

Lecture 6: Image-Making Technologies, Architecture, and Identical Replication.

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Review:

We have learned from previous lectures that Leon Battista Alberti was on a quest for objectivity in the reproduction of artifacts. Alberti developed a series of improbable technologies to compensate for the unreliable way in which images were reproduced and distributed during the 15th century in Italy. We have also learned that printed images, the technology which would eventually resolve this problem, was available at the time when Alberti wrote his famous text. However, the idea that printed images could be applied towards serious tasks had not yet been accepted.

A society's failure to fully accept a technology at the time of its invention has been dubbed "postponed invention" by the anthropologist Andre Leroi-Gourhan. Gourhan wrote that significant change often doesn't come about as the result of technology until that technology has been widely accepted by a wider cultural environment. This lecture addresses the impact of technologies for image reproduction, first printing and later photography, on architectural imitation in the West.

In 1537, Sebastiano Serlio produced the first widely distributed architectural treatise since the mass adoption of book printing. Unlike Alberti's book of one hundred year earlier, Serlio's included drawings. Serlio's images were drawn to scale and could have been precise enough to construct a building from. However, all of his drawings contain some perspectagle distortion. This suggests that images were not considered an objective means of communication. They were assumed to have a point of view and subjectivity. In addition, each image in Serlio's book is supplemented by a redundant textual description which includes dimensions. In Serlio's book, the ability to accurately produce and distribute architectural drawings preceded a trust in the communicative power of drawing.

In 1609, the Franciscan Friar, Bernardino Amico Da Gallipoli, conducted an extensive survey of monuments in the Holy Land using orthographic drawings (plan, section, elevation). However, buildings were rarely if ever imitated in their entirety until the 19th century. Architecture was often imitated at the scale of building components. It was not unusual for column capitols, column bases, and cornices from different historical examples to be combined in one new building. Sometimes, these parts were physically plundered from older buildings. In 1762, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, two Englishmen, published the first book ever with accurate drawings of the antiques of Athens, Greece. James Stuart was later credited with building replicas of Athenian antiques in the gardens all over England. However, Stuart's replicas were not exact either. They were creative variations of examples included in his survey.

Following the invention of photography, ideas about architectural imitation changed drastically. In the 19th century the visual environment was vastly influenced by ubiquitous mechanically reproduced images, either derived from handmade sketched or, more often, from photographic, ID EST machine-made, snapshots. Although architects were not yet explicitly using photography as a tool for design, this atmosphere helped

compose the setting for a debate over the significance of replication in art. In 1832, Quatremere de Quincy wrote De L'imitation or On Imitation on the problems of exact replication. He was among many who became nostalgic for the creative imitation of previous eras.

Photographs heralded the transference of the physical environment. Replicas of buildings followed this change. In 1858 the bishop of Montreal had the idea to build a replica of St. Peter's Basilica (for reasons that might have had to do with the weakening of Papal power in Rome and a widespread search for potential new homes). The bishop sent a team to take accurate measurements of St. Peter's in order to reconstruct the building. Although a replica had never been attempted before, a complete survey of St. Peter's had already been conducted and published (in 1620 and 1684). The surveying team from Montreal must have been aware of the earlier survey although it is unclear whether or not they used it. Regardless, the architects who reconstructed St. Peter's in Montreal did not use photography but they may have been influenced by the idea, inherent to photography, of automated, identical reproducibility.

There were many other examples of architectural imitation in the 19th century. By this time, the transplanted image of another city had been made publicly palatable by photography. In the 1840's, the city of Munich built an exact copy of a Florentine building, The Loggia Dei Lanzi, next to the Palazzo Vecchio. At the end of the 19th century, Nashville Tennessee built two temporary structures to resemble the Parthenon and the Pyramids for the world's fair. The original replicas had been made as temporary structures out of timber and plaster. They were subsequently removed but then rebuilt in the 1930s out of reinforced concrete.