

The Reinvention of Modernity: Gianugo Polesello and the *Gruppo Architettura*

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The theoretical constructs developed by Gianugo Polesello in the field of urban studies, which have characterized the research activity of the Gruppo Architettura since the second half of the 20th century, provide a methodological reflection aimed at defining tools and operational categories for urban and territorial planning sub specie architecturae conceived not as an ideological reconciliation of contradictions, but rather as a unifying logic capable of sustaining conflicts within a unitary construction that assumes the “dialectic of the distinct” as the only possible relationship between irreducible specificities. To revisit these researches also entails questioning, today as then, the “legacy of the Modern” and its reflection in contemporary experience, with intentions that aim not so much at “orthodox” reformist agendas or ideological totalitarianisms, but rather at a “heterodoxy” very attentive to the thought and figures that represent an alternative vision of Modernity. An “other Modernity”, indeed, which, in our view, has its roots in the full acceptance of “partiality” and “conflict” as indispensable conditions of a “design thinking” that does not seek to dissolve multiplicities to overcome contradictions, but rather, to embrace their components as a constitutive principle of a new “idea of space” for the city and its territory.

Gianugo Polesello, initially a student of Ignazio Gardella and then of Giuseppe Samonà, actively participates in that period of disciplinary and cultural renewal in the theoretical teaching of architecture and the practices of architectural and urban design started by Samonà who was appointed to lead in 1943 the then *Regio Istituto Superiore di Architettura di Venezia* [Royal Higher Institute of Architecture of Venice]. A renewal continued in the following years through the teaching and research activities of young architects and professors at *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia* [University Institute of Architecture of Venice] – Aldo Rossi, Romeo Ballardini, Guido Canella, Costantino Dardi, Giovanni Battista Fabbri, Mauro Lena, Pierluigi Nicolini, Raffaele Panella, and Luciano Semerani – whom Carlo Aymonino, initially a lecturer from 1963 to 1981 and then rector from 1974 to 1979, starting from the late Seventies brought together within the *Gruppo Architettura* [Architecture Group].¹

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1. Giovanni Fabbri, *Carlo Aymonino e le svolte della storia* (Conegliano: Anteferna, 2023); see also Giovanni Marras, “Il valore del vuoto. Gianugo Polesello nel Gruppo Architettura”, in *Gianugo Polesello. Un Maestro del Novecento*, ed. Pierluigi Grandinetti, Armando Dal Fabbro and Riccarda Cantarelli (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2019), 92-103.

As is known, Gianugo Polesello's contribution to the research activities of the *Gruppo Architettura* is distinguished by assuming the city "as the place of origin and return for the experience of architectural design".²

A programmatic assumption that falls fully within the realm of theoretical constructs and design investigations, which find wide reference in the tradition of studies from the Schools of Venice³ and Milan⁴ since the second half of the 20th century and can be situated within the broader scientific paradigms concerning the issues of the relationship between architecture and the city, and the correlations that exist between the study of the city and its design (Figure 1).

For Gianugo Polesello, architecture and urban planning constitute two "separate scientific domains",⁵ maintained as "autonomous and independent" from a technical standpoint yet regarded as 'complementary' in city design. The aim is not to exclude urban planning from the project of the city, but rather to consider architectural design as a tool for experimental verification and concrete measurement of the general system of motivations and design choices that make up the Plan. Therefore, the design operation is substantiated by assuming a 'double scale', that of urban planning, which 'locates' functions and relationships in the territory in relation to political and economic objectives for the overall functioning of the urban structure, and that of architectural design, which measures the possible forms of their concrete and precise 'construction' in the physical space of the city.

"The city design - writes Polesello - is generally considered both an urbanistic and architectural issue. At least in the sense that for every intention of a generalizing nature, aiming at the general configuration of a scheme, it is believed that there must correspond a defined set of formal, qualitative attributes, which ensure a complete physical identification of that scheme".⁶

2. Gianugo Polesello, "Note per un'architettura tematica", in *Per un'idea di città. La ricerca del Gruppo Architettura a Venezia (1968-1974)*, ed. Claudio Aldegheri and Maurizio Sabini (Venezia: Cluva, 1984), 18.

3. "School of Venice", *Architectural Design*, guest ed. by Luciano Semerani, no. 5-6 (1985).

4. Antonio Monestiroli, *La ragione degli edifici. La scuola di Milano e oltre* (Milano: Marinotti, 2010).

5. Gianugo Polesello, "La progettazione della città come architettura e come piano", in *La progettazione analitica della città*, ed. Pierluigi Grandinetti and Franca Quaderni del Dipartimento no. 1 (Venezia: Dipartimento di teoria e tecnica della progettazione urbana - IUAV, 1979), 4.

6. Gianugo Polesello, "La progettazione della città per parti", *Il Confronto*, no. 5 (1968): 31 (also in Gianugo Polesello, "La progettazione della città per parti", *Hinterland*, no. 18 (1981): 30-33).

