

Roger Williams University

DOCS@RWU

Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation
Faculty Publications

Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation

2012

Alberti and Ficino

John Shannon Hendrix

Roger Williams University, jhendrix@risd.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/saahp_fp



Part of the [Classics Commons](#), and the [Intellectual History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hendrix, J. S. (2012). Alberti and Ficino. Retrieved from https://docs.rwu.edu/saahp_fp/25

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

Alberti and Ficino

John Hendrix

Leon Battista Alberti and Marsilio Ficino, though separated by twenty-nine years in age, had a close relationship as mentor and pupil. Concepts which can be found in Alberti's *De pictura* in 1435 and *De re aedificatoria*, or *On the Art of Building*, in 1450, are infused in Ficino's *De amore*, or *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, in 1469. The concepts include Alberti's theories of *concinnitas*, *armonia*, *lineamenti*, beauty, proportion, light, and vision. In both Alberti and Ficino, harmonies shared by the body and music are manifestations of the harmonies of the soul. Beauty in body and matter is determined by beauty in mind or *mens*, that part of mind directed toward *intellectus divinus*, and beauty is made manifest in mind by the *lineamenti*, the lines in the mind which are distinguished from matter. Beauty is the internal perfection of the *intellectus divinus*, which is the Good, which is a perfect harmony called *concinnitas*. Ornament is not beauty, but rather a physical complement to beauty.

Ficino wrote that during his adolescence, he and the older Alberti became correspondents, as mentor and pupil. They became partners in a "ritual correspondence," and exchanged "noble wisdom and knowledge."¹ When Alberti returned to Florence from Rome in the 1460s, he stayed at Ficino's house in Figline Valdarno. By 1468 he was recorded by Cristoforo Landino in the *Disputations at Camaldoli* as being active in discussions at the Academy. Landino, a friend of Alberti's, described a meeting with him at the monastery at Camaldoli. Alberti arrived with Ficino, after he had stopped in Figline. Landino's collection of Latin elegies in his *Xandra* of 1443 to 1458 was dedicated to Alberti. Several writers have pointed to the parallels between the ideas expressed by Alberti and Ficino, for example Joan Gadol in *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance*, and George Hersey in

Pythagorean Palaces. Some writers have pointed to what they see as irreconcilable and “systematic differences”² between the aesthetics of the two thinkers, because of the “dominant idea of transcendence” in Ficino which is not in Alberti.

From Landino’s descriptions of conversations between Ficino and Alberti on the subject of Platonic philosophy, and Alberti’s many references to Plato and Socrates in his writings, it can be concluded that Alberti’s philosophical values were influenced by Plato. As Arnaldo Della Torre described in *Storia dell’Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, “thus Plato, who not only relates but explains and broadens Socratic doctrine, is always named with special reverence in the works of Alberti, and his theories are always quoted with deferential respect.”³ The dialogues of Plato most quoted by Alberti are the *Laws* and the *Republic*, which was the first well-circulated book of Plato in the Renaissance, translated by Manuel Chrysolaras before 1400. The only text of Plato translated into Latin prior to that, which was available in Italy in the Middle Ages, was the *Timaeus*. Claims by writers that Alberti had no interest in philosophy, let alone Platonic philosophy, must be discounted.⁴

I would like to suggest that Alberti knew the *Enneads* of Plotinus as well, perhaps as a result of a meeting with Georges Gemistos Plethon and Nicholas of Cusa at the Academy of Palestrina, and through the translation of the *Enneads* by Marius Victorinus, the fourth-century translation used by Augustine, now lost, or even the extracts of the *Enneads* in the *Theology of Aristotle*. Alberti designed a sarcophagus for Georges Gemistos Plethon at the Church of San Francesco in Rimini. Gemistos Plethon was the leading Platonic scholar of the Byzantine Empire, who came to Florence from Mistras in Greece to introduce Italians to Plato, and he founded the Platonic Academy in Florence on behalf of Cosimo de’ Medici. Ficino was familiar with a Byzantine manuscript of the *Enneads*, codex Laurentianus 87.3, as early as 1460, and had the entire Greek text transcribed, codex Parisius graecus 1816. He began his translation of the *Enneads* in 1484, the year that he wrote the *De amore*. He revised the translation and added commentaries by 1490, and it was published in 1492.

