



# *Athens Journal of Architecture*

Quarterly Academic Periodical,

Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024

URL: <https://www.athensjournals.gr/aja>

Email: [journals@atiner.gr](mailto:journals@atiner.gr)

e-ISSN: 2407-9472 DOI: 10.30958/aja



## Front Pages

FRANCESCO DEL SOLE

[Neo-Baroque Flowers in Contemporary Architecture](#)

LUCA LAZZARINI, ELENA OSTANEL & EZIO MICELLI

[Networks Cultivating Values: Insights from Five Culture-based Regeneration Projects in Italy](#)

VINCENZO MOSCHETTI

[Into the Storm: A Crossing through the Venetian Wilderness: Architectures 1979-1999](#)

MARTINA CASTALDI & AGOSTINA MARIA GIUSTO

[The Drawn Garden: Historical, Iconographical and Representative Analysis through Time of the "Villa Di Livia" in Rome](#)

OLIVIA LONGO

[The After Image Phenomenon between Immaterial and Hyper-Material Architectures: Hypothesis on the Influence of Italian Architecture at the Time of the Cold War](#)

# Athens Journal of Architecture

*Published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)*

## Editors

- **Dr. Nicholas N. Patricios**, Vice President of Strategic Planning & Analysis, ATINER and Professor & Dean Emeritus, School of Architecture, University of Miami, USA

## Co-Editors

- **Dr. Clara Germana Gonçalves**, Head, Architecture Unit, ATINER & Researcher, CITAD (Centro de Investigação em Território, Arquitectura e Design), Lusíada University and Associate Professor, ISMAT (Instituto Superior Manuel Teixeira Gomes), Portugal.
- **Dr. Fatih Rifki**, Academic Member, ATINER & Professor, Montana State University, USA.
- **Dr. Jesus J. Lara**, Academic Member, ATINER & Associate Professor, The Ohio State University, USA.
- **Dr. Giulia Pellegri**, Vice Dean & Associate Professor, Architecture-Polytechnic School, University of Genoa, Italy.

## Editorial & Reviewers' Board

<https://www.athensjournals.gr/aja/eb>

## Administration of the Journal

1. Vice President of Publications: Dr Zoe Boutsoli
2. General Managing Editor of all ATINER's Publications: Ms. Afrodete Papanikou
3. ICT Managing Editor of all ATINER's Publications: Mr. Kostas Spyropoulos
4. Managing Editor of this Journal: Ms. Olga Gkounta

\*\*\*\*\*

*ATINER is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. ATINER is an independent and non-profit Association with a Mission to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Both these historic places are within walking distance from ATINER's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens "...is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War). It is ATINER's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in ATINER's name.*

\*\*\*\*\*

The *Athens Journal of Architecture (AJA)* is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of architecture. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the [Architecture Unit](#) of the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER). All papers are subject to ATINER's [Publication Ethical Policy and Statement](#).

The Athens Journal of Architecture  
ISSN NUMBER: 2407-9472- DOI: 10.30958/aja  
Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024  
Download the entire issue ([PDF](#))

<b><u>Front Pages</u></b>	i-viii
<b><u>Neo-Baroque Flowers in Contemporary Architecture</u></b> <i>Francesco Del Sole</i>	223
<b><u>Networks Cultivating Values: Insights from Five Culture-based Regeneration Projects in Italy</u></b> <i>Luca Lazzarini, Elena Ostanel &amp; Ezio Micelli</i>	239
<b><u>Into the Storm: A Crossing through the Venetian Wilderness: Architectures 1979-1999</u></b> <i>Vincenzo Moschetti</i>	257
<b><u>The Drawn Garden: Historical, Iconographical and Representative Analysis through Time of the “Villa Di Livia” in Rome</u></b> <i>Martina Castaldi &amp; Agostina Maria Giusto</i>	279
<b><u>The After Image Phenomenon between Immaterial and Hyper-Material Architectures: Hypothesis on the Influence of Italian Architecture at the Time of the Cold War</u></b> <i>Olivia Longo</i>	311

# Athens Journal of Architecture

## Editorial and Reviewers' Board

### Editor

- **Dr. Nicholas N. Patricios**, Vice President of Strategic Planning & Analysis, ATINER and Professor & Dean Emeritus, School of Architecture, University of Miami, USA.

### Co-Editors

- **Dr. Clara Germana Gonçalves**, Head, Architecture Unit, ATINER & Researcher, CITAD (Centro de Investigação em Território, Arquitetura e Design), Lusíada University and Associate Professor, ISMAT (Instituto Superior Manuel Teixeira Gomes), Portugal.
- **Dr. Fatih Rifki**, Academic Member, ATINER & Professor, Montana State University, USA.
- **Dr. Jesus J. Lara**, Academic Member, ATINER & Associate Professor, The Ohio State University, USA.
- **Dr. Giulia Pellegrini**, Vice Dean & Associate Professor, Architecture-Polytechnic School, University of Genoa, Italy.

### Editorial Board

- Dr. Arthur Chen, Academic Member, ATINER & Director, Center for World Heritage Studies, School of Architecture, University of Minnesota, USA.
- Dr. Fatih A. Rifki, Professor, Montana State University, USA.
- Dr. Nico Kotze, Professor, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Dr. Eren Erdener, Professor Emeritus, The University of Oklahoma, USA.
- Dr. William Douglas, Professor & Associate Dean, College of Art & Design, Louisiana State University, USA.
- Dr. Angus Shuenn-Ren Liou, Professor & Vice Dean, College of Planning and Design, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan.
- Dr. Vimolsiddhi Horayangkura, Professor, Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Thammasat University, Thailand.
- Dr. Stefania Mornati, Professor, Department of Civil Engineering and Computer Science Engineering, University of Rome, Italy.
- Mr. Ryadi Adityavarman, Associate Professor, Kansas State University, USA.
- Dr. David A. Badillo, Associate Professor, City University of New York, USA.
- Dr. Wah Sang Wong, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
- Dr. Milica Muminovic, Assistant Professor, University of Canberra, Australia.
- Dr. Levent Kara, Assistant Professor, School of Architecture and Community Design, University of South Florida, USA.
- Dr. Nik Nikolov, Assistant Professor, Lehigh University, USA.
- Dr. Zeynep Akture, Assistant Professor, Izmir Institute of Technology -Department of Architecture, Turkey.
- Dr. François Blanciak, Lecturer, Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, University of Sydney, Australia.
- Dr. Nick McCullen, Lecturer, Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering, University of Bath, UK.
- Dr. Gehan Selim, Lecturer, School of Architecture, Planning and Civil Engineering, Queens' University Belfast, United Kingdom.
- Dr. Anna Hooper, Tutor/Researcher, Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne, Australia.
- Dr. Ana Peric, Lecturer & Chair of Spatial Development, Institute for Spatial and Landscape Development, ETH Zurich.
- Dr. Kees Doevendans, Researcher, Department of the Built Environment, Technical University of Eindhoven, The Netherlands.
- Dr. Carlos Alberto Tello, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Montreal, Canada.

- **General Managing Editor of all ATINER's Publications:** Ms. Afrodete Papanikou
- **ICT Managing Editor of all ATINER's Publications:** Mr. Kostas Spyropoulos
- **Managing Editor of this Journal:** Ms. Olga Gkounta ([bio](#))

### **Reviewers' Board**

[Click Here](#)

# President's Message

All ATINER's publications including its e-journals are open access without any costs (submission, processing, publishing, open access paid by authors, open access paid by readers etc.) and is independent of presentations at any of the many small events (conferences, symposiums, forums, colloquiums, courses, roundtable discussions) organized by ATINER throughout the year and entail significant costs of participating. The intellectual property rights of the submitting papers remain with the author. Before you submit, please make sure your paper meets the [basic academic standards](#), which includes proper English. Some articles will be selected from the numerous papers that have been presented at the various annual international academic conferences organized by the different divisions and units of the Athens Institute for Education and Research. The plethora of papers presented every year will enable the editorial board of each journal to select the best, and in so doing produce a top-quality academic journal. In addition to papers presented, ATINER will encourage the independent submission of papers to be evaluated for publication.

The current issue is the third of the tenth volume of the *Athens Journal of Architecture* (AJA), **published by the [Architecture Unit](#) of ATINER**

Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
ATINER



## Athens Institute for Education and Research

### *A World Association of Academics and Researchers*

#### 14<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Architecture

8-11 July 2024, Athens, Greece

The [Architecture Unit](#) of ATINER, will hold its 14<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Architecture, 8-11 July 2024, Athens, Greece sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Architecture](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers from all areas of Architecture. You may participate as stream organizer, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2024/FORM-ARC.doc>).

#### Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Nicholas N. Patricios**, Vice President of Strategic Planning & Analysis, ATINER and Professor & Dean Emeritus, School of Architecture, University of Miami, USA.
- **Dr. Clara Germana Gonçalves**, Head, Architecture Unit, ATINER & Researcher, CITAD (Centro de Investigação em Território, Arquitectura e Design), Lusíada University and Associate Professor, ISMAT (Instituto Superior Manuel Teixeira Gomes), Portugal.
- **Dr. Fatih Rifki**, Academic Member, ATINER & Professor, Montana State University, USA.
- **Dr Anna Hooper**, Academic Member, ATINER, Coordinator, Lecturer, Lead Tutor, Ormond College and Melbourne School of Design, The University of Melbourne, Australia.
- **Dr. Maria João Dos Reis Moreira Soares**, Academic Member, ATINER & Associate Professor, Lusíada University – Lisbon, and Research Fellow, CITAD – Research Centre on Territory, Architecture & Design, Portugal.

#### Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **DEADLINE CLOSED**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **10 June 2024**

#### Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Atiner.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

More information can be found here: <https://www.atiner.gr/social-program>

#### Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€

Details can be found at: <https://www.atiner.gr/fees>



## Athens Institute for Education and Research

### *A World Association of Academics and Researchers*

#### **15<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Urban Studies & Planning, 2-5 June 2025, Athens, Greece**

The [Architecture Unit](#) in collaboration with the [Social Sciences Division](#) of the ATINER will organize its **15<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Urban Studies & Planning, 2-5 June 2025, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Architecture](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers from all areas of social sciences such as urban sociology, urban geography, urban design, urban planning, architecture, etc. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair of a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2025/FORM-PLA.doc>).

#### **Important Dates**

- Abstract Submission: **29 October 2024**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **5 May 2025**

#### **Academic Members Responsible for the Conference**

- **Dr. Nicholas N. Patricios**, Vice President of Strategic Planning & Analysis, ATINER and Professor & Dean Emeritus, School of Architecture, University of Miami, USA.
- **Dr. Virginia Sisiopiku**, Head, Transportation Engineering Unit, ATINER, & Associate Professor, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, USA.
- **Dr. Jesus J. Lara**, Academic Member, ATINER & Associate Professor, The Ohio State University, USA.
- **Dr. Giulia Pellegri**, Associate Professor, Architecture-Polytechnic School, University of Genoa, Italy.

#### **Social and Educational Program**

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Atiner.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

More information can be found here: <https://www.atiner.gr/social-program>

#### **Conference Fees**

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€

Details can be found at: <https://www.atiner.gr/fees>





## Neo-Baroque Flowers in Contemporary Architecture

By Francesco Del Sole \*

*Many historians have attempted to define Neo-Baroque in contemporary architecture. Yet, leafing through the manuals, it is not possible to find a definition of this phenomenon, described as “a hypothesis waiting to be developed”. This paper attempts to enter the debate, defining Neo-Baroque not as a mere citation practice, but as a cultural style that identifies today’s society, made of instability and restless expectations. To better understand the contemporary Neo-Baroque soul, the architectural historian must move using those same tools that animate Baroque aesthetics, trying to connect different times and concepts in order to realize relational subtleties that, in Baroque treatises, “are called flowers”. The formal value of Baroque architecture was rehabilitated in the 20th century by architects such as Paolo Portoghesi who, in parallel with the writing of the first manuals on the Baroque, intrinsically re-proposed neo-Baroque forms in his projects, making his architecture “blossom” through that dynamic of folds that is well described by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. This folding will become a real working method for architects of the caliber of Frank Gehry who stretch and distend forms to replace the lost center with the fragmentation of viewpoints. Through an excursus of the most important “neo-Baroque flowers” of contemporary architecture, the contribution is an invitation to reflect on that aesthetic in which fold upon fold, fold within the fold, the neo-Baroque flowers express the same qualities as the flowers present in 17th-century architecture in plan and ornament: ephemeral, precarious, but also cultured citations and, in the words of Eugene D’Ors, “forms that fly”.*

### Introduction: on the Notion of Neo-Baroque

In the pages of the “Enciclopedia Treccani”, Neo-Baroque is described in a few lines as a current of taste in society between the 19th and 20th centuries that falsifies Baroque forms while waiting to find its own *esprit nouveau*.<sup>1</sup> In this wake, studies have also recently sprung up such as that of Stephen Calloway, who speaks of Neo-Baroque as a *Baroque Baroque*, a twentieth-century revaluation of the (Baroque) culture of excess.<sup>2</sup>

Gillo Dorfles, in an essay published in 1951, was one of the first to find analogies and derivations of the Baroque age in contemporary architecture, not

---

\*Assistant Professor, Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Salento, Italy.

1. “Neobaroque”, Treccani, accessed January 17, 2024, <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/neobarocco/>.

2. Stephen Calloway, *Baroque baroque: the culture of excess* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995). They seem to echo the definitions of Baroque that have been known since the 18th century and survived until Benedetto Croce, according to which everything Baroque “responds to the law of libitus, of convenience, of caprice”; Benedetto Croce, *Storia dell’età barocca in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1929), p. 25.

only on a formal level but above all on a spiritual one.<sup>3</sup> The author specifies that “the Baroque is something well-defined and linked - historically and aesthetically - to a particular era (the 17th century) of which our age can be considered as the extension and extreme offshoot”.<sup>4</sup> Dorfles’ intuitions have been accompanied over the years both by a rehabilitation of the historical value of Baroque architecture, and by Omar Calabrese’s acute investigation who, in 1987, published *L’età Neobarocca*.<sup>5</sup> The book, which has had great critical success, outlines an analysis of today’s world that, thanks to a series of analogies, unconsciously rediscovers Baroque values not only in the academic field.<sup>6</sup> Just as in the 17th century Galileo, Copernicus, and Kepler challenged the certainties of science and described a world in which man lost his centrality, so today physics is knotted around the theory of chaos and mathematics speaks of phenomena that resist universal laws, introducing concepts such as turbulence, fluctuations and conflicts.

The moment we realize that chaos is not only the prerogative of infinite space but also of the inner universe of each of us, Neo-Baroque is born. It is an aesthetic wave (associated by some with the metaphysics of chaos) traceable in artistic, literary, philosophical and mass-media production, with behaviour, oriented towards fragmentariness, instability and the fascination of complexity. There is a hint of nostalgia for that idea of speed that intoxicated the Futurists with optimism a hundred years ago and which today leaves us in an uneasy expectation, as if the 21st century should still give us what we think we deserve.

Calabrese’s study intentionally closes without claiming to draw precise contours around the term Neo-Baroque, described as “a provisional definition, a hypothesis waiting to be developed”.<sup>7</sup>

What we intend to propose here is an attempt to pursue what the author has proposed to the young historians of the various disciplines, namely to investigate the chaotic complexity of the phenomenon by providing not an overall image, but a few peculiar characters, a particular point of view that is capable of producing “arrows, connecting signs, hatching lines that establish rhymes”<sup>8</sup> between the Baroque era and today’s world.

In architecture, the use of metaphor is the fil rouge that allows us to understand how Baroque form (made not only of ellipses, spirals and folds of matter, but above all “of spatial liberation, mental liberation from rules..., from elementary

---

3. Gillo Dorfles, *Barocco nell’architettura moderna* (Milan: Tamburini, 1951). In Dorfles’ analysis, the true Neo-Baroque, nourished throughout the 20th century by “preparatory movements” such as Art Nouveau and leading figures such as Mendelsohn, is realized in the organic rationalism of Alvar Aalto.

4. Ibid, 17.

5. Omar Calabrese, *L’età neobarocca* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1987). The book was republished in 2013 under the title *The Neo-Baroque. Form and Dynamics of Contemporary Culture*. In addition to containing a preface by Umberto Eco, the volume collects Calabrese’s subsequent reflections on the Neo baroque in a single tome.

6. It echoes Eugenio D’Ors’ theory of *constants* according to which if the Classical produces genres, the Baroque degenerates and produces imbalances, especially sentimental ones. See Eugenio D’Ors, *Del Barocco*, edited by Luciano Anceschi (Milan: Rosa & Ballo, 1945).

7. Stefano Jacovello, “Appunti per domani”, in *Il Neobarocco. Forme e dinamiche della cultura contemporanea*, ed. Omar Calabrese (Lucca: Volo Publisher, 2013), 412.

8. Ibid.

geometry and from staticity”<sup>9</sup>) has been transformed into a neo-Baroque formula,<sup>10</sup> which has produced today those same fantastic fabrications that, in seventeenth-century treatises, are called “flowers”.<sup>11</sup>

### The Century of Flowers

The flower is the metaphor chosen by the literati to represent the baroque era in its entirety. This is not just a linguistic game, considering that there was a real fashion that involved the whole of seventeenth-century society. Stimulated by the invasion of exotic plants from America and the Orient, the European world proposed the flower garden as a new type of exhibition typology, supported by specialist literature such as Giovan Battista Ferrari’s famous treatise on floriculture (1633).<sup>12</sup> There could not have been a better metaphor to illustrate a world that celebrates the ephemeral and *humana fragilitas*, in which the Baroque intellectual himself seems to have the sole aim of “frolicking in a lonely garden”.<sup>13</sup>

The natural world speaks to men as if it were a great poetic book, making the boundary between reality and artifice ever more uncertain: the motions of the soul are likened to the swaying of meadows in the wind, and flowers themselves are “elegant figures and lively witticisms of ingenious nature”.<sup>14</sup> The flower thus becomes the epicentre and pretext for innumerable linguistic artifices: from botanists to scientific illustrators, all the arts feed on this metaphor, since wit “illustrates its sayings with [...] flowery beauties”.<sup>15</sup> Gian Battista Marino himself, in his *Adonis*, makes the flower the means of psychological consolation, because when man transforms himself into it, he resolves all contrasts within himself.

Even the post-Tridentine Church allows itself to be overwhelmed by the Baroque spirit, boasting that it has “finally found a demure flora that does not contaminate customs, but sows flowers in the souls better than in the earth”.<sup>16</sup> It is no coincidence that the collections of texts useful for ceremonies of worship are

---

9. Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), 86.

10. An important role plays, in the revival of Baroque forms, the so-called *aesthetics of repetition*, made up of variations within repetition, repetitions within repetition. See on this subject Calabrese, *L'età neobarocca*, 21-48.

11. “Le argutie dei poeti si chiamano fiori” [The witticisms of poets are called flowers]; Emanuele Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico, o sia Idea dell'arguta et ingenua elocutione...* (Venice: Baglioni, 1663), 67.

12. Giovan Battista Ferrari, *Flora, ovvero cultura dei fiori* (Rome: Facciotti, 1638).

13. Pietro Sforza Pallavicino, *Trattato dello stile e del dialogo* (Rome: 1646 – ed. 1828), 76.

14. Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, 73.

15. Sforza Pallavicino, *Trattato dello stile e del dialogo*, 131. Writing is a “sowing of words over the page” and the individual terms with which the poet plays in order to receive “the applause of the hearers for the words” are mere *leaves*, raw material on which to build modernity: Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, 18, 123. Gracián speaks precisely of the existence of a *foliage of words* at the beginning of Baroque composition. See Baltasar Gracián, *L'acutezza e l'arte dell'ingegno*, trans. Giulia Poggi (Sesto San Giovanni: Aesthetica, 2020).

16. Ferrari, *Flora, ovvero cultura dei fiori*, Introduction. Ferrari’s *Flora* is now purified of all ancient elements of pagan licentiousness, because it belongs to that same poetic universe, Christian and anti-Marinist, that fuels the literary *otia* of Urban VIII and his nephew Francis.

called *florileges*, in which those flowers of holiness that define the “flowery way to walk to Heaven”<sup>17</sup> are displayed. Architects of the calibre of Cosimo Fanzago and Giuseppe Zimbalo display all their originality in the decorative efflorescence of their architectural works, visually translating the Counter-Reformation doctrine, permeated with botanical symbols and floral references in the orations as in the sermons. The blossoming of the new creed therefore also involved the sacred space, which, from the 17th century onwards, was nourished by fresh flowers, marble and stone flowers, silver branches on altars and floral arabesques even in liturgical vestments.<sup>18</sup>

It can certainly be said that the Baroque man, both in the sacred and profane spheres, identifies himself with a peregrine flower that intends to “compete with the vagueness of the heavens” in order to “fabricate for the century of flowers almost a new world”.<sup>19</sup>

### Paolo Portoghesi: The Neo-Baroque Flower Garden

If the Baroque intellectual not only celebrated the beauty of the flower, but also codified it mathematically - see Guido Grandi's volume entitled *I fiori geometrici* - the Neo-Baroque architect understands that, before seeing a flower blossom, “a copious fruit of labour” is required, because “not everything every terren produces”.<sup>20</sup>

The first sowers, those who rehabilitated the formal value of the Baroque and its architecture during the 20th century, were prominent figures such as Wölfflin, Brinckmann, Calcaterra, Morpurgo Tagliabue, Argan, Maurizio and Marcello Fagiolo. It was realized as early as the 1960s that the 17th century had to be brought up to date and that there was a great modernity in that Baroque demonized by Croce aesthetics. Step by step, the apparent seventeenth-century irrationality was codified as a superior rationality, as “from the logic and geometry of common notion we pass to transcendental logic and geometry”.<sup>21</sup>

It may well be said that the season of intense flowering began precisely in 1980.<sup>22</sup> In that year, the Baroque flourished again, both with the multiplication of conferences and debates on Gracián and his notion of *agudeza*, and with international initiatives aimed at the dissemination of new lines of historical-artistic research on the subject (see the numerous Baroque Study Centres that

---

17. Ibid, 2.

18. On this subject see Maria Concetta Di Natale, “Frasche e fiori d’argento per gli altari”, in *Arredare il sacro. Artisti, opere e committenti in Sicilia dal Medioevo al Contemporaneo*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, Maurizio Vitella (Milan: Skira, 2015), 63-80.

19. Ferrari, *Flora, ovvero cultura dei fiori*, I, 38.

20. Ibid, 73.

21. Giulio Carlo Argan, *Storia dell’arte italiana* (Florence: Sansoni, 1968), 374.

22. Marcello Fagiolo, “Argan, il Barocco e il Centro di Studi su Roma presso l’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei”, in *Giulio Carlo Argan intellettuale e storico dell’arte*, ed. Carlo Gamba (Milano: Electa, 2012).

sprung up all over Italy, promoted by Marcello Fagiolo).<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Paolo Portoghesi inaugurated a *Strada Novissima* from which to start again, a place where twenty architects captured images and suggestions from the *presence of the past* in that year's Biennale.

It is not possible to understand Portoghesi's architecture if one does not perceive the weight he attaches to the Baroque tradition that is a constant presence in his projects. The neo-Baroque that has blossomed in Portoghesi is a "fruit of delight". It is a graft that combines the rediscovery of Baroque architecture - from a very young age he wrote monographs on Borromini and Guarini<sup>24</sup> - with an attempt to bring to life in "modern language fragments deduced from the experiences of past eras, distant in time and space and chosen as (...) prophecies of modernity".<sup>25</sup>

It could be said that Portoghesi has created, over the course of his professional career, a very personal garden of neo-Baroque flowers: of different varieties and colours, cultivated at different times and in different ways, his flowers appear to be connected by sharpness, acts of genius that have created unexpected approaches, as in a great composition in which "at the top of the goal rises the most beautiful flower".<sup>26</sup>

Reasoning on the words of masters such as Bruno Taut, who, in *The Dissolution of Cities* (1920), called for a destruction of the "houses of stone producing hearts of stone"<sup>27</sup> so that the earth would once again generate "valleys in the shape of flowers"<sup>28</sup>, Portoghesi does not demonize the architecture of his time, but makes a critical judgement on it, demonstrating that it is possible to go beyond righteousness. He thus constructs those floral crystals imagined by Taut by starting out precisely from the Baroque architects who, centuries earlier, had skillfully used the curve and, at the same time, from the archetypes of centrality par excellence: the star, the flower and the interpenetration of both.

Just think of the recurring motif in Borromini's masterpiece, the church of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza; everything revolves around star symbolism, from the plan to the dome to the ornamentation.<sup>29</sup> In Portoghesi's research, in Sant'Ivo "what

23. In 1982, the Study Centre on the Baroque in Sicily and the Study Centre on the Baroque in Lecce were established. In the following decades, six more Baroque Study Centres were established in Naples, Tuscany, Umbria, Liguria, Calabria and Malta.

24. The first monograph on Guarino Guarini is from 1956, the one on Borromini (recently reprinted with additions and clarifications) is from 1967.

25. Paolo Portoghesi, *Roma/Amor* (Venice: Marsilio, 2019), 34. It is the same Baroque intellectuals who suggest how important the poetics of theft, of imitating "but with improvement", of emulating for the creation of "the admirable fake"; Sforza Pallavicino, *Trattato dello stile e del dialogo*, 89, 92.

26. Ferrari, *Flora, ovvero cultura dei fiori*, 396.

27. Bruno Taut, *La dissoluzione delle città*, trans. Giacomo Ricci (Naples: Archigrafica, 2008), 5.

28. Cities flourish, according to Taut, literally. He himself, after the subtitle the earth as a good habitation, in fact says that "of course it is only a utopia and a brief entertainment, though provided with documentation in the literary appendix for the gentle reader. A parable, or (albeit somewhat premature) paraphrase of the third millennium A.D."; Ibid, 5.

29. The plan, central but with a complex geometry, is obtained by interpenetrating two triangles, so as to obtain a six-pointed star motif, which includes a regular hexagon in the centre.

weighs seems to rise into the air with primitive, natural energy” and the star dome is compared to a Germanic Iris due to the compositional affinity of the forms, made of “two groups of three equiangular symmetry axes rotated by 30 degrees” (Figure. 1a-b).<sup>50</sup>

If in Sant’Ivo the star is transformed into a flower, in the Calcata garden it is the flower that crystallizes into a star. Standing out amidst the greenery of a garden made of memories is a stone tulip, a “fountain of eternal youth” that opens up to the sky in the form of a star, whose angular silhouette is also projected horizontally onto the geometric design of the boxwood beds.<sup>31</sup> Referring back to a Marian symbolism that often recalls the flower-star dynamic in the litanies of the Rosary,<sup>32</sup> this combination seemed the best form for the construction of the church of S. Maria della Pace in Terni (1997-2003). The building is designed as a space pressed outwards by the folding walls and modelled by the light roof so that it expands outwards, almost as if to represent the complementary relationship between prayer rising upwards and divine love descending downwards.

Over time, the star motif became recurrent in the architect’s works,<sup>33</sup> until it was masterfully repeated in the early 2000s in the Church of Saints Cornelius and Cyprian in Calcata, where the alternation of tufa and wood in the tiburium creates a chromatic play that recalls the silhouette of a flower with a yellow pistil and white petals, a real star of Bethlehem (Figure 1c-d). If the beauty of lotus flowers immersed in water inspired the winning design of an international competition for a new jetty on the Fregene waterfront (2006-2007) (Figure 2a), the German iris inspired a design for a car park along Rome’s eastern ring road (1988) (Figure 2c). The design for a “megastore” (2004), on the other hand, is a gerbera with enormous petals (Figure 2b), while there is no shortage of studies on the theme of the rose, understood as a “turbine of petals” (Figure 3b).

The Breathing Tower in Shanghai synthesises the “dualism of life” in a living but still immature bud, a virtual movement of dilation and contraction suggested by the course of the three curved surfaces enclosing the central void (Figure 3c);

---

The points of the base star are treated differently: three turn into concave semicircular niches, the others are mixtilinear, with convexities broken up by small niches. The star shape is maintained up to the dome, which is set directly on the walls, eliminating connecting elements with the body of the building, and is still decorated with stars, alternating eight and six-pointed. Finally, all the stars in the dome, alternately eight and six-pointed, are gradually smaller and create a perspective effect that suggests an immense height.

The church of Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza was also the starting point for the composition of the church of the Holy Family in Fratte, Salerno. In that case, forgetting the stellar symbolism, the geometric symmetry of Borromini’s plan was broken down by linking the various parts according to “a process of growth and fractal self-similarity”; Paolo Portoghesi, *Poesia della curva* (Rome: Gangemi, 2020), 187.

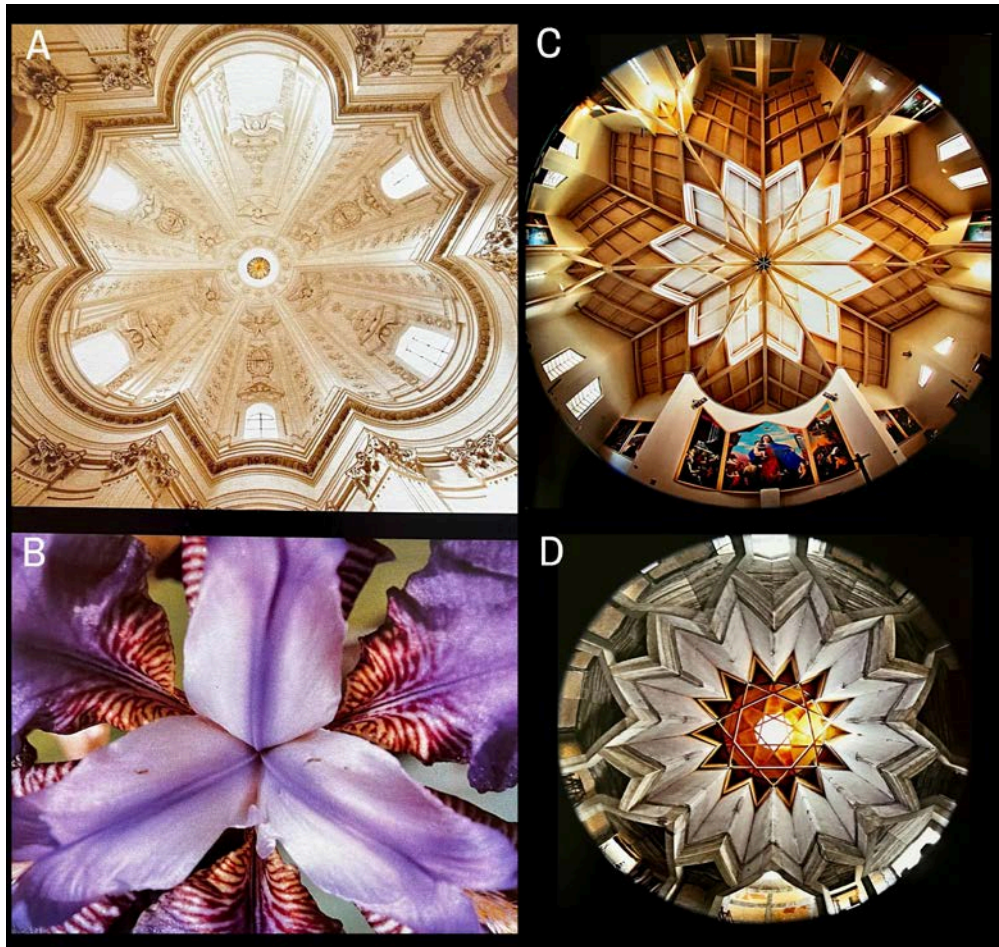
30. Paolo Portoghesi, *Natura e architettura* (Milan: Skira, 1999), 354.

31. Bruno Taut also combined the construction of the *great flower* (a sanctuary to absorb solar energy with glass plates, lenses and burning mirrors) with the *great star* (a crystal temple).

32. In the litanies recited during the rosary, Mary is both *Mystical Rose* and *Morning Star*.

33. See for example the glass roofing of the central atrium in the headquarters of the Academy of Fine Arts in L’Aquila (1978-95), the project for the unification of the Vallo di Diano municipalities in the province of Salerno (1980), the Piazza Madonna delle Grazie in S. Marco in Lamis (1987-2000) and many others.

the upward-facing, not yet blossomed lily of an office tower in Treviso (2003; Figure 2d) belongs to the same category.



**Figures 1a-b.** *The Dome of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza (Rome, Italy) Compared to the Form of a German Iris*; **Figures 1c-d.** *The Star Shape of the Domes by Paolo Portoghesi in the Church of S. Maria della Pace in Terni (Italy) and in the Church of Saints Cornelius and Cyprian in Calcata (Italy)*

The key to Portoghesi's projects is a tight opposition to the unique and invariable right angle. As Argan wrote, his historical method demonstrates that "poetics is not the premise, but the ethical necessity of the commitment to the operational level of art".<sup>34</sup> His compositional research is nourished by folds of matter that internalize the Baroque lesson and reflect the secret that Gilles Deleuze discovered in the same years, that of the *folds of the soul*. The philosopher, analytically rereading Leibniz, affirms that "there seems to be a long Baroque line that passes through the fold, bringing together architects, painters, musicians,

34. Giulio Carlo Argan, Mario Pisani (eds.), *Il punto su Paolo Portoghesi* (Rome: Gangemi, 1993).

poets”;<sup>35</sup> and it is precisely there, among the folds of substance, that we must seek the forms of style. The fold is power that opens up infinite possibilities.