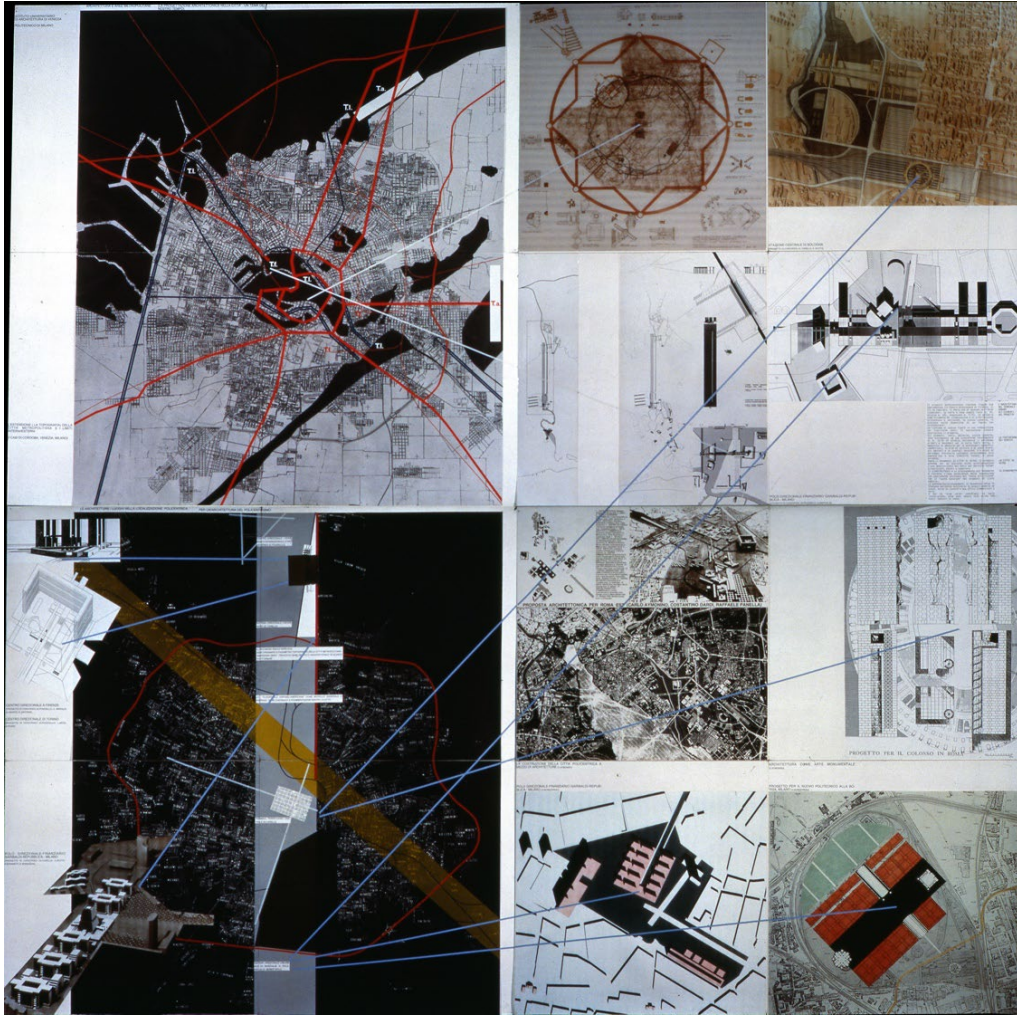


Figure 1. Carlo Aymonino, Guido Canella, Antonio Monestiroli, Gianugo Polesello, *Design Exercises* developed within the Activities of the Ph.D. Program in Architectural Composition at the IUAV University of Venice Between 1988 and 1995. Board Realized for the Seminar Entitled “For an Architecture of Polycentrism: Architecture-Places in Polycentric Localization. The Extension (Topography) of the Metropolitan City at Internal/External Limits: The Cases of Cordoba, Venice, and Milan”, 1995 Source: University Iuav of Venice, Project Archive, Gianugo Polesello Fund.

In order to better grasp the theoretical and operative reflections developed by Gianugo Polesello within this historical and thematic context, it is useful to retrace some passages of the *Piano territoriale di coordinamento della regione veneta* [Territorial Coordination Plan of the Veneto Region], realized in collaboration with Giuseppe Samonà in 1968 upon commission by the former *Magistrato alle Acque di Venezia* [Magistracy of the Waters of Venice].⁷

7. Gianugo Polesello and Giuseppe Samonà, *Piano territoriale di coordinamento della regione veneta. Studio di III e IV fase*, 1968 (University Iuav of Venice, Projects Archive, Gianugo Polesello Fund).

A design reflection that if, on one hand, reasons about issues connected to specific needs of urban and territorial development of the metropolitan lagoon city of Venice and the regional system of Veneto, on the other, stands at the origin of a whole series of methodological reflections, developed and deepened in the subsequent years, aimed at defining principles and tools useful for framing “the general-theoretical structure of architecture as a matrix”⁸ of analysis operations and architectural design of the city.

More precisely, in the introductory section of the *Piano*, the two authors delineate interpretative and operational categories for urban planning of the territorial system, which take on a foundational nature for the subsequent theoretical constructs developed by Polesello within the context of urban studies that have characterized the research endeavors of the *Gruppo Architettura*.

“The urban planning [...] – Samonà and Polesello write – organizes a territory as a system that manifests itself through contexts of elements coordinated among each other by the concrete presence of urbanistic emergences. These are taken as dimensional and qualitative parameters within a field where the contextuality of the elements is defined by their readiness for transformation, which is the intentionally established premise guided by motivations concerning the urbanistic treatment of the territorial emergences”.⁹

For the two authors, the natural or artificial “urbanistic emergences” acquire the significance of “dominant motifs”, as they represent patterns of significant signs that history traces in the physical space of the territory, in relation to which it becomes possible to formulate specific criteria of divisibility into autonomous and coordinated parts, assumed as potential fields for subsequent states of transformation.¹⁰

The meaning of “urban emergence”, as specified at the territorial planning scale in the Plan, is operationally translated into the city’s design through the significance attributed to the concept of “urban fact”.

