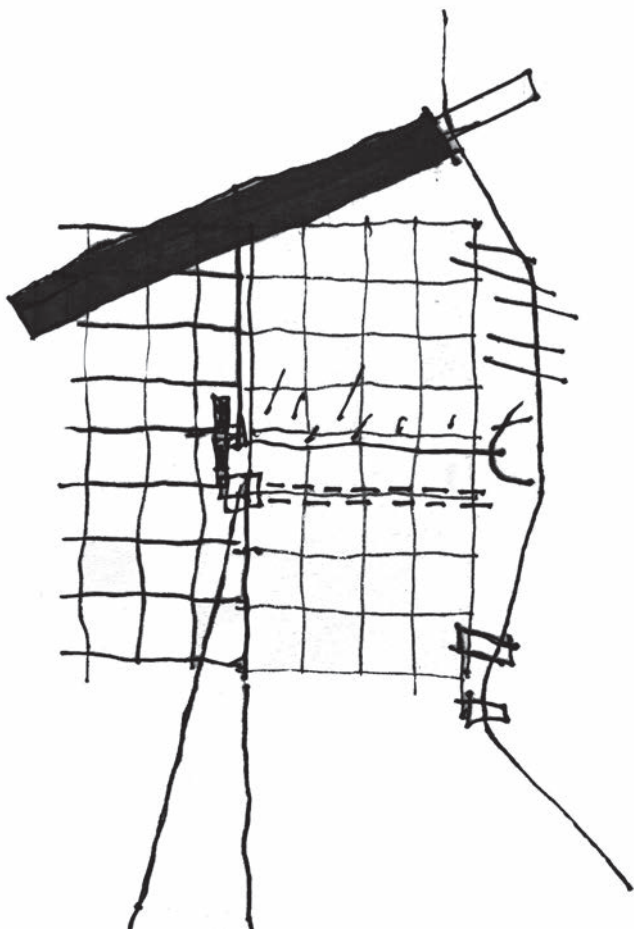


**Alessandro Virgilio Mosetti,
Gundula Rakowitz**

Costellazione Venetiae

Prefazione di Daniel Sherer



Nuova serie di architettura
FRANCOANGELI

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Mundus alter, mondo altro, diverso, forse incognito e arcano,
oppure, anche, nessun-mondo. Venezia. Ma esiste Venezia,
può esistere una città che non ha confini, quella linea dove la
terra finisce e comincia l'acqua, dove dunque sia possibile stabilire
un qui e un là, un qui e un altrove, un dentro e un fuori?

Franco Rella, *Immaginare Venezia* (2022)

Prefazione

Daniel Sherer
Princeton University School of Architecture

“To read what was never written”. Such reading is the most ancient: reading before all languages, from the entrails, the stars, or dances.

Walter Benjamin, *On the Mimetic Faculty* (1933)

Venice: she can be seen as the place where antitheses have been removed, where dialectics has no function, in which there is no contradiction between tradition and innovation, development and memory, continuity and renewal, sacred and profane.

Manfredo Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance* (1985)

It is often said that Venice has a theatrical quality unique among Italian cities. This observation may be regarded as particularly significant insofar as these urban centers do not lack distinctively scenographic characteristics. The reason for this is self-evident: a city that is not *on* the water, but *in* it, is dramatic in ways that other cities simply cannot match. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by an inescapable impression that accompanies visitors to the city of St. Mark, namely, that when making our way through the *calle* and *rive* of this city we intuitively identify every *piazza* as a stage writ large: an act of imagination which ends up transforming the observer, no less than the observed, into so many *dramatis personae*.

Along with other important factors, the theatrical implication of urban space lends Venice a remarkable inner coherence.

Central to any understanding of her singular position within the world of urban phenomena, this coherence is maintained despite, or perhaps precisely because of the multiplicity of the maritime city. Of what does this multiplicity consist? On the one hand, there is the separation into *sestieri* on either side of the Grand Canal; on the other, there are the numerous interconnections, both real and ideal, between Venice's overall urban structure and the territories of the *terrafirma* and the extended *stato da mar*: one that, at the height of Venetian power, from the Fourth Crusade (1204) to the Battle of Zonchio (1499) stretched across the entire Adriatic into the Greek islands and at times even to mainland Greece, where the first theaters in the world were founded¹.

And just as Venice's multiplicity is connected to this pervasive theatricality – for what else is the theater but an empty space that can become *any* and *all* spaces, since the movement of the imaginary inheres not only in the playwright's and set designer's talents but also in the projective ability of the audience – its paradigmatic quality as a city presupposes a situation in which all other cities are tacitly reflected in its *forma urbis*. Venice, then, reveals itself to be a stage where the *idea of the city* is powerfully enacted. This theatricality is deeply rooted in the urban imaginary no less than in the unique civic, architectural and social reality of Venice, even as it inevitably calls to mind the overfamiliar image of the mask (which is however in many respects quite different from it, insofar as the theater is spatial, not just a matter of surfaces).