If the Baroque, in the words of Deleuze, “continually produced folds”<sup>36</sup> by inventing the infinite operation of stretching/distending, contracting/dilating, the neo-Baroque architect does not have to ask himself the problem of how to finish the fold, but how to take it to infinity. In fact, a continuous fold defines Portoghesi’s hand when he imagines a new bouquet of flowers in 2019, made of only dahlias (Figure 3a). Situated in the heart of Rome’s Talenti district, the Belvedere “Le Dalie” complex expresses a perfect match with both the Rione Rinascimento (the project completed by Portoghesi ten years earlier) and the landscape in which it is located: a large park that retains the connotations of the Roman countryside. The building is a tribute to the topicality of Borromini’s work: two blocks dialogue in a relationship of harmonic tension thanks to the curvilinear course of the balcony overhangs. In Portoghesi’s words, it is important that “it has been given a name that identifies not so much the inspiration as a characteristic that is undoubtedly of this architecture, that is, the fact that it takes up the regularity and at the same time the richness that is characteristic of flowers”.<sup>37</sup> We are faced with a veritable intellectual alliteration: the Baroque is distinguished by a transcendental dimension aspiring to the infinite, and Portoghesi represents the demiurge of the non-earthly who, through a language of which Borromini remains the paradigm and the flower the metaphor of his own inspiration, inaugurates that neo-Baroque line that helps us not to forget how necessary it is to *inhabit the Earth poetically*.<sup>38</sup>

---

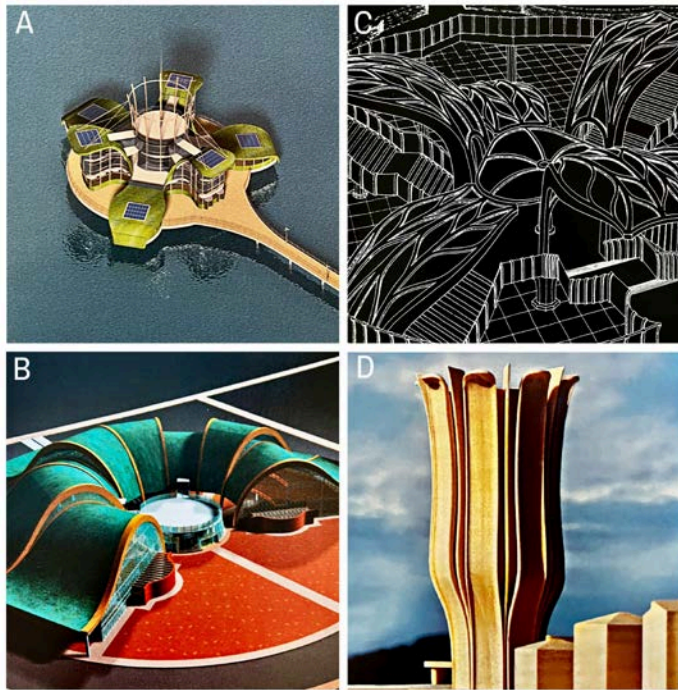
35. Gilles Deleuze, *La piega. Leibniz e il Barocco*, trans. Davide Tarizzo (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), 57. For a closer look at Deleuze’s philosophy and Bernini’s work see Maria João Moreira Soares & Clara Germana Gonçalves, “Gilles Deleuze and Bernini’s Bel Composto: From Theatricality to a Living-montage,” *Athens Journal of Architecture* 8, no. 4 (2022): 315-336.

36. Ibid, 5.

37. The architect’s words come from an interview during the inauguration of the architectural work. See: <https://www.arketipomagazine.it/complesso-residenziale-belvedere-le-dalie-roma-paolo-portoghesi/> (Accessed January 26, 2024).

38. One of Portoghesi’s latest publications, in collaboration with his wife Giovanna Massobrio, is precisely entitled *Abitare poeticamente la terra. La casa, lo studio e il giardino di Calcata*. This locution has been transferred to architecture by the author taking as reference other studies in the literary and philosophical field by scholars such as Giachery who, in turn, proposes a series of variations on a single theme taken from a phrase by Friedrich Hölderlin (Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnt der Mensch auf dieser Erde, “Full of merit, but poetically, dwells man on this earth”).





**Figure 2a.** P. Portoghesi, *Project for an International Competition for a New Jetty on the Fregene Waterfront* (2006-2007); **Figure 2b.** P. Portoghesi, *Project for a “Megastore”* (2004); **Figure 2c.** P. Portoghesi, *Project for a Car Park Along Rome’s Eastern Ring Road* (1988); **Figure 2d.** P. Portoghesi, *Project for an Office Tower in Treviso* (2003)



**Figure 3a.** P. Portoghesi, *View of the Belvedere “Le Dalie” complex* (Rome, 2019); **Figure 3b.** P. Portoghesi, *Studies on the theme of the rose*; **Figure 3c.** P. Portoghesi, *Project for the Breathing Tower in Shanghai*;

### Frank Gehry: From Garden to Neo-Baroque Flower Field

Paolo Portoghesi's work has been distinguished by a renewed enthusiasm attributed to historical citation, understood as the analogical juxtaposition of fragments.<sup>39</sup> This is the greatest legacy of post-modernism:<sup>40</sup> to produce a reflection on the true nature of the discipline of architecture, which must be understood first and foremost as an aesthetic process, not an exclusively utilitarian one; an architecture that has a different attitude towards the past and is capable of creating flowers of various species that "imitate embroidery (...) with the arrangement together and with the diversity of colours".<sup>41</sup> The architects of the turn of the century enriched the flower garden inaugurated by Portoghesi more and more. By means of an unconscious something-or-other, the neo-Baroque curves that seemed to be intentional and controlled have unknowingly become everyday practice: architects have made bending a method for replacing the lost centre with fragmented views.

If Portoghesi's curve arises from a fracture of the circle that loses its integrity (also symbolically)<sup>42</sup> but combines, fragment after fragment, continuing the fold between concavity and convexity, other architects come to terms with a world in which the curve has become intricately complicated in the papers of scientists who have come to understand the physical and mathematical value of nodes (closed curves intertwined in space).

Frank Gehry, ever since his fragment of *Strada Novissima* in 1980, is one of those protagonists who, internalizing post-modern teaching, does not seek to untangle the knots of life, but to indulge "the line of life itself, which contorts, extends and accumulates and pushes and drips, which is heavy and rough and sweet and stupid like life itself".<sup>43</sup> Reading the articles, essays and interviews of those who attended the opening of the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris in 2014, different and changing impressions emerge: some described it as a cathedral of light, others as a fish, a cloud, a sailboat, or simply a snow-white flower blossoming in the context of the Bois de Boulogne (Figure 4a). Gehry was enthusiastic about the multitude of suggestions, stating that the aim was to create an architecture that would internalize all kinds of metaphors of ephemerality and fluidity.<sup>44</sup> Just as in a garden where "various kinds of colours (...) in most flowers are desired",<sup>45</sup> Daniel Buren has provided for this need in 2016 with a temporary work (Figure 4b). The French artist covered the building's twelve iconic sails with

---

39. Historical citation has been joined, more and more recently, by the dangerous tendency towards *pastiche*, i.e. the handling of historical baggage in order to repeat the past but very often in an a-critical manner, lacking its historical depth.

40. In many manuals, post-modernism is regarded as a mere "architecture of nostalgia (...), an expression of an expressionless and grotesque mask of consumer society". See Alessandra Muntoni, *Lineamenti di storia dell'architettura contemporanea* (Bari: Einaudi, 2005), 336-337.

41. Ferrari, *Flora, ovvero cultura dei fiori*, 20.

42. See the design of *Dikaia*, a utopian city of the future imagined in 1968. The urban space is subdivided by walls that are portions of a circle marking "the desert of the possible".

43. [https://spazioinwind.libero.it/freedom\\_mind/Mind%20Food/Frank\\_O.Gehry/FrankO.Gehry.html](https://spazioinwind.libero.it/freedom_mind/Mind%20Food/Frank_O.Gehry/FrankO.Gehry.html) Accessed March, 16, 2023.

44. See the 2014 interview with the architect: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG0y07wNNqU> Accessed January 26, 2024.

45. Ferrari, *Flora ovvero cultura di fiori*, 457.

3600 pieces of glass in thirteen different colours. A mosaic of shapes and reflections has been created, destined to appear and disappear according to the various times of day and seasons; that “miracle of various colours in the same plant”<sup>46</sup> that Giovan Battista Ferrari attributed to the “talent [of the sowers] of representing by the diversity of colours a new rainbow”<sup>47</sup> seems to have been realized. The same chromatic dynamic resonates in the link between the dark red bricks on the ground and the white plaster of the Marta Museum in Herford, East Westphalia. If the inner core of the building, a former textile factory, remains largely unchanged in its architectural language based on lines and right angles, the undulating dynamic of the external forms is much more than a compositional choice. We are faced with a neo-Baroque ligament that expresses concern for the environment (a founding characteristic of the museum, also expressed in the acronym Marta) through the undulating roof landscape that reflects the adjacent course of the river Aa. With its abundance of water, the river creates “a land that (...) all year round becomes a happy mother of a very vague offspring of flowers”;<sup>48</sup> for this reason, the same curves which, taken individually, are the rivulets of water of the river, joined together by compositional links, represent the petals of an enormous shining flower visible in the landscape thanks to the stainless steel, the material of which the roof of the entire building is made (Figure 5).

Gehry’s entire design path is studded with metaphorical choices, first and foremost the desire to disguise his real name (Frank Owen Goldberg) because, as he himself states, his work is the result of a great healthy insecurity that is reflected in the architecture, sometimes leading the visitor to get lost in labyrinths made up of different trajectories and collisions. The perimeter of the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, for example, is composed of a series of green crossing paths that form a veritable public garden around the building which, with the outdoor spaces that wedge around the concert hall, is reminiscent of the petals of an open rose (a flower much loved by the commissioner, the widow Disney). The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, on the other hand, is the most striking example demonstrating Gehry’s ability to make a real urban node bloom; a project commissioned at a time of severe economic crisis for the city of Bilbao.<sup>49</sup> In a choice at once symbolic and strategic, an abandoned site of the old port was selected for the new building. The visitor arrives at the building from the main road running through Bilbao, only to lose himself in its titanium-covered structure with complex volumes: bridges crossing the spaces, tunnels, stair towers and glass lifts ensure that the work has no flat surfaces. If, looking at it from the river, the Guggenheim appears to be shaped like a ship, thus paying homage to the port city, the shiny panels resemble the scales of a fish. In fact, to quote the “New York Times”, the Guggenheim Museum more than anything else resembles a true miracle that made the economy of a decaying city flourish again. And it is precisely a flower that the visitor sees when, inside the large atrium, he turns his gaze upwards; the same neo-Baroque

---

46. Ibid, 457.

47. Ibid, 467.

48. Ibid, 73.

49. <https://smarthistory.org/frank-gehry-guggenheim-bilbao/>. Accessed March 16, 2023.



flower that is realised when looking down from above, fold after fold, thanks to the twisting of the facades one on top of the other (Figure 6).

Observing other works by Gehry (such as, for example, the extraordinary case of the Hotel Marqués de Riscal in Elciego)<sup>50</sup>, it is possible to think that after all, Bruno Taut's utopia is not so unrealizable, and that architecture can flourish in a natural way. Gehry's flowers are humanized buildings, implicit metaphors for a peculiar conception of the world. His architectures lead the visitor to interface with his own nodes, passing through a seemingly hostile, decomposed, unbalanced and inexorably closed environment. It is only by looking at the building with a conscious gaze, *from above* and *from afar*, that one perceives instead that the architect has made a piece of the city flourish.



**Figure 4a.** *F. Gehry, View of the Louis Vuitton Foundation (Paris, 2014); Figure 4b.* *D. Buren, Observatory of Light, Louis Vuitton Foundation (Paris, 2016)*

---

50. The hotel is a building that rises above the vineyards, evoking the shape and gestures of the vine with its twisted branches.



**Figure 5.** *F. Gehry, Aerial View of the Marta Museum (Herford, 2005)*



**Figure 6.** *F. Gehry, Aerial View of the Guggenheim Museum (Bilbao, 1997)*

## Conclusions

The metaphor of the flower makes one realize how bluntly Baroque *deja vu* is nowadays, but it is only one of many links that can be traced if one tries to “bring about a great deal of mutual harmony between the parts”. It would be necessary to modify that meagre “Treccani” definition by pointing out that Neo-Baroque is not a mere citation practice in the field of arts and architecture, but a state of survival. Moving the definition of the phenomenon away from that generic nineteenth- and twentieth-century revival tendency, it is necessary to focus attention on that precise spiritual affinity with the Baroque that has evolved more and more since the middle of the last century and was definitively triggered in the 1980s, when the rediscovery of Baroque culture (in poetry, philosophy, architecture) had an explosion that travelled in parallel with the renewed enthusiasm for historical citation, of which *Strada Novissima* is the most emblematic example. Since then mathematicians, physicists, poets, historians and architects have continually contaminated each other, making Neo-Baroque a true cultural style that identifies today’s society made up of forces that bend, flex and undermine existing systems.<sup>51</sup> Architecture, poetry and philosophy feed on scientific terms to elaborate metaphysical concepts and, conversely, physics and mathematics have come to use terms such as *landscape* to grasp certain concepts.<sup>52</sup> The aim of intellectuals, whether physicists or architects, is the same: to study and propose connecting *links* between complex and apparently closed components;<sup>53</sup> exactly what in the 17th century were ligaments, points, sharpnesses, all attempts to associate opposing elements “like strangers among citizens”.<sup>54</sup>

Since it is therefore an aesthetic process, in today’s architecture the flowers can only be grasped by looking from above and from afar, the fruit of a perspective that invests not only the technique but above all the metaphors used by the architect to best render the precarious equilibrium that is before our eyes. As Deleuze’s philosophy teaches us, in our own small way we believe we are made of imbalances and conflicts; it is only when we learn to know our folds, to live *fold by fold*, to transform insecurities into strength that it is possible to make our innermost essence bloom; and it is thus, by following the folds, that architects build flowers.

---

51. The notion of Neo-Baroque is therefore not opposed to the definitions attempted by historians to catalogue today’s movements, such as deconstructivism or liquid architecture, but encompasses them. While very often such definitions group together the experiences of architects for a different use of construction techniques, means and design technologies, Neo-Baroque focuses on the aesthetic reasons that lead the architect to want to build following the rules of folding.

52. String theory is a branch of theoretical physics that aspires to answer several profound questions about the foundations of physics. One of the problems with the theory is that the complete formulation is not always satisfactorily defined in all possible theoretical scenarios. Another is that it is believed to describe an enormous “landscape” of possible universes, which makes attempts to identify particle physics within the theory complicated.

53. In mathematics, and more specifically in knot theory, a *link* is a collection of nodes in space.

54. Jon R. Snyder, *The Aesthetics of the Baroque* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2005), 33.



## Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this essay to Paolo Portoghesi, who passed away last year.

## Bibliography

- Argan, Giulio Carlo. *Storia dell'arte italiana*. (Italian history of Art). Florence: Sansoni, 1968.
- Argan, Giulio Carlo, and Mario Pisani (Eds.) *Il punto su Paolo Portoghesi*. (The point on Paolo Portoghesi). Rome: Gangemi, 1993.
- Calabrese, Omar. *L'età neobarocca*. (The Neo-Baroque Age). Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1987.
- Calloway, Stephen. *Baroque baroque: the culture of excess*. London: Phaidon Press, 1995.
- Croce, Benedetto. *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia*. (History of the Baroque Age in Italy). Bari: Laterza, 1929.
- D'Ors, Eugenio. *Del Barocco*, edited by Luciano Anceschi. (On the Baroque). Milan: Rosa & Ballo, 1945.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *La piega. Leibniz e il Barocco*. (The fold. Leibniz and the Baroque). Translated by Davide Tarizzo. Turin: Einaudi, 2004.
- Di Natale, Maria Concetta. "Frasche e fiori d'argento per gli altari." In *Arredare il sacro. Artisti, opere e committenti in Sicilia dal Medioevo al Contemporaneo*, edited by Maria Concetta Di Natale, Maurizio Vitella, 63-80. Milan: Skira, 2015.
- Dorfles, Gillo. *Barocco nell'architettura moderna*. (Baroque in modern architecture). Milan: Tamburini, 1951.
- Fagiolo, Marcello. "Argan, il Barocco e il Centro di Studi su Roma presso l'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei." In *Giulio Carlo Argan intellettuale e storico dell'arte*, edited by Carlo Gamba. Milano: Electa, 2012.
- Ferrari, Giovan Battista. *Flora, ovvero cultura dei fiori*. (Flora, or flower culture). Rome: Facciotti, 1638.
- Gracián, Baltasar. *L'acutezza e l'arte dell'ingegno*. (The sharpness and art of ingenuity). Translated by Giulia Poggi. Sesto San Giovanni: Aesthetica, 2020.
- Jacovello, Stefano. "Appunti per domani." In *Il Neobarocco. Forme e dinamiche della cultura contemporanea*, edited by Omar Calabrese, 411-434. Lucca: Volo Publisher, 2013.
- Moreira Soares, Maria João, and Clara Germana Gonçalves. "Gilles Deleuze and Bernini's Bel Composto: From Theatricality to a Living-montage." *Athens Journal of Architecture* 8, no. 4 (2022): 315-336.
- Muntoni, Alessandra. *Lineamenti di storia dell'architettura contemporanea*. (Outlines of Contemporary Architectural History). Bari: Einaudi, 2005.
- Portoghesi, Paolo. *Natura e architettura*. (Nature and Architecture). Milan: Skira, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Roma/amoR: memoria, racconto, speranza*. (Rome/amoR: memory, narrative, hope). Venice: Marsilio, 2019.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Poesia della curva*. (Poetry of the curve). Rome: Gangemi, 2020.
- Sforza Pallavicino, Pietro. *Trattato dello stile e del dialogo*. (Treaty of Style and Dialogue). Rome: Torreggiani, 1646 (ed. 1828).
- Snyder, Jon R. *The Aesthetics of the Baroque*. Bologna: Il mulino, 2005.
- Taut, Bruno. *La dissoluzione delle città*. (The dissolution of cities). Translated by Giacomo Ricci. Napoli: Archigrafica, 2008.

Tesauro, Emanuele. *Il cannocchiale aristotelico, o sia Idea dell'arguta et ingeniosa elocutione...* (The Aristotelian telescope, or the Idea of witty and ingenious elocution...) Venice: Baglioni, 1663.

Zevi, Bruno. *Saper vedere l'architettura*. (How to see Architecture). Turin: Einaudi, 1983.



## Networks Cultivating Values: Insights from Five Culture-based Regeneration Projects in Italy

By Luca Lazzarini<sup>\*</sup>, Elena Ostanel<sup>±</sup> & Ezio Micelli<sup>°</sup>

*This contribution aims at improving the understanding of the conditions and dynamics that facilitate processes of culture-based urban regeneration via social innovation. It presents and discusses the outcomes of an in-depth investigation of five projects taking place in large cities in Italy dealing with the reuse and regeneration of urban spaces through creative and innovative practices. Research findings demonstrate the centrality of the network dimension in sustaining and shaping processes of urban regeneration through social innovation and cultural production. Networks are led by social entrepreneurs having a strong territorial focus that “cultivate” new values for the local community by reusing and mobilizing publicly owned vacant or abandoned material assets.*

### Introduction

Urban regeneration using culture in its broad sense has long emerged as a key feature of our cities. Several scholars highlighted that culture-based regeneration is crucial for the economic success of urban areas.<sup>1</sup> Alongside the large-scale and top-down development projects with cultural facilities, infrastructures and events having a central role, the past decades have seen the proliferation of small-scale cultural actions involving grassroots and community creative groups, that have framed arts and culture as catalysts for widening the usage of local amenities as well as for animating and/or revitalizing deprived urban neighborhoods. This has obviously given rise to tensions between top-down and bottom-up cultural initiatives that have pushed local administrations and policymakers to address critical issues but also to integrate culture into local plans and strategies.<sup>2</sup>

Among the benefits generated by small-scale cultural practices, the capacity to sustain urban regeneration processes through the reconfiguration of social networks, the socio-political mobilization of marginalized groups, and the co-

---

<sup>\*</sup>Assistant Professor, DASTU/Polytechnic University of Milan, Italy.

<sup>±</sup>Assistant Professor, IUAV University of Venice, Italy.

<sup>°</sup>Full Professor, IUAV University of Venice, Italy.

1. Among the many: Florida R (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books; Pratt A (2010), Creative cities: Tensions within and between social, cultural and economic development: A critical reading of the UK experience. *City, Culture and Society* 1(1): 13-20.

2. Tallon A (2013) *Urban regeneration in the UK*. London: Routledge; Grodach C (2013) Cultural Economy Planning in Creative Cities: Discourse and Practice. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(5): 1747-1765.

production of activities and services is emphasized by some authors.<sup>3</sup> Due to its attempt to achieve responses to unmet social needs, strengthen empowerment and increase collective efficacy, community involvement in culture-based urban regeneration has often resulted in the emergence of social innovation (SI).

Within this framework, this contribution aims at improving the understanding of the conditions and dynamics that facilitate processes of culture-based urban regeneration *via* SI. It presents and discusses the outcomes of an in-depth investigation of five projects taking place in large cities in Italy dealing with the reuse and regeneration of urban spaces *via* creative and innovative practices. Research findings demonstrate the centrality of the network dimension in sustaining and shaping processes of urban regeneration through SI and cultural production. Networks are led by social entrepreneurs having a strong territorial focus that “cultivate” new values for the local community by reusing and mobilizing publicly owned vacant or abandoned material assets.

The contribution includes four sections. The first section presents an overview of the concepts of urban regeneration, social innovation and cultural production, and discusses some implications present in the debate. The second section highlights the research methodology and briefly introduces the study cases under investigation. In the third section, the research findings are presented with a specific emphasis on the profile of actor(s) promoting the projects, the type, size and ownerships of the assets involved and their forms of mobilization, the management procedures and regulations and the relationships with the municipality. The article ends with a discussion of the findings and some concluding remarks.

## Theoretical Framework

Several scholars highlighted that the concept of SI can be considered a productive field for urban regeneration.<sup>4</sup> Reasons lie in the increasing recognition that SI initiatives often produce a range of socio-spatial benefits that can improve urban areas and neighborhoods, helping to contrast dynamics of social exclusion, spatial segregation, and material decay.<sup>5</sup> Despite remaining a suspicious concept

---

3. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91; Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28; Baraldi S, Salone C (2022) Building on decay: urban regeneration and social entrepreneurship in Italy through culture and the arts. *European Planning Studies* 30(10): 2102-2121.

4. Vicari S, Moulaert F (2009) *Rigenerare la città*. Bologna: Il Mulino; Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Mehmood A, Hamdouch A (2013) *The international handbook on social innovation, Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*. UK: Edward Elgar; Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

5. Phillis J A, Deiglmeier K, Miller Dale T (2008) Rediscovering social innovation. *Stanford social innovation review* 6(4): 34-43; Cajaiba-Santana G (2013) Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 82(1): 42-51; Ionescu C (2015) About the conceptualization of social innovation. *Theoretical & Applied Economics*, 22(3): 53-62.

in the eye of many due to its uncertain and vague demarcation<sup>6</sup> and the uncritical view – still dominant in the debate – that its broad effects are necessarily good,<sup>7</sup> SI has been frequently framed in a context of scarcity of public resources and private investments, as a possible, quick-fix and low-cost solution to contemporary economic, social, and spatial challenges that characterize urban.<sup>8</sup> Ostanel<sup>9</sup> pointed out that in the past two decades, the intervention of the State in deprived and low-income neighborhoods has progressively diminished due to financial crisis and austerity politics, which have produced also significant retrenchment dynamics in local welfare systems. While this process has resulted in creating limitations to the exercise of *social citizenship* widening the gap between social needs and service providers and challenging the quality of local welfare supply),<sup>10</sup> at the same time a variegated wave of new ideas, projects, and initiatives initiated by citizens, young professionals and community groups has emerged in different urban neighborhoods in European cities and abroad. The interesting point is that many of these initiatives, while responding to unmet social needs, empowering specific social groups, and modifying social relationships in the light of social justice and cohesion, have also sustained and promoted relevant processes of regeneration and revitalization of the existing material legacy.<sup>11</sup>

There is wide evidence in the debate that space is a critical dimension for the emergence of social innovation.<sup>12</sup> SI initiatives often take place in a physical space that is empty, available, functionally flexible and that can be easily mobilized for hosting new activities. Thus, the significant role that SI has for urban regeneration depends on the presence of a stock of underused, unsold, or abandoned material

---

6. Mulgan G (2006) The process of social innovation. *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization* 1(2): 145-162; Bragaglia F (2020) Social innovation as a 'magic concept' for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance. *Planning Theory* 1-19; Dobay KM (2021) Social innovation and rural development. Two longitudinal case studies from the North-East Romania. *Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, New Series, Year XVIII* 1: 109-129.

7. Brandsen T, Evers A, Cattacin S, Zimmer A (2016) Social Innovation: A Sympathetic and Critical Interpretation. In Brandsen T, Cattacin S, Evers A, Zimmer A (eds) *Social Innovations in the Urban Context. Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies*. Cham: Springer.

8. Bragaglia F (2020) Social innovation as a 'magic concept' for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance. *Planning Theory* 1-19.

9. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

10. Martinelli F (2012) Social Innovation or Social Exclusion? Innovating Social Services in the Context of a Retrenching Welfare State. In: Franz HW, Hochgerner J, Howaldt J (eds) *Challenge Social Innovation. Potentials for business, social entrepreneurship, welfare and civil society*, Berlin: Springer Verlag, pp. 169-180.

11. Brandsen T, Cattacin S, Evers A, Zimmer A (2016) (Eds.) *Social innovations in the Urban Context. Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies*. Cham: Springer.

12. Among the many: Brignone L, Cellamare C, Gissara M, Montillo F, Olcuire S, Simoncini S (2022) Social Innovation or Societal Change? Rethinking Innovation in Bottom-Up Transformation Processes Starting from Three Cases in Rome's Suburbs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol 482. Cham: Springer, pp. 483-493; Ostanel E (2017) *Spazi fuori dal comune. Rigenerare, includere, innovare*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

assets, that can be readapted to new uses with relatively low effort and resources.<sup>13</sup> Abandoned properties can be transformed into *commons* that public administration can grant to whoever has the capabilities to initiate a socially innovative project.<sup>14</sup> According to Mangialardo and Micelli,<sup>15</sup> this revitalization process has produced a paradigmatic change in our cities which is both content and process related. The aim is no longer to extract financial rent from properties but to experiment with new forms of economic and social development. Moreover, this change has pushed local authorities to formulate new legal frameworks for the use of public assets by community groups that have allowed to explicit the legal conditions, the arrangements and the resources needed for a public property to become a support for SI.

As far as the process dimension is concerned, Ostanel<sup>16</sup> underlines that SI projects can push toward the creation of innovative multi-level governance arenas that may help to overcome the policy *silo* approach by which local administrations usually approach urban regeneration, promoting institutional learning, and innovating regeneration policies. In other words, SI possesses a tension that can work to overcome the idea of urban regeneration as a comprehensive and top-down approach of public policies leading to the resolution of urban problems through sectoral interventions,<sup>17</sup> toward a more critical and pragmatic interpretation. Urban regeneration can thus be interpreted not only as a large-scale and public sector-driven redevelopment approach focused on economic growth and property development,<sup>18</sup> but rather as an incremental bottom-linked governance process<sup>19</sup> that can trigger an incremental socio-spatial change in the existing urban fabric, modifying social relations between individuals and groups. In this vein, bottom-linked governance can be seen both as an outcome of urban regeneration and a socially innovative space of action where the local community's effort toward addressing regeneration challenges can be channeled.<sup>20</sup>

---

13. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28.

14. Soma K, Vatn A (2014) Representing the common goods: Stakeholders vs. citizens. *Land Use Policy* 41: 325-333.

15. Mangialardo A, Micelli E (2017) From sources of financial value to commons: Emerging policies for enhancing public real-estate assets in Italy. *Papers in Regional Science* 97(4): 1397-1408.

16. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

17. Figueiredo I, Prim MA, Dandolini G (2022) Urban regeneration in the light of social innovation: A systematic integrative literature review. *Land Use Policy* 113: 105873.

18. Tallon A (2013) *Urban regeneration in the UK*. London: Routledge.

19. Mehmood A (2016) Institutional forms of social innovation. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, 10(3): 300-311; Castro-Arce K, Vanclay F (2020) Transformative social innovation for sustainable rural development: An analytical framework to assist community-based initiatives. *Journal of Rural Studies* 74, 45-54.

20. Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Van den Broeck P, García M (2019) Bottom-linked governance and socially innovative political transformation. In Schröder A, Kaletka C, Howaldt J, Zirngiebl M (eds) *Atlas of Social Innovation - A World of New Practices*. München: Oekom verlag, 62-66.

Culture is by no doubt an important driver for SI initiatives to trigger urban regeneration.<sup>21</sup> Cerreta et al.<sup>22</sup> describe two relevant aspects in relation to the creative and SI practices linking culture and urban regeneration. The first concerns the generation of complex values of places, considering value as a multifaceted output of culture-led regeneration that comprises various tangible and intangible dimensions (spatial, economic, social, environmental). The second is the creation of complex values networks, which means that the presence of networks rooted in a locality contributes to shape the system of values itself and create complementary relationships between its different dimensions.

The network dimension is emphasized also by Tricarico et al.<sup>23</sup> who use the term “platform spaces” to refer to “the cultural and creative spaces where social innovation plays a key role in community engagement activities as well as generating horizontal/collaborative interactions among different stakeholders and their interests while aligning with territorial development targets”. The main point is to consider platform spaces as the outcome of a growing role of SI and culture within urban regeneration and territorial development approaches. Following this view, platform spaces can act as real engines for the regeneration of private spaces and public services where community groups are interpreted not as a mere end-user of the process but as activators (of spaces) and connectors (of actors and resources) in the revitalization of vulnerable urban neighborhoods.<sup>24</sup> Hence, platform spaces have the potential to enhance the synergistic effect of culture-led regeneration processes, working both on mobilizing latent resources, generating new values, and on strengthening existing (or shaping new) networks according to an interactive growth process.<sup>25</sup>

## Methodology

The five projects investigated belong to the 2017 and 2018 editions of *Culturability*, a call promoted and funded by Fondazione Unipolis. Unipolis is an enterprise foundation operating in Italy since 2007 whose work is oriented to the cultural, social, and civic growth of local communities, with a specific commitment to wellbeing, culture, and mobility as the three axes shaping the Foundation’s

---

21. Campagnari F, Micelli E, Ostanel E (2022) Culture Leading to Urban Regeneration. Empirical Evidence from Some Italian Funding Programs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol 482. Cham: Springer; Baraldi S, Salone C (2022) Building on decay: urban regeneration and social entrepreneurship in Italy through culture and the arts. *European Planning Studies* 30(10): 2102-2121.

22. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28.

23. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22.

24. Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.

25. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28.

strategy toward long-term sustainability. The objective of the Call, whose first edition was launched in 2009 and that in the past ten years has significantly evolved in terms of mission and objectives),<sup>26</sup> is to support ideas and projects conceived by third-sector organizations contributing to the creation of new spaces where culture generates processes of community activation, empowerment, and cohesion. The Foundation supports the projects selected not only through a monetary contribution, but also through the establishment of an enabling and collaborative process, which consists in the provision of skills of its dedicated staff, and in the creation of relationships and partnerships with the aim to create synergies between the projects. While the first edition of the Call was oriented to promote the creation of new cultural and creative enterprises promoted by young entrepreneurs, since its second edition the Call is aimed at supporting new cultural hybrid centers born through bottom-up regeneration processes.

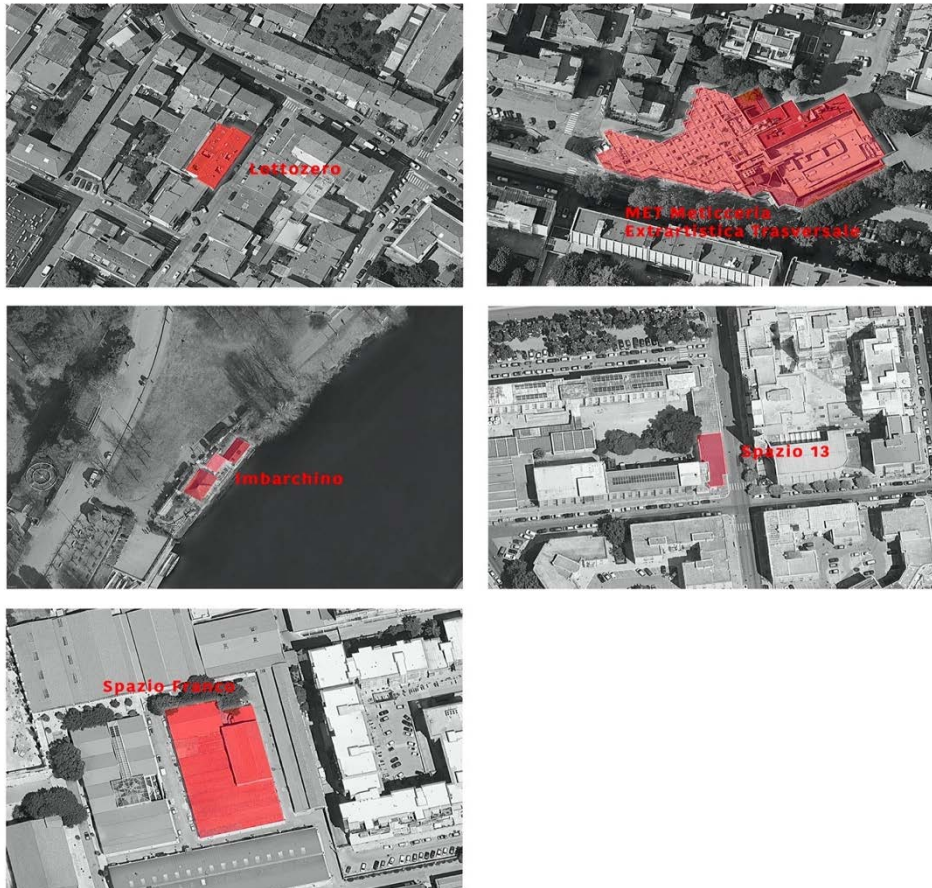
The selection of the five projects (Table 1) is based on the willingness to analyze, under a comparative lens, initiatives of urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production located in large cities in Italy (Torino, Bologna, Bari, Palermo, Prato). We decided to focus, respectively, on Italy as this is the domestic context which we are most familiar with, and on large cities as we believe that our research can contribute to the debate on the conditions and dynamics that facilitate processes of urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production in urban and metropolitan areas. More research is thus needed to explore the role of culture and SI in regenerating rural and inner peripheral contexts.