“The concept of part – Gianugo Polesello writes – must be synonymous with architectural quantity dominating as Urban Fact”.¹¹

Polesello attributes to the notion of “dominant” a value traceable to the original category of “land use”, which, referring to the initial relationship between “site” and “building”, in other words, to that “will to build” that determines the buildability of the land, allows for representing a precise “organizational system” of the city.

To consider the “dominant” as an interpretative and design category of an urban system made “by dominants” means that urban facts do not necessarily correspond only to historical and monumental emergences assumed in their meaning of “permanent primary elements” as an expression of collective memory linked to facts and places of the city.¹² Instead, by attributing to them the value of operational tools directly connected to the problems of design and transformation of the urban system,

8. Gianugo Polesello, *L'architettura e le aree centrali monumentali. RICERCA MURST 60% 1996* (University Iuav of Venice, Projects Archive, Gianugo Polesello Fund), 2.

9. Gianugo Polesello and Giuseppe Samonà, *Piano territoriale di coordinamento della regione veneta*, II-III.

10. Ibid, I-XVIII.

11. Gianugo Polesello, “La progettazione della città come architettura e come piano”, in *La progettazione analitica della città*, 5.

12. See Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città* (Padova: Marsilio, 1966).

they coincide with those ‘parts’ of the city, “place-architectures” or “artifacts-architecture” (Figure 2), to which an additional value of a ‘structural’ nature is recognized, which, as it “explains and allows relationships with other buildings or other places”,¹³ allows the architectural project to achieve a concrete result on the ‘whole’ of the city through a direct action only on a ‘part’ of it.¹⁴

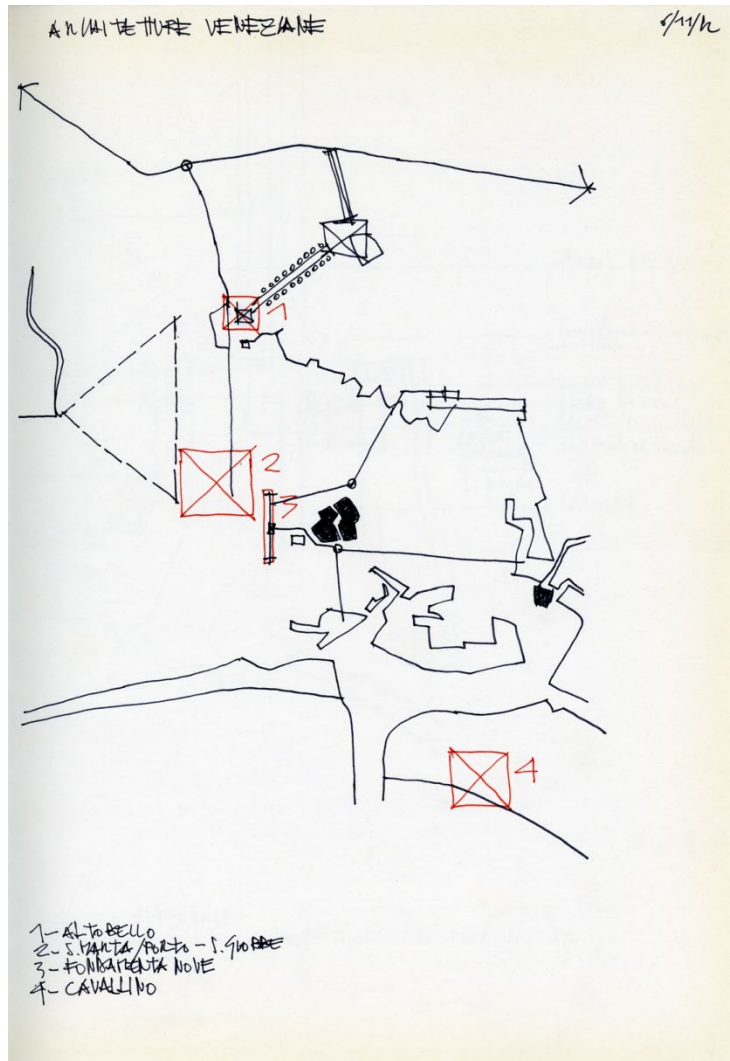


Figure 2. Gianugo Polesello, “VENETIAN ARCHITECTURES”, *Drawings and Notes*, November 6, 1982, in *Notebook 12*

Source: University Iuav of Venice, Project Archive, Gianugo Polesello Fund.

More precisely, Gianugo Polesello considers a “double scale” as constitutive of the “urban fact”, as a consequence of the relationship it establishes between reasons of a ‘general’ nature related to the functioning of the urban system as a ‘whole’ –

13. Gianugo Polesello, “La progettazione della città come architettura e come piano”, 6.

14. See Gianugo Polesello, “Lo strumento urbanistico e lo strumento edilizio nella progettazione della città”, in *Gruppo architettura. Per una ricerca di progettazione 2* (Venezia: IUAV, 1970), 94.

encompassed, that is, within the scope of “abstract principle formulations”¹⁵ – and the needs of a ‘particular’ nature linked to interventions on each individual ‘part’ of the city – which are, differently, attributable to the “concrete local structure [...] and its specific characteristics”¹⁶ – that distinguishes each “urbanistic motivation”, connected with the needs for transformation of urban and territorial phenomena.

“The sense of these initial observations – as Samonà and Polesello write – converges primarily on the concept of urban motivation, which is determined on two levels. One, more general, concerns urban culture itself, as a discipline with highly characterized and theoretical principles and global purposes of meaning and quality; the other one, more operational and pinpointed, concerns the specific territories on which urban action is exercised, whose motivations operate on the initial major lines of intervention and determine the transformation hypothesis to be verified”.¹⁷

Two dialectically opposed and coexisting levels within the design operations, the reasons for which are to be referred to the necessity of establishing a direct and continuous confrontation with the historical and concrete conditions of urban phenomena, in order to overcome the abstract deductive logics that presided over the generalizations of the then modern Master Plans, without, however, renouncing the possibility of a significant action on the general structure of the city.