In this and in other respects the destiny of Venice and that of theatrical representation are intimately linked. This is the case both *in potentia* and *in actu*, due to the workings of the urban imagination, and not only to that aspect of this imagination which overlaps with what the authors of this book call "*lo spazio scenico*", citing a celebrated exhibition, *Venezia e lo spazio scenico* of 1979, an important point of reference for their inquiry². Devoted to the theme of the inherent plurality of the Lagoon city, this inquiry, undertaken by two architects who do theoretical and practical research on architecture at the IUAV, Alessandro Virgilio Mosetti and Gundula Rakowitz, offers new projects for Venice and its hinterland,

¹ Lane F. C., *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore/London 1973, chapter 1; Tenenti A., *Il senso del mare*, in Tenenti A., Tucci U. (eds.), *Storia di Venezia*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome 1991, vol. 12, 74ff.

² Brusatin M., Poli A. (eds.), *Venezia e lo spazio scenico: Mostra a Palazzo Grassi in occasione del Carnevale del Teatro. Venezia 1979*, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice 1979.

along with theoretical discussions of the convergences and divergences between type, urban morphology, and the surrounding territory. Casting new light on little-known aspects of Venice, their approach presupposes a unique reciprocity between architecture and urban form, with the *idea del teatro* as the principal point of conjunction. In so doing the projects in question provide an essential mediation between the aesthetic and technical dimensions of this most singular of maritime cities.

But their impact does not end there. For these projects also involve a complex dialogue between the monumental nuclei of Venice, above all S. Marco and the Rialto, and their framing contexts in alluvial and marine areas. With an intellectual and artistic genealogy that extends back to approaches and formal codes developed in the late 20th century, this dialogue has unexpected implications for current readings of the urban structures of the present. More specifically these last are informed by a specific disciplinary consciousness that emerged between the mid-1960s and the late 1980s along the well-trodden Milan-Venice axis that proved to be so central to postwar Italian architecture and urbanism, in the projects and theoretical contributions of Giuseppe Samonà, Luciano Semerani, Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello, and Gian Carlo Leoncilli Massi³. All of these protagonists shared a common objective: to liberate the architect from stylistic limitations no less than from the illusion of a worn-out fealty to a monolithic “Modern Movement”, thereby expanding architecture’s critical capacity, while providing new conceptual instruments with which to rethink the project of architecture, along with urban form and territorial construction, from the ground up.

Once we place these names side by side, we confront a series of architects that corresponds to the configuration of Venice that they helped shape, and which is here propelled into the future by a compact set of design strategies balancing memory and invention. We also confront, through this *accostamento*, a feature which unites these architects across generations, despite considerable differences. What we are ultimately dealing with, in studying the proposals put forward in this volume, is a way of coming to terms with the genesis and development of the city from late antiquity to the present, guiding the approaches through which singular forms of continuity and collective memory

³ An extensive bibliography exists on these figures. I will limit myself to the most essential references: Tafuri M., *History of Italian Architecture 1944-1985*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA/London 1986; Semerani L., *The School of Venice*, “AD”, n. 59, 1985.

come together to shape the interaction of type and morphology and the multiple dimensions of urban experience to which they gave rise⁴.

Among those who wrote about Venice who were neither architects nor urbanists, but literary figures, Italo Calvino understood this multiplicity better than anyone else⁵. This is something that seems even more paradoxical (or at least more unexpected) than it might initially appear to be given the fact that he grew up on the Ligurian coast, controlled by Venice's most important rival, Genoa – when he put the following words into Marco Polo's mouth in *Le Città invisibili*: in response to the insistent questions of the Great Khan about the one city that the all-powerful had perceived that his illustrious visitor had omitted.

Dawn had broken when he said: “Sire, now I have told you about all the cities I know”. “There is still one of which you never speak”. Marco Polo bowed his head. “Venice,” the Khan said. Marco smiled. “What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?” The emperor did not turn a hair. “And yet I have never heard you mention that name”. And Polo said: “Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice”.

This question – or rather this enigmatic answer to an unasked question, which may be paraphrased in the following way – “how is it that all other cities are contained within Venice, if only implicitly?” evokes the singularity/multiplicity tension within the very structure of the maritime city that echoes down the centuries as a recurrent figure, a sort of *ritornello*. It has prompted a wide variety of responses, each of which registers a dimension of the multifaceted reality of the city “*posto nell'impossibile*”, as Francesco Sansovino put it, each of which has contributed to its mythical construction over the long term⁶.

In the chronicles and juridical and political treatises one finds the first stirrings, as well as the inevitable recapitulations of the myth of Venice, not unmixed with true statements. “*Venetiarum civitas non est insula*” wrote a 17th century jurist, M. A. Peregrino, a judgment which is perfectly accurate, as no natural island, but only artificial constructions, are to be found in the space

⁴ Muratori S., *Studi per una operante storia di Venezia*, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Roma 1960.

⁵ Calvino I., *Invisible Cities*, tr. William Weaver, Harcourt Brace, San Diego/New York/London 1974, p. 86.

