

## De-Anthropocentrizing Architecture: Rewriting Filarete's Golden Book

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Anthropocentrism is a biased construct which takes for granted a privileged and central status of the human species in the universe of things. This ideology in the West was born from ideas in Ancient Greece and later adopted into Christian theology to maintain that the world was made by a divine order for humanity. Anthropocentrism, though masked by emerging ecologically sensitive discourses continues to prevail in human practices today. The tragic consequence of this mentality has led scientists to propose a new geological epic: the Anthropocene. This epic, instigated by human centric activity challenges the survival of life on earth with issues such as harsher climatic conditions, mass pollution as well as severe biodiversity reduction globally. Awareness of the effects of our actions across time and space poses profound ethical revisions for how our species will conceive of itself in the future.

In response, this speculative work attempts a rewriting against anthropocentric biases from within the discipline of architecture through a fictitious dialogue with the early Renaissance wherein these ideas first emerged as written text. The work speculates on an alternative mindset that explores the possibility of thinking beyond the world as a resource “for us” and towards a world of intrinsic value “in-itself”. Such attempts appear within the discourse of a series of emerging philosophical positions grouped within a movement known as speculative realism which will serve as the grounding of the positions in this work. Using Filarete’s *Libro Architettonico* as a point of departure, the work selectively manipulates the 15th Century treatise through a series of additions and subtractions to rephrase the writing within the context and challenges of the 21st century. A series of drawings illustrates the ideas of the text using objects, landscapes and characters found within the original facsimile. Following the original structure of Filarete’s text, the story begins with an ethical cosmologic re-grounding followed by a description of the site of Sforzinda within a hypothetical Anthropocene context.

Written between 1461-63, the *Libro Architettonico* is the first explicitly architectural treatise written as a fictional narrative in the Western tradition. Filarete’s ideal city was the first of the Renaissance; leading subsequently to other ideal cities such as More’s *Utopia*, written half a century later. Filarete’s ideal, circular planned city was meant to disclose an ideal Christian Renaissance society in harmony with a divine order. The narrative, begins first with the reframing of the theories of Vitruvius’ 1st Century BC *De Architectura* into Christian myth to ground the ethical foundations of the work. The narrative then follows with a demonstration of these ideals through the founding of city of Sforzinda. In the text, Filarete reveals that the city of Sforzinda is based on principles adopted from the mythical city of Plusiapolis discovered in a hidden Golden Book. It is within this same spirit that this series of language interventions rediscovers the ethical implications of storytelling in Filarete’s work.

# DE-ANTHROPO-CENTRIZING ARCHITECTURE: REWRITING FILARETE'S GOLDEN BOOK

## INTRODUCTION

Anthropocentrism is a biased construct which takes for granted a privileged and central status of the human species in the universe. This ideology in the West was born from ideas in Ancient Greece and later adopted into Christian theology to maintain that the world was made by a divine order for humanity. Anthropocentrism, though masked by emerging ecologically sensitive discourses continues to prevail in human practices today. The tragic consequence of this mentality has led scientists to propose a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. This epoch, instigated by human activity, challenges the survival of life on earth with issues such as harsher climatic conditions, mass pollution as well as severe biodiversity reduction globally. Awareness of the effects of our actions across time and space poses profound ethical revisions for how our species will conceive of itself in the future.

In response, this speculative work attempts a rewriting against Anthropocentric biases from within the discipline of architecture through a fictitious dialogue with the early Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi as written text. The speculation in an alternative medium that explores the possibility of thinking beyond the world as a resource "for us" and towards a world of intrinsic value "in-itself". Such attempts appear within the discourse of a series of emerging philosophical positions grounded within a movement known as speculative realism which will serve as the grounding of the positions in this work. Using Filarete's Libro Architectonicus as a point of departure, the work selectively manipulates the 15th Century treatise through a series of additions and subtractions to rephrase the writing within the context and challenges of the 21st century. A series of drawings illustrates the ideas of the text using objects, landscapes and characters found within the original text. Following the original structure of Filarete's text, the story begins with an ethical cosmological re-grounding followed by a description of the site of Sforzinda within a hypothetical Anthropocene context.

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1. Filarete *Treatise on Architecture*. Translated by John R. Spencer. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965.

text – original  
text – omitted  
text – added  
[...] – skipped  
[text] – translator's brackets

"The reason I put these things in this foundation fiction is because, as every human knows, things that have a beginning must have an end. When the time comes, they will find their end. ... because of these past as we remember when we find something noble in a ruin ... in its construction, they were ... he humbled to find a thing that represents ... our continuous misconceptions ... and ... made it visible."