More precisely, the publication in 1960 of Saverio Muratori’s volume titled *Studi per una operante storia urbana*¹⁸ di Venezia [Studies for an Active Urban History of Venice], which concludes a decade-long cycle of research on the relationship between “building typology” and “urban morphology” of Venice, demonstrated the necessity of taking historical knowledge of the city as an indispensable prerequisite for any urban planning operation and architectural design of its parts.

Theoretical constructs that operationally develop some programmatic intentions already formulated by Giuseppe Samonà during the inaugural address held at the opening of the academic year 1953-1954¹⁹ and in his subsequent writings,²⁰ aimed at overcoming the statistical approach of a “technicist” urban planning, which, according to Samonà, was incapable of fully adhering to the specific conditions of historicity inherent to the different urban realities, as it was an ideological application of a superstructure that failed to represent the concrete facts of the city by adopting a “historical perspective”. Hence the declared supremacy in the subsequent years of “morphological analysis” as a tool that excludes “grand syntheses” in order to measure within the built *continuum* of a constructed

15. Gianugo Polesello and Giuseppe Samonà, *Piano territoriale di coordinamento della regione veneta*, VI.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid, IV.

18. Severio Muratori, *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia* (Roma: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1960).

19. Giuseppe Samonà, “Necessità di uno studio di Venezia per la pianificazione urbanistica delle sue esigenze moderne”, in *Unità architettura urbanistica. Scritti e progetti: 1929-1973*, ed. Pasquale Lovero (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1978), 241-249.

20. Giuseppe Samonà, “Un piano urbanistico per Venezia”, in *Unità architettura urbanistica. Scritti e progetti: 1929-1973*, 306-314.

environment that “unitary discontinuity” which distinguishes the urban structure and whose representation becomes, as Samonà writes, “knowledge of the city determined as the object of historical experiences”.²¹

Foundational theoretical and programmatic premises of an analytical and operational nature from which to formulate a design method capable of engaging with a “dual meaning” that, according to Polesello, architecture assumes in every project of the city.²² It is attributable to the need to respond simultaneously both to the specificity and concreteness of “particular needs” that demand the architectural design ‘in’ the city of “parts of the city as autonomous artifacts”,²³ as well as to the “general needs” of a logical-structural nature through the design of the architecture ‘of’ the city which requires, instead, the definition of every specific intervention with respect to the value assumed by the “*part* in relation to the *totality of the parts* which is the city”.²⁴

“The relationship between part and whole – as Polesello specifies – is a relationship of logical and technical nature; it does not compromise the possibility of motivations external to the internal logic of the procedure, but rather demands that these motivations be both a premise and a consequence of the process”.²⁵

In order to define the tools and operational categories of architectural project through which finds its expression on this “dual metric” of urban design, relating to the “autonomy and complementarity (in turn) between the parts of the city”,²⁶ Gianugo Polesello, during the research years developed within the *Gruppo Architettura*, adopts as scientific paradigms of a broader “Theory of the City” the studies of Ludwig Hilberseimer on the *Groszstadt*, published in the volume *Groszstadt Architektur* (1927),²⁷ and Le Corbusier’s projects for a *Contemporary city of three million inhabitants* (1924)²⁸ and the *Ville Radieuse* (1935).²⁹

According to Polesello, in both theoretical formulations, the dwelling constitutes the “fundamental matter” of the modern city organized within the “urban field” based on a broader design constituted by specific “dominants” that assume the value of “concrete categories of the Architecture of the city”.³⁰

21. Giuseppe Samonà, “Un piano urbanistico per Venezia”, 310.

22. Gianugo Polesello, “La progettazione della città per parti”, 30-33.

23. Ibid, p. 31.

24. Ibid.

25. Gianugo Polesello, “L’architettura e la progettazione della città e nella città”, in *La progettazione analitica della città*, 7-8.

26. Gianugo Polesello, “Tipologia e destinazione d’uso: i progetti di Hilberseimer e Le Corbusier”, in *Gruppo architettura. Per una ricerca di progettazione 3* (Venezia: IUAV, 1971), 5.

27. Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Groszstadt Architektur. L’architettura della grande città*, trans. Bianca Spagnuolo Vigorita (Napoli: Clean, 1998), or. ed. *Groszstadt Architektur* (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1927).

28. Le Corbusier, *Urbanistica*, trans. Annamaria Beltrami Raini (Milano: il Saggiatore, 1967), or. ed. *Urbanisme* (Paris: Éditions Crès, Collection de “L’Esprit Nouveau” 1924).

29. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse* (Boulogne-sur-Seine: Éditions de l’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, Collection de l’équipement de la civilisation machiniste 1935).

30. Gianugo Polesello, “Afterword” to Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Groszstadt Architektur. L’architettura della grande città*, 106.