⁶ Sansovino F., *Delle cose notabili che sono a Venezia*, Venice 1561. Tafuri M., *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects*, tr. with a preface by Sherer D., Yale University Press/Cambridge, MA Harvard GSD, New Haven/London 1996, p. 85; Gaeta F., *L'Ida di Venezia*, in Arnaldi G., Pastore Stocchi M., *Storia della cultura veneta*, Vicenza 1981, v. 3, pp. 565-641.

of Venice⁷. For Francesco Sansovino, building on the medieval idea of the microcosm, the city of St. Mark was an “image of the earth... in the midst of the ocean sea... locked in an immutable balance “between two elements suspended”⁸. Venice, it was said, is like the Virgin – immaculate, paradoxical, “*miracolosissima*” – born from nothing, founded “*in alveo maris*”, rising directly from the depths of the sea, “destined to remain unique and inimitable throughout the course of history” (Ennio Concina)⁹. An emissary from Friuli, Cornelio Frangipane, in an oration delivered before Doge Francesco Donà (1543/1544), once praised Venice as incomparably beautiful to see, marvelous to contemplate, secure, peaceful and rich; on another occasion he added that, after Paradise, Venice was the best place in the universe¹⁰.

In historical, panegyric, and ekphrastic texts, no less than in cartographic images of the lagoon city one can discover an even wider network of analogies, metaphors, and comparisons whose rhetorical scope is no less striking. Venice, due to the serpentine shape of the Canal Grande, serving as its spine, has also been compared to a dolphin in Jacopo de’ Barbari’s famous map of 1500: a very suggestive image, given the propensity of that animal to reappear above the waves just after it has been submerged, just like Venice¹¹.

⁷ Peregrino M. A., *De privilegiis et iuribus fisici*, Venice 1626, p. 358, cited by Ennio Concina, *A History of Venetian Architecture*, tr. by Judith Landry, Cambridge University Press Cambridge/London, 1998, p. 10, n. 1. Peregrini’s statement refers to the main body of the maritime city, which is not, and never was, an island in the usual sense, unlike others in the archipelago. According to Deborah Howard, “After the inhabitation of the first few islands of the archipelago before the year 1000, even the land itself was mainly reclaimed artificially” see Howard D., *Venetian Architecture*, in Dursteler E. (ed.), *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, Brill, Leiden/Boston 2013, p. 743. See also, on urban morphogenesis through reclamation in Venice, Crouzet-Pavan E., “*Sopra le acque salse*”: *Espaces, Pouvoir et Société à Venise à la fin du moyen âge*, Rome 1992, 2 vols; Dorigo W., *Venezia origini*, Electa, Milan 1983, 2 vols; *Id, Venezia romanica: La formazione della città medioevale fino all’età gotica*, Cierre per Istituto Veneto Scienze Lettere ed Arti, Verona/Venice 2003, 2 vols.; Ammerman A. J., McClennen C. E. (eds.), *Venice before San Marco: Recent Studies on the Origins of the City*, Colgate University Press, Hamilton, N.Y. 2001.

⁸ Sansovino F., *Delle cose notabili che sono in Venetia...*, *op. cit.*

⁹ Peregrini E., *De privilegiis et iuribus fisici...*, *op. cit.*, p. 366, cited in Concina E., *A History of Venetian Architecture*, tr. by Judith Landry, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/London 1998, p. 1, n. 1; On the analogies between the Virgin and Venice, see Tafuri, *Interpreting the Renaissance*, *op. cit.*, p. 85, n. 95.

¹⁰ The oration was published by Francesco Sansovino, *Delle orationi recitati a principi di Venetii nella loro creazione di ambasciatori di diverse città...*, Venice 1562, cited in Muir E., *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1981, p. 14, n. 3.

¹¹ Howard D., *Venice as a Dolphin: further Investigations into Jacopo de’ Barbari’s View*, in “*Artibus et Historiae*”, 18, No. 35, 1997, pp. 101-111.

And Venice is also, of course, indelibly associated with the Lion of St. Mark, who is, in one particularly significant iconographical variant, shown with his front paw on the *terrafirma*, and two back paws dipping in the water, to exemplify, allegorically, Venice's dual support on land and sea, as seen in the famous painting by Carpaccio in the Palazzo Ducale (1516)¹².

In the following pages Venice is compared to a constellation: this marks the first time, to the best of my knowledge, that such a comparison has been made in the vast literature on this city. Recently, much has been made about the paradigm of the urban archipelago¹³. In place of this model, it seems more apt that Venice, which always returns to her pristine glory after being momentarily eclipsed by the onslaughts of fortune (whether this is climate-based, political or some combination of both) should be compared to recognizable groups of stars which wheel back into view after having been obscured due to a specific periodicity. It is therefore both fitting and understandable that Mosetti and Rakowitz draw a strong analogy between Venice, in its unity of discrete parts, and the venerable figure of the constellation: and who would deny a constellation its peculiar coherence, despite the fact that it is made up of multiple stars of varying magnitudes, with their own specific place in the dynamic *Gestalt* that is co-extensive with the constellation itself? What emerges from this emphasis on the *costellazione Venetiae* in any case is not a purely intellectual construct, but a mode of reading able to make sense of the place of the lagoon city within an extended territorial network.

This emphasis is also appropriate insofar as the discrete elements come together to form a figure that is at once familiar and mysterious, like Venice herself. And yet there is another side to this “familiar mystery” which precludes all comparison, as it is impervious to the seductions of analogy: an option that is good as any other, and perhaps better, as it has the advantage of being consecrated by tradition, as well as being elegant in its unitary, self-referential quality: namely, the proposition that holds that Venice can only be compared to itself. This is what the chroniclers, panegyrists and countless visitors – among them Goethe – have said about the maritime city, a fact

¹² On St Mark as patron saint of Venice and the cult that grew up around his relics, see Geary P., *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1991; Concina E., *History of Venetian Architecture...*, *op. cit.*, 18ff.

