

# OF STONES AND TRAVELERS

*The Venetian Matter*

a productive machine in its own consuming

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## Abstract

*Venezia, la Serenissima.*

The *most serene* Republic. One adjective is sufficient to identify the city of Venice; more complicated is to figure out its singularities: the city of canals, trades, cultural exchange, gate between the west and the east, the city of the myth, the romantic city, the city of the endless descriptions. “*At once solid and liquid, at once air and stone*”,<sup>1</sup> claimed Erica Jong, almost as if she wanted to seize in a sentence the multiple facets of the Venetian character. The several representations and attributes that depict Venice not only precede its reality, but constitute a determinant part of its character: the island is simultaneously more than its narrations and more than its reality.

Starting from this dicotomy, the following research focuses on the analysis of Venice’s reality, the one of its present situation, by keeping its narrations as a boundary condition.

The consideration of Venice not being the *most serene* Republic anymore is a fact. The city is experiencing a transitional moment in its lifetime: events as tourists’ invasion, drop of the population, transformation of the building stock to accomodate tourists’ needs are determinant factors for the future of the city, internationally recognised as *slowly dying*.<sup>2</sup> The transformations are influenced by the effect that phenomena as overtourism produced on the island. And it is precisely the relationship between overtourism and Venice the topic that is tackled in this research, by taking the city as a case study, a symbol in the broader discussion about city and overtourism. Therefore this research does not want to be considered as a method for the definition of a solution for all the cities

that are experiencing the aforementioned situation, but the opposite: the foundation for the development of an architectural proposal for the Venetian context, with the aim of invigorate the international debate around the topic of overtourism and cities’ transformations.

The research is developed in two complementary sections.

In the first section the topic of overtourism is introduced: the investigation of the causes that have produced it and the social transformations that have nourish it define overtourism as an effect and not as the problem of the current situation that Venice is experiencing. In this frame, the development of the research as the base upon which create a design proposal has permitted to highlight one of the effect produced by overtourism: the ephemeral permanence of the majority of visitors on the main island and the consequent modification of the built environment to host such transiency.

In the second section the city of Venice is dissected through its *technicities*, the urban elements that not only have affected the present situation of the city itself but have also determined its development through time. Their analysis has permitted to acknowledge the current situation of Venice through an architectural lense and therefore has created the premises for a project in Venice and for Venice, with the aim of tackling the problem of the day trippers, by showing how through architecture it is possible to affect their permanence in the city, by reinterpreting the Venetian character and combine it with the needs and the transformations that the city is experiencing.

<sup>1</sup> Jong E., 1986, *A city of Love and Death: Venice* in *New York Times*, New York

<sup>2</sup> Kington T., 2009, *Who now can stop the slow death of Venice* in *The Guardian*, London



In 2018 the word *overtourism* has become one of the most used terms in the news all around the world<sup>1</sup>. Defined by the World Tourism Organisation as “*the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way*”;<sup>2</sup> it represents nowadays one of the most relevant factor in the social and morphological modification of the urban settlements around the world. The extent that the phenomenon has reached represents the reason of its notoriety, and its influence in affecting the politics of transformation of cities worldwide. Even though the proliferation of the term has happened only in recent time, the premises of overtourism’s success dates back in the past, by being the result of a series of dynamics that brought tourism to become a determinant factor in the economies of different countries, therefore the unsustainable development that characterises their current situation.

In the global scenario of cities undermined by the effects of overtourism a special case is reserved for Venice, a city that shows at its best the consequences and modifications of the urban environment that follow the intense impact of overtourism on the city itself.

In this research it is important to underline that overtourism is considered as the effect of political, social and cultural choices, and not as the origin of the problematic situation of Venice nowadays. In fact, the generalisation in considering the phenomenon as the cause of the present situation of Venice would lead to the definition of a vague problem statement not directly tackled via architectural terms; only the dissection of its features would be relevant in order to define a proposal against the overtourism’s outcomes.

In order then to understand the reason why

the phenomenon plays a relevant role in the current dynamics of the city and the social effects that overtourism has produced, it is necessary to understand and unveil the causes that has generated it, therefore the different dynamics that have brought different cities, and especially Venice, to rely upon the economical engine provided by overtourism.

There is no official date of birth for tourism: the first attempt to regularise it took place in 1925, a time where it was considered as a mere traffic activity;<sup>3</sup> a decade later it was converted into propaganda, focusing on the spreading of informations about where and how to travel; after the Second World War, the issue grew exponentially reaching a governmental level, with the following requirement of the tourism agencies’ organisation between different countries.<sup>4</sup>

The development of the understanding of tourism from a moment of break from everyday routine to the creation of the industry is crucial in the definition of the premises for the later development of *overtourism*. This transformation is reflected in the publication of the book “*The G.I. Guide to travelling in Europe*” by Arthur Frommer in 1955; by citing his same words:

“people weren’t looking for a big travel book with a thorough explanation of a country’s history and culture that would stay on their book shelves for years. They wanted a guide.”<sup>5</sup>

The understanding of people’s lack of interest in the different particularities of each country and their desire in being guided in their travelling defined the strategy upon which Frommer developed its book, consequently its success and the definition of the policies

1 cfr. Rai, 2018, *La parola del momento? “Overtourism”. E Venezia ne è, naturalmente, la capitale mondiale*, Roma, Rai News

2 Carvão S., Oliveira D., 2018, *Overtourism? Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth Beyond Perceptions*, Madrid, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

3 cfr. Becker E., 2013, *Overbooked. The exploding business of travel and tourism*, New York, Simon & Schuster, p.6

4 ibidem, p.6

5 ibidem, p.8

upon which tourism was further developed and transformed into an economic industry by each country. The aim of the different governments was the one of displaying to the users the several parts that constitutes the phenomenon, namely the travel companies, the hotels sector, the sightseeing infrastructure, the service industry. By officially claiming the business character of tourism, its modern dynamics started to be defined following two important events: the energy crisis of 1970's and the end of the Cold War in 1991. These episodes combined together affected both the geographical configuration of Europe, that experienced a reshape of its countries and the following possibility of crossing borders<sup>6</sup>, and the rethinking of the economical manouvres that were necessary to overcome the energy related crisis. Therefore, tourism was presented as the opportunity to grasp, and in most cases to rely upon, for the future development of the countries: the creation of new markets, new profits based on the touristic experience, the multiplication of the reason for travelling and the encouragement of experiencing different places have been the characters that started to be established and exploited as a method of profit, and that still now influence the way in which travelling is experienced: not anymore as a journey of discoveries, but as a planned series of encounters.

It is also important to notice how the collapse of spatial barriers did not correspond to the relative loss of significance of the space.<sup>7</sup> As claimed by David Harvey:

“Heightened competition under conditions of crisis has coerced capitalists into paying much closer attention to relative locational advantages, precisely because diminishing spatial barriers give capitalists the power to exploit minute spatial

differentiations to good effect. [...] As spatial barriers diminish so we become much more sensitized to what the world's spaces contain.”<sup>8</sup>

As a consequence of the sensibilisation towards the peculiarity of different spaces, their politics have been directed towards the improvement of their attractiveness in terms of moving capital,<sup>9</sup> by creating a distinctive image that could reflect its atmosphere and tradition. Therefore the opening of the barriers have not only been the pretext and opportunity to enhance tourism as an economic engine but especially to transform the cities and their spaces into products of consumption, phenomenon that has affected cities' development and their future conditions.

6 *ibidem*, p.9

7 *cfr.* Harvey D., 1990, “*The Condition of Postmodernity. An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*”, Oxford, Blackwell, p.293

8 *ibidem*, p.294

9 *ibidem*, p.295



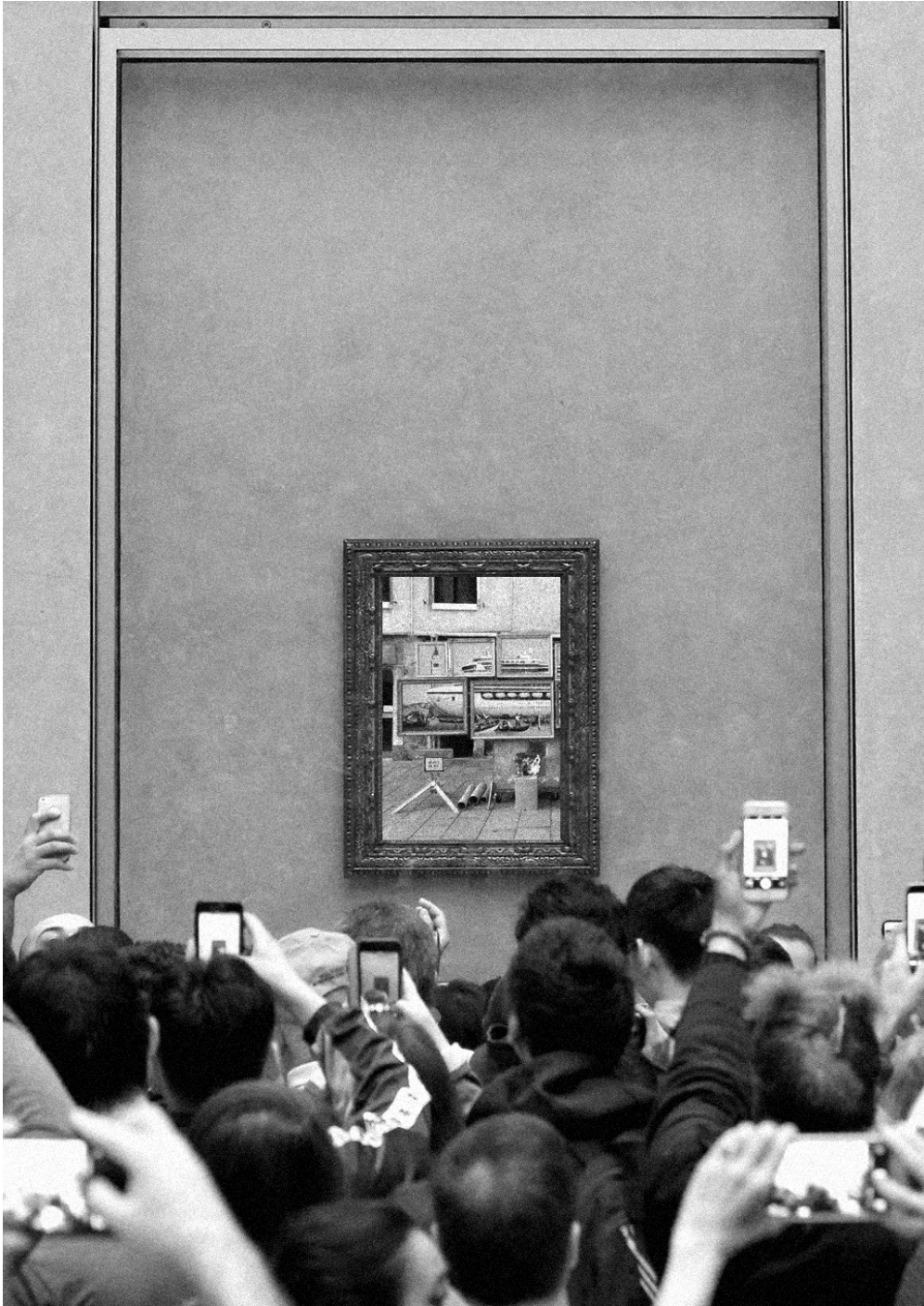


Fig. 1. Overtourism



The display of the dynamics that regulated the birth of overtourism have been determinant to understand the phenomenon as an effect, and therefore the causes that have generated it. What was not immanent in the aforementioned explanation were the reasons why different countries had the confidence that relying their economies on tourism would have been a long term solution in order to increase considerably their gross domestic product and their own richness. In other words, what is still missing in this frame is the description of the transformations that occurred in the contemporary society alongside the birth of overtourism, the same transformation that have determined its success and rooting in our way of living.