The “urban dominants” defined by Le Corbusier as the “constituent elements of the contemporary city”³¹ and matched by Hilberseimer with the typical equipment of the *Groszstadt* – commercial buildings, covered halls and theaters, constructions and buildings linked to mobility and transportation – are specified as “architectural facts” that, even though corresponding to “specific places in the city designated for specific uses”,³² are, at the same time, “general functions” of the urban system, because they concern, as Polesello write, “the internal relationships among those human activities that establish the conditions of the city’s existence”.³³

Gianugo Polesello clarifies from the outset that the meaning of the term ‘functioning’ in the theory of Hilberseimer’s *Groszstad* and in the theoretical-design constructions of Le Corbusier is not attributable to that technocratic-oriented “Functional Theory of the City” which aims to ideologically resolve the complexity of urban phenomena through the construction of *a priori* structure “that serves to define a common structure”.³⁴ Instead, it establishes a conceptual analogy between ‘functional’ and ‘formal’ to preserve such complexity within a field “within which specific architectural design operations are determined to be congruent, that is, endowed with meaning in relation to the action that – through them – is carried out within the field itself”.³⁵

More precisely, the foundational value of the theoretical action of Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer, for Polesello, lies in the “reduction of urban complexity to certain determined components, specified as ‘dominants’”³⁶ to which such significance and validity are attributed in relation to a precise transformative value and design role that are not defined in abstract, but rather, by assuming as analysis and design field the concrete historical conditions of the “existing city in its complex reality [and] contradictoriness”.³⁷

“[...] the problem of functionalism – Polesello writes – is first of all [...] a problem of *localization*, an urbanistic problem. Secondly, the localized approach of the individual themes referring to the two sectors mentioned (dwelling and equipment) must correspond, in a coherent relationship, to the *construction* of artifacts that, due to their localization and structure, are capable of fulfilling each of the needs expressed by the big city [italic added]”.³⁸

The pair ‘localization-construction’ represents the operational category through which the ‘opposition’ between the ‘general’ principles of urban planning for the city and the ‘specific’ instances of architectural design for each individual part of it

31. Gianugo Polesello, “Tipologia e destinazione d’uso: i progetti di Hilberseimer e Le Corbusier”, 6.

32. Gianugo Polesello, “Afterword” a Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Groszstadt Architektur. L’architettura della grande città*, 106.

33. Gianugo Polesello, “Problemi di progettazione urbana e l’esperienza di Le Corbusier”, in *Gruppo architettura. Per una ricerca di progettazione 2* (Venezia: IUAV, 1970), 101.

34. Gianugo Polesello, “L’abitazione in rapporto alla città e al modello. Le Corbusier”, in *Gruppo architettura. Per una ricerca di progettazione 3* (Venezia: IUAV, 1971), 1.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Gianugo Polesello, “Afterword” a Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Groszstadt Architektur. L’architettura della grande città*, 106.

38. Gianugo Polesello, “Tipologia e destinazione d’uso: i progetti di Hilberseimer e Le Corbusier”, 2-3.

is resolved into a “dialectic unity”, already embraced by Giuseppe Samonà as necessary for every city and territory design operation.³⁹

Through the examination of the theoretical content of certain projects by Le Corbusier for the cities of *Hellocourt* (1935), *La Rochelle-La Pallice* (1945), *Sant-Dié* (1945), and *Marseille-Veyre* (1945), Gianugo Polesello defines a design-compositional procedure that is operationally clarified in the ‘construction’ of building ‘prototypes’ morphologically designed in relation to motivations internal to the architectural artifact attributable to the concrete needs of individual urban facts. Simultaneously, due to their ‘localization’, they take on the value of functionally defined “*outil*” in relation to ‘theme-problems’ relevant to the general functioning of the city, understood in its systemic meaning of “*machine*”.

“The autonomy of the artifact, or of the group of artifacts – Polesello specifies – is always partial because the presence of the context is a necessary element even for the ‘understanding’ of the individual artifact or group of artifacts”.⁴⁰

To this ‘dual scale’ within architectural design of the building ‘prototype’ or the ‘part of the city’ – which, as we recall, for Polesello is always synonymous with the “urban fact” as a “dominant architectural quantity” – are related the distinct and complementary urbanistic and architectural aspects of urban design. On one hand, these pertain to the city perceived as a system of functional relationships and ‘localization’ of its parts, on the other hand, they relate to the accomplished ‘construction’ of each individual part of it.

“The scale of urban planning – Polesello writes – concerns issues of localization and, more generally, the arrangement of human activities in space. Thus, it involves the relationships between urban and territorial facts and the significance that each of these assumes based on its position in relation to the position of all others. In this way, the architecture of the Plan remains defined. [Conversely] The scale of architectural design pertains to issues of construction and internal construction of each artifact or group of artifacts taken as the subject of a unitary, formally accomplished, and defined design”.⁴¹

In the theoretical formulations developed by Gianugo Polesello, a constant methodological research becomes evident. On one hand, this can be traced to the necessity for architectural design to hold a role and value in the construction of the city. On the other hand, it stems from the need to specify a “new architectural materialism”⁴² as a design method founded on the study of the concrete historical conditions of the existing city.

Polesello highlights a profound theoretical and operational distinction between Le Corbusier’s modern city and Hilberseimer’s *Groszstadt*. While the first one aims to replace the historic city and thus position itself as an ‘alternative’ to it (Figure 3), in the second one, what is considered replaceable is not the city itself, but the

39. See Giuseppe Samonà, *L’unità architettura-urbanistica. Scritti e progetti: 1929-1973*, ed. Pasquale Lovero, (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1978).

40. Gianugo Polesello, “L’abitazione in rapporto alla città e al modello: Le Corbusier”, cit., p. 4.

41. Gianugo Polesello, “Il centro-città come categoria progettuale”, in *Gruppo architettura. Per una ricerca di progettazione 5* (Venezia: IUAV, 1972), note 2, 3.

