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Venise, sujet ou objet de mémoire

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In this article, I wish to expose, through the project of a new orientation and urban signals system for Venice, how strong the necessity is of imagining the city - imagining Venice, in the present case.

Venice is one of the few cities, such as Athens, Rome, New York or Paris, whose mention refers to several meanings, which are like so many worlds, deeply marked by history, politics, culture and art. Venice is a place for utopia and myth. It is an ideal place to study the impact on culture of the social, political and spatial organisation of the city. Or its impact on the relation between man and technique in the urban environment. It is a realm, historically and symbolically, for political imagination. It is a place where the effects of time, emotions, and feelings are directly perceptible. It is a place for cultural exchange and also intercultural tension.

Venice combines many different characteristics, which make it a special city.

The geographical situation of Venice is unique. It is the only island city which is protected by the lagoon, a genuine water wall. That lagoon, of course, is the result of natural evolution. The *Hinterland* rivers have been washing into the sea the sediment collected along their course. The sea and the contrary winds have retained part of the alluvial deposits near the land. This caused sand barriers, dunes - the *lidi* -, which separate large expanses of water from the open sea. The lagoon, however, also results from human action, skilful maintenance over centuries, and even rerouting of the course of rivers.

One of the distinctive characteristics of Venice is precisely that determination to master the natural environment. Progressively, in the course of time, the Venetians were able to create the institutional tools to control and, whenever needed, to alter the natural environment. Despite the assertions of some nostalgic ecologists, those tools were not the consequence of a mythical realisation that nature is fragile and must be protected. They were the practical application of a well-defined social, economic and political plan. 'The daily and century long efforts to subject private and individual interests to the common good of the water and the city, and also to involve them and make them cooperate in that common good' is the expression of 'the master course of the success of Venice', according to the historian Piero Bevilacqua, and that is what makes the special uniqueness of Venice¹.

There is more, however, to the uniqueness of Venice. Without going into full details, it may be observed that Venice is generally referred to with various superlatives, which Venice certainly deserves. Venice the Most Serene; capital city of the Adriatic, 'one of the most precious jewels of our common human heritage'². Sergio Bettini, historian of art and architecture, in *Venezia, nascita di una città* states, for example, that 'Venice may be considered the most city of all cities', the 'place which has been most "constructed" by mankind'³. Those superlatives reverberate at various levels: the physical level, as well as the level of social organisation and the metaphysical level.

First, at the physical level, one may notice that those superlatives are not excessive. In Venice, the ground itself has been constructed by human effort. The soil needed to be fastened and anchored before it was possible to build houses. The sludgy bed of the islands had to be reinforced by wooden piles. The banks had to be raised and consolidated against the tide. Canals had to be led into diversion or division. Construction materials and techniques had to be adopted to take into account the load capacity of the soil.

¹ Piero Bevilacqua, *Venise et l'eau*, Paris 1996, p. 14, personal translation

² René Maheu, 'Appeal of 2nd December 1966 by the Director-General of UNESCO', on the internet site: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/admin/ev.php?URL_ID=3527&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201&reload=1101998558

³ Sergio Bettini, *Venezia, nascita di una città*, Milano 1988, p. 30 (pers. transl.)

At the cultural and social level, it may be said that Venice has had an urban dimension from the very beginning. The Venetian populations which inhabited the small islands of the lagoon were very attached to their Roman origin. In the Fifth Century, when they took refuge on those lands, still under water, they were fleeing not only from the physical domination of Attila and the Huns - and of the Lombard, a hundred years later - but also from the cultural conditioning imposed on them. They wanted to remain free citizens and refused to become 'partially civilized Nomads'⁴. For the Venetians who participated in the construction of the city, the latter, from its inception, bore *signs* which had 'the historical depth of urban culture'⁵. And that was so even though the city seemed to take form following a process of accumulation, of *collage*, so to speak, where it is difficult to see the 'totality of intention' which will later characterise her.

