

René Soleti

Designing with void.**The structuring role of the wide open space**

Abstract

Starting from the void as an opportunity to redefine urban balances in social and environmental terms. Resume the idea of the "city by parts", the role of the dispositio, the stripping of the urban pattern (as an increase in those "urban voids", indispensable material for the genesis of the architectural project). The cases treated in this paper propose a well defined city, which works through urban islands and recognizable complex architectural units. They build an identity dictated by regulatory criteria, based on distances and isolations. The construction or transformation of urban part can be thought as an organized and coordinated manageable system, capable of responding more effectively to pandemic emergencies.

Keywords

Architectural void — City defined — Separation — Wide-open space — Gianugo Polesello

The "Polesellian" Venetian projects are associated by the almost paradigmatic exceptionality related to the experimental place: the city of Venice. They are easily comparable and interpretable as variations of a single huge project. The final goal is to reinterpret the city as architecture and formal identity parts that must be recognizable. This method starts by reading the urban characters and processes, in order to search the meanings of those iconic forms, which are often coming from the history.

This architectural approach is part of venetian school and it is not a simple rhetorical exercise, but it would be a platform built in order to discuss through the project (this is perhaps one of the most important aspects) «so that the reference is not just a figurative register, but a kind of way to interpret it» (Canella 1969).

Novissime is one of the first competition projects launched in Venice in 1964, for a new island of Tronchetto. The project was signed by G. Samonà, C. Dardi, V. Pastor, G. Polesello, L. Semerani, G. Tamaro, ER Trincanato. It was mentioned for its "explosive" and innovative use and acquisition in terms of geography and urban morphology of the structure, oriented towards the *architectural void*¹ as an essential factor of "the urban character".

Novissime, is based on compositional operations requiring subtraction and addition of parts of the city, in order to define a peculiar urban character. A distinctive basic lexicon that crosses the boundaries of the Venetian school by spreading a scientific approach to architecture starting from a theory of the city by parts (Aymonino 1977).

This study highlights the growth and the development of the settlement through the *architectural void* that is an essential factor of the project. In particular, the selective use of history and fragments taken as tools of continuity and

Fig. 1

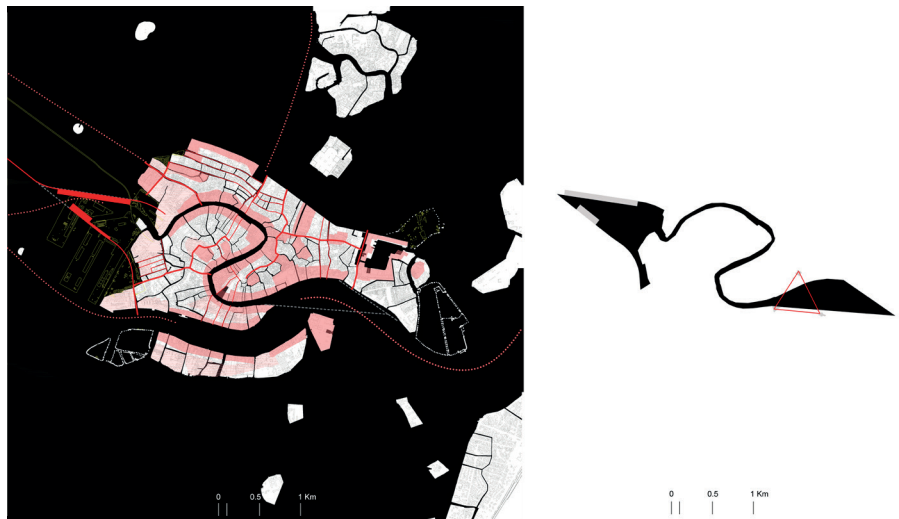
Model of “International Competition for the drafting of the urban planivolumetric plan for the New Sacca del Tronchetto”, Novissime 1964.

Projects Archive of the Iuav University of Venice, Egle Renata Trincanato fund.

**Fig. 2**

Summary plan of the interventions and figure of the great void of the Grand Canal, Novissime 1964.

Reproduction of the author.



transformation respectively is now essential. This procedure is almost summarized in the definition of the principle of “creative conservation” (Samonà 1964), theory used in the description of the first *Novissime* project, «a new interpretation of the city for compact nuclei with conservative voids» (Ibidem). The principle of “creative conservation”, is an idea that interprets the historical urban form of Venice and reinterprets it with a personal itinerary of reflections, that collects categories and rules that keep the parts and sub- parts of the city together, reversing the idea of conservation and transformation from full to empty as well.

First in *Novissime* (Fig.02) and then in *Venice port-city* (Fig.03), *Fondamenta Nove* (Fig.04 - 05) and *Venice West*, it becomes simple to identify the Venice represented by Benedetto Bordone², that is a Venice and the constellation of smaller islands, enclosed within a populated perimeter that corresponds to the modern belt of the land near the coast. In this representation, the *architectural void* (Samonà 1964) condition becomes central with respect to the historical city. In this condition, it is possible to read an operation to preserve the voids, understood as *architectural voids*, as monuments and historical parts in the urban composition that mainly refers to the idea of separation and the struc-



Fig. 3
Termination of the great void
of the Grand Canal, *Novissime*
1964.
Reproduction of the author.



Fig. 4
The thickness of the limit, Venice
city-port 1973.
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turing role of the open space, of the void.

The fragment, the space “between”, a continuous search of a conclusion, awaiting an identity. These ideas are involved in the project as in a game of lying positions that, according to the general principle that governs spatial relationships, they determine a heterogeneous, but formally finished, overall system.