**Table 1.** Background Information of the Five Projects under Investigation

Case-study	Edition of Culturability	Location	Promoter	Other actors involved
1. Lottozero, textile laboratories	2017	Industrial neighborhood, Prato.	A non-profit cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art and craft schools</li> <li>• professional associations</li> <li>• municipality</li> <li>• local museum and fab-lab</li> </ul>
2. MET Meticceria Extrartistica Trasversale	2017	Peripheral neighborhood, Bologna.	A social promotion association (APS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipality</li> <li>• Academy of Fine Arts</li> <li>• university</li> <li>• music school</li> <li>• international networks in the field of performing arts</li> </ul>
3. Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura	2018	River bank in a public park, Turin.	A cultural association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipality</li> <li>• Conservatory</li> <li>• local cultural associations and social cooperatives</li> <li>• local health company</li> </ul>
4. Spazio 13	2018	Central neighborhood, Bari.	A temporary association formed by 12 associations and 2 innovative start-ups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipality</li> <li>• Academy of fine arts</li> <li>• cultural and social associations operating in the neighborhood</li> </ul>
5. Spazio Franco	2018	A former industrial area, Palermo.	A temporary organization formed by 4 cultural associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipality</li> <li>• cultural and neighborhood associations</li> <li>• migrants association</li> </ul>

26. Franceschinelli R (2021, ed) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. Milan: Franco Angeli.

In the selection, we also adopted the criterion that at the time of submission to the Call the projects should have been already in an advanced state of development and generated significant impacts in the regeneration of the spatial capital.<sup>27</sup> In particular, two projects were presented in the 2017 edition of *Culturability* (“Lottozero textile laboratories” in Prato and the “Meticceria Extratristica Trasversale” hereafter “MET” in Bologna) and the other three in the 2018 edition (the “Imbarchino, molto più di un luogo comune” in Torino, the “Spazio 13” in Bari, and the “Spazio Franco” in Palermo). A brief introduction of each project follows.



**Figure 1.** *Locations of the Five Projects in the Urban Context*

Source: Elaboration by the authors on images extracted from Google Earth.

The first project, “Lottozero textile laboratories”, consists in the transformation of an old shed located in an industrial neighborhood in Prato to create a new hub for young creative and talented entrepreneurs, sustaining research, experimentation, and networking in the field of textile design. MET is the second project investigated and it is promoted by an association involved in the production of theatrical performances in Bologna. The project has created in a peripheral

27. Micelli E (2018) Enabling real property. How public real estate assets can serve urban regeneration. *Territorio* 87: 93-97; Micelli E, Ostanel E, Lazzarini L (2023) “Wanna Be Provoked”: Inner Peripheries Generators of Social Innovation in the Italian Apennine. *Land* 12: 829

neighborhood a center to valorize and transform the competencies of migrants and refugees into employment opportunities to be invested in the cultural and creative sectors. The third project is the “Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura”. It sees an old embankment point along the river Po in Turin transformed into a space for social recreation and cultural co-design that strengthens the citizens’ participation in city’s cultural program, as well as offers new resources to young people to implement their creative ideas and projects. In Spazio 13, chosen as the fourth project, a group of cultural associations has taken over a former secondary school building from the municipality, which has been readapted as a cultural and social hub for activating, aggregating, and qualifying the youth resources of the city linked to sectors of digital manufacturing, design, music, and photography. The fifth and last project’s mission (Spazio Franco) is the creation of a laboratory for art production and for training and creating synergies between young artists inside a pavilion located in a former industrial area (Cantieri Culturali) affected by socio-spatial marginality in Palermo.

From the methodological point of view, the projects were investigated thanks to two qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of project applications. As far as the semi-structured interviews are concerned, we conducted a total of 6 in-depth interviews addressed to 11 project promoters. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, were recorded, and then fully transcribed. These were conducted using a common track of questions, covering the following topics: i) profile and background information of project promoters, ii) typology and profile of the organization leading the project, iii) actors and networks shaping – or cooperating in – the project activities, iv) relationship with the local administration, v) expertise and skills needed to carry on the project, vi) role and features of the building or space where the project takes place. Concerning the documentary analysis, emphasis was placed on the materials included in the project applications, especially the Project Dossiers and the summary sheets. In particular, each Dossier’s structure follows the guidelines provided by the *Culturability* Call, and includes three sections: presentation of the project, description of the project, and background information about the proponent actor. The second section is the most relevant both for the evaluation of the proposals by Unipolis Foundation and for our research objectives as it includes three sub-sections that offer relevant information about the project: identity, origin and motivations, SWOT analysis and risks’ management, description of the space or area hosting the project, targets, stakeholders, resources available and needed, funding mix, governance, monitoring and evaluation.

The data collected were analyzed comparatively in a survey carried out following a common analytical framework (Table 2). The framework, readapted and integrated from Campagnari et al.,<sup>28</sup> includes five dimensions: size and ownership of the asset(s) involved in the project, their forms of mobilization, management procedures and regulations, contribution of the project to local/

---

28 Campagnari F, Micelli E, Ostanel E (2022) Culture Leading to Urban Regeneration. Empirical Evidence from Some Italian Funding Programs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives*. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems, vol 482. Cham: Springer.



national/international networks, and relationship with the local government. Findings from the comparative survey are presented in the following section.

**Table 2.** *The Analytical Framework for the Investigation of the Five Projects*

Case study	Type, size and ownership of the asset(s) involved in the project	Forms of mobilization of the asset(s)	Management procedures and regulations	Contribution to local / national / international networks	Relationship with the municipality
<b>1. Lottozero, textile laboratories</b>	A 400sqm shed owned by two entrepreneurs.	In 2016 the owners of the shed granted it to the cooperative through a free-use loan for 10 years. It was refurbished thanks to a crowdfunding campaign.	No regulatory or procedural implications reported.	Participation in two international networks (TCBL and European Creative Hubs Network). Collaboration with international schools, universities, and Fab Labs in the field of textile training.	Collaboration with the culture department of the municipality was initiated after the project started. This helps the cooperative to strengthen its visibility and supports it in participating in EU projects.
<b>2. MET Meticceria Extrartistica Trasversale</b>	A portion of a multifunctional building (520sqm) where also a large supermarket and other associations are located. The municipality owns the building.	In 2017, the tenant of the building (cooperative) granted the space to the association <i>via</i> a free-use loan for 49 months.	The municipality has given the building on rent for 99 years to a supermarket cooperative. This has granted some space to the association <i>via</i> a free-use loan.	Participation in two international networks related to European projects (Beyond Theatre and Urban Innovation Actions).	Collaboration with the culture department of the municipality and the youth information office (Informagiovani).
<b>3. Imbarchino, uno spazio per vivere la cultura</b>	A former 360sqm embarkation point readapted as a bar during the 1980s, currently owned by the municipality.	In 2016 the municipality has granted the space to the association for 14 years through a public tender.	The agreement provides that the association takes charge of the renovation works in exchange of a reduction of the rent during the first years.	Participation in a local network of social, cultural and environmental organizations operating at city level.	Good collaboration with several municipal departments: youth policy, culture, public property, retail.
<b>4. Spazio 13</b>	A former secondary school for a total of 1000sqm indoor and 500sqm outdoor (courtyard).	In 2017 the municipality has granted the former school to the association for 3 years <i>via</i> a free-use loan.	The agreement provides that the association does not pay any rent for the use of the space. Bills are also covered by the municipality.	Participation in the local network of associations and start-ups that manage the space.	Partnership with the municipality. The governance of the space is shared with municipal representatives.
<b>5. Spazio Franco</b>	A 200sqm pavilion owned by the municipality	In 2017 the municipality has granted the pavilion to the association for 12 years (6+6) <i>via</i> a public tender launched by the youth department of the National council presidency	Presence of regulation constraints due to the classification of the area as an industrial archeological site.	Participation in a local network of cultural and social associations operating in the area and the city.	Creation of a permanent technical table where municipal representatives get together for jointly tackling the problems of the area.

## Findings

Firstly, we should acknowledge that the four projects investigated in the survey present a specific and contextual relationship between the initiative of project promoters, the forms of mobilization of local assets and resources, the levels of institutional support provided to the project and the patterns of collective efficacy present in each local community. This last dimension refers to the intersection between mutual trust, shared expectations among actors, and the willingness to intervene and interact in a given context, all conditions influencing the success of the projects.<sup>29</sup> We believe that, alongside the comparative lens adopted by this article, this diversity should be acknowledged and not overlooked by the research.

Nevertheless, given the choice of the projects within the same framework of the *Culturability* Call already mentioned, several common traits can be recognized. These were made explicit in the guidelines of the Call and relate to the ways in which culture-led urban regeneration can be sustained and promoted *via* social innovation in urban contexts by the grassroots effort of creative professionals or cultural associations.

The first aspect of interest concerns the profile of the actors promoting the projects. The survey highlights that these include a cooperative (Lottozero), two social and cultural associations (MET and Imbarchino), and two temporary associations formed by other third-sector organizations to participate in the Call (Spazio 13 and Spazio Franco). In the case of Lottozero, project promoters motivate the form of the cooperative by recalling the need to achieve the project's economic sustainability and guarantee adequate revenues for cooperative employees.

“We see Lottozero as a company, not as an association [...] The important thing for us is not to make a profit, but also not to work for free and as a volunteer...”  
Interviewee TM.

The temporary associations instead recall the objective of building a time-limited and purpose-oriented coalition of actors (14 associations in the case of Spazio 13 and 4 in the case of Spazio Franco) that were already cooperating within the project and that are thus searching for new ways to scale up their activities and enlarge their settings.

Looking at the actors involved in the projects, it is interesting to notice the diversity of the profiles present in each project. The local government is always present, as well as several third-sector associations operating in or around the regeneration area. In four of the five cases, the contribution of education organizations is also relevant (from the art and craft schools to the conservatory), due to the need to bring external expertise in the project as well as to involve

---

29. Sampson RJ (2011) Neighborhood effects, causal mechanisms and the social structure of the city. In Demeulenaere P (ed) *Analytical Sociology and Social Mechanisms*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 227-249; Jørgensen A, Fallov MA, Casado-Diaz M, Atkinson R (2020) Rural Cohesion: Collective Efficacy and Leadership in the Territorial Governance of Inclusion. *Social Inclusion* 8: 229-241.

students among the target users of the initiatives, not just as mere audience but as individuals actively contributing to the regeneration process.

The second aspect concerns the typology, size and ownership of the asset(s) involved in the project, and their forms of mobilization. It is interesting to notice that in four of the five cases investigated, the assets are publicly owned, with the municipality owner of the building where the project takes place. In the case of Spazio13, the building is a former welfare space (a secondary school) that the municipality decided to grant to project promoters to host cultural and social activities. In two cases (Lottozero and SpazioFranco), the projects reuse vacant sheds and industrial pavilions that the private sector left empty and that for their inherent features (large surfaces, wide functional adaptability, good structural conditions, low real estate value) are particularly suitable to be exploited for culture-based activities.<sup>30</sup>

A mention of the dimensions of the assets mobilized by the projects reveals that the majority of spaces are 200/500 sqm large, with just one space 1000sqm large (Spazio13). The prevailing medium size of the assets depends on the specific matching between the projects, the resources that these can mobilize, and the existing material legacy present in each city. Thus, what counts is the capacity of project promoters to take advantage of the assets available in the contexts where they operate, achieving a good balance between social needs, project missions, and economic resources that can be mobilized to reuse and/or restore the asset. These aspects have in turn an impact on the scale of the regeneration process generated by the project. All initiatives focus on the regeneration of one single asset due to the limited amount of resources in the hand of the project promoters needed to restore or furnish it, even though three cases (Imbarchino, Lottozero and Spazio Franco) show an emphasis on the capacity of the project to generate positive impacts on the surrounding area or neighborhood, activating local latent resources, improving the quality of public spaces and triggering new practices and activities.

“It is a reality that we live much beyond our 200 sqm. We are the theatrical heart of the Cantieri Culturali [...] Several relationships have already been born [...] There are many things to do, and now we have to start doing small things together, like getting out of our space and trying to figure out if our skills can generate collective value in the public space.” Interviewee GP.

One relevant aspect which influences the achievement of project objectives concerns the forms of mobilization of the asset(s). As previously mentioned, the majority of the assets are owned by the municipality. Accordingly, the most common device used to mobilize them is the free-use loan (in Italian “comodato d’uso gratuito”), adopted in three of the five cases investigated. In the other two, the asset has been granted to the project promoters through a public tender, and its use is subjected to the payment of an annual rent that was defined after a negotiation process with the local government in order to ensure that the fee was

---

30. Mangialardo A, Micelli E (2017) From sources of financial value to commons: Emerging policies for enhancing public real-estate assets in Italy. *Papers in Regional Science* 97(4): 1397-1408.

economically sustainable for the project. One critical factor is the duration of the loan or rent contract: in three cases (Imbarchino, Lottozero and Spazio Franco) this is equal to (or longer than) 10 years, while in the other two (MET and Spazio 13) is between 3 and 4 years, though with possibilities to extend it over a longer period of time.

Concerning the management procedures and regulations, the survey highlights the problematic role that in one case (Spazio Franco) local regulations have had for the development of the project. In particular, the presence of regulation constraints due to the classification of the area as an industrial archeological site acts as an obstacle to the activities as any transformation in the place requires a specific permission procedure issued by a different institution.

“This is an area subjected to restrictions because it is defined as industrial archaeology. When restructuring and reconversion of the small, medium, and large works that can be made inside the spaces, every time there is a passage to do to the Superintendency which is not easy. There are actors within the area that have had great difficulty, and had to change their original project because it did not comply with the constraints set by the Superintendency.” Interviewee GP.

In two cases, the interaction between the project promoters and the municipality has contributed to co-produce the management procedures in order to guarantee favorable conditions for the use of space by the users. For instance, in the Imbarchino study case, after a catastrophic event (a river flood) that significantly damaged the spaces in 2016, the agreement stipulated between the association and municipality has provided, respectively, that the first would have taken charge of the renovation works in exchange for a reduction of the rent to the second during the first years of activity.

As far as the network dimension is considered (Figure 1), it is important to recall that all projects are managed in connection with important networks of actors allowing project promoters to cooperate with a coalition of different actors belonging to several sectors and levels. While in the case of Imbarchino, Spazio 13 and Spazio Franco the networks are mainly spatialized locally with cultural and social organizations operating at the neighborhood or city level, for Lottozero and MET the participation in international networks is motivated by the opportunity to contribute to EU funded projects and take advantage of partnerships with international institutions bringing expertise on specific issues (e.g., textile training or theatrical performances).

It is relevant to notice that solid cooperation with the municipality is a relevant aspect of all projects. What emerges from the survey is a good level of collaboration built between project promoters and different sectors of the local administration, especially with the culture department, both with the political representatives (council members or assessors) and the technical staff. In almost all cases, cooperation with the municipality was among the pre-conditions that ensured the initiation of the project. Different is the case of Lottozero where the collaboration with the municipality began only after the project started. The advantages of these forms of collaboration lie in the already mentioned provision of material assets that local government has granted to project promoters *via* free

loans or rents, as well as in the visibility and support that it can provide to project activities.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The five study cases presented above show the central role played by culture as a driver for urban regeneration processes.<sup>31</sup> Culture is interpreted as a crucial factor acting both on the regeneration of abandoned or underused spatial capital and on the creation of new or strengthening of existing social and territorial networks. One important aspect to recognize is that the cultural orientations characterizing the projects are strongly shaped and influenced by the individual and collective cultivation of attitudes. Ferilli et al.<sup>32</sup> pointed out that “the ability of a community to generate social and economic value through culture is largely path-dependent”. In this vein, the cases highlight the crucial capacity of young and creative entrepreneurs and innovators to “cultivate values” and become promoters of cultural initiatives that activate and sustain regeneration processes. What these actors have in common is the attempt to conceive original formulas for creating cultural activities and services starting from the (re)use of material assets:<sup>33</sup> an abandoned shed in Prato and Palermo, a former secondary school in Bari, a damaged embarkation point in Turin and a portion of a multifunctional building in Bologna.

The capacity of these actors to mobilize territorial capital resources through innovative procedures and farsighted design abilities motivates why they can be defined “territorial entrepreneurs”,<sup>34</sup> considering entrepreneurship as one of the vehicles by which SI can acquire a territorial configuration and contribute to shaping local and territorial development practices.<sup>35</sup> The relevant role of territorial entrepreneurs lies in their capacity to shape new territorial relationships and configurations, reassemble local expertise and assets,<sup>36</sup> and produce with their activity a socio-spatial impact on the surrounding local community that results in

---

31. Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28; Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22; Baraldi S, Salone C (2022) Building on decay: urban regeneration and social entrepreneurship in Italy through culture and the arts. *European Planning Studies* 30(10): 2102-2121.

32. Ferilli G, Sacco PL, Noda K (2015) Culture-driven policies and revaluation of local cultural assets: A tale of two cities, Otaru and Yubari. *City, Culture and Society* 6: 135-143.

33. Micelli E, Ostanel E, Lazzarini L (2023) “Wanna Be Provoked”: Inner Peripheries Generators of Social Innovation in the Italian Apennine. *Land* 12: 829.

34. Ostanel E, Micelli E (2021), Il profilo del rigeneratore: nuovi profili, nuovi planner. In Franceschinelli R (ed) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 89-102.

35. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22.

36. McFarlane C (2011) *Learning the City. Knowledge and Translocal Assemblage*. Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester.

improving its internal cohesion.<sup>37</sup> Territorial capital is here intended as the set of localized assets —natural, human, artificial, organizational, relational, and cognitive ones— that constitute the competitive potential of a given area,<sup>38</sup> whose embeddedness influences the emergence of SI. As already mentioned by Ostanel and Micelli (2021), the territorial entrepreneur can be considered an evolution of the profile of the social entrepreneur, where the actor shows not just a tension towards improving social well-being, solving social problems and creating social value for the community<sup>39</sup> but also becomes the *interpreter* of a strong transformative attitude. He/she thus works to mobilize territorial capital resources and exploit their transformative potential for sustaining SI.<sup>40</sup> In the five projects, territorial entrepreneurs turned the space into a generator of socio-spatial relationships that answered to unmet social needs and created value for the local community. Space as a support for, respectively, the activation and empowerment of marginal and weak populations through culture and arts in the case of MET, the creation of new employment opportunities, synergies and networks for young talents in the cases of Lottozero and Spazio Franco, and the co-design of cultural activities to strengthen the community-culture nexus in the case of Imbarchino.

The fact that the territorial entrepreneurs as project promoters have not operated alone, but have shaped networks and platforms involving a variety of actors highlights the relevance that the network dimension has in ensuring the success of projects.

In conclusion, we want to underline two aspects that characterize the projects' network dimension.

The first is the *raison d'être* of the network itself, namely the reason or motivation why a network is formed and several actors decide to get together and collaborate within a common platform. The five cases demonstrate that the presence of a social or spatial problem in a given context and, more importantly, the recognition by a group of actors that this problem can be treated or solved by a collective effort is the real push for the emergence of the network.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the disconnection between creative young people and the productive and cultural sectors in the case of Lottozero and Spazio 13, the scarce job opportunities for migrant populations in the case of MET, and the lack of resources and spaces for young creative talents and cultural workers in the case of Imbarchino and Spazio Franco are problematic conditions that motivate the creation of a multi-actor coalition for responding to that specific social need.

---

37. Lazzarini L, Pacchi C (2021) Local narratives and spatial configurations of territorial cohesion: some evidences from COHSMO Project. *DASStU Working Paper Series*, n. 07/2021 (LPS.21).

38. Camagni R, Capello R (2013) Regional Competitiveness and Territorial Capital: A Conceptual Approach and Empirical Evidence from the European Union. *Regional Studies* 47: 1383-1402.

39. Tricarico L, De Vidovich L, Billi A (2022) Entrepreneurship, inclusion or co-production? An attempt to assess territorial elements in social innovation literature. *Cities* 130: 103986.

40. Ostanel E, Micelli E (2021), Il profilo del rigeneratore: nuovi profili, nuovi planner. In Franceschinelli R (ed) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 89-102.

41. Ibid.

The second aspect concerns the diversity of actors belonging to the networks. This provides arguments for the assumption that urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production requires the *assemblage* and combination of different actors, each bringing his/her own specific knowledge and expertise to the project. In other terms, we believe that the already mentioned territorial entrepreneur can act successfully only if he/she is able to build effective alliances of actors and activate what several scholars defined as platform spaces,<sup>42</sup> namely multi-actor action arenas where different actors and networks collaborate, (co)produce and exchange knowledge via collective and creative learning. Tricarico et al.<sup>43</sup> defined platform spaces as “cultural and creative places where social innovation plays a key role in community engagement activities as well as generating horizontal/ collaborative interactions among different stakeholders and their interests while aligning with territorial development targets”. The five cases highlight that the importance of these spaces lies in their capacity to overcome the dualism between top-down and bottom-up approaches of SI toward a combination of the two, providing an intermediate space for actors from various sectors and levels to meet and implement regeneration objectives. Among these actors, a crucial role is played by the local administration who is always present in the network, being the actor that mobilizes the material assets utilized by projects as well as the one that pools expertise and visibility and that sets the right framework enabling the actors to develop the socially creative strategy.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, while the actors and organizations operating at the local level (city or neighborhood) are a recurring presence in the networks underlying the five projects, in some cases such as Lottozero and MET an important role is also played by national organizations and international networks whose contribution is aimed at scaling up project activities and at bringing expertise and knowledge in the local context. This is the reason why we have used the term “bottom-linked governance” to underline the complementary or even alternative role that these platform spaces can have to those of bottom-up governance.<sup>45</sup> The importance of these socially innovative spaces of action lies in their capacity to channel the local community’s effort toward answering to unmet social needs, empowering vulnerable populations, and addressing urban regeneration challenges.

In this article we have cross-analyzed five projects of urban regeneration *via* social innovation and cultural production, looking at their actors and networks, at

---

42. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22; Micelli E, Ostanel E, Lazzarini L (2023) “Wanna Be Provoked”: Inner Peripheries Generators of Social Innovation in the Italian Apennine. *Land* 12: 829.

43. Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22.

44. Neumeier S (2017) Social innovation in rural development: Identifying the key factors of success. *The Geographical Journal* 183: 34-46.

45. Mehmood A (2016) Institutional forms of social innovation. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, 10(3): 300-311; Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Van den Broeck P, García M (2019) Bottom-linked governance and socially innovative political transformation. In Schröder A, Kaletka C, Howaldt J, Zirngiebl M (eds) *Atlas of Social Innovation - A World of New Practices*. München: Oekom verlag, 62-66.

the assets used and their forms of mobilization, at the management procedures, and at the relationships with the local government. The contribution has highlighted the relevance that the network dimension and the mobilization of spatial capital have for the emergence of SI initiatives in urban neighborhoods as well as the role of culture as a catalyst for shaping new socio-spatial configurations and for reactivating and regenerating vacant or abandoned spaces.

### Bibliography

- Baraldi S, Salone C (2022) Building on decay: urban regeneration and social entrepreneurship in Italy through culture and the arts. *European Planning Studies* 30(10): 2102-2121.
- Bragaglia F (2020) Social innovation as a ‘magic concept’ for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance. *Planning Theory* 1-19.
- Brandsen T, Evers A, Cattacin S, Zimmer A (2016) Social Innovation: A Sympathetic and Critical Interpretation. In Brandsen T, Cattacin S, Evers A, Zimmer A (eds) *Social Innovations in the Urban Context. Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies*. Cham: Springer.
- Brandsen T, Cattacin S, Evers A, Zimmer A (2016) (Eds.) *Social innovations in the Urban Context. Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies*. Cham: Springer.
- Brignone L, Cellamare C, Gissara M, Montillo F, Olcuire S, Simoncini S (2022) Social Innovation or Societal Change? Rethinking Innovation in Bottom-Up Transformation Processes Starting from Three Cases in Rome’s Suburbs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol 482. Cham: Springer, pp. 483-493.
- Cajaiba-Santana G (2013) Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 82(1): 42-51.
- Camagni R, Capello R (2013) Regional Competitiveness and Territorial Capital: A Conceptual Approach and Empirical Evidence from the European Union. *Regional Studies* 47: 1383-1402.
- Campagnari F, Micelli E, Ostanel E (2022) Culture Leading to Urban Regeneration. Empirical Evidence from Some Italian Funding Programs. In Calabrò F, Della Spina L, Piñeira Mantiñán MJ (eds) *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2022. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol 482. Cham: Springer.
- Castro-Arce K, Vanclay F (2020) Transformative social innovation for sustainable rural development: An analytical framework to assist community-based initiatives. *Journal of Rural Studies* 74, 45-54.
- Cerreta M, Daldanise G, Sposito S (2018) Culture-led regeneration for urban spaces: Monitoring complex values networks in action, *Urbani Izziv* 29 S. 9-28.
- Dobay KM (2021) Social innovation and rural development. Two longitudinal case studies from the North-East Romania. *Agricultural Economics and Rural Development*, New Series, Year XVIII 1: 109-129.
- Ferilli G, Sacco PL, Noda K (2015) Culture-driven policies and revaluation of local cultural assets: A tale of two cities, Otaru and Yubari. *City, Culture and Society* 6: 135-143.
- Figueiredo I, Prim MA, Dandolini G (2022) Urban regeneration in the light of social innovation: A systematic integrative literature review. *Land Use Policy* 113: 105873.
- Florida R (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books.



- Franceschinelli R (2021 (Ed.) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. (Spaces of the possible. The new places of culture and the opportunities for regeneration.) Milan: Franco Angeli.
- Grodach C (2013) Cultural Economy Planning in Creative Cities: Discourse and Practice. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(5): 1747-1765.
- Ionescu C (2015) About the conceptualization of social innovation. *Theoretical & Applied Economics*, 22(3): 53-62.
- Jørgensen A, Fallov MA, Casado-Diaz M, Atkinson R (2020) Rural Cohesion: Collective Efficacy and Leadership in the Territorial Governance of Inclusion. *Social Inclusion* 8: 229-241.
- Lazzarini L, Pacchi C (2021) Local narratives and spatial configurations of territorial cohesion: some evidences from COHSMO Project. *DASStU Working Paper Series*, n. 07/2021 (LPS.21).
- Mangialardo A, Micelli E (2017) From sources of financial value to commons: Emerging policies for enhancing public real-estate assets in Italy. *Papers in Regional Science* 97(4): 1397-1408.
- Martinelli F (2012) Social Innovation or Social Exclusion? Innovating Social Services in the Context of a Retrenching Welfare State. In: Franz HW, Hochgerner J, Howaldt J (eds) *Challenge Social Innovation. Potentials for business, social entrepreneurship, welfare and civil society*, Berlin: Springer Verlag, pp. 169-180.
- McFarlane C (2011) *Learning the City. Knowledge and Translocal Assemblage*. Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester.
- Mehmood A (2016) Institutional forms of social innovation. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, 10(3): 300-311.
- Micelli E (2018) Enabling real property. How public real estate assets can serve urban regeneration. *Territorio* 87: 93-97.
- Micelli E, Ostanel E, Lazzarini L (2023) “Wanna Be Provoked”: Inner Peripheries Generators of Social Innovation in the Italian Apennine. *Land* 12: 829.
- Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Mehmood A, Hamdouch A (2013) *The international handbook on social innovation, Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*. UK: Edward Elgar.
- Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Van den Broeck P, García M (2019) Bottom-linked governance and socially innovative political transformation. In Schröder A, Kaletka C, Howaldt J, Zirngiebl M (eds) *Atlas of Social Innovation - A World of New Practices*. München: Oekom verlag, 62-66.
- Mulgan G (2006) The process of social innovation. *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization* 1(2): 145-162.
- Neumeier S (2017) Social innovation in rural development: Identifying the key factors of success. *The Geographical Journal* 183: 34-46.
- Ostanel E (2017) Urban regeneration and social innovation: the role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua, Italy. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 11(1): 79-91.
- Ostanel E (2017) *Spazi fuori dal comune. Rigenerare, includere, innovare*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Ostanel E, Micelli E (2021) Il profilo del rigeneratore: nuovi profili, nuovi planner. (The profile of the regenerator: new profiles, new planners.) In Franceschinelli R (ed) *Spazi del possibile. I nuovi luoghi della cultura e le opportunità della rigenerazione*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 89-102.
- Phillis J A, Deiglmeier K, Miller Dale T (2008) Rediscovering social innovation. *Stanford social innovation review* 6(4): 34-43.

- Pratt A (2010), Creative cities: Tensions within and between social, cultural and economic development: A critical reading of the UK experience. *City, Culture and Society* 1(1):13-20.
- Sampson RJ (2011) Neighborhood effects, causal mechanisms and the social structure of the city. In Demeulenaere P (ed) *Analytical Sociology and Social Mechanisms*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 227-249.
- Soma K, Vatn A (2014) Representing the common goods: Stakeholders vs. citizens. *Land Use Policy* 41: 325-333.
- Tallon A (2013) *Urban regeneration in the UK*. London: Routledge.
- Tricarico L, Jones ZM, Daldanise G (2020) Platform Spaces: When culture and the arts intersect territorial development and social innovation, a view from the Italian context. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44(4-5): 1-22.
- Tricarico L, De Vidovich L, Billi A (2022) Entrepreneurship, inclusion or co-production? An attempt to assess territorial elements in social innovation literature. *Cities* 130: 103986.
- Vicari S, Moulaert F (2009) *Rigenerare la città*. (Regenerate the city.) Bologna: Il Mulino.

## **Into the Storm: A Crossing through the Venetian Wilderness: Architectures 1979-1999**

*By Vincenzo Moschetti\**

*Venice oscillates between two main images, that of the city of Venezia, subject to continuous environmental alterations, and that defined by the slogan Venice, besieged by crowds of tourists. Between the folds of the two images lies a third, often coinciding with the figures proposed, capable of expressing the real condition in which the two forms come to life. It is the wilderness that constitutes the third lens, intended to be an “agglomeration of ‘zones’ in which it is easy to get lost, but also an ‘environment’ that can be crossed by drawing lines of incursion. To inhabit the wildness means increasing the capacity for recognition, defining modes of coexistence; fundamentally, a ‘new alliance’ is called for” (Marini 2020, 15). Discovering Venezia according to this system provides an armamentarium of elements intended for the project where the cross-reference is life, movement, storm, and darkness. Crossing the storm, devising lines of incursion, is the pretext for rereading the figure of Venezia, a dimension in which the project grows, develops, that is, that setting where the signs and actions of the architecture that uses the metaphor of the outpost – the project of conflict – to spatially propose a possible salvation or survival find their place.*

### **Introduction: About the Turbulence of “Wilderness”**

The wilderness manifests itself as both concrete and theoretical reality, its bodies are made up of systems as much material as intangible, and its return to the palimpsest-world represents a datum to be explored and traversed.

The rise of the wilderness, the advancement of a state of nature that Morton has defined through the title *Dark Ecology*<sup>1</sup>, compels an updating of the notion by re-weaving systems and figures that throughout “history” has been part of the human and thus architectural imaginary. Dante’s *dark forest* or the forests of Laugier’s hut, or even those of Boullée’s architecture born in the shadow of the woods, have returned in written or drawn form, through books, the tangible and intangible condition of this parallel world. The evidence of an ambiguous organism implies the entry into the field of materials that may not be directly referable to architecture but that can, with theoretical lunges, recover or update notions capable of establishing nexuses and connections in the direction of a projectuality.

---

\*Researcher, Department of Architecture and Design, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy.

1. See Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, Columbia University Press, New York 2016.

The question to be answered is structured through phases that together can give an image of what is wild space that speaks of *Formless*<sup>2</sup>, in the Bataillan sense of the term, and that overturns (or updates) the canonical intersections between “form” and “content.” In this sense, the term wilderness is to be understood as “more apt to define primordial nature, within which the human is still indistinct and fully immersed in natural dimensionality [...] presenting the wilderness as dense, intricate, inaccessible, dark.”<sup>3</sup> This organism returned copiously by literary and philosophical publicity has not at the moment undergone a lunge by the literature of architecture allocating the construction of its map through a set of themes such as to define instruments of investigation. If it is still defined as a “multitudo arborum diffusa et inculta”<sup>4</sup> it is possible to verify a basis for exploration and graft onto such a “surface” from the many focal points, hypotheses of representation of space. A set of documents (textual, photographic, pictorial, and even digital) were collected to trace a logical sequence in the themes.

Overlays of texts generated a circuit of indications of what the forest might be-in the spatial sense of the term-to establish connections with respect to known or nearby figures. From this emerged the studies made by Lebbeus Woods (1940-2012) not directly related to the wilderness but close to the hypotheses, to the crises of the existing-in line precisely with Morton’s statements—such as to return an apparatus of signs (words, spellings...) that can be associated with the theme of turbulence within which the wilderness can find theoretical positions.

*Turbulence*, coined by Woods, has thus become the container of these documents, traversed both in paper and digital form, expanded by the analysis of the blogs kept by the author to cross-fertilize operations capable of returning usable notions in the direction of the research in question. The materials introduced, as will be seen, this must be emphasized, are of a different nature, “wild,” also concrete and intangible fix points around which to work in order to determine—where possible—a map that nevertheless is to be understood as a metaphor, that is, a reading of systems and not a mere cartographic science.

The use of *turbulence* in representational codes marks the stages of a journey that merges words and graphemes to increase the armamentarium with respect to an image not yet operative in the field of architecture. Woods critically points out how the goal was to enter the realm of these systems to project a whole living but submerged world in which the human and the natural were “co-dependent and unified with each other not through mere symbolism but by a richness of differences and diversity.” Drawing enters the practical description of etymologies by surpassing symbolic analysis and operationally inserting conditions useful in identifying the possible phenomenon(s).

Narrative practices increase the degree of individuation of aspects by giving the possibility of translating into maps, understood as metaphors, the elements

---

2. See Yve Alain Bois, Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide*, Zone Books, New York 1997.

3. Dario Gentili, Federica Giardini, *Selva e stato di natura: variazioni cinestesiche per il contemporaneo/Sylva and State of Nature: Kinesesthetic Variations for the Contemporary*, in “Vesper. Rivista di architettura, arti e teoria / Journal of Architecture, Arts and Theory”, no. 3, 2020, p. 84.

4. Ibid.

brought into play by Woods' investigation. The parallel with etymological factors induces the fixing of points that find in turbulence a way of representation that can clarify what happens within masses and wild spaces making the main lines of tension visible to the eyes of the project.

