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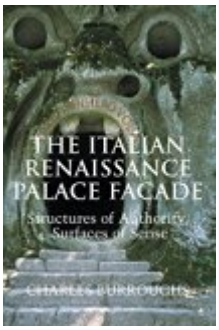
Charles Burroughs. *The Italian Renaissance Palace Facade: Structures of Authority, Surfaces of Sense.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xix + 289 pp. $70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-62438-1.



Reviewed by Michelle Duran-McLure

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In his most recent book, Charles Burroughs seeks to go beyond traditional explorations and analyses of Renaissance architecture that often focus on formal qualities and their relationship to antiquity by examining Italian palace facades of the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries from an approach that is based in large part on semiotic theory, an examination of contemporary architectural treatises and a "period-eye" approach. As such, Burroughs casts a more far-reaching net in terms of the numerous theoretical and cultural history references that form his base of analysis, references that are, in many respects, outside conventional architectural history. Burroughs chooses as his subject a fairly narrow selection of canonical works, for the most part located in the urban environments of either Florence or Rome, including the requisite Palazzo Medici and Palazzo Rucellai of Florence; the Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne, Palazzo della Cancelleria and of special importance to Burroughs, the Palazzo Caprini, all of Rome; and even a few selections from northern Italy such as the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino. Burroughs's choice of secular palace architecture has been determined, in part, by his desire to focus on those buildings that point to larger changes in the urban landscape. In addition, Burroughs devotes at least four chapters to examining the figures of Brunelleschi, Alberti and Bramante within a larger historical context that allows him to incorporate sources not usually seen in architectural histories. Although Burroughs admits his analyses are oftentimes deliberately superficial in their formal treatment of the subject(s), such an approach allows him to explore more fully the "dialogic and dynamic processes" that were at work in constructing meaning during the period in question (p. xvii).

Burroughs states that his objective is to facilitate a broader understanding "of the facade as cultural phenomenon" (p. 7). Burroughs lays out his methodology clearly and concisely in the introduction, and a major focus is exploring how the Renaissance palace facade created meaning for its patron, both on a personal level and as a reflection of a larger urban identity. As such, following the work of the early semiotician C. S. Peirce, Burroughs sees the facade as an active force, revealing (and regulating) identity through

its role as "symbol," in which meaning is created through the aesthetics of its appearance, and "index," in which the physical form of the facade itself reveals clues about the building's interior domestic function. In Burroughs's point of view the building is a body, with the facade functioning as a way to articulate the identity of that body through both symbol and index. The ability of the facade to create an identity for the (male) patron lies in the architect's use of certain signs, symbols and materials (or emulation of materials) that referenced an established visual code. During the Renaissance the use of classical forms was an essential part of the visual code because it visually linked patrons to an aesthetic that incorporated a variety of social and political ideologies, connecting the past to the present. In a period of political stability--or instability, as the case may be--these visual ideologies allowed the patrons to attach themselves to well-established social and political forces (think, in the larger sense, Greek democracy or the Pax Romana, or in terms of local Florentine politics the Golden Age of the Republic). Thus, the visual ideologies embodied in the facades played a significant part in the process of self-identity within the larger urban milieu. It is Burroughs's analysis of the process of self-creation and representation that is the most interesting aspect of his book, and the methodology he chooses to employ, focusing on a broad selection of theoretical and cultural history sources, distinguishes Burroughs's examination of Renaissance palace facades from the work of other scholars.

The first chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the remainder of the book and introduces many of the concepts that Burroughs calls upon later; its main purpose is to explore both the practical and theoretical concept of the facade by tracing the evolution of its function and usage. While essential in explaining Burroughs's methodology, the chapter could be a tedious read for those not familiar with semiotic theory and/or cultural histories. A brief examination of Boccaccian narrative reveals, in chapter two, what Burroughs sees as "language adequate to the architectural ... phenomenon of the Renaissance facade" (p. 43). For Burroughs, the ideological processes involved in the design of the facade helped it to function as both symbol and index; descriptions of this phenomenon are absent in contemporary texts about architecture, hence the reason for Boccaccio. Chapter 3 focuses on the development and evolution of the late-medieval facade and its contribution to secular Renaissance architecture.

The remaining chapters of the book focus on specific monuments, their broader cultural context and the processes involved in the creation of contemporary meaning, both particular to the building in question as well as to the larger urban (and to a certain extent rural) environment. In the chapters on Brunelleschi and Alberti, Burroughs examines the different approaches of these two masters in terms of both architectural theory and design, especially with regards to their differing concepts of the "building as body" metaphor. Brunelleschi was interested in the more universal concept of architecture as institution (here the Florentine Republic) while Alberti was more concerned with architecture as a means to create identity for the patron. The following chapter on the Palazzo Ducale at Urbino demonstrates the relationship between architecture and identity by examining the degree to which self-consciousness is revealed through the interplay between exterior and interior; here Burroughs demonstrates the strength of his argument, which carries through to the next chapter on Rome and Bramante. Burroughs defines reflexivity as the key feature of the Palazzo Caprini facade, because of the visual and cultural references to the language of classical architecture. This is, of course, what necessitates his methodology in going beyond formal analysis; only by incorporating larger cultural issues can the significance of the Palazzo Caprini be established. The binary facade, rusticated on the bottom but heavily classicizing on the top, functions as both symbol and index because its division symbolizes, displays and reinforces the hierarchy

of the social classes. This visual ideology not only refers to ideas about the contrast between ***civilitas/urbanitas*** and ***rusticitas***, but structurally also refers to earlier Roman buildings (***insulae***). Here, Burroughs argues for the privileging of the Palazzo Caprini because it best represents the moment in which nature and culture played equally important roles in the creation of an urban, elite Renaissance identity, which reinforces the major thesis regarding the role that the facade played in the creation of a visual language for the patron class. In the last two chapters of his book Burroughs examines the diffusion of the facade as sign and signifier in the environs of Rome and beyond.

Burroughs's book is extremely well organized, with clear chapter titles and headings that make it easy for readers to find the specific topics that concern them. Unfortunately, for those who are interested in a longer read, the headings become a major distraction that interrupt the flow of ideas Burroughs takes such care to present. In addition, the stated superficiality of the book often leaves one wanting much more observation and analysis than is given. For example, in the section on late-medieval Florence, Burroughs tempts the reader with a section on "The City as Symbol: The Florentine Oligarchy and the Sea of Stone," in which he brings up important concepts about the employment of visual codes as well as noting the use of the facade as a way to allude to and define contemporary ideas about public/private, masculine/feminine spaces. Burroughs does not take these ideas any further, though, in spite of the fact that to do so would certainly bolster his thesis. Another major drawback of the book is certainly the paucity of good quality illustrations; this book has neither the quality nor quantity that one would expect to accompany a book whose stated purpose is to promote a better understanding of the cultural significance of the Renaissance palace facade. The vast majority of the reproductions show blurred and faded palace facades, not the strong and forceful images that Burroughs describes in his text. The lack of detailed views further weakens Burroughs's analysis as the reader must either use personal recall or consult another pictorial source in order to fully appreciate the significance of the author's observations.

The strength of the book is undeniably Burroughs's methodology and sources outside the scope of traditional architectural studies, and to this end Burroughs accomplishes his goal of writing something that will bridge the gap between practical examinations of Renaissance architecture and theory. The reliance on and incorporation of the most recent theoretical systems of analysis distinguish this work from the work of other architectural historians, and drawbacks aside, ***The Italian Renaissance Palace Facade*** stands as a valuable contribution to cultural studies of the Renaissance.

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