The sustenance of the industry has been guaranteed by three important transformation of contemporary society: the constant increase of the middle class, the internet's success, the use of social media. Even though the latter depend on each others, their differentiation is significant: while in fact the internet success has created the conditions for the birth and development of easy packages for traveling, the upsurge in the use of social media has influenced the image and the consideration people have created for certain places. Therefore, while the former has affected practically the growth of tourism, the latter has influenced psychologically the image and character of different places, flattening their history and culture into an exclusive aesthetical allure.

The combination of these three factors have not only permitted to the phenomenon to continuously grow and expand, but also to be enhanced to the point that could influence people's lifestyle. In fact, the ease in travelling, the redefinition of distances, the enhancement of connection constitute an invitation to people to nourish the industry, and simultaneously change their relation and commitment to places.

Starting from the economic growth post II World War, the society has experienced a constant increase in numbers of the middle class. In terms of the tourism industry, such a growth relates with the increase in the amount of people who can manage to travel, a possibility that in the past could be afforded only by aristocrats, who traveled for their own amusement, or educated people, mostly engaging the famous *Grand Tour*. In this social category not only adults contribute to the intensification of travels but especially the younger generation, marked out by the will of prioritising experiences over material possession.<sup>10</sup> That also signifies that the younger and new generation constitutes the main actor in the nourishing of the touristic industry because they are more prone to spend their money in experiencing the world instead of accumulate and possess personal objects. This last conclusion constitutes a consequence of the travel costs' reduction that means of transportation have experienced within the global competition of low fares ways of traveling, by transforming it into a mainstream activity, accessible to everyone.

In addition to the growth of the middle class and the increase of the economical possibilities of a major number of people, the internet success and the technological improvement has played a key role in the success of tourism as an industry, therefore in its unsustainable development into overtourism.

The new discoveries and advancement in technology have permitted to facilitate travelling around the world, changing our perception on distance and time. Being constantly on the move has become the main trait of the modern society, a modernity described by the sociologist Zygmunt Baumann with the term *liquidity*:

"Forms of modern life may differ in quite a few respects – but what unites them all is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and

10 cfr. Dickinson Greg, 2018, *Dear dictionaries, this is why 'overtourism' should be your 2018 word of the year* in *The Telegraph*, London

inclination to constant change. To 'be modern' means to modernize – compulsively, obsessively; not so much just 'to be', let alone to keep its identity intact, but forever 'becoming', avoiding completion, staying underdefined."<sup>11</sup>

It is under this frame that we can recognise the act of travel as the modern activity par excellence, expression of those tendencies described by Baumann that characterise forms of modern life. Temporariness, fragility and vulnerability do not only represent the present forms of life but especially the circumstances of our surroundings, not anymore lived and nurtured, but merely consumed by the fleeting population.

If on one hand the technology's progress has allowed to reach even the farthest places on earth in minimum time, on the other hand it has also influenced the dimensions of the means of transportation through which people travel everyday: nowadays cruise ships, planes, trains permit the movement of enormous flows of people from one place to another, literally invading the destinations. It is in fact crucial to underline that travels favor certain cities to the detriment of others, depending on their captivating and fascinating beauty, exploited character and symbol of income for the political administration. This is reflected in a process of engulfing that has become a permanent trait of certain localities, that have become unbearable to live in for their same citizens. The causes of this phenomenon have to be traced back in the internet's success: the web has permitted not only the development and spreading of a low fares system of travelling that comprehend airlines, accommodations, restaurants and experiences, but also a platform for cities to sell themselves, to attract ever growing numbers of tourists. In this frame, not only internet has given to everyone the opportunity to travel, but it has also created a hierarchy of interest between

the different cities around the world, focusing the flows of people towards only chosen destination, the ones that are now engulfed by tourists.

And who better than the social media has had a determinant impact on this differentiation in the privileged destination? Facebook and Instagram plays a key role in determining which are the most desired destination around the world, especially because they do not intrigue the viewers in "*seeking for the experience but in building their own personal brand*".<sup>12</sup> People do not aim anymore to discover a place but instead to show their presence on it, giving more importance to the photos taken on the trip than the experience itself.<sup>13</sup>

11 Baumann Z., 2000, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p.82

12 Manjoo Farhad, 2018, 'Overtourism' Worries Europe. How Much Did Technology Help Get Us There?' in *New York Times*

13 cfr. ibidem







Fig. 2. Venice: productive city in its own consuming

It is common knowledge that in the last 50 years Venice has undergone a series of modification of its urban qualities and active politics that have transformed the city into a productive machine in its own consuming. The consequences of this phenomena have become evident: conversion of the majority of the building stock into accommodation facilities, consequent depopulation of the Venetian residents and exploitation of its inherited beauty represent just the tip of the bigger problems that are threatening the city. In this frame, a predominant and determining role is played by tourism, a statement that certainly needs clarifications. In fact the phenomena itself is not the cause of the Venetian problem, but it is the extent that such phenomena has reached, especially on the main island of Venice, that has influenced the way in which the city has transformed. In this case, we will address to the phenomenon of *overtourism*, displaying especially one of the consequences that has developed from it: the urban transformation of the city depending on the different gradient of time in the visitors' permanence in Venice.

But when does the city started to become productive in consuming itself? The idea of exploiting the inherited beauty of the city took shape in the 18th century, when Venice experienced the doubling of its image: on one hand its picturesque character and its unique atmosphere; on the other hand the productive side of the city. Division that has only been enhanced by the realisation of Porto Marghera, the moment in which *"irreversibly consolidated the dichotomy between a historically protected centre and an*

*industrial city.*"<sup>14</sup> From this moment on, the historical centre of Venice served the mere purpose of representation, transformed later on into a feature of self exploitation:

"Venice is confused with an eponymous, immaterial city. Since the early nineteenth century, the depiction and description of Venice in art and literature have transformed it into a pre-established experience of imagination. [...] it has been replaced by a metaphorical preconception. Understood as an allegory of decline and fall, it began to be experienced as an idealised atmosphere."<sup>15</sup>

The transformation of the city into a product for the market reflects the observations made by philosopher Gilles Deleuze on the transformation of the capitalistic policies from a *"capitalism of concentration* to a *capitalism of higher order production*"<sup>16</sup>

"[...]capitalism is no longer involved in production [...]. It's a capitalism of higher-order production. It no longer buys raw materials and no longer sells the finished products: it buys the finished products or assembles parts. What it wants to sell is services and what it wants to buy is stocks. This is no longer a capitalism for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed."<sup>17</sup>

The data reveals the alarming situation that Venice is experiencing: not only in the last 60 years the population in the historical centre has dropped from 150.000 inhabitants to 53.000,<sup>18</sup> but it has transformed into a productive machine for hosting the multitude of visitors, 77.000 per day,<sup>19</sup> the 76% of

14 Scheppe W., Cantz H., 2009, *Migropolis. Venice / Atlas of a Global Situation*, Venice, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa and Comune di Venezia

15 ibidem

16 a thorough explanation of these two terms can be found in Deleuze G., 1992, *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, Vol.59, Cambridge Massachussets, The MIT Press

17 Deleuze G., 1992, *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, Vol.59, Cambridge Massachussets, The MIT Press, p.6

18 data from *Comune di Venezia - Servizio Statistica e ricerca su dati Anagrafe comunale*

19 Redazione Online, 2018, *Venezia «sold out», può «sostenere» 52mila turisti al giorno in Il Corriere della Sera*

which are just excursionist, meaning people that do not spend any night in the city.<sup>20</sup> The disbalance created between the actual residents of Venice and the fleeting people has heavily influenced the way in which the city currently acts. The conversion in the use of the building stock, 75% of which is owned by foreigners and destined to investments, that is touristic destination,<sup>21</sup> is only the reflection of the lack of a cohesive community on the island. Its further exploitation and transformation follows what visitors need, by making the entire economy of the city relying merely on the touristic industry.

Not only the effects produced by overtourism are affecting intensely the transformation of the city, but its same politics play an active role in its process of museumification. Venice itself has become a productive machine in its own consuming. As a confirmation of this is the absence nowadays of a cohesive community, that therefore act towards personal interests to the detriment of communal benefits. The same mayor of Venice, Luigi Brugnaro has declared to base its govern strategy on the enhancement of tourism, construction of residential and hotels and attraction of multinational corporations.<sup>22</sup> In this term, it becomes evident how the same role of the first selectman is not the one of enhancing the interests of the city but the profits that can derived from it, by selling Venice as a product by aiming to always higher incomes.<sup>23</sup> This is the acting methodology of what Meillassoux identified as a *reactive subject*, a subject who:

“undergoes a line of becoming which actually consists of a constant retreat, a reassurance of its own supposed givens and limits, a perpetuation of

modes of thinking and practices which are never to deviate from its own, immediate and short-term interests.”<sup>24</sup>

It has to been said that due to the level of complexity of the topic and the interrelation of different layers, such as economic, political, social, it has been impossible to analyse all the different aspects of it. The lense I decided to analyse it is through the means of architecture, the only one through which I could try to develop a proposal that aim to tackle the ephemeral permanence of visitors on the main island and open the discussion on such a topic like overtourism. In a global situation that in 1959 counted 25 milion visitors around the world, in 2017 counted 1.3 billion and forecast the possibility of reaching 2 billion tourists in 2030<sup>25</sup>, is there still something architecture can do to affect in a productive way such a phenomena? This is the question I asked myself in the development of my research.

20 ibidem

21 Somma P., 2019, *Venezia: da città a marchio di successo* in *Il Diritto alla Città Storica. Atti del convegno*, Roma, Associazione Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, p. 41

22 cfr. ibidem

23 cfr. ibidem

24 Kousoulas S., 2019, *An Athens yet to come*, Tu Delft, unpublished, p.9

25 Redazione Online, 2018, *Turismo di massa, Venezia prima al mondo con 73,8 visitatori per abitante* in *IlMessaggero.it*



