

## Anarchic Thinking

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We're here today to tour the treasury of the thinking of Marco Frascari, who has, for the past thirty years or more, tried to set architecture education on a path of imaginative self-sufficiency. His ideas have always been difficult for others to grasp, but in the turn to digital representation they have increasingly been drowned out, and the metaphor that comes to mind is of the cities on sea-coasts that are threatened by the melting of the ice-caps.

*We live in times where it is easier to imagine the catastrophic end of all life on earth than it is to get out of our consumption economies of enjoyment.* Enjoyment in Late Capitalism is distinguished by its quality as a surplus, as something that by definition can never be satisfied. By converting enjoyment, which is really a disease, into a surplus/command, we normalize anxiety. By renaming culture as nature, we should at least be allowed to study it in terms of ecology, and to protect the endangered species of the mind, one of which is Marco's idea of the slow food of the imagination, which must be cultivated and is not the product of the accumulation of facts or the pretended mastery of digital representation, is ever more important.

I bring up the issue of enjoyment because it was Giambattista Vico, the 18c. Neapolitan philosopher of culture, who was the first to realize its implications and to understand that it was an all-consuming logic. Vico called this the age of human thought, in contrast to the magical thought of human origins and the heroic thought of traveling heroes. Lacan put this in terms of the "discourse of the university," and in any university you can see it in action, precisely because universities count themselves as exceptions to the world of private capital, as models of participatory democracy. But, they have no formal studies of travel, no departments of Odysseus.

What I want to say about enjoyment specifically relates to Marco, who could hardly be said to be against enjoyment in the normal sense of the word; but in the specific sense it is not "enjoyment" *per se* but the ideological employment of enjoyment that is at issue. Marco made clear in his book on the slow cooking of architectural thought, that fast food is our ideological situation. In fast food, we can see that although enjoyment is placed in a superior position, it is out of reach. It is always defined in terms of a surplus. We cannot get all we want, but the paradox is that if could it, this kind of enjoyment would kill us. Marco's point is that slow food for the mind or body involves a move from the public domain of enigmatic commands to enjoy to a private domain, where "slow" involves "being out of synch." Slow food is a set of practices that combine time and space into a logic of delay and reflection. Enjoyment, which is commanded from the outside, can be exchanged for pleasure, which comes from individual, private means. Marco's method is durable and it may be the only thing to save us.

The techniques Marco has advocated have been around for a long time. They were described in part by Góngora and Gracián, two Mannerist critics from Spain who perfected the logic of the conceit. Vico described it in one of his short works, *The Study Methods of Our Times*. I claim that Lacan re-discovered these secrets in the 1940s and they launched his career. ] The mirror stage is not just an idea about child development, it is a diagram of this method of thinking by halves.

What's the Phenomenology connection? We must allow that many things are called

Phenomenology; it is not a coherent school of thought. It has come to mean anything deployed to deal with the anxiety created by the broad applications of Positivism and instrumental science. I for one am not happy with this negative definition. But, the question of anxiety in itself is key.

In my dissertation on Vico, I attacked attempts to create an objective core for subjectivity. Such efforts were, without exception, imposed for ideological reasons. I played out the idea of a Vichian phenomenology, which was nothing less than a comprehensive theory of the imagination, replacing the idea of a core with the idea of an initiating transfer. James Joyce had recognized Vico's discovery, and built it into *Finnegans Wake*, Lacan had independently discovered the core, and played it out over three separate investigations, built around the imaginary, the symbolic (language), and the Real of trauma.

At every critical point over the past 20 years, architecture theory has attempted to re-establish the objective core in some new way: a "new normal" so to speak. Even those who have the most to lose by doing this have taken the lead.

The antidote seems to be a "no method method." Its most official name is "*ars topica*," the art of topics. The practitioners you know about best, possibly, are the OULIPO writers, such as Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, and Raymond Queneau, whose sources and neighbors included Raymond Roussel, Vladimir Nabokov, and, earlier, Poe, Giulio Camillo, and even Plato.

Those who have discovered "no method" have been ruthlessly methodological. Where the poet Robert Frost said that free verse was like playing tennis without a net, Perec (and the others of his kind) are like playing tennis with nets all over the place. Calvino's books are constructed to precise formulas, just as Roussel's idea of the "*procédé*" involved strict abstract premises. Dante, it turns out, was thoroughly mathematical. But, like Dante, these masters spiritualized structure, they didn't structure spirituality. The key has seemed to lie in the term *askesis*, withdrawal. This is withdrawal from an objective core that takes place in actual human history and experience as well as by the methods used by those interested in these experiences. The negative logic of contraction and retreat looks like defeat by those who go in the opposite direction, so it's hard to have good conversations with those who don't appreciate the full complexities of *askesis*, but for those who do, there are no limits. Architecture is involved directly; theory does not just add captions. The theorist and the work of art or architecture operate using the same rule-book, so to speak, but the rule-book is required to have missing pages, which are permanently missing, not just temporarily lost.

Because of the *askesis* theme, I've recently applied the literary theorist Harold Bloom's system of revisionary ratios to formalize the process of *askesis*. As with the OULIPO groups, imposing impossible restrictions on work, even theory work, yields immediate results.

In yet another attempt to give the secret away, I've would borrow a term from logic, "reversed predication," and used a calculus from the forgotten theoretician George Spencer-Brown. There are depths in the ideas of *askesis* and *dæmon* that should allow for an expansion of Lacan's idea of discourse to cover architecture's most sensitive subject, the exceptions to function (the *utilitas/firmitas* relationship) that cannot be captioned but only experienced directly.