



# FOUR DOORS

An architectural memory protocol

During Summer of Protocols I traversed a cross-cultural landscape of memory protocols, technologies, and techniques. My lines of inquiry brought me from the Australian Aboriginal peoples to European Renaissance magicians. But I found myself continually drawn to the research of NYU professor Mary Carruthers on the memory protocols of Medieval monasteries. What piqued my interest was the relationship between the monks' memorization techniques and their architecture.

In her book *The Craft of Thought*, Carruthers writes that "The monastery buildings themselves ... were understood to function rhetorically as a support and conduit for the memorial work of both meditation and liturgical prayer ... The medieval monastery church is a tool, a machine for thinking, whose structure and decoration together serve as its functioning parts." The philosophy of the faith community was articulated in the language of architecture—the building encoded its highest ideals in its structure and its engravings.

Halfway through the Summer of Protocols, our eclectic crew of researchers met for an in-person retreat at a hotel in St. Edwards State Park, not too far from Seattle. The hotel building was once home to a seminary staffed by the Society of St. Sulpice, from 1931 until 1976. The redevelopment project preserved many features of the old sacred architecture including the basic floor plan and, notably, the Latin inscriptions above all four entrances.

Over the course of our five-day stay, I used perplexity.ai to translate and contemplate the Latin inscriptions above each door. Together these doors formed a protocol of initiation for the 20th century seminarians.

*Latin inscription above the door at the seminary-turned-hotel where Summer of Protocols met for a retreat*

They served as mnemonic portals to the central ideas in their course of study. It only felt right to apply what I'd learned about monastic memory techniques and allow the building to function as a "machine for thinking."

So I've turned the Four Doors of the Lodge at St. Edward Park into a "gathering site" for my reflections and research on protocols. Four Doors is an experiment in architectural memory, where each door's inscription is the gateway to a room full of associations. They take the form of the *intercolumnia* that were often used as mnemonic devices in Medieval monasteries. As Mary Carruthers writes, "The intercolumnia in a church, formed by sets of arche or aches, is a perfect unit or scene for memory work. And of course one has only to look at the arches often made to articulate the intercolumnar location of devotional scenes ... to see how this trope is worked continually, as a basic memory tool."

Four Doors asks us to listen to the speech of the buildings we inhabit, to reanimate the memory infrastructure we inherit from our predecessors, and to find continuity between technologies past and present. How might these seemingly distant memorial practices inspire modern protocol designers? As you pass through the Four Doors, you're invited to build on the chain of associations and reflect on how we become the buildings we behold. ♦

*Aaron Z Lewis*

North—Omnibus omnia factus sum. South—Pro eis sanctifico me ipsum. East—Spes messis in semine. West—Regnum dei intra vos est.

# REGNUM DEI INTRA VOS EST

reflection

research

*Regnum dei intra vos est,* carved above the West door of The Lodge at St. Edward, translates to *The kingdom of God is within you.* Taken from the 17th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, the phrase instructs readers that the “kingdom” is not a physical space but rather a state of being. In other words, it is a warning against confusing an internal process of transformation with an external object. ¶ By way of analogy, this dictum helps us understand that protocols are not finite visible structures we can point to in the physical world. Instead, they are ongoing processes of transformation that unfold both without and within us, as we participate in bringing them to life. Though we are unable to perceive protocols as discrete objects, we can learn to practice “protocolized thinking”—tuning our attention to how they shape the environments and systems that surround.

*The kingdom of God is within you* corresponds to a number of memory protocols that were employed by monks in the medieval ages. “The goal of meditation,” writes Mary Carruthers in *The Craft of Thought*, “is to build oneself into a ‘templum spiritualis.’ And the temple into which one constructs oneself is richly decorated.” ¶ Monastery buildings were built to support the memorial work of meditation. They were external architectures that monks could internalize through a rigorous method of daily visualization exercises and prayers. The goal of these memorization protocols was to re-shape interior life in the image of the religious architecture of the sacred texts or of the cloister. The monks used “architectural plans as the routes of meditative composition ... [and] meditation machines” (Carruthers 229). In this way, they brought the “kingdom” within.