In this sense, if the wilderness is device<sup>5</sup>, turbulence represents and outlines the lines of accumulation of the system. The multidirectionality of the *multitudo inculta* signals the properties of an environment within which the architectural project must penetrate. Such crossing-comparable to some of Woods' studies of Da Vinci and the placing of obstacles in the flow<sup>6</sup>-describes the conflict between the two polarities: artifact and nature, capable of redistributing the cycle of turbulence that seems in this way to regenerate itself by reforming from the obstacle.

In some ways, Da Vinci's drawings are warnings, yet they are not without hope. Human beings cannot control nature, whose power can destroy them, but through their understanding of it, they can adapt themselves when necessary. His understanding of the changing forces liberated by fluid dynamics anticipates key developments in modern science and art. Arguably, he was the first architect of their indeterminate form.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the metaphor of turbulence identifies a strategy that can document and define the crossing practices affected by the project.

### **Methodology: Wilderness as a new Operationalization of the Project**

However, as with all descriptions, they cannot bring us to full analytical understanding. We need other perspectives, and for that must turn to the analog. The analog emphasizes some aspects of a slipstream space, while it ignores others. In fact, it creates a fictional construct based on facts, or at least selected ones. [...] Slipstream space can be inhabited by people and sometimes is. Auto racers get extra speed while spending less fuel by following fast cars in front of them, as do drivers of eighteen-wheelers, whose boxy trailers create exceptionally violent turbulence and powerful slipstreams, which is why you will often see, on the highway, two or more of these trucks following each other in a tightly spaced line. [...] Virtual and analog experiences emphasize some characteristics of a phenomenon while ignoring others.

---

5. See Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (2006), Nottetempo, Milan 2018; Gilles Deleuze, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?*, in VV.AA., *Michel Foucault philosophe, Rencontre internationale, Paris 9, 10, 11 Janvier 1988*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1989.

6. "Turbulence in a smoothly flowing stream of water (or air) is caused by the insertion into the stream of an obstacle. Da Vinci made many studies of such a situation and was especially interested in the effect of geometric obstacles. A completely different form of turbulence is caused by a smoothly flowing fluid stream pouring into—and colliding with—a still fluid body," L. Woods, *Da Vinci blobs*, December 3, 2012/4:40 pm. See: <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2010/12/03/da-vincis-blobs/>

7. Ibid.

That is the price to be paid for vastly expanding the boundaries of our experience, and for exploring the imaginary in the real.<sup>8</sup>

Woods suggests that the sign is not pure, but rhythmic, impetuous, by necessity disconnected from Cartesian logic, ready to intervene in forthcoming issues where the alteration between degrees of civilization is now discussed under the terms of thickets, conflicts, indeed storms. To enter the darkness described by Woods is to find a door into the open, to cross the space of darkness by recognizing traces by means of small, fragmentary flashes. The result is a conflict between the architectural “form” and the ‘anti-form’ of the wilderness, within which the scale of representation provides a map capable of reproducing a possible reading of space.

This operationally new reality intersects spaces that speak of conflict where the lens of the forest, served by the critical structure of turbulence, understood as storm or disturbance, can translate parts of contemporary scenarios. Wilderness and turbulence thus refer to “living” issues, the former as space, the latter as flux; they are generators or translators of lines of tension that if written or read can be made traversable according to the project.

Representing the wilderness indicates the enactment of an unpredictability that can only partly be physically discussed. The signs that Woods proposes are as multiple as the actors in the field. They are elements that underline the existence of tension in functions of projections.<sup>9</sup>

This projecting refers to a condition that indicates the strategies and (possible) operations and actions of the project. If this, therefore, falls under the elaboration of maps, it is necessary to think of these in function of a metaphor that depicts the different and multiple elements of the forest to return them according to signs capable of producing project activity.

The images that fall within the research in question establish an existence other not unlike the superimposition of layers that have affected the evolution of Venice. This is why it can be seen that even “the documents in the Museo Correr’s printed collection include topographical maps, plans and views with different and relevant contents. They reproduce not only tangible elements but also imaginary ones, without excluding plans in which a hypothetical reality that cannot always be realized is represented.”<sup>10</sup> The tangibility of the element or its parallel ‘imaginary’ existence in the documented Venice reinforces the hypothesis of an overlap with wild bodies.

If what has been discussed above is verifiable, it is therefore possible to identify a coplanarity between objects and actions whereby Venice seems to be

---

8. Lebbeus Woods, *Slipstreaming*, December 18, 2012/1:06 am. See <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2010/12/18/slipstreaming-2/>

9. “This ‘projecting’ of Woods is interesting then because it seems to affirm not so much or not only the security of one’s direction as the possibility of the existence of a ‘government of becoming’,” Alberto Bertagna, *Il controllo dell’indeterminato. Potëmkin villages e altri nonluoghi*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2010, p. 112.

10. Giuliana Baso, Marisa Scarso, *Raccontare e interpretare la laguna. Descrizione catalografica delle opere a stampa*, in Id., Camillo Tonini, (edited by), *La laguna di Venezia nella cartografia storica a stampa del Museo Correr*, Musei Civici Veneziani, Iuav, Marsilio, Venice 2003, p. XVII.

immersed in a condition of wildness, that is to say in a palimpsest of turbulences and perturbations to be investigated (maps) in order to find possible projectual crossings (outposts).



**Figure 1.** Venice “Sylva”

Source: © The author, 2021.

### The Case: Venice Turbulence and Storm

Venice’s images are often anchored in a world of dreamlike visions, peaceful conditions and human supremacism as well as control over an environmental system that is highly tumultuous, turbulent and disturbing: wild.

In the darkness of the inks, based on Romanelli’s statement, the existence of “black” traces, uncertain signs, and positions that do not always coincide with binary codes, as much as movements and asymmetries, currents, and displacements that attack civilization by reinventing quotas and arrangements, is evident. In Venice, the control of the indeterminate is a real fact, and the city’s project emphasizes the practices of crossing dangers, itself in the inks of the cartographies becomes a space of conflict, and a machine of recognizability and advancement.



[...] perhaps its greatest—but indirect—contribution to the definition of the image of the city lies precisely in this *resistance* that VENETIE MD opposes to the investigation, which is dedalic, dense but very articulate, homogeneous in the complex but highly discontinuous in its fragments; compact but individualized in all its parts—even the most minute—; rich in decoration and invention and yet serial. [...] The accentuation of the protean and the multiform, of the monumental and the celebratory, of the extravagant originality and the labyrinthine and labyrinthine nature remain and coexist until the insurgent need for order and clarity, the choice of a different accentuation, even graphic, of what is essential and of the accessory. [...] In addition, it should be noted that the map is not limited, most of the time, to being a record of what has happened, but rather a suggestion for new interventions, a reason for reflection and stimulus for projects and for the same options in the field of town planning.

The reading of a homogeneous palimpsest of fragments reveals other presences, excluded from the narrative but now central under the lens of the forest. The representation of the project of this system moves between the material and immaterial, using the environment as a paradigm in which to immerse the certainty of a city that is nevertheless historically under siege.

There are, therefore, two main movements that the inks highlight, on the one hand the position of the city dense with architecture, and on the other, the background of the figure, a living breathing organism that has as much to do with the plant world as with the animal world and that together, with other connections, give us, in the vision of a project, a biological image.

In Cristoph Stimmer's *Pianta prospettica della città e delle sue lagune* (1558)<sup>11</sup>, the object of investigation is still the city surrounded by a small constellation of islands. The urban core is placed in the center of a semicircular representation where Venice is placed in a barycentric position. The built-up area is thus protected by a continuous sign where, on one side to the left, is the *terrafirma*, and on the other to the right, what the engraver calls *Naturale littus*.

It is the graphic code that renders the antithetical of the environment that becomes emblematic of a reading that observes things under a different lens.

Never before has Venice spoken a more topical and universal language to historians and mankind in general, offering us the experience of a microcosm crossing the path, full of dilemmas, of a risky and perpetually precarious relationship with nature. Its amphibious location, between land and sea, within a lagoon continually threatened by silting and other phenomena of degradation, has prompted it to apply protection policies at an early stage.<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Reference number: S. C.; F. M.: M 10849, Correr Museum, Venice. See also Giandomenico Romanelli, Susanna Biadene, *Venezia piante e vedute. Catalogo del fondo cartografico e stampa*, Museo Correr, Venice 1982.

12. Piero Bevilacqua, *Venezia e le acque. Una metafora planetaria.*, Donzelli editore, Rome 1998, pp. 20-21.



**Figure 2.** Jacopo de' Barbari, *VENETIE MD – Veduta di Venezia a volo d'uccello*, 1500

The *amphibious location* is, in this sense, the pretext for the reinterpretation of the lagoon palimpsest, where Venice is not to be understood as the absolute center of a basic composition, but as a fragment of a discourse born of uncertainty. The inks of the papers that emerged from the archives thus overturn the thought that obscurity is only a place fraught with danger, “obscurity can also be a place of freedom and possibility, a place of equality [...] we have much to learn from non-knowledge. Uncertainty can be productive, even sublime”<sup>13</sup>.

Stimmer's woodcuts darken the layers of a *Dark Era*, which parallels Morton's *Dark Ecology*, allowing the map-makers to construct those disturbances whose reference is selva. Within the tension lines etched by Stimmer based on other previous representations, the existence of a landscape of turbulence turns out to be a concrete reality, where it is possible to “acquire a new dimension of life”<sup>14</sup> and where the lagoon seems to be a diagram, an open system in which the project acts.

This dimension is defined here by the environment, which is followed by a setting, which Tafuri had linked under the representation of Giorgione's *La Tempesta*, indicating “the sacredness of Venetian origins: mysterious ‘conjunction’ of incorruptibility and worldliness.”<sup>15</sup> This double track is an example of the alliance between the biological and the artefactual that underlies the comparison in this research and is reflected in the textual and representational discussions. The amphibious location of which Bevilacqua speaks, found in Stimmer's woodcut, among others, is the key to understanding the palimpsest-lagoon on which Tafuri's *Tempest* works.

13. James Bridle, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*, Verso Books, New York 2018, pp. 24-25.

14. Giancarlo De Carlo, *La città e il territorio. Quattro lezioni*, edited by Clelia Tuscano, Quodlibet, Macerata 2019, p. 102.

15. Manfredo Tafuri, *La «nuova Costantinopoli». La rappresentazione della «renovatio» nella Venezia dell'Umanesimo (1450-1509)*, in «Rassegna. Problemi di architettura dell'ambiente», no. 9, March 1982, p. 20.

In the *Tempest* we have all the figures mentioned, including the serpent, which in the *Hypnerotomachia* is said to “obrepere fora d'una latebrosa crepidine di saxo”. A *Venus-Venice*, identified as parent and protector of her children, but also Venetia-Iustitia, echoing the nude of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi. [...] Whose left leg, we note, is covered by a wild rose bush, whose allusive function is emphasized by the painter. We also note that the depiction of Venice can be traced further within the painting: in the very pose of the woman, whose body seems to trace the shape of the Grand Canal; in the river, crossed by a wooden bridge; in the city, which appears to be without walls and dominated—note—by a neo-Byzantine dome, in the two columns and two trees. [...] The past—the classical ruins, painted without mournful complacency—needs a “bridge” to join the present; nature contains the scene – the sacred and mystical “naturalness” of Venice. But that “*physiozoa Venus*” awaits the summer: she does not weep, because she knows that the festival time will return, in tune with the cycle of time.<sup>16</sup>

Venice is thus immersed in a natural image that is both a literary figure, such as the forest and the wild, one thinks of Dante or Hillman, and a concrete and tangible one, such as the dimension that reality returns. The *Tempest* is the pretext in which to reread his figure, which is therefore composed of “natural” elements and breathes in a certain wildness in which ruins and fragments are immersed, dominated by a lurking danger coming from the sky but not only. This dimension is that in which the project grows, develops, that environment in which the signs and actions of that architecture that uses the metaphor of the outpost to find a possible position find their place. The very title *Giorgione, la Tempesta e la salvezza*, chosen by Sergio Alcamo<sup>17</sup>, indicates the design response on which Venice works, that of “rescue;”<sup>18</sup> where the elements of the pictorial representation highlight the dangers and immersions from which to defend oneself.

The storm<sup>19</sup> is therefore a dynamic figure, it highlights shifts and disturbances and if these are part of a “Venetian” literature, it is therefore possible to find the evidence of a wild existence that inks and brushes have explored.

---

16. Ivi, pp. 36-37.

17. See Sergio Alcamo, *La verità celata: Giorgione, la Tempesta e la salvezza*, Donzelli, Rome 2019.

18. One thinks of the projects submitted for the *Salvataggio di Venezia* (Saving Venice) competition and in particular the 9999 project. The project envisaged saving the city by transforming the lagoon into a large prairie, a space of land. See Sara Marini, Malvina Borgherini, Cristina Baggio (eds.), *Dall'archivio: rimontaggi radicali*, Iuav University of Venice, Venice 2016.

19. See Manfredo Tafuri, *Nella Tempesta*, in «Vesper. Rivista di architettura, arti e teoria | Journal of Architecture, Arts and Theory», no. 1, *Supervenire*, 2019, pp. 8-12.



**Figure 3.** Giorgione, *The Tempest (La Tempesta)*, ca. 1508, Gallerie dell' Accademia, Venice

This conflicting, complex and at times ambiguous space is the space of the lagoon, which from that *Naturale littus* observes the changes and entrances to question itself—through active planning activities<sup>20</sup>—on how it can survive and cross possible dangers. Not only is the tide therefore the enemy to be faced, but also and above all a system of factors on several levels that can be read both horizontally (*acqua grande*, for example) and vertically, in a falling sense.

The elements of siege are “a heap” of things, echoing the etymological definition of *selva*, rendering a figure—that of the Lagoon of Venice—where “this hinge is both process and condition. As a process, forces of transformation unfurl at different scales and across different geographies, producing variegated social

20. See VV.AA., *MOSE. Effetto Mose: le sfide di un progetto per il futuro*, Marsilio, Venice 2021.

and ecological effects. As a condition, the moment of pause-of fallowness-is replete with potential to forge new social and ecological relations.”<sup>21</sup>

Objects are detectors of change, weavers on a state of sinking or salvation, placed at the boundaries of a system that in part seems closed but in reality is constantly undergoing interventions from “outside”, incursions. In this sense, internal perturbations are compounded by others, giving rise to that selva device that we call a “lagoon” by organization of research.

### Venice’s Outposts: The Architectures of Wilderness

The theoretical background that the wilderness proposes thus interrogates the practice of the project and proposes actions that in the military language and technique of war and engineering establish devices so that forests can be traversed (and not controlled). If, in the wake of Agamben, we have recognized in the forest a possible device, then the outposts in their technical and exploratory traits can also be associated with this field, including, in the question of the device, aspects that we will verify with the project. The background against which the figures are composed is (di)marked by two macro devices, where on the one hand the first – the wilderness – advances by reinventing palimpsests, and on the other – the outpost – explores and converts into space the actions that the wilderness proposes even if only temporarily.

The outpost constitutes the predetermined and temporary synthesis of confrontation where, according to the textbook, one could say how “the project reads the existing as a reference [...] [and where] the relationship between the layers inserted is not aimed at establishing a univocal logic nor a certain alternative to the fabric.”<sup>22</sup> Despite the general order dictated by the manual, the role of architecture is not constantly the same but devises different and/or complementary operations depending on the space that the “forest” proposes, as well as the existence or otherwise of a certain land.

In this sense, the specter of the lagoon assigns new meanings to the architectural project, which, using the metaphor of the outpost, takes shape according to a system of operations in the idea of crossing the space affected by advances, immersions, and conflicts.

Architectures, sentinels and islands become the projects within which to respond to the jungle environment by presenting the search for possible disappearances, design of abandonments, and welcoming of nestings as the configuration of an operational palimpsest that from Alvise Cornaro to MOSE has invested its signs (inks) within the confines of the Venice Lagoon and its “periphery.”

---

21. Michael Chieffalo, Julia Smachylo, *Fallow*, in «New Geographies», no. 10, *Fallow*, 2019, p. 6.

22. Sara Marini, *Nuove terre. Architetture e paesaggi dello scarto*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2010, p. 123.

## Sentinel

In the experimentation of the outpost, two dates and two projects intersect to give rise to the sentinels, i.e. bodies of “vigilance” and custody, elements of anticipatory waiting and scrutiny. 1975 and 1979 mark the times when John Hejduk’s two architectures came to life: *Cemetery for the Ashes of Thought*<sup>23</sup> and *The Thirteen Watchtowers of Cannaregio*<sup>24</sup>. Both left on paper represent the result of a patrol in the Lagoon of Venice, two overturning experiences that attempt various degrees of incursion, the first horizontally, following the direction of the water in a state of stillness, the second, on the contrary, vertically, that is, challenging the rising sea level.

Since 1974 Venice has preoccupied the nature of my work. It is a forum of my inner arguments. The thoughts have to do with Europe and America; abstraction and historicism; the individual and the collective; freedom and totalitarianism; the colors black, white, grey; silence and speech; the literal and the ambiguous; narrative and poetry; the observer and the observed.<sup>25</sup>

*Observer* and *observed*, that is, the observer and the observed, are the principles of a strategic narrative that uses architecture, and its design, to process interactions of crossing and existence between the layers of a turbulent ecology. The two projects mark a precise moment of knowledge and vigilance over the lagoon territory. They position themselves according to the security of a spatial argument interested in the practice of control.

The signs of the cemetery, or rather the “columbarium”, behind the Molino Stucky, on the island of Giudecca, an island in a state of abandonment at the beginning of the 1970s, represent the author's response to the need to read the palimpsest. Composed of continuous lines, the columbarium is the matrix of a cultural programme that Hejduk imports into the lagoon to house excerpts of Western literature in which pieces of a Melvillian *Moby Dick* also stand out.<sup>26</sup>

The Molino Stucky Building’s exterior is painted black. The Molino Stucky Building’s interior is painted white. The long, extended walls of the Cemetery for the Ashes of Thought are black on one side and white on the other. The top and end surfaces of the long extended walls are grey. Within the walls are one-foot square holes at eye level. Within each one-foot-square hole is placed a transparent cube containing ashes. Under each hole in the wall is a small bronze plaque indicating the title, and only the title of a work, such as Remembrance of Things Past, The Counterfeiters, The Inferno, Paradise Lost, Moby Dick, etc. On the interior of the

---

23. See documentation within the John Hejduk fonds, 1947-2000, predominant 1947-1996, Series: *Professional Work, 1954-2000, predominant 1954-1996*, Project: *Cemetery for the Ashes of Thought*, 1975, reference number: AP145.S2.D35, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

24. See documentation within the John Hejduk fonds, 1947-2000, predominant 1947-1996, Series: *Professional Work, 1954-2000, predominant 1954-1996*, Project: *The Thirteen Watchtowers of Cannaregio* [1974-1979], reference number: AP145.S2.D37, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

25. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa*, edited by Kim Shkapich, Rizzoli, New York 1985, p. 136.

26. See Cesare De Seta, *Venezia e Moby Dick*, Consorzio Venezia Nuova, Venice 2012.



walls of the Molino Stucky Building are small plaques with the names of the authors of the works: Proust, Gide, Dante, Milton, Melville, etc. In the lagoon on a man-made island is a small house for the sole habitation of one individual for a limited period of time. Only one individual for a set period of time may inhabit the house, no others will be permitted to stay on the island during its occupation. The lone individual looks across the lagoon to the Cemetery for the Ashes of Thought.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 4.** John Hejduk, *Perspective for Cemetery for the Ashes of Thought*, 1974-1979. Fonds: John Hejduk fonds, 1947-2000, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

The process of adhesion between project and context seems to invert the rules of a conflictual space by adhering to an idea of thought that tends to work with invisible signs on the horizon. A trace that is the origin of the origin and as such “the ashes mark the event of disinscription of the world and the condition of possibility for reinscription in the future. While the system of names establishes the symbolic structure of thought, the system of ashes points to the pre-symbolic real. But the ashes are not an origin, they are anterior to origins—they erase origins in favor of beginnings and performatives.”<sup>28</sup>

27. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa* cit., p. 80.

28. K. Michael Hays, *Of Mirrors and Ashes and Beginning Again: A Note on Hejduk's Instauration of Brunelleschi's Experiment*, in «Harvard Design Magazine», 38, *Do You read me?*, 2014, p. 61; see also: K. Michael Hays, *Encounter*, in Lamberto Amistadi, Ildebrando Clemente (eds.), *John Hejduk*, Aion, Florence 2015, pp. 23-43.



These signs<sup>29</sup> are the enactment of a concrete reality that verifies the passages and states of a possible tide, they are the field in which the starting point is re-established according to a new quota that is immovable but ready for immersion as much theoretical (thought) as practical. The architecture-sentinel is the possible origin of a new history marked by the occupation of individual blocks, which measure even the smallest differences in the surrounding state in support of the nearby island—also a project by Hejduk—in which a vertical element, the only one actually legible in the composition, gives its name to the *House of States of Head*.

In contrast to the horizontality of the project in Giudecca, the thirteen “guard” towers for Cannaregio represent an inverse but complementary reading, placed on the other side, north of the city, towards the mainland. “Each tower measures 4.87 x 4.87 x 29.26 meters in height. [...] The towers stand on a rectangular slab surrounded by water. A canal 7.41 m wide, a ditch 1.22 m wide and two ditches 0.61 m wide.”<sup>30</sup>

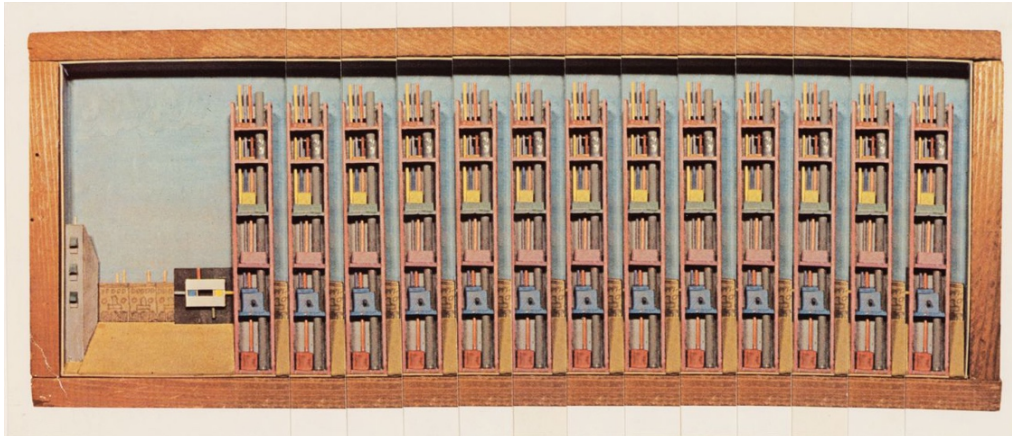
The design makes space controlled. The measurements are given, not random, and the plate regulates the life that can be created around it and likewise declares the existence of predefined distances. However, the experiment cannot be read into the uniqueness of the project alone, which, as stated, is part of a broad system of events that entered the *Venice system* between 1979 and 1980.<sup>31</sup> The towers represent the trace of a program of sentinels that precisely immerse themselves in the city or its surroundings to experiment the existence of design and thought in the face of the movements that the lagoon proposes. The height of the thirteen towers is an example of a vigilance entrusted to the architecture and its inhabitant, a single person, a relationship that Hejduk probably intends to be univocal between the built machine, the man and the palimpsest. Placed in order, they represent a point of reference of space, visible, and not absent to the eye as in Giudecca; their color (pink, green, grey and white) is the expression of a “forestructure” placed in a defensive position.

---

29. “The work consists of two perimeter walls that laterally enclose the island, thus determining a construction with a ‘head’: the mill is a wake or tail-shaped enclosure within which fifty-one parallel walls are positioned. These inner walls have the same height as the side walls, but a shorter length; the result is a building oriented towards Venice within a saturated and compact space. The walls, painted white on one side and black on the other, mark different rhythms depending on their direction (towards Venice or the lagoon); the side walls are painted the same colour as the interior walls but in the opposite direction. [...] The final compactness of the island; the coincidence of land and built-up area, and the strong directionality of the object, are determined by an architectural composition that acts as a disposition in time and space of a simple element: the wall placed within the fixed perimeter of the island,” Fabian Carlos Giusta, *John Hejduk: Profezie figurative. Il progetto per Cannaregio ovest, Venezia 1978*, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2013, pp. 28-29.

30. John Hejduk, *Venezia 1979. Le tredici torri di guardi di Cannaregio*, in Francesco Dal Co (edited by), *10 immagini per Venezia*, Officina, Rome 1980, p. 66.

31. See also to the project *The Silent Witnesses* (1974-1980).



**Figure 5.** John Hejduk, *The Thirteen Watchtowers of Cannaregio*: section comprising views of a presentation model, 1974-1979. Fonds: John Hejduk fonds, 1947-2000, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

The strategy that the projects propose marks a circuit that uses the city as a base for observing lagoon behavior, mapping it, according to that “in-depth knowledge of the enemy and its possibilities.”<sup>32</sup> In the exercise between verticality and horizontality, Hejduk’s machines design an organism that works with stratification without choosing the type of disturbance to counteract, as much as devising the existence of a gaze that from bottom to top can quantify the advances offered not as rescue elements but as systemic landscape structures generated by a discourse of environmental necessity.

## Ark

On 11 November 1979, a new ark joins the Venetian archipelago, it is that of an artificial land that can change its own position following the routes of fortune and chance<sup>33</sup>, something close to the terms expressed by the lens of the wilderness. The latter theme prepares the concrete field of research by declaring the assiduous presence of natural cycles with respect to “a Venice in white, all marble, destined to remember itself, to become a monument”<sup>34</sup> as was the intention of Jacopo Sansovino or Palladio. Following the traces traced in the drawings of *La città analoga* (*The analogous city*), it emerges how the theatre

32. Biblioteca Esercito Italiano, *Memoria sull'impiego delle grandi unità: (n. 900/A della serie dottrinale), Le operazioni difensive*, vol. I, Stilgrafica, Roma 1987, p. 26.

33. “I use the term Fortune, with a capital letter, in the sense of the ancient writers, of a goddess or an intangible quality that when it surrounds a place, a building, a man makes everything lucky or auspicious. How luck intervenes in the life of things and people we certainly do not know; we only know that, like Providence in the Catholic world, it is linked to Hope and therefore to Faith, which are theological virtues. It is therefore clear that I am not referring to a practical, or commercial or other kind of fortune; in the case of the Teatro del Mondo, the divergence of this other fortune is even clamorous, as it is a building that was deliberately destroyed, with decision and efficiency rare in our country,” Aldo Rossi, *Teatro del Mondo*, in Id., *Teatro del Mondo*, edited by Manlio Brusatin, Alberto Prandi, Cluva, Venice 1982, p. 12.

34. Aldo Rossi, *I quaderni azzurri 1968-1992*, edited by Francesco Dal Co, Electa-The Getty Research Centre, Milano-Los Angeles 1999, Q/A 26, 1979.

project sees Venice in its being a city interrupted or abandoned to the cycle of its own ecology, an environment made of water where the islands give land to an architecture whose interiors are rooms of wonders, theatres, leading the thread back to what the 1979 Theatre Biennale promised, namely *Venezia e lo spazio scenico*.<sup>35</sup>

Rossi, using the city as an experimental laboratory, takes on the role of “romantic poet, faced with the inexorable reality of the survivor, yearning for a return to the possibility of the hero.”<sup>36</sup> The hero is both the author and the work, the Theatre of the World, where the architecture, consisting of a single large room with a central plan, represents the last possible *Wunderkammer*, the last hope of a city devoured by its own ecological palimpsest incapable of expansion and renewal.

In this way, the project becomes another piece of Venice, of this city, supporting its ecological systems without defining a distinction between the city and the lagoon, without separating the two aspects which, on the contrary, become the spirit of the architecture invented. In Venice, the theatre, an ark, arrived from the water, like the *Bucintoro*, fixing the origin and end of the work in the narrative of the project: a floating body and not really a ship. Re-discussing this paradigm can put into practice some considerations not as much on the known genealogy of the project, but on the motifs and intentions of the spatial scene supported by texts and notes that broaden its meaning.

The drawing<sup>37</sup> for the main elevation, represented in shadow form, suggests the existence of a paradox, traceable to that of Theseus’ Ship, where the Theatre of the World absorbs parts of a process from the behavior of the water. In the drawing, in fact, parts seem to be missing, lost in the stroke and in the hatching, drowned almost by a reflection. These missing parts within established boundaries signal the existence of subtexts and the fixation of a possible theory that breaks through the two-dimensionality of the surface to grasp distant focal points, programs, discourses on the environment, but above all settings. The only color in this case is defined by the black that declares the presence of depths or emersions, once again the black of the inks; like a patina, the general representation is the summation of the motifs that this architecture takes on in order to survive or anticipate the relationship with the water that erases, absorbs, drags, adds. In and around this same water, the theatre will be destroyed.

If, on the one hand, the proposed solutions demonstrate the will to work again on the city’s emergencies, on the reinterpretation of historical or historicized

---

35. “The interiors of Venezia are Wunderkammers of spaces: no occasional vessel is given access, here the tide enters only to mirror the mirrors and tapestries and then to go out sadly. The beauty of Venezia is peaceful, it is exposed and protected from unrepeatable excesses, from the dream of an architecture that whised to become a city,” Sara Marini, Alberto Bertagna, *Venice: a document*, Bruno, Venice 2014, p. 37.

36. Peter Eisenman, *The House of the Dead as the City of Survival*, in Id., Aldo Rossi, *Aldo Rossi in America: 1976–1979*, Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York 1979, p. 6.

37. In this regard, reference should be made to the drawing *Prospetto*, [s.d.], N INV 193, pencil on tissue paper; 50x39 cm, kept at the Aldo Rossi Fonds, Professional Activities, AP/45: *Theatre of the World for the 1st International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, 1979–1980*. Architecture Archives Centre, National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome.

scenarios, reviewing notions such as context and restoration, understood in their values with respect to architectural operations; the precariousness with which the Theatre is presented at its berth speaks consciously of survival. The ark<sup>38</sup> is the manifestation of this clash between the heroicity of the architectural sign and the cycle of nature, where the only way to “survive” is not just to rely on Fortune, but to understand the movements, to abandon the solidity of the earth—here in Venice—and to become part of an organism of atmospheric and chronological uncertainty, of landlessness.

There are no animals or men to be protected tout court, but there is a theory of space to be demonstrated and transported beyond the dimension of the tides and the force of the sirocco wind. Venice, in this sense, imposes a probable reversal of previous considerations; the disappearance of land, the emergence of islands and the ecological system place the project in the dimension of testimony, of the documentation of temporal parts. Even the ark, more than a ship, discussed with speculation in Kircher’s *Ark Noë*, absorbed the instances of nature, resisting the force of winds and waters with the “forms” of the monument, representing in the palimpsest of events around its construction a world of meanings that return in the body of the theatre.<sup>39</sup>

The Theatre of the World is an intermittent work, it is a monument that operates only for small temporal fragments, a victim of the weather imposes a verification of the truth of the mask used by Rossi, which by logic and autonomy establishes “the realm of the separate, the multiple, the confused.”<sup>40</sup> This architecture works on the limit—understood not in the condition of boundary but of stability—allowing itself interventions and movements that would otherwise be impossible, refusing limitation right from the start, with the design and construction of a palimpsest that will return in future time.

In the movements, the 1979 project produces images by redistributing its presence with respect to the fixity of the context which, however, in each environmental variation, seems to be able to be reinvented or updated.

If, on the one hand, the typological rigidity distances the design of the theatre from the splendid 16th-century theatres such as Rusconi’s, on the other hand the assemblage of pieces and collected parts becomes the paraphernalia for survival constituted by the terms of *Fortune* and *Hope*.

The architecture of the theatre is destined to dissolve together with the utopia of Venice, nature, and spectacle, on the contrary, are immortal and persist in their functions, in constituting the settings. This “reminds us of that space itself *is* an event connected to time” according to which the project returns to work after a long absence with the cosmos, that is, with the whole awaiting future completion.

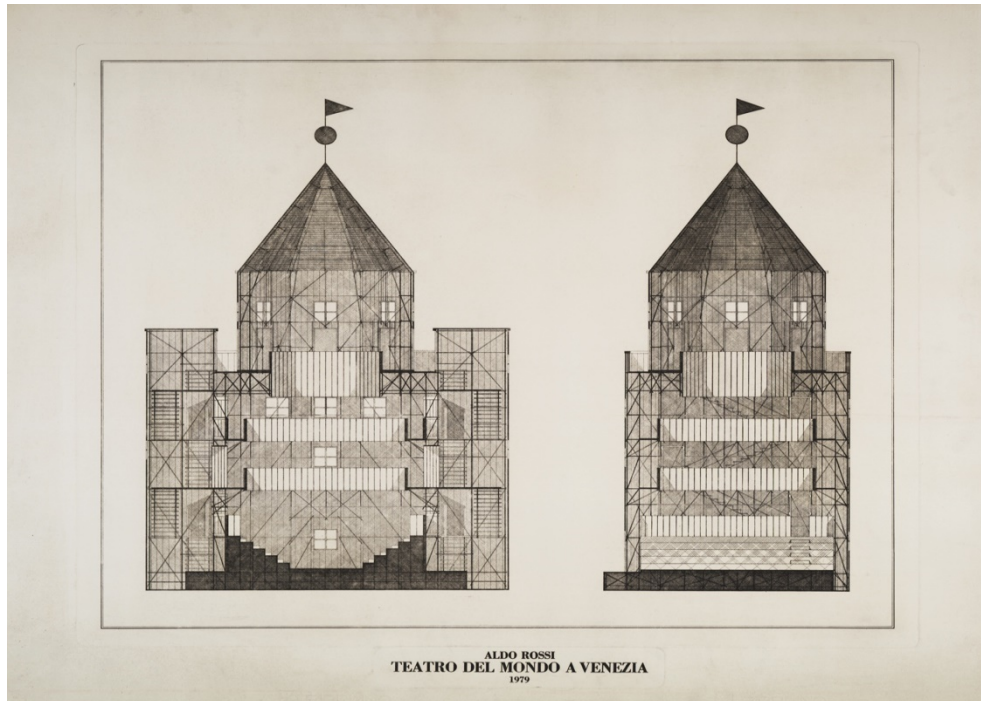
---

38. In Busatin’s essay and the respective iconographic atlas, the first images are those of arches. The representations of Athanasius Kircher (1675) and Jan Sadler (16th century) set the theoretical scene in which the design of the Theatre of the World may have found relations; see Manlio Busatin, *Theatrum mundi novissimi*, in Aldo Rossi, *Teatro del Mondo* cit., pp. 17-96.

