**Statuesque Words in *Locum Tenens:*
Cornucopian Instruments,
Lieu-tenants of Statements**

"Please make way for an instant," Leon Battista Alberti has his character Xerxes say to the gathered crowd; please make way for an instant such that the *Debauchee*, the pleasure-lover, can pass through and have his fortune told by *the Astrologer* who is not but wants to be respected "making predictions that come from the stars, not from himself."[1] The Astrologer is described as *decrepit*, worn down, exposed, as a figure of ridicule, largely stripped bare of credit and appreciation—Xerxes has to temper the crowd: "What manners! What a worthy and modest city!... has your impudence taught you to demand everything you desire?" He appeals with urgency rather than sovereign authority: "I beg you again: leave at least a little space before the door. And you,

1 Leon Battista Alberti, *Dinner Pieces: A Translation of the "Intercenales,"* ed. by David Marsh, New York, State University of New York at Binghamton, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987, p.40.

decrepit astrologer, sit down inside where the mob can't crush you."[2]

The piece that depicts this situation is entitled *The Soothsayer.* It is one of the so-called *Dinner Pieces* in Alberti's book *Intercenales,* literally *Between Meals.* This book from the early 15th century does something remarkable: like Daily News Papers, it is concerned with current topicalities, with *Aktualitäten,* as we say in German, with what has been happening lately. But its treatment of News, we could say, is inverse to that of journals. It is not the extraordinary, the singular, the catastrophes and crises; it is not the breakdown of a time that would, if it could, unfold according to linear expectations where from one thing, the next thing is to follow. Rather, the latest happenings always come cyclically for Alberti. We are in a temporal domain that unfolds *between meals,* the time of the Gospel is interrupted, the News are actualities that are strangely so in time but out of it too, current topics that are current while also being absent, and that are absent while also being current. It is the domain of such a *locum tenens*, a domain of place-holding positions that I want to explore in the following. I am interested in it because it appears to open a novel manner of thinking about a domestic kind of

2 Ibid.

architectonics according to which—and here I am perhaps over stressing the point, but for the sake of speculation let's do it—one can establish knowledge like one founds cities. When daring to learn from Alberti about such a civic epistemology, such an architectonic social science approach, we should not forget that Alberti was by formation a jurist and, by passion, a mathematician. The methods and imagination of the law, as well as of mathematics, pervade his entire work— perhaps especially his literary work.

Indeed, in Alberti's *Dinner Pieces* and a great number of his lesser-known writings, Alberti knows how to redistribute the many characteristic power positions in a manner seldom heard nor seen. In the passage cited at the beginning of this talk, Alberti, in one stroke, redraws the positions of the dramatic plot of the Classical Polis: Xerxes, the allegorical Persian Emperor once so feared by the Greek city-states, finds himself displaced to mid-fifteenth century Rome, in an Italy of cities freshly emerging with a novel kind of autonomy out of a declining Empire. Xerxes does not belong here, but Alberti demands from him that *he makes room and keeps a place* for an Authority not only other than himself but also one of at least the same age as Xerxes himself, yet one that is even more of

a mistrusted stranger in this dis-placed situation than he is. Astrology has to be told by Xerxes that it needs to sit down *in* the center, that it can no longer speak from a position out there outside of the social domain. Xerxes himself, the sovereign emperor, needs to guard the door—we hear him speak again to the Astrologer: "I'll stand in the doorway and describe people's appearance and features, which you can discern but poorly because of your defective vision."[3] Alberti allots positions key to many political plots: we have a Sovereign present but not really in charge and not really out of charge either; he is a gatekeeper, not a dictator or leader; we have another authority competing with but also conspiring with that of the sovereign, one that knows how to keep time and tell the future that too is present yet not really in charge and not really out of charge either. In any case, the Astrologer appears largely disempowered because his vision, at least for what is in the proximate distance, has been dismantled and is considered "defective."

And then we have, of course, Alberti himself as the authorial voice that witnesses the story of such redistributed allocation, such plotting. And this authorial voice speaks in coded metaphoric speech—literally, as the German language has it,

3 Ibid.

"*in* übertragener *Rede.*" In speech that is being *transmitted*, *transferred*—but transmitted, transferred *from where* and *to where*? And transmitted *how*?