The compositive principle foresees to use an architectural linguistic database, not just in its first elements but also in the figures and in the most complex groupings.

Such approach contemplates a dual dimension that highlights a relationship between the plan and the project, in which elements are in tension through a position relationship and this aspect becomes the main part of the “poliselian architectures”.

The architectural composition turns into a logical moment, recovering the original meaning of “composition” as a combination of elements in a structured ensemble.

In several cases studied, it is evident the presence of geometric shapes, clearly visible, according to their simplicity, regularity and reiteration.

These simple figures are repeated, they connect the fragments in a system of rules and structuring relationships, that determine the final shape.

Construction and relationship, are categories in which the *architectural void* arises through ways and rules, according with the organized space is charged with a specific meaning, with the arrangement of certain elements within it and the relationships that they establish from a distance. *References from a distance* that bring the space back to a global unity: the poliselian Venice. These references are modulated and ordered by the project through the use of axes as ideal vectors along which the elements are organized.

In fact, the *dispositio* as a compositional practice, enhances the importance of the tension between the elements according to a defined project design, that configures a space not limited by elements themselves.

In the urban design, the *architectural void* represents an organising element, an instrument of measurement and dynamic balance. It is the space between the buildings, a place for the relationship between different parts. The void obtains a central role so strong, to leave the singularities of the architectural

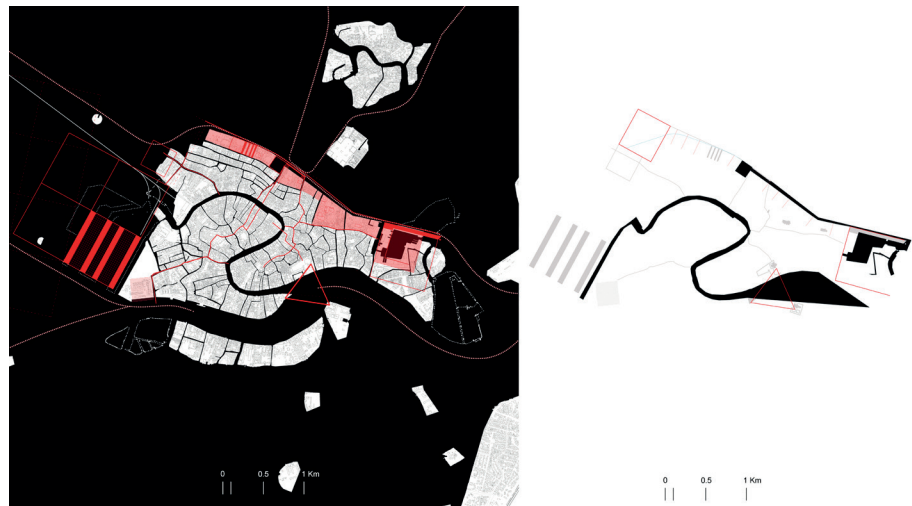


Fig. 5

Geometries and shapes of the void, *Fondamenta Nove* 1973. Reproduction of the author.

objects themselves in background, in favor of a unitary system that combine it with the full.

A space intended as a populated “place” with a significant value of forms and catalyst of the main urban identities.

In addition to the compositional aspect, it is worth to notice the collective dimension of the city, the human space organized by discontinuous fields of multiple social and cultural relationships (Secchi 2013, p.5). The growing gap – highlighted not only by B. Secchi and Z. Bauman (2015) – between prosperity and poverty, increases the current democratic and social crisis by contradicting the capitalistic idea according to, in a long term, the economic development would ensure similar levels of wealth all over the world (Secchi 2013, p. 5). With the first pandemic emergency, the economic and social structure ran into a crisis, bringing the urban issue in high priority, in particular the issue related to space and its physical structure³. The organization of work and life has been drastically revolutionized respect to how it works, the relationships between wealthy class and poorer class, how it appear. These aspects generate debates and experiments (many times in opposition to one another) on policies and projects about the city. The separation, the idea of distinction and exclusion of some high-risk areas, is the most widespread practice to contain the epidemic, but which give a temporary answer unable to keep alive the idea of a city democratically organized as we know today.

Looking to the health crisis diffusion and its consequences, it is possible to understand how the urban reference model must accommodate ecological, technological and social criteria in a vision where the public actor should be able to guarantee organization and coordination of the urban transformation in order to respond efficiently to the emergencies. «We must to insist on creating only the building, spaces and objects that serve as a more fitting background to those conditions we now recognize more clearly as fundamental for society and human life» (Chipperfield 2020). This would require a public approach which should recover a detailed planification of urban and territorial transformations with a single actor, thus not compatible with an individual liberal approach. Architecture and economy require a new season of revitalization under controlled management where the final goal must be the common good and the civil commitment for future challenges (Sennet 2020). Re-thinking architecture as a civil commitment could rise again this discipline to a leading position in a new policy, where the urban form is not imposed by simple speculative approaches, but becomes again to a much broader meaning⁴. Make experiments starting from the void, as an opportunity

that requires to leave the building settlement speculation in favor of the structuring role of the empty space as a common good of public importance.

Notes

¹ Giuseppe Samonà's theory of the finiteness of the ancient city and the theory of *architectural voids* (Samonà 1964).

² B. Bordone, Italian cartographer author of the representation *View of Venice* from the *Venice Island* of 1528.

³ C. Schmitt's view that there are no political ideas that are not referable to a space, as there are no spatial principles to which political ideas do not correspond, is taken up again.

⁴ «Return to reflect on a spatial structure of the city that develops the demand for the plus grand nombre, not to rely on questions from social and technological niches». (Secchi 2013, p. 71-78).

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