

Alberti's Missing Appendix

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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. This then is the architect.

Leon Alberti Batista, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*.

Leon Battista Alberti wrote ten books and five appendices.¹ Four of the appendices have been lost including the text entitled 'The Service that the Architect provides'. This paper will look at residual evidence in Alberti's Books that gives form to the work or the service of an architect of his period (1404-1472).² It will then examine the everyday work of an architect of this time (i.e. the author), briefly examining projects that represent the polarities of a 'practice' that sits outside mainstream architecture. Whilst Alberti is understood as one of architecture's founding fathers, he was also atypical of his own time. Alberti's passion and skill challenged and supported the development of 'Architecture' and for that reason, though he may belong to an alternative value system to that of the author, he is in some ways a mentor. It is hoped that by reflecting on 'Alberti and me'³ the mainstream can be reviewed, and a process initiated that leads to the reconstruction of Alberti's Appendix for this time and place.

¹ The appendices were 'small books' covering 'The Ship, Economics, Arithmetic and Geometry, and The Service That the Architect Provides.' According to the notes of Rykwert et al, 'the last four of these have been lost'. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor, 4th ed., (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), p. 367.

² Alberti's birth/ death dates.

³ The author's relationship to Alberti is not one of scholarship but rather through the device of an 'imaginary' friend. This 'working' relationship began in 1991 with a project called 'Alberti's Room', reflecting on the connection between the domestic room and the city.

In the Days of Alberti

Despite the loss of the vital appendix, Alberti provides in his prologue and throughout the ten books, a relatively full description of the skills and territories of an architect. The frequently referenced quote in the paper's abstract: 'Him I consider the architect, [...]', comes from the opening paragraphs of Alberti's prologue. Taken in isolation it sounds somewhat pompous but it is language of its time and the reference to the 'movement of weights' within the quote, alerts today's readers to the difference in Alberti's cultural context. Despite that, Alberti's description of the tasks of an architect, as providing a welcoming hearth and environments that succour the body physically and the soul spiritually, are familiar to us. However Alberti's architect is also involved in 'cutting through the rock', 'tunnelling through mountains or filling in valleys', 'restraining the waters of the sea and lakes', 'draining marshes', 'building of ships', and 'dredging the mouths of rivers' etc. Alberti rhetorically asks whether 'the architect has not only met the temporary needs of man, but also opened up new gateways to all the provinces of the world?' He also draws attention to the significance of the architect during times of war, saying that by using 'the power of invention', architects are instrumental in attacking cities and defending them from siege. That,

the skills and ability of the architect have been responsible for more victories than have been the command and insight of any general. [...] And what is more important, the architect achieves his victory with but a handful of men and without loss of life.⁴

⁴ Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 4. Is this the first evidence of a sustainable agenda in Architecture?

⁵ Cf. Rykwert, Leach and Tavernor's glossary in their translation of Alberti, *On the Art of Building* for interesting discussion of definition of 'lineaments', p. 422-423.

Clearly, architects of the time were involved in diverse activities at strategic levels, but when wars are over and infrastructure is in place, it is time to focus on the building of buildings; and for the rest of his ten books that is what Alberti does. He covers all that we in our time would expect of someone writing about architecture—design (lineaments),⁵ materials/construction, building types, ornament (expression), and restoration. These are themes and issues that can be mapped against contemporary practice, but looked at in detail, he writes of knowledge and practice that lies entirely outside our experience, for example:

Position your dovecot near water; make it conspicuous and moderately high so that the pigeons, weary from flying and from performing their winged gymnastics and their clapping, will gladly glide in to land with outstretched wings [...]. If, under the entrance, you bury the head of a wolf, sprinkled with cumin seed, inside a jar that is cracked so that the smell can escape, it will attract several pigeons away from their previous homes; and if you cover the ground with clay and repeatedly soak it in human urine, it will further increase their number.⁶

⁶ Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 143-144.

It is a quirky and rather beautiful passage, and whilst Alberti's concern for pigeons (and rabbits, horses, cattle etc.) is unfamiliar to us today, we might frame this within our own cultural understanding as a demonstration that architecture is determined by the needs of the user.