Alberti chooses *literary* domains to express what he has to say, rather than those of a practical treatise or that of learned commentary and explanation. It is a *communicative transfer* that Alberti is performative in, and it proceeds poetically; I want to suggest one that proceeds with *rhetorical coding.* To proceed poetically, this means that it takes turns, goes in angles, and the lines of its prose are dramatic and tempered. They are exciting as well as excitable. *Rhetorical coding that proceeds poetically* involves a manner of reasoning that is conductive and current, also recurrent, progressive as well as iterative. This reasoning is *versatile*, but it *is* principled; it is concerned with origins and ends, orders and purposiveness. It needs to be called domestic, pragmatic too, and architectonic.

To be proficient in such rhetorical coding that proceeds poetically, one needs to know how to play instruments *mathematically*—this is how Alberti's book *Ludi Rerum Mathematicarum*[4] (plays with mathematical things) expresses it. Such know-how is not characterized by an either-or. It involves proficiency. Instruments that can be played mathe-

4 Kim Williams, Lionel March, Stephen R. Wassell (eds.), *The Mathematical Works of Leon Battista Alberti,* Basel, Birkhäuser, 2010.

matically are instruments of encoding and decoding. Rather than speaking of Alberti's technique as *allographic*, as Mario Carpo has recently done, we should speak of it as *cryptographic*. The difference is substantial: while allographic is a term regarding how meaning is to be represented, cryptographic is a term regarding how the articulation of meaning can be socialized and cultivated. The former seeks to strip all inventiveness as forms of subjective bias from its treatment of meaning; the latter is passionate about how to invent manners of how meaning can be addressed legitimately. Alberti was a jurist by formation; his approach to coding is categorical in the old sense of that term, namely, how a thing is to be addressed before the law. For Alberti, the law and the city are mutually implicative. Neither one pre-exists before the other. They call each other forth. The literary domains where Alberti expresses what he has to say, those *loci tenens* of his communicative transfers, his encoded imports and exports, are the dramatic sites where the contrasts between ideality and reality need to become manifest. The city is where such profiling takes form.

Alberti was the illegitimate son of a powerful Patrician Florentine family. He wrote the *Intercenales* for his friends after he finished his studies in Law and when he began to spend days and days,

evenings and evenings in his position as a Secretary at the Papal Chancery in Rome. Alberti's time was an interesting time to study law: Canon law, church law which had been codified by a Bolognese monk called Gratian in the early 12th century, was taught in parallel to the Justinian Code of Civil Law; but only a few people commented on both traditions. Alberti did not strive to work as a lawyer because, I like to imagine, he could not decide on either one. Rather, his humanist disposition inclined him to build bridges between the two. As I want to demonstrate in a moment, Alberti's architectonic reason is pervaded by translating between canons. In the young and emerging cities, with their novel kind of autonomy, it is perhaps the first time such translation becomes possible. The old authorities need to be respected, that of the larger empire as well as that of the Church. To do that, the foresight of the Astrologer is needed as an imported point of view from the outside of a city, and it is taken into service for the public good. I want to suggest that it is the authority of a voice that, from then on, comes to speak in the architectonic tradition of *disegno*. Drawing things together, planning the next steps, designing architectural models, all these things do not happen in an ideal and a-temporal domain of form—the plotting is called by Alberti to the

city center, even though their authority is that of a stranger who comes from elsewhere. Drawing things together needs to happen amidst—where there is action always already taking place. But it cannot happen without also lending an ear to what sounds from the outside. As the *astronomer* perhaps knows better than the *astrologer*: mathematics provides instruments that need to be played mathematically. The lines of mathematical reasoning are like excitable strings on an instrument that can be played upon. This is what articulation, rhetorical coding, does. Founding a city, if we understand it as an analogy to how knowledge can be established by mathematics, is not something that happens at one point and then remains the increasingly distant reference through time for all that happens afterwards. Founding a city, like the establishment of knowledge, never ceases to involve us. Alberti's small treatise on how to map the Roman city, in particular, can help us better understand how.