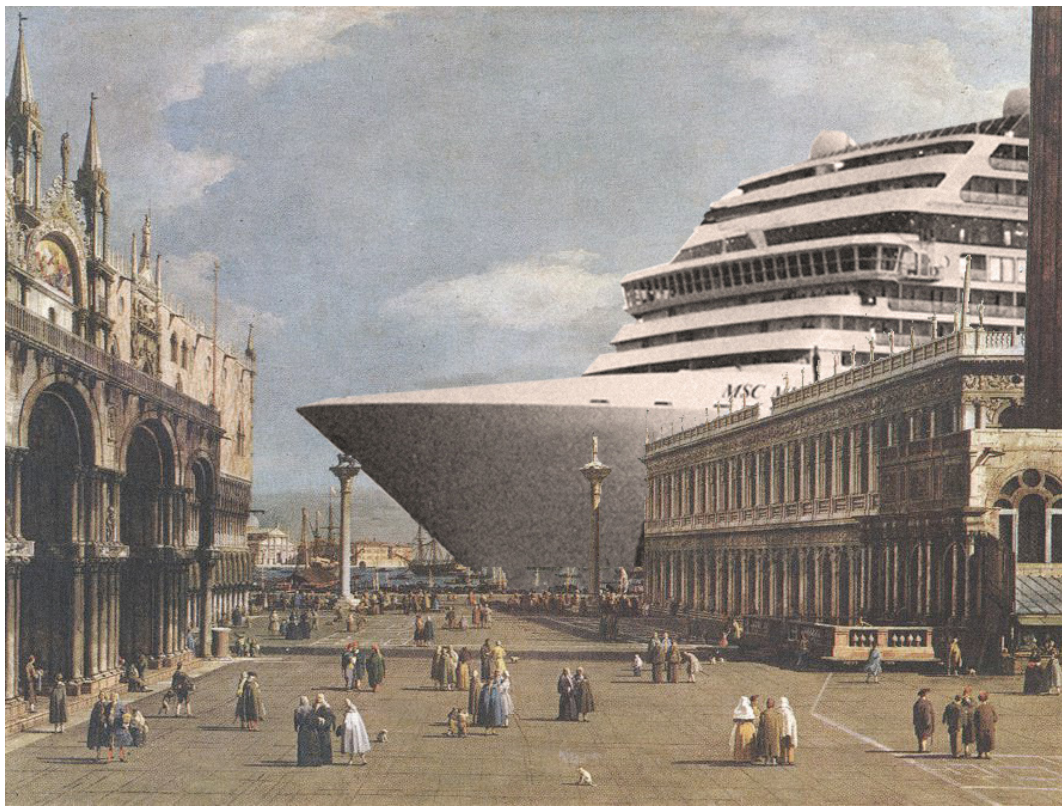


Fig. 3. A New Parade in Bacino San Marco

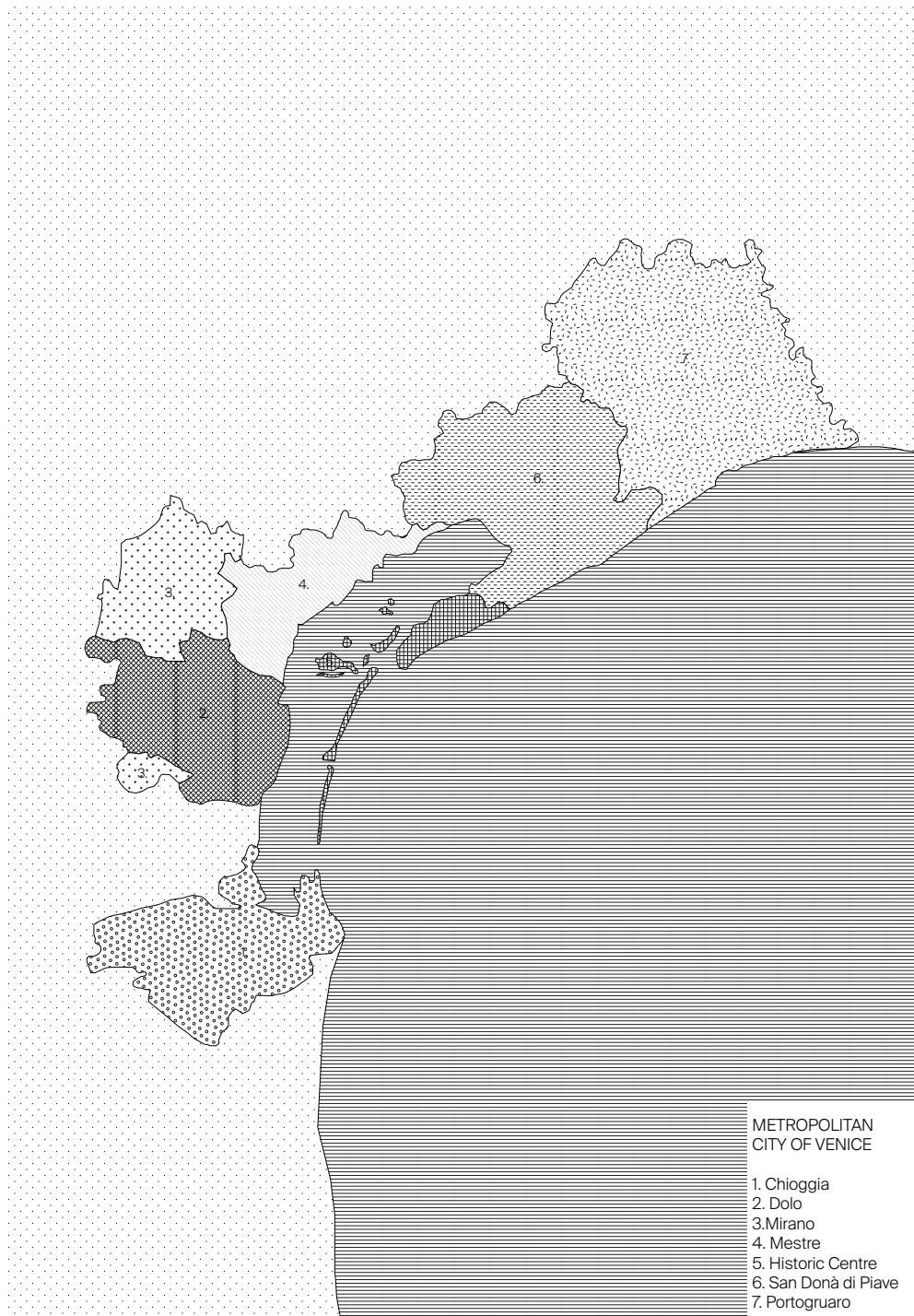


Fig. 4. Metropolitan City of Venice

The purpose of the research is the one of trying to understand, in urban terms, what are the reasons behind the phenomena of overtourism, that is to identify what are the elements of Venice that not only are affecting the present problematic situation of the city itself but have also determined its development through time. This implies the fact of considering the city as an architecture, *“not only referring to the visible image of the city and the totality of its architecture, but rather to the architecture as construction. The construction of the city through time.”*<sup>26</sup>

It is only through an understanding of the urban characters of the city that will be possible to develop a project that aims to create a proposal for tackling the problem of the ephemeral permanence of visitors on the main island.

Before introducing the methodology applied in the main part of the research, it is important to clarify the common and incomplete understanding of what Venice is as a city. In fact the main island, which is usually taken for Venice, is just a part of the administrative, political and urban compound of the city, an assemblage that include the archipelago, the mainland around the lagoon, and the infrastructures that connect them. It is inside this frame that it is possible to understand how the common idea of Venice is relative, because just confined in its historical centre: Marghera, Mestre, Lido, Murano, Burano and Torcello are as well contributors in the definition of the Venetian character, showing different facets of the city, underdeveloped and overcome by the beauty of the complexity and stratification of the historical centre.

It is only by acknowledging Venice as an assemblage and not merely as its historical centre that is possible to make decision about

what to research, by being intellectually honest and recognise the limits that are gonna be set for this research.

It is only by having this knowledge that I took the decision to focus the research on the main island. The decision is twofold, and finds its reason in the present condition of the city: on one hand the historical centre of Venice is the part of the metropolitan city that is experiencing the phenomena of overtourism at its highest extent, therefore the consequent transformation of its urban fabric are evident and worth to be analysed; on the other hand, the historical centre of Venice represents the primordial matrix of the city, the expression of the logics behind its uniqueness. It is particularly in the historical centre that a careful eye can recognise the reason that brought the city to obtain its current configuration and the rules that have governed its transformation.

Therefore, in order to understand the urban character of the city, the research will focus on the *Venetian Technicities*. The concept of *technicities* elaborated by Gilbert Simondon can be defined as the *“mode of relation between human and the world”*<sup>27</sup> through technical objects. It is important to clarify that Simondon shared the idea of technology with the definition of Michel Foucault, who refers to *“any practical rationality governed by a conscious goal.”*<sup>28</sup> By shifting the focus from the usage and utility of the technical objects to their modes of existence, technicity focus on *“the genesis of the objects themselves”*<sup>29</sup>, that means on the relations they establish with a determined subject and a territory in their perpetual becoming.<sup>30</sup> Starting from this concept, the analysis will manifest the way in which people affected the environment of the lagoon through the realisation of

26 Rossi A., 1966, *L'architettura della città*, Milano, Città Studi Edizioni, p.9

27 Simondon G., 1989, *Du Mode d'Existence des Objects Techniques*, Paris, Aubier, p.152

28 Foucault M., 2000, *Power*, New York, The New York Press, p.364

29 Simondon G., 1989, *Du Mode d'Existence des Objects Techniques*, Paris, Aubier, p.5

30 cfr. Kousoulas S., 2019, *An Athens yet to come*, Tu Delft, unpublished

urban elements that in turn, by affecting the territory, influenced the development and the habits of the Venetian citizens.

Through this approach, the relational character between human, technicities and environment will be displayed.

Due to the limit imposed by this research, the technicities that I have identified are four: the *limit*, primary and indispensable condition in the life of Venice; the *infrastructure*, and especially the way in which affected the urban configuration of the city; the *public spaces*, in their importance on the social level; the *nodes*, namely those building in the urban fabric that had an impact on the society as a whole. The reason of my choices depended on those elements that bear the memory of Venice's formation for their importance in affecting its development and the one of the society. As Aldo Rossi stated in his book *The Architecture of the City*:

“With time, the city grows upon itself; it acquires a consciousness and memory. In the course of its construction, its original themes persist, but at the same time it modifies and renders these themes of its own development more specific.”<sup>31</sup>

It is important to remember that the elements presented in this research operates in terms of *reticularity*<sup>32</sup>, that is not as individual and autonomous elements but in constant relationship with each other, in a given structure described with the Deleuzian term of *assemblage*:

“the reason why the properties of a whole cannot be reduced to those of its parts is that they are the result not of an aggregation of the components' own properties but of the actual exercise of their capacities.”<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the selection of determined urban elements has been made based on their capacities in affecting the city, in its double meaning of 'affect' and 'be affected'.

31 Rossi A., 1966, *L'architettura della città*, Milano, Città Studi Edizioni, p.10

32 see Kousoulas S., 2019, *An Athens yet to come*, Tu Delft, unpublished

33 Delanda M., 2006, *A new philosophy of society. Assemblage theory and social complexity*, London, Continuum books, p.11

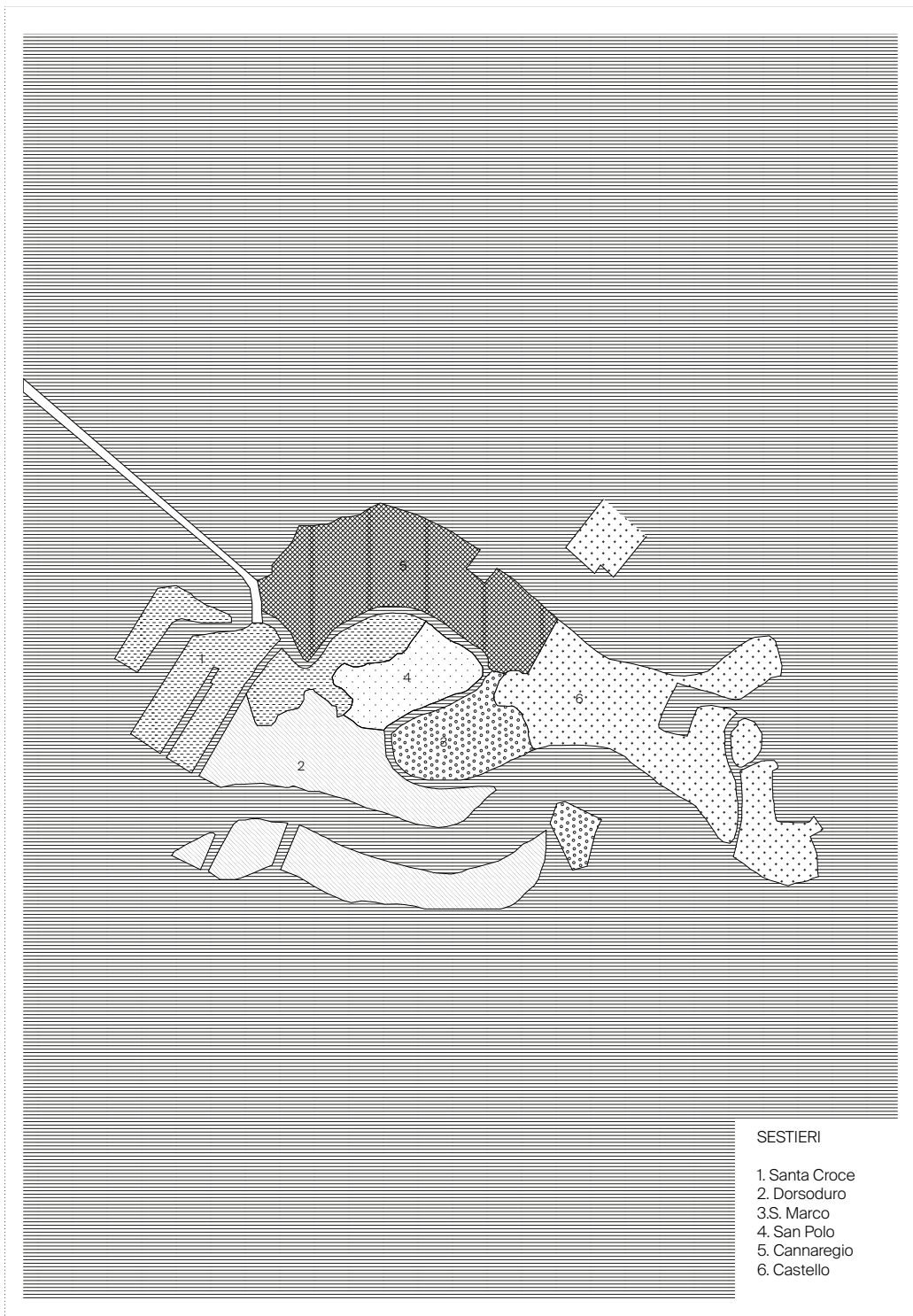


Fig. 5. Venice's Sestieri



Fig. 6. Venice, 1943



The formation of Venice cannot be compared with the development of other cities, in which, by starting from a central location, the consequent and growing expansion has brought the city itself to loose its limits, to even deny the same idea of limit.<sup>34</sup> In modern times, the division of the cities and the countryside has become blurred, impossible to recognise and define: outside their old centre, cities has now lost the principles that regulated their birth and development, by being merely determined by the rules of the market. As Calvino describes in the tale of Pentecilea's invisible city:

"You have given up trying to understand whether, hidden in some sack or wrinkle of these dilapidated surroundings there exists a Pentecilea the visitor can recognize and remember, or whether Pentecilea is only the outskirts of itself. The question that now begins to gnaw in your mind is more anguished: does an outside exist outside Pentecilea? Or, no matter how far you go from the city, will you only pass from one limbo to the other, never managing to leave it?"<sup>35</sup>

In Venice, on the contrary, the formation of the city has been determined by several centralities, an archipelago of islands. Their initial independence, still recognisable today by looking at the recurrent elements that characterise the urban morphology of each island, has been progressively developed in the establishment of a unique artefact marked out by the relationship between the single parts that compose it. The environment upon which these island are formed is the one that also condition their existence: the lagoon. Different from being a mere body of water, the lagoon lays in between its transformation into another piece of mainland or a bay of the sea. It is a living entity, that with its boundaries and natural laws has affected the life of people in it. Its characters of instability

and continuous search for an equilibrium is what has conditioned the actions of the Venetians in the creation of their masterpiece: the city itself.

It is therefore evident that the boundaries represent the existential condition of the city. Not only because they have determined the appropriate situation for the creation of a city protected from the attacks of possible enemies (in fact Venice is first occupied in 421 a.C. when the Roman population took refuge from the barbarian invasions) but especially because they have heavily affected the living condition of the Venetians. By dissecting the different layers of the concept of limits, it will be then noticeable the impact they have always had in the current configuration of Venice.

First of all, speaking about Venice means speaking about its lagoon. It constitutes the major boundary of the city and the essential feature of its existence. By being in the middle of the lagoon, Venice has always related to the presence of water, and particularly to its unstable character. This has determined that every human operation on land depended on the water's behaviour, in its respect and in the searching for an equilibrium.

However, the ability of the Venetians laid in the transformation of the water element from an initial threat to a favourable feature: water became not only the main infrastructure in the city, but especially the way of communication with the entire world. In this terms, the lagoon and its limits were both the reason of Venice's birth, richness and success. As a port city, the condition of water was essential: the speed and the profits of the trades via navigation were so much higher than regular trades inside a determined territory than the city could prosper and develop faster and in a more intense way than anywhere else. Defined

<sup>34</sup> Erbani E., 2018, *Non è triste Venezia*, San Cesario di Lecce, Manni Editore, p. 43

<sup>35</sup> Calvino I., 1972, *The invisibles cities*, Torino, Einaudi, p.153

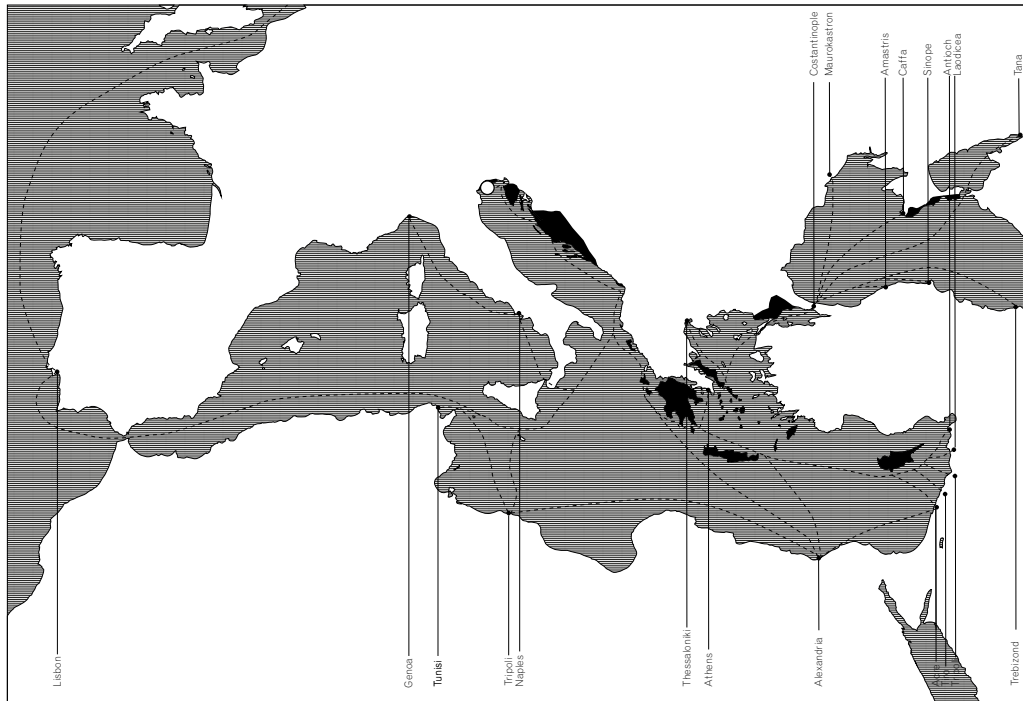


Fig. 7. Venice's trades and territories in the years of the Republic

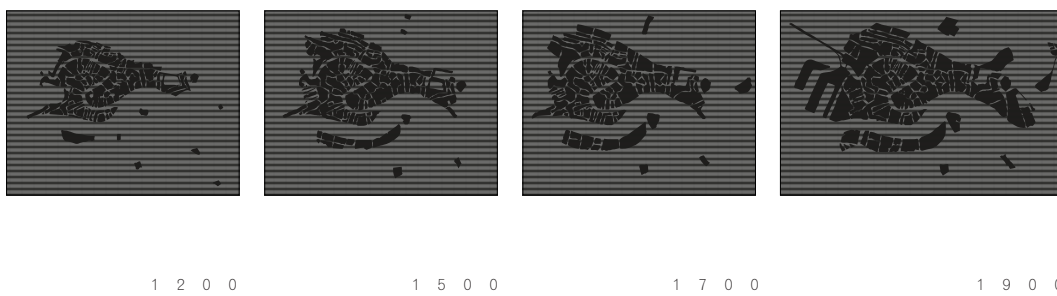


Fig. 8. Venice's Development



by Manuel Delanda as “*topological and not hierarchical connection*”<sup>36</sup>, the city of Venice was oriented more towards the outside, in a continuous process of deterritorialisation that permitted the creation of a mixed identity in the city, the “*unitary discontinuity that characterises it*”.<sup>37</sup> If on one hand the lagoon was representing the first major limit of the city, on the other hand, through the element of water, was also the reason of its “*dimension with no boundaries*”<sup>38</sup>, in terms of cultural influence and trades exchanges.

If the lagoon represent the first boundary, the land conquered by the Venetians in the middle of it illustrates the second limit. As claimed by Franco Mancuso, professor at IUAV university in Venice, “*Venice is a city that is simultaneously similar to itself and totally different*”<sup>39</sup>. On one hand, its similarity is given by its realisation in a short period of time: before the XIV century the city had already realised all of its structures. Since that moment, it stopped to grow and it started to be the subject of several transformation that aimed both to change the aesthetic of its most important locations and to adapt the existing urban stock to the modern needs. In this process, the city has never trespass its limits, that constitute the reason of the complexity of Venice’s urban morphology, created by the succession of modifications, additions, extensions happened in an island which surface has remained identical for most of its time.

Finally, if we intend boundaries not only as

physical limits, but also in terms of resources, it is possible to understand their impact in affecting the Venetians’ way of living. The most visible example is the one of the well. The collection and use of potable water in a land surrounded by salty water was of vital importance in the island, and like other resources, it had to be obtained without be wasted or consumed unconditionally. Therefore, the act of collecting water had brought the venetian citizens to develop for themselves structures and components that could performance the same services that in other environments could have been taken for granted.<sup>40</sup> In this continuous process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation<sup>41</sup>, the Venetians have not only evolved by “*adapting their habits to the one of the milieus with which they interacted*”<sup>42</sup>, but also through the construction of a sense of community needed to face such difficulties. Therefore, the well is a representation of what is defined by Leroi Gourhan with the term *generalisation*, the process of the man to “*evolve by externalising through technology*”.<sup>43</sup> Intrinsic to this process is the one of *concretisation* of the technical object, introduced by Gilbert Simondon, that is the operation of “*perpetual, yet peculiar, specification*”<sup>44</sup> through which the technicity used by the man relates with its territory in the continuous process of affections that determine its way of living.

Not by chance, also in this occasion, the limit is transformed by Venetians into an opportunity to define the urban qualities of

36 Delanda M., 2011, *The city and Capitalism*, European Graduate School Video Lectures

37 Busetto G., 2014, *Etica, creatività, città. Giuseppe Mazzariol e l’idea di Venezia*, Milano, Silvana Editoriale and Fondazione Querini Stampalia,, p.159

38 Calvino I., Barenghi M. (curated by), 1995, ‘*Venezia archetipo e utopia della città acquatica*’ in *Saggi 1945 - 1985. Tomo II, Descrizioni e reportage*, Milano, Mondadori

39 Mancuso F., 2016, *Venezia è una città. Come è stata costruita e come vive*, Venezia, Corte del Fontego

40 cfr. Protevi J., 2013, *Life War Earth. Deleuze and the sciences*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p.49

41 Deterritorialisation and territorialisation are two terms introduced by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. With these two terms they indicate the process of the components of an assemblage in either stabilise its identity or destabilise it.

42 ibidem, p.48

43 Kousoulas S., 2019, *An Athens yet to come*, unpublished, p.2

44 ibidem, p.3



Fig. 9. Wellhead under construction

the city. The well not only represents a past symbol of the Venetian society, but it became the element around which the social life of the Venice's population took shape: not by chance, it was always positioned in the 'Campi', the traditional public spaces, once arable fields, of Venice. The procurement and distribution of the water were communitarian activities in the social life of Venice, and the collective effort towards the difficulties aimed to enhance the feeling of solidarity between the citizens: the well represents this reality, and for Venetians, it is the symbol of their past.

Considering the analysis of the different layers contained in the character of the limits, it can be stated that the relation between the citizens and the limits imposed by the natural condition of Venice constituted the first, and the most relevant step, in the definition of the Venetian territory. Defined by Deleuze and Guattari as a "*semi-stable selection from chaos*",<sup>45</sup> indicating with chaos the lack of an *a priori* organising principle, the construction of the milieu, together with its ability to accept "*variation in the comings and goings within it*"<sup>46</sup>, namely the *rhythm*, represents the base for understanding the characters of a territory. It is relevant to notice how in the description of the milieu, the two philosophers bring the attention in its flexible character, the one that permit its own survival:

"If *milieus* concern what happens where, *rhythms* are about how and when things within and between milieus happen, and hence the flexibility and survivability of a milieu is a rhythmic concern."<sup>47</sup>

Even though the simple description of milieu and rhythm does not clarify what a territory is, it is important to claim that through the constant "*conquest and consolidation of the variations*"<sup>48</sup> of the milieu it has been possible for the Venetians to define certain habits that aimed to the continuous search for an equilibrium with the environment in which their territory has been later developed, that is their own outliving.

