word 'Vitruvian' often receives a distinctly political twist. In all this there is tilting at windmills from every side, but Vagnetti is certainly right when he faults the kind of architectural history that can appreciate the greatest architects who built in the classical language of architecture only by exposing them a revolutionary anticlassicists in some essential, underneath-it-all way.

Vagnetti's principal aim is to document the massive impact of Vitruvian thought on western architecture since the study of his treatise was received by the humanists of the early Renaissance and to show how vast and richly articulated its impact has been. By tracing the publishing fortunes of Vitruvius' book, he demonstrated that the frequency and number of the republications give a clear index of Vitruvius' historical importance. Thus the heart of the book is a chronological (1486-1976) and critical register of printed Vitruvius editions, translations, commentaries, compendiums, and epitomes, along with the most important studies of Vitruvius' treatise, a section prepared in collaboration with Laura Marcucci. The bibliographical descriptions are annotated, with fuller discussions devoted to the major editions. There are side benefits, too. We can see what was printed under the same covers with Vitruvius. Frontinus' *De Aquis* was by far his most common partner in the 15th and 16th centuries. A useful and praiseworthy feature is that all the entries are accompanied by a number of library locations, usually in Italy, but also in Paris, London, and elsewhere, and usually with call numbers. This extra effort turns the book into a new vade mecum for Vitruvian studies.

The bibliography takes us far beyond the well-known editions of Fra Giocondo, Cesariano, Philander, and Barbaro and plunges without ceremony into the details of the matter. There are 166 distinct editions, not counting reissues. Developments are summarized at the end of each century. Vagnetti's story begins in earnest with the introduction of the printing press; it is a story of courage, adventure, and idealism, crossed by devil-may-care literary theft, of outside deluxe editions and of pocket-book manuals. The first wave of interest mounted in the 16th century with 49 items evenly spread across 100 years. Our own century has seen as many Vitruvian publishing enterprises, but the interest is now largely erudite and philological, as it was in the very first years of the Vitruvian revival over 500 years ago.

The more than 75 figures, drawn from the woodcuts and engraved plates that constituted a visual commentary to old Vitruvian editions, prove how interesting it would be to have a complete corpus of Vitruvius illustrations. They also throw into relief how strong the presence of figural elements in the Vitruvian tradition actually was — and how much of its sculptural interest Western architecture owes to Vitruvius.

Since Vagnetti means only to map out a territory, there is no time for a detailed analysis of the editions and commentaries, topic by topic, issue by issue. Because of the obscurity of Vitruvius' text and the incompleteness of his indications, his treatise afforded considerable latitude for interpretation. Into this breach architects marched with supreme confidence. Vitruvius' 10 books provided a matrix on which to formulate their own ideas and through which to project their own imagination onto a mythical, wondrous world of the past. In the interpretations of Vitruvius there is much that reveals contemporary architectural conceptions. Thus Vagnetti's work points the way to a history of Vitruvian themes, based first on detailed treatments of their development and variation within the printed editions. Countless topics such as the Persian Porch, the Homo *ad quadratum*, hydraulic clocks, war machines, the *scamilli impares*, or the architect's education beg for special study. In this connection, the reader should also remember the valuable introduction to Carol Krinsky's edition of Cesariano's Vitruvius (Munich 1969). But, for now, Vagnetti has drawn our attention to Vitruvius and the Vitruvian age in a useful and worthy fashion and with appealing and open modesty.

Of no less interest to architectural historians is a second volume by Vagnetti in the same series. Vagnetti's *Prospettiva* is a detailed critical bibliography of perspective treatises and perspective studies. Much more care has been expended on the critical commentary devoted to the entries of this bibliography. They are arranged, first topically and then historically, and made accessible through a detailed index of names.

Books on perspective found their way onto the shelves of the architect's library alongside others treating the many different kinds of learning comprising the wide-ranging education prescribed by Vitruvius, who reports the existence of ancient treatises on scenographic perspective. Contemporary with the revival of interest with Vitruvius, a flood of perspective treatises impinged upon the architect's consciousness. During the 16th century some 40 new works on the subject were issues, together with an equal number of reprints of older works.

The treatises and studies Vagnetti describes (as well as many now obscure perspective illustrations he brings out from his cupboards) are fascinating for their own sake. But examining entry after entry in Vagnetti's bibliography, [252] keeping the architectural historian's point of view in mind, one impression grows ever stronger. If we were to put to one side all the studies that have to do with the rôle of perspective in architectural representation (the architect's use of perspective to convey the appearance of the building he

proposes, the visualization of architectural fantasies and archeological reconstructions, and the like), and if we leave out scenographic urbanism, it is surprising to realize that only a handful of studies remains that substantively relate perspective to architecture. If optical refinements and isolated perspective tricks are discounted, their number is further diminished. Very few studies document explicit relationships between perspective and architectural planning, design, and execution. In elementary terms we are brought face to face with the question of whether perspective is central to architecture, or if instead it is only a marginal phenomenon. This question is not entirely new, but it has not received all the attention it deserves.