¹³ On the city as an archipelago, see Aureli P. V., *The Possibility of An Absolute Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA/London 2011, pp. 177-228.

which paradoxically enough does not prevent us from perceiving her multifaceted character¹⁴.

This multiplicity of Venice is, then, by no means incompatible with her singularity. Moreover, such a simultaneity of contraries can help explain why the theatrical figuration of the city has played such a decisive role in representations of its singular urban structure. This becomes particularly evident when attempting to trace the different typomorphological continuities and discontinuities, the millennial interactions of architectonic invention and urban convention, that have accumulated on this one locus over time: a locus that is, strictly speaking, a *non-site*, as no dry land ever corresponded to it.

Though one might initially grant theses of continuity pride of place in Venice, in fact it is the force of novelty which stands out in this context. This is because the *spazio scenico* of Venice is, as the authors note in the first line of their text, above all, a space of invention. And perhaps this is the real reason why Aldo Rossi, when seeking to capture the theatrical character of Venice, devised a supremely inventive floating theater, the Teatro del Mondo, as an allegory of the city for the 1980 Biennale: moving through the canals and estuaries of the Lagoon, the Teatro thus acted as a free-floating signifier of *Venezianità*, dramatizing the specific and singular urbanity of the maritime city¹⁵.

Here we would do well to remember that the internal heterogeneity of Venice, its status as a unity that is made up of *partes inter partes*, is not at odds with its coherence as an urban phenomenon: quite the contrary. Indeed, this coherence is not only related to this heterogeneity, but is in fact constituted by it. And since, like any complex and articulated reality, Venice elicits all sorts of metaphors, it is worth recalling that one of the more unexpected metaphorical images elicited by the Venetian *imago urbis* derives from the accumulated astronomical knowledge of the zodiacal constellations: an *episteme* that, like the history of Venice herself, always involved a fertile tension, from earliest times, between objective observation and mythical construction¹⁶.

¹⁴ J. W. von Goethe, *Italian Journey*, 1786-1788, tr. Auden W. H. , Mayer E., Penguin, London 1970, p. 77.

¹⁵ Sherer D., *Aldo Rossi: The Architecture and Art of the Analogous City*, SoA, Princeton 2018.

¹⁶ On the role of metaphor and rhetorical construction in human knowledge, see Blumenberg H., *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, tr. with an afterword by Savage R., Cornell University Press, Ithaca/London 2016. On the tension between scientific observation and mythical construction in the history of astronomy, see Neugebauer O., *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, Dover, New York 1951, pp. 71-139; Di Santillana G., von Dechend

And yet, the notion of *costellazione Venetiae* does not only operate on a metaphorical plane of reference, as do the rhetorical tropes cited above. It also has a specific conceptual basis, it being understood that both figures and concepts condition our perception of urban reality in different ways. To be sure, concepts are no more present in the world than constellations actually exist in the heavens, but like constellations they enable us to perceive the shifting relations among elements of varying magnitudes, enabling us to discern a sense in these relations by generating specific readings. What we are dealing with, then, when we confront a constellation is a configuration that is perceived to be more than the sum of its parts. A classic instance of what Richard Wollheim has called the process of “seeing in” (as opposed to the more straightforward, empirical process of “seeing-as”), in a more precise, disciplinary sense the constellation exemplifies the architect’s power of visualizing ideas, of laying them out in a specific yet open-ended arrangement¹⁷.

In this respect, the idea of the constellation, understood as a unique figure of thought, becomes a critical instrument of remarkable efficacy in the hands – and the eyes – of the architect, eliciting new interpretations of a diverse and shifting set of architectural projects, morphological ensembles, and patterns of settlement. Moreover, the link between the image of the constellation and the urban and territorial configuration of Venice has well-established ideological and geographical precedents. Here we may emphasize the ideological pole of the argument by paying particular attention to the textual basis of the mythic reading of this configuration.

The earliest manifestation of this reading can be discerned in Cassiodorus’s famous letter of 537/538 asking for auxiliaries for the fortress of Ravenna, a key source for subsequent ideological constructions of Venice¹⁸. After comparing the houses of the primitive Venetians to “aquatic birds, now on sea, now on land”, this text puts forward a reading of the first inhabitants of the Lagoon which would subsequently provide the basis for the venerable political tropes of the

H., *Hamlet’s Mill: An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and its Transmission Through Myth*, Godine, Boston 2017, pp. 144-145.

¹⁷ Wollheim R., *Art and Its Objects*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980, p. 224; *Id.*, *Painting as an Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1987, p. 46.

¹⁸ Tafuri M., *Venice and...*, *op. cit.*, 1-2; Carile A., *Le origini di Venezia nella tradizione storiografica*, in Arnaldi G. (ed.), *Storia della cultura veneta: Dalle origini al Trecento*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 1976, pp. 135-166.

stato misto [mixed polity] and *uguaglianza patrizia* [patrician equality] that are central to Venetian political thought¹⁹: “You have only abundance of fish. Rich and poor live together in equality. The same food and similar houses are shared by all; wherefore they cannot envy each other’s hearths, and so they are free from the vices that rule the world”²⁰.

