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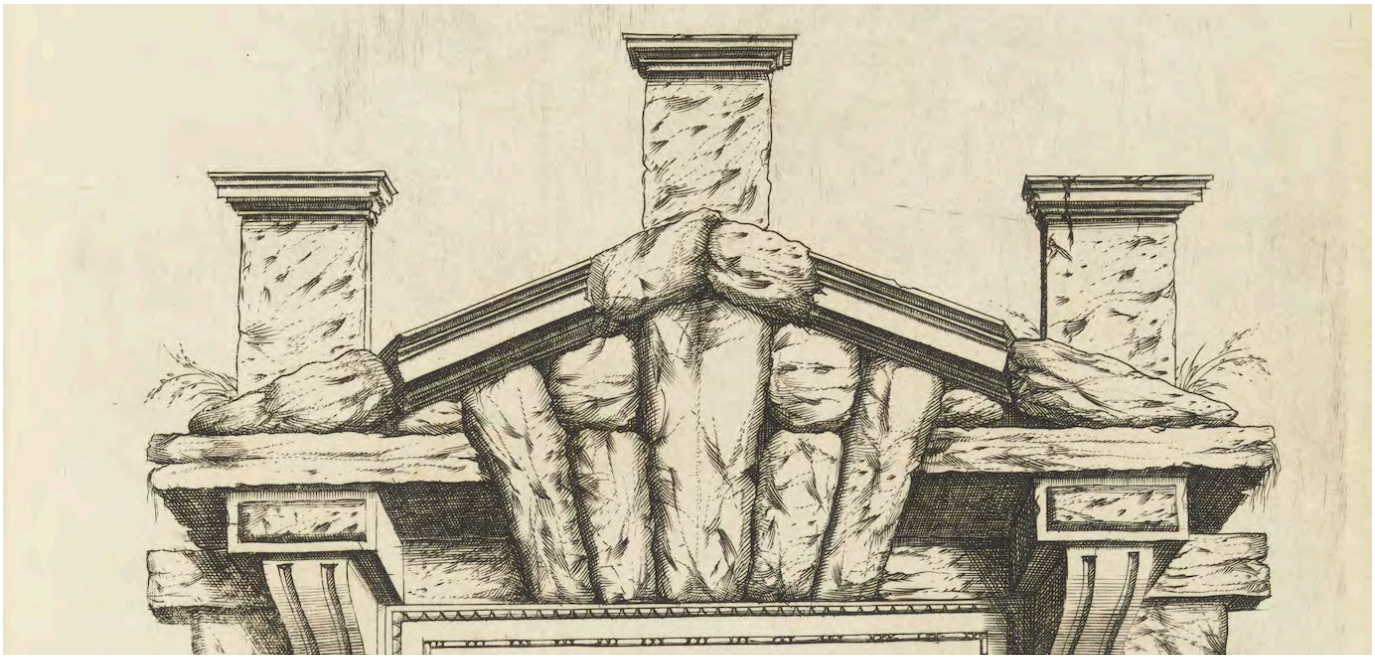

Sebastiano Serlio, Livre Extraordinaire de Architecture [...] (Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1551), plate 18, detail

Citations, Method, and the Archaeology of Collage *

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> But let us not have recourse to books for principles which may be found within ourselves. What have we to do with the idle disputes of philosophers concerning virtue and happiness? Let us rather employ that time in being virtuous and happy which others waste in fruitless enquiries after the means: let us rather imitate great examples, than busy ourselves with systems and opinions. … For this reason, my lovely scholar, changing my precepts into examples, I shall give you no other definitions of virtue than the pictures of virtuous men; nor other rules for writing well, than books which are well written.
>
> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse,* Letter XII (William Kenrick transl., 1784)

Children learn to speak their mother tongues through practice and observation. They don't need grammar rules. Grammar comes later, when it is taught at school. This shows that we may know a language without knowing its grammar. Grammar is an artificial shortcut to fluency, replacing the lengthy process of learning from life. For a fifteen-year-old high school student struggling to learn German, grammar is indispensable. Yet plenty of native German speakers don't know declensions by heart and still manage to get their word endings right – in speech as much as in writing.