It is worthwhile to recall that the term "city" does not apply only to an urban "construction". The city is a social, political and legal, as well as religious order. It is a particular structure of the way of *living together* and even of the way of *being in the world* of humankind. A structure corresponding to the way of thought and action, of expression and communication and eventually, of shaping the world. That is, a dimension to which even the most secret structures of the mind refer, art being not the least of them⁶.

At the metaphysical level, Venice can rightly be considered the 'place which has been most "constructed" by mankind'⁷, if we consider her as a symbolic, mythological construction. All cities were built through a succession of social, symbolic and mythological representations, which envelop their history in facts full of more or less imaginary images. It is the case, for example, of the story of the foundation of the cities, halfway between history and mythology. While telling the origins of the building of a given city, it is characteristic for those stories to appear a long time after the foundation of the city. If however, we admit the idea that the organisation of space reflects the organisation of society, such stories can give us a view of the *basic image*, which the human group concerned has about its place of residence.

The story of the foundation of Venice probably appeared in the Ninth Century, at a time when the city put herself under the protection and authority of Saint Mark Evangelist, to show her will to remain neutral with regard to the Byzantine Empire and the Empire of Charles the Great (Charlemagne) and their respective Churches. According to the story, the city was founded on 25 April 421, precisely on the Saint's day. All the elements of a myth of origin can be found in that story.

The *Civitas Rivoalti* sprung up on 25 April. She is not inserted into the terrestrial time but into the time of Providence. Indeed, 25 April is the date when Christ was conceived, according to Marin Sanudo Junior himself, the same day when God created Adam, and when Christ delivered humankind through his death on the cross. One should consider that Venice is identified not only with Venus, but also with the Virgin, divine, impregnable and unique, without walls, like Plato's utopia, shielded from the modern times and exempted from the sin both of Cain and of Romulus⁸.

To refer to the terms of the philosopher Massimo Cacciari, Mayor of the city from 1994 to 2000, the history of Venice easily tends toward "mythologisation", and that makes its knowledge rather difficult. The reason is that the official history of the city is based on a mentality which is not dialectic. Venice seems to get rid, over time, of all alternatives of the type: conservative/progressive, yes/no, right/left, closed/open, on which the modern paradigms are founded. Moreover, as a whole, the mythical representations which appear over the centuries, are functionally useful. Thus, the foundation

⁴ *ibid.*, p.30

⁵ *ibid.*, p.30

⁶ *ibid.*, p.34

⁷ *ibid.*, p.30

⁸ Massimo Cacciari, Francesco Dal Co, Manfredo Tafuri, 'Il mito di Venezia', in *Rassegna Rivista Trimestriale*, Milano 1985, p.7 (pers. transl.)

story mentioned above supports a policy of balanced distance from Rome and from Byzantium. The claim of an original independence is the basis of a steadfast mythical representation, ascribing the institution, in the year 697, of the doge and his function, to a democratic ideal, given as *natural* to the Venetians. That, therefore, shows the perennial autonomy and independence of the Republic of Venice. Indeed, Paoluccio Anafesto is the first to accede to the function of doge in the year 697. However, he was appointed *dux* of the populations of the lagoon by the representative of the Byzantine Empire in Ravenna. That conferred a degree of autonomy to the island communities but certainly not full independence.

Examples of the mythical constructs of the history of Venice are countless. My research in progress is a study of precisely that aspect. I tackle Venice as a city which bears mythical representations, deeply rooted in the Western collective imagination. My research on Venice aims at the study, in a sociological perspective, of the mechanisms through which mythical representations emerge and are reinforced in time. What are the mechanisms of a mythological construction ? How have they been refined over time, through the different successive societies which have shaped civilisation ? Are there really mechanisms to guarantee the proper selection for collective memory, for common heritage, for general History ? Those are some of the questions underlying my current research.

Occupying the urban space of the historical centre of the city

Venice could be said to be a real *mass of memories*, material as well as immaterial, which designate her as one of the capitals of world tourism. Venice is, indeed, the chosen destination, each year, of nearly 14 million tourists from all origins. Such a massive frequenting inevitably brings about an over-occupation of the urban space of Venice. The entanglement of the canals and alleys must absorb the flow on the water (vaporetti, taxis, *caorline*, gondolas and other small boats), and particularly the flow of pedestrians. There might be up to 400'000 feet to walk the Venetian pavement in a singular day (all feet joined), in a city which counts a resident population of hardly 64'000 souls. That touristic attendance sometimes causes monstrous pedestrian traffic jams, for example during Carnival⁹.