Some of the studies cited by Vagnetti that touch upon it are important and well known. In the Warburg Journal both Argan (1946) and Wittkower (1953) advanced the then new position that perspective is of the essence in Brunelleschi's architecture. In Wittkower's view linear perspective was the prerequisite to a conception of rational space, the foundation stone of Renaissance architecture. Ludwig Heydenreich's conception of „prospettiva aedificandi“, presented to the 20th International Congress of the History of Art in 1961 (1963), was more complex. But he too maintains the importance of the „visual aspect“ as a factor in the design process from the outset, and he shows how perspective affects Brunelleschi's designs in terms of plastic articulation as well as in proportioning, which is where Wittkower had laid stress. Thus it seems agreed that linear perspective in architectural design is a basic component of Brunelleschi's style and its novelty.

Professor Lotz (1956) has laid bare a later development, tracing the impact of perspective on Bramante's architectural drawings and on his architecture of views — the architectural pictures of a painter-architect. But Lotz also shows that perspective, as an important planning method or design technique, rapidly fell from favor with the separation of the professions of painter and architect in the course of the first half of the 16th century.

In this context, one thinks also of Antonio da Sangallo at the Palazzo Farnese, and of the famous scenographic effects of baroque art, for instance, the perspective experiments of Maderno, Bernini, Borromini, and Guarini. But do they truly belong to the mainstream of architectural design?

There are not a great many more studies that sustain the belief that perspective is central to architecture. Did perspective ever penetrate deeply into all levels of building activity? Needed are studies that consolidate and extend the insights of the fundamental contributions already mentioned in terms of particular circumstances and buildings.

For a case in point, it seems that Bramante's approach to architecture and the perspective ideas embodied in his celebrated exedra or hemicycle of the Belvedere were carried forward by Vasari into the Del Monte Chapel at S. Pietro in Montorio, built for Julius III in the early 1550s, and from there onward to the Villa Giulia, with even more spectacular results. The left side of Uffizi 2191A (Fig. 1*), a hitherto unpublished drawing by Vasari, clearly relates to a tradition of pictorial and scenographic perspective experiments carried out in the late 1400s and very early 1500s, a tradition of perspective constructions that finds explicit expression in the elaborate scenography of Vasari's Cancellaria frescoes (1546). The right side of Vasari's drawing (Fig. 1) is scarcely more than a variation on Bramante's original Belvedere exedra. The drawing lets us see the true nature of the most hopelessly ‚pictorial‘ fact about Bramante's Belvedere design: the circular staircase with its kaleidoscopic convex-concave steps. In this light, Serlio's plan, elevation, and perspective of this ‚scala-teatro‘, as labels it in Book III, dramatically reveal that the form of the staircase is visual geometry; it was simply

founded on a perspective or scenographic demonstration, one derived from the ancient theater's plan, and one which, following Bramante's lead, was soon used again in the paintings of Raphael's school in the Vatican *Stanze*. Although more complete, the right side of Uffizi 2191A is identical to the architectural scene of Vasari's large Roman altar painting in the Del Monte Chapel, completed by 1552. The semicircular structure behind the double flight of steps in Vasari's drawing (his „teatro“, in contemporary terminology) doubtless belongs to the immediate background of the famous Villa Giulia hemicycle it so resembles. In 1555 Ammannati described this hemicycle as a „teatro“, and indeed he explained the rest of the main courtyard in terms of the parts of the Vitruvian theater („proscenio“, „orchestra“, „scena“). The scenographic connotations of the structure are inescapable and have not passed entirely unobserved. A pronounced perspectival component can also be documented in the large architectural fountain of the villa through contemporary drawings and descriptions.

All this is worth mentioning in bare outline, for it shows that at the very beginning of the second half of the 16th century perspective still permeated deeply the design process of the most important and marvelous building of its day. Moreover this case is doubly important for it affords an unparalleled view of how design ideas that germinated in the studios of painters and perspectivists were actually realized in the durable stones of architecture.

It would be interesting to learn of many more related examples in order to form a correct picture of the importance of perspective in Renaissance architecture.

One remarkable instance, which Vagnetti neglects to mention, is reported in an almost ephemeral pamphlet by Lando Bartoli. *Un restauro e un problema di prospettiva: Il palazzo Rasponi Spinelli a Firenze* (Florence, C.L.U.S.F., 1967, 19 pp., 10 pls.) documents a unique perspectively calculated vaulted entrance passageway (*androne*) in a late 15th-century palace in the Borgo S. Croce (Florence). The five [253] unequal vaulted bays of the *androne* grow smaller as they move from the street to the cortile. Their diminution proceeds according to a harmonic formula obtained through a series of geometric projections. The tunnel shape of the passageway focuses the potential vantage points along a straight line. From the street the perspective effect is enhanced, and the rate of diminution increases. But from the cortile this process is reversed; there is a tendency to nullify the ‚normal‘ perspective effect. ‚Objective‘ proportions are, as it were, maintained. This double-edged perspective tunnel is remarkably early in date, and the indisputable objective situation Bartoli has discovered is of the first interest. It appears all the more seriously intentioned and noteworthy owing to the undramatic character of the experiment; its illusions work even after they are unmasked. This construction also has general and theoretical implications. What, for instance, does it say about the conflict between perspective impression and objective proportionality?

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* (Fig. 1): Figure 1 is not reproduced here. The same image is to be found in: *Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Charles Davis and Anna Maria Maetzke, exhibition catalogue, Arezzo, 1981-1982, Firenze: EDAM, 1981, fig. 143.

(*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, volume XXXIX, October 1980, No. 3, pp. 251-253)