At a higher level of linguistic practice, literary composition too used to have its own rules – rules that were taught at school. Until the end of the nineteenth century rhetoric was a compulsory subject in most European secondary schools. Rhetoric is the science of discourse. It teaches how to find the arguments of speech, how to arrange them in an orderly manner, and how to dress them with words. Rhetoric teaches how to be clear and persuasive. Seen in this light, rhetoric would seem to be a necessary discipline – indispensable, even. Instead, it no longer features in school and university curricula. France stopped teaching rhetoric in 1885, when French lycées replaced it with the history of classic and modern literature. Nineteenth-century educators seemed to have concluded that, when learning to write, we are better off in the company of literary masterpieces, rather than engaged in the normative study of classical (or modern) rhetoric. A century after Rousseau, Julie-Héloïse's pedagogical programme quoted above became law.

In times gone by students would have learnt the art of discourse by systematically studying grammar and rhetoric – page after page of rules to be learnt by heart. Today high school students in all European countries are instead obliged to read the masterpieces of their respective national literatures, often ad nauseam. This evidently follows from the assumption that, by reading and re-reading these exemplary works, students will (at some point) learn to write as beautifully as these canonical authors once did. Never mind that nobody knows precisely how and when that almost magic transference, assimilation, and transmutation of talent might occur: grammar has almost completely disappeared from primary school teaching, and rhetoric barely features in higher education – now an intellectual fossil of sorts. Meanwhile, the old art of discourse tacitly lingers on, in business schools, in creative writing and marketing classes. Especially in the latter, the ancient forensic discipline is returned to one of its ancestral functions: that of persuading, even when in the wrong.

For the Humanists of the Quattrocento, the first language to learn

was Latin. Not Medieval Latin of course – a corrupt and barbaric but still living language. Renaissance Humanists wanted to speak in the tongue of classical antiquity; they wanted to learn Cicero's Latin. But Cicero's Latin is, by definition, a dead language: quite literally so, since it died with Cicero. Cicero also wrote manuals on the art of rhetoric, but the Humanists believed that the best way to learn to write like Cicero was by imitating his way of writing. Well before the Romantics and the Moderns, they found learning from rules unappealing. They preferred to copy the style of Cicero from examples of his work.

The Humanists' veneration of examples was not limited to languages. Their exemplarism was an épistémè – an intellectual, cultural and social paradigm, deeply inscribed within the spirit of their time. That was their rebellion against the world they grew up in. For centuries the Scholastic tradition had privileged formalism, deductive reasoning, and syllogistic demonstration. The Humanists rejected this "barbarous", "Gothic" tradition of logic, in favour of their new way of "learning from examples". The dry and abstract rules of medieval Scholasticism were difficult to handle. Examples, on the other hand, were concrete and tangible. Imitating an example was easier, more pleasurable, and allowed more room for creativity than merely applying rules. This is how, at the dawn of modernity, antiquity was turned from a rule book into an art gallery.

*** *** ***

Like the arts of discourse, the arts of building require schooling. At the height of the Middle Ages, when both Gothic architecture and Scholasticism were at their peak, architectural lore was the preserve of guilds, and its mostly oral transmission was regulated by secretive initiation practices. By contrast, the Humanists pursued a more open strategy – reviving the ancient custom of writing books on building. The first modern treatise, Alberti's De Re Aedificatoria, deals with the architecture of antiquity, but the structure of Alberti's discourse was still medieval and Scholastic. Alberti advocates classical architecture as a paragon for all modern building, but Alberti's antiquity was an abstract model, devoid of any material, visible incarnation. Rather than an atlas of classical buildings, Alberti's book offers a set of classical design rules – rules for building in the classical way. To put it in more contemporary terms, Alberti formalized classical architecture. Alberti's rules replace the need to see – let alone imitate – the monuments of classical antiquity. To avoid all misunderstanding, Alberti's book did not describe any actual ancient monument, either in writing or visually: Alberti's De Re Aedificatoria originally did not include any illustrations, and Alberti explained that he wanted it that way.