Paradoxically, consecration of the Serenissima by recourse to this myth of origin gave the lagoon city a posture that was implicitly oriented towards the future. This was due to a strict adherence to its own path of urban development, preserving its primordial network of partly terrestrial, partly marine constructions as an open structure available to constant improvement and modification. This structure, which can be identified with the *Ur*-constellation of Venice, presupposed a need to maintain the delicate hydrogeographic equilibrium that marked the lagoon city in all phases of its history, up to and including the present²¹.

The coalescence of fishing communities originally built upon piles driven into the alluvial mud was flexible enough to ensure the endurance of the expanding urban/territorial organism: in consequence “it would be reductive to read the Venetian cult of continuity as an exasperated form of conservatism” (Tafuri)²². In this respect the primeval constellation in question and the balance of land and sea which it depended upon had a powerfully cohesive and uniquely dialectical function, that of uniting the disparate. The equilibrium that resulted is, arguably, the real subject of this book, which approaches this theme both in terms of the supremely difficult project of finding space for the new within the ancient city of St. Mark and of redrawing, in minute detail, its “constellated” structure.

¹⁹ Gaeta F., *Alcune considerazioni sul mito di Venezia*, in “Bibliothèque d’humanisme et Renaissance”, 23, 1961, pp. 58-75.

²⁰ Cassiodorus, *Letter*, cited in Tafuri, *Venice and... op. cit.*, 1-2. The text of the letter has been published in Hodgkin T. (ed.), *The Letters of Cassiodorus*, Henry Frowde, London 1886, pp. 515-518.

²¹ Tafuri M., *Interpreting the Renaissance, op. cit.*, 1-2.

²² *Ibidem*. Needless to say, even if the traditional date of the founding of Venice (March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, 451, which coincided with the dedication of the church of San Giacomo di Rialto, by three consuls from Padua) plays a key role within the religious and cultural imaginary of the city, it cannot be taken to refer to any specific point of historical genesis. However, it does offer a rough chronological indication of the migration of the refugees from *Alinum*, *Aquilea*, *Padua* and *Concordia* (present-day Portogruaro) when fleeing the Germanic and Hunnic invasions. On the dedication of S. Giacomo di Rialto and its history, see Concina E., *History of Venetian Architecture, op. cit.*, 17, pp. 42-43; Ammerman A. J., *Venice before the Grand Canal*, in “Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome”, 48, 2003, p. 141.

This book is both important and unusual in that it lays out a new framework for dealing with the complexity of Venice. It does so by deploying a deep knowledge of traditional patterns of urban construction, relying upon the “sinuous” interpretation of Roman *castramentatio* applied to the lagoon environment developed in the classic study of Wladimiro Dorigo²³. At once operative and theoretical, the framework elaborated by Mosetti and Rakowitz is informed by a unique historical awareness of the critical parameters of the “Venice problem”, extrapolating the possibility of interstitial urban initiatives from Dorigo’s well-founded analyses. More specifically the approach pursued in the following pages hinges, on the one hand, upon a mode of abstraction articulated across scales in the discussion of the urban renewal project for housing and mixed-use buildings on the so-called “*isola Realtina*”, laid down on lines initiated by Polesello, a purely speculative project. On the other hand it relies upon the notion, equally theoretical, yet paradoxically quite credible and buildable, of the ephemeral, upon a logic of construction that resists the claims of permanence, held up as a methodological ideal applied to a small artificial island near the Zattere.

In the latter case Rakowitz outlines the structural, formal and spatial implications of Libelulla, an ambiguous project for a pre-existing peripheral island. This work, which owes much to the formal brevity and dramatic and abstract potency of the *lezione* of Polesello, is at once stark and eloquent. Eloquent because stark, also because, like Rossi’s Teatro del Mondo, it engages in dialogue with its dramatic surroundings, including Palladio’s Redentore on the Giudecca across the water. Unlike Rossi’s moving *artificium* this project is a fixed *theatrum*, “moving” only as an asymmetrical abstraction, reminiscent of early Soviet avant-garde agitprop structures, here come to rest in the *bacino* of Venice.

If the the design of ephemeral projects is presented here as a sign of hidden continuities and unforeseen connections with the monument and its *permanenze*, it also constitutes a modern response to that which is premodern in Venice²⁴. In this regard the modernity of the avant-garde and the historicity of the pre-modern come together in an unexpected confrontation. This confrontation stands out from many others that have been inspired by Venice insofar as it contains multiple traces – visual, cognitive, material – of a complex process of superimposition, rewriting, and

²³ Dorigo W., *Venezia Origini...*, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Rossi A., *The Architecture of the City*, tr. by Ghirardo D. and Ockman J. with an Introduction by Eisenman P., MIT Press, Cambridge MA/London 1982.

revalorization of the pre-existing urban texture. At the same time the acceptance of the challenge of ephemeral architecture marks an innovative way of dealing with what Venice owes to the atemporal, to that which resists temporality within specifically Venetian temporal rhythms²⁵.