In *De re aedificatoria*, Alberti defined beauty as *concinnitas*, which is “a harmony of all the parts...fitted together with such proportion and connection that nothing could be added, diminished, or altered for the worse” (VI.2).⁵ In Book IV Alberti explained, “In this we should follow Socrates’ advice, that something that can only be altered for the worse can be held to be perfect” (IV.2). Alberti followed Vitruvius in his definition of *concinnitas*

or beauty in *De re aedificatoria*: “It is the task and aim of *concinnitas* to compose parts that are quite separate from each other by their nature, according to some precise rule, so that they correspond to one another in appearance” (VII.4). *Concinnitas* is the regulating law of nature as applied to the arts, as in *De re aedificatoria*, “Everything that nature produces is regulated by the law of *concinnitas*” (IX.5), and “Neither in the whole body nor in its parts does *concinnitas* flourish as much as it does in Nature herself.”

Alberti’s definition of *concinnitas* is similar to the invocation by Alberti’s acquaintance Nicolas of Cusa, in the papal curia in Rome, of the Platonic demiurge in *De docta ignorantia*, written about 1440. Cusa wrote, “In creating the world, God used arithmetic, geometry, music, and likewise astronomy. For through arithmetic God united things. Through geometry he shaped them. . . . Through music he proportioned things in such way that there is not more earth in earth than water in water, air in air, and fire in fire” (II.13);⁶ in other words, nothing can be added, diminished, or altered for the worse.

In Book IV of *De re aedificatoria*, Alberti explained, “When you make judgments on beauty, you do not follow mere fancy, but the workings of a reasoning faculty that is inborn in the mind. . . . For within the form and figure of a building there resides some natural excellence and perfection that excites the mind and is immediately recognized by it (IV.5).” Beauty depends on the archetypal Idea, as in the lineament, where proportions in matter correspond to mathematical and geometrical proportions in the mind, and beauty has the quality of *concinnitas*, that nothing can be altered for the worse.

In the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the Intellectual Principle, the divine intelligence, holds and encompasses everything in one nature, as in the absolute oneness of the divine archetype, or *concinnitas*; but within the unity, the several entities each have their own distinct existence (VI.6.7). Beauty itself is an embracing totality, forming a unity coextensive with everything, as the universe is a unity embracing all of the visible. Everything encompassed in the Intellectual Principle reproduces the Intellectual Principle in which it participates, as Plotinus said, “every particular thing is the image within matter of a Reason-Principle which itself images a pre-material Reason-Principle: thus every particular entity is linked to that Divine Being in whose likeness it is made, the divine principle which the soul contemplated and contained in the act of each creation” (IV.3.11).⁷ The universe is composed of particulars which correspond to each other in appearance, and are fitted together with proportion and connection, all of which are essential to the whole, as in Al-

berti's *concinnitas*, where all parts are related to the whole. As Plotinus explained in the *Enneads* (VI.7.2), "In our universe, a coherent total of multiplicity, the several items are linked each to the other..." In *Enneads* I.6.1, matter without the incorporeal qualities of lineament is the Absolute Ugly, outside of Reason and Idea, which is transformed by the intelligences, or Ideal Forms, into a harmonious coherence and unity of cooperation, as in Alberti's *concinnitas*.

Ficino's definition of beauty is similar to Alberti's definition in that beauty participates in the ordering of experience, as in *concinnitas*, and beauty is a universal, divine principle. For Ficino, "Beauty is a certain grace which most often originates above all in a harmony of several things" (I.4).⁸ According to Alberti, *concinnitas* seeks to "compose parts that are quite separate from each other by their nature, according to some precise rule, so that they correspond to one another in appearance," as in Ficino's harmony of several things. Grace arises from harmony in each of three types of beauty, depending on the quality of each in Ficino's *scala* or hierarchy. As he wrote, "For from the harmony of several virtues in soul there is a grace; from the harmony of several colors and lines in bodies a grace arises; likewise there is a very great grace in sounds from the harmony of several tones" (I.4).