39. “The roles that the individual parts of the edifice are called on to play never happen by chance but occur as part of a precise hierarchy, just as in the plot of a play,” Alberto Ferlenga, *The Theaters of the Architect*, in «Perspecta», vol. 26, 1990, p. 197.

40. Alessandro Fontana, *La verità delle maschere*, in VV.AA., *Venezia e lo spazio scenico*, La Biennale, Venice 1979, p. 21.

In this sense, the theatre immerses itself, otherwise it could not live, without sinking; the raft saves it and gives it images and symbols identified in the sacred scriptures, giving life to the abandonment of “an earthly certainty”<sup>41</sup> through the use of the metaphor of the outpost.



**Figure 6.** Figure 6. Aldo Rossi, *Teatro del Mondo*, 1979, Venice. MAXXI, Rome. MAXXI Architecture Collection, Fonds Aldo Rossi, Attività professionale, 45: *Teatro del Mondo per la I Mostra Internazionale di Architettura della Biennale di Venezia*, N. INV. 193

Source: Eredi Aldo Rossi.

## Island

The notion of an island refers to an ideal world where an association of concepts shows how the line of meaning is not to emphasize the existence of an introverted system, but, on the contrary, to indicate that the operative strategy to 'survive' the advance of the jungle is to respond by carving out spaces of communication within it, islands. The lands and utopias of the archipelago indicate the osmosis between the two organisms working on dynamic processes, of movements, rather than on the static nature of the masses. In *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, a redesign underlines the work plans in Tafuri's book: Alvise Cornaro's three projects for St. Mark's Basin (c. 1560). Two of the three proposals submitted to the *Savi ed Esecutori delle Acque di Venezia* are islands: a theatre and

41. Daniel Libeskind, «*Deus ex Machina*», «*Machina ex Deo*», in Aldo Rossi, *Teatro del Mondo* cit., p. 120; or. text Id., «*Deus ex Machina*», «*Machina ex Deo*», in «*Opposition: Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture*», no. 21, 1980, pp. 3-23.

an artificial hill. The project forms Cornaro works with are therefore “islands” in the idea that they could safeguard and resist the movements of the lagoon. Cornaro’s islands are responses to the state of a turbulent landscape in which the design of architecture and its project are called upon to operate in the field of possibility. On Cornaro’s vision of founding “new lands”, insists the proposal for the extension of the cemetery of San Michele in Isola (1998) by Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue (EMBT). The elements at the basis of the planning document produced by the Venice City Council already called for a hypothesis of enlargement of the cemetery field along the south-eastern side. The idea behind the requests was to establish a time evolution of the enlargement and therefore a multi-phase construction site. The response of the various projects accepted for the second phase, including the winning and currently being realized project by the David Chipperfield studio, involves the entire area made available through sequential “courtyards” or communicating septa systems. In contrast to this, EMBT’s project does not seek to extend the new extension by using the entire perimeter granted, but rather by inserting, within it, a “land” that would respond to the ecological framework of the lagoon.

I am deeply interested in those things related to recollection. The Venice Cemetery was essentially a game of ludo. Because in this project there was an underlying contradiction which is that if the city is not growing, why should the cemetery? Inside the cemetery it is insane.... OK, from a distance, with the mist, it’s nice but not inside. They have kept on digging and digging for years in order to keep burying. And I said to them, ‘What you have to do here is play a game of ludo,’ and that is why we played with Max Bill’s figure, which always closes in on itself. And when you have finished, the chapel will be produced, and then from here, you take a leap, you know? And you take a leap to get nowhere. It is a beautiful project because of that recollection you have of a classical place, you imagination of death. Although it irked me that people began to regard us as cemetery specialists, which I did not enjoy a bit– not in the least. Absolutely not! We had better change the subject.<sup>42</sup>

The project intends to work with the environment and be a product of it according to an *atmospheric*<sup>43</sup> process that invests the lagoon and in this, in its wildness, seeks ways and times of life. Today, in 2023, we are still in the first phase, determining the design of two interconnected elements: a “courtyard” building and an island as the terminal part of the route.<sup>44</sup> The authors therefore, in

---

42. Enric Miralles in Emilio Tunon, Luis M. Mansilla, *Notes on an Informal Conversation [with Eric Miralles]/Apuntes de una Conversación Informal [con Enric Miralles]*, in «El Croquis», no. 100-101, 2000, p. 20.

43. “The proposal drawn up in 1998 for the competition to enlarge the cemetery of San Michele in Isola, in the northern lagoon of Venice, constitutes the last of these atmospheric projects, where the choice to produce ‘documents for building’ instead of conventional representations is more clearly expressed,” Marco De Michelis, Maddalena Scimemi, *Architettura: istruzioni per l’uso*, in Id. (ed.), *Venezia Vigo: EMBT / Miralles Tagliabue*, Skira, Milan 2002, p. 46.

44. “The project for the first phase of the expansion consists of a plot of land that, in its anomaly, establishes a direct relationship with the hexagonal chapel, located at the opposite end of the island: its perimeter, a sort of deformed pentagon, is attached only on one side to the existing cemetery, precisely the most regular and organic side of the project. The project is not closed, although it is ‘complete’: the perimeter boundary of the cemetery, designed with prefabricated



the overall operation, do not imagine a new architecture so much as a new land. A land that the authors emphasize is within the constellation of Venetian islands in a representative process that sees Venice and its lagoon palimpsest immersed in a celestial vault. A reference probably to Bordone's *Isolario* and to the idea that lagoon and sky, as well as forest and celestial system, are communicating with each other in their outcomes and movements.



**Figure 7.** EMBT, *Project for San Michele in Isola*, 1998-1999, *Fundació Enric Miralles e Benedetta Tagliabue EMBT Architects*

concrete and brick panels supported by poles, is detached from the edge of the island and suspended over the surface of the lagoon. This time the recourse to the suggestion of reflection follows a more extensive path, since in the motto 'for floor the sea and for roof the sky' with which the designers presented their proposal, the concern for the condition of the observer in movement seems to resonate: movement of the gaze and of the position within the island," Ivi, pp. 46-47.



The consequence of the design thought identifies the action through the sense of *mapas para una cartografias* where the island, a space immersed in the storm, therefore a child of the jungle, responds to the needs of a world of conflicts and instability. The new land proposed by EMBT is the result of a process that will add up over time and will grow according to two main factors, the first connected to the tides, the second, connected to the mass of waste and sludge that companies will be able to collect from the canals in and around the city to bring them to this land. It will therefore be weather and storms, wild actions, that will declare the fate, existence and duration of the outpost of San Michele in Isola.

The island as outpost reverses the static vision to accommodate motion, allocating its process and organization to it; it is not the land that determines the currents as much as the currents themselves that document its boundaries. In this sense, the project, which stems from the collection of rejected, discarded land, recovers the notion of the island to make it operational in the context of the lagoon as a survival solution according to a logistical action, therefore adaptable to changes and indispensable for crossings.

### Conclusions: Outposts as New Lands

Already some of the experiences of the competition announced by the magazine «2G» for the Sacca di San Mattia in Murano were signs of these notions where the island emerges “as the pretext for taking a look at the problematic of the lagoon [...] facing the highly contemporary topics of pollution, congestion, ecological threat, the *hyper-frequentation* of tourism, and also facing the need for development.”<sup>45</sup> Within the semantic operation, it is again Polesello who uses the lagoon as an experimental territory to “lay the ‘figurative’ foundations for understanding and inventing, finding new keys to interpreting the Venetian spatial universe”<sup>46</sup> where the coherence of forms marks the possible passages of a field where the earth often gives way. The author, therefore, proposes a system of centralities that work as islands do in the entire archipelago, transforming the “natural” into *artifacts*, by necessity, and yet guaranteeing a heteronomous breath with the lagoon *ecumène*.

It seems to me that today considering (and putting into practice) the unity of the lagoon, of the lagoon eco-system, is not substantially possible if a disjunctive specialist view is taken, which distinguishes between “natural” and “artificial” aspects regarding the built-up city and the sandbanks with water as elements that can be “de facto” separated from the former.

---

45. Anne Lacaton, in *Comentarios del jurado/ Jury comments*, in Moisés Puente, Anna Puyuelo (editors), *Concurso 2G Competition. Parque de la Laguna de Venicia/Venice Lagoon Park*, G. Gili, Barcelona 2008, p. 20.

46. Gianugo Polesello, *Progetti veneziani*, in Mirko Zardini (edited by), *Gianugo Polesello: architetture 1960-1992*, Electa, Milan 1992, p. 121.

The lagoon unit is a great, extraordinary construction, it is an enormous *artifact* on a geographical scale that assumes and coordinates within itself different, distinct elements, mediating along a scale whose extremes are *wilderness* and total artifice.<sup>47</sup>

The operative principle is that, although referring to a field of constructions, all of which are directed towards a concreteness, even if some have remained on paper, it is not the “form” that emphasizes the path—except in the “Venetian” author—as much as, referring to the theory, it is the spatial operation that emphasizes the life and alliance as in an outpost.

The projects rediscussed under the lens of the forest thus become outposts, opening up a discourse on the environment (ecology) understood precisely as an alliance. The reference is to an amphibious system, “with a double life”, i.e., “capable of living in two different environments” where the instrument of “form” is only apparently autonomous when inserted into the lagoon palimpsest. Hejduk and Polesello plan possible rescues, Rossi and Miralles plan lands that can be modified in terms of extension or position. Each with a precise technique, invents a system of survival that is not always to be understood as disappearance, but as a planned destiny that can reason with a notion of life that is therefore double.

It is in the *blackness of the inks*, that of the drawings, the very ones by which with *turbulence* and Venice this quest was marked, that reveals a possible epilogue. The inks in the clustering of signs prepare the field in which the designs have operated.

To stay in the wilderness and to cross it, there can therefore be two conditions suggested by the architecture. The first belongs to the surface discussed by Glissant in conversation with Obrist<sup>48</sup>, namely that of moving between the lands of the archipelago, like clearings, like refuges, “islands” in a figurative sense. The other—expressed by the Rossi-authors—lies in the fact that to cross the wilderness it is necessary to be inside, like Dante, looking for the way between the layers, like a wood, in the blackness of the inks, in the depths where movements are minimal compared to the surface that produces islands, daughters of storms where architecture is a guide that hides multiplications and decompositions, of a new world and a possible Venice under the lens of the wild.

### Acknowledgements

The results presented here are the outcome of a research undertaken at the Iuav University of Venice intitled “Guide to the Forest” (2022-2023, scientific supervisor: Prof. Sara Marini) as part of the PRIN (call 2017) *Sylva. Ripensare la «selva». Verso una nuova alleanza tra biologico e artefatto, natura e società, selvatichezza e umanità / Rethink the «sylvan». Towards a new alliance between biology and artificiality, nature and society, wilderness and humanity* (2020-2024), Iuav University of Venice Research Unit (scientific director: Prof. Sara Marini).

---

47. Ivi, p. 119.

48. See Édouard Glissant, Hans Ulric Obrist, *The Archipelago Conversations*, Isolarii, New York 2021.

### Bibliography

- Baso, Giuliana, Marisa Scarso, and Tonini Camillo (Eds.) *La laguna di Venezia nella cartografia storica a stampa del Museo Correr*. (The Venetian lagoon in the historical cartography on the stamp of the Correr Museum). Venice: Musei Civici Veneziani, Iuav, Marsilio, 2003.
- Bevilacqua, Piero. *Venezia e le acque. Una metafora planetaria*. (Venice and the water. A planetary metaphor). Rome: Donzelli editore, 1998.
- Bois, Yve Alain and Rosalind Krauss Rosalind. *Formless: A User's Guide*. New York: Zone Books, 1997.
- Bridle, James. *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. New York: Verso Books, 2018.
- Dal Co, Francesco (Ed.) *10 immagini per Venezia*. (10 images from Venice). Rome: Officina, 1980.
- De Michelis, Marco and Maddalena Scimemi (Eds.) *Venezia Vigo: EMBT / Miralles Tagliabue*. Milan: Skira, 2002.
- De Seta, Cesare. *Venezia e Moby Dick*. (Venice and Moby Dick). Venice: Consorzio Venezia Nuova, 2012.
- «El Croquis», no. 100-101, 2000.
- Giusta Fabian, Carlos. *John Hejduk: Profezie figurative. Il progetto per Cannaregio ovest, Venezia 1978*. (John Hejduk: Figurative Prophecies. The project for West Cannaregio, Venice 1978). Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2013.
- Glissant, Édouard and Hans Ulric Obrist. *The Archipelago Conversations*. New York: Isolarii, 2021.
- Hays K., Michael. "Of Mirrors and Ashes and Beginning Again: A Note on Hejduk's Instauration of Brunelleschi's Experiment." In Harvard Design Magazine, no. 38, *Do You read me?*, 2014, 54-61.
- Hejduk, John. *Mask of Medusa*. Edited by Shkapich Kim. New York: Rizzoli, 1985.
- Marini, Sara. "Nella selva." (Wildness). In *Vesper. Rivista di architettura, arti e teoria / Journal of Architecture, Arts and Theory* no. 3, *Nella selva / Wildness*, 2020.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sopra un bosco di chiodi*. (Above a forest of nails). Milano: Mimesis, 2023.
- Marini, Sara and Alberto Bertagna. *Venezia: a document*. Venice: Bruno, 2014.
- Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- «New Geographies», no. 10, *Fallow*, 2019.
- Puente, Moisés and Anna Puyuelo (Eds.) *Concurso 2G Competition. Parque de la Laguna de Venecia / Venice Lagoon Park*. Barcelona: G. Gili, 2008.
- Romanelli, Giandomenico and Susanna Biadene. *Venezia piante e vedute. Catalogo del fondo cartografico e stampa*. (Venice plans and views. Catalog of the cartographic and printing collection). Venice: Museo Correr, 1982.
- Rossi, Aldo. *Teatro del Mondo*. (Theater of the World). Edited by Brusatin Manlio and Prandi Alberto. Venice: Cluva, 1982.
- Tafari, Manfredo. "La «nuova Costantinopoli». La rappresentazione della «renovatio» nella Venezia dell'Umanesimo (1450-1509)." (The "new Constantinople". The representation of the «renovatio» in the Venice of Humanism (1450-1509)). In *Rassegna. Problemi di architettura dell'ambiente*, no. 9, 1982, 25-38.
- «Vesper. Rivista di architettura, arti e teoria | Journal of Architecture, Arts and Theory», no. 1, *Supervenire*, 2019.
- VV.AA. *MOSE. Effetto Mose: le sfide di un progetto per il futuro*. (MOSES. Mose effect: the challenges of a project for the future). Venice: Marsilio, 2021.
- Zardini, Mirko (Ed.) *Gianugo Polesello: architetture 1960-1992*. Milan: Electa, 1992.

## The Drawn Garden: Historical, Iconographical and Representative Analysis through Time of the “Villa Di Livia” in Rome

By Martina Castaldi\* & Agostina Maria Giusto<sup>‡</sup>

*“Villa di Livia” at Prima Porta is an archaeological complex located in the suburban area of Rome. This villa was built in 39-38 B.D. at the behest of Livia Drusilla Claudia, the wife of Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus. The discovery of this complex took place in 1863 and brought to light several archaeological finds: one of particular aesthetic value are the frescoes with naturalistic motifs, where the attention to detail, the pictorial technique and the variety of flora and fauna make it one of the most famous examples of Roman garden motif painting. The aim of this research is to analyse the wall fresco decoration of the Villa. The investigation is historical, iconographic-representational and symbolic, in order to understand -on the one hand- the origin of these frescoes and the motivations that led to the choice of this particular type of representation and -on the other hand- to study the decorative, perspective and colouring techniques. The work will try not to exclude the analysis of the fact that the architecture and the decorative apparatus are -currently- in different locations, which is certainly a benefit from the point of view of restoration and conservation, but may have an impact on the perception of the frescoes.*

### Introduction

Livia's Villa at Prima Porta, located in the Roman countryside, is an important Italian archaeological site that has become famous mainly due to the discovery of an entire underground room frescoed with astonishing “garden” motif decorations of imperial ownership. These decorations, due to their stylistic uniqueness, size, quality of execution and the perfect condition in which they were found, are presented as a *unicum*, making them the oldest Roman “garden” paintings ever.

The research conducted investigates, on the one hand, the architectural composition of the Villa, through historical, socio-cultural and architectural analysis (spatial, volumetric and construction phases) trying to understand the socio-political thinking and the motivations that at the time led to the construction of this complex and its main architectural characteristics; and on the other hand, a symbolic, iconographic-representative and geometric study of the “garden” frescoes to learn about the decorative, perspective and figurative techniques used.

The architectural and decorative study will be conducted jointly in order to understand the relationships and to study the two parts as a single organism; this analysis will be carried out without however excluding the fact that, today, the villa and the frescoes are no longer in the same place and therefore there is no

---

\*PhD Student, University of Genova, Italy.

‡PhD Student, La Sapienza University of Rome, Italy.

longer a close dialogue between them. While this is certainly advantageous for conservation and restoration practices, it certainly has an impact both on the perception of the frescoes and of the underground environment of the villa in which they were located. Although it is not impossible, thanks to new technologies, to reunite, even virtually, the two parts, we will ask whether this union is actually fundamental for the understanding and correct perception, in the eyes of the observer, of a stylistic-architectural unity or if is only one more technological possibility of virtual display.

### Villa di Livia: From its Origins to its (Re)discovery [A.M.G.]

The Villa di Livia is a building complex believed to have been built from the first half of the 1st century BC<sup>1</sup> onwards, and is located on the outskirts of the city of Rome. The Villa was a place of retreat from the hectic city life in order to accommodate those who could afford some periods of rest and relaxation. In this case, the site was built by Livia Drusilla, wife of Emperor Augustus, the main protagonist of the site's history as the original owner of the land and the main commissioner of the villa.

Much has been written about the history of this marriage, as it is narrated by the emperor himself in his chronicles, in which he describes his marital relationship as an exception, as it was born out of love and not out of political or economic interests.<sup>2</sup> The chronicles allow us to reflect on the timeliness of his words -in terms of positioning his wife as a peer in both private and public tasks<sup>3</sup>- and it can also be known that Livia is a woman "of character", perhaps precisely for this reason it is that the historical tradition has been generally hostile or ill-disposed towards Livia.<sup>4</sup> While acknowledging her intelligence, acumen, charm and loyalty

---

1. The Villa has undergone various modifications and alterations over the centuries.

2. "I have been married three times...marriages take place "lightly" because we usually get married for political or family reasons; many marriages are arranged for convenience (...); however there are some marriages, among which I include mine - and I thank the Gods for this -, which provide inexhaustible joys and which give both the man and the woman the capacity to grow in sympathy and understanding...". [Quotation from the transcription by the author Maria Pia Partisani within her article *Le galline e gli allori dell "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas* of the text A. Massie "Augusto, il grande imperatore", in *I Big Newton* (Roma: Newton Compton Editori, 2001)].

3. The same is true when we learn that not only were they both married at the time they met, but that both divorced and married while Livia was pregnant by her former husband Tiberius Claudius Nerone. This is how Augustus himself narrates it in his chronicles: "We divorced from our respective spouses and Livia's second child was born three days after our marriage. Her ex-husband warned me about Livia's temper: then he asked me to take care of his second son...". [Quotation from the transcription by the author M. P. Partisani within her article *Le galline e gli allori dell "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas* of the text A. Massie "Augusto, il grande imperatore", in *I Big Newton* (Roma: Newton Compton Editori, 2001)]

4. This invisibilization or -as in this particular case- misinterpretation of the figure of the woman occurred with her as with so many other female protagonists of history. Particularly within the discipline of architecture, in recent years, the tendency has been to revive, recover and revalue - from a feminist point of view- those women whose personality and participation were fundamental to the development of history.

to her authoritative husband, she offered a portrait of a tough woman, unscrupulous and wicked calculator, who with subtle and diurnal work, and with extraordinary tenacity managed to impose her ambitions in the dynastic and political events of early imperial Rome.<sup>5</sup>

As already mentioned, the relevance of Livia as the main client of the Villa dates back -in part- to the fact that the sources agree in attributing ownership of the site to her, but do not specify whether she had received the Villa from her family, the gens Livia, or -less probably- by her first husband, Tiberio Claudio Nerone. Be that as it may, the two gentes belonged to the Roman aristocracy and the property must have complied with the choices of the wealthier families of the late Republican period who preferred, for their estates, the surroundings of the city, in this case the territory of the ancient Etruscan city of Veio.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, another fact from which the figure of Livia takes on relevance is that she was responsible for defining the location of the villa at the precise point where it was built. This decision was taken after -according to Svetonio- an eagle prodigiously dropped a white hen with a laurel sprig in its beak on the empress's lap.<sup>7</sup> And it is from this fact that the Villa was also called *ad Gallinas Albas* (“*alle Galline Bianche*”).

The Villa is located fifteen kilometers from Rome, in the suburb of Prima Porta, and was built on the hill overlooking the crossroads between the Via Flaminia and the Via Tiberina. According to Umberto Pappalardo it has an area of about fourteen thousand square meters, which makes it one of the largest in Lazio; but according to Gaetano Messineo it is still impossible to determine the limits of the property (*praedium*) in which the villa was inserted, or the relevance to it of the numerous remains of other residences, partly also of a rural nature, located in the Prima Porta district.

Located high up on the top of a hill, the large reinforcement walls -which serve to support the natural terrace on which the Villa is strategically positioned- are still visible today through the lush vegetation, announcing the existence of the Roman archaeological remains. These reinforcement walls were first made only of *opus reticulatum* walls<sup>8</sup> and were modified at a later time -probably due to problems related to the static nature of the hill- when counterforts were added in *opus mixtum* walls with the aim of further consolidating the hill on which the Villa stood.<sup>9</sup>

The decision to build the Villa on this large terrace -called *basis villae*- and therefore in an elevated place, dominating the surrounding area, was most likely

---

5. M. P. Partisani, “Le galline e gli allori dell ‘Ulisse in gonnella’. Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas,” in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell’Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

6. M. P. Partisani, “Le galline e gli allori dell ‘Ulisse in gonnella’. Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas,” in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell’Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

7. U. Pappalardo, *Affreschi Romani* (Verona: Arsenale Editrice, 2009).

8. The construction system allows them to be dated around 50 BC.

9. M. P. Partisani, “Le galline e gli allori dell ‘Ulisse in gonnella’. Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas,” in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell’Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

made to avoid the danger of flooding from the river and the ditches connected to it.<sup>10</sup> This choice could also have a relationship with finding an isolated place, with large panoramic views to take advantage of the view of the Via Flaminia and looking out over the Tiber to Fidene and the Crustumini hills (see Figure 1). Without forgetting that the Villa was a complex architectural entity which -especially at the beginning of the second century BC- was transformed into a place destined for comfort, escape, isolation and literary and artistic leisure.



**Figure 1.** Area where the Village is located

Source: G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

In this sense, the Villa of Livia represents a recurring form of lifestyle starting from the second century BC in Roman building history, and that is the place where to spend the *otium*<sup>11</sup> in the best possible way, which with Lucio Anneo Seneca<sup>12</sup> in the sixth book called "De Otio" placed within the "Dialoghi" of the 1st century AD, took on a meaning not only of free time, which is opposed to the practice of the *negotium*,<sup>13</sup> but as a time of spiritual retreat aimed at the aspiration of basic wisdom for good governance. That is, this place presents the possibility of relieving and free from daily worries (*rilaxatio animi*), proposing intellectual, meditative,

10. M. Carrara, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta da praedium suburbanum a villa Caesarum," in *Roman villas around the Urbs. Interaction with landscape and environment. Proceedings of a conference held at the Swedish Institute in Rome, September 17–18, 2004*, ed. B. Santillo Frizell & A. Klynne (Rome: The Swedish Institute in Rome, 2005).

11. *Otium*: in ancient times *otium* means self-care and taking care of one's own wisdom, which passed through contemplation and study as the only way that leads to happiness.

12. Lucio Anneo Seneca (Cordoba, 4 BC - Rome, 19 April 65) was a Roman philosopher and politician, one of the greatest exponents of eclectic stoicism of the imperial age.

13. *Negotium*; nec-otium indicated all those activities necessary for individuals to guarantee their survival and therefore opposed to free time. It consisted, for the most part, in carrying out practical activities, public duties and governmental commitments.



recreational and restorative activities, which they understand not only as an essential need of the soul and body, but also as fundamental elements of the lifestyle and the moral character.<sup>14</sup>

### The Villa Becomes Archaeological Site: The Discovery of the Underground Room

The famous residence of the third wife of Augustus already aroused interest in the topographers of the late Renaissance, but it was only with the first scholars of the Roman countryside, at the beginning of the 19th century, that the ruins dominating the medieval village of Prima Porta were identified with certainty as those of the famous imperial residence mentioned by ancient literary sources.<sup>15</sup>

Giovanni Antonio Guattani and Antonio Nibby were the first ones that recognized the remains of the Villa di Livia over the hill at the crossroads between the Via Flaminia and the Tiberina.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in 1828 Giuseppe Antonio Guattani,<sup>17</sup> in his work dedicated to northern Sabina from Rome to Norcia, attributed the founded ruins to the Villa of Livia and, a few years later, it is done also by Antonio Nibby<sup>18</sup> -author of a "guide" to the surroundings of Rome- and by the architect Luigi Canina.<sup>19,20</sup>

In the years 1863-64, on the private initiative of Count Francesco Senni, who was a tenant of the land together with two partners, archaeological excavations began. Important discoveries of great value, not only architectural but also artistic and archaeological, were quickly made. The two most important of these -not only in terms of their state of preservation, but also because of the fame they acquired at the time- were the statue of Augustus, discovered on 20 April 1863, and the underground room painted with frescoes with garden motifs, found on 30 April of the same year.

The statue of Augustus, also called *Augusto loricato*<sup>21</sup> -which was in an astonishing state of conservation and still with traces of the original, lively polychromy- was transferred and is now on display in the Vatican Museums in

---

14. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

15. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

16. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

17. Cfr. G. A. Guattani, *Monumenti Sabini* (Roma: Tipografia di Crispino Peccinelli, 1827).

18. Cfr. A. Nibby, *Analisi storico-topografica-antiquaria della carta de'dintorni di Roma*. Vol III. (Roma: Tipografia delle Belle Arti, 1837).

19. Cfr. L. Canina, *Gli edifizii di Roma antica e sua campagna*. Sez II, Vol V: Edifizii dei contorni della città. (Roma: Stabil. Tipog. Di G. A. Bertinelli, 1856).

20. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

21. The Latin etymology *lorica* indicated the cuirass of the legionaries: a piece of armor that covered the chest, belly, hips and back up to the belt, like a cuirass.

Rome. However, the enthusiasm aroused by the frescoes on the underground room was so great that this complex was restored and left visible.<sup>22</sup>

At the time of the discovery of the room only the first part of the vault was preserved and the whole room, evidently after a destructive event, was filled with rubble.<sup>23</sup> Several authors refer to this event as an earthquake that, occurred in 17 BC, would have been the cause of the destruction of the barrel vault that originally covered it, and the reason why it was decided to abandon it -filling it with rubble and earth- and build another one to replace it, although this time at the same level as the rest of the Villa's rooms. According to G. Messineo, the underground room was given a new roof that served as the floor of the newly built room, which was transformed -somehow replacing the previous one- into the main room of the complex. It is not known, however, whether the use assigned to the new room was the same as that assigned -by various authors- to the underground room (to which we will refer later); nor is there any data regarding its decorative motifs, and it is not known whether -if there were any- they were similar to those of the underground room in terms of their theme and the technique used. In other words, it remains to be known whether the new room replaced -not only in size and importance- the underground room, but also in terms of its use and the spatial and decorative quality that the latter had.

In addition, it is not known whether this new room was still standing (or at least part of it) at the time of the archaeological discoveries of 1863-64, although -in any case- the discovery of the underground room with the frescoes in an excellent state of preservation attracted the attention of archaeologists and historians, leaving the later room in the background. From that construction part of its long perimeter walls are still recognizable to the present day. Also the holes for the plugs that held the marble cladding slabs are still recognizable on the sides of the deep 19th century<sup>24</sup> cavity created to insulate the frescoed walls from humidity.<sup>25</sup>

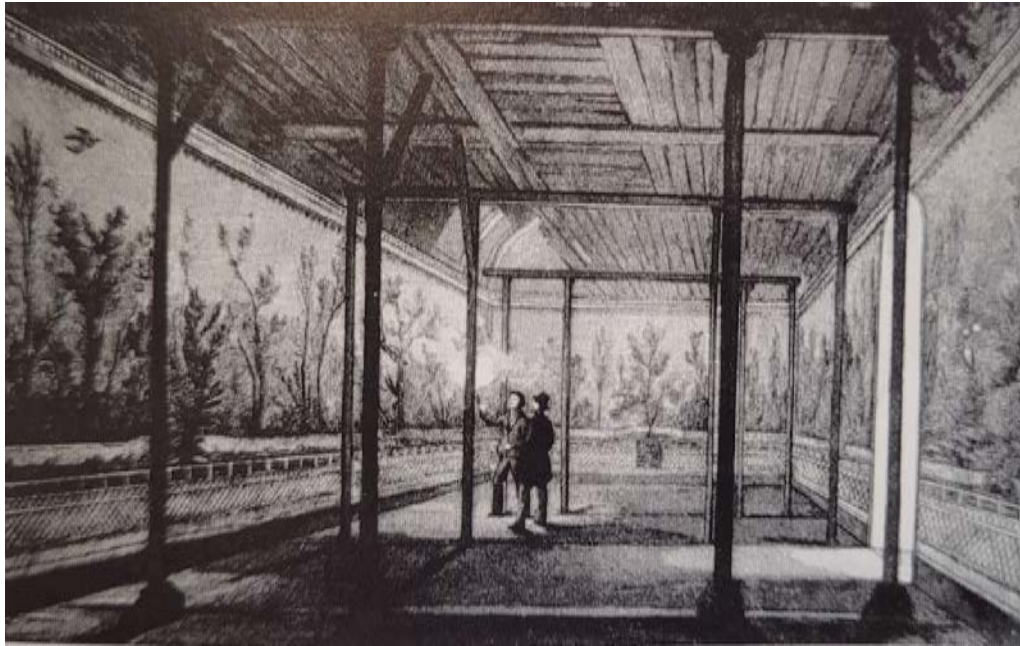
---

22. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

23. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

24. Although he refers to the empty space around the underground room as having been created in the 19th century shortly after the archaeological discoveries on the site, G. Messineo clarifies that this space had to have been foreseen in the past, with the same aim of preventing humidity from rising on the walls of the room with the fresco.

25. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).



**Figure 2.** *The Underground Room Soon After its Discovery*

Source: G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

As can be seen in Figure 2, the underground room was quickly covered after its discovery -with what appears to be a temporary wooden structure- in order to allow it to be visited by the public. According to M. P. Partisani, this structure was built to support the ceiling of the room with the frescoes, evidently subject to collapse; however for G. Messineo the wooden structure was built to cover the area while the existing roof was demolished and the barrel vault was rebuilt. This vault, which covered the space in imitation of the original, is still standing today.

Shortly after the work carried out by the archaeologists, and despite the strong interest aroused by the discoveries at the time, only the underground room was left visible, while the rest of the villa returned to being part of an agricultural estate, which after 1870 became private property and was subjected to damage from ploughing, to which were added, in 1944, those of a heavy bombing which devastated the hill, also damaging the frescoes in the underground room, already used as a bivouac by the German troops.<sup>26</sup> At that time the few archaeological remains visible on the hill overlooking the small town of Prima Porta definitively lost their interest, to the point of suggesting a disappearance of the ancient imperial residence.

Finally, after the Second World War, in 1948, archaeological restrictions were imposed on the area, to protect the area from agricultural works which continued to threaten the buried structures. However, it was not until the year 1951 in which, having ascertained the deterioration and after various restoration interventions, the painted plasters were detached by the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro and taken to

---

26. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

safety in the Museo Nazionale Romano, where they can still be admired today after a long restoration work.<sup>27</sup>

The painting was carried out on six layers of plaster, five of *arriccio*,<sup>28</sup> that is lime, sand and pozzolana, and one of preparation, in Roman stucco, that is a mortar with added marble dust. This plaster was not placed on the wall directly, but on a curtain of tiles fixed to the wall by T-shaped iron clamps, and the joints carefully cemented with mortar. The poor conservation conditions were not due only, or rather were not due so much, to an aggravation of the humidity conditions of the environment or to carelessness due to the war period, but rather to the progressive constant alteration of the substances spread with incautious imprudence on the paintings in distant and not so distant times.<sup>29</sup>

From the reports written by Pietrogrande to the Consiglio Superiore,<sup>30</sup> a number of details are known about the decision to dismantle the fresco and move it to another site, as a solution to the possible gradual disappearance of the frescoes due to their constant degradation. In this regard, one of his letters states that:

“the detachment (...) should not be carried out in “massello” as advised by Venturini-Papari, since in that case, by preserving the plaster and the wall, it would not remove the causes of the ailment, but would preserve them by transferring them to the Museum. Instead, it will be necessary to detach the paintings with the plaster, which will then have to be thinned out until all the altered parts and those likely to produce new faults are removed. In other words, it will be necessary to adopt the type of transport that has been successfully tested for the paintings in Livia's house on the Palatine and for the paintings in the Farnesina in the Museo Nazionale Romano.”<sup>31</sup>

The technique of detaching the paintings consisted of several stages, beginning on 4 June 1951. First, “it began with the removal of mold from the surface of the paintings and with the removal of the saltpetre which dulled the colors almost everywhere. The raised color flakes were then welded (...) by soaking them in a solution of shellac and alcohol and crushing the raised parts with spatula strokes”, after which “we proceeded (...) to glaze the frescoes by means of large hemp canvases applied with soft glue”. According to the same Dr. Pietrogrande “in some points the plaster still tenaciously adhered to the tegulae [also called tiles], while in others it was completely detached. This led to some difficulties in the detachment, which were however happily resolved. The *arriccio* was then removed, leaving

---

27. M. P. Partisani, “Le galline e gli allori dell’“Ulisse in gonnella”. Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas,” in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell’Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

28. *Arriccio*, in Italian, is the second of the three fundamental layers of the historical technique for the base of a fresco or the finishing of rough walls.