Another central manifestation of this dialectic is the *storia di medio periodo* between long term histories and histories of the event, if not the events themselves – a medium range periodicity to which architecture can rightly lay claim as its privileged domain²⁶. The ephemeral at once chips away at this domain and highlights its specificity like a searchlight in darkness, the hidden obscurity which weighs upon long time periods. Through the ephemeral the architect can traverse the *longue durée* of the Venetian urban organism, lighting up its more obscure corners. There is something Baroque and scenographic about this action of the ephemeral: hence the attraction to the Baroque and to allegories of the theater (e.g. above all, Robert Fludd, Giulio Camillo, Fischer von Erlach, *inter alia*...), and to the *theatrum* of allegory, in this singular book, which is perhaps more Benjaminian in its resonances and underpinnings than it might at first appear to be²⁷. Here it is worth recalling that the notion of the constellation as a unique figure of thought is Benjamin's own, even as it provided a basis for Adorno's epistemological innovations as laid out in his theoretical and aesthetic writings²⁸.

Always keeping the image of the constellation in mind, this book has something essential to teach us about Venice understood as a focal point of unexpected intersections, as Calvino's Marco Polo knew so well, but also about the singularity of an urban experience where all contradictions dissolve (Tafuri), a site where plurality and unity co-exist²⁹. Venice thus takes on the lineaments of a single urban artifact made up of an interrelated network of parts:

²⁵ Ephemeral constructions played a considerable role in the politics of representation in Venetian statecraft. On this role see Brown P. F., *Measured Friendship and Calculated Pomp: The Ceremonial Welcomes of the Venetian Republic*, in Wisch B., Munshower B. (eds.), *All the Worlds a Stage?: Art and Pageantry in Venice in the Renaissance and Baroque in Triumphal Celebrations and Statecraft*, Penn State University Press, University Park, PA 1990, pp. 136-186.

²⁶ Tafuri M., *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects*, tr. with a preface by Sherer D., Yale University Press, New Haven/London 2006), chapter 3; Sherer D., *The Architectural Project and the Historical Project: Tensions, Analogies, Discontinuities*, in "Log", 31, 2014, pp. 115-138.

²⁷ Benjamin W. on constellations: *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, tr. by Osborne J. with an introduction by Steiner G., NLB, London 1977, p. 34.

²⁸ Adorno T. W., *Negative Dialectics*, tr. by Ashton E. B., Continuum, New York 1973, pp. 162-164.

²⁹ Tafuri M., *Venice and the Renaissance*, *op. cit.*, X.

Gianugo Polesello avrebbe immaginato Venezia come *pars inter partes*: artefatto non chiuso in sé alla sola dimensione territoriale-metropolitana-lagunare ma in quanto *artifact* a scala geografica: “L’unità lagunare è una grande, straordinaria costruzione, è un enorme *artifact* di scala geografica che assume e coordina nel proprio interno diversi, distinti elementi, mediando lungo una scala che ha come estremi la *wilderness* e l’artificio totale”.³⁰

This passage highlights something that is far from obvious, namely that the complex urban development of Venice is driven by the coalescence of an overarching urban artifact: one elaborated at a territorial level, and for that reason not closed in upon itself, but open to the flows of an entire region. Interrogating the meaning as well as the future trajectory of the city, this book offers a series of related designs meant to bring forward this notion of a part-based reticulated complex, built up over a long period of time, constructed at the territorial and maritime scale.

A radical temporal shift – a profound alteration in the way Venice’s relation to time itself is conceived – corresponds to this gradual process of spatial construction³¹. As Nietzsche put it, reversing the commonplace that maintains that Venice is a beautiful and decaying prisoner of her own past, the Lagoon city is a privileged site of the future:

A hundred deep solitudes taken together form the city of Venice - that is her charm. An image for men of the future.³²

This quote captures the underlying significance of the ideas and projects presented in the pages that follow – so much so that it could serve as the motto of the entire book. For by seeing Venice as the *locus* of an unexpected, open futurity, rather than as a fragment of the late antique past washed up onto the shores of the present, Nietzsche makes the maritime city into a site that foretells the future of architecture. He thus transforms it, if only implicitly, into a touchstone for the aspirations of the discipline

³⁰ V. *Infra*, 36 and n. 17.

³¹ On the temporalities specific to Venice, and, concomitantly, historical shifts in Venice’s relation to time and space as her maritime empire dwindled in the 16th century, see Tenenti A., *The Sense of Space and Time in the Venetian world of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, in Hale J. R. (ed.), *Renaissance Venice*, Faber, London 1973, pp. 17-46.

³² Nietzsche F., *Dawn* (Fragment from Spring 1880), in Colli G., Montanari M. (eds.), F. Nietzsche, *Opere*, Adelphi, Milan 1964, vol. 5, p. 296. On Nietzsche’s response to Venice, see Tafuri M., *Venice and the Renaissance*, *op. cit.*, XI, and n. 7; Plant M., *Venice: Fragile City, 1797-1997*, Yale University Press, New Haven/London 2002, pp. 196-198; Pasqualotto G., *Nietzsche: considerazioni attuali*, in “Nuova corrente”, 68-69, 1975-1976, pp. 422-463.

itself. I know of no better characterization of the projects and thoughts of Mosetti and Rakowitz than the Nietzschean one. And yet, Calvino's aforementioned assertion, uttered by his Marco Polo, that Venice is all cities while being nothing but herself can scarcely be ignored as a *conchetto* able to account for what we witness when we examine the unprecedented contours of the *Venezie possibili* delineated by these architects³³.