To face up to that massive occupation of the public space of Venice, the city authorities need to show a practical imagination so as to control the traffic of tourists, while guaranteeing the practicability of everyday life for the local inhabitants. In other words, it is a matter of sharing the public space among its various users and to organise the course of them all - like a *nervous impulse* in the urban cephalic structure¹⁰. This implies, for example, that a directional signal system must be set up to regulate the traffic. The two flows to be guided do not move in the same rhythm. The tourist flow follows the mode of holidays, moving slowly, stopping at shop windows, watching with a slightly jealous delight the gondolas gliding on the water of the canals. The flow of inhabitants on the other hand, aims at efficiency. That flow needs courses unencumbered by the first flow, which might slow it down. Besides, if you talk to a Venetian, he will explain that the alleys of Venice could be compared to the streets of other cities. Forgetful that our sidewalks are often just as obstructed as the Venetian *calli*, he will inevitably ask you: - *Would it occur to you to stop in mid-traffic and examine in detail the contents of an attractive shop window ?...*

The circulation and use of the public space are covered by two different regulations: the *Regolamento Comunale per la segnaletica direzionale in centro storico* (Municipal Rules to regulate the Directional Signs in the Historical Centre of the City) of 11 July 1996¹¹ and the *Regolamento tecnico per l'uso degli spazi pubblici urbani del Comune di Venezia* (Technical Regulation to organise

⁹ Francesco Perego et Francesco Sbeti, *Vivere a Venezia: vita quotidiana e qualità della vita*, Venice 1998

¹⁰ You will be able to observe the cephalic structure of Venice by looking at a map of the city.

¹¹ Please refer to: <http://www.comune.venezia.it/comune/lex/regolamenti/regsegi.asp?ipo=&C=> (as of 16.4.03)

the Use of the Urban Public Space of the Municipality of Venice) of 17 July 2003¹². Those regulations mainly consist of directions as to the physical characteristics and positioning of the directional signposts, illustrated with practical examples. Yellow signs with black inscriptions are to indicate the main courses tourists should follow to reach the places of “traditional pleasure” (the Piazza San Marco, the Rialto, the Fondamente Nuove, etc.). Or they should show the direction in which to find the head offices of the most important cultural institutions primarily intended for the foreign visitors (such as the Accademia, the Guggenheim Museum, the Palazzo Grassi, etc.). Signs are also to indicate the head offices of the public services intended for the local population: the municipal services, the courts, the hospitals (Venice, one should recall, is the county town of the Veneto). The latter signs are intended to be unobtrusive, white with black inscriptions, of spare installation, to avoid the risk of overburdening the urban space.

Those rules and regulations are utterly precise - even to a millimetre - for the directional signs. They do not however deal with the management of the flows as such. The subject matter of both regulations is the occupation of public space, the banning of the congestion in any way whatsoever, of that space, but there is not the slightest mention of a principle of management of the flows in the historical centre. Would it be, perhaps, because that matter might be more closely related to a Strategic Plan for the city, than to municipal rules? I have checked on this and referred to the very recent *Piano Strategico di Venezia*, dated February 2004. It seems that the management of the flows, however, is not of its concern either.

[The Strategic Plan] differs from urban planning because it is oriented towards entirely socio-economic actions rather than to the regulation of the use of the land. It also differs from short-term and long-term classical planning since it is not limited to adapting expectations to trends considered normal, but is aimed at new opportunities and new objectives¹³.

There is no official policy in Venice to manage the occupation of space, despite various statements of intention. The absence of such policy may be explained by the number and efficiency of the pressure groups. The gondoliers, taxi drivers, hotelkeepers, (licensed) street vendors, tradesmen, craftsmen, various political groupings, etc., are sure to turn up whenever a political or administrative intention comes out, which might ever so slightly modify their immediate interests.