29. M. Cagiano De Azevedo, “La sala dipinta della Villa di Livia a Prima Porta,” in *Bollettino dell’Istituto Centrale del Restauro* no. 13 (Roma: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1953).

30. These reports are transcribed by Cagiano De Azevedo, M. in his text “*La sala dipinta della Villa di Livia a Prima Porta*”.

31. M. Cagiano De Azevedo, “La sala dipinta della Villa di Livia a Prima Porta,” in *Bollettino dell’Istituto Centrale del Restauro* no. 13 (Roma: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1953).

only the layer of *intonachino*<sup>32</sup> composed of lime, sand, marble dust and alabaster, for a thickness of 1 cm". Thus, using the technique described above, it was possible to remove the entire fresco in just seven working days: the first was on 19 June, the second on 21 June, followed by 9, 14, 20, 25 and -finally- 31 July. During each of these days, sections of the fresco were extracted from the wall, which after being separated from the wall "the *arriccio* was removed before extracting it from the room and then transported to the Museo Nazionale Romano".

From the moment when the room loses its most important frescoes, the few visible parts of the Villa remain of no interest, so much so as to make the monument look completely unnoticed.<sup>33</sup> Apart from a few historical studies on the Villa and its archaeological remains found in the second half of the 19th century,<sup>34</sup> it was not until during and after the excavations started in 1982 by Gaetano Messineo for the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, that it was possible to define the extension of the building complex and reconstruct the various phases of its life.<sup>35</sup> These excavation and reorganization interventions in the area have returned to life a monument characterized by sophisticated architectural solutions and splendid decorative pieces, including many mosaics and wall paintings of the highest executive level.<sup>36</sup>

### The Villa: Spaces and Functional Organization

As mentioned above, the architectural typology of "villa romana" was characterised by the fact that it was a space for relaxation and leisure, activities which are presented as simple but which nevertheless required the creation of large architectural complexes, with multiple and varied functions taking place simultaneously throughout its spaces -both interior and exterior, open and closed- destined for this purpose. Of all these spaces and activities, the dining room was the place most dedicated to the ostentation of rank and heritage, but there were other environments and services for leisure: libraries, gymnasiums, terraces, roof gardens, massage rooms, private thermal baths, arcades and avenues for strolling, fountains and *nymphaeums*, all furnished with the best the market could offer, that is precious marbles, sparkling bronzes, elaborate mosaics, masterpieces of art.<sup>37</sup>

The remains that are still preserved from the Villa allow us not only to know, but also to understand the way in which these spaces were made, how they were

---

32. *Intonachino*, in Italian, is the last layer of plaster; it is a coating mainly intended for external surfaces for protective and aesthetic purposes.

33. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

34. According to the author M. P. Partisani: the study of the architectural layout of the Villa, was started by Giuseppe Lugli in 1923, continued by Heinrich Sulze in 1932, and further deepened by Heinz Kahler in 1959.

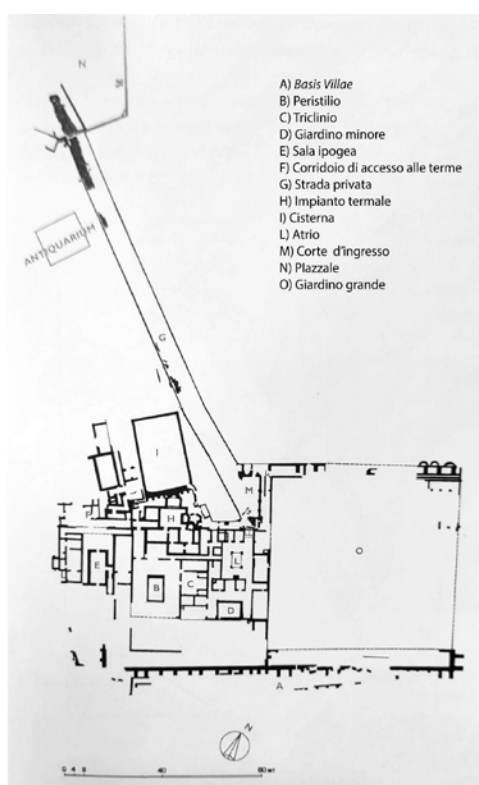
35. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

36. U. Pappalardo, *Affreschi Romani* (Verona: Arsenale Editrice, 2009).

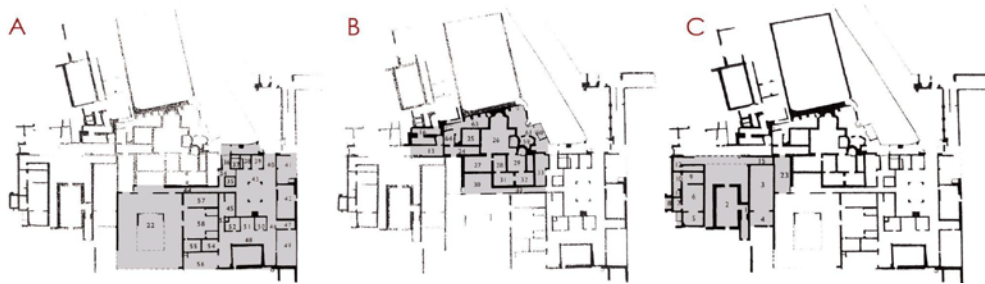
37. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

organised, what the dimensions and characteristics of each of the rooms were and how they were related to each other. In fact, to a certain extent, the level of conservation of spaces and their decoration allows us to perceive the way in which this site was inhabited.

The architectural structures of the Villa are set out along nine chronological phases ranging from the Republican age (although the site was already frequented in the Etruscan age) to the second half of the 4th century AD. Within these chronological extremes are the renovations undergone by the complex after the Octavian/Livia wedding in 38 BC, and the changes in use of some rooms caused by the earthquake of 17 BC mentioned by Giulio Ossequente, with the relative abandonment of the underground room; followed by the Flavian arrangement of the thermal area (last quarter of the 1st century BC), the floor and decorative reconstructions of the Antonine age (late 1st-2nd century AD), and the complete restructuring of the thermal plant under the Severi (late 2nd -early 3rd century AD).<sup>38</sup>



(*pars urbana*). Inside the residential complex we can find various functional areas: private rooms, representative rooms, rooms intended for guests -placed behind a large room built above the underground summer triclinium-, a thermal facility -served by an imposing cistern that is still visible-, and finally several service rooms with the relative accesses (both surface and underground).<sup>39</sup> We will divide the block called residence -according to the organization made for G. Messineo in his book "*La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta*", which is also observed in the itinerary of the visit to the archaeological area- into three large areas: the private district, the area of the thermal complex and the residential district (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** *The Residence Area: The Private District (A), The Area of the Thermal Complex (B) and the Residential District (C)*

Source: G. Messineo, "*La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta*," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

The access to the Villa was through a private road, which branched off from the Via Flaminia just beyond the crossroads with the Tiberina (see Figure 3). It was originally just over two meters wide but was later enlarged, paved with paving stones of flint and leucidic trachyte, a material suitable for sloping paths (see Figure 5).<sup>40</sup>

This road made it possible to make a short tour -or perhaps a promenade through the garden- which led to the entrance to the villa, from where it was possible to enter the private district directly. This entrance (no. 40 in the image), flanked by a small basin, is marked by a travertine threshold with hinges (the lead casting for fixation remains in one of the recess) and the holes for the posts of a double door: this gives access to the denominated area of the private district (see Figure 4). Crossing a short vestibule one arrives at an atrium with a mosaic with a black background and a decorative motif of city walls around the basin of the central "*impluvium*".<sup>41,42</sup>

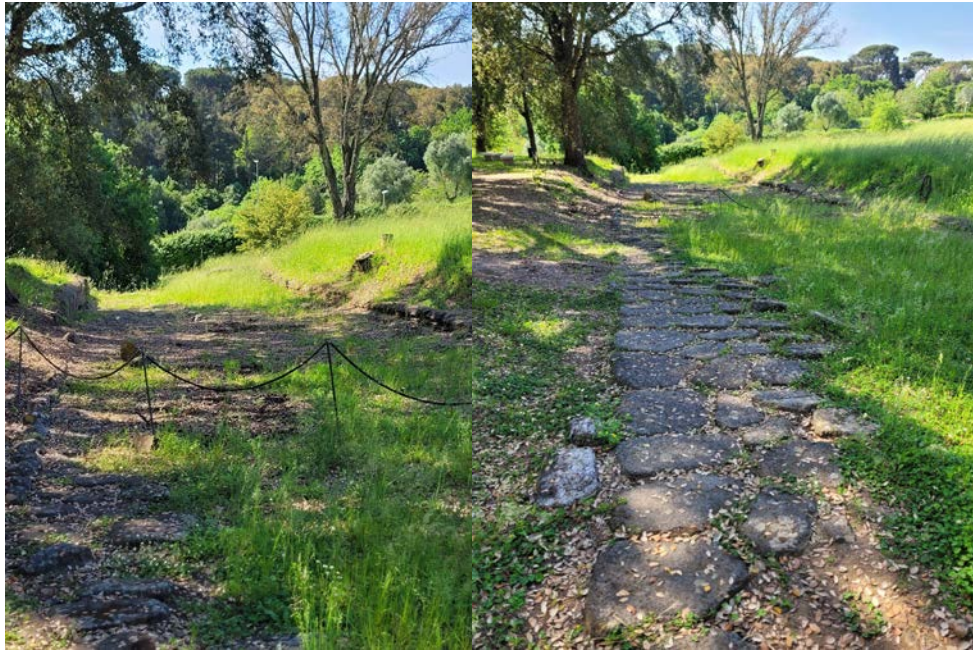
39. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

40. G. Messineo, "*La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta*," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

41. *Impluvium*: in archaeology, a lowered and framed part of the floor of the atrium in the Etruscan-Italic and Roman house, with a rectangular basin, a flat bottom and drainage for rainwater, which fell there from the *compluvium*. [Treccani Vocabolario].

42. G. Messineo, "*La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta*," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).





**Figure 5.** *The Access to the Villa*

Source: Photo by the authors.

To the right of the entrance and atrium with the impluvium was the large garden, however, these two spaces are not connected, as the atrium is enclosed on this side by a series of rooms (no. 41, 42, 47, 49). The most important part of this area is the “*portico*” (no. 48), which is a space open onto a small garden, surrounded on three sides by columns or pilasters. Around this space are located some living rooms and bedrooms, through which it is possible to reach the peristyle (or courtyard) surrounded by porticoes (no. 22), which contains a marble-clad “*natatio*”<sup>43</sup> in the centre.

Connecting the area of the private district with the area of the thermal complex (see Figure 4) is a long corridor (no. 44) which still has its black and white curved paving. This area was the result of enlargement work carried out in the 2nd century AD, and is made up of various rooms, the most important of which is the “*caldarium*”<sup>44</sup> (no. 29).

The district defined as residential -also called representative- includes a series of rooms (see Figure 4) located side by side and intercommunicating with each other: in the part closest to the peristyle it is located the underground complex including the decorated room with the famous frescoes with garden views, to which the villa mainly owes its fame. The access to the room is via a staircase which ends, with an ancient travertine step, in a vestibule with an Augustan mosaic with a black background and rows of white tiles. From there, there are two symmetrical arched passages: the one on the left opens to the fresco room and the one on the right goes into a cellar with a barrel vault, partially dug out of the rock.<sup>45</sup>

43. *Natatio*: it is an outdoor (cold water) pool.

44. *Caldarium*: in the ancient Roman baths, a heated room for taking hot baths and sweating.

45. G. Messineo, “La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta,” in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d’Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).



## The Frescoes' Underground Room

There are at least three reasons why the room attracted attention at the time of its discovery: its underground location, its decoration -not only because of the "garden" motif with which it was decorated, but also because of the quality of its execution- and the high level of conservation with which it was found. In this sense, such characteristics lead to certain conjectures regarding its function within the Villa, the way in which it was used and the reason for the choice of using a "garden" motif (with the use of a certain type of specific vegetation) to decorate it. The archaeologists all appear to agree on the fact that this underground room was located near an external environment, probably the garden of the villa itself, and that it was mostly used in the summer period when the heat did not allow external moments of conviviality and therefore interior spaces were preferred,<sup>46</sup> given that -from its position- it certainly allowed a greater feeling of refreshment and it is therefore assumed that its function was precisely that of conviviality even if there is no certainty.

Both the architectural and decorative features suggest that the room is a *nymphaeum*<sup>47</sup> or a summer *triclinium*,<sup>48</sup> which re-proposed the charm of the real garden in the coolness. In the Hellenic-Roman civilization the *nymphaeum* was a place, with a rectangular or elliptical plan, characterized by niches or exedras and peristyle elevations, used to contain fountains, pools and basins. The Roman *nymphaeum* was usually a space where banquets were held overlooking a garden-peristyle; it was an ideal place to spend the so-called *otium*. The *triclinium*, on the other hand, was an environment in which meals were served and guests were entertained, who could lie down on beds, also called tricliniums, covered with cushions around a central low table. This room was decorated with mosaics or frescoes on the walls usually with joyful images or with divinities such as Dionysus or Venus to recall an atmosphere suitable for relaxation and fun.

The painted underground room -covered with a barrel vault- measures 53 palms long and 28 wide (5.90 x 11.70 meters) and is perhaps one of the first Roman examples of naturalistic/landscape representation, as on all four walls of the room reproduce a garden with ornamental plants and fruit trees, enlivened by birds and flowers.<sup>49</sup>

The landscape, rendered in an extremely meticulous and analytical way, appears as a continuous naturalistic setting, that is, not interrupted at the corners of the room.<sup>50</sup> If we look at the painting from bottom to top, we can see a composition

---

46. G. Messineo, *Ad gallinas albas. Villa di Livia* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2001).

47. *Nymphaeum*: originally a sanctuary for nymphs, it later became a place characterised by the presence of water with a remarkable scenic splendour. [Treccani Vocabolario].

48. *Triclinium*: In the stately homes of ancient Rome, the dining room, so called because of the three beds (also called triclinium) placed on three sides of the table and on which, three by three, the diners were arranged. [Treccani Vocabolario].

49. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

50. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

divided into three large areas: first a plinth, which is followed by a set of elements that could be called "closing elements" whose purpose is to separate the viewer from the painted garden, and -at last- the garden, that is located at the back and forms the third part of the composition.

The barrel vault is decorated with stucco squares painted with figurative elements.<sup>51</sup> It is separated from the paintings with "garden" motifs by a sinuous motif -perhaps a recurring row of stalactites- which hangs all around from the edge of the vault, as if wanting to introduce the observer/guest in the center of a hypothetical cave (or natural cavity) from which to enjoy the panorama that unfolds around him. However, of the decoration of the barrel roof only remain some of the squares (lacunar) with a white and blue background.<sup>52</sup>

This clear desire for artificiality makes the room almost become the scene of a theatre. The illusion and alienation must have become even stronger if the room received light from an opening in the ceiling.<sup>53</sup> This hypothesis -advanced by several archaeologists- speaks of the possibility that a diffused light could illuminate the frescoes and the room from above so that the painting is visible without another type of lighting and that the environment can remain cool and comfortable. According to G. Messineo, among the numerous examples of these particular environments, characterized by the underground position, the presence of water, the reference to natural caves in the structure or the imitation of the rock in paint and stucco, we can mention in Rome the so-called "*Auditorium de Mecenate*" on the Esquiline or numerous Pompeian frescoes, in which landscapes similar to those of the Villa of Livia return within false windows.

However, the choice of the "garden" decorative motif may have other reasons, unrelated to the architecture of the Villa, the location of the room or the possible uses assigned to it. The use of this type of landscape -rich in trees, flowers and birds of all kinds- can be related to the fashions of the imperial court (ancient sources tell that Augustus owned a talking magpie, as well as a crow and a parrot) and therefore with the symbolic messages of prosperity and well-being transmitted by the Augustan art in favour of the new imperial regime.

The authorship of this painting is still unknown, although several hypotheses have been put forward. M. P. Partisani transmits the words of Vitruvio and Plinio, both of whom describe paintings -executed at the same time as the Villa and the fresco- with some of the general characteristics of the period, even referring, in the case of Plinio, to the representation of the landscape motif as a novelty:

"... Vitruvio Pollione, in a famous passage of his treatise *De Architectura* dedicated to structural decorations, recalls among the characteristic themes of the wall paintings of his time (1st century BC) views of ports, promontories, coasts, rivers, springs, canals,

---

51. G. Messineo, "La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta," in *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d'Italia* no. 69 (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004).

52. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

53. M. P. Partisani, "Le galline e gli allori dell' "Ulisse in gonnella". Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas," in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell'Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

sanctuaries, groves, mountains, sheep, shepherds and other amenities of nature. Plinio senior, who lived at the time of the emperor Vespasian, recalls how in the middle of the Augustan age a certain Ludius (or Studius, according to the handwriting of some manuscripts) had been the first artist to pictorially evoke panoramas and animated landscapes, drawing direct inspiration from reality (*ex veris rebus*) and “specializing” in topiary work”.<sup>54</sup>

Based on this description by Plinio, several authors have attributed the authorship of the work to Ludius, although there is still not enough evidence to support this hypothesis. Although it is not known who was the hand behind the work of art, it is recognised the importance of the work not only as an expression of Roman art and culture, but also for its historical value and as a source of knowledge of the cultural skills developed by that society at that precise moment in history, between the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Imperial Age. A time when -as the author R. Bianchi Bandinelli expresses it in his book “*Roma: l’arte romana nel centro del potere, dalle origini alla fine del II secolo d.C.*”- an artistic civilisation was formed in Rome derived fundamentally from Hellenistic art, which was characterised not only by imitating it but also by the recent possibility of obtaining and transporting such works of art. In this sense, this appropriation of the Hellenistic art model attempts -at the same time- to compete with it, and allows the shaping of the character attributed to villas, gardens, and residential decorations of the time.

### **The Drawn Garden: The Frescoes of the Villa [M.C.]**

Inside the Villa di Livia a Prima Porta there was a basement room, which had a barrel vaulted roof, illuminated by a modest skylight placed in one of the lunettes on the short side of the room. Of this environment there are no reliable sources that agree on its function but archaeologists are mainly divided into two main streams of thought. Whatever the intended use of this room was, what is certain is that it was a place where one could spend leisure moments enjoying the beauty in which one found oneself and, thanks to its underground location, a place of refreshment especially in the summertime. Since their discovery in 1863-64, due to their size and very few gaps, these decorations have been considered the oldest fresco of its kind, dated to the 1st century BC, and for this reason considered unique. The fame was also such because, at the time of the discovery, the frescoes were perfectly preserved despite their underground location; the reason for these fortunate conditions lies in the fact that these decorations were made on a layer of plaster adhering to tiles which, in turn, kept detached from the wall, formed an air gap preventing humidity from affecting the frescoes.

This underground environment has no columns or architectural elements placed in the center that could alter the total perception of the room which has a

---

54. M. P. Partisani, “Le galline e gli allori dell’“Ulisse in gonnella”. Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas,” in *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell’Incontro di Studio*, ed. F. Vistoli (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010).

rectangular proportion. The life-size garden is painted along the full height of the walls, seamlessly from the floor to the impost of the barrel vault, which was probably also frescoed with a continuous sky; here were arranged relief frames (33 partially intact ones remain today only along the long sides of the room), in white and blue with alternating red borders, housing images of Pompeian grotesques. The room is accessed through a staircase adjacent to the eastern wall in which, in the center, the small access door opens, the only point where the frescoes are interrupted. The depth of the fresco is rendered by the representation of a double fence, which runs across the entire room, one of which is placed just above the plinth and the other on a second floor not far from the previous one. The perspective expedient of inserting these two fences not only serves to give depth and a sense of three-dimensionality to the surface, but also to make the observer realise that he is in the presence of a place inhabited and built by man and not in front of unspoilt wilderness. Geometrically, the frescoed walls can be divided into three sections: the lower part with plinths and fences, which is predominantly brown in colour; the central part characterised mostly by flowers, plants and small animals, which is predominantly green in colour with coloured patches in shades of yellow, orange and pink; and finally, the upper part with tree tops and some birds in flight, which soften the light blue of the sky.

The relationship of the environment, underground indoors, with the subject represented on the walls appears oxymoronic: a lush, brightly coloured garden set in an airy, light-filled environment. This contrast has prompted many scholars to look for a symbolic interpretation in these frescoes, convinced that this place, and its paintings in particular, were almost certainly also and above all a means of communication widely used in Roman times. This type of depiction was probably conceived because rooms such as the *nymphaeum* and *triclinium* were usually built in front of the garden or otherwise adorned with plants and floral elements. However, it seems highly unlikely that the representation was conceived and executed purely for aesthetic and narrative pleasure, as a simple description of the nature that surrounded the villa.<sup>55</sup>

A further possible hypothesis on the choice of subject depicted, perhaps, leads us to believe that it was an expedient desired by the commissioner, of a purely scenographic nature, to involve the spectator to the point of making him feel as if he were really standing in front of a Roman garden despite being below ground level. Another, even more symbolic interpretation, alludes to the prosperity of the imperial age in fact, all the plants depicted are in full bloom at the same time, even though they flower at different times of the year; the garden theme thus seems to be a clear reference to the perpetual peace guaranteed by Augustus, husband of the commissioner Livia.<sup>56</sup>

---

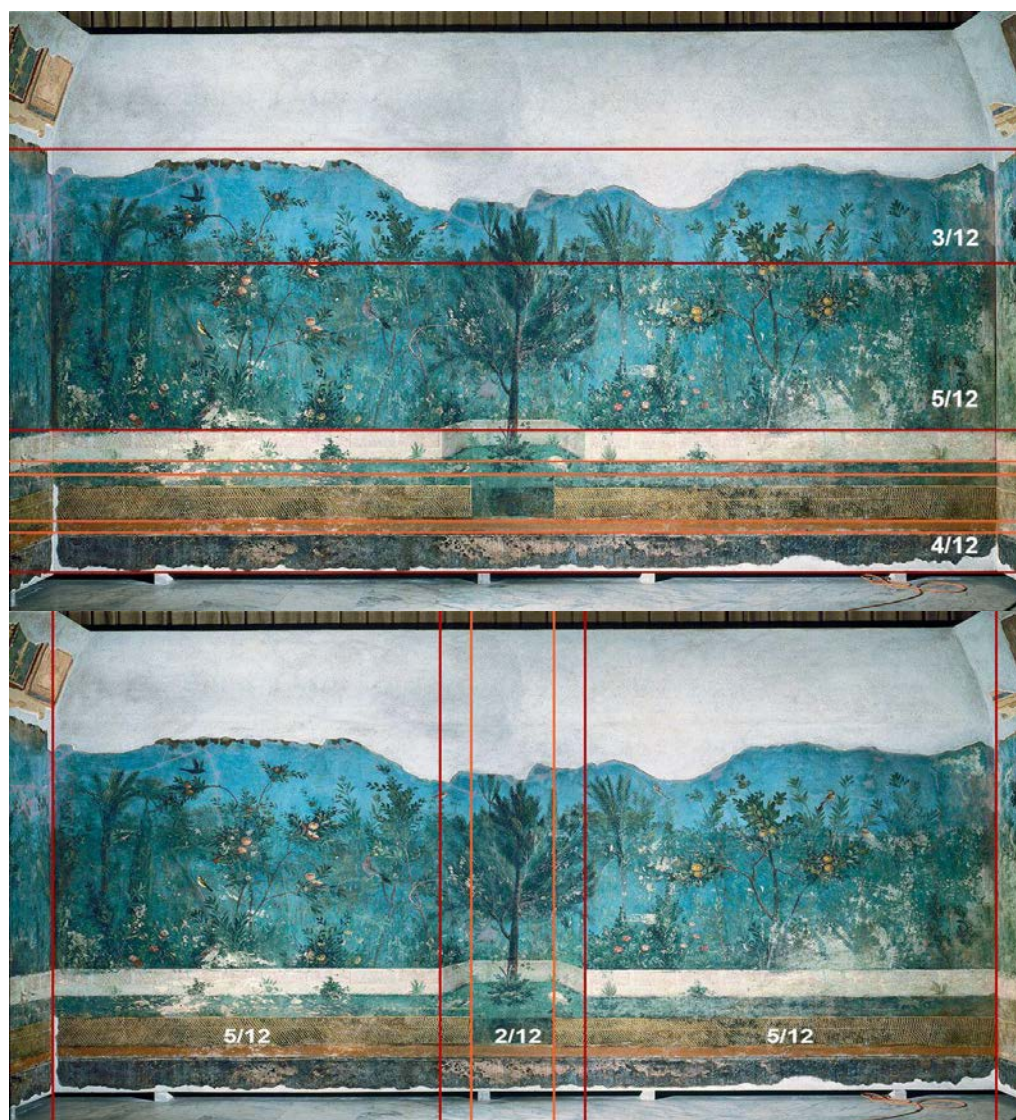
55. G. Caneva, "Ipotesi sul significato simbolico del giardino dipinto della Villa di Livia (Prima Porta, Roma)," in *BCAR - Bollettino Della Commissione Archeologica Comunale Di Roma* C (1999): 63-80 (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1999).

56. U. Pappalardo, *Affreschi Romani* (Verona: Arsenale Editrice, 2009).

### The Representative and Iconographical Description of the Frescoes

Livia's work in her Prima Porta villa, therefore, was perhaps precisely to create a new space to entertain guests, giving them the refreshment they needed to face the sultry summer days and at the same time creating the illusion of being in an open-air place to enjoy the beauty of nature, the result of her remarkable painterly precision and knowledge of botany and zoology.

In order to better illustrate the description of the fresco, it has been divided into horizontal and vertical bands as in the image (see Figure 6); in particular, the burgundy lines divide the fresco into the main bodies horizontally and vertically, while the orange ones serve to identify the subdivisions within the former to better specify certain specificities of the fresco.



**Figure 6 A/B.** Study of the Horizontal and Vertical Proportions of the Frescoes of the Villa di Livia placed on the Short Northern Wall

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Horizontally, the bands run along the four walls of the room as follows: the plinth that is approximately 4/12 of the entire fresco; the body that is approximately 5/12, and the crowning that occupies the remaining approximately 3/12.

Vertically, the subdivision is as follows: on the short sides of the room, a central body that occupies approximately 2/12 of the entire fresco and two symmetrical lateral portions that occupy approximately 5/12 respectively, while on the long sides, the room can be divided into five parts that two exedras alternate with three continuous parts. The entire environment, therefore, sees the organisation of a careful symmetry of the garden that is, however, partially masked by elements that animate the scene such as the arrangement of birds in flight and the tops of the tallest trees bent by the wind.

Horizontally, the base plinth is subdivided into five parts: the first two bands, i.e., the plinth and the thinner band, which run without interruption throughout the room; the two bands that house the parapets and the grassy band that divides the previous two.

The actual plinth has a uniform grey-brown hue; above it is another, thinner band with the typical colour of rammed earth, which may represent a step through which one enters the garden; Still above this is a third band housing the first fence, this one depicted with a detailed rhombus motif, probably made of wooden or reed strips, as also betrayed by the colouring in shades of ochre, reinforced by a current placed about two-thirds from the base and two stringers at the top. The parapet is then completed by a light handrail, supported by thin uprights at regular intervals. The fence appears light and would seem to reveal the garden belonging to the house, reached through the four openings left along the perimeter. They are placed: one in front of the entrance, the other two on the smaller walls, suggesting the most suitable position for symbolically accessing the garden, and a last one, which in fact interrupts the entire composition, at the entrance to the room accessed through an opening with a round arch. Beyond this first fence, a fourth band identifies the garden, a space left to turf with the planting of a few shrubs, which give a sense of three-dimensionality and spontaneity to the scene, even if arranged at regular intervals, clarifying the intervention of 'man'. The garden extends until it meets the second fence, the fifth strip, which gives the observer another feeling of depth.

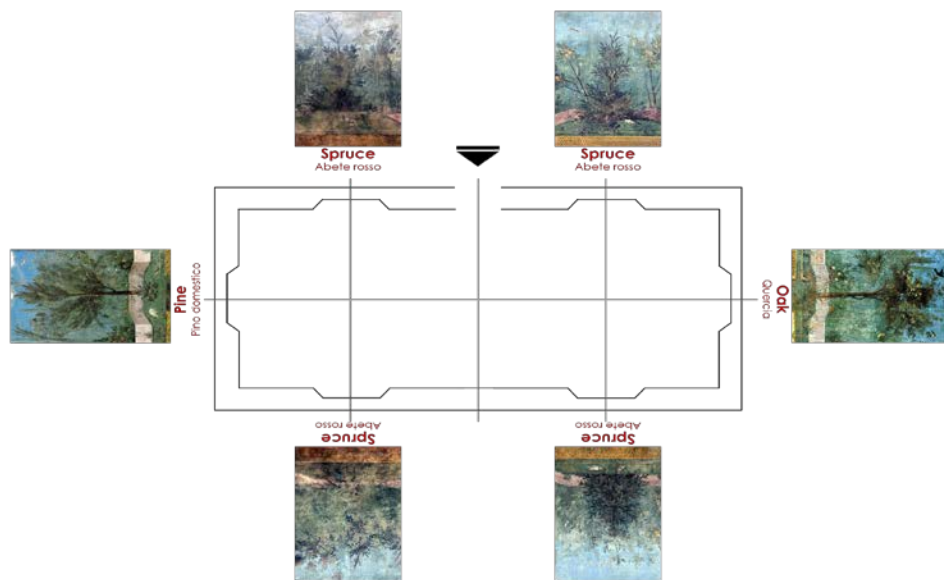
This too is of modest height and it can be assumed to be a solid structure, in light-coloured brick or, more probably, marble given the rank of the owners, which is depicted as a gate, which is represented as worked in the *guise of a gate*<sup>57</sup>, with three different motifs: lozenges, overlapping arches and rectangular geometric figures with diagonal elements. This second covering, unlike the one in the foreground, is never interrupted, with the exception of the correspondence with the entrance to the room, but its rhythm is broken by square-shaped exedras in each of which a large tree is depicted down to the smallest detail. These exedras meet symmetrically, one on the short side and two on the long side, the latter larger, for a total of 6; the symmetry is partially masked by the planting of

---

57. AA.VV. (1863), *Bullettino dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica per l'anno 1863*, May-June. Editoriale Tipografia Tiberina, Roma.



different trees: four spruce, an oak and a pine, all curiously without flowers or fruit (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** *Identification in Plan of the Plant Species Arranged in the Niches of the Frescoes of the Villa of Livia*

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

In the central body of the fresco, behind the second fence that acts as a wall, an apparently spontaneous nature is represented where, following an orderly and systematic cadence, another series of small trees and shrubs are depicted in great detail, some of them with floral or fruit elements; nests and various species of birds complete the representation. In this part of the fresco, where the parapet does not meet the exedras, the fruit trees arranged symmetrically in the composition are depicted in greater detail; these, like the plants depicted in the exedras, are painted with a very high degree of detail that not only makes pomegranates, quinces and strawberry trees recognisable, for example, but also helps to identify an initial compositional arrangement of the trees. Along the second fence, again in correspondence with the exedras, are instead arranged a series of small shrubs, also very detailed, which enliven and colour the scene thanks to the notable presence of brightly coloured flowers and leaves.

Behind this second line of trees, the vegetation gradually fades more and more and appears with less detail until it blends into the background with a predominantly green hue.

The crowning band, representing the last horizontal band, depicts the tops of the tallest trees silhouetted against a clear, turquoise sky, enlivened by the presence of birds in flight and the sinuous movement of the tallest tree branches caused by the breeze. The frescoed composition concludes with a band with a motif imitating the stalactites of a cave.

Vertically, looking at the short sides of the room, the fresco can be divided into three main parts: side part - central body - side part; while on the long sides

into five parts according to the following arrangement: side part - exedra - central part occupying a double space - exedra - side part.

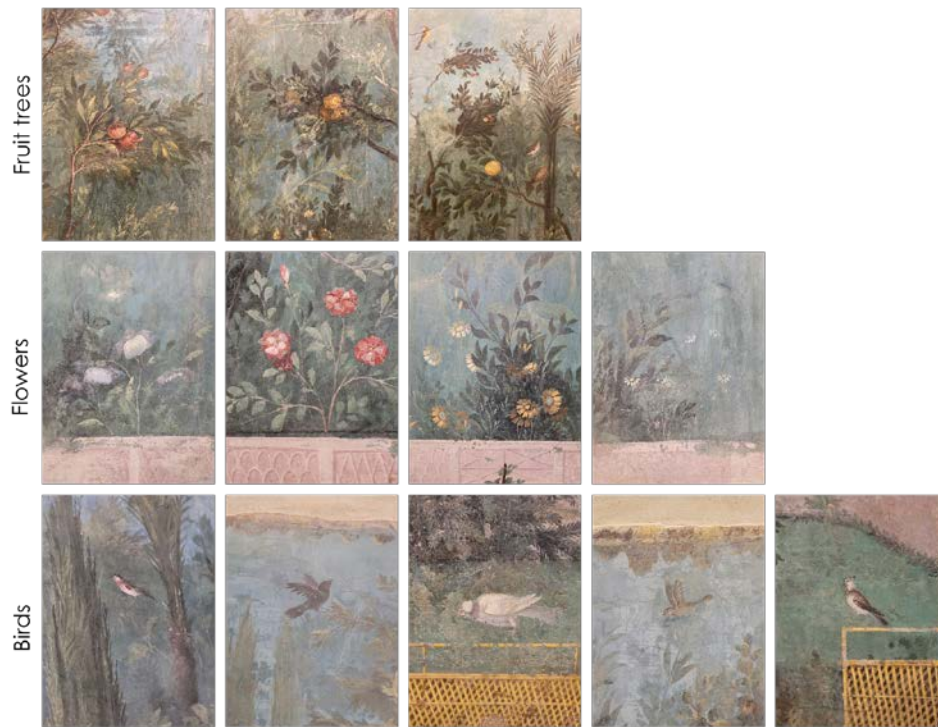
Analysing the short wall of the room, the central band is the centrepiece of the garden with the entrance to it, through the gateless opening in the first lattice fence, the exedra in the background, created in the boundary wall, and the main tree planted within the garden itself. The orange lines show how the opening to the garden optically corresponds to the recess of the fence in the background. The two side parts, substantially symmetrical, represent the plinth, the manicured garden serving the house adorned with a few small shrubs without floral elements; while beyond the second wall develops what should be the natural part apparently devoid of human intervention, but which instead betrays a certain human interference with the presence of well-tended fruit trees and shrubs that are certainly not spontaneous. Scholars have also noted the inconsistent presence of flowers and fruit that in nature do not belong to the same season, and this further reinforces the hypothesis of human control even on the part apparently not shaped by man; using a description by Settis, the garden presents itself as a "*botanical catalogue and in no way a portrait of a garden at a specific time*"<sup>58</sup>. The further presence of human intervention is revealed by the presence of a small aviary, placed above the boundary wall, with a goldfinch inside.