42. Gianugo Polesello, “Afterword” a Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Groszstadt Architektur: L’architettura della grande città*, 104.

individual architectures that constitute it. Indeed, if there's no doubt about the substantial difference between the pre-industrial city and the *Groszstadt*, it's equally true that this latter, as Polesello points out, "is a 'different' architecture not because the complex existence of the city has become different, but because the themes are different".⁴³

The "Nestorian' procedure" formulated by Polesello, by operationalizing the structure of Hilberseimer's *Groszstadt Architektur* book, precisely demonstrates this possibility of adopting the "architecture of the city", as described in the first and last chapters, with the meaning of a system of relationships among distinct architectures that specify the different ways of existence of specific functions within the urban system. This is, in other words, the fixed principle of an 'order' within which "individual internal elements are examined and proposed in their autonomy, in a relative independence among them",⁴⁴ in order to modify and update them in relation to the "new needs/themes expressed in the city and its new functions".⁴⁵

It is through this theoretical and design approach that the "dual sense" of a city planning "by-architectures" finds expression. An approach that is realized operationally by maintaining, on one hand, the constant principle of seeking the "right relationships among the 'given' elements in the project",⁴⁶ and on the other hand, by modifying the choice and construction of the "constituent elements in relation to the project's requirements"⁴⁷ associated with that urban transformations linked to the city's history and the continuous changes in meaning, value, and role of each individual part of it.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid, 103.

45. Ibid, 104.

46. Gianugo Polesello, "L'abitazione in rapporto alla città e al modello: Le Corbusier", 10.

47. Ibid.

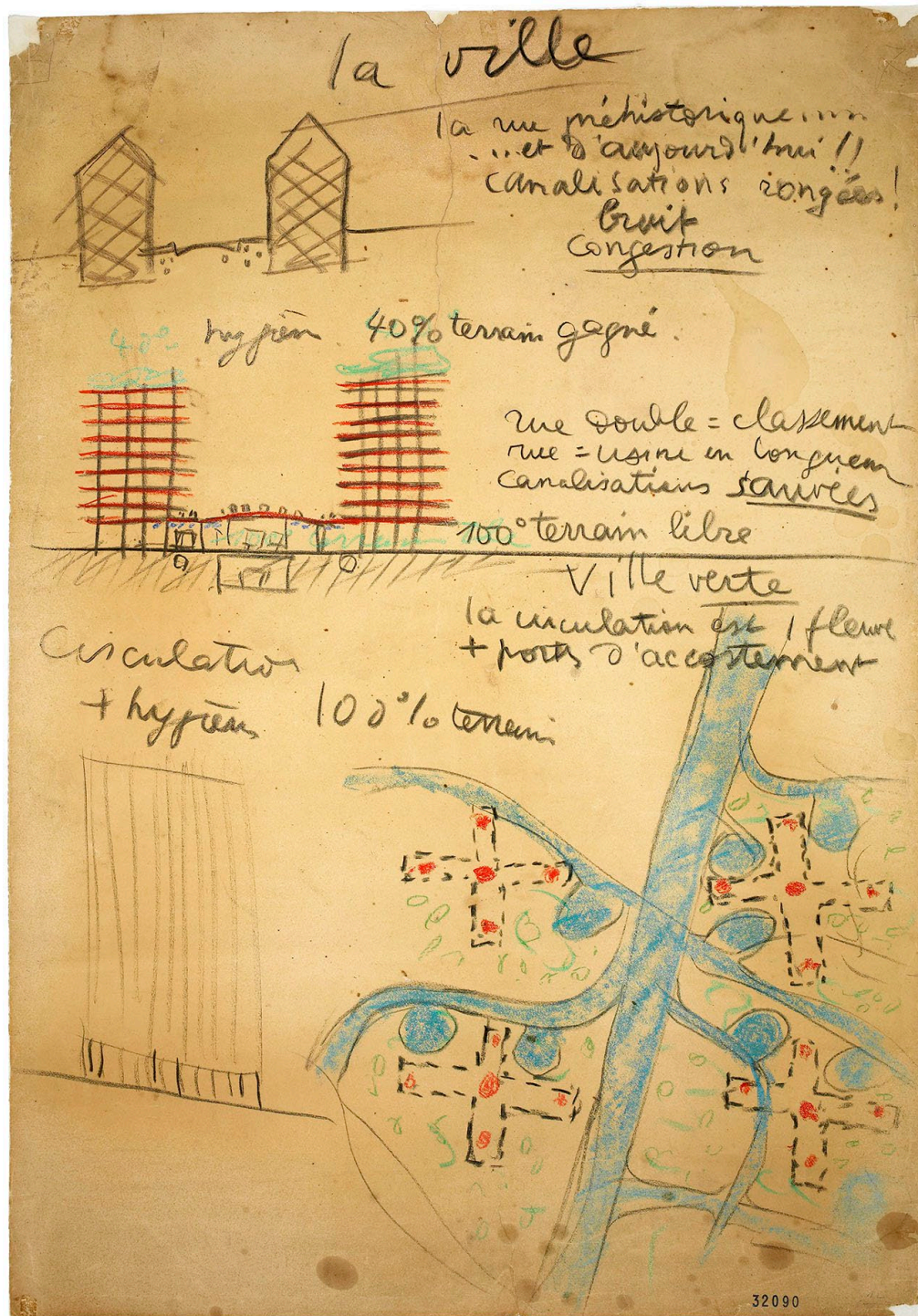


Figure 3. Le Corbusier, “la ville”, Drawings and Notes Made for the Second “Amis des Arts” Conference Titled “Les techniques sont l’assiette même du lyrisme”, Held in Buenos Aires on October 5, 1929
Source: FLC Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