Whilst architecture seems to have been a wider discipline in Alberti's time and many aspects of its knowledge base are unrecognisable to us today, it is still involved in strategic decision-making and the 'power of invention'. Perhaps, with Alberti in mind, we can look more critically at the needs of our time—where we are today in the profession—whether the contexts we sit within (time and place) require us to broaden our focus to encapsulate territories beyond, around, before and after the built-thing? And whether our skills also need to alter to map against that expanded and shifting horizon.

By looking at a 'practice' that sits on the periphery of contemporary mainstream architecture, perhaps we can review the mainstream and initiate a process that leads to the reconstruction of Alberti's Appendix.

In my Days

I am a female, mid-career, academic/architect. Being not so well off, educated at a regional school of architecture and 'unconnected', meant that 'putting up buildings' was as close as I was likely to get to 'designing architecture'. However, despite not being in the inner circle of the profession, I have always felt that I, and others like me, have something to say about the profession. Architectural education offered and continues to offer a site for alternative dialogues and space to nurture other forms of practice. Over time I have gradually divested myself of the insecurities associated with not building buildings, and paradoxically, as I move away from the central practice of architecture, my actions become increasingly architectural. However, I remain a registered architect and actively support the professional bodies, contributing locally to mainstream built environment discussions, but my practice is definitely different.

Aside from what I am, the issue of where I am (Belfast, Northern Ireland) is significant to the nature of my practice. This is not London, and although it may, like many regional centres aspire to be 'London-like', realistically its history and resources impact severely on such aspirations. Being in Belfast throws up weighty questions about the nature of architectural practice and the role it can play in a period of 'conflict transformation'.⁷ Walking the arterial streets of Belfast is an acute test of the architect's optimism and creative vision. But the conditions and lessons learnt in such a critical context can, it is hoped, add to the debate in other sites of contestation that exist around the world: e.g. the nature of long-term relief following climatic disasters, the interfaces between

⁷ The language of 'peace and reconciliation' asserts that we are not post-conflict but rather in the process of transforming conflict.

indigenous and immigrant populations, ongoing issues of segregation/gentrification in inner cities, etc.

My practice, therefore, reflects the 'who' and the 'where', falling into three territories: material, strategic and academic. Whilst the territories themselves are relatively unconnected and the scale of the projects differs, the principles evolve from a central set of values around people and space to a wider concern about the interconnections between critical users,⁸ place, creativity and pedagogy. The following sections give an overview of these areas of practice, not as models of best or even better practice, but rather as a way to illustrate a 'type' of practice that sits outside the mainstream.

⁸ 'Critical Users' are those people most disadvantaged by the built environment either permanently or temporarily i.e. people with disabilities, single mothers, children, etc. They have 'critical' needs and offer us a means by which we can critique the built environment.

Material Practice

One such example of this area of practice is the project *Girli Concrete*,⁹ a research and development project that was formed around the desire of a textile designer/researcher and architect (author) to work together. Conceptually it sets the utopian challenge of bringing together hard and soft materials and the technologies of two diverse but traditional Northern Irish industries: construction and textiles. The textile designer, having spent most of her working life successfully designing textiles for the fashion industry, was keen to become involved in textiles and space. As an architect, I was interested in ideas of enhancing tactility in the built environment, partly in response to previous work on inclusive design/design for disability, but also as an echo of the many discussions around the sensation of architecture. An example of this being Peter Rice's reference to the need to '[...] make real the presence of the material in use in the building, so that people warm to them, want to touch them, feel a sense of the material itself and of the people who made and designed it.'¹⁰

⁹ For more information visit; <http://girliconcrete.blogspot.com>

¹⁰ Peter Rice, *An Engineer Imagines*, (London: Ellipsis, 1994), pp. 76-77.

Initially, we experimented with a range of materials but settled on using concrete and textile techniques to generate something that would be 'nice to touch'—with the intention of elevating the specification of the human interface to the same level as that of the technical requirements. Our vision became 'Mainstreaming Tactility in the Built Environment'. Although it is utopian and theoretically situated, it is neither an art nor an applied art project. It is also not a traditional product development, since it is neither driven by an identifiable market nor an existing problem. Engineers and scientists struggle with the practicalities of it, questioning why one would deliberately place soft, delicate substances into a harsh alkaline environment. But we have persisted, driven by a strong set of principles and a process of continual critique. In counterpoint to the academic environment that we are situated in, we seek out real-world deadlines with defined deliverables. So far, despite the hybrid nature that at times can draw out scepticism in the purists, we have been successful in attracting research funding, product development funding, press attention and now

commissions. The project faces technical challenges and opportunities but is on course to resolve and exploit these. We have come to understand that *Girli Concrete* is as much about creating a product as refining a process, and now recognise it as the pilot project in an ongoing, larger and systematic interaction between textiles and construction. Throughout the project we have worked hard to define the context: historically, theoretically and in terms of current markets—we do this as a way to clearly designate present and future territories, avoiding replication. We hope that the project's provocative titling, *Girli Concrete*, openly signals its unconventional, non-mainstream approach.