In this treatise, Alberti facilitates his reader to craft maps of Rome, each for her or himself. He calls these maps *descriptio,* the city can be described, but the descriptions need to be crafted. What we need to understand better is how such maps must count as original maps, as maps of the original Rome— only, this originality has never ceased being alive!

Alberti's work at once was and was not that of an archaeologist. It was in so far as it maps a strange kind of incessant and prolongated "state," an ongoing stasis—one that depicts and fathoms out the thickness of historic change that actually happened and keeps happening to Rome. But also, it was *not* archaeological as it does not seek to fix a bottom to this thickness to identify a ground that would lay inertly at its foundation. Rather, Alberti, the jurist, seeks how the reason that builds the foundations of Rome can be addressed. Alberti's project was not one in *ichnography*; it was one in terms of *lineamenta*. I will come back to this in a minute. He did not actually *draw* a map to be representative. Rather he gave a particular set of *instruments* for drawing maps of which each is to compose a score according to which the classic "originality" of Rome—with which Alberti, like all of his Renaissance peers, sought to reconnect—could be played anew. They are instruments that anybody could learn and play because they operate by and are made of technical schemata. But these technical schemata, for Alberti, represent what they facilitate as little or as much as a violin represents the music it can sound. They are the instruments that facilitate play with mathematical "things"—literally, mathematics means all that pertains to learning. They are hence

instruments that allow playful interaction with what can be *known*.

But again, *where* would such play be happening? Where would its domain be located? What space could accommodate the categories of addressing the reason at work in something classical, something timelessly actual? Here lies the great inventiveness of Alberti: he invented what I call an architectonically-literary setup for map-making. He invented the endowment of a *locus tenens* that would turn it into a site from within where the thickness of this manifestation of Roman history can be mapped. It is a self-referential site of the where-within it is possible to map; it comes as a projective satellite image, a *Weltraumbild* that comes in the form of data tables. It is an image, but not one that was to represent the Earth (or any other object) from *outer* space. Rather it is an image that is to conduct and facilitate encrypted statements of what it is to depict *from within and amidst the domain of time.* It facilitates *the imagination* of how the classical city, the ever-actual city that lasts through time, can be one of Age and Youth. Albertis's *Weltraumbild* is a satellite image that needs *time-ships* rather than *spaceships* to capture the sight that it captures. Albertis's *Weltaumbilder* give us a crypto-scopic view

from within *the outer time* of the universe that hosts the natural history of the Earth. Let's see how.

Alberti needs two instruments that play together for such map-making. One he calls a horizon, and it is to encompass all of the absently-present city. The other is a radius ruling on that compass, it is a ruler that is mobile and that can rotate in discrete steps on the compass's disk. The setup of Alberti's map-making observatory looks a bit like a watch. The horizon line comprehends the two singularities when day and night are equally long—the Western and the Eastern *Equinoctia*. They both serve as polar coordinates within one common compass. Alberti applies a procedure well known from calendar making, where polar coordinates constitute the Equinoctial horizon and where the cyclic passing of days and nights can be counted: the compass of the calendar cycle is divided into months, each month into days, days into hours, minutes and seconds. But with regard to calendars, such counting goes in accumulatively progressing circles. In the years that pass, in every cycle, there are not only the two equinoxes; there is also the solstice, the singular point of turn. Alberti is playing here with the technique of calendar making and time counting—he is playing "with this mathematical thing:" Alberti's compass was to be divid-

ed into forty-eight parts which he calls "degrees." The "degrees" are again partitioned into four parts, which Alberti calls "Minutes."[5]

Alberti's satellite image, *taken from within the outer time of the Universe*, proposes nothing less than a structural analogy between the classic city of Rome and the device of classicality itself, that of how time can be kept, the clock and its counting through Calendars. Architecture incorporates and manifests objectively time that passes massively, the time of ageing. Architecture manifests how there is ageing to originality. This is why already, for Vitruvius, not only *buildings* and *cities* but especially also *gnomons* and *machines* were constitutive of architecture.[6] Alberti's mathematical instruments are gnomonic too: in addition to this horizon that is to encompass the city of Rome in its historic thickness, which is to be graphed on the cypher disk of his instrument, he provides a second device, a ruler that rotates and