However nowadays, the boundaries of the city have been trespass: the creation of the 'Ponte della Libertà', the bridge that connects Venice with the mainland, and the urban sprawl of the Venetian outskirt in the city of Mestre have denied the character of the limit that has marked out the city during its history. The centre of industrial productivity has been moved towards the mainland, leaving the historical city intact in its beauty, in its appearance, as a "*touristic ruin*".<sup>49</sup> This process has done nothing but enhance the division between the main island of Venice and its expansions, not only in terms of functions but consequently in terms of attractions: the pressure of overtourism that is affecting with a such high extent the historical centre is partly due to the condition of the surrounding areas, and especially for the absence of landmarks or circumstances that could interest visitors, for their mere industrial character.

At the same time, the boundaries of the historical centre are also affecting the current situation that the city of Venice is facing: because of its limited surface and capability, the city of Venice cannot bear the high numbers of the intense tourism that is experiencing; and because the boundaries have

45 Kleinherenbrink A., 2015, *Territory and Ritornello: Deleuze and Guattari on Thinking Living Beings in Deleuze studies*, Edinburgh University Press, p.212

46 ibidem, p. 215

47 ibidem, p.215

48 ibidem, p.215

49 Mazzariol G., 1969, 'Louis Kahn. Un progetto per Venezia, Lotus n.6' in *Etica, creatività, città. Giuseppe Mazzariol e l'idea di Venezia*, Milano, Silvana Editoriale and Fondazione Querini Stampalia, p. 163

always determined the urban morphology of the city and host its continuous changing, it is also difficult to make transformations on the built environment, due to the fact that every one of it would affect different layers of complexity in the city.

L'ISOLAMENTO DI VENEZIA  
È FINITO  
SENZA ALCUNA OFFESA  
ALLA SUA DIVINA BELLEZZA.  
IL GIGANTESCO  
PONTE LAGUNARE  
VOLUTO DAL DUCE  
00·06·17·20 1

È STATO INAUGURATO  
CON ECCEZIONALE  
SOLENNITÀ  
DAI PRINCIPI DI PIEMONTE.  
VENEZIA NE TRARRÀ  
NUOVA VITA  
00·06·27·23 2  
R. C. A. PHOTOPHONE

Fig. 10. Giornale Luce, 1933

"The isolation of Venice is over, without any offence to its divine beauty. The gigantic lagoon bridge, wanted by the Duce, has been inaugurated by the royals of Piemonte with exceptional solemnity. Venice will draw new life from it."

Giornale Luce, 1933



Fig. 11. Metropolitan City of Venice





Fig. 12. Ponte delle Libertà, 1933



Fig. 13. Mestre, 1960



Fig. 14. Mestre, 2016





Fig. 15. Porto Marghera, 2017



Fig. 16. Porto Marghera, 2017



Fig. 17. Le Corbusier, *Je prends Venice a témoin*, 1924

### Calli and Canals

The system of infrastructure in Venice represents one of the most brilliant urban solution adopted by the Venetians in the construction of the city. It has been so appreciated and admired during modern time that Venice itself has become the reference model in the architectural debate regarding the design of the city of the future. In this regards, the words of Harvey Willie Corbett in the description of the futuristic New York in 1923 are exemplary:

“We see a city of sidewalks, arcaded within the building lines, and one story above the present street grade. We see bridges at all corners, the width of the arcades and with solid railings. We see the smaller parks of the city (of which we trust there will be many more than at present) raised to this same side-walk arcade level... and the whole aspect becomes that of a very modernised Venice, a city of arcades, plazas and bridges, with canals for streets, only the canals will not be filled with real water but with freely flowing motor traffic, the sun glistening on the black tops of the cars and the buildings reflecting In this waving flood of rapidly rolling vehicles.”<sup>50</sup>

One year later, Le Corbusier will praise the pedestrian network of Venice, by claiming that:

“Venice is a pure cardiac system, impeccable. The percentage of land devoted to the pedestrian circulation is minimum! Venice, functional city, extremely functional, is a model for urban planners of today, testimony of the rigour required for the urban phenomena. Venice is a testimony of functional rigor.”<sup>51</sup>

However, what appears as an homogeneous network of communication is the result of several transformation in the environment of the lagoon. In fact, since the birth of Venice,

the main system of transportation has always been the one of the water. The different little islands communicated between them through the canals, that obtained their current dimensions once the archipelago started working as a totality. It is precisely the moment in which Venice experienced the shift from an archipelago of indipendent islands to a unique urban system that the pedestrian infrastructure was created, in order to separate the main routes devoted to trades to the network used by the citizens to move around the city.

The consequential process in the realisation of the two networks is proven by numerous instances. First of all, by analysing the morphology of these elements, it can be noticed how the canals are marked out by fewer elements that extend over longer distances, than the elements of the pedestrian networks, that appears like scattered fragments extracted from the urban fabric.<sup>52</sup> This difference reveals the origin of the city as an archipelago, a system in which communication could only took place via water. In addition to this, it is still visible in the pattern of the ‘calli’ the interdependence with the water network: the overlapping points of the two systems are the locations in which ‘campi’ were created, in order to easily change communication system between water and land.<sup>53</sup>

The pedestrian networks laid on the communication structure that was prior defined by the canals. The richness of its very own naming, represents the diversification that took place above the level of the lagoon, a unique layer which division has been determined by the dry land:

“water is the unifying element, it receives its differentiation from emerged places; the lagoon is a single level, while foundations and bridges

50 Koolhaas R., 1978, *Delirious New York*, New York, The Monacelli Press, p.123

51 Foscari G. 2014, *Elements of Venice*, Zurich, Lars Muller Publisher, p. 129

52 cfr. Psarra S., 2018, *The Venice Variations. Tracing the architectural Imagination*, London, UCL Press, p.39

53 ibidem, p. 41





Fig. 18. Water Networks



Fig. 19. Pedestrian Network

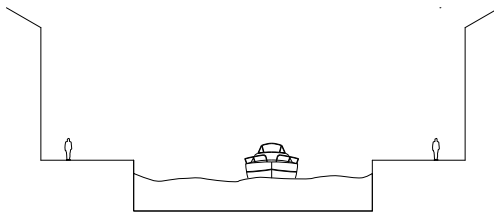


Fig. 20. Canal



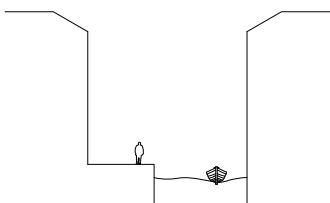


Fig. 21. Rio

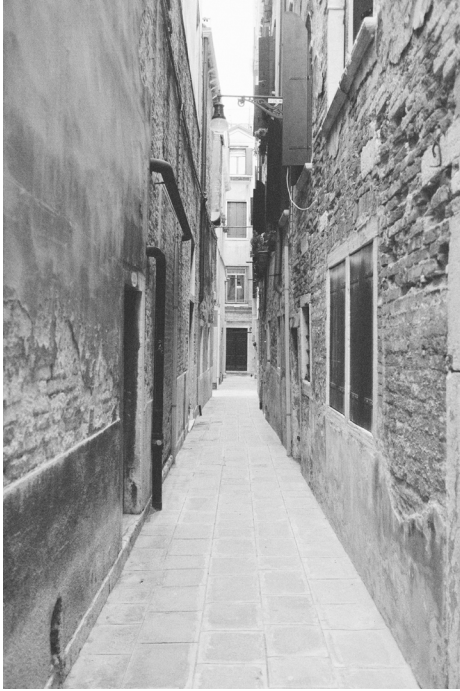


Fig. 22. Calle | Rio terà | Ramo | Ruga

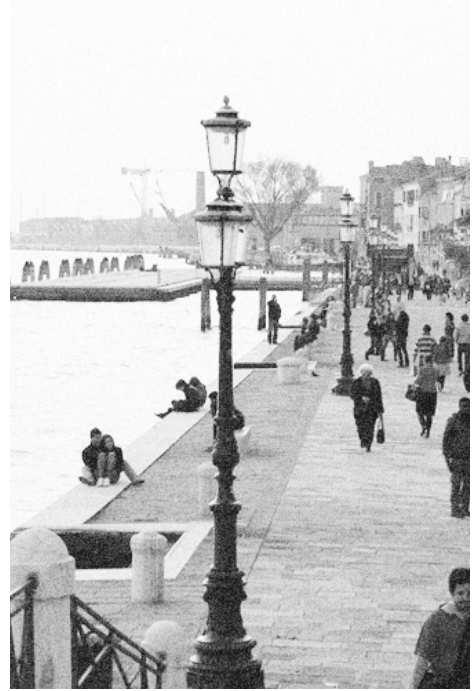


Fig. 23. Fondamenta | Riva



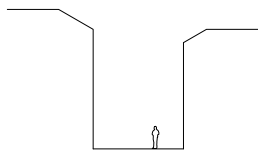


Fig. 24. Salizada

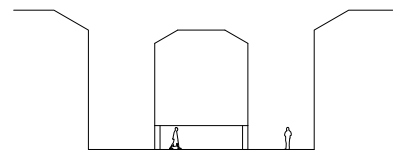
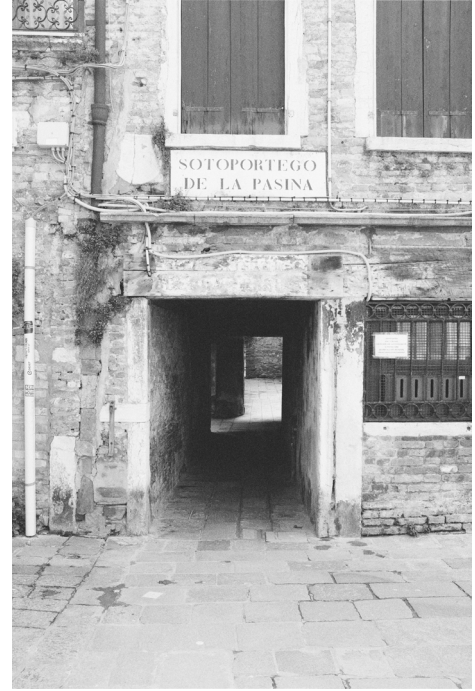


Fig. 25. Sotoportego

with their continuous rising and falling of steps introduce the element of discontinuity that is proper to language.”<sup>54</sup>

The structure of the Venetian network has not change since its creation. Only few additions have been made in modern times consequently to the realisation of the train station on the main island, transformation that reflect the coming trend of tourism: among them, of noticeable importance are the realisation of Strada Nuova, the only street in Venice, that cut the Cannaregio neighbourhood to directly bring visitors from the train station to the San Marco neighbourhood, and the ‘Ponte della Costituzione’, that has facilitated a direct connection between the bus station and once again the neighbourhood of San Marco.

Its features still influence how the city function today, affecting the way Venice is dealing with the current phenomena that are determining its urban qualities. Due to the changing in the way of commuting in the island, nowadays canals are mostly used for touristic purposes and fast movement between different parts of the city: while on the Canal Grande it is possible to see taxi and ‘vaporetti’, in the ‘rii’, the little canals that runs in between the islands, the gondola is ruling the space, followed by little boats used by Venetians for the transportation of goods or considerable objects. The reason of this transformation relates with the changes of the commercial activities of the city, not anymore oriented towards the outside, as it was in the past, but just towards its same land, with the exploitation of its inherited beauty and the regeneration of the highest part of the urban stock as a mere element of profit: hotels and shops.

The entire population of Venice, considering both the citizens, the tourists and the fleeting

population, is then moving currently through the pedestrian network: for the workers, the streets facilitate to reach the different work locations by walking; for the tourist, walking and getting lost through the maze of calli has become an imperative in the discoveries of Venice, that show its uniqueness also in the authorless architecture. But due to the same nature of the pedestrian network, that is the one of functioning as a ‘rue corridor’<sup>55</sup>, a simple element of connection in the city, the system cannot host the amount of people that are now everyday cruising throughout the city. In this way, it affects the life of the Venetians citizens, who cannot moving and commuting easily in the city, and the life of Venice itself, for its continuous and constant preservation in facing an outstanding and unbearable number of tourists everyday.