Thanks to the abundance of detail and pictorial precision, together with the painter's already in-depth knowledge of botany and zoology, it was possible to identify with certainty the floral and faunal species animating the scene (see Figure 8). By carefully observing the nuances of the plumage, the color of the foliage, which varies from the darkest of laurel to the silvery of oak, and the color of the various fruits and flowers, such as the reds of pomegranates and the ocher of quinces, it is it was possible to identify 69 different varieties of birds and 23 trees belonging to 20 distinct families. Among the birds you can meet goldfinches for the most part, one of which is inside the aviary, sparrows, pigeons, blackbirds and robins; all these birds are typical of the Mediterranean fauna and can be found perched on trees, pecking seeds on the turf and in flight in the highest part of the composition.

---

58. Settis S. (2008), *La villa di Livia. Le pareti ingannevoli*, Mondadori Electa, Roma, p. 6





**Figure 8.** Identification of the Species of Fruit Trees, Flowers and Birds Most Frequently Represented in the Frescoes of the Villa of Livia

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

From a floral point of view, different tree species typical of the Mediterranean maquis have been identified with the exception of the date palm, native to warmer climates, and the spruce, typical of northern Europe and more rigid climates in general. The species in the niches see on the two short sides the representation of a stone pine and an oak, both protagonists being represented only once but certainly common to the eyes of the observer, while in the remaining four niches, on the long sides of the wall, the spruce. The pine tree has a rather complex symbolic meaning in Greco-Roman mythology, but certainly linked to the myth of generation; the oak tree, on the other hand, was sacred to the god Jupiter and was a symbol of strength and used in civic wreaths; finally, the fir tree, which according to Pliny was a symbol of mourning and used in funeral celebrations. The choice of depicting these trees without flowers or fruit may have been deliberate so that the human eye would not focus on the elements that give colour and liveliness to the plant, focusing rather on the symbolic meaning of the plant. The most frequently depicted species is the laurel, which has always been a symbol of royalty and triumph as well as a plant sacred to the god Apollo, probably, in a hypothesis put forward by Settis, because Suetonius, Pliny and Cassius Dione all agree that “around the villa of Prima Porta there was a laurel forest from which branches were taken for the triumph of the Caesars”.<sup>59</sup> Other essences include the cypress, a tree sacred to Pluto and symbol of mourning; the holm oak, a tree consulted by the oracles; trees with fruit such as the pomegranate (6 plants), an oxymoronic symbol

59. Settis S. (2008), *La villa di Livia. Le pareti ingannevoli*, Mondadori Electa, Roma, p. 6.

of fertility and death; the myrtle or quince (6 plants), which in ancient Greece were symbols of good luck; and the strawberry tree (4 plants), a plant protective of evil spirits; trees with flowers such as oleander (4 plants), considered to be deadly due to the toxicity of its juice, and viburnum, a triumphal plant; finally, various budding shrubs such as chrysanthemum, often used in funeral rites with protective functions; rose, a flower associated with love and the goddess Venus; and wild violet, a symbol of love and linked to the myth of the generation of the pine tree.

### The “Garden” Fresco: Historical and Geometrical Analysis

In late republican and imperial Roman thought, the ornamental garden was conceived in such a way that the architectural and natural components were inseparable from each other, where each built part dialogued with the garden.

Thanks to various literary documents that have come down to us, we can understand the love the Romans had for the natural world and for gardens; examples of this are the treatises of Varro, Pliny the Elder and Virgil in which relevant information is provided on plants, their uses and the introduction of new species to the Italian peninsula; the main problem with this type of source is the nomenclature, which in many cases can be misunderstood; pictorial representations then come to the rescue as more reliable sources. The genre codified as 'garden' painting originated within Roman wall painting in the last decades of the 1st century B.C. precisely within the 2nd-3rd Pompeian style, reaching its peak in the 4th style. The 3rd Pompeian style overlaps chronologically with the 2nd and takes up some elements such as cornices and friezes with plant shoots, but eliminates perspective and the feeling of three-dimensionality in favour of flat, monochrome backgrounds; the 4th style, on the other hand, presents elements and decorations that had already been experimented with such as false architecture, *trompe-l'oeil* and decorations with candelabra, winged figures and plant shoots.

The origin of the "garden" painting is not certain but there are already some references attributable to the Alexandrian era, where plant decorations on a 1:1 scale have been found, others are of strictly Hellenistic and Roman influence. The first example, Roman, of this decoration can be found in complementary or semi-open spaces in direct connection with the real garden; rooms like the *impluvium*<sup>60</sup> frescoes and mosaics with bucolic and vegetal motifs and depictions, which often decorated these rooms, are a real introjection of nature inserted into the house, were able to transform the opaque walls into wide views of countryside landscapes. Archaeologists all appear to agree on the fact that the birth of the Roman garden is connected to the acquisition by the Romans of the architectural element of the peristyle; the latter, in fact, was born as a partially open internal room in continuation with the external areas. The frescoes with garden motifs were created, perhaps, precisely to recall the connection with the typical peristyle garden of Roman country villas and to reproduce the amenity of nature in this environment. It was not just a decorative element for its own sake but also an illusionistic extension, an ostentation of the owner's aesthetic taste and social and intellectual

---

60. From the lat. *in* = inside and *pluvia* = rain, it was a quadrangular basin with a flat bottom typically located in the atrium and designed to collect rainwater.

status. Usually the Roman "garden" paintings are made as decoration of entire rooms with real proportions, they are placed inside architectural frames occupying the entire wall, only portions of them or only in the plinth, configuring themselves as a fictitious barrier, decorated in a trellis or low wall, from which bushes and plants emerge in an apparently spontaneous order. These gardens are often animated by animal species such as birds and small terrestrial animals typical of the Mediterranean fauna; while from an architectural point of view the elements that are sometimes depicted are mostly decorative objects such as fountains, sculptures, herms or masks as well as elements typically of exotic-Egyptian taste, mainly attributable to the Augustan era, such as sphinxes, statues of the goddess Isis and animals like hippos or crocodiles. The background shades of the garden paintings can be different depending on the symbology and the place where they are represented: blue and dark green for the sky and the dense vegetation; black especially in Pompeii and Herculaneum used to symbolize the shady coolness of the garden; yellow or red, in Pompeian paintings typical of the IV style and finally white if linked to the sacral or funeral sphere.<sup>61</sup>

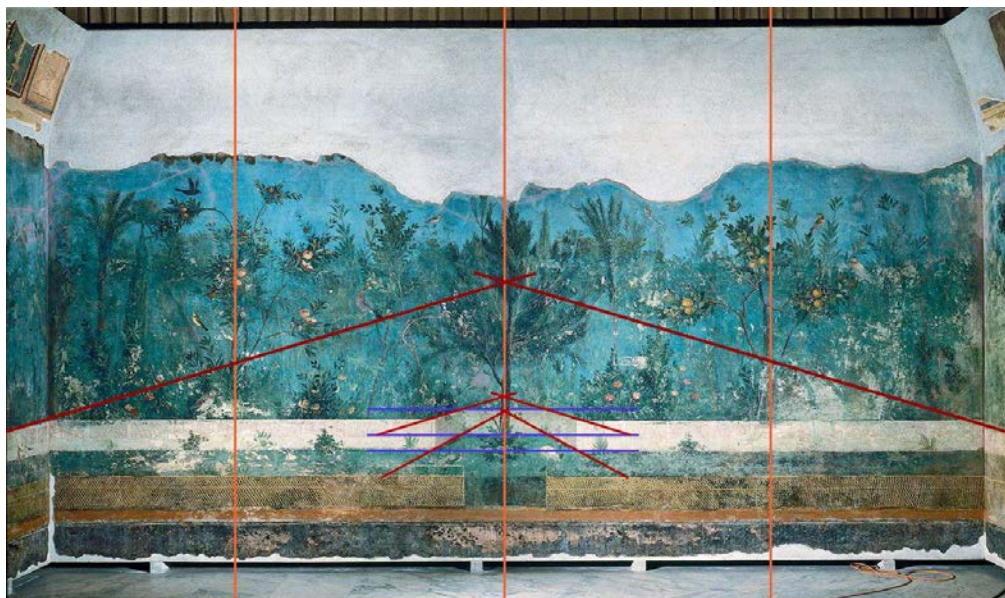
In the perception of represented space today, there is a tendency to read ancient paintings almost always according to the laws of linear perspective with a single vanishing point codified in the Renaissance. The reconstruction of cities, and the consequent representation of them, during the 15th-16th centuries saw the creation of symmetrical street axes, the use of clear geometries and the creation of simple, related volumes. The studies of architects and intellectuals such as Leon Battista Alberti, Piero della Francesca and Filippo Brunelleschi shaped today's way of studying and codifying perspective techniques, changing the logic of study and representation up to the present day.

All these studies are based on the study of the proportions between the parts, in fact the etymology of the word proportion derives from the Latin *proportio-onis*, "according to the portion", and indicates the correspondence of measurement between two or more closely related parts. These correspondences are mathematical relationships and in architecture they find a field of application in the Middle Ages, through the use of geometry, while in the Renaissance through numerical correspondences. In ancient Rome, on the other hand, the buildings did not have an urban-architectural relationship deriving from the study of the proportions between the parts, rather they were designed and legible as a singularity. As for urban planning, also for wall decorations, the Romans did not concentrate on the construction of a three-dimensional space that followed the rules of perspective and they did not even let nature be uncontaminated, not shaped by the hand of man, and the wild environment, to govern the delimitation of the environment itself. Architectural and figurative planning were therefore an illusionistic device used to convey an idea of depth of architectural spaces often inserted in natural contexts modeled by man.<sup>62</sup> The Romans, taking up Greek painting, rejected "*the depth of field towards infinity and for the natural landscape*" preferring to it the

61. U. Pappalardo, *Affreschi Romani* (Verona: Arsenale Editrice, 2009).

62. E. La Rocca, "Paesaggi che fluttuano nel vuoto. La veduta paesistica nella pittura greca e romana," in *Roma. La pittura di un impero*, ed. E. La Rocca, S. Ensoli, S. Tortorella, M. Papini (Milano: Skira Editore, 2009), 39-55.

clarity and precision of the elements of the composition. The individual detailed representations, however, do not find a unitary and coherent dialogue within a single environment, but each appear to be fragmented in a precise spatial delimitation. This type of figurative composition in the "garden" frescoes of the Villa di Livia therefore does not present the spatial depth dictated by the use of the single-focus perspective system, which would see the convergence of the lines towards a fire at the back of the scene (see Figure 9), but rather presents a relationship that makes the different parts of the representation dialogue thanks to the extreme attention to details in the foreground which tend to fade away. This scaling of details in the representation of tree species gives a precise sense of spatial depth and creates a feeling of real atmosphere thanks to the color variations of the background; the latter is iridescent with green tones up to the horizon point beyond which the sky with turquoise pigments stands out. According to Settis, this technique was an expedient, probably unknown to the artist, which however suggests to the observer the depth of the fresco.<sup>63</sup>



**Figure 9.** *Study of the Lines of Symmetry and Depth of the Frescoes of the Villa di Livia*

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

The underground environment of Prima Porta presents itself to the observer as a theatre scene where the human figures are not represented but the painter makes them coincide with the observer himself; the spectator is therefore not a passive figure who limits himself to watching the scene but unknowingly is also an active part of it by animating it. From an architectural point of view, the only elements depicted are the two fences; in fact, there are no columns, pillars or vertical elements which optically interrupt the fresco. Among the most common practices in "garden" painting is the creation of optical wings that simulate depth through the scansion of planes of depth which in this case is given by the two low

63. S. Settis, *La villa di Livia. Le pareti ingannevoli* (Roma: Mondadori Electa, 2008).

fences enlivened by niches and exedras behind which the garden. Probably this representation of an open view towards the garden was also dictated because, in the Roman villas located in the countryside, the garden opened externally, surrounding a peristyle patio with a slightly protruding cover with respect to the axis of the columns which left the eye with the possibility to wander without encountering obstacles. The part inside the peristyle, on the other hand, was a patio that housed beds, small tables and everything needed for moments of conviviality. All the walls of the room in Livia's Villa show extreme attention to detail that binds and relates the different levels of depth but never in the Renaissance logic of a unitary composition from an illusionistic-spatial point of view, but in the narrative expansion of the fresco according to a composition that develops in length and not in depth, creating a planar and non-spatial system. The fact that Livia's frescoes, but Roman and Greek paintings in general, are not represented according to the rules of perspective does not mean that the Hellenic-Roman culture was unaware of perspective techniques, it simply reveals how they did not attribute the importance which was attributed to her during the Renaissance. In fact, there are different examples of Hellenic-Roman painting dating back to the 5th century BC where the use of a linear perspective can be understood mainly in the creation of theatrical sets and in some examples of wall painting in the domus.

### **Conclusion: The Villa as a Cultural Heritage**

#### **One Masterpiece, Two Museums [A.M.G]**

More than two thousand years separate us from the time when Livia Drusilla thought of and built her villa together with her husband Emperor Augustus. The villa was inhabited not only by them, but also by other owners who -without a doubt- left their physical mark through a series of varied modifications that the villa underwent throughout its many centuries of existence. Long years went by in which the village was forgotten, abandoned to vandalism and the passing of time, which - albeit in a slow process - deteriorates and destroys it.

Compared to its years of existence, it is relatively recent the (re)discovery - carried out in 1863- of the remains of the villa. However, it has already undergone a series of modifications that made it impossible to return it to its original state. This refers above all to the decision to dissect and move the frescoes of the underground room, which is the most important room in the Villa, the one that attracted attention due to the quality and level of conservation of its decorative elements.

A museum project has been developed in the place where the remains of the Villa are still preserved today. The quantity and quality of the preserved remains make the site a place of particular historical interest. The museum is constituted as a route that takes the visitor along an ordered walk from the original access and through the interior of the Villa.

The most important intervention carried out on the site for the museum project is a large roof that covers the archaeological remains, respecting the



dimensions of the spaces and attempting to reproduce the original heights of each one of them. In this sense, the visitor takes the tour under the roof, in a space circumscribed between the floor and the roof which -thanks to the remains of the existing walls, paving and frescoes- allows the observer to recreate a clear image of the Villa (see Figure 10). Furthermore, the roof -painted light blue- has the walls of the villa represented on it, which means that the museum space is configured, read and understood on the basis of the archaeological remains and the roof as a whole.



**Figure 10.** *The Archaeological Remains of the Villa di Livia: The Roof*

Source: Photo by the authors.

However, the most interesting thing is that the museum functions at the same time as a protection for the archaeological remains, as the roof is intended to prevent the archaeological remains of the Villa from degrading. In this sense, although the roof is perceived and noticed, it tries to be as ethereal as possible through the use of metallic structures that make it possible to obtain a thin roof with few supports and reduced dimensions. These supports rest on the archaeological remains in an orderly manner, generally at the corners of two walls -although not always- and never do so with the full section of the metal profile, but diminish its section a few centimetres before reaching the archaeological wall, resulting in a rather subtle support on the ruin (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11.** *The Archaeological Remains of the Villa di Livia: The Supports of the Roof*

*Source:* Photo by the authors.

One space in the museum where the well-achieved relationship between perceiving the exhibition space and the real space of the Villa is lost is the underground room, since, despite the gradual change in temperature as one descends the stairs, the sensation on arrival is one of discomfort: A cool -or, rather, cold- space in semi-darkness which, with its bare walls, does not allow the visitor who is unaware of the existence of the frescoes to understand the importance of the site or even to perceive the presence of the decoration (see Figure 12).



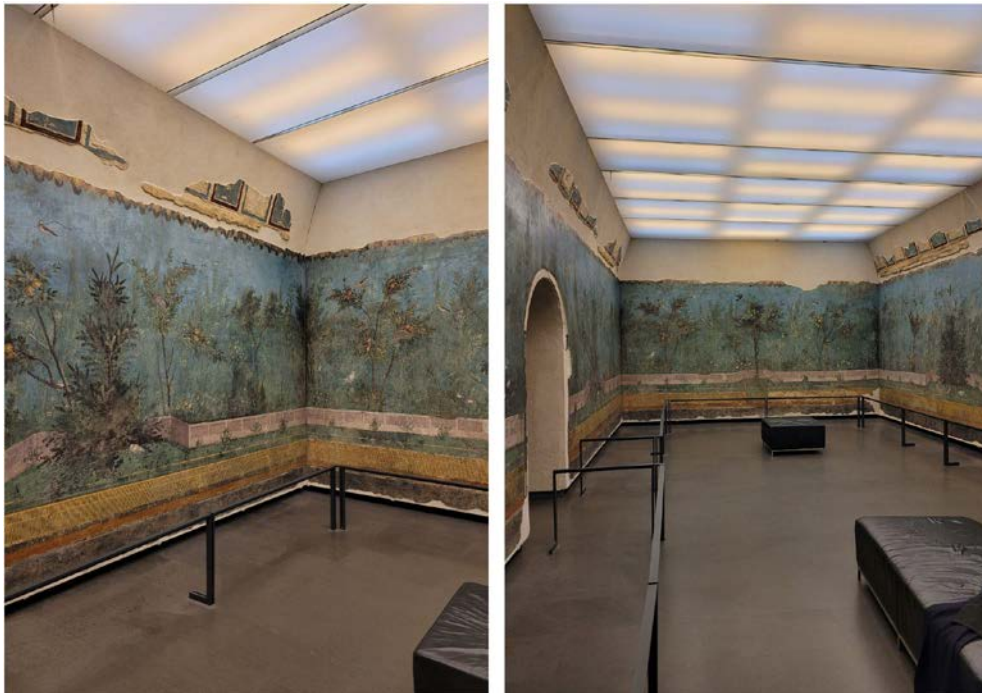
**Figure 12.** *The Archaeological Remains of the Villa di Livia: The Underground Room*

*Source:* Photo by the authors.



A similar experience occurs when visiting the Museo Nazionale Romano in the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, where the frescoes are on display (see Figure 13). A perfect setting and lighting allows one to observe them properly and examine the details of their exquisite execution. However, the experience of observing the frescoes is incomplete when their context is missing, that is without the cool, dimly lit environment, viewing the frescoes becomes an action of simple observation rather than an immersion within a space that was certainly intended to be a complete sensory experience.

This phenomenological experience of the space is incomplete also because the architectural context is different; although the proportions of the room are maintained, the barrel vault -although sketched- has not been reproduced in the museum's exhibition, which translates into a lack of understanding on the part of the visitor. In other words, the fresco is admired as a pictorial work in itself, without adding to it the value acquired by the fact that it was made for a specific architectural space, with particular characteristics regarding form, materiality, lighting and atmosphere, which are undoubtedly essential for knowing and understanding the work of art as a unit.



**Figure 13.** *The Exhibition of the Frescoes at Palazzo Massimo alle Terme*

Source: Photo by the authors.

### **Echoes of History: Symbolic Representation [M.C.]**

This research work studies the Villa di Livia starting from its beginnings, trying to understand the reasons why it was decided to build this architectural space. And -from there- to understand how the passage of time and the hand of man have brought modifications to the architecture of the Villa that -beyond categorising them as good or bad interventions- are understood as part of the

history of the site: as a succession of layers of history that, together, form a kind of narrative, a story of the site over the years.

It is impossible to separate the figure and life of Livia from the history of the Villa, the underground room or the frescoes. Not only because it is thought that she was the main commissioner of all of them, but also because it is likely that she also participated in the decision-making process. It is undeniable that architecture and art transmit and communicate -even over the years- a code that those who know history can certainly decode with greater precision and depth.

From the representative, iconographic and geometric analysis of the frescoes, it is reasonable to think that the depicted garden is the transposition of an ideal place in which floral and zoological species that could not coexist in the same environment coexist. The use of frescoes, in classical times, was widespread not only with merely aesthetic-decorative functions but also and above all as a vehicle for messages charged with symbolic meanings. The botanical species found in this garden carry meanings of a spiritual and religious nature that would seem to allude to the transience of human life, such as box and cypress trees, which are able to renew and regenerate themselves cyclically, like the flowers and budding fruit symbolising fertility.

Livia and her husband Augustus, through the remains of the villa and the fresco, convey luxury and comfort, recreation and amusement, but at the same time they speak of ostentation, the search for beauty, precision and the use of a symbolic language. The Villa and the painted room speak to us of a period of transition, of the passage from republic to empire, of the relevance of personality and individual power behind both private -as in this case- and public commissions. In this sense, the villa was certainly also a vehicle for political messages; in fact, the recurring representation of the laurel plant is certainly a reference to Roman culture, where all victories and acts of peace were consecrated to the god Apollo, considered the symbol of wisdom and intelligence. This plant thus probably also alludes to the emblem of the supreme power of the imperial family and the restoration of peace throughout the empire.

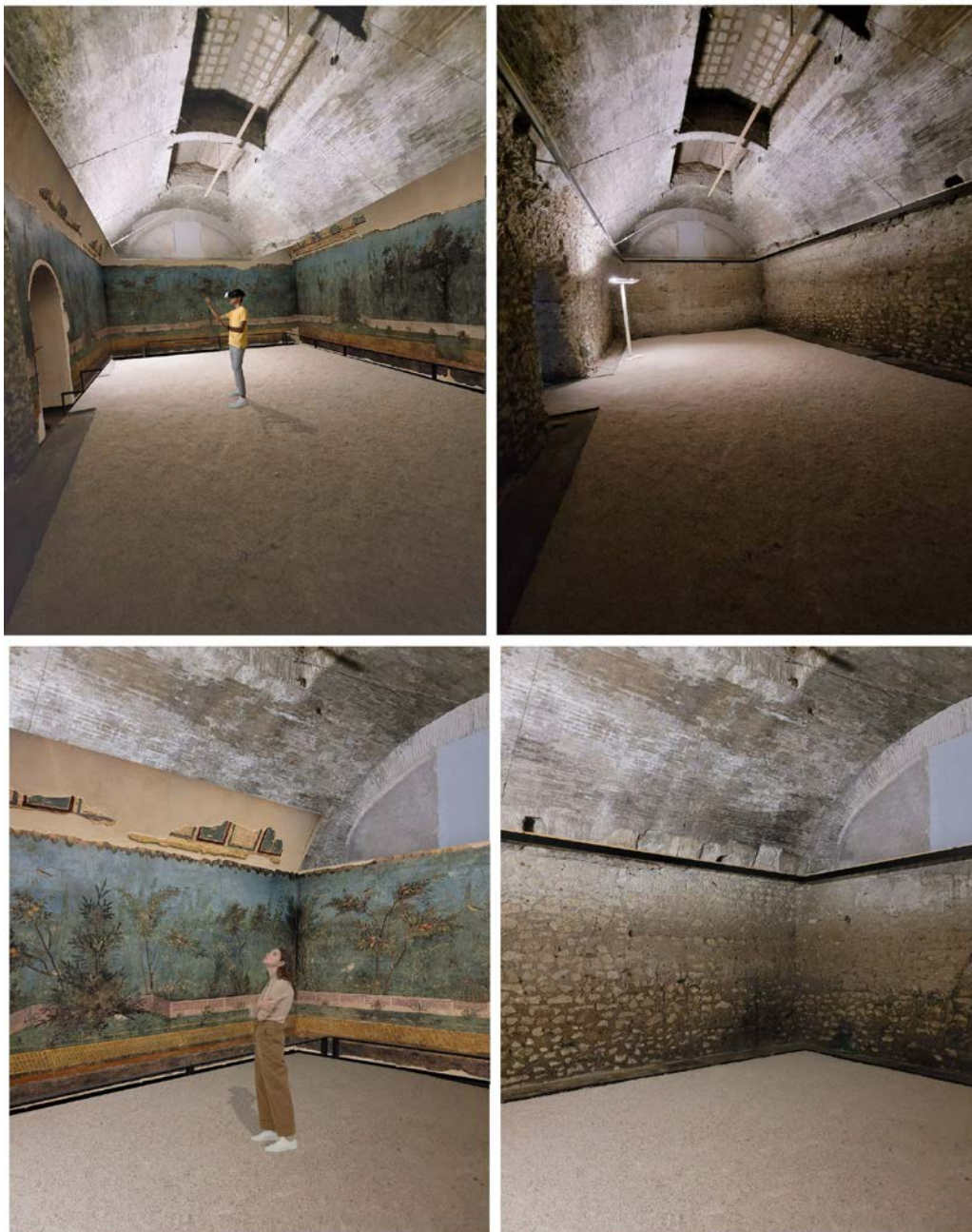
### **The (Re)United Masterpiece: New Technologies at the Service of Art and Architecture [M.C. e A.M.G]**

Although it is impossible to see the room in its original and unitary physical state, it is not impossible to recover -using new technologies- the stylistic/architectural unity. But what are the technologies that allow it? In what way? How can the visitor be incorporated? Or rather, what would be the role of the visitor?

A more or less recent example is the project -released in 2008- 'Villa di Livia reloaded' in the Virtual Museum of the Ancient Via Flaminia. The installation allows a more 'natural' and intuitive interaction and the involvement of a much wider public through virtual scenarios where one can explore the 3D space. There are two scenarios that can be accessed: the reconstructed villa from the Augustan period and the present one. In the latter, the visitor has the sensation of flying above the archaeological structures, while in the 3D scenario he follows a path at

human height, encountering personalities from the period, from Livia and Augustus to the painter or the villa's gardener.

This example -although interesting and well achieved- does not yet allow us to achieve the stylistic/architectural unity referred to above, which could be carried out in two ways: by bringing the frescoes into the actual underground room in the Villa, or by bringing the underground room into the actual frescoes exhibited in the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme.



**Figure 14A/B.** *Elaboration of Design Hypothesis, with VR or Projector, for the Archaeological Site of the Villa of Livia*

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

Both ideas are not impracticable projects for the future, but have great potential to be developed today. In this sense, new reflections and unknowns arise: what possibilities exist to carry them forward? With what methodology and methods? How would these digital installations modify the museum experience? (see Figure 14). And, in this sense, what are the future prospects for museums? These are all open questions, as yet unanswered, which nevertheless generate new reflections and concerns for further research activities.

### Acknowledgments

All the authors shared the principles of the study presented here, however the “*Villa di Livia: from its origins to its (re)discovery*” and subparagraph “*One masterpiece, two museums*” was written by Agostina Maria Giusto [A.M.G.]; the paragraph “*The drawn garden: the frescoes of the Villa*” and the subparagraph “*Echoes of history: symbolic representation*” was written by Martina Castaldi [M.C.]. The “*Introduction*” and the subparagraph “*The (re)united masterpiece: new technologies at the service of art and architecture*” was written by both authors.

### Bibliography

- AA.VV. *Bullettino dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica per l'anno 1863, May-June*. (Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeological Correspondence for the year 1863, May-June.) Roma: Editoriale Tipografia Tiberina, 1863.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *I pittori di Pompei. Affreschi romani dal Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*, catalogo della mostra. (The Painters of Pompeii. Roman Frescoes from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, exhibition catalogue.) Edited by M. Grimaldi. Roma: Mondo Mostre, 2022.
- Bacchetta, A. *Oscilla. Rilievi sospesi di età romana*. (Oscilla. Suspended reliefs from the Roman period.) Milano: LED Edizioni Universitarie, 2006.
- Baldassarre, I. et al. *Pittura romana, dall'ellenismo al tardo-antico*. (Roman painting, from Hellenism to Late Antiquity.) Milano: Federico Motta Editore, 2002.
- Barone, V. “Reale e virtuale per il patrimonio culturale. Nuovi ponti attraverso antiche frontiere.” (Real and virtual for cultural heritage. New bridges across ancient frontiers.) In *Paesaggi domestici*, edited by V. Barone, and A. Pagano, 219-226. Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2020.
- Bianchi Bandinelli, R. *Roma: l'arte romana nel centro del potere, dalle origini alla fine del II secolo d.C.* (Rome: Roman art in the centre of power, from its origins to the end of the 2nd century A.D.) Milano: Rizzoli Editori, 1976.
- Cagianò De Azevedo, M. “La sala dipinta della Villa di Livia a Prima Porta.” (The painted room of Livia's Villa at Prima Porta.) In *Bollettino dell'Istituto Centrale del Restauro* no. 13. Roma: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1953.
- Caneva, G. “Ipotesi sul significato simbolico del giardino dipinto della Villa di Livia (Prima Porta, Roma).” (Hypotheses on the symbolic meaning of the painted garden of the Villa of Livia (Prima Porta, Rome).) In *BCAR - Bollettino Della Commissione Archeologica Comunale Di Roma* C 1999, 63-80. Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1999.
- Carrara, M. “La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta da praedium suburbanum a villa Caesarum.” (La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta da praedium suburbanum a villa Caesarum.) In

- Roman villas around the Urbs. Interaction with landscape and environment. Proceedings of a conference held at the Swedish Institute in Rome, September 17–18, 2004*, edited by B. Santillo Frizell, and A. Klynne. Rome: The Swedish Institute in Rome, 2005.
- Ciarallo, A. *Flora pompeiana antica*. (Ancient Pompeian flora.) Napoli: Electa, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Le piante e i giardini nell’antichità.” (Plants and gardens in antiquity.) In *Il giardino antico da Babilonia a Roma: scienza, arte e natura*, edited by G. Di Pasquale, and F. Paolucci, 154-177. Livorno: Sillabe, 2007.
- La Rocca, E. “Paesaggi che fluttuano nel vuoto. La veduta paesistica nella pittura greca e romana.” (Landscapes floating in the void. The landscape view in Greek and Roman painting.) In *Roma. La pittura di un impero*, edited by E. La Rocca, S. Ensoli, S. Tortorella, and M. Papini, 39-55. Milano: Skira Editore, 2009.
- Messineo, G. *Ad gallinas albas. Villa di Livia*. (Ad gallinas albas. Villa of Livia.) Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “La Villa di Livia a Prima Porta.” (Livia’s Villa at Prima Porta.) In *Nuova Serie. Itinerari dei musei, gallerie, scavi e monumenti d’Italia* no. 69. Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 2004.
- Nardini, B. “Il restauro dell’Hortus di epoca romana. Una lettura storico-critica degli interventi in area pompeiana.” (The Restoration of the Roman Hortus. A historical-critical reading of interventions in the Pompeian area.) Unpublished Master’s Thesis. Università di Genova, 2022.
- Pappalardo, U. *Affreschi Romani*. (Roman Frescoes.) Verona: Arsenale Editrice, 2009.
- Partisani, M. P. “Le galline e gli allori dell’‘Ulisse in gonnella’. Note sulla villa di Livia ad Gallinas albas.” (The hens and laurels of ‘Ulysses in skirts’. Notes on Livia’s villa ad Gallinas albas.) In *La riscoperta della via Flaminia più vicina a Roma: storia, luoghi, personaggi: atti dell’Incontro di Studio. Auditorium dell’Ara Pacis. June 22, 2009*, edited by F. Vistoli. Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010.
- Settis, S. *La villa di Livia. Le pareti ingannevoli*. (Livia’s villa. The deceptive walls.) Roma: Mondadori Electa, 2008.
- Simelius, S. “Pompeian Peristyle Gardens.” In *Studies in Roman Space and Urbanism* no. 8. Abingdon (London): Routledge, 2022.
- Zanker, P. *Augusto e il potere delle immagini*. (Augustus and the power of images.) Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006.
- Zanker, P., and A. Zambrini. *Pompei. Società, immagini urbane e forme dell’abitare*. (Pompeii. Society, urban images and forms of living.) Torino: Einaudi, 1993.
- Zarmakoupi, M. “The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas.” In *Städtisches Wohnen im östlichen Mittelmeerraum 4 Jh. v. Chr. - 1. Jh. n. Chr (Akten des internationalen Kolloquiums vom 24-27 Oktober 2007)*, edited by S. Ladstätter, and V. Scheibelreiter, 621-631. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The intermediality of landscape in the decorum of Roman villas.” In *Principles of decoration in the Roman World*, edited by A. Haug, M. Taylor Lauritsen, 177-192. Berlino: De Gruyter, 2020.



## The After Image Phenomenon between Immaterial and Hyper-Material Architectures: Hypothesis on the Influence of Italian Architecture at the Time of the Cold War

By Olivia Longo\*

*The Cold War was not only a political-military confrontation but also a way of life, an atmosphere that enveloped and influenced society in all its dimensions. Through the two key concepts of "anarchic architecture" and "interrupted sign" the paper analyses the design processes theorized and experimented by Giancarlo De Carlo within the complex and articulated historical-cultural context of the Cold War. From this analysis, the research highlights both the conscious and unconscious origins of a complex process of dematerialization that has characterized some more recent architectures, oriented towards the rejection of compositional processes based on the composition of forms, instead privileging abstract design concepts more closely linked to the user's emotional and perceptual sphere. Finally, the research refers to the phenomenon of the After Image defined by Biraghi as a possible orientation towards an "after contemporary architecture".*

### Introduction

This contribution explores the causes that in the last twenty years have led to the global spread of architectures expressing messages of immateriality and transparency. They seem to oppose the previous compositional process based on the construction of shapes, as it occurred in the pursuit of compositions of architectural volumes during the Modern Movement of the twentieth century.

By investigating the characteristics of the Cold War, this research identifies some connections between the compositional methods of Giancarlo De Carlo's architectural projects (from the 1950s to the end of the 20th century) and the cultural phenomena that characterized this global conflict.

To proceed with this examination, it is necessary to provide a historical introduction to the Cold War.

At the end of World War II, the introduction of nuclear weapons led to the paradox of MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction), which made conflict unlikely due to the extreme effects it would entail.