According to Polesello, if we consider the problem of urban design as a territorial issue, it's possible to view the city as a morphologically defined part within a recognized unity as a historical construct that contains various forms of territory occupation and configuration. These represent, for urban planning, "physical signs" of the transformations carried out by humans in different geographic areas, enabling "the formation of parameters for partitioning, for the establishment of a dimensionality of the territory in continuous and precise relation to any desired future modification".⁴⁸

Interpreting the urban structure of the territory as an "ordered system of these signs"⁴⁹ entails considering the territorial urban system as a construction of heterogeneous, autonomous, and complementary parts. This takes the form of a "polycentric system" in which "single cities" coexist, seen as distinct parts from the "settlement unities" - more or less urbanized according to land use and the nature of productive activities - and from the entirety of the infrastructure and equipment that, as Polesello states, "materialize the system of relationships between them [...] and between all the cities considered as a system and the territory".⁵⁰

The urban planning of the territory is thus conceived as a matter of relationship between different urban unities and the areas of territory beyond them. This is not based on an abstract "isotropy" aiming to dissolve their distinctions by theorizing a development directed by the presence or establishment of numerous qualitatively and quantitatively homogeneous poles. Instead, it involves the concrete assessment of the "emerging signs" of a territorial configuration which, as Samonà and Polesello specify, "finds in these signs the valid reasons to justify [...] the meaning of its future development".⁵¹

In accordance with this conception, the territory becomes enriched with a multiplicity of "dominant motifs", different from those constituted by the major urbanized centers, however, making them also valid as urban phenomena. The relationship between architectural design and urban planning is established when the architectural project of a building or a part of the city or territory embodies and materializes all the 'functional' intentions of the urban and territorial system envisaged by the Plan. This is the point of "dialectical unity" between urban planning and architecture which, on the one hand, allows an abstract logic to transform into physical structure through the architectural construction of individual "urban facts" that concretely respond in 'functional' and 'morphological' terms to the intentions of the Plan, and on the other hand, specifies operative categories useful for overcoming the "homogenizing abstractions that nullify with differences also the value of individual places"⁵² to assume 'discontinuity' and 'heterogeneity'

48. Gianugo Polesello, "L'architettura e la progettazione della città e nella città (parte I)", in *Gruppo architettura. Per una ricerca di progettazione I* (Venezia: IUAV, 1969), 80.

49. Ibid, p. 81.

50. Ibid, p. 82.

51. Gianugo Polesello and Giuseppe Samonà, *Piano territoriale di coordinamento della regione veneta*, XVI.

52. Gianugo Polesello, "Venezia: necessità di coordinamento tra 'piano' e 'progetto'", *L'Architetto* mensile del Consiglio Nazionale degli Architetti, no. 73 (1992): 11.

as “possible forms” of existence and design of those urban and territorial structures that, according to Polesello, take on a metropolitan ‘dimension’.⁵³

The structural and morphological characteristics of the ‘modern city’ are inherent in these settlement and construction forms consisting of heterogeneous, autonomous, and complementary parts within a complex “polycentric system”, of which Venice assumed inside its lagoon represents the most paradigmatic historical example (Figure 4).

According to this representation, the city’s structure consists of a multiplicity of distinct “urban units” to be valued as distinguished by their own internal structure and characters, among which establishing a condition of reciprocity capable of providing each of them with its own value and simultaneously in relation to that of the other units, specifying through the project, to quote Gianugo Polesello, “new relationships to be proposed among ‘elements’ evaluated (or even evaluated) in their singularity and the ‘whole’ of these single elements grouped together to be put back into the construction of a ‘system’”.⁵⁴



Figure 4. Map of the Islands in the Venetian Lagoon Drawn by Benedetto Bordone in 1528

Source: Bendetto Bordone, *Isolario di Benedetto Bordone. Nel qual si ragiona di tutte l'isole del mondo, con li lor nomi antichi & moderni, historie, fauole, & modi del loro viuere, & in qual parte del mare stanno, & in qual parallelo & clima giaciono*, Nicolo d'Aristotele detto Zoppino, Book II, Venezia 1534.

53. Ibid.

54. Gianugo Polesello, “Ric. 40%”, January 18, 1994, in *Notebook 55* (University Iuav of Venice, Projects Archive, Gianugo Polesello Fund); see also Gianugo Polesello, “PER UN’ARCHITETTURA DEL POLICENTRISMO”, 1995, in *Notebook 103* (University Iuav of Venice, Projects Archive, Gianugo Polesello Fund).

To reread today Polesello's reflections on the project of the Modern City developed during the years of the *Gruppo Architettura* means, more generally, to inquire about the "Legacy of the Modern" and its reflection in contemporary experience, with intentions that look beyond mere reformist "orthodoxies" or ideological totalitarianism, focusing instead on a very attentive "heterodoxy" to the thought and figures that represent an alternative view of Modernity. 'Another Modernity' precisely, which, in our opinion, has its roots, as Giovanni Fabbri states, "in the full and realistic acceptance of partialities and conflicts as indispensable conditions of action and life".⁵⁵

The current relevance of these theoretical constructions is therefore to be attributed to the possibility of proactively considering the heterogeneity and discontinuities observed, both today and back then, within urban and territorial systems, in order to build a 'grammar' of architectural project capable not so much of dissolving the multiplicity to overcome contradictions, but rather of assuming these components as constitutive principles of a new 'idea of space' for the city and the territory. In relation to this, the project is not thought as an ideological conciliation of contradictions, but rather as a unifying logic through which to sustain conflicts within a unitary construction that assumes the 'coexistence of distinct' as the only possible relationship between irreducible specificities⁵⁶ (Figure 5).