This is the case insofar as some of these possible cities are made real through words and images which are rooted both in the irreducible specificity and the formidable analogical capacity of this most singular of maritime cities: the city which is a mirror, now agitated, now serene, of all others. These include, along with ones which endure against all odds, those, like ancient *Altinum* (the *Ur-Venice* from pre-Roman times to late antiquity), which no longer exist; those which exist only in the mind; and those which are destined to come into being at some point in the future only to disappear³⁴.

All of these cities, like Venice, correspond to an enigma suspended precariously between land and sea, past and present, proximity and distance, surface and depth, rationality and myth: opposed qualities which co-exist in an unresolved tension that, when seen from another angle, offer a vision of profound potentiality. The result is a condition which, rather than precluding the real, exposes it to the powers of the imaginary, thereby bringing about a synthesis of urban continuity and the radically new, if only by the most indirect routes (the only reliable ones in Venice, as anyone who has tried to navigate her bridges, canals, *calle*, *rii*, *fondamenta* and *piazze* is well-aware). In this regard the Venice unveiled in this book is not only a complex and labyrinthine urban structure but is also a site that, while seeming to constrain the architectural project in more than one sense, obliquely contributes to its fruition. It does this by identifying the impetus of the project with a formal idea poised at the limit of its own realization, simultaneously pregnant with the future and guided by the past, as the city of St. Mark, more than any other city, knows how to lighten the burden of all that has come before.

³³ Puppi L., Romanelli G. (eds.), *Le Venezie possibili. Da Palladio a Le Corbusier*, Electa, Milan 1985.

³⁴ Tirelli M., *Altino antica, dai Veneti a Venezia*, Marsilio, Venezia 2011; Concina E., *A History of Venetian Architecture, op. cit.*, p. 33.

Introduzione

La teatralità viene assunta come un orizzonte per trattare della complessità strutturale che permea i luoghi che compongono, in relazione transcalare metropolitana, la *Costellazione Venetiae*.

Si ritiene che un approccio scenico al processo di lettura del luogo si accordi coerentemente con le procedure che muovono dai principi della disciplina dell'architettura; tale approccio è significativo per l'urgenza di lavorare – nella teoria e nella pratica – all'interno del preciso ambito semantico del progettare.

Esercitare un duplice sguardo scenico dall'interno all'esterno della disciplina (e viceversa), dal processo compositivo alla costruzione del progetto (e viceversa), garantisce la permanenza di quella ricchezza di contenuti che necessariamente struttura qualsiasi proposta progettuale.

Intendere *Le Venezie* e il loro territorio come teatro d'invenzione è il dato di partenza dal quale intessere una narrazione progettuale volta non solo alla comprensione della struttura territoriale vista come matrice di cultura e civiltà ma, simultaneamente, all'interpretazione-invenzione del territorio mediante l'esercizio di una necessaria finzione scenica incarnata dal progetto stesso.

In diacronia, la *Costellazione Venetiae* chiede di essere indagata secondo un proprio tempo, così come richiede uno sforzo interdisciplinare per l'investigazione dei materiali difformi che descrivono le sue urgenze contemporanee.

Tra queste assume un ruolo primario il superamento dell'oblio delle ragioni che legano il sistema insulare ad un più ampio complesso di relazioni fisico-culturali denominabile come terraferma.

Nel concreto, i contributi desiderano riflettere sul rapporto tra immaginazione e memoria, tra inventario e invenzione, facendo ricadere esiti progettuali su un territorio concepito come luogo teatrale.

Dalla necessità di individuare la metafora scenica come ambito adeguato ad osservare la complessità del reale e tradurla in progetto, la prefazione di Daniel Sherer introduce i contributi degli autori che con 'parole e progetti' danno corpo alle premesse ed ai fini posti dal progetto di architettura. Il volume si presenta come unione di parti autonome, le quali collaborano l'una con l'altra determinando un ritmo di lettura che procede per testi e immagini. L'emersione di una scala teatrale delle *Venetiae* costituisce il sottofondo – vero e proprio *Hintergrund* ricco di sonorità e spazialità – su cui si inanellano i singoli contributi.

Ricercando un legame in tensione tra arcipelago e terraferma, tutte le riflessioni che vengono presentate al lettore si costruiscono proiettivamente nella ricerca dei tempi compositivi cari al progetto veneziano: la natura transcalare dell'approccio che consente la prassi della trasposizione analogica, l'apporto scenico alla prassi del comporre, il rigore che ammette scarti e misurate eccezioni, divengono le qualità richieste all'architetto che opera all'interno dell'indefinito *Teatro Venetiae*.

Le narrazioni di Gianugo Polesello e Gian Carlo Leoncilli Massi, per differenza generazionale, di premesse operative, di approccio teorico-pratico al *topos* Venezia, attraverso la presentazione di specifiche sperimentazioni progettuali, sono capaci di esprimere parte significativa di quella ricchezza colta e difforme in fatto di approccio al progetto di architettura urbana che è riconducibile alla stessa Scuola di Venezia.

La frizione tra gli esiti di progetti difformi e di processi di analisi del luogo che fagocitano più o meno intensamente apporti letterari e mitologici, quantitativi e analitici, viene riassorbita all'interno dell'urgenza di recepire la finzione come necessità; di accogliere la necessità della finzione come un fatto che attiene al teatro territoriale in quanto sistema di luoghi di progetto. La finzione è ricercata, misurata e tratta a segno rileggendo ciò che il territorio mette in scena in termini di strutturazione fisica e mentale/mnemonica.