5 Alberti, cited in Mario Carpo, *Leon Battista Alberti's Delineation of the City of Rome,* Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007.
6 Ibid., "You must divide this horizon into equal parts such that there are forty-eight parts—we shall call these parts "degrees." And beginning with the first, write a number for each of these degrees in this way, namely in order 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. up to 48—the result will be that, starting with the first degree on the horizon to the north, the south will bear the number 24, the eastern equinox will be numbered 12 and the western equinox will be marked 36. I then subdivide each of these degrees into four parts—these are called "minutes," p.97.

that indicates positions within the compass. It is also divided, into fifty equal parts which he also calls "degrees," and which he again subdivides by four into "minutes."

What we have here is counted minutes rotating across a disk of counted minutesimality—and this disk of minutesimality, in turn, is to *legitimate* the actual counting of the radial passing of time in minutes. The classical city is the ever-absent city. The one where time lasts and does not pass. In other words: the lasting time of the classic city is rendered graphical, sharable, and communicable by Alberti, and thereby facilitates the ever-actual and ongoing process of how it is not just assumed as an ideality but is actually being founded by discrete steps that proceed gradually! Like his Renaissance peers, Alberti, the humanist, wanted to continue the classic legacy of Rome, but not without reserving the possibility for exceptionality and criticality that would mark the re-birth of the classical, its contemporaneity and its generational logic of ageing.

The *Dinner Pieces*, the short texts in the *Intercenales*—these *literary pieces from between meals* from which I cited the short passage with Xerxes and the Astrologer in the beginning—are allegorical dramatizations that create *civic* tension. They do so

rather comically by evoking a sense of allegorical likeliness that always counts in the lower animal nature that coexists with the emerging humanist sense of natural dignity. Intellectual understanding and socialization customs are counted here, even if, and precisely in how, they inevitably fall apart. Such allegorical dramatizations are comical not by lack of rationalization and theory but by means of it. We have here a form of the comic that works not by *pathos* but by theoretical anticipation, wit and humor. The aspiration is clearly that of developing a shared common sense, but one that roots in a shared detachedness, not communion. And yet, through the humor with which it works, it is not stripped from warmth and empathy.

When many appearances are profiled against each other, we usually know that we are in a comedy—it is the main feature that the comic shares with the festival, the banquet and the symposium tradition. Luigi Pirandello, the early 20th-century Italian poet and intellectual, admirably writes, in his treatise *On Humor* (1920), that "If one sees in humor a particular contrast between ideal and reality, it means that it has been considered superficially and from one aspect only." For in comic writings, an ideal may very well exist—but "this depends on the personality of the poet," Pirandello continues—

and if it exists, "It needs to be analyzed, limited, and represented in this way"[7]—that is, as an actively witnessed contrast between ideal and real.

It seems that a specific awareness of just such comic complexities is an important bond among the very diverse writings of Alberti—from the early literary texts to his influential treatises on sculpture, painting, mathematics, cryptography, linguistics, and architecture.

It is well known how much Alberti owed to the Roman tradition of rhetorics and mnemotechnics, especially Cicero and Lucian. What links rhetorics with this tradition of the comic, as well with the particular view on architecture I want to suggest here, is knowing how intricate it is to ask questions that seek to *find* what in ancient rhetorics was called a stasis or a common ground; stasis, here, is not what can be taken for granted, an inertial background to all dynamics. It is what must be achieved and dispositioned and what will characterize any action that might unfold in a particular plot. Stasis is a term that means the precondition for any possible argument—and as such, also any possible *appropriateness* or *decorum*.

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7 Luigi Pirandello and Teresa Novel, "On Humor," in *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1966, pp.46–59, here p.47.

Stasis theory in rhetorics manifests an instrumental kind of reasoning. It assumes that for every opinion, for every argument, there is also a *valid* counterpoint that cannot be made to go away—rather, one needs to lay out a site, to endow a place such that it can act as a kind of a *fulcrum,* a point against which a lever can be placed such that both poles can trust to find themselves, in principle, respected and taken into account. Such stasis is achieved only with skill and by asking the right questions, by finding how to frame what is at issue in manners generous but also polyvalent enough for all parties to consider themselves, in principle, heard and recognized. This was one of the key challenges of ancient rhetoricians, which we tend to forget entirely now that we tend to only attribute the potential for biased manipulation to this instrumental reasoning.

