

Coluccio Salutati Essay

Robert Modafsky
Fall 2013

“The beauty of Florence cannot be appreciated unless seen from the inside...for behind the walls of buildings of Florence there are no fewer ornaments and no less magnificence than there is outside; nor is any street better decorated or more handsome than another, but every quarter shares in the beauty of the city.”
-Leonardo Bruni Panegyric to the City of Florence.

I believe that it is at this moment, when a person transitions from the streets to the interior of a building or monument, we become lost. Lost in the richness of Florence. When I walk into a building the rest of the city suddenly disappears, and my mind completely focuses on the present and how I locate myself within the space.

One of the first weeks here I visited Santo Spirito: a discrete church with no façade in a beautiful corner of the city across the Arno. I had carefully located myself within the city before walking in. I walk in the doors, and I am disoriented (or rather no longer concerned with orientation). I am lost in the beauty of the interior, surrounded in Corinthian columns, Brunelleschi's niches that surround the space, and the rays of light that highlight these details. I walk around the perimeter, taking in every step.

This eagerness to experience a building and take it all in can be attributed to my architecture education. We learn the importance of not only the experience, but what defines that experience. When we enter a space we sense a feeling and immediately ask ourselves, why? And then how? What is it about this structure that makes me feel ___. It is this level of comprehension that allows me to get lost in the interior of Florence, and the architecture of Italy. I want to clarify that I am not lost in the details, but rather in the composition. When we come across a new building in the city it has a sense of belonging from the exterior, even though sometimes the architect completely disregarded the urban grid, but there is a contextual identity there. When you walk in the interior is an object within itself, a spatial anomaly all its own, separate from the city.

Leonardo Bruni defined the streets of Florence as a façade to the true identity of the city that is not seen from the surface of a building but in the interior. This is when the building becomes an object all its own, hidden by the collective urban condition. These moments are completely unrelated to time and context, they simply exist and you are experiencing them. I am lost in the present. I approach the door through which I entered, and suddenly I am back in reality, no longer lost, but perhaps not necessarily found.