Nel teatro territoriale le architetture si dispongono a ricostruire la trama slabbrata di una mnemonica urbana-territoriale che necessita di nuovi apporti e di conferme, facendosi tramite di saperi antichi, misurando la costruzione dei propri spazi mediante moduli tratti da figure archetipiche ora legate alle quadre che definiscono i reticolati

delle centuriazioni di terraferma, ora a singoli dettagli compositivi. In ogni caso, il problema che si è posto come premessa alla scelta del tema sviluppato dai singoli contributi, coincide con l'esercizio di uno sguardo volto all'origine terrigena veneziana – *Venusberg* – da ricercare al di là della linea di gronda, in un altrove che oggi sembra più distante di quanto lo sia in realtà, se consideriamo la pluralità insita nello stesso nome *Venetiae*.

A tal fine, progetti quali *La Medusa Veneziana* e *La Libellula*, ultimo progetto di Gianugo Polesello a quattro mani con Gundula Rakowitz, sperimentano nodi scenici della *Costellazione Venetiae*, riemergendo come relazioni di un sistema teatrale pluriscalare nell'arco del rapporto mutevole tra le scale architettonico-metropolitana e lagunare-territoriale.

Il contributo di Alessandro Virgilio Mosetti introduce il progetto di allestimento pluriscalare ideato da Gian Carlo Leoncilli Massi per la mostra *Venezia e lo spazio scenico* promossa dalla Biennale Teatro/Architettura del 1979. Lavorando sulla categoria dell'effimero, l'ipotesi progettuale identifica le architetture di cui si compone come crisalidi di memoria capaci di manipolare la teatralità al fine della rappresentazione di un grado maggiore di complessità del reale che non può essere perseguito nel solo esercizio della pratica teatrale.

In *Venezia Criptica*, il tema di ricerca si declina partendo dall'assunto di inventare un foro ipogeo – il doppio riferito all'invaso di Piazza San Marco – tale da configurarsi come una sala ipostila il cui disegno planimetrico materializza segni di per sé immateriali, tracce, citazioni, giaciture di strutture non più esistenti che tornano ad essere strutture di un teatro architettonico posto a sostegno di una mnemonica urbana.

Per giungere a tal fine, risulta centrale la riflessione degli autori intorno alla peculiare metodologia compositiva riassumibile nell'espressione *mise-en-scène* dello spazio. Tra le parole e i progetti, i contributi intendono sfaccettare le ricadute in termini di un approccio scenico al progetto di architettura assumendo il medesimo luogo Venezia – una singolarità che introietta una pluralità di luoghi – come ambito spaziale nel quale sperimentare i propri contenuti teorici.

È nella lettura del carattere difforme dei progetti presentati che si manifesta l'alto grado di variabilità, ibridazione e mutevolezza capace di rispecchiare quello stesso carattere proteiforme che definisce l'artificio del teatro lagunare veneziano. Tale difformità esprime le potenzialità di una ricerca segnata dal suo carattere plurale e aperto.





Theatrum Venetiae

Alessandro Virgilio Mosetti

Si decide che il *Teatro Venetiae* sia lo spazio nel quale fare accadere l'invenzione; tale spazio scenico è simultaneamente reale e mentale; possiede una propria struttura fisica – da leggere in rapporto simultaneo e transcalare – così è definibile come ambito di pensiero nel quale l'invenzione, per prodursi, necessita degli artifici tecnicamente riconducibili alla pratica della *mise-en-scène* e quindi all'esercizio di una necessaria finzione alla quale partecipa, in parole e progetto, l'architettura.

Ma quale teatro per il *Teatro Venetiae*?

Ponendo lo sguardo all'etimologia¹, il termine *teatro* assume la stessa radice – *theà* – riferita all'azione del guardare meravigliato e qualora venga accostato a definizione del luogo-territorio, ne significa la natura metaforica e duale: luogo/spazio di rappresentazione di una necessaria

¹ “teàtro *fr.* théâtre; *sp.* teatro; *port.* teatro: *lat.* theàtrum dal *gr.* theàtron propr. luogo destinato agli spettacoli, da theà il guardare, vista, theà-omai guardo, riguardo, considero [Cfr. theàma spettacolo e propr. la cosa a cui si guarda | theatès spettatore], le quali voci fanno capo alla stessa radice di thayma ammirazione, meraviglia, thaymàxò ammiro, guardo con meraviglia, thaymastòs mirabile [...]”, da Pianigiani O., voce *teatro*, in *Vocabolario Etimologico*, ed. a cura di Meldi D., Edizioni Polaris, Faenza 1991, p. 1414; “teoria *gr.* theòria propr. osservazione, lo stare osservando, da theòròs spettatore accanto a theòreò sono spettatore, considero, contemplo, dalla stessa radice di theàò-mai guardo (vedi *Teatro* e Cfr. *Teo-remà*). Dottrina speculativa che consiste nell'investigazione della verità, fatta astrazione della pratica alla quale dà norma”, da Pianigiani O., voce *teoria*, ed. a cura di Meldi D., Edizioni Polaris, Faenza 1991, p. 1422.



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