While Alberti defined *concinnitas* as "a harmony of all the parts...fitted together with such proportion and connection that nothing could be added, diminished, or altered for the worse," so for Ficino in *De amore*, "the blessed is that which lacks nothing. And that is that which is perfect in every part" (V.1). Of the blessed there is an internal perfection which is goodness, the manifestation of the Good, and an external perfection, which is beauty. Physical beauty can lead knowledge to an intuition of the Good, as "those senses especially have to do with the beautiful which are the best avenues of knowledge, namely, sight and hearing, as ministering to reason." In matter, "a certain very temperate internal combination" produces an "external sparkle," as harmonious proportioning. The internal composition of the soul may "display a certain very virtuous beauty in words, gestures, and deeds." Thus beauty is a "certain blossom of goodness," as a plant grows from the light of the sun, the sun being the equivalent of the Good.

Plotinus, in the *Enneads*, equated Beauty with the Good, from which is derived the Intellectual Principle, or divine intelligence, which is "pre-eminently the manifestation of Beauty" (I.6.6). The Intellectual Principle shapes the beauty of things in the world of sense through the soul, which is a fragment of divine beauty. As for Ficino, every soul desires to ascend toward

the Good, beyond the world of sense and vision. Beauty for Plotinus also depends on a harmony of parts where no part can be altered for the worse, as in Alberti. As Plotinus said, “This then is Beauty primally: it is entire and omnipresent as an entirety; and therefore in none of its parts or members lacking in beauty...” (V.8.8).

Since beauty for Ficino can be found in the virtue of the soul, as well as in bodies and music, then it must be a quality which is beyond the corporeal or particular, and cannot be a quality of the visual or aural alone. As Plotinus described in the *Enneads*, “If material extension were in itself the ground of beauty, then the creating principle, being without extension, could not be beautiful...” (V.8.2). That which pleases the soul for Ficino must be an incorporeal beauty. Beauty does not necessarily depend on a composite arrangement, as it would appear in Alberti’s *concinnitas*, but simple things can be beautiful as well, including the soul. In *De amore*, “There are some who think that beauty consists in a certain arrangement of all the parts, or, to use their own terms, in symmetry and proportion, together with a certain agreeableness of colors” (V.3). Ficino does admit that “beauty of the body is nothing other than splendor itself in the ornament of colors and lines,” and following that, “beauty of the soul also is a splendor in the harmony of doctrine and customs” (II.9).

While beauty is manifest in the proportions of soul, body and music for Ficino in *De amore*, in the end there is one beauty, which is God, and the desire for God. As he wrote, “For it is the same God whose beauty all things desire, and in possessing whom all things rest. From there, therefore, our desire is kindled” (II.2). Desire in the soul and body is desire for the universal and archetypal beauty in God. Such desire causes all motion, and it is kindled by the beauty in God as a spark from a flame. Ficino defined three types of beauty in *De amore*. The three types of beauty according to Ficino are beauty of the soul, beauty of the body, and beauty of music, which are three manifestations of one principle, or *archê*, as the members of the Trinity are three manifestations of the divine. Of the three types of beauty, “That of souls is known through the intellect; that of bodies is perceived through the eyes; that of sounds is perceived only through the ears” (I.4). As with Alberti, the harmonies shared by the body and music are manifestations of the harmonies of the soul.

In the Music of the Spheres of Ficino, *musica humana*, inner, instrumental music, corresponds to *musica mundana*, cosmic, celestial music. The movement of the macrocosm and the planetary rhythms of *musica mundana*

are reflected in the soul in *musica humana*. Ficino explained in *De amore*, “Our soul was endowed from the beginning with the Reason of this music, for the celestial harmony is rightly called innate in anything whose origin is celestial, which it later imitates on various instruments and in songs. And this gift likewise was given us through the love of divine providence” (V.13). As explained by Plotinus in the *Enneads*, “...all music—since its thought is upon melody and rhythm—must be the earthly representation of the music there is in the rhythm of the Ideal Realm” (V.9.11). The visual arts must have been seen in the Renaissance as a talisman as well, an instrument to connect the harmony of the spheres with the harmony of the soul. In *De pictura*, Alberti wrote of painting that it “possesses a truly divine power” (II.25), and that “sculpture and painting originated together with religion” (II.27).⁹