As a commercial venture, Alberti's De Re Aedificatoria was not a success. Renaissance architects found it easier to skip Alberti's writings altogether, and go see, touch and learn from the extant magnificence of Roman ruins in person. Moreover, and crucially, as of the early sixteenth century drawings of ancient monuments started to be sold and circulated throughout Europe. Survey drawings in particular, for the first time made available through print, made the laborious ekphrastic and normative mediation of Alberti's writings all but unnecessary. But models, if beautiful to behold, are not always easy to imitate. Copies will inevitably be more or less successful, depending on the individual talent of each practitioner. By the second or third decade of the sixteenth century imitation itself had become a pedagogic and didactic conundrum.

Not just architectural imitation: writers had the same problem. After all, imitating Cicero is easier said than done. Many

rhetoricians in the sixteenth century will strive to transform the practice, skills, and tacit knowledge of literary imitation into a rational, transmissible technique. The modern notion of "method" was born out of sixteenth century rhetoric, but sixteenth century authors were not trying to develop a (scientific) method for making new discoveries; they were trying to develop a (pedagogic) method to better organise and teach what they already knew. Their post-Scholastic, pre-scientific method was essentially a diairetic method – a method of division: all knowledge, they argued, can be partitioned into smaller and smaller units, easier to learn, remember and work with. For sixteenth century scholars, "method" still meant "short cut" – a short cut to knowledge.

Discourse itself can be divided into modular parts: prefaces, arguments, conclusions, formulas and figures, idioms or turns of phrase, sentences, syntagms, words and letters. Sixteenth-century rhetoricians used this divisive technique to invent a new method for literary imitation. On the face of it, Cicero's style may appear as an ineffable quintessence, but at the end of the day all writing is text, and every text can be broken down into a linear sequence of alphabetical units. Of course, breaking up a text is not a straightforward operation: the parts of speech are held together by syntactic, semantic, and functional relationships. Some of these links can be uncoupled. Others can't. A text is a heteroclitic, variable cohesion aggregate of parts. Its segments differ in both extension and complexity. Yet even the most sophisticated literary monument can be subdivided into fragments; and once a fragment has been set apart from its compositional context, it can also be reused, reassembled, or recomposed into another text.

In reducing the art of discourse to a citationist technique – by turning ancient texts into a repository of infinitely repeatable citations – sixteenth century rhetoricians invented a new rhetoric. Ancient and modern texts came to be seen as mechanical assemblages of parts. Ancient works could be decomposed into segments, and these segments could then be reassembled to form new works. The smaller the segments, the more fluid or freer the outcome. Ciceronian Latin was an extraordinarily sophisticated and effective instrument of communication, but some modern ideas fundamentally differed from those of Cicero. The citationist method of imitation allowed Renaissance authors to use an old language to express new ideas.

Renaissance architects also needed a rational method for producing modern buildings while imitating classical examples. The greatest structures of antiquity – temples, amphitheatres, thermal baths – were of no use to modernity. Temples, in particular, while representing the pinnacle of classical architecture, had been built to house rituals and represent heathen gods whose worship had long ceased. The entire language of classical architecture had to be adapted for typologies and functions that had no precedents in antiquity. The image of antiquity itself as a building that can be endlessly dismantled and reassembled was a commonplace in the Renaissance. It was also a common practice on many building sites. Architect Sebastiano Serlio would turn this practice into a design theory.

That was no accident. Giulio Camillo, one of the main theorists of the sixteenth century citationist method, had an interest in architecture. He was also a friend of Serlio. The two were supported by the same patrons, and moved in the same circles of Evangelical (and perhaps Nicodemite) inclination. The method of Giulio Camillo's Neoplatonist rhetoric is well known:

1. Appropriate ancient examples (literary or otherwise) must be

1. Appropriate ancient examples (literary or otherwise) must be selected. The criteria for this selection were a much-disputed matter at the time, and one on which Camillo himself did not dwell.

2. The resulting corpus of integral textual sources must be segmented or divided into parts according to functional or syntactical criteria.