Let's again hear Pirandello:

> Surely, [....] *a contrast between ideality and reality* enters and is felt in any humorous work. It gives to it a particular character and particular taste. But it isn't a pre-established condition. Just the opposite: it is characteristic of any humorist, through his special kind of reflection, which creates the feeling of incongruity, of not knowing any more

which side to take amid the perplexities and irres-olutions of his conscience.[8]

Does such a contrast between ideality and reality not also resonate astonishingly well with Alberti's intricate relation between what he called "line-amenta"—the architectonic fitting of lines and angles, an "ichnographia" understood as "ground plans"? Alberti's term "lineamenta" has indeed of-ten been translated with just that same word as "incongruity." Could it be that Alberti's literary writings, his architectural drawings, and his un-derstanding of *disegno* are conceived in a manner that is, in the senses of such instrumental reason as I tried to depict here, deeply—archaeologically, if I may say so—*comical*? Let's hear Pirandello again:

> Comedy and its opposite lie in the same dispo-sition of feeling, and they are inside the process which results from it. In its abnormality this dis-position is bitterly comical, the condition of a man who is always out of tune; of a man who is at the same time violin and bass—of a man for whom no thought can come to mind unless suddenly anoth-er one, its opposite and contrary intervenes—of a man for whom any one reason for saying yes is at once joined by two or three others compelling him to say no, so that yes and no keep him suspended and perplexed for all his life—of a man who can-

8 Ibid.

not let himself go in a feeling without suddenly realising something inside which disturbs him, disarranges him, makes him angry ... [9]

Certainly, in Alberti's literary writings, we can easily recognize just such a disposition of the authorial voice. Alberti's topics in the *Intercenales* are comical characterizations of many things. One among them treats Patience and depicts her as the daughter of Necessity. Patience tells her mother that she is "not one who regards as certain and true everything that has been written down," just before asking her mother what the words meant, which she finds written on a jar that contains, as she is being told, the best protection you can provide against men's maladies." We learn that it is a jar full of "ointment made from the essences of diligence and labor"—but before Necessity can tell her daughter what the words written on that jar mean, Patience lets the jar fall— "please don't think I did it on purpose mother, it was bad luck, the jar was greasy and slippery and slipped from my hands."[10] Other *Dinner Pieces* treat in a similar allegorical manner The Coin, Wealth, Fate and Fortune, but also Fame, the Cycnic, Stubbornness, Discord, Religion, the Lake, the Widow, Poverty, The Marriage and The Love Affair.

9   Ibid., p.46.
10 Alberti, 1987, p.47.

There is a *domestic* manner of reasoning depicted in these pieces, but one that at the same time shuns any transcendent protection offered by the Domus of such domesticity. It is a manner of reasoning that knows that it ages and matures, grows old and stiff, or is born with fresh youth, and at times cannot help behaving in an infantile manner. It is a reason that cannot ever undo its past, one that is always coming from somewhere. It is a reason for which there is no innocence to be claimed. Domestic architectonic reason articulates itself with the voice of a *vicarious authority*—the speaking subject proceeds by experiences; it is on the basis of experience that it proceeds by crediting and praising, by discarding, spending and banking, by hosting and servicing, by withholding and hypothecating. It is a reason, in short, that subjects to a *substitution play* whose stasis needs to be dispositioned architectonically and whose motive, whose moving force is larger than it could possibly know of. Its domain is that of vicarious plots that condition presences as much as negligences. Such architectonic reason, I suggest, is subject to a universal economy, it is domestic, private, but it is also political, public, because it orients itself with the help of concepts, we ought to call *capital*.