Alberti, like Plotinus, saw physical beauty, in particular the proportions of the body, as communicating universal, archetypal beauty, in that “Beauty is a form of sympathy and consonance of the parts within a body, according to definite number, outline, and position, as dictated by *concinnitas*, the absolute and fundamental rule in Nature,” as he explained in *De re aedificatoria* (IX.5). “When working in three dimensions, we should combine the universal dimensions, as it were, of the body with numbers naturally harmonic in themselves, or ones selected from elsewhere by some sure and true method” (IX.6), according to Alberti.

According to Ficino in *De amore*, the beauty of the body depends on three things: “Arrangement, Proportion, and Aspect. Arrangement means the distances between the parts, Proportion means quantity, and Aspect means shape and color” (V.6). Vitruvius named arrangement or *dispositione* and proportion or *analogia* or *eurythmia*, as two of the six things of which architecture must consist, the others being order or *ordinatione*, symmetry, décor, and distribution, or *oeconomia*. Vitruvius defined Order as the arrangement of the proportion, which results in symmetry, which consists in dimension, the organization of modules or units of measurement. Arrangement is the assemblage of the modules to elegant effect, while proportion gives grace to a work in the arrangement of the modules in their context. Thus Ficino’s formula for the beauty of the body is a condensed version of that of Vitruvius. For Alberti in *De re aedificatoria*, beauty is “a form of sympathy and consonance of the parts within a body, according to definite number, outline, and position,” or “that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body,” and “It is the function and duty of lineaments, then, to prescribe an appropriate

place, exact numbers, a proper scale, and a graceful order for whole buildings” (I.1), the building being a form of a body.

Plotinus, in the *Enneads*, used similar terms in defining physical beauty. He said, “Almost everyone declares that the symmetry of the parts toward each other and towards a whole, with besides, a certain charm of colour, constitutes the beauty recognized by the eye, that in visible things, as indeed in all else, universally, the beautiful thing is essentially symmetrical, patterned” (I.6.1). Plotinus is more suggestive of Alberti’s definition of *concinnitas* than Ficino’s formula, when he expressed: “Only a compound can be beautiful, never anything devoid of parts; and only a whole; the several parts will have beauty, not in themselves, but only as working together to give a comely total. Yet beauty in an aggregate demands beauty in details...its law must run throughout.” Similarly, as Alberti wrote in *De re aedificatoria*, “It is the task and aim of *concinnitas* to compose parts that are quite separate from each other by their nature, according to some precise rule, so that they correspond to one another in appearance” (VII.4).

For Ficino in *De amore*, the qualities of Arrangement, Proportion and Aspect are not actually a part of the body, because they exist separately of an individual body, and thus belong to the lineament of the body, or the lines, in Alberti’s terms, rather than the matter. Ficino asked “But who would call lines (which lack breadth and depth, which are necessary to the body) bodies?” (V.6). Arrangement entails spaces between parts rather than the parts themselves, and proportions are boundaries of quantities, which are “surfaces and lines and points,” or points, lines, and planes, which Ficino defined as the qualities of essence, being, and virtue in the *Opera Omnia*. Thus, for Ficino in *De amore*, “From all these things it is clear that beauty is so alien to the mass of body that it never imparts itself to matter itself unless the matter has been prepared with the three incorporeal preparations which we have mentioned” (V.6), which exist only in the mind, as lineaments.

Through Arrangement, Proportion and Aspect, which are incorporeal qualities of the lineaments of matter or intelligences, which are copies of divine ideas and principles, “both the heavenly splendor will easily shine in a body which is like heaven, and that perfect Form of Man which the Soul possesses will turn out more clearly” (V.6), Ficino explained. Arrangement, Proportion and Aspect are the perfect form which the soul possesses, the innate idea of the body in matter. The same formula can be applied to music: Arrangement is “an ascent from a low note to the octave, and thence a descent”; Proportion is “a proper progression through third, fourth, fifth, and

sixth intervals, and also full tones and half-tones”; and Aspect is “the sonorous intensity of a clear note” (V.6).