3. This catalogue of dissolved fragments must be sorted, so new users know where to look for the fragments they need.

4. A modern writer (a composer, but also in a sense a compositor: an ideal type-setter) will pick, reassemble and merge, somehow, any number of chosen textual fragments.

Thus new ideas could be expressed through ancient words and phrases – fragments severed from their original context, yet validated by prior use by a recognised "authority". In Camillo's view, this compositional technique constituted the inner workings and the secret formula of all processes of imitation. Furthermore, this was a compositional method that could be taught and learnt.

One essential tool in implementing this pedagogical programme was Camillo's notorious Memory Theatre, a walk-in filing cabinet where all the textual sources (and possibly some of the fragments deriving from them) would have been sorted following Camillo's own classification system. The whole machine, which included an ingenious information retrieval device, would have been in the shape of an ancient theatre – and it appears that Camillo built at least a wooden model or mock-up of it, in the hope (soon dashed) of selling his precociously cybernetic technology to King Francis I of France.

In a long-lost manuscript (found and published only in 1983) Camillo also explains how the same principles can inform a new method for architectural design. In Camillo's Neoplatonic hierarchy of ideas, the heavenly logos descends down into reality following seven steps or degrees of ideality. Individuals inhabit the seventh (lowest, sublunar) step; their ascent and crossing of the lunar sky occurs by dint of their separation from the accidents of space and time. In the case of architecture, actual buildings as they exist on earth must be separated from their site to become ideas of the lowest (sixth) grade. This separation of the real from its worldly context results in something similar to what we would today call "building types" – which are buildings in full, except they do not inhabit any given place. These abstract types are then further subdivided into columns and orders (of the five kinds then known: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite). The five orders are then broken down into regular geometric volumes, then surfaces, all the way to Euclidian points and lines. On each grade or step, a catalogue of ready-made parts would offer any designer all the components needed to assemble a new building. Thus Camillo's design method doubles as a shortcut to architectural imitation, and as a universal assembly kit.

A more scholarly trained Neoplatonist philosopher (and a few existed in Camillo's time) would have objected to some of Camillo's brutal simplifications, and could have pointed out that his theory had severe epistemic flaws. All the same, Camillo's architectural method (which its first editor, Lina Bolzoni, dated to around 1530) is almost identical to the plan laid out by Serlio in the introduction to the first instalment of his architectural treatise, published in Venice in 1537. Some of Serlio's seven grades did not correspond to Camillo's order: most notably, his atlas of archaeological evidence, the base and foundation of Camillo's Neoplatonic scaffolding, should have been on the lowest

step, but was instead printed as Serlio's Third Book (likely for commercial reasons). Additionally, one of the seven books in Serlio's original plan, his revolutionary Sixth Book, on Dwellings for all Grades of Men, was written but never published – at least, not until 1966. Serlio also wrote an additional, Extraordinary Book (literally, a book out of the original order) – a cruel, sombre joke disguised as a book, which Serlio bequeathed to posterity shortly before dying, poor and dejected in his self-imposed French exile.