Fig. 1. *Girli Concrete*, 2008. Photo: Ruth Morrow.

Strategic Practice

This work grows out of collaborations with an artist collective and an inner city community, both based in Belfast.

PS² is a small artist collective, with studio space in the centre of Belfast. They have a 'project space' on the ground floor of the building, known locally as 'the wee space with the big windows'. I co-curate with Peter Mutschler those projects that focus on urban creativity and social interaction by artists, multidisciplinary groups and theorists. We aim to open the traditional categories and expand the work to external locations. Whilst PS² still values 'internal discourse', we think that some of the work deserves larger audiences and that people outside the traditional art-audience deserve more and better art. We place art before diverse street audiences, initiating a process of active re-appropriation of public space through creative, non-commercial means. It is a model that exists in many other places but we are not driven to be new, just appropriate and active in our own neighbourhood. However because it is located work it does in the end appear to be 'new'.

¹¹ Bryan Bell (ed.), *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), p. 264.

¹² J. Schneider and I. Susser (eds.), *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalised World*, (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 16.

I also work with an inner city community, Donegall Pass. It is a loyalist protestant enclave in Belfast with a mix of low rise residential and business uses (notably Asian restaurants and supermarkets) isolated by road and rail routes. Like other segregated areas, it has maintained a strong sense of community. In the past, it was 'the other community' that acted as the threat, but increasingly the challenge to community coherence is from private investment and the privatisation and commercialisation of space;¹¹ this is particularly true of those inner city working class communities where land is at a premium. The city fathers have little means to restrain development, which although confident of healthy financial returns shows little regard for the existing built fabric nor indeed the societal structures of Northern Ireland. As Schneider and Susser observe of the regeneration of 'wounded cities' around the globe, '[...] reclamation processes can themselves have destructive spin-offs. The communities must in the end become informed and active in order to face these challenges',¹² and it's against this backdrop that I am involved with the Donegall Pass community.

The relationship to Donegall Pass and its Community Forum developed out of the project SPACE SHUTTLE (co-curated with PS²). SPACE SHUTTLE, a scale replica of 'Project Space', was used as a mobile workstation for urban space exploration. It had six missions, and was 'manned' by artists and multidisciplinary groups, who worked for the duration of one to two weeks, in the local environment. Mission 1: the Pass Odyssey, landed on Donegall Pass in August 2006. It was an all-female crew called 'call-centre collective', made up of a group of fellow practitioners/researchers (interactive media, fine art, textile and product design) and myself. Over the course of eight days we ran a range of events (see Fig. 2) that had developed out of six months of talking to community members, producing an 'Index of Ideas' and editing it to suit their and our interests. The events were successful to different degrees, but the long term effect was and still is that the community came to know us as individuals who had energy, could deliver creative actions, source funding, publicise work on national and international networks *and* were approachable.

As a consequence, I was invited to contribute to the formation of the Donegall Pass Community Development Company (non-profit-making) and now act as a Board member. The company has started a process of developing projects that bring together social, economic and physical regeneration. It looks to existing models that release the equity from land that is 'occupied', rather than necessarily 'owned' by communities, with an aim to revitalise the community in a shared future, resisting where possible the effects of gentrification. It will be a long journey but so far there have been some initial 'wins'. In addition, and perhaps more interestingly, some women of the Pass went on to run further pamper events in the vein of the Shiny, Sparkly Sunday Afternoon, out of which developed the first women's group that Donegall Pass has seen in many years.