Capital concepts are conductive rather than delineating. They are hosting what they conceive rather than deciding what belongs to what. Their form must itself be counted, and the unit that lends itself for such counting is a restless unit in circulation. Capital concepts are presuming and excitable concepts; they are concepts that do not grasp but that stand up and let go; they introduce right angles, orthogonality, they know manners of conduction where no plane lines show the pathway. The kind of conception they are capable of only partially falls within their own domain. It consists of acting as the host of a happening which they let pass, which they do not seek to control. And yet the conception that Capital concepts are capable of is not undecided and meandering; it is discrete and decisive. It is a decisiveness that is rational and yet never happens according to pre-established rules. Capital concepts conceive not through outlining and separating but through hosting. They are not symbolic concepts that would unify different things. Rather, we can think of them as actively accommodating, conductively, what they are to conceive, by letting go of what they could hold on to, by letting things get away. Capital concepts do not capture; they instead *offer*. They are reasonable but without immediately making sense. This is because abstractly consid-

ered, they can make any sense, while on the other hand, if one were to look at them as something concrete, they would be concepts that can no longer be considered capital; they would then be regulated and principled totally. What they contain would have turned into administrated good, stripped bare of all virtuality.

We indeed need to say of capital concepts—even though they are excitable—that they lack direction (sense). But if they are treated reasonably, they "lack" direction (sense) actively by seeking to collect all that can be considered *absent*. Capital concepts host what they conceive rather than deciding what belongs to what—attempting to account exhaustively for what they are capable of "hosting" is as impossible as accounting exhaustively all that can be realized, over time, with a certain sum of money.

Reasoning, in terms of capital concepts, does not try to get things right. It seeks to support the uprightness of things—by challenging them forth. At the table of such a natural, cyclically current communicative intellect, the hosting reason will want nothing but never to cease being a host. And for that, it will want to keep things open. It needs to lose direction. It needs to let go of what it accommodates. In other words, capital concepts incorporate intellectually what it means to have a body that can

be absent; and they know well that they are nothing on their own. A capital concept is one of uttermost generality—like a sun that tries to collect all it has to spend. At that same time, capital concepts are concepts only in so far as they are parsed (partitioned) into the scales of a not-ever properly lasting minutesimality that inheres to, and that inhabits, the massive passing of time in a great many spaces of polar coordination. They are concepts that do not grasp but stand up. What they contain cannot be depicted but must be sounded, for they matter in what they are saying, even though they are attempting not ever to say anything in particular. This they do precisely and actively so, with more or less finesse.

Through such domestic architectonic reason, drawn to excitement and interest by subscribing itself to the task of translation and diplomacy more than to judgement and classification, this is how we find in Alberti's oeuvre, in an exemplary manner, a reason that reflects about itself in what I would call a *cornucopian* manner—theory in architecture tends to produce instruments, instruments that sound a bottom that can never be exhaustively fathomed, because the more it is sounded, the deeper it reaches. Knowing how to play the instruments of domestic architectonic sources sounds from

the clamorous absurdity of noise, in finding ever new translations from an acoustic and responsive domain of harmonics to the visual and imaginary domain of geometry.

Cornucopian instruments articulate a vicarious order which needs not only be capable of facilitating novel and contemporary conducts of life but also to accommodate any form of heritage—classical, traditional, ecclesiastical. It is, hence, an order of substitute positions; it is an order by means of keeping absences, it is an architectonic that knows how to keep recognized but empty the contested positions of power, might, authority, hospitality, hostility, and patronage. It is *eine Platzhalter Ordnung,* which depends upon dressing up, allegorical veiling, forms that keep latent, not to the end of locking away and keeping secluded a particular content, for an exclusive group of the initiated, but rather to make what it veils—without precisely knowing how to—bearable, sharable, communicable. Not more and not less.

"*Please make way for an instant,*" we started by citing Alberti's character Xerxes in the piece entitled *The Soothsayer.* That is because instants do not just pass. Sometimes the ways for instants to pass are to be made, fabricated, dispositioned, guarded, and called forth. At stake is a notion of beginnings that

are neither those of a determined path, nor those of myth, nor those of explanation. They are *unlikely* assessments—speculatively-projective excavations that bring into novel constellations the vicarious structures of plots and stories that date in time in heteroclite manners—*heteroclite,* like those words in grammar which demand irregular inflection.

Making way for an instant to pass—perhaps there *is* no architectonic articulation without prophecy?