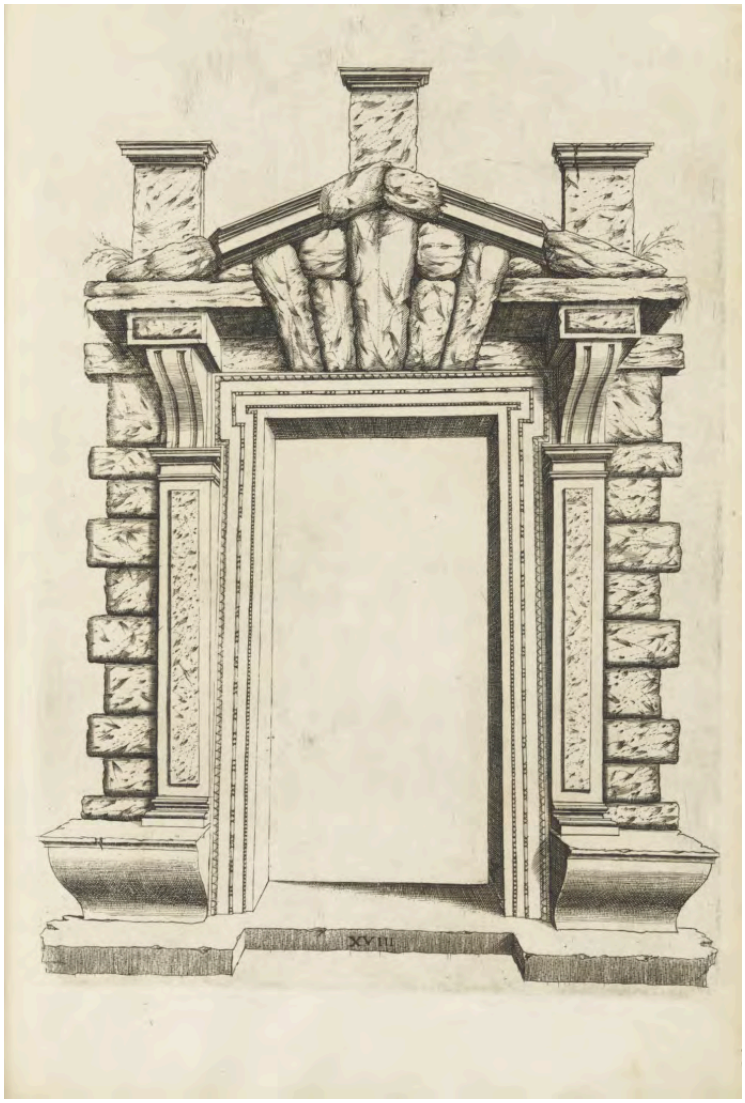
Regardless of some factual discrepancies, Serlio's compositional method is ostensibly the same as Camillo's. Architecture's exemplary models are selected, and then fragmented. These fragments are sorted and classified at different levels or grades of dissolution. Instructions for their reassembly are then provided, together with examples of successful new compositions. The pivot of the whole system was the book on the five architectural orders, which Serlio published first (albeit titled Fourth Book to comply with the general plan): a catalogue of stand-alone constructive parts (columns, capitals, bases, entablatures and mouldings), destined for identical reproduction in print, in scaled drawings, and in buildings of any type. In Serlio's method, this was the main offspring of architectural "dissolution" (or disassembling), and the basic ingredient of architectural design, i.e. re-composition. Pagan idols had to be broken down; only their fragments could be used, purified ingredients in the building of a new Christian architecture.

All the way, Serlio was aware of, and attuned to, the purpose and limits of his architectural method. Serlio turned architectural design into an assemblage of ready-made modular components. These were not actual spolia, but compositional design units, part to a universal combinatory grammar and destined for identical replication. Giulio Camillo's rhetoric reduced the imitation of Cicero's style, hence all literary composition, to a cut-and-paste method of collage and citation. Serlio's treatise did the same for architecture. His theory of the orders was the keystone of the entire process. Serlio couldn't standardise the building site (that would have made no sense in the sixteenth century), but he could standardise architectural drawings and design.

Serlio knew full well that his simplified, almost mechanical approach to design would entail a decline in the general quality of architecture. Many critics across the centuries have indeed frowned at the models and projects shown in his Seven Books. Serlio's designs have often been seen as repetitive, banal, ungainly or chunky; lacking in inspiration and genius. But Serlio did not write for geniuses. His treatise was a pedagogical work, not an architectural one. As Serlio tirelessly reminds the reader, his method is tailored to "every mediocre": to the "mediocre architect" – the average, middling designer. Today we might say that Serlio's treatise aimed at creating an intermediate class of building professionals. Michelangelo and Raphael had no need for "a brief and easy method" that turned architectural invention into cut-and-paste, collage and citation.

