



This is a repository copy of *Introduction: Concinnitās*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/222731/>

Version: Published Version

Article:

El Chami, Y. orcid.org/0000-0002-0055-3639 and Palate, S. (2019) Introduction: Concinnitās. Scroope: Cambridge Architecture Journal, 28. pp. 4-7. ISSN 0966-1026

© 2019 The Author(s). Reproduced with permission from the copyright holder.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

concinnitās

Scroope Issue 28
2019

EDITORS

Yasmina El Chami
Savia Palate

DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Yasmina El Chami
Savia Palate

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ben Beach, Matthew Bovingdon-Downe, Tobias Ehret, Stan Finney, Marisa Grove, Hannah Martin-Merchant, Patricia Mato-Mora, Nicoletta Michaletos, Katerina Mizrokhi, François Penz, Wendy Pullan, Dena Qaddumi, Natcha Ruamsanitwong, Sofia Singler, Benjamin Thomas, Simon Wallington, Ran Xiao.

This publication was supported by the Department of Architecture and the Researcher Development Programme at the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Cambridge.

ISSN 0966.1026 Issue 28
© Scroope Journal 2019

Cover: *Surreal City, 2013*, Neil Spiller

Copyright is retained by the respective authors unless otherwise indicated.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. Any copyright holders we have been unable to reach or to whom inaccurate acknowledgment has been made are encouraged to contact the publisher.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publishers.

Although the highest care is taken to make the information contained in Scroope: Cambridge Architecture Journal as accurate as possible, neither the publishers nor the authors can accept any responsibility for damage resulting from the use of this information.

SCROOPE: Cambridge Architecture Journal
Department of Architecture
1-5 Scroope Terrace
Cambridge CB2 1PX
United Kingdom

www.arct.cam.ac.uk
scroope@aha.cam.ac.uk



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**
Department of Architecture

Contents

Foreward François Penz	1
Introduction: Concinnitās Yasmina El Chami and Savia Palate	4
It All Starts With the Ground... Interview with Amanda Leveté Yasmina El Chami and Savia Palate	8
MRT Daisy Ames	22
A Dying Moth on a Modern Window: Eileen Gray and Virginia Woolf's Tales of Nature and Life Sarah Bonnemaïson	27
Super-Quotidian Charline Ouellet	40
Palimpsest Approaches: Temporality as Process in the Kolumba Museum Complex Vasiliki Zochiou	44
Informal Sequence Behrang Fakharian	56
An 'Other' Concinnitas: Temporality and Renewability in the Yuanlin Zhang Gallery Xiang Ren	60
Analogical Syntax Cameron McEwan	74
Expanding Architectural Practice through Contemporary Art: Case Study on the Kandos Art Facility Sarah Breen Lovett and David Kroll	78
A Fictional Glitch Matthew Turner	91
Lap, Twist, Knot: Coupling Mental and Physical Labours in Contemporary Architectural Practice James Forren and Claire Nicholas	94
Connotations of the Deconstructed, Surrealist City Neil Spiller	108
Citations, Method, and the Archaeology of Collage Mario Carpo	112

Introduction

Concinnitās

Yasmina El Chami
Savia Palate

Concinnitas—

*The state of being skilfully put together or joined;
a beauty that comes from the harmony, proportion, and congruity of
the various parts of a whole assembled according to principles*

Borrowed from the art of rhetoric, Leon Battista Alberti used *concinnitas* to describe the inherent beauty of nature from which architecture ought to be inspired. In Alberti's view, the 'art of building' went beyond the physical form and was equally concerned with the effect of buildings on their users, their surroundings, and the city. This beauty was neither innate nor insular, but was created from a correspondence and relationship with a context, an outside. This notion of a discursive 'beauty', deriving from rhetoric—the art of discourse and persuasion—is not solely about relationships, but also representation: the ability to make intelligible a form of argument that unites the various parts of a building and clarifies their relationship:

Him I consider the architect, who by sure and wonderful reason and method, knows both how to devise through his own mind and energy, and to realise by construction, whatever can be most beautifully fitted out for the noble needs of man, by the movement of weights and the joining and massing of bodies. To do this he must have an understanding and knowledge of all the highest and most noble disciplines.¹

The architect then, becomes an agent of beauty; architecture moves away from the art of *creatio ex nihilo*, and positions creativity and *invenzione* in the hands of man. Characterised by Jacob Burckhardt as Alberti's 'most expressive term', *concinnitas*, goes beyond a mere aesthetic concord, and, based on decorum, prerequisites a purpose. Harmony is reached and fulfilled through the realisation of form and content; an underlying principle in the history of design and architecture ever since Vitruvius formulated them, and still salient today.

If there is, perhaps, a common trajectory among architects, the demiurges of form, it is that design and the consistent desire of architecture to reach 'beauty' is never achieved in the same way. It is a composition, a negotiation, a combination, a juxtaposition, a dialogue, a conflict of at least two parts, that together construct a 'whole'. For Vitruvius, *firmitas, utilitas, venustas* (stability, utility, beauty) were the sacred basis of an architectural unity. Alberti elaborated his principles by combining those of painting and mathematics, and as a refinement of Brunelleschi's perspectival building methods. Walter Gropius, when founding the Bauhaus, advocated towards a progressive design curriculum based on arts and technology. Le Corbusier's 'architectural revolution' strove to construe an aesthetic language using 'scientific' and mathematical sequences. Whereas the Modernists adopted Mies Van de Rohe's 'Less is more', striving to eliminate the plurality of parts, Robert Venturi, representing an emerging post-modern ideal, claimed that 'less is a bore', reopening the immeasurable possibilities towards an architecture of contingency.