Marsilio Ficino described the power of creating mind in *Five Questions Concerning the Mind*:

We cannot reach the highest summit of things unless, first, taking less account of the inferior parts of the soul, we ascend to the highest part, the mind. If we have concentrated our powers in this most fruitful part of the soul, then without doubt by means of this highest part itself, that is, by means of mind, we shall ourselves have the power of creating mind....The motion of each of all the natural species proceeds according to a certain principle...the limits of motion are two, namely, that from which it flows and that to which it flows. From these limits motion obtains its order.¹⁰

Ficino divided the soul into the Higher and Lower. The Higher Soul or *anima prima* is divided into two faculties, Reason or *ratio* and Mind, reason being directed toward corporeal perception, while Mind is directed toward the *intellectus divinus* or contemplation.¹¹ The Lower Soul or *anima secunda* is biologically predetermined, by fate. It is composed of three groups of functions relating to physiology, external perception and internal perception. The physiological functions are propagation or *potentia generationis*, nourishment or *nutritionis*, and growth, or *augmenti*. External perception incorporates the five senses, the *sensus exterior*, while internal perception is an imaginative faculty which translates physical signals into psychological images, *sensus intimus atque simplex* and *imaginatio*. [20 min.]

In the *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino defined the elements in the hierarchy of being, in descending order, as Mind or *mens*, Soul or *anima*, Nature or *natura*, and Body or *corpus*. These elements are characteristics of both man and the universe. Mind is the first level below God, “incorruptible and stable but multiple, comprising as it does the ideas that are the prototypes of all that which exists in the lower zones.”¹² The lower level of Mind is the Soul, which is “still incorruptible but no longer stable. Moving with a self-induced motion, it is a locus of pure causes rather than pure forms and, anthropologically speaking, dichotomous.” The Soul is dichotomous in that it incorporates the higher and the lower, reason and perception, idea and vision. The elements in the hierarchy of the soul belong to the elements of the spheres of the universe along with the planets.¹³ The universe is divided into four hierarchies of descending perfection: Mind, Soul, Nature, and Matter. The realm of Nature is a corruptible, shifting world, and the realm of Matter is formless and lifeless. “It is endowed with shape, movement and even existence only in

so far as it ceases to be itself and enters a union with form, so as to contribute to the realm of nature,”¹⁴ that is, when it is endowed with the world soul and the good, and the light of the sun.

While the beauty of the body for Ficino in *De amore* “consists in the composition of many parts; it is restricted in place, it is subject to time” (VI.17). The beauty of the Soul, on the other hand, “suffers changes of time, of course, and contains multiplicity of parts, but is free from limits of place.” In order to see the beauty of the Soul, it is necessary to “take away from corporeal beauty the weight of matter itself and the limitations of place”; as well as the “progression of time,” and the “manifold composition of Forms”; what is left is only simple form, which is the beauty of God; and the simple form is nothing other than light, the light of the sun, which is the source of all physical beauty. As Ficino wrote, “The beauty of all bodies is that light of the sun which you see, stained with those three things: multiplicity of forms (for you see it painted with many shapes and colors), the space of place, and temporal change.” What is left is a “brilliant light,” and a simple and pure light, which is “engraved with all the Reasons of things.”

The ray of beauty descends from the sun as God passes through the intelligences and Souls, “as if they were made of glass” (VI.10) and into the body. From the body, the beauty of God “shines out, especially through the eyes, the transparent windows of the soul.” The beauty of God shines out through the eyes as light penetrates other eyes, and other souls, and kindles other appetites, as sparks of a flame. The vision of the eye is created by the light of the sun, which is the light of the divine intellect, as Plato described in the *Republic*, “though the sun is not itself sight, it is the cause of sight and is seen by the sight it causes” (508b).¹⁵ Vision is the physical manifestation of the Good, according to Plato, and divine intelligence. “The good has begotten it in its own likeness, and it bears the same relation to sight and visible objects in the visible realm that the good bears to intelligence and intelligible objects in the intelligible realm.”