Moreover, the construction of a new 'concept of space', if on the one hand originates from those modernist inquiries aimed at grappling with the complexity of the new 'functions' of the industrialized world, no longer representable according to the rules of perspectival spatiality,⁵⁷ on the other hand, it resurfaces in the contemporary precisely due to a research, to conclude with Gianugo Polesello, "inclusive of contradictions that we do not want to 'overcome' but rather 'insert' in our complex way of seeing and characterized by the widest possible use of many available viewpoints [...]. Maintaining the contradictions and wanting to include many points of view, does not imply a pretend 'totality' [...] but display a form of thought that characterized the Modern from its very roots [...] and manifests itself in the ambiguity, the differences, the repetitions, the rewritings, the simultaneous interest for the ancient and the new, etcetera".⁵⁸

55. Giovanni Fabbri, *Carlo Aymonino e le svolte della storia*, 14.

56. Massimo Cacciari, "Sul metodo Polesello", in *Gianugo Polesello. Architetture 1960-1992*, ed. Mirko Zardini (Milano, Electa, 1992) 7-13.

57. Giulio Carlo Argan, *Modulo-misura e modulo-oggetto*, in *Progetto e destino* (Milano: il Saggiatore, 1965), 104-115.

58. Gianugo Polesello, "Città ideale", lecture held at IUAV University of Venice on February 11, 1998, cit. in Teresa Stoppani, *Paradigm Islands: Manhattan and Venice. Discourses on architecture and the city* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011) 175.

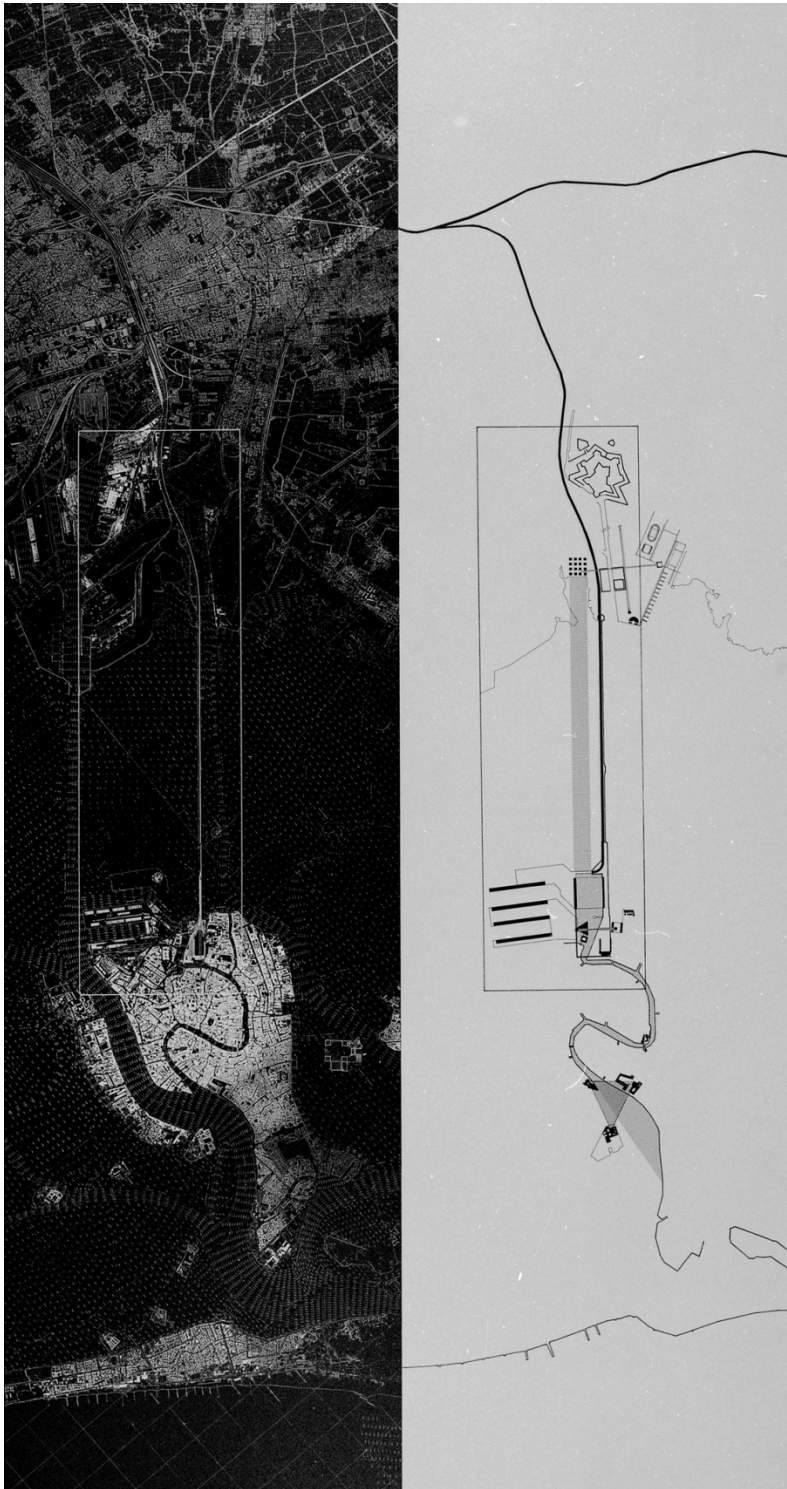


Figure 5. *Planimetric Composition of the Projects for “West Venice”, a “New Lagoon Terminal in San Giuliano”, and “16 Towers in the First Industrial Area of Marghera”, Realized a Design Seminar of the Ph.D. Program in Architectural Composition at the IUAV University of Venice, 1992-1993*
Source: University Iuav of Venice, Project Archive, Gianugo Polesello Fund.

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