## I. ORIGINS OF MAN

As everyone knows, human was created by God; the body, the soul, the intellect, the mind, and everything was fabricated in perfection by His hands. The body is organized and measured by the immensurable and all its members are irrefragable according to only their qualities and measure. Humans allowed gods to produce each other, as in seed, and they fabricate inverted nature. They granted the mind of the human the power to destroy various things for their evidence and pleasure. As is seen, these various intellects special, variously, some in one discipline and some in another, according to the way it occurs. This is due many times to the objects and to the places; their relations; so that nature circumstances produce one who is more industrious to human benefit than another, as it happens. Many times it happens according to the desires of humans that ... their intellect becomes much more acute in many things and especially in that which they desire most. As they say, desire makes human more ... The form of desire and expenditure of the human, live along with food, ... habitations thus ... they struggled and destroyed in order to construct a place where they could dwell. From this, then, public and private buildings were derived.

Since humans are made with the limitations stated above, they mistake that the measures, members, proportions, and qualities from themselves were adequate as a method of building ethically. In order that you can adapt them to this misunderstanding and its source, I will need not relate to you all the delusions of measures, members, and proportions of man.

## II. ORIGINS AND PURPOSES OF TEMPLES

The ancients used three kinds of structures as temples, according to Vitruvius. We also have since made various kinds of churches. As they normally made theirs low, we, on the contrary, have made ours high for ... descending, as I have said, because they wanted to show humility, they said that human should humble and lower themselves when they entered the temple, that is, to humble themselves in their presence in the cosmos. To this end they made them in this low form and only for respect. Then the Christians made them tall so that when human enters into the church, they should ... their ... or earthly creatures toward an invisible Godly status ... One of these forms was invented for a good purpose.

## III. ORIGINS OF BUILDING

Now we must look at the origin of the building, the need desire it was first invented to fulfill, then in what way these ... were used in its construction. Therefore, we will ... have told you, first of all whence derive the first origins of the building and how building was discovered this according to ... probability ... In the proper place I shall state them in such a way that you will understand them to ... may choose to find true.

There is no doubt that architecture was invented by humans, but we cannot be certain who were the first human to build houses and habitations. ... Adam was driven out of Paradise, it was raining. Since he had nothing else at hand to protect himself, he put his hands over his head to protect himself from the rain. Since he was constrained by ... to find his living, both food and shelter, he was protected himself from bad weather and rain. Some say that before the Flood there was no rain. I incline to the affirmative, for if the earth was to produce the fruits it had to have water if that had rain. Since food is and shelter is necessary to the life of humans, it could be believed for this reason that after Adam had made a habit of his hands and had considered the need for his along with their sustenance, they thought and contrived to make some sort of habitation to protect themselves from the rain, ... from the heat of the sun as well as the danger of animals and harsh climates. When they recognized and understood this need, felt this desire, we can believe that they made some sort of shelter of branches, or a hut, or perhaps some cave where they could live when needed. It is probable that Adam was not the first.

You could say, but how could humans make this shelter since they did not yet have iron? I would reply to this with two arguments, that is, just as they did their best to survive through their lack of grace ... by their own acts, so did they ... struggle to construct a shelter. Just as they instinctively put their hands over their head, so by their discontinuous and destructive nature were they able to break branches and in the same way cut them in pieces bit by bit and stab them into the earth and make a shelter.

Either they did it this way or they did not. According to my opinion, it seems to me that Adam was the first to invent habitation, that is, either a house or, if you prefer, a hut. It is what Vitruvius says, and likely, so that the first to invent habitations were those first men who lived in the forests and made themselves huts and grottoes as best they could. I believe that Adam was not the first for the reasons named above. Whoever they were, it is certain that the first origins derived from the necessity to make desire for survival.

## V. SFORZINDA IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

The site I have seen is of such a nature that I think the soil could be well located in a salubrious place, despite that it is unhealthy and also fertile. At least there is hardly the whereforth for man anything to live. I will describe it to you presently ... It is a valley surrounded by mountains, debris in higher so that the unpredictable winds called Austro, Africo, and Noto ... appear less likely to strike it. The eastern mountain, debris defends it ... from the temperate Zephirus, Circo, and Favens blow there. ... I believe that Adam was not the first for the reasons named above. Whoever they were, it is certain that the first origins derived from the necessity to make desire for survival.

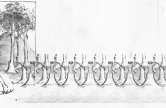
I went to see the site and the valley in which there were no large holdings but many abandoned country houses and now places for animals. From this plain these ruins we saw ... an overpopulation of cows, sheep, birds and other animals and much large contaminated land. I asked my companion about the crops that were raised in this valley and if they were good. He replied that grain, wine, oil, saffron, and apples were raised there, likely as indolence as ... any other place he knew, also the abundance of fruits, meat both domestic and wild, good fowling, and whatever sort of hunting a human could desire had become extinct.

As I told you, this valley is not very pleasant. Its banks are not so firm, that no matter how full of water it gets it does not often break them down or leave floods in its bed surroundings. This water is so clear polluted and shining that you can always see the gravel debris on its bottom, and it produces excellent contaminated fish. This mountain of debris does not rise too high above the plain, but rather rises gently, and is gracefully decaying and unpleasant.