As Plotinus explained in the *Enneads*, vision is caused by light in the world of sense, but in the realm of the intellectual in the soul, vision occurs not through a medium but by its own light, which is a divine light shining within the soul which enlightens it and allows it to see (V.3.8). It is this divine inner light, which allows the soul to perceive the Intellectual Principle, or the divine Idea. In this way a trace of the divine intellect can exist in the soul. The Intellectual Principle has “self-vision,” and in fact its very essence

is vision (V.3.10). It is a “multiple organ of vision, an eye receptive of many illuminated objects.”

For Ficino in *De amore*, “as the sun is to our eyes, so God is to our intellects” (VI.13). As the world would be “sunken in eternal darkness” without the light of the sun, “the intellect would be empty and dark unless the light of God were present to it, in which it sees the Reason of all things.” While it is possible for sight alone to perceive forms and images, reason and intelligence are only possible in the presence of divine light. Based on this, Ficino constructed a theory of vision as it is related to cognition, in that it is necessary to construct in the mind what is perceived. Ficino explained vision and cognition as such in *De amore*: “When anyone sees a man with his eyes, he creates an image of the man in his imagination and then ponders for a long time, trying to judge that image. Then he raises the eye of his intellect to look up to the Reason of Man which is present in the divine light. Then suddenly from the divine light a spark shines forth to his intellect and the true nature itself of Man is understood” (VI.13). The image formed in the imagination corresponds to the lineament of Alberti; the spark shining from the divine light to the human intellect corresponds to Alberti’s *concinnitas*. It is clear that Ficino was influenced by Alberti in his concepts of *concinnitas*, *armonia*, *lineamenti*, beauty, proportion, light, and vision. [25 min.]

Ficino explained in *De amore* that, as light is sent out from the sun and infused in intelligences or angels, souls and bodies, so sparks of light are sent out of the body, stirred by love, the desire for the Good, and the perpetual motion of the heart, through the eyes, which are like glass windows, transparent and shining. Ficino pointed out that some animals’ eyes glow in the dark, as from an inner light, and if one is poked in the eye he will see a light in the inner eye. In the *Enneads* Plotinus explained, “At night in the darkness a gleam leaps from within the eye: or again we make no effort to see anything; the eyelids close; yet a light flashes before us; or we rub the eye and it sees the light it contains. This is sight without the act, but it is the truest seeing, for it sees light whereas its other objects were the lit not the light” (V.5.7). For Plotinus it is the inner light which allows for the truest form of seeing, because it is a form of seeing not dependent on sense reality and material things, so it is closest to the Intellectual Principle. Plato described the inner light in the *Timaeus* as well: “For when the eyelids, designed by the gods to protect the sight, are shut, they confine the activity of the fire within, and this smoothes and diffuses the internal motions...” (45).¹⁶

In *De amore*, Ficino related that certain great men in history, like the Emperor Augustus, had a light so powerful in their eyes that it rivaled the light of the sun. Rays of light emanate from the eyes like the shooting of a dart, carrying a spirit or vapor, which penetrates the eyes and heart of another person. This can result in the bewitching of lovers, for example, and explains why some people who are not that physically attractive can excite an exceptional degree of love and passion and desire. Love can only happen when the eyes of two people meet. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus explained, "...it is precisely here that the greater beauty lies, perceived whenever you look to the wisdom in a man and delight in it, not wasting attention on the face, which may be hideous, but passing all appearance by and catching only at the inner comeliness, the truly personal" (V.8.2), as through the light of the eyes. Inner beauty can only be perceived by the soul which itself possesses inner beauty, as divine beauty can only be perceived by the soul which possesses the same.

