



# The Rule and the Model: On the Theory of Architecture and Urbanism

*Françoise Choay*

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*"To see the strangeness in writings on urbanism, one must first be willing and able to recognize what is out of the ordinary and improbable in their undertaking, when seen against the background of how, in the cultures of the world, throughout history, humans have gone about organizing and building their settlements. The creation of a specific, autonomous discipline for the construction of space is an enterprise whose uniqueness and audacity are easy to miss because of its present universality and banality."*

When it was first published in France in 1980, *La Règle et le Modèle* was awarded the prestigious *Grand prix de la critique d'architecture*. In this long-awaited translation of her seminal work on architecture and urbanistic theory, Françoise Choay elucidates the entwined fate of two theoretical genres. One is represented by Alberti's architectural rule book *De re aedificatoria*, the other by Thomas More's idealizing projection of *Utopia*. Choay pursues the trajectories of these two genres in order to trace the genealogy of a third, more heterogeneous discourse associated with the term "urbanism."

*The Rule and the Model* elaborates Choay's hypothesis about the specialized tradition of theorizing architecture and urbanism, the origins of which she locates in Western society with its belief in the constitutive role of architecture in founding and transforming human institutions over time. She demonstrates that since its emergence in the fifteenth century, this discourse has been organized by two principal formulations: the *rule* and the *model*

Choay surveys and rearranges the landscape of conventional historiography, assigning new value to the familiar landmarks, and tracing down to our own epoch texts descended from Alberti's treatise and More's utopian model. She proposes a coherent system for deciphering our master texts as well as a new means for considering the implications of our *de facto* mastery of the built environment.



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