Not all of them followed Alberti's intellectual pursuits; some of them vehemently rejected the historical precedent, antiquity's canon, and the notion of a pre-defined system of principles. Nonetheless, the tenet that architecture exists in the unity of its counterparts, that the building is an entity comprised of separate components, and that design is unavoidably transdisciplinary and engaged with the uncertain, resonates with Alberti's ideas of a 'beautiful whole'. In the modern period, even the humblest of projects embodied an ambition towards social reform and individual expression. Today, political, economic, cultural, regional, environmental, personal, (and the list grows indefinitely) agendas are not only multiplying but seem to have become indispensable for the process and future of architecture.

Scroope 28 gathers contributions that propose a new genealogy of *concinnitas*, including critical and theoretical explorations of the term as well as reinterpretations by practicing architects, that attempt to mediate the interdisciplinary nature of architectural discourse and the complex processes that shape contemporary architectural praxis.

The issue opens with an interview with Amanda Leveté (AL_A), whose recent works, such as the extension of the V&A on Exhibition Road (London, UK) and the MAAT Museum (Lisbon, Portugal), reflect a contemporary commitment to a concinnitas in which architecture emerges as a relational set of ideas and simultaneously a discursive object, through a careful articulation of concepts, elements, materials, and scales. From the early phase of design, dialogue becomes the leading method to communicate and exchange ideas among clients, users, and other stakeholders, coalescing into a project that unfolds as a narrative, inscribed with qualities of material, construction techniques, form, and programme, formulating clear relationships with its public and the urban realm.

Theories of design and making are explored in the contribution by James Forren and Claire Nicholas, in which a rich literature drawn from philosophy, anthropology, and architecture informs an interdisciplinary collaborative project, *Lap, Twist, Knot*, made with a unique fibre-cement composite. A participatory project with an interdisciplinary approach is similarly presented by Sarah Breen Lovett and David Kroll in the *Kandos Art Facility* project, which was primarily conceived as an artwork and public engagement project before materialising into a physical space.

The relationship between the natural and the built environment is addressed in Sarah Bonnemaïson's text, re-reading Eileen Gray's E1027 house through Virginia Woolf's *The Death of the Moth*. Building on the notion of organicism, the article mourns the growing gap between humans and nature, emotions, and spirituality. Illustrating its fatal counterpart, this romantic atmosphere is disturbed by Charline Ouellet's exploration of Manhattan's skyscrapers, projecting a dystopian future of New York in 2050: a gated community accommodating the 1% super-rich of the world following increasing unaffordability and an ensuing housing crisis.

In a different geographic context, Xiang Ren's contribution revisits concinnitas through the Chinese philosophical concept of 'harmony between the Heaven and Human.' Illustrated by the project for the *Yuanlin Zhang Gallery*, an expansion of the Source Museum in China, the reuse of existing parts of a building from the traditional 'Hui prefecture' in the contemporary addition posits notions of temporality and materiality as central to a specifically Chinese alternative notion of concinnitas. Juxtaposition is also used as method in Behrang Fakharian's photographs, which flatten volumetric forms to contrast scale and proportion in the densely-built environments of Stockholm, Kuala Lumpur, Qazvin, and Bogota.

Temporality is central to Vasiliki Zochiou's analysis of the Kolumba Museum in Cologne, as it exposes palimpsests of the site's history in both the completed proposal of Peter Zumthor and in David Chipperfield's competition entry. Questioning the role of contemporary extensions in environments of cultural heritage and historical value, the essay unravels the different possibilities and interpretations that articulate the two proposals as they respond to the challenge of combining layers of history and a contemporary brief. Constructing a virtual technological palimpsest of sorts, Matthew Turner's 'Fictional Glitch' is a deconstruction of Edwin Lutyens' Castle Drogo, drawn from five Instagram images and disembodied parts of the building, and reassembled as virtual frames.

Shifting from reality to perception, and from the physical object to its representation, Daisy Ames, through the superimposition of three artworks by Mary Corse, Rachel Whiteread, and Tauba Auerbach produces drawings that play with light, altering the viewer's experience of the pieces. Deconstructivism reaches its apex in Neil Spiller's drawings of the Surrealist City, in which complex clusters of architectural elements and contemporary cityscapes combine in a cacophonous construction of virtual and actual geographies that follow no rules, dogmas, or doctrines. While these papers and projects propose to deconstruct and reconstruct a unity of elements through a harmonious articulation of parts, Cameron McEwan translates three projects by Aldo Rossi into a series of montages to purposefully disarticulate, cut apart, and separate their parts and forms, illustrating visually Rossi's theory on the analogous city.

Finally, the issue's epilogue by Mario Carpo, invited to contribute on the pertinence of Renaissance humanism, architecture, and rhetoric today, proposes making 'architecture easy for everyone'. It reconsiders Serlio's revolutionary stance towards a pedagogical structure firmly established in Ciceronian Latin, and his aims towards an architectural language—a system of standards and methods—that despite its monotony and banality would be legible to the 'mediocre' architect. This ideological and social project, moving away from elitist trajectories of inequality, bias, and discrimination, underlines concinnitas' urgency in our contemporary society: the search for a harmony of diverse positions coming together in a consensual whole.

Note

¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans by Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 1988), p. 3