The Big Whinge Box	An elaborate contraption to collect your environmental concerns and pass them on to local representatives and concerned bodies.
A Doorbell For The Pass	Design a doorbell ring to capture the sounds of the Pass.
Arch Future	Workshop to design a contemporary version of the Donegall Pass Orange Arch.
Passbroadcast	Come and broadcast to the Pass. Visits to BBC and local radio stations.
Model Pass	Workshop to explore ideas for Posnett Street Site. Architects and landscape architects on hand to help out.
Audio Tour	We'll be collecting audio memories related to the Pass—Come in and listen or contribute your own memories.
Shiny, Sparkly Sunday Afternoon	An afternoon of luxury for the women of the Pass, perhaps a manicure, a head massage or a pedicure. Come and indulge yourself in the SPACE SHUTTLE.
Space Walk	Children's workshop—making space suits for life as an urbanaut. Director of Armagh Planetarium will help us to survive the dangers of space. Star in a moonwalk video.
Big Projection Night	We are collecting images of life in the Pass, both past and present; of your special occasions (weddings, birthdays etc.) and daily life. Together with the historic images that have been on show this week in the Shuttle (from Ulster Museum) we will show all during the open-air Big Projection Night on the last night of the Mission.

Fig. 2. Pass Odyssey Events.

Academic Practice

I am interested in scholarship as a means to an end. As part of that I understand pedagogy as the application of knowledge, gained through scholarship, in the construction of skills and understanding. Therefore, within the territory of academia, pedagogy is for me a form of creative practice. I am particularly interested in the pedagogy of creativity itself, being as one might expect, a core element of architectural education. The means by which we give *expression to creativity* is well rehearsed and apparent, but the processes by which we *develop and nurture creativity* going on to *build sustained and sustainable creativity* are less clear. We can read about how others do 'it' and we can talk about developing 'it' in the design studio, through continuous dialogue and critique with those who either claim to do it/have once done it or know someone who

did/does do it ... , but this is vague So my academic practice has been driven by the question: 'How well do we teach/learn creativity in schools of architecture?' and thus has become focused on the pedagogy of creativity.

In terms of pedagogy, I am drawn to inclusive, transformative pedagogies. So whilst I accept that hierarchies exist in learning environments—sometimes by necessity—my aim is to firstly expose, and then where possible, swap around those hierarchies. Judith Sachs in *The Activist Teaching Profession* writes of the power of the teacher who becomes a learner and shows the need for teachers to be seen 'to practice the value of learning'¹³ and the strength in opening up and becoming 'publicly vulnerable and accessible'.¹⁴ These are, in my view, essential tactics if one is to include and motivate more people for longer in the often 'uncomfortable' process of learning.

¹³ Judyth Sachs, *The Activist Teaching Profession*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

In terms of creativity, I also recognise this as a process that at different times is both open and closed. When designing with others, it is about knowing the moment at which the process has to be extrovert or introvert. In an attempt to teach creativity, I try to understand the negative and the positive impacts of 'real-life' issues on creativity and I am interested thus, in the set of skills one has to develop to sustain creativity in the toughest of environments.¹⁵ As part of this work, Mission 1 of SPACE SHUTTLE was analysed not as a participative model, but as a 'street-level pedagogy of creativity'. It was concluded that whilst the content of the curriculum and the extent of the classroom could be clearly defined, the struggle lay in forming the 'class' and in negotiating who were the teachers and/or learners and when. This work is further developed in an ongoing research project called Creative Transformations that captures best practice models of community-based creative projects (ranging across two and three dimensional, spatial and environmental projects). These case studies are chosen on the basis that they demonstrate high levels of creativity and show evidence of personal and/or community transformation. They are analysed for those conditions that are conducive or obstructive to sustainable practice.

¹⁵ Cf. R. Morrow, J. Torrington and R. Parnell, 'Reality Versus Creativity', *Transactions: Online Journal of Centre for Education in the Built Environment*, 1(2)(2004).

Practicing in a Northern Irish context makes it apparent that creativity, like reading, writing and arithmetic, is a basic block of individual life and a vital keystone in a civilised society. Long-term conflict profoundly affects creativity. It impinges on people's **Confidence**, takes away their **Voice**, and dulls their **Vision**—the key ingredients for a creative approach. When a society is under threat, the act of looking 'beyond' becomes an act of escape rather than of learning and reinvestment. During periods of threat or violence, creativity is often released in less visible and more transient forms of self-expression, e.g. writing, poetry etc. Creativity relies on challenging the existing and on the fundamental belief in the right to self-expression, yet conflict creates polarised societies where conservative actions and anonymity become ingrained tactics of survival. Whilst