The Cold War arose from a political-military, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and ideological opposition, no longer solvable through frontal warfare and thus based on the so-called "balance of terror" in a new bipolar world divided between the two superpowers, the USA and the USSR.

Europe was a contested territory between the two blocs because the proliferation of financial, commercial, and cultural ties between the two Europes

---

\* Associate Professor, University of Brescia, Italy.

(Western and Eastern), the dynamism, openness, and prosperity of Western societies determined the psychological and then political surrender of the Eastern part.

Globalization was not generated by the Cold War, although it facilitated and channeled it, but rather the dynamics of globalization determined the end of this conflict. Although the European territory was the main object of contention, this war focused on controlling the political and social development of the Third World.

Believing their position in Europe to be consolidated, the Soviet Union hoped to turn the upheavals of the Third World to its advantage, while the West continued to influence European thought in the sphere of communication, using principles and categories such as freedom and liberation, deterrence and credibility, which exist only in the interpretation given to them by people from time to time. For this reason, the Cold War has been defined as the greatest "fiction" of the time, fueled and shaped by imagination, which in turn continued to fuel it.

Considering the complexity and ambiguous nature of the events of this war, it must be remembered that although the era of the Cold War ended in 1989, the long reflections of its lights and shadows will slowly fade away, accompanying us for much longer.<sup>1</sup>

The Cold War was not just a political-military confrontation but a way of life, an atmosphere that conditioned society in all its dimensions. A daily life lived and suffered in an atmosphere of absolute distrust and fear that led to the birth of the so-called "culture of suspicion." A way of conceiving and looking at "the other" as an enemy, the one who lived beyond the iron curtain, behind the wall (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Frame of *A Bridge Too Far*, Movie by R. Attenborough, 1977

Source: Raiplay, 2020. Graphic processing by O. Longo (2020).

In the last twenty years, the most successful architectural production seems to be oriented towards an immaterial representation of buildings, rejecting the formal compositional processes of the Modern Movement. In this regard, Biraghi identifies

---

1. See Romero F (2009) *Storia della Guerra fredda. L'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa*. Turin: Einaudi, pp. 8-12, 346.



the phenomenon of the *After Image*,<sup>2</sup> which can represent this type of architecture that the historian defines as "post-contemporary".

Among the many possible architectural examples, this concept of *After Image* clearly emerges from the architectures of Herzog and de Meuron, where there is a willingness to oppose a type of design based on the mythologization of form and image. The paradox of this process lies in their search for the moment when materiality transcends immateriality by using a strategy of hyper-materiality, where the material conditions of the structure are questioned from the outset.<sup>3</sup>

The contribution will seek to identify both the conscious and unconscious origins of this complex concept of immateriality, through the key concepts "anarchic architecture" and "interrupted sign" that we can apply to the design processes theorized and experimented by Giancarlo De Carlo, within the complex and articulated historical-cultural context of the Cold War.

### Literature Review

In 2019, during the celebration of the centenary of De Carlo's birth (organized by the Architects Register of Milan), focusing on themes dear to the Master such as participation, ethics, and the future, Massimo Cacciari highlights De Carlo's strongly ethical-political spirit, as well as that of other contemporaries, and his fundamentally anarchic approach, making specific reference to immaterial architecture as a possible new frontier in architectural research of our time.

On several occasions, De Carlo criticized the methods of the rationalists of the 1920s, such as their attempt to frame the modern world according to logics that failed to adhere to reality.

Since the 1960s, he has proclaimed the need to understand the process of city formation as a succession of interconnected and rational stages but characterized by transitional moments caused by "unknown and broad participations or the impulse of individual actions", that determine its irrational character.<sup>4</sup>

In 1969, at a conference in Liege, De Carlo spoke about the crisis of architecture at that time: the Modern Movement and its "heroes" must be re-evaluated from a different perspective, from that devised by their own advertising strategy.

The Modern Movement aimed to conquer (and effectively did) the domain already occupied by academic or corporate architecture, excluding what was not shared by the classes in power in economic, social, cultural, and aesthetic terms.

De Carlo recalled the 1929 Frankfurt CIAM dedicated to minimal housing and reiterated the need for a true metamorphosis to develop new design methods

---

2. See Biraghi M (2008) *Storia dell'architettura contemporanea II. 1945-2008*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, pp. 509-532.

3. See Mori T (2002) *Immaterial / Ultramaterial. Architecture, design and materials*. Bergamin A (ed), *Immateriale / Ultramateriale. Architettura, progetto e materiali*. Milan: Postmedia, 2004, pp. 105-107.

4. See De Carlo G (1960) Introduzione. In *The future metropolis, American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. In Rodwin L (ed), *La metropoli del futuro*. Padua: Marsilio editori, 1964, p. XIII.

and new models of architect behavior. The intrinsic aggressiveness of architecture and the forced passivity of the user must dissolve into a condition of creative and decisional equivalence.<sup>5</sup>

Through these and other writings by De Carlo and some masters of the twentieth century, it is possible to identify traces of a design root that tends towards the symbolic disintegration of volumes and facades. To this end, it is necessary to first describe an overview of the historical situation of the time.

The complexity of the social and moral position of the West in post-war Europe is evident in the film "The Third Man" (1949) through the personality of the protagonist Holly Martins, an American writer who fails to communicate and place himself in the complex Viennese context portrayed in the film.<sup>6</sup>

The film is set during the brief and uneasy truce between the fall of Hitler and the onset of Cold War tensions. The most famous scene is performed by Orson Welles with the monologue about the Swiss cuckoo clock<sup>7</sup>, while the film's particular documentary and neorealist components, with expressionist shots and a haunting musical theme played by Anton Karas (with the Austrian zither), add an atmosphere of paranoia and anguish.<sup>8</sup>

In 1998, Leonardo Benevolo wrote his book *L'architettura delle città nell'Italia contemporanea*, in which he describes Italy in the post-war period by quoting a series of Italian films of the time.

Benevolo states that in those years, architects of his generation chose to distance themselves from the previous generation of architects, because they needed to create architecture based on an objective reality that could be represented by the term "Realism".

Benevolo cites the films *Roma città aperta* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946) by Rossellini, *Sciuscià* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) by De Sica, using their scenes to describe the Italian landscape of that time.

Benevolo asserts that to tell the story of Italian post-war architecture, one must remember the atmosphere of that period, such as the detachment from myths and the need to objectively verify previous architectural experiences.

According to Ignasi De Solà-Morales, the crisis of modern architecture has generated the idea of an aesthetic as the production, by a subject, of elementary perceptual experiences that produce meanings through the ability to generate emotions.

---

5. See De Carlo G (1970) Architecture's public. In Blundell Jones P, Petrescu D, Till J (eds), *Architecture and Participation*. London-New York: Spon Press Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, pp. 6-11.

6. See Wilson C (2015) Rooting for Harry Lime: 'The Third Man' As Morally Ambiguous Heterotopia. In *PopMatters*, 7 Ottobre, <https://www.popmatters.com/196355-rooting-for-harry-lime-the-third-man-as-morally-ambiguous-heterotopi-2495496750.html> (01/2020).

7. *You know what the fellow said – in Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.* (Orson Welles / Harry Lime).

8. See Thomson I (2019) *Financial Times*, 23 Agosto, <https://www.ft.com/content/5cce6602-bf76-11e9-9381-78bab8a70848>, (12/2019).

As with all fields of aesthetic creation, architecture also gains absolute freedom of perceptual experimentation, especially regarding the effects generated by forms, materials, and spaces.<sup>9</sup>

If it is true that architecture becomes art when society reaches a certain level of wealth and moral culture,<sup>10</sup> then we can draw some parallels between the history of art and that of architecture, which can help us understand the development of modern architecture.

We know that in a short span of time, a work of art can concisely and synthetically express the human condition of a particular era, sometimes also marking the different phases of civilization's progress.<sup>11</sup>

According to Hauser,<sup>12</sup> by renouncing the harmony and chromatic beauty of Impressionism, Modern Art opposes this movement because it wants to be "ugly" in principle. In painting, it destroys pictorial values; in poetry, feelings and image perfection; in music, melody and tonality, instead becoming a kind of anxious flight from everything that is pleasant and decorative.

The painter, the poet, the musician wanted to draw from intellect rather than from feeling. This attraction sometimes manifests with the purity of structure, sometimes with the ecstasy of metaphysical passion.

The squalor, oppression, and torment of Picasso, Kafka, and Joyce are the manifestation of this search for truth against the sensualism of the previous illusory world of art.

As Gardner, Nicholls, and White wrote in 2012 about Italian art, can Italian architecture also be considered influenced by the effects of the Cold War?

Italian art of the post-war period was influenced by the geopolitical context of the Cold War in two significant ways:

1. With the help of the Marshall Plan (see Figure 2) and the support of Americans, because organizations, and individuals arrived in Italy from the United States, creating international artistic colonies in Rome, Venice, and Milan, and generating a significant impact on the peninsula's culture.
2. After the period of Fascist autarchy that isolated Italy politically, economically, and culturally from the Western world, Italians developed a great interest in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this significant cultural exchange between Italy and the United States (which was in a situation of economic prosperity after World War II), between 1950 and 1952, President Truman's policy against Soviet influence and the armed conflict in Korea against the communist North by the South Koreans had a

---

9. See De Solà-Morales I (1991) *Architettura ed esistenzialismo: una crisi dell'architettura moderna*. Casabella 583, p. 40.

10. See Quatremère de Quincy AC (1788) *E.M.A.*, I tome. Farinati V, Teyssot G (1985) *Dizionario storico di architettura. Le voci teoriche*. Venice: Marsilio, p.120.

11. See Arnheim R (1971) *Entropy and Art. An Essay on disorder and order*. Pedio R (ed), *Entropia e arte. Saggio sul disordine e l'ordine*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2001, p. 79.

12. See Hauser A (2001) *Storia sociale dell'arte*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi.

13. See Gardner A, Nicholls M, White A (2012) Cold War Cultures and Globalisation Art and Film in Italy: 1946-1963. In *Third Text* 26(2), p. 208.

significant impact on American society. The result was a climate of suspicion that led to the persecution of anyone who could be involved in alleged anti-American activities.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 2.** Schild "Hier half der Marschallplan", about 1950

Source: Creative Commons, Schiffahrtsmuseum in Kiel, author Holger.Ellgaard, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marshallplan\\_Schild\\_2015.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marshallplan_Schild_2015.jpg) (07/2022).

### Methodology

The methodology of this research was based on a dialectical evaluation of the interaction between person and world, through the observation of the experiential and interpretative quality of thought, feeling, and human action within the scope of architectural production and composition.

An interdisciplinary bibliography was collected, including the field of Cold War history and that of Art and Architecture history.

Some aspects of De Carlo's architectural design approach were studied using these concepts: "anarchic architecture" and "interrupted sign," identified through the analysis of his writings.

From these observations on De Carlo's thought and architecture emerges the hypothesis that his work may have initiated a trend in architectural production oriented towards the dismantling and dematerialization of the rationalist volumes of the Modern Movement.

---

14. See Carluccio G (2012) Il cinema americano classico, 1930-1960. Evoluzione e declino dello «studio system». In P Bertetto (ed) *Introduzione alla storia del cinema. Autori, film, correnti*. Novara: UTET Università De Agostini Scuola, p. 140.

This line of thought may have then evolved over time into the contemporary conception of "Immaterial Architecture," to which the concept of *After Image* defined by architectural historian Marco Biraghi can be associated.

Finally, to illustrate this latter concept, some architectures by Herzog & de Meuron were selected, following the analysis of some of their writings.

## Results

In his book *Gli spiriti dell'architettura*, De Carlo asserts that architecture and urban planning are fundamentally authoritarian because architects and urban planners have provided their services to power and have thus developed theories, solutions, and projects in line with their clients. However, there are different ways of conceiving the relationship between people and territory.

He claimed that in the American cultural context, there is an important current, often overlooked by official criticism: the deeply anarchic thought that consists of not specializing the human environment, not dividing the territory from the city, the neighbourhood, the building, but rather seeing them together as a place of existence.

De Carlo cites two Italians who would belong to this orientation: Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino.

His book *Le città del mondo* reflects this libertarian thought, this articulated vision of the city. "Invisible Cities" are the product of the people who inhabit them and of the infinite stratifications, not the product of authorities. For Calvino, it is the use of the city that defines it, not who ordered or designed it.<sup>15</sup>

After World War II, De Carlo met the anarchist groups of the magazine *Volontà* with Berneri and Zaccaria, and the English magazine *Freedom* with Woodcock, Read, Richards.

In the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition of De Carlo's works at the Triennale in Milan, De Michelis writes that after World War II, the modernist tradition had inevitably merged into the conventional character of the International Style, repeatedly condemned by De Carlo.

From 1945 onwards, a question permeated the debate of the time: whether the "modern tradition", interrupted by the war and somehow defeated by the political-cultural crisis of Europe in the 1930s, could take on the task of reconstruction; on the contrary if it was impossible to absolve rationalist architecture from its complicity with the fascist regime in Italy during the previous decade.<sup>16</sup>

In 1966, De Carlo went to the United States for the first time, where he would return several times for teaching periods at MIT, UCLA, Cornell. The discovery of American reality in a period of intensity (the Vietnam War, the revolt of the youth,

---

15. See De Carlo G (1992) *Nelle città del Mondo*. Venice: Marsilio, pp. 195-198.

16. See De Michelis M (1995) In forma di introduzione. In Mioni A, Occhialini EC (eds), *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*. Milan: Electa, p. XIII.

pop art, rock music, the advent of anti-Bauhaus architecture) had a considerable influence on him.<sup>17</sup>

In the introduction to the book *The Future Metropoli* (1960) which collects essays (published the following year in *Daedalus*) by eleven American scholars belonging to different disciplinary fields (urban planning, visual design, political science, social history, territorial economy, trade, and philosophy), De Carlo emphasizes the scientific and interdisciplinary component of American urban culture, considering the variety of themes treated as valuable, united by the interest in the general problems of metropolitan development at the time. De Carlo identifies in the writings an optimistic confidence in a policy considered capable of managing the imbalances of urban growth, directing development towards goals of real efficiency.

He thus initiates a fundamental reflection on the complexity and contradictions of the modern world, without avoiding explicit commentary on the differences between American and Italian culture, and between the left and capitalism, which were central issues for the dynamics of the Cold War.

De Carlo describes very frankly the main reasons behind the suspicion of Italian urban academics towards American research. Among these, he emphasizes the problem of the vision of Italian left-wing culture, which, although open to the increase of rational domination, is conditioned by an indiscriminate recourse to abstract value judgments, letting the concrete aspects of experiences escape. De Carlo does not even spare American culture, defining it in some respects naive and particularly tied to a capitalist political and economic system.<sup>18</sup>

With this approach to complexity and avoiding easy escapes, De Carlo demonstrates that he anticipated the issues of today's architecture and cities by decades through a courageous work of exploration and management of a constantly changing reality.

Interviewed by Franco Bunčuga, De Carlo declares that he returned to admire anarchist thinkers after being disappointed by communism around the 1950s. Rereading their writings, De Carlo emphasizes the anarchists' ability to be patient and asserts that these principles were his starting point for his architecture and urban planning projects. By emphasizing the means, anarchists end up suggesting complex and tortuous processes, described by hesitant and itinerant curves. By allowing the possibility of meeting other non-linear processes, such as those of nature, the inefficiency of anarchists thus becomes an ethical and political quality, because it can lead to being more inclusive and, consequently, more effective.<sup>19</sup>

In this way, De Carlo confirms that it is possible to have a project without keeping fixed objectives because they will continuously adapt to circumstances and context, depending on the changes that will occur.

---

17. See Mioni A, Occhialini E C (1995) Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti. Milan: Electa, p. 179.

18. See De Carlo G (1960) Introduzione. In *The future metropolis, American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. In Rodwin L (ed), *La metropoli del futuro*. Padua: Marsilio editori, 1964, pp. X, XV.

19. See De Carlo G, Bunčuga F (2000) *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*. Milan: Elèuthera, pp. 210-212.

The contradiction that runs through the theme of "freedom" in De Carlo's architecture lies on one hand in the tension towards the conquest of an architectural expression devoid of obligations towards pre-existing conditions, and on the other hand in the ability to measure oneself with the context.

His critical approach to typology emerges in his way of considering living as a set of constantly evolving modes, shaped over time by community life.

From the concrete characteristics of a consolidated settlement habit, De Carlo triggers a series of progressive mutations according to a situationist attitude that explores its hidden potentials and implicit subversions.

In his works, De Carlo often resorts to the "staging" of the daily life of the inhabitants and visitors of his architectures, acts of his stories of ordinary people who become active protagonists of the architectural expression of his buildings.

In the residences of Mazzorbo (see Figure 3), a series of spaces (from urban scale to that of the single dwelling) and the typological matrix dissolve into a network of topological relations, where distance and proximity become tools for narrating living together, in an urban landscape that does not seem designed but spontaneously generated.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 3.** Residential Complex in Mazzorbo, Venice, Giancarlo De Carlo, 1980-1997

Source: Adobe Stock, author Guido, [https://stock.adobe.com/it/search/images?k=Giancarlo%20De%20Carlo&search\\_type=default-asset-click&asset\\_id=473965806](https://stock.adobe.com/it/search/images?k=Giancarlo%20De%20Carlo&search_type=default-asset-click&asset_id=473965806) (05/2022).

In 1951, De Carlo, Samonà, and others curated the exhibition on spontaneous architecture for the IX edition of the Triennale. Here the anonymous rationality, faithful however to the *genius loci* of the buildings of the Italian countryside, in continuity with Pagano's research on rural architecture, replaced the monumental prototypes of American industrialized architecture, denouncing that sort of "retreat from Modern Architecture" by Italians.

---

20. See Purini F (2004) L'opera e il tema. In Samassa F (ed) *Giancarlo De Carlo. Percorsi*, IUAV – AP archivio progetti. Padua: Il Poligrafo, pp. 83-86.



This kind of break with the Modern Movement guided De Carlo towards a process of fracture that has been synthesized here in the concept of the "interrupted sign".

From this critical revision of the recent past, De Carlo assimilates and interprets the ethical component of the evolution of the idea of standard, preserving the coherence of the process. He is also shifting his attention towards urban design as a synthesis of architecture and urban planning, which opposes the idea of urban fabric (born within the CIAM and developed through the work of the Team X designers) to the dialectic between street and built. The ground is no longer a tray on which to place volumes but a carefully designed whole in which spaces, streets, buildings, green systems, and paving interact.<sup>21</sup>

Through a critical revisitation of Le Corbusier's writings, the young De Carlo had already broken with the "tradition of the new", orienting himself years later towards the experimentation of diffused settlement forms (houses in Baveno in 1951 and the Spine Bianche neighborhood in 1954), whose origins certainly date back to the spontaneous architecture of the 1951 Triennale.

By interrupting the constructive continuity, De Carlo designs small isolated two-family units, equipped with semi-public spaces intended for the social interaction of the community.<sup>22</sup>

At the architectural scale and vertically, the interrupted sign is explicit in the glass façade of the new thermal power plant under the Novizi's Garden of the Benedettini Monastery in Catania, where De Carlo proposes a reflective glass that narrates the Monastery in fragments, along a broken line of rectangles with different inclinations (see Figure 4).

---

21. See Borgarino M.P., Bazzoli N., Del Curto D., Mazzolani M., Sansonetti A., Troisi A., *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, pp. 38-39.

22. See De Michelis M (1995) In forma di introduzione. In Mioni A, Occhialini EC (eds), *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*. Milan: Electa, pp. XIII-XIV.



**Figure 4.** *Recovery of the Complesso dei Benedettini, Catania, Giancarlo De Carlo (1986-2004). On the left: the glass wall of the new thermal power plant under the Giardino dei Novizi, where the Monastery is narrated through fragments and broken images that reflect along a sequence of rectangles with different inclinations. On the right: the helical staircase, nestled between the lava rock and the floor level of the Giardino dei Novizi, concludes the sequence of overlapping "interrupted signs," both natural and man-made.*

Source on the left: photo by Nicolò Arena (2015), Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Centrale\\_termica\\_monastero\\_catania\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Centrale_termica_monastero_catania_1.jpg) (09/2021). Source on the right: photo by Nicolò Arena (2015), Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scala\\_elicoidale\\_monastero\\_catania.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scala_elicoidale_monastero_catania.jpg) (09/2021).

Other interrupted signs characterize the design of the tower for Siena (1988), conceived as a "disordered" volume because De Carlo asserted that disorder is often a higher form of order, more nuanced, intricate, and arcane than the usual ones; yet endowed with rigorous internal correspondences.<sup>23</sup>

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the production of Italian architects oscillates between rigorous and "sincere" symbols and ambiguously "interrupted" signs. The character of incompleteness could derive from the Zeigarnik effect discovered in 1927 by the psychologist of the same name, who claimed that interrupted behaviours are more easily remembered than completed ones.<sup>24</sup>

In 1978, Giulio Carlo Argan and Christian Norberg-Schultz organized the international exhibition in Rome "Roma interrotta", paraphrasing the title of an editorial column edited by Luciano Patetta, "L'architettura interrotta" published in the magazine *Controspazio* directed by Paolo Portoghesi.

23. See De Carlo G (1992) *Gli spiriti dell'architettura*. In Sichirolo L (ed), Rome: Editori riuniti, 1992.

24. See Spaltro E (1992) Vittoriano Viganò ovvero come un architetto possa esprimere una città. In *A come Architettura*. Milan: Electa, p. 155.

Among others, Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi, Paolo Portoghesi, and James Stirling participated in the exhibition.

As Patetta stated, the architecture of the exhibition was characterized by an unrealism that, on the one hand, denounced the impotence to which architecture was constrained and, on the other hand, alluded to an alternative reality.<sup>25</sup>

After observing the student protests between 1963 and 1968, when the University students spilled onto the streets, in his essay "La piramide rovesciata", De Carlo states: only when institutions are 'interrupted' can we reach 'total experience'.<sup>26</sup>

The student revolt interrupted an institution traditionally immovable since its post-medieval reinvention. It perhaps interrupted for a moment too short, perhaps falling too soon into violence and sinning from excessive simplifications.<sup>27</sup>

In comparing De Carlo's and Woods' projects for the University of Dublin, as different interpretations of mat-building, Zuddas identifies the conception of the university as a system of scattered poles connected by generic spaces for the most public use possible. Through these poles, De Carlo fragments the systems of academic power, destabilizing the old conception of a centralized university.

The university is transformed into a large urban infrastructure in which the properly academic use becomes only a transitory moment, instead creating spatial conditions to define continuous re-territorializations for the practice of different forms of learning that go beyond the traditional ones.<sup>28</sup>

We can therefore assert that the concept of "interrupted sign" has been present in architectural theory and that De Carlo applied it during his design processes.

Therefore, the "interrupted sign" represents a break from traditional architectural conventions. De Carlo indeed preferred to interact with users (inhabitants of a building or users of an urban space) during the design process, activating a dynamic transformation of architecture where solutions are not static but adapt to the expectations of the people involved from time to time.

The "interrupted sign" is a symbol of openness to diversity and complexity. It is an invitation to overcome old relationships between designer and user to conceive architecture as a continuous process of exchange and flexible adaptation.

These theories of De Carlo are evident in his buildings, such as in the Collegi universitari in Urbino (Figure 5), where he created spaces that reflect the users' needs, challenging traditional architectural conventions.

---

25. See Biraghi M (2008) *Storia dell'architettura contemporanea II. 1945-2008*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, p. 192.

26. See Zuddas F (2015) Pretentious Equivalence. De Carlo, Woods and mat-building. In *Magazine del Festival dell'Architettura* 34, p. 51.

27. See Zuddas F (2019) La piramide rovesciata. Università e architettura italiane del '68 secondo Giancarlo De Carlo, 13 marzo, <https://www.tribune.com/editoria/libri/2019/03/la-piramide-rovesciata-giancarlo-de-carlo/> (09/2021).

28. See Zuddas F (2015) Pretentious Equivalence. De Carlo, Woods and mat-building. In *Magazine del Festival dell'Architettura* 34, p. 60.



**Figure 5.** *Collegi Universitari in Urbino, Giancarlo De Carlo, 1962-1983*

Source: Own work, by Limoncellista (2019), Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Collegi\\_Urbino.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Collegi_Urbino.JPG) (02/2024).

The building system covers an area of approximately 62,000 square meters and is designed to provide a unique living experience, not just accommodation, with common and public spaces where people can meet informally, study, discuss, relax, or spend leisure time, without separation between areas dedicated to students and those open to citizens.<sup>29</sup>

This building system is considered one of the most important works of Italian architecture in the second half of the 20th century. Among the first in Italy, it addressed themes that were at the centre of international debate at that time, such as the inclusion of social objectives in architectural design and the development of a new modern language.

Here, De Carlo imports his interpretation of the campus that he had experienced in the USA as a Visiting Professor at Yale University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell University, and the University of California at Berkeley. He intertwines the civil and social role of education with the themes of landscape and history. For this reason, he creates architecture that combines an innovative cultural vision with a recognizable modern language inspired by the context.<sup>30</sup>

There is also a clear reference to the historical fabric because the buildings and pathways (that connecting them) are built using few simple elements that repeat with minimal variations, and they are distributed in different ways to accommodate differences elevations of the terrain, and directing users' views, pathways, and actions in various directions.

In 1966, Van Eyck described this architecture as follows: it is two places at the same time, open and closed, interior and exterior, large and small, and it is

29. See Stocchi V (2019) La Visione dell'Università, in Borgarino M P, et al., *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, p. 12.

30. See Borgarino M P (2019) Il Piano di Conservazione e Gestione dei Collegi Universitari di Urbino, in Borgarino M P, et al., *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, p. 14.

simultaneously individual and collective. It belongs to the building as much as to the surrounding area, so the building and the area coincide.<sup>31</sup>

### Discussion

To understand how De Carlo's work can be connected to the design processes of contemporary architecture, we will base our discussion on the studies of architectural historian Marco Biraghi.

In 2008, he identified thirteen phenomena that define the 'myths' and 'rituals' of contemporary architecture, traceable only through some 'clues' contradicting each other.

Among these phenomena, concerning the image and its potentialities, we find what the historian defines as the *After Image*, associated with an architecture where the configuration of buildings, especially regarding the use of materials, is a source of mutability and continuous variation.

To make this assertion visible through the architectures realized in the last twenty years, a fitting example could be the architectures of Herzog and de Meuron.

In 2001, during a roundtable discussion, Jacques Herzog asserts that his deep interest in the physical world originates from the ancient history of human culture based on the dialectic between material and immaterial.

Herzog reminds everyone that in the current phase of human civilization, much of our perceptual energy is absorbed by the visual impact of electronic media. Our culture is now moving towards more immaterial values.

For this reason, through the conscious stimulation of both tactile and olfactory senses, Herzog and de Meuron's architectures are always conceived to engage all five senses (see Figures 6-7).

The concept of "immaterial architecture" can also be perceived through Ean White's work "Boundary Interference", where space and the movement of its inhabitants are connected to their emotions. On an interior wall, behind a foam bench, just above the central point of the spine, devices have been placed to emit recordings of traffic noise. When the listener sits on the bench and leans back, the sound is transferred through the bones, producing the sensation of perceiving traffic noise inside their body.

The space is thus silent and empty until human activity alters this condition through touch and the movement of their body.

---

31. See Borgarino M P, et al. (2019) *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, p. 35.



**Figure 6.** *Allianz Arena, Herzog & de Meuron, 2002-2005*

Source: photo by Timothy Brown, Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Allianz\\_Arena,\\_Herzog\\_et\\_de\\_Meuron\\_\(2665665506\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Allianz_Arena,_Herzog_et_de_Meuron_(2665665506).jpg) (07/2022).



**Figure 7.** *Laban Dance Centre, Herzog & de Meuron, 2003*

Source: photo by John Lord, Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity\\_Laban\\_\(8340754913\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity_Laban_(8340754913).jpg) (07/2022). Graphic processing by O. Longo (2022).



## Conclusions

The influence of the Cold War on architecture and territories occurred mainly through deterrence operations, namely through various highly effective means capable of influencing governments and masses of individuals globally.

Although the origins of these (psychological) weapons of war in the twentieth century date back to the Great War, the global scale of the Cold War involved territories much larger than previous wars.

The First World War was among the most innovative for its modern approach to psychological warfare, aimed at the moral exhaustion of the opponent through propaganda and the use of new communication tools such as radio and persuasive images.

These tools induced people to donate their belongings, oppressed by the moral obligation to support compatriots sacrificed on the front lines.

While the other wars of the twentieth century were much shorter and more visible, transforming territories even during subsequent reconstruction, in the nearly forty years of the Cold War, the effects of the conflict at a psychological level were predominantly subliminal and prolonged over time.

Also markedly different was the kind of physical transformation of places, which mainly involved areas where new military infrastructures were built, even adapting existing ones to the needs of a new type of warfare.

On the other hand, in different contexts and with different purposes, in the fifties and sixties, Guarini and Gideon reported that the knot of the new culture that emerged in the twenties and thirties had highlighted a "tragic fracture" between the conditions of the context and human reality, between the psychic and spiritual capacities of the inhabitant and their adaptation to places.

A fracture that led to unsuspected risks and responsibilities emerged from 1964 and until the early seventies, during politically critical years on a global scale.

During that period, in Milan, the radical cultural change was manifested in international exhibitions at the Triennale in the Palazzo dell'Arte, oscillating between radical research and provocative positions.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned above, in this context, Giancarlo De Carlo combined his passion for architecture with a commitment to participation, freedom, and interest in people's needs, demonstrating how architecture can be a tool for social change and the creation of more inclusive spaces.

---

32. See Crippa M A (2009) Vittoriano Viganò e l'ambiente culturale milanese. In Cao E, Piva A (eds.), *Vittoriano Viganò. A come asimmetria*, Rome: Gangemi editore, pp. 20-24.



## Bibliography

- Arnheim, R. *Entropia e arte. Saggio sul disordine e l'ordine*. (Entropy and Art. An Essay on disorder and order.) Edited by R. Pedio. Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2001.
- Benevolo, L. *L'architettura nell'Italia contemporanea*. (Architecture in contemporary Italy.) Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1998.
- Biraghi, M. *Storia dell'architettura contemporanea II. 1945-2008*. (History of contemporary architecture II. 1945-2008.) Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2008.
- Borgarino, M. P., N. Bazzoli, D. Del Curto, M. Mazzolani, A. Sansonetti, and A. Troisi. *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*. (Giancarlo De Carlo's colleges in Urbino. Conservation and management plan.) Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, 2019.
- Carluccio, G. "Il cinema americano classico, 1930-1960. Evoluzione e declino dello «studio system»." (Classic American Cinema, 1930-1960. Evolution and decline of the "studio system".) In *Introduzione alla storia del cinema. Autori, film, correnti*, edited by P. Bertetto. Novara: UTET Università De Agostini Scuola, 2012.
- Crippa, M. A. "Vittoriano Viganò e l'ambiente culturale milanese." (Vittoriano Viganò and the Milanese cultural environment.) In *Vittoriano Viganò. A come asimmetria*, edited by E. Cao, and A. Piva. Rome: Gangemi editore, 2009.
- De Carlo, G. "Introduzione." (Introduction.) In *La metropoli del futuro*, edited by L. Rodwin. Padua: Marsilio editori, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Architecture's public." In *Architecture and Participation*, edited by P. Blundell Jones, D. Petrescu, and J. Till. London-New York: Spon Press Taylor & Francis Group, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "L'«altalena» tra urbanistica e architettura." (The "seesaw" between urban planning and architecture.) *AB* 3 (1985).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Gli spiriti dell'architettura*. (The spirits of architecture.) Edited by L. Sichirolo. Rome: Editori riuniti, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Nelle città del Mondo*. (In the cities of the world.) Venice: Marsilio, 1992.
- De Carlo, G., and F. Bunčuga. *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*. (Conversations on architecture and freedom.) Milan: Elèuthera 2000.
- De Michelis, M. "In forma di introduzione." (In introduction form.) In *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*, edited by A. Mioni, and E. C. Occhialini. Milan: Electa, 1995.
- De Solà-Morales, I. "Architettura ed esistenzialismo: una crisi dell'architettura moderna." (Architecture and existentialism: a crisis of modern architecture.) *Casabella* 583 (1991).
- Gardner, A., M. Nicholls, and A. White. "Cold War Cultures and Globalisation Art and Film in Italy: 1946-1963." In *Third Text* 26, no. 2 (2012).
- Hauser, A. *Storia sociale dell'arte*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2001.
- Mioni, A., and E. C. Occhialini. *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*. (Giancarlo De Carlo. Images and fragments.) Milan: Electa, 1995.
- Mori, T. *Immateriale / Ultramateriale. Architettura, progetto e materiali*. (Immaterial | Ultramaterial. Architecture, design and materials). Edited by A. Bergamin. Milan: Postmedia, 2004.
- Purini, F. "L'opera e il tema." (The work and the theme.) In *Giancarlo De Carlo*, edited by F. Samassa. *Percorsi*, IUAV – AP archivio progetti. Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2004.
- Quatremère de Quincy, A. C. *E.M.A.*, I tome. In *Dizionario storico di architettura. Le voci teoriche*, edited by V. Farinati, and G. Teyssot. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1788.

- Romero, F. *Storia della Guerra fredda. L'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa*. (History of the Cold War. The last conflict for Europe.) Turin: Einaudi, 2009.
- Spaltro, E. Vittoriano Viganò ovvero come un architetto possa esprimere una città. (Vittoriano Viganò or how an architect can express a city.) In *A come Architettura*. Milan: Electa, 1992.
- Thomson, I. *The Third Man at 70 — why the noir classic is as potent as ever*. Financial Times, 23 August 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/5cce6602-bf76-11e9-9381-78bab8a70848>.
- Wilson, C. (2015) *Rooting for Harry Lime: 'The Third Man' As Morally Ambiguous Heterotopia*. PopMatters, 7 October 2015.
- Zuddas, F. "Pretentious Equivalence. De Carlo, Woods and mat-building." In *Magazine del Festival dell'Architettura* 34 (2015).
- . *La piramide rovesciata. Università e architettura italiane del '68 secondo Giancarlo De Carlo*. (The inverted pyramid. Italian universities and architecture of '68 according to Giancarlo De Carlo.) Artribune, 13 March 2019. <https://www.artribune.com/editoria/libri/2019/03/la-piramide-rovesciata-giancarlo-de-carlo/>.