In Venice, architecture coincide with city planning. There is no land prior to the building: there has never been a land division, facilities, infrastructure before architecture. The entire system is created simultaneously to architecture, that means that constructing architecture coincided with designing the city: the forms of the streets, the campi and the rii are interdependent with the construction of Venice’s urban fabric in time, therefore are expression of the history of the city<sup>56</sup>.

54 Calvino I., Barenghi M. (curated by), 1995, ‘Venezia archetipo e utopia della città acquatica’ in *Saggi 1945 - 1985. Tomo II, Descrizioni e reportage*, Milano, Mondadori

55 Foscari G. 2014, *Elements of Venice*, Zurich, Lars Muller Publisher, p. 259

56 Erbani F., 2018, *Non è triste Venezia*, San Cesario di Lecce, Manni Editore, p. 37

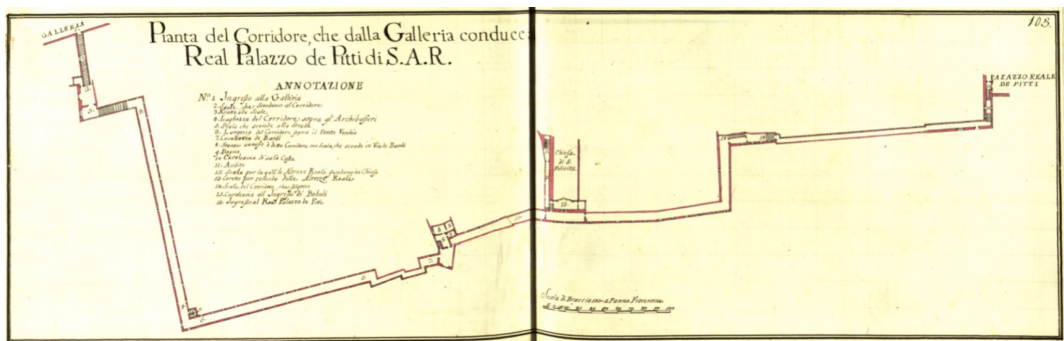
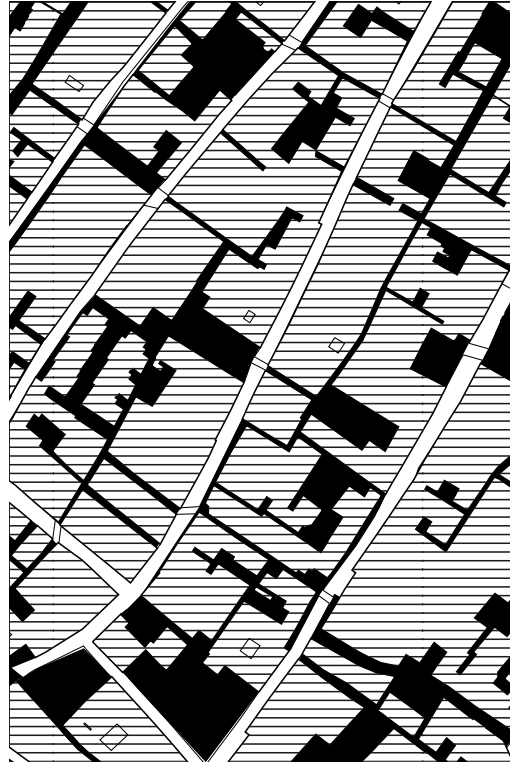


Fig. 26. Calle as a Rue Corridor



Fig. 27. Piazza San Marco

The intersections of the two networks, the aquatic and the pedestrian, are the points in which the open spaces are located. Their in-between position reflects the origin and the following transformation of Venice from an archipelago of islands to a compact artifact: their proximity to water echoed the time when the communications between the different islands took place uniquely via water; instead their interconnection through the pedestrian network represented the creation of thoroughfares in the development and comprehension of Venice as a totality.

It is relevant to notice how time is embedded into space, and consequently space becomes history<sup>57</sup> in the analysis of Venice and its technicities. History that is displayed both in the forms of the built environment and in the social consequences that the same forms produced. In fact, by analysing the role of the open spaces in the urban configuration, it will result evident their importance as places of “*interrelation between public and private dimension, and places that enhance the sense of community*”.<sup>58</sup>

Once again, it is important to take into consideration the different naming used to indicate the Venetians open spaces. Campi or Campielli, depending on their dimensions, is the name used to indicate the open spaces; Piazza is only used referring to Piazza San Marco. Already in this division the different character of the open spaces is declared: while in the rest of Italian cities the Piazza is the place in which the city shows itself, by defining it through the architectures that represents the government's power, in Venice this feature is reproduced only in San Marco, symbol of the *imago urbis*.<sup>59</sup> In all the other public spaces the predominant characters are not the ones of monumentality and display

of power but instead the ones of intimacy, daily activities, affable situations. Not by chance in some of the Campi the churches or public institutions do not show their main facade, highlighting the public feature of the space, and its intention of belonging to the community. The same shape of the Campi, in relation with the dimension and the monumental design of Piazza San Marco, manifests the importance of the people who are actually interacting with the space rather than the display and focus on the architecture that defines them. This feature trace back to the primary use of Campi, which name means ‘arable field’: from their use the social character has been conveyed through all the different modifications that the Venetian environment has experienced.

Even though the Campi have different forms, they all present some recurrent elements: among them their proximity or direct connection to the water and the presence of a well are the most important, because manifest their importance in both the viability network and in the formation of the Venetian community.

The current situation sees the role of the Campi heavily mutated compared with the key role they had in the past. With the lack of a defined and cohesive Venetian society, characterised by the Venetians who has direct interest in the exploitation of the city's beauty, the fleeting tourists, the students and the few Venetians who share no interest in the tourist sectors, the sense of community that brought the people to gave shape and constantly transform the city in its continuous process of individuation, has disappeared. The active politics of the city have transformed Venice into a productive entity in its consuming, therefore the actions projected on the city

57 cfr. Crouzet-Pavan E., 2005, *Venice Triumphant. The Horizons of a myth*, Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press

58 Ermani F., 2018, *Non è triste Venezia*, San Cesario di Lecce, Manni Editore, p. 32

59 see Tafuri M., 1989, *Venice and the Renaissance*, Cambridge Massachussets, MIT Press. The discussion related with the construction of the image of the city raised during the 16th century, and addresses all forms of art. The work of Giovanni Bellini and Jacopo de Barbari in paintings, the completion of Piazza San Marco by Vincenzo Scamozzi, Palladio's churches along the islands facing Venice represents not only the transformation from a Republic to a State but also the consolidation of a Venetian image that could express the Myth of Venice.

are mere individual, aiming to obtain the maximum income without considering their effects on the community. The reason behind these transformations lays not only in the percent disbalance between the different characters that compose the Venetian society but especially in their different permanence on the island. In fact, the combination of the fleeting characters in the Venetian population (tourists and students) outnumbers the residents in the historical centre, affecting both the relationship between the urban spaces and its users and the transformation of the built environment around them. The latter has experienced a progressive conquest of the open spaces, through the trespass of the private activities outside their buildings and the street vendors, magnet for tourists. Moreover, their change in functions have also affected people behaviour: not many are the ones who stopped and experience the space; the majority just pass it without even consider its traits, as another transitional space in their route towards the most touristic destinations.

The sense of commitment towards the city and its urban qualities has decreased with the dissolution of a cohesive Venetian society, especially for the transitoriness of the majority of the people that experience the city, that has consequently lost any long term vision for curating its own future, by being more prompt towards its self exploitation. In the description of the concept of the *tourist syndrome*, elaborated by the sociologist Zygmunt Baumann, is expressed the trait of the aforementioned situation:

“There is no firm commitment, no fixed date of staying; it’s all ‘until further notice’. Presumption of temporariness is built into the way of being

and behaving. This is very different from one very important expectation which was so typical of solid modernity and the foremost feature of a ‘Fordist factory’ or more generally of panoptical power: the assumption that ‘we will meet again’ – tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next year, next decade perhaps... If people know/believe that they are going to meet again and again and again, they strive to work out a certain *modus vivendi*, elaborate certain ways of living together, compose rules (norms) by which, as they assume, all of them will abide by.”<sup>60</sup>

As David Harvey claims in his *time-space compression theory*, the difficulties in engaging in any long term planning for the city has defined two different ways of becoming: either the transformation of the city into an adaptable and fast moving system to react to the the dynamic market or the definition of active politics suitable for mastering the volatility of the rapidly changing modern society.<sup>61</sup> The decision of Venice to direct its own politics towards short term solutions is backed by two main reasons: they are the easiest and preferred ones in a system that is constantly dealing with ephemeral floods of people because they can be converted instantly into a more profitable object; short term solutions coincide with control, “*continous and without limits, of rapid rates of turnover*”<sup>62</sup>, therefore ideal for the perpetual exploitation of the urban environment and its successively dependence on the visitors’ experience.

60 Zygmunt B., Franklin A. (the interviewer), 2003, “*The tourist syndrome*”, London, Sage Publications, p.3

61 cfr. Harvey D., 1990, “*The Condition of Postmodernity. An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*”, Oxford, Blackwell, p.287

The term volatility is used by Harvey to identify the main trait of the *realm of commodity production*, namely those activities that “*experienced ephemerality as a consequence of the general speed up in the turnover times of capital.*” The effect of these alterations brought to elevate as values the traits of instantaneity and disposability, expression of the acceleration of goods into pure consumption.

62 Deleuze G., 1992, *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, Vol.59, Cambridge Massachussets, The MIT Press, p.6





Fig. 28. Campi's Morphology



Fig. 29. Jacopo de Barbari, *Veduta di Venezia*, 1500



In addition to considering the city of Venice through its urban features, it is important to keep into consideration the political force that it was on the economic, social and cultural level. The transformation of the city from the archipelago to the urban assemblage is the reflection of the changes in the political realm: “*from an islands commune to a state, from the republic to the empire.*”<sup>63</sup> Parallel to these modifications in the political power was the creation and consolidation of the mythological idea behind the foundation and splendour of the city. Formerly known as the Myth of Venice, the creation of an ideal image of the city for strengthening the community values became the prominent topic upon which the Venetian politic actualised most of its decisions. Not only arts had a prominent role in this process, with the paintings of Gentile Bellini’s and the Jacopo de Barbari’s aerial view of the city among all the others, but also architecture: the redefinition of the piazza of San Marco, though not without intense discussions<sup>64</sup>, represents the most celebrated and important intervention in the space that symbolise par excellence Venice’s image.

The Myth of Venice can be considered in many different aspects: the *geographical* aspect, related with the position of the city in the lagoon, the place that secured and permit the development of Venice as a port city; the *economic* aspect, connected to the flourished economy that the city experienced in its period of completion of its configuration; finally, the *social* feature, through which the government succeeded in mitigating the social differences between people from different classes, creating a civil interrelated network in the strengthening of the sense of

belonging to the city.

In the following section, the analysis will focus on the social aspect of the Myth, especially on the way in which determined buildings have favoured the mixture of different classes, therefore creating the premises for an ideal society. By analysing both the affects they determined on the social network and nowadays on the urban environment of Venice, the analysis will aim to understand how these element are still relevant in the understanding of the current condition of the city.

To reach this goal, the architectural elements that are gonna be analysed corresponds to the nodes of the Venetian foreground network, by indicating with this term their relevant role in affecting the society and especially the social mixture. This phenomena permitted the creation of a community that has always looked towards the consolidation and implementation of the public dimension, that is one of the condition that determine the reduction of inequalities between social classes, together with the offer of urban policies, assistency, accessibility and the creation of public spaces, places in which the city shows its true characters.<sup>65</sup> Within the limit of this research, the architectural nodes that I have contemplated are the ones of Churches, Palaces and Scuole. For each one of them, the analysis will be developed inside different time frames: from the archipelago to the birth of the compact city for the Churches, the period of the Republic for the Palaces (10th - 11th centuries) and the Renaissance period for the Scuole.