‘viverevenezia3_in the labyrinth’

Given the obstruction of the alleys during the touristic period and the increasing dissatisfaction of the resident population, the authorities were forced to become aware of the obsolete situation of the directional sign system. A quick analysis was enough to show that the system was confusing and insufficient, and at times contradictory, in one word inconsistent. To try and put right that situation, the Venice Local Authority Department of Culture, the IUAV Venice University Institute of Architecture and the Consorzio Venezia Nuova¹⁴, have decided to start a reflection on the subject of a new orientation and urban signals system, to answer appropriately and coherently to the particularities of the city. It resulted in the convening of an international workshop, *viverevenezia³_in the labyrinth*, which involved six groups of students and their professors, from the Werkplaats Typografie of Arnhem, the Hochschule für Künste (University of the Arts) of Bremen, the Ecole Cantonale d’Art of Lausanne (Lausanne Cantonal School of Art), and the Faculty of Art and Design of the IUAV.

¹² Please refer to: http://www.comune.venezia.it/direzioni/territorio/spazi_publici/ (12.3.03)

¹³ Roberto D’Agostino, *Presentazione del Piano Strategico di Venezia*, Venice 2004, p.IV (pers. transl.).

Please refer to: http://www.comune.venezia.it/pianostrategico/documenti/docPS_10.04..pdf (3.4.04)

¹⁴ The Consorzio Venezia Nuova is comprised of all the large public as well as private national corporations, and the local cooperatives and firms. It is the sole concessionary of the Italian Ministry of Public Works. It is in charge of the feasibility studies of the projects to save Venice and her lagoon, of the impact studies of such projects on the environment, and, as the case may be, of the realisation of those projects.

In the terms of Armando Peres, the Venice City Councillor for Culture, Tourism and Communication, the aim was to 'make the "labyrinth" inviting'. That expression, in his view, best expressed the difficulties of understanding the city of Venice, and her delicate physical and social balance.

The city council's aims and priorities had to include a plan to make movement within the city easier and more enjoyable, at the same time providing the tourist with useful stimuli for a closer, more intelligent approach to the city's rich artistic and cultural heritage. There may be many ways of achieving this intention, but all require that urban mobility and locating the places to visit be rationally facilitated¹⁵.

The first priority appeared to be the management of the flows of tourists, for a freer flow of the circulation, concealed under the guise of an encouragement or even an education for *intelligent* tourism. A freer flow for more consumption of Venice: not a rationalisation of the movements related with tourism - not a facilitated mobility and easier use of the city by the Venetians. No wonder the workshop was intended for students of design and graphic arts - and not urbanism.

The intention to guide the flow of tourists appears also in the projects presented in the frame of *viverevenezia³ in the labyrinth*, and it must be emphasised, that it does in no way tarnish the originality of some of the projects. At the time of the International Conference *Imagining the City*, end of July, beginning August 2004, only a few sketching out of projects had been presented to the press and were available for the general public. Since that time, six proposals have been selected and have been exhibited at the Palazzo Fortuny in Venice, from 3 September to 3 October 2004.

The Werkplaats Typografie of Arnhem has proposed *The Sirens of Venice*, an elaborate talking infrastructure giving voice to an information network, an audio signage system accessed by telephone. The system is called *Salvatore*, in reference to the multilingual monk in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. It would connect various services, such as a speaking clock, a weather report, a transport schedule, a touristic audio guide, etc. The system would be made available for mobile phones, or accessed in special listening booths, and the wi-fi signals would give the alarm in case of high tide, throughout Venice.

The project presented by the *Intermedia Team* from the University of the Arts Bremen is called *The Gomitolo Point to Point way-finding system*, and refers to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. The directional system takes up the intuitive displacements of the Venetians.

The '*campo in campo*' (square to square) system creates a complete web or network that encompasses the whole of Venice. 'The *campi* and *punti* are like pearls threaded on a string.'¹⁶ In practice, that string, called *Filo*, would be constituted of coloured ceramic bricks and tiles that would show the routes of the Filo and lead to the Navigation Points: 3-D area maps, similar to the *pozzi*, the traditional Venetian wells.