Knowledge can be taught, not genius. Serlio's pedagogical structure and design method were parts of an overarching ideological project. Serlio's method promises uniform and predictable architectural standards. These are perhaps banal, or monotonous, but that's the price one pays to make "architecture easy for everyone". And it is a price Serlio was willing to pay. Serlio's concern was the average quality of building, not the artistic value of a few outstanding monuments. This was a most unusual choice for an artist of the Italian Renaissance – an iconoclastic, almost revolutionary stance. Serlio's worldview was not one in which the misery of the many was contrasted by the magnificence of a few. Serlio pursued the uniform, slightly boring

repetitiveness of a productive, "mediocre" multitude. This was an ideological project, but also a social project, ripened in the cultural context of the early protestant Reformation. It is a position that evokes and preludes well-known categories of modernity.



Sebastiano Serlio, Livre Extraordinaire de Architecture [...] (Lyon: Jean de Tournes, 1551), plate 18.

* ***Footnote to this translation***

This is a translation of the introduction to my book Metodo e Ordini nella Teoria Architettonica dei Primi Moderni (Geneva: Droz, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 1993), edited, abridged, and adapted for clarity, but not updated. That book in turn derived from my PhD dissertation, supervised by Joseph Rykwert, researched and written between 1984 and 1989, and defended in the spring of 1990. Heavily influenced by Françoise Choay's La Règle et le Modèle and by works of literary criticism by Terence Cave (The Cornucopian Text), Antoine Compagnon (La seconde main ou le travail de la citation), and Marc Fumaroli (L'âge de l'éloquence), all published between 1979 and 1980, my enquiry on the use of visual citations in Renaissance architectural design was evidently in the spirit of the time: post-modern architects in the 80s were passionate about citations (or the recycling of precedent, otherwise known as reference, allusion, collage and cut-and-paste); they were equally devoted to architectural history, and particularly to the history of Renaissance classicism. My aim then was to bridge the gap between those two sources of PoMo inspiration, showing that Renaissance architecture was itself, quintessentially, citationist. How could it have been otherwise, since the main purpose of Renaissance architects was to revive, literally, the buildings of classical antiquity – piece by piece? Thanks to the first studies of Lina Bolzoni on the sulphurous Renaissance philosopher and magician Giulio Camillo

sulphurous Renaissance philosopher and magician Giulio Camillo, and to my then girlfriend, who was studying Renaissance Neoplatonism (and is today a known specialist of that arcane science), I soon found evidence of an extraordinary link – biographical, ideological, and theoretical – between Giulio Camillo and Sebastiano Serlio, and I wrote a PhD dissertation to explain the transference of the citationist method from Bembo's Prose to Camillo's Theatre to Serlio's Seven Books – and ultimately to Serlio's architecture.

Unfortunately, in the process, I also found out that the citationist method in the 16th century was a tool and vector of modernity. It was a mechanical method, made to measure for the new technology of printing; it was also in many ways a harbinger of the scientific revolution that would soon follow. Besides, the citationist method was more frequently adopted by Evangelical and Protestant thinkers (particularly Calvinist), and it was condemned by the Counter-Reformation. None of this would have pleased the PoMo architects and theoreticians who were then my main interlocutors.

Fortunately for me, they never found out. When my book was published, in 1993, the tide of PoMo citationism was already receding. Investigating the sources of citationism was no longer an urgent matter for architects and designers. My book was published in Italian, in an austere collection of Renaissance studies – few architects would have known about it, let alone read it. It received some brutally disparaging reviews, as due, by some of Tafuri's acolytes, because they thought, without reading my book, or misreading it, that I was bringing water to the PoMo mill. I wasn't. But at that point that was irrelevant. We had all already moved on.

I was pleasantly surprised when, a few years ago, Jack Self commissioned this translation for publication in Real Review (the translation, by Fabrizio Ballabio, was soon thereafter partially republished in Scroope, the journal of the Cambridge School of Architecture, at the request of Yasmina Chami and Savia Palate); and I was of course more than happy when my colleague Alessandro Bava asked me to review it for publication in the B-Pro journal of Bartlett School of Architecture. As we all know, collage and citation are becoming trendy again in some architectural circles – for reasons quite different from those of the late structuralists and early PoMos that were my mentors when I was a student. I have somewhat mixed feelings about the current, post-digital revival of collaging, but I would be happy to restart a discussion we briefly adjourned a generation ago.

Mario Carpo (March 2022)

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