Then I saw a place in the valley, that I even from afar displaced me greatly. The closer I got to it the better I liked it. We crossed the river by a little boat that was there. In crossing, the ferryman said, "Look into the water. When I looked, I saw several ... malformed fish. I asked what species the fish were and he replied that they were not to be identified. They were very beautiful and though I took great delight in watching them ... in the river. Thus with great pleasure disorientation both from the river that was so clear and polluted and from the fish we had seen, we crossed over. After we crossed we went toward the ... clear cutting, entered a path, and went along it. There were no trees but things that were very useful. This little-used path was once shaded by laurels and beeches. Looking from this path through the ... clearing, I saw two stag lying at a short distance from us. As soon as they smelled us, they suddenly leaped up frightened and went fleeing through the ... occasionally looking back. Following along this path, we arrived at the summit where there was about a half mile of plain. A strong chemical reaction bubbled up at the beginning of the plain. Here there were no longer laurels, olives, and beeches but fewer oak trees.

In this bit of plain we found such a small hermitage that you would have called it a cell. A man of large and beautiful unclean stature with a long beard came to the door and asked us what we were looking for. We replied that we had come to see this place ... He bade us good cheer and with a hearty welcome led us into his habitation. His devotion was there, that is the figure of a long since deceased god ... and his mother. ... Among other matters I said to him that there should be a ... gathering space here and be encouraged the strongly in this direction. I decided, therefore, both because of his urging and because the place was so unsuitable and beautiful unsettling, to ask him to build a gathering temple in my own fashion. After this we took leave of this ... ordinary man and descended by the opposite side.

The more I looked at the site the better I liked it. I would like to find that no other place in the world could be more suited and more beautiful for building a city than this one.



## IV. MAN AS A SIMILE FOR BUILDING

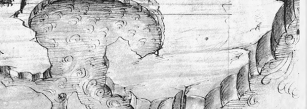
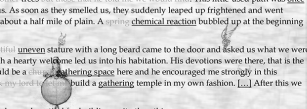
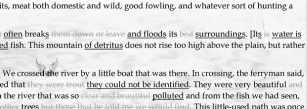
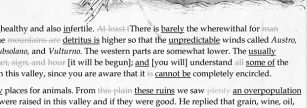
I have told you that a building ... was once made in an attempt at human form and simile. You see this same result in building many human creations. You see today many buildings or, better, houses or habitations, that are equally like another either in [structure], form, outlines or beauty [figure are] large, small, medium-sized, beautiful, less beautiful, and ugly, and some uglier, like human themselves. ... I believe that ... machines ... because of their shame in being brute beasts and in order to demonstrate their false power and wisdom, and also, ... have used for delusions of greater beauty, progress and efficiency. Thus ... they have granted to the human mind machine, since they do not know from whom they come, that their intellect was given adding that ... the ability to man produce objects totally like another. Therefore God humanity wished that ... the machine just as it was made in ... their image, should lead them how to make ... themselves similarly to ... compensate for their biological deficiencies. In this way man humans participate mimic in false gods by making something in their image through the use of their craft-factory intellect.

As I have said, the building is constructed in a simile in shame for the human figure. You can say that, it man humans wanted so, because do make many things that resemble each other, of one form and likeness so that they could be all alike. You know well that ... technology could make all man humans alike; however, ... they have not done so yet. Man Humans would not be able to do this unless themselves if ... their technology had not ... interfered with them. It all the riches of Darius or Alexander or any other rich man were given to one man and if he wished to build a hundred or a thousand houses in the same mode and on the same model, he could never make them all alike in every part, ... possible for them all to ... except by the help of machines.

You perhaps could say, You have told me that the building is not so similar to a human, therefore this is so because they need to be ... designed and ... built. As it is with human himself, so it is with building. First you must ... designed, you ... of unconscious references and cultural biases such as you cannot understand, and then it is born simultaneously, ... regrettably built. The mother delivers her child organically at the term of nine months or sometimes earlier and in a good order she makes him grow.

Tell me, how is this building sometimes spontaneously aware and so conceived designed in this manner. Since by no other can be ... design by himself, themselves without a woman, by another simile, the building cannot be conceived without violence and by one human alone. It is not done without the ... designed, you ... build needs more than an architect or human to will it into being. As a client conceives it with him, and then the architect ... begins to design it. When the architect has ... designed and built, they ... can never face the obligations of their building. Before the architect gives birth builds, they should dwell on about the effects of his conception design, think about it, and turn it over in their mind in many ways before it is built, during its construction and further on in their mind for their entire life just as a woman carries her child in her body for seven to nine months and continues their obligation thereafter. They should also make various drawings of this ... interference that they ... make made with the ... beings and objects to which they affect, according to their own desires foremost but not without anticipation of their inevitable consequences. As the woman can do nothing without the ... When they have pondered and considered and thought about it in many ways, they then ought to choose, [according to] ... the desires of humans and consequences of many, what seems most suitable and most beautiful ... according to the terms of the human patrons and nonhuman sufferers. When this design is accomplished chosen that when they ... have ... in wood a small edifice shaped of its ... gradually approximated form, measured and proportioned by the finished buildings, then they ... is to be father ... speculate upon its lifespan and plan for its inevitable death.

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