The ECAL (the Lausanne Cantonal School of Art), has invented a numbering of the small islands which form Venice. *Common Places and Places in Common* intends to make 'the existing network of *sestieri* (districts) denser by superimposing a complementary rather than competitive micro-network of islands, that seems likely to constitute the "natural sign" residents and visitors can agree on.'¹⁷ The Swiss students did not present a pragmatic proposal: they took advantage of the invitation to the workshop to make an analysis of the requirements of urban signage, through the particular case study of Venice.

The IUAV presented three different projects, by three different teams. The first project also refers to the Minotaur. *In the labyrinth Ariadne's subtle thread* is a very realistic project of new urban

15 Armando Peres, 'Making the "labyrinth" inviting', in *viverevenezia³ in the labyrinth*, edited by Mauro Marzo, Venice 2004, p.9 (pers. transl.)

¹⁶ *viverevenezia³ in the labyrinth*, edited by Mauro Marzo, Venice 2004, p.85

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.112

signage, focusing on some constituent elements of the city's urban fabric: the system of accesses to the city; the bridge system; and the *campi* system. These three systems are the logical base of the graphic orientation and localisations proposed. Several supports were selected: traditional physical supports (direction signs and horizontal, oriented maps of the *panorama* type), to which the use of the GPRS telecommunication technology would be added.

In the project of the second group, we again find a proposal to renew the urban sign system of Venice, using new fonts for the writing, choosing new colours for the directional signs, and new signposts on the *campi*. This project leans on the necessity of an enhanced visibility of the directional sign system, but there is neither special reflection on the meaning of such a sign system, nor any real semantic change with respect to the existing situation.

The work of the third group, *I'm lost, it's ok*, rests on emotions and feelings experienced when one is lost. For the conception of their project, the students of that group handed out a questionnaire to tourists, residents and pendular workers (the pendular-workers coming to Venice are more than 30'000 each day). The study of the questionnaires showed that, for 90 % of the persons interviewed, getting lost is nice. 42 % of the participants in the poll make use of the signs for their orientation, 18% follow the flow of people, 15% the sounds, 16% signs and graffiti, and 9% colours, yellow being clearly preferred¹⁸. The project presented two distinct elements: on the one hand, there was a proposal to renew the existing yellow signposts by adding an indication of the situation taken from the photoplan of Venice¹⁹. On the other hand, the project presented a more innovative proposal using the results of the poll: a real *kit for getting lost*. Small yellow movable signage, intended for shopkeepers, which they could easily hang up in their shop window, deciding which direction they preferred, whether right or wrong²⁰.

Some of the proposals, or a combination of some of them, are to be tested *in situ* in Winter 2005. That may result in a change of the urban sign system in the historical centre in a near future. But for this to happen, elicited oppositions should not be too vehement.

Imagining or consuming the city

I have presented those various projects, not in order to discuss their aesthetic qualities or to challenge their practical efficiency, but rather to show that, for any project in urbanism, even if it seems a mere adjustment of an existing situation, the reference to a definition of the city is required, and an in-depth reflection on the essence of the city is implied.

The participants in the reflection launched by *viverevenezia3_in the labyrinth*, that is to say the students, their professors and the organisers who had to evaluate their work, were confronted, just as we in this International Conference, with the necessity to imagine Venice, a city, the City. They had to place Venice in history and in the evolution of time. They had to decide what they wanted to show of that city, they had to reconstruct an *idea* of Venice, since 'a city also lives in its interpretations, its images and its myths'²¹. That reflection is a complex one, necessarily influenced by ordinary stereotypes on culture, on common heritage, on who has access to culture or heritage, on tourism, on the city. Of course, that reflection is subject, here, to common sense and cliché, as conveyed in literature, in the cinema, in advertising and in the imagery linked with the trade of leisure activities, particularly tourism.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.136

¹⁹ The photoplan of Venice, *Venezia forma urbis*, has been carried out in 1982 under the direction of Edoardo Salzano, professor of urbanism at the IUAV. The photographs and the completing map are available in French under the title *Venise, portrait d'une ville. Atlas aérien*, at the Éditions Gallimard, Paris 1990. An English translation is to be found at the end of the book. The original, in Italian, has been published in 1989 by Marsilio Editori in Venice.

