

In the prologue to *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* Alberti sets out the claim:

'... that the security, dignity and honour of the republic depend greatly on the architect: it is he who is responsible for our delight, entertainment and health while at leisure, and our profit and advantage while at work, and in short, that we live in a dignified manner, free from any danger. In view then of the delight and wonderful grace of his works, and how indispensable they have proved, and in view of the benefit and convenience of his inventions, and their service to posterity, he should no doubt be accorded praise and respect, and be counted among those most deserving of mankind's honour and recognition.'

(Alberti, 1988, p.5)

Architects and architecture, however, need not only honour and recognition but also understanding of the work processes involved. This matters not only in teaching institutions – the Royal Academy of Architecture or the Bauhaus – but also in practice when tackling a project we start with an in-built set of assumptions, virtually impossible to purge, about the appropriate way to pursue the design process. These predispositions strongly influence the way we tackle the design which in turn affects the eventual outcome. Some of the predispositions come from our education, some from our personal characteristics and preferences, some from the current paradigm which tends to ring-fence what is thought to be significant or, at least, appropriate. That understanding is, I believe, in any case also of general interest since architecture affects, as Alberti emphasises, so many facets of our lives.

There is additionally a further and perhaps ultimately more crucial reason: non-verbal thinking extends far beyond architecture yet is sparsely chartered territory. It is important to be aware what non-verbal thinking can and cannot do. There

are, moreover, significant differences between various kinds of non-verbal thought.

Mime, for instance, can tell a story and convey emotions. It does so because it heightens body language which we use everyday, consciously and unconsciously, to convey meanings on its own or to emphasise words. Some body-language is almost universal, some specific to a society. It is our empathy with the mimed actions, our intimate relation to those actions, which makes it possible to tell a story through mime. Architecture is too abstract an art, too separated from bodily actions (with just the possible exception of the caryatids) to be able to mimic human behaviour and emotions. It might be said that a column represents a body supporting a weight; it could equally, however, represent a tree trunk or indeed only represent itself. We can ascribe all kinds of meanings to the straight line, vertical and horizontal, and the intersection between the two, but these meanings will always be ambiguous. The integrity of the lines will, however, remain; three straight lines

Right
El Lissitzky, Street poster
 1919–20, *Beat the Whites
 with the Red Wedge*