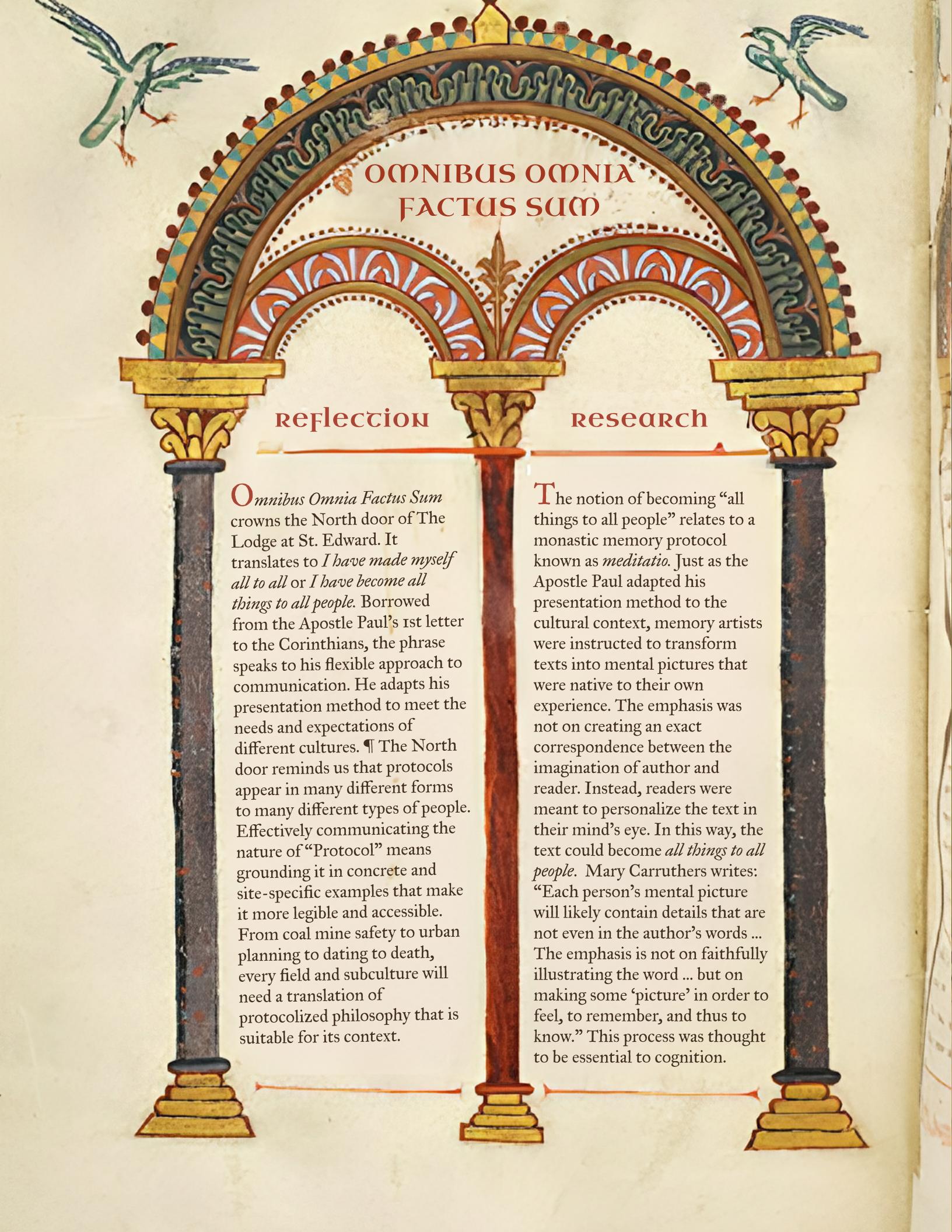
PRO EIS SANCTIFICO ME IPSI

## reflection

*Pro Eis Sanctifico Me Ipsum* sits above the the South door of The Lodge at St. Edward. It comes from the Gospel of John and it means *For them so I sanctify myself*. In the Gospel of John, sanctification is about making something sacred by setting it aside for special use. ¶ Protocols aren't (usually) employed for religious purposes, but they do enable ritualized interactions that are *set apart* from the ordinary. Protocolized behavior is sanctified in the sense that it stands out from informal, everyday happenings.