Northern Ireland is currently in a process of conflict transformation, many of these characteristics still exist. In terms of architecture and urban design projects, which are traditionally viewed as a long term investment for future generations, environments of quality become almost unattainable in a context of latent destruction, where each generation is focused on its own survival. In this environment, teaching and practicing sustained creativity is a challenge, but a profoundly necessary action. Through the Creative Transformations Project, an alternative definition of 'creativity' arose: *a process that recognises and accepts challenges, with a confidence borne out of skills, knowledge and reflection, resulting in a transformative outcome.*

Reconstructing Alberti's Appendix

We now need to scrutinise the issues that arise as a result of such 'peripheral practice'. In doing so, we may begin to see where mainstream architecture could adjust in scope and depth, and in the end begin a process of reconstructing an Alberti's Appendix for our time/place. When thinking of a professional service or action, we typically break it down into the component parts of 'who it's for', 'what it is' and 'how it is carried out'. When we look at 'peripheral practice', it gives us some indication where we might be heading.

Who Might it be For?

If we reformulate the assertive title of Alberti's missing appendix, 'The Service That the Architect Provides', into a question: 'Who do we serve and what services do we offer?', it starts to reflect the concerns of some contemporary practitioners. Bryan Bell in his book, *Good Deeds, Good Design*, generates his own question on this issue, 'how can architects increase the number of people that they serve?' and responds by citing examples of practice that engages with the 98% (of the general public) who typically have no access to architects.¹⁶

This isn't just a question of making architecture serve more people; it is also about fracturing architecture's reliance on 'good clients'. When Will Alsop says: 'As architects, we are only as good as our clients. If they do not want to explore and achieve something worthwhile, it is very difficult for us to persuade them otherwise.'¹⁷ It illustrates the 'high dependency' that architects have on the 'right kind of client'. This one-way relationship is fraught with difficulties, not least the loss of control over our professional relevance. But the architectural profession might also benefit by uncovering new territories for intellectual exploration, helping to sideline the profession's tendency to generate form through endless lists of architectural adjectives: curvier, shinier, fluffier, smoother, etc. Perhaps, as Frampton suggested in 1983, it really is time to look at the relationship between the architect and user, uncovering new working processes and new spatial programmes. Interestingly, Alberti's meticulous concern for

¹⁶ Bryan Bell (ed.), *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), p. 13.

¹⁷ From lecture given by Will Alsop to CABE, 2001. See: *Architecture Link*, (2007), http://architecturelink.gemini.titaninternet.co.uk/NOF/bldgfs.asp?unique=1191529592405&nof_id=12, [accessed 3rd Oct 2007].

the welfare of pigeons, impacts on his knowledge of spatial practice and programming (i.e. location and urination!). This resonates to some extent with the profession's need to connect not only to those who pay the fees, but also to those who live with the consequences.

What Might it be? (It's not that it's not about building)

In non-mainstream practice, buildings are understood as only one point on the horizon of architecture. It may be a significant and highly visible point, but not always one that can be achieved within time or resources, nor indeed one that is necessary. It involves bringing people to the point where they understand that 'owning' or better utilising their space, whether through permanent or temporary intervention, is empowering and fundamental to improving on life's chances. Bringing them to the point where they also know when not to build, creating a void for future moments or transient activities, acknowledging that this is equally crucial to their health, welfare and development. It is pertinent to ask what other professional, other than the architect, could support this type of activity? In this way of thinking, architecture exists in the territory before, around and after the built thing, and architectural processes can lead as much to an empty space as to a built one.

How it Might be Carried Out? (Collaborations and Pedagogy)

Practice on the margins is dependent on odd conjunctions, it forms pragmatic alliances as a way to consolidate and support activity. In so doing, it realises the enormity of the unheard voice in architecture, i.e. the voice that belongs to everyone *but* the profession. 'Peripheral practice' relies on what Park Fiction calls: 'Tools, attitudes, courage, practices, programs, that make unlikely encounters, meetings and connections more likely, search for them, jump over cultural or class barriers, go where no one goes'.¹⁸ Such a process offers potential sites for 'rich' collaboration and through such strategies one learns to respect the work practices and cultures of others. In return, one is able to view the architecture profession from a fresh position, and rather than undermining professional allegiance, it seems to highlight and intensify the role and skills of the architect.