²⁰ The shopkeepers are very often requested by the tourists to give indications and directions and they are very obliging, according to a satisfaction study by the Tourist Office of Venice.

²¹ Massimo Cacciari, 'Venezia possibile', in *Micromega n° 1*, Rome 1989, p.218 (pers. transl.)

Mapping out an itinerary, as implied in a new sign system of Venice, is tantamount to imagining the city with respect to its past, its present and its future. Inevitably, that reflection would result in the necessary decision between an economic Venice, a touristic product to be exploited to the best of its possible returns; or else, a more utopian Venice, which might become the future 'capital of immateriality'²², as a fashionable slogan has it. That may well be, but surely such reflections are exactly of the kind which may expose the municipal authorities to the stand, often very passionate, taken by the pressure groups directly or indirectly linked with tourism and its economic fallout.

At present, the choice made by the municipal authorities - their non-choice, according to their detractors - is to preserve the celebrity of Venice whilst showing concern for the management of the flows. It is the 'narrow track' that the city is 'constrained to follow'²³. As I explained earlier, however, the management of the flows does not lean on any principle, nor on any precise political idea about the occupation of the urban space. The concern of the municipal authorities is limited to finding immediate practical solutions allowing the control of the pedestrian traffic which obstructs definite parts of the city and which thus prevents the optimal *consumption* of the urban space.

Thus, the authorities show their will to extend the consumption of the urban space - which should not remain limited to the areas of San Marco and of Rialto -, and to spread and disperse the tourists over the whole of the historical centre. The application of that will to extend the *consumable space* may be observed in the pamphlet distributed by the Azienda di Promozione Turistica (the Office for the Promotion of Tourism). In the form of mini-guides put at the disposal of the visitors free of charge, and which propose itineraries for the discovery of Venice '*Oltre a San Marco*', beyond Saint-Mark.

If that will to extend the *consumed space* shown by the authorities of the city is realised, it will create problems for the inhabitants of Venice who have been constrained since many years to negotiate a new use of their public and private space, precisely because of the (over)presence of the tourists. The Venetians are shut away and locked in their private spaces - apart but not always protected from the gaze of voyeur tourists. I want to mention here the example of a Venetian friend who recently became a happy father, and who told me how he had been upset by the tourists who entered the hospital of Venice to visit it, just like any other cultural place of the city. Or the example of that other friend who also lives in the historical centre and who said how irritated he was to be photographed regularly, when entering or leaving his home, as if he were some rare bird or a native of a dying out species.

To escape such behaviour and to move more easily and efficiently, the inhabitants of Venice were constrained to imagine a new use of the space of their city. They have readjusted their daily routes to hitherto parallel itineraries. The main itineraries were henceforth dedicated to the tourists. The resident population was obliged to reappropriate the space, to proceed to a real semantic shift for the ways which up to then had been minor and became their main itineraries²⁴. More simply said, they left the streets following the bottoms of the palaces of the Grand Canal to follow anonymous alleys, far from the offices, the banks, and the accesses to public transportation and which sometimes force them to insane detours.

To displace the touristic flow toward itineraries still relatively preserved from pedestrian over-occupation will certainly provoke new tensions and reinforce an already strong anti-tourist feeling. It is hard to believe that the authorities will be able to avoid the potential conflicts merely by issuing rules of *savoir vivre* for the visitors. (I refer to a leaflet published by the Municipality, under the heading: *Ten (!) good advices for intelligent tourism* (as opposed to what kind of tourism ?). The leaflet is very largely distributed in several languages, English, French, German and Italian. The

²² Giuseppe De Rita, *Una città speciale, rapporto su Venezia*, Venice 1992 (pers. transl.)