## research

Monastic memory protocols helped monks sanctify themselves and the texts they encountered. Just as certain objects were set aside for ritual use, passages of texts were set aside for hyper-visual contemplation. In a process known as *tractare* (meaning to 'draw out' or 'extract'), readers would pull out choice passages and transform them into icons or symbolic shorthands, which they then arranged in imaginary grids for easy re-view. The goal of this process was to create interior sacred space, set apart from ordinary memory.



# OMNIBUS OMNIA FACTUS SUM

## reflection

## research

*Omnibus Omnia Factus Sum* crowns the North door of The Lodge at St. Edward. It translates to *I have made myself all to all* or *I have become all things to all people*. Borrowed from the Apostle Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians, the phrase speaks to his flexible approach to communication. He adapts his presentation method to meet the needs and expectations of different cultures. ¶ The North door reminds us that protocols appear in many different forms to many different types of people. Effectively communicating the nature of "Protocol" means grounding it in concrete and site-specific examples that make it more legible and accessible. From coal mine safety to urban planning to dating to death, every field and subculture will need a translation of protocolized philosophy that is suitable for its context.

The notion of becoming "all things to all people" relates to a monastic memory protocol known as *meditatio*. Just as the Apostle Paul adapted his presentation method to the cultural context, memory artists were instructed to transform texts into mental pictures that were native to their own experience. The emphasis was not on creating an exact correspondence between the imagination of author and reader. Instead, readers were meant to personalize the text in their mind's eye. In this way, the text could become *all things to all people*. Mary Carruthers writes: "Each person's mental picture will likely contain details that are not even in the author's words ... The emphasis is not on faithfully illustrating the word ... but on making some 'picture' in order to feel, to remember, and thus to know." This process was thought to be essential to cognition.

## SPES MESSIS IN SEMINE

### REFLECTION

**S**pes Messis in Semine, carved above the East door of The Lodge at St. Edward, translates to *The hope of the harvest is in the seed*. Inspired by the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the phrase orients readers towards all that can grow out of relatively simple starting conditions. ¶ By way of analogy, a new protocol can be envisioned as an “unreasonably sufficient” seed that grows into an infrastructure that supports surprisingly complex interactions. Simple protocols like the diplomatic handshake, traffic rules, and hand-washing can blossom into expansive and intricate ecologies of behavior. The fruit of these seeds is the civilizational stability that is sometimes easy to take for granted. We “harvest” each time we benefit from their effects.

### RESEARCH

**T**he ethos of *Spes Messis in Semine* is reflected in the many monastic memory protocols that are inspired by gardening. Peter Chrysologus, a 5th century Bishop, compares short mnemonic summaries to seeds, saying: “if we would only sow this grain of mustardseed in our memories in such a way that it will grow into a great tree of knowledge ... it will spread out into all the branches of the sciences.” A 13th century practitioner of memory described an “imaginary library using as his organizing scheme a ‘little garden.’ The books, classified according to divisions of the liberal arts, are planted in beds.” These memory metaphors re-made monks’ minds in the image of soil, shaping their interiority into a fertile ground that produced many harvests.



Buildings become enfolded in people's thinking habits.  
The remembered familiarity of a building's plan ... seems  
actually to channel and "carry" the movements of one's  
thinking. The mind is entirely freed to make its thoughts  
when it also has entirely familiar habitations and its  
familiar routes.

*Mary Carruthers*

Carruthers, Mary J. *The craft of thought: Meditation, rhetoric, and the making of images, 400-1200*. Vol. 34. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Carruthers, Mary J. *The book of memory: A study of memory in medieval culture*. No. 10. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 98, lines 28:33

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ProtocolKit



# ProtocolKit

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