The creative practitioner working in relatively nascent or sensitive territories acts in ways similar to an inclusive pedagogue. In order to bring people along, engage and empower them through creative actions, one has to reveal hierarchies, understand their role and look for instances where they can be reversed. There are times when it is important to be the 'designer' and times where the role is of a 'teacher/facilitator/advocate/translator'. Knowing *when and how to be present* is critical. Occasionally there is a tendency to be overly sensitive, losing one's sense of professional direction. To this end, 'peripheral practice' should reveal the motivations behind the work/ and the presence of those involved; Define and hold Professional territories whilst remaining open and discursive (Clare Hackett, of Falls Community Council talks about this as establishing

¹⁸ Park Fiction, 'Project Unlikely Encounters' in AAA-PEPRAV (eds.), *Urban/ACT: A Handbook for Alternative Practice*, (Montrouge: Moutot Imprimeurs, 2007), p. 30.

¹⁹ Comment by Clare Hackett (Falls Community Council), 'Dúchas Oral History Archive' in, Morrow, Rohr and Mey, *Creative Transformations: Conversations on Determination, Risk, Failure and Unquantifiable Success*, (Ulster: University of Ulster, 2008).

permeable boundaries);¹⁹ and probably more crucially, choose the moment and build the bridges. It is not enough to have a good idea; it also has to be timely and relevant.

Interestingly, these are tactics that mirror inclusive pedagogies. At the heart of the most sustainable forms of creative practice is a pedagogical approach. Perhaps this is why we still read Alberti over 500 years later—because he too was a pedagogue. Even in a mundane passage (Fig. 3) about the construction of corners on stone buildings, Alberti utilises a full range of pedagogical skills; simplicity in the language, clarity in the argument, reasons for needing such knowledge, and analogies used to build relationships between abstract language and mental images. Alberti doesn't just want to tell us what he knows, he really wants us to understand and apply that knowledge. The architect as preacher-teacher has been dominant throughout architectural history, perhaps now architects can build on Alberti's natural instincts, expose (and value) their full complement of skills and place their practice within a pedagogical framework.

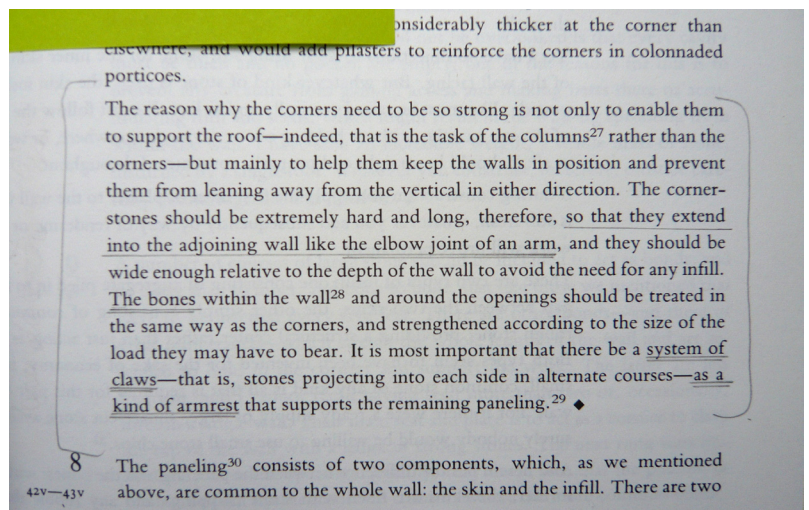


Fig. 3. Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 71. Photo: Ruth Morrow.

Finally: Just Practice

The loss of Alberti's Appendix may have been fortuitous. It leaves a void in which we can continue to examine and re-imagine our own individual practice and 'the services' we offer. Although perhaps it is advisable not to agonise too extensively about what defines architectural practice but rather to get on and do it. There are many urban practitioners, past and present, whose work has been hybrid and difficult to define. One contemporary organisation, Park Fiction says that such groups 'do not let their activities be reduced to symbolic action, mirroring, critique, negation, or analysis of their powerlessness, nor do they muddle along in their assigned corner.'¹⁹ Beyond refusing to 'muddle along in the assigned corner', creating a critical space to practice creatively and with spatial understanding will certainly result in architectural practice if not architecture.

¹⁹ Park Fiction, 'Project Unlikely Encounters', p. 30.