²³ Antonio Preiti, *Le nuove domande del turismo nell'area veneziana*, Venice 1994, p.18 (pers. transl.).

Please refer to: http://www.fondazioneveneziana2000.org/biblioteca/show_book_frameset.asp?ID=24&CAP=a (11.04.2003)

²⁴ Gabriele Zanetto, personal communication, April 2004, referring to one of his (unpublished) studies of the 80's on the perception of space in Venice by her inhabitants.

advice extend from 'Show respect for the city by helping us keep it clean' to 'Never stop on bridges'. The leaflet is posted at every *vaporetti* (water bus) stop, at the reception of most hotels and it is distributed by the Tourist Office of Venice, together with the touristic maps. But don't you worry: you won't incur no sanction, not even administrative, if you do not observe those few rules. At the very worst, an intruder is likely to appear on your photograph - perhaps my friend Edoardo who boasts about being the most photographed person in Venice since he decided to stop stopping to wait for the click of the camera a long time ago. Or you might be the target for short vindictive expressions in Venetian dialect. Or else, you might be discreetly elbowed, as if unintentionally. In short, nothing very serious !

Conclusion

The particular structure of Venice does not allow the multiplication of itineraries to go from one spot to another of the city. It is up to the municipal authorities to show a practical imagination to manage the flows of tourists and the movements of the citizens. They have to find solutions allowing all to live out their city, at the risk for Venice to lose its very substance, that is to say its population, and to become a kind of artistic, cultural and historical casket, splendidly adorned - and empty.

For any solution to be truly efficient, I think it is necessary and inevitable that it leans on a genuine idea of the city which should go beyond the mere management of traffic. In order, indeed, to manage the occupation of the urban space, whether in the form of consumption, of use, or of a more or less equitable sharing out, it will not suffice to apply partial solutions of the control of the flows such as new itineraries or new signs. The efficient occupation of urban space requires a deeper reflection on the meaning and finality of the space itself, supporting the past, present and future history.

Some persons turn their attention to Venice and to the possible solutions so that Venice may remain a mythical reference of our Western culture and also a lively contemporary city with its population living a normal everyday life, that is to say a 'home for society' to use an expression which I like²⁵. I am convinced that they cannot avoid facing the fundamental questions on our relations with history, or with the access to culture, or with our understanding of a common heritage or of land property, and so forth. In short, they will have to face the meaning of the City. Venice combines remarkably her various characteristics, uniting them into a structure, so unique that it incites all those who expatiate upon Venice to deal with all the aspects related to the city, without any possible omission. This also includes very plainly the death of Venice, the death of the city. In other words, Venice is a 'city where myths become reality'²⁶, a city where experience and utopia are united inseparably and coherently, in form and in function, even in the 'minor singular objects'²⁷, a city which brings together all the characteristics of the other cities. And that is the reason why Venice is a privileged place for the study of the cultural impact on the social, political and spatial organisation of the city, and particularly for the study of the successive social representations of the city throughout history. According to the historians who devoted their studies to Venice, she is the place of emergence of a form of proto-capitalism, of the appearance of the spirit of the *self-made man*, of a State within a type of liberal interventionism and so forth. Venice is a 'factory of mythical representations', a 'factory of symbols', a 'leading firm in the construction of symbols'²⁸. That is because Venice has been able, in the course of History, to be a city of her time.

Venice, not a city among cities, but the City embracing all cities.

It is not surprising that in Venice more than anywhere else, imagination and the city are intimately united: 'Venice is nothing but a huge fantastic brain [...] the relation of Venice and her people is nothing else but the relation between brain and psyche !'²⁹

²⁵ Edoardo Salzano, *Urbanistica e società opulenta*, Bari 1969 (pers. transl.)

²⁶ Frederic Lane, *Venise, une République Maritime*, Paris 1985, p.135 (pers. transl.)

²⁷ Sergio Bettini, *Venezia, nascita di una città*, Milano 1988, p.40 (pers. transl.)

²⁸ Alberto Antonio Semi, *Venezia in fumo: 1797 - 1997*, Milano 1996 (pers. transl.)

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.32

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