The Churches represent the “earliest permanent structures that were created on

63 cfr. Psarra S., 2018, *The Venice Variations. Tracing the architectural Imagination*, London, UCL Press, p.29

64 In Manfredo Tafuri’s book *Venice and the Renaissance*, the author describes thoroughly the architectural and political debate behind the restoration project of piazza San Marco. The renewal of the image of the city, following the idea of the Myth of Venice, has been the motive for the conflict between the two factions of the ‘Young’ and the ‘Old’: on one hand the decision of transforming the architecture of San Marco following the Renaissance canons of Roman architecture; on the other hand the resolution in changing the image of the piazza following the more traditional elements of the Venetians traditions. The final decision leant towards the former, with the completion of the library of Jacopo Sansovino and the realisation of the Procuratie Nuove by Vincenzo Scamozzi.

65 cfr. Erban F., 2018, *Non è triste Venezia*, San Cesario di Lecce, Manni Editore, p. 37 and 42

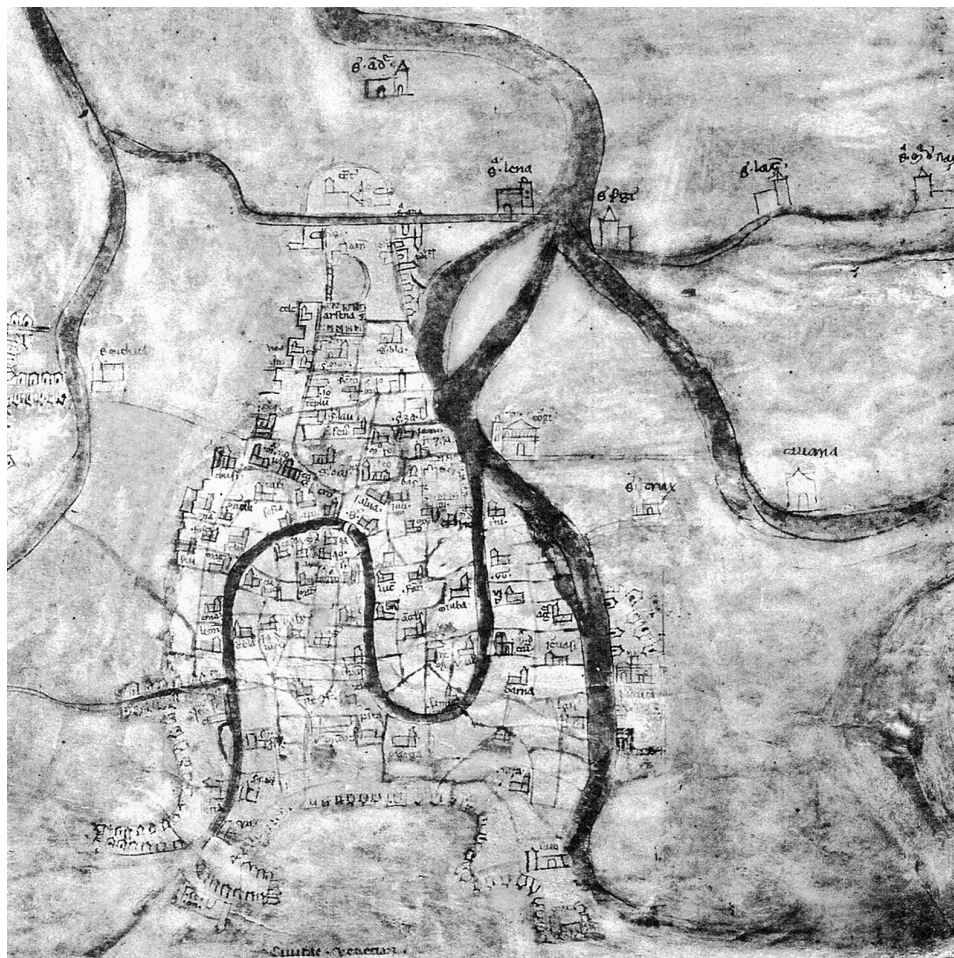


Fig. 30. Fra Paolino, *Civitas Venetiarum*, 1346





Fig. 31. Gentile\_Bellini, *Processione in Piazza San Marco*, 1496

the lagoon”:<sup>66</sup> this is already visible in one of the first map of Venice, dating 14th century, where Venice is represented as a land divided by canals into little interconnected realities, each one individuated by the presence of a church. These several realities were the ones of the parishes, initial centres in the development of different social communities. These nuclei comprehend the construction of the urban fabric around the church and the campo, the two main elements that determined the local character of each island. Each of these centres acted as an autonomous artifact and developed a strong sense of local traditions, that will still remain visible in the following transformation of the multitude of islands into a compact city. The churches then were the symbols of the different communities of the archipelago and affected its urban environment functioning as key buildings from which the development of the islands could take place.

By the end of Middle Age, the territorialised process of the parishes were challenged by the loss of their autonomous character in favour of their interconnection into a bigger system, the one of Venice as a totality. Connections between the different churches started to appear, as well as shifts of their position from the centre of the islands towards its boundaries, that is towards the element of water. These transformations related with the process of deterritorialisation and consequent re-territorialisation of the different islands: from local realities to a global structure, with the consequent creation of a global network through water.

In this process of deterritorialisation, the role assumed by the churches changed but its influence on the community remained unvaried. In fact, while the churches changed their position closer to the canals, not being determinant anymore as the centres of expansion of the city but as nodes of representation for the different communities

inside the Venetian system, their role in connecting different social classes became predominant in the formation of the Venetian Myth.

Rituals and ceremonies were the apparatus through which the sense of belonging in the community was established and strengthened, and the events that promoted the social mixture between the Venetian citizens. Furthermore, their purpose was also the one of continuously strengthen both the growing of the global character, in terms of the Republic's creation, and the local character of the different parishes from which this formation started. That is why next to paintings such as the '*Processione in piazza San Marco*' by Gentile Bellini, other more intimate rituals are depicted, showing the predominant role of the churches in bringing together the Venetians. In the painting "*Il miracolo della reliquia della Santa Croce in Campo San Lio*" it is possible to notice the participation of the community in the passing of the ceremony, a celebration that, for a short period of time, would change the entire appearance of the city into a urban theatre. Complementary to the consolidation of the community is the unification of the urban fabric: the scene of the human actions.

By being important nodes in the commercial network of Venice, the typology of the Palace started to be developed during the years of the Republic, the golden age of the city. In fact, they were not merely the residences of the richest people in Venice, but hosted under the same roof three different functions: residential, production and commercial.<sup>67</sup> This is expressed by the access to the buildings, doors that open both towards the water and the land: the former used for fast and long trades, the latter for the local market and the connection with the other important social and political nodes

66 Psarra S., 2018, *The Venice Variations. Tracing the architectural Imagination*, London, UCL Press, p.30

67 cfr. Foscarini G. 2014, *Elements of Venice*, Zurich, Lars Muller Publisher, p. 64



Fig. 32. Palaces' entrances



of the city. In fact, the owner of the palaces were also the most important people in the politic realm of Venice, by being members of the ‘*Gran Consiglio*’, the govern organ flanked to the *Doge*. Different from any other cities, the aristocracy in Venice did not depended on inherited nobiliar titles but on the wealth obtained through the trades; this is the reason why Palaces represented the architectural expression of the highest social class in the city.

By looking at the positions of the Palaces on the main land, it is relevant to notice how they are scattered throughout the urban fabric of Venice. The reason of this phenomenon relates with the absence of a preexisting urban plan in the construction and definition of the city and the Palaces’ need of proximity to water in order to enhance their trades. The lack of a masterplan determined the lack of zoning in the city, therefore the mixture of such structures with the authorless architecture that create the majority of the urban structure of Venice. In addition to this, the mixture was also reiterated inside the same Palaces, in which the several transformation and expansion allowed for the realisation of servant living spaces. In this terms, the Palaces worked as civic nodes in the social context of the community, by aiding the interrelation and contact between different classes and strenghten the social bond.

Together with the Churches and the Palaces, the Venetians Scuole constituted the other relevant institutions in the determination of the social mixture of the Venetian society. Their differentiation into ‘Scuole Piccole’ and ‘Scuole Grandi’ reflected the different purposes that regulated every institution:

the former related with the associations of arts and crafts with the aim of secure the profit of the different categories of workers and regulated their activity, and the national Scuole, collectives of the members of the several foreign community in the town<sup>68</sup>; the latter consisted in the devotional Scuole, with their specific religious connotations, that transformed into institutions of healthcare, charity and bank services.<sup>69</sup>

The two different types of Scuole acted as association that aimed to “*fulfill the aspiration of the middle class and mediate between the wealthy and the poorer classes*”.<sup>70</sup> This was evident both in their openness towards all the different social classes of Venetians society, in the opportunity they offered to the non patrician class to still play an important role in the community, and in the public services provided.

Among them, the Scuole Grandi were the only ones that were represented by the magnificent architecture built throughout the urban fabric.

If in Venice became evident that architecture coincide with urban planning, always relating the private construction with the realisation of services for the community, in the same way the Scuole Grandi reflected this idea in their actions: an institutions of patricians that in order to protect and develop their interests had the obligation of offering a public service towards the Venice’s community. The acts of charity, healthcare and bank services not only characterise the Scuole Grandi as associations in between the economic and religious life of the citizens but also determined their role in connecting different peoples and institutions, especially for their “*lack of interaction with the local community in which they were located*”.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the strenghtening of solidarities between

68 cfr. [www.scuolagrandeSanRocco.org](http://www.scuolagrandeSanRocco.org)

69 cfr. Foscari G. 2014, *Elements of Venice*, Zurich, Lars Muller Publisher, p. 90

70 Psarra S., 2018, *The Venice Variations. Tracing the architectural Imagination*, London, UCL Press, p.57

71 ibidem, p.53

the same members of the institutions and with the citizens of other social classes was a key element pursued by the Scuole, in the Venetian's aim of constructing an ideal form of society in which the differentiation inside the community were smoothen through the Republic's operate.

The consequences of the way in which these nodes affected the society of Venice are still visible in current times, not anymore in terms of society but in terms of built environment. In fact, if on one hand the social mixture provided by Churches, Palaces and Scuole is not present anymore, for their transformation in touristic and attractive spots in the city, on the other hand their distribution throughout the island affects the way tourism is experienced in the city. The lack of a masterplan and a zoning plan in the construction of Venice has determined the equal development of all the neighbourhoods of the city, potentially transforming the entire island into a touristic attraction. But if in the past *“economic specialisation and functional diversification did not transform the city of Venice into a series of closed, occupationally defined neighbourhoods and spatially defined social groups”*<sup>72</sup>, nowadays the opposite process is taking place. By starting from the quote of the artist Andy Warhol *“all the warehouse will become museums and all museums will become warehouses”*<sup>73</sup>, it is evident how Venice, considered as an open air museum by the administrators of its politics, is intended as an artifact that has to be reassembled like a warehouse, through the *“process of zoning depending on the purchasing power of its consumers”*.<sup>74</sup> Therefore the area of Piazza San Marco and Rialto have been transformed into shopping

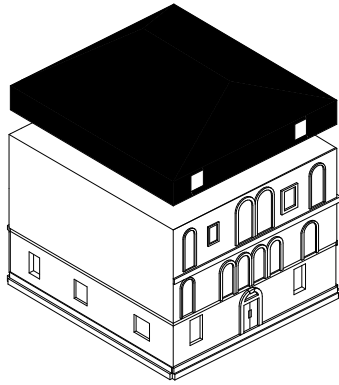
district connected by shopping routes; the island of the lagoon have been converted into luxurious hotels; the area of the Arsenale and the several monuments around the city occupied by the Biennale and sold to the intellectual tourism. Outside of this areas the second tier tourism has marked out the built environment, leaving the residual parts of the city to the remaining citizens.<sup>75</sup>

72 Romano D., 1987, *Patricians and Popolani. The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, p.81

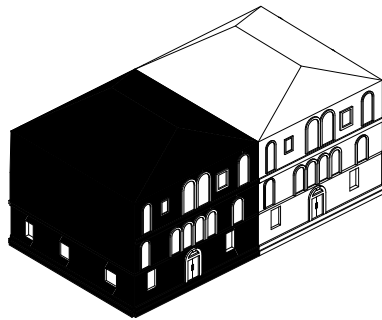
73 Wrenn M., 1993, *Andy Warhol in his own words*, London, Omnibus Press