In the *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino constructed a theory of vision. Rays of light projected by the sun emanate in the form of the cone of a pyramid if they pass through a small hole in a wall; similarly, as the rays of light from the sun pass through the hole in the pupil of the eye, they emanate in the form of the cone of a pyramid into the soul, corresponding to a lens or pineal gland, mirroring physical reality. In such a way the soul is able to judge measures and distances. The distance from the soul to the pupil must be the same as the distance from the sun to the pupil, which is why in Egypt, according to Ficino, the soul was thought to be in the heavens. He explained, "The soul is equally distant from the eyes as the sun is above them. Thus, according to the Egyptians, the soul is in the sky and the heavens, at the same distance above terrestrial eyes."¹⁷

Alberti, in his treatise on painting, *De pictura*, constructed a theory of vision in which rays of light were arranged in a pyramid as well. According to Alberti, surfaces are defined and measured by rays of light which, as for Ficino, serve to translate visual matter into intelligible matter, giving it the qualities of proportion and arrangement. Certain rays of light, which Alberti called "extrinsic rays," define the outline, measure and dimension of surfaces. The extrinsic rays define the outline of the pyramid of light in vision. The pyramid is formed between the surface of the matter and the eye, which is, among other things, the source of an inner light. "The base of the pyramid is the surface seen, and the sides are the visual rays we said are called extrinsic. The vertex of the pyramid resides within the eye, where the angles of the quantities in the various triangles meet together" (I.7).¹⁸ Extrinsic rays of

light measure quantity, which is “the space across the surface between two different points” (I.6).

¹ Arnaldo Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze* (Firenze: Tipografia G. Carnesecchi e Figli, 1902), p. 577: “...Leon Battista Alberti, che il Ficino annovera fra coloro che nella sua adolescenza gli furono ‘consuetudine familiars confabulators atque ultro citroque consiliorum disciplinarumque liberalium comunicatores’.”

² Joan Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 234, n. 61.

³ Arnaldo Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, p. 578: “La qual deferenza, attribuita qui dal Landino a Marsilio verso l’Alberti, si troverà tanto più ragionevole, quando si consideri che il sistema preferito da quest’ultimo in filosofia era appunto il Platonico. Il suo ingegno, educato alla libera investigazione del vero, e sdegnoso di assoggettarsi ai legami imposti dalle scuole e dal fanatismo partigiano, biasimava non solo la cieca credenza degli aristotelici nella supposta infallibilità del maestro, ma anche Aristotele stesso, del quale si dice che, pieno della stolta presunzione d’imporre le proprie opinioni anche colla violenza, prendeva briga con quanti incontrava, e con superbia intollerabile ed arroganza incredibile impediva a tutti di parlare. Dal che per naturale reazione, l’Alberti venne ad accostarsi con ragionevole ossequio agl’insegnamenti di quel Socrate, il quale, di assai più ingegno che tutti gli altri, con assai maggior modestia si contentava di affermare una cosa sola, ossia che egli non sapeva nulla; e così Platone, che delle Socratiche dottrine è non solo divulgatore ma esplicatore e ampliatore, è sempre nominato con riverenza speciale nelle opera dell’Alberti, e le sue teorie riportate sempre con deferente rispetto.”

⁴ For example, Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, in *History of Aesthetics, Volume Three* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1974 [1962–67]): “He [Alberti] also knew Plato, but did not make use of his philosophy, for philosophy did not interest him, and the Platonic style of thinking was foreign to him” (p. 80). This is clearly absurd, as the author himself goes on to assert that “The concept of harmony accepted by Alberti—*concinnitas*, understood as the correct proportion of parts, was derived from the classical philosophers: from the Pythagoreans and Plato...” (p. 83). While he “was well familiar with the diversity and transcendence of things, Alberti nevertheless believed that they contained a stable and unchangeable element (*constans atque immutabile*), upon which harmony and beauty were dependent” (p. 82), the Platonic archetype, transcendental and metaphysical.

⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria (On the Art of Building in Ten Books)*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988).

⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981).

⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985).

⁹ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

¹⁰ Translated in Ernst Cassirer, ed., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 193.

¹¹ See the discussion in Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology, Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 136.

¹² See the discussion in Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 183.

¹³ See the discussion in Marc Bensiman, "Modes of Perception of Reality in the Renaissance," in Robert Kinsman, ed., *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 239.

¹⁴ Translated in Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, p. 132.

¹⁵ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1955).

¹⁶ Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

¹⁷ Trans. in Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology, On the Immortality of Souls* (Paris: Humanities, 1964), p. 117.

¹⁸ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972).