74 Somma P., 2019, *Venezia: da città a marchio di successo* in *Il Diritto alla Città Storica. Atti del convegno*, Roma, Associazione Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, p.54

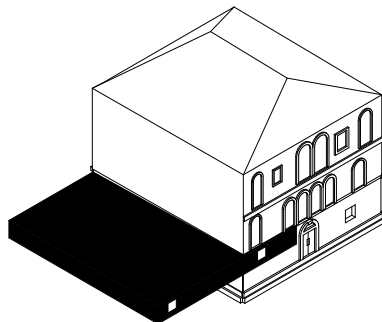
75 *ibidem*, p.54



Stacking



Doubling



Inserting



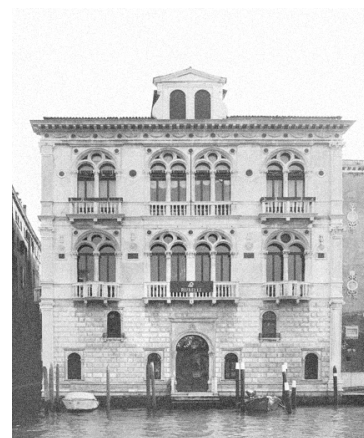


Fig. 33. Palaces' modifications

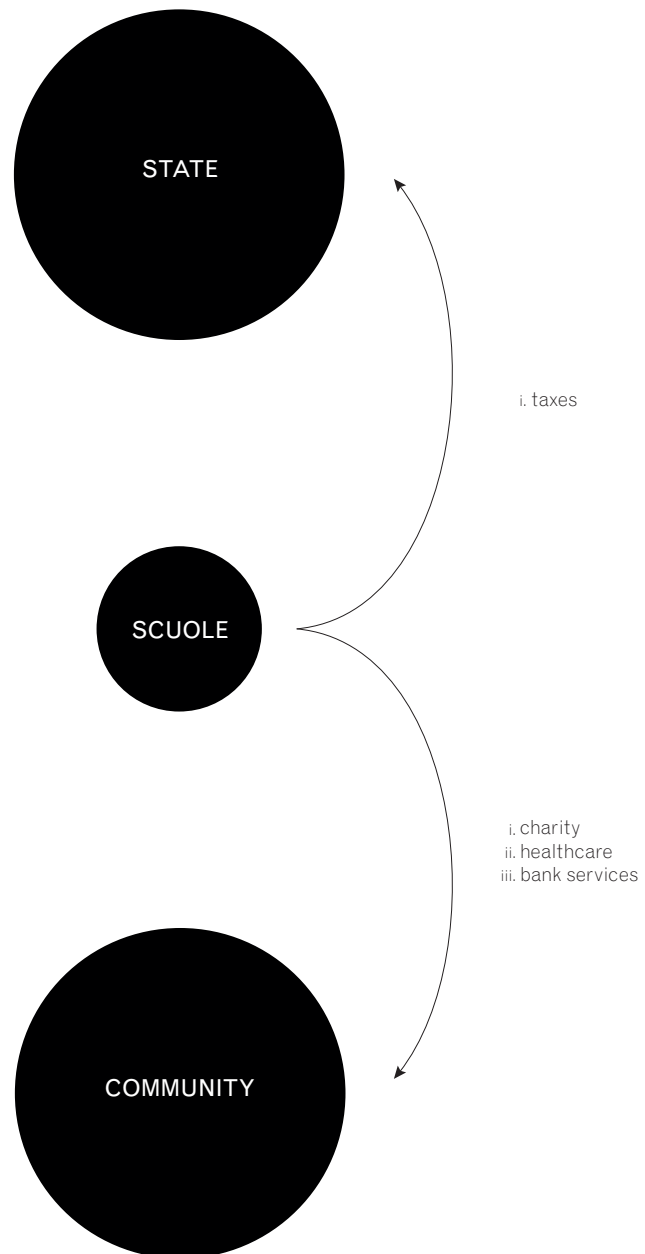


Fig. 34. Role of Scuole in the Venetian Society



Fig. 35. Churches' location in Venice





Fig. 36. Palaces' location in Venice



Fig. 37. Scuole's location in Venice





## A Venetian dichotomy

The understanding of the logics that has governed the development and the current situation of Venice has allowed me to comprehend both the signature traits of the city and the productive terms through which Venice is affecting its own present condition. The product of this condition is the high specialisation of the city in the touristic sector, directed entirely towards those visitors who experience Venice for short, ephemeral period of time. Among the spectrum of the different actors of the Venetian society we can indeed notice how there is a combination between people with different time of permanence on the island: residents, students, workers, tourists, day trippers. Among them there is a significant misbalance: the 57% of the visitors are just day trippers, consuming the city daily; tourists are following, together with the students; controversially, residents are the minority on the island. Therefore, the majority of the Venetian society is composed by fleeting characters, people on the move that temporary stay on the island.

But if it is common knowledge that Venice is flooded by tourists every day, it is worth to ask ourselves why such a phenomena happens: why the majority of tourists are just consuming the city daily ?

There are three main reason I have identified that bring tourists to experience the historical centre for short time period.

The first one is related with the costs: nowadays staying in the historical centre has become too expensive, an elitarian status, a consequence of the fame of Venice and the high numbers of visitors who wants to visit it. For the same owners of accomodations in Venice it is more convenient to rent them and move to the mainland, where the costs of living are more affordable. It is important to notice how the same act of renting is directed and preferred towards those categories that are planning short stays in Venice: it creates more income and it is easier to manage.

The second one is the commercial image of Venice, the general idea that visitors have about the city: most of their time is spent in the historical centre of Venice, both because

of its celebrated beauty and the visitors' unawareness of the extension of what the city really is: the Metropolitan City of Venice comprehend in fact the entire lagoon, with its different islands, and the mainland that overlook it. Such ignorance is translated into short permanence stays in Venice, long enough to admire the most picturesque spots, frame them in a picture and leave.

The third reason relates with services: Venice does not offer anymore the services needed for a long stay in the island. This condition is a direct reflection on the transformation of the built environment depending on the misbalance in the percentage of people who experience Venice for short period of time. The entire historical centre is in fact overlavished by touristic activities that took the place of the public services necessary to the sustenance of every city, brought to the outside of the main island. Every building has been emptied from its original function in order not only to increase their value and allure but especially to be transformed into a service for the fleeting visitors of Venice. This is the reason why what Venice has created is a dichotomy: to the beautiful historical centre with underdeveloped services is opposed the ugly outskirt with potential services. It is in fact outside the historical centre that the infrastructure of the city are located, all those services that allow people to have a long permanence in a fixed place; simultaneously, people are not interested in taking advantages of these services, because located in anonymous cities, too close to the island of Venice for developing their own character. In fact, the entire mainland is composed by cities that have no character on their own, but being identified as outskirt of the centre of Venice. The character of the island is so strong that influence the same singularities of the other urban agglomeration of the Metropolitan City of Venice. Cities as Marghera or Mestre are nothing else than the outskirt of Venice. They are not indipendent cities recognisable through their own individualities, but the anonymous expansion of Venice on the mainland. This is the reason why the



Venetian problem does not strictly relate to the historical centre, but it has repercussions on the entire area that surrounding it, that feels the influence of the historical Venice. The dichotomy between the historical centre of Venice and its outskirts is so strong that the city lacks that buffer zone where, in other urban agglomerations, the life of their inhabitants take place, where the majority of houses and common activities are located. Between the city centre, representative place of the city, and the outskirt, where services and industries are located, it develops the residential and more characteristic part of the city, the area in which the culture of a place can be experienced. Because of the lagoon, that transitional area could not be developed in Venice, enhancing the opposition between the two facets of the city, the representative and the industrial one, each one ruling out the other.

Therefore, by looking outside the historical centre of Venice, is it possible nowadays to intervene in underdeveloped and abandoned industrial area of the Metropolitan City of Venice in order to create an intermediate zone that could host both the reinterpreted aesthetics of Venice and its industrial character, therefore could offer services for a long permanence? Is it possible to regenerate the area on the mainland in order to make it attractive not only for its new aesthetically experience but especially for the creation of social conditions through which developing a new collective on the island ? It is precisely in this buffer zone that architecture can develop a strategy to affect the permanence of stay of the Venetians visitors, by transforming an area that can contain these both characters: the industrial feature and the morphological characteristics of Venice.



Fig. 38. Venetian Dichotomy



## Conclusion: Moderation as the new Radicalism

The analysis of the predominant role that overtourism has assumed in the global economy and especially its declination in the Venetian context has established the basis of my research, the topic to tackle. The study of the city through the *Venetian technicities* has defined the problem in architectural terms, by the exploration of Venice through its essential urban elements.

The combination of these two paths will constitute the base for developing a frame of intervention in respect of the Venetian character, the foundation of an architectural proposal with the aim of tackling the problematic situation created by the misbalance in the spectrum of people's different gradient of permanence in Venice. It has to be underline that the project won't aim to solve the problem in its totality, but positively affect the present situation by influencing the permanence of people on the island. Along with this argumentation are the one of releasing the touristic pressure on the main island and let visitors discover other parts of Venice, that simultaneously are unknown to the majority of people and represent other facets of the city.

Therefore the conclusions of this research pose the questions for the following design: how can we affect the short permanence of the people in Venice via architectural intervention? Is it possible nowadays to intervene in underdeveloped and abandoned industrial area of the Metropolitan City of Venice in order to create an intermediate zone that could host both the reinterpreted aesthetical experience of Venice and its industrial character, therefore could offer services for a long permanence?

From these question, it derives a logical shift of interest in the selection of the project area,

a project that has to reinvigorate the areas of the Metropolitan City of Venice that amounts to the industrial outskirt of Venice, by offering to people conditions that are not present in the lagoon so far, that intermediate zone that in Venice could not develop due to the division of the water: an area in which both the industrial character and the aesthetical experience of Venice can coexist.

It is important to underline that the latter does not contemplate an aesthetical reproduction of the image of Venice, but an abstraction of its main features repoposed in modern times through the process of *actualisation*:

"Actualisation occurs in time and with time. Time is real, a dynamic and perpetually activated flow."<sup>76</sup>

Therefore, the reproduction of the Venice's romantic idea is not the content of the project, following the demistification introduced by Le Corbusier with the project for the Venetian hospital<sup>77</sup>. In this regards, punctual is the claim of the poet Italo Calvino :

"considering in fact the city merely for its artistic and historical allure means to grasp just one of its aspects, prestigious but limited. The power with which Venice affects the imagination is the one of a living archetype which overlooks the utopia."<sup>78</sup>

Following these reasonings, the approach through which is important to develop the design is the one of *moderation*, considered in this frame as a new form of radicalism. The term *moderation* reflects the idea of affecting the present condition of Venice by facing its problematic character, not by imposing an external scenario impertinent

<sup>76</sup> Kwinter S., 2002, *Architectures of Time*, Cambridge Massachussets, MIT Press, p. 10

<sup>77</sup> cfr. Busetto G., 2014, *Etica, creatività, città. Giuseppe Mazzariol e l'idea di Venezia*, Milano, Silvana Editoriale and Fondazione Querini Stampalia, p.60

<sup>78</sup> Calvino I., Barenghi M. (curated by), 1995, *Saggi 1945 - 1985*, Descrizioni e reportage, Milano

to the Venetian reality but by working with the existing condition offered by the site. This claim reflects the methodology that is going to be used, because the one that I hold to be true and the most appropriate to the Venetian frame. I strongly believe that it is only through a moderate project that the short permanence of visitors can be tackled; by starting from the existing situation and affecting its transformation it will be possible to have a stronger impact than to adopt a radical approach. The current condition of the city of Venice is marked out by two opposite sides: the industrial and the picturesque, independent realities divided by water. Two radical situations facing each other. The development of a radical project won't do anything else than enhance this dichotomy, leaving both the historical centre and the outskirts of Venice without any added value.

*Moderation as the new radicalism:* this is the statement upon which the project will be developed.





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