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On the voices of Venice: a question of memories, specters, and space

Das vozes de Veneza: uma questão de memórias, espectros e espaço

De las voces de Venecia: una cuestión de memorias, espectros y espacio

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Abstract

This article prioritizes the concept of public space as a virtual domain rather than focusing on its physical attributes. Through Peter Eisenman's Cannaregio Town Square (1978), the text seeks to question the notion of "space," using a project that engages with *absences* rather than *presences* within the urban context of Venice. Just as the elements utilized are not presented in their physical state, the project itself is not intended to be constructed. In this sense, it can be understood as an architecture that originates from a virtual context and returns to it, positioning drawing as the tool capable of manipulating these absent elements (sometimes referred to as mnemonic or spectral

throughout the article) and of *realizing* it as architecture on its own right. To do so, the text is divided into three parts: first, it addresses the circumstances surrounding the project's development; then, it explores its conceptual contributions; and finally, it discusses its formulation as space. The aim is to critically examine the creation of this "space," framing it as an urban memorial, even if not a tangible one.

Keywords: Virtual space. Memory. Specter. Cannaregio Town Square. Peter Eisenman

Resumo

Este artigo prioriza a concepção de espaço público pelo seu domínio virtual em vez de suas qualificações físicas. Através do *Cannaregio Town Square* (1978), de Peter Eisenman, o texto visa questionar a noção de "espaço", tomando como objeto um projeto que dialoga com as *ausências*, em detrimento das *presenças* do contexto urbano de Veneza. Assim como os elementos empregados não se apresentam dispostos em sua condição física, o projeto também não tem por objetivo ser construído. Deste modo, pode ser compreendido como uma arquitetura que parte de um contexto virtual e volta-se para ele, apontando o desenho como esta ferramenta capaz de manipular tais elementos ausentes (por vezes chamados de mnemônicos ou espectrais no decorrer do artigo) e também de *realizá-lo* enquanto a arquitetura propriamente dita. Para tanto, o texto subdivide-se em três momentos, partindo das circunstâncias de elaboração do projeto, depois debatendo seus aportes conceituais e encerrando na sua discussão enquanto formulação de espaço. Pretende-se, assim, problematizar sobre a criação deste "espaço", colocando-o na qualidade de memorial urbano, ainda que não concreto.

Palavras-chave: Espaço virtual. Memória. Espectro. Cannaregio Town Square. Peter Eisenman

Resumen

Este artículo prioriza la concepción del espacio público a través de su dominio virtual más que de sus calificaciones físicas. A través de *Cannaregio Town Square* (1978), de Peter Eisenman, el texto pretende cuestionar la noción de "espacio", tomando como objeto un proyecto que dialoga con las *ausencias*, en detrimento de las *presencias* en el contexto urbano de Venecia. Así como los elementos utilizados no están dispuestos en su estado físico, el proyecto tampoco pretende ser construido. De este modo, puede entenderse como una arquitectura que parte de un contexto virtual y gira hacia él, apuntando al diseño como esa herramienta capaz de manipular dichos elementos faltantes (a veces llamados mnemotécnicos o espectrales a lo largo del artículo) y también de llevarlos como la propria arquitectura. Para ello, el texto se subdivide en tres momentos, partiendo de las circunstancias de elaboración del proyecto, luego debatiendo sus aportes conceptuales y finalizando con su discusión como formulación

del espacio. El objetivo es, por tanto, discutir la creación de este "espacio", situándolo como un memorial urbano, aunque no concreto.

Palabras clave: Espacio virtual. Memoria. Espectro. Cannaregio Town Square. Peter Eisenman

Introduction

In an effort to move beyond the physical constraints of the notion of space, this article examines Peter Eisenman's project for Cannaregio Town Square (1978) as an architecture capable of turning into figures certain memories of Venice. The square does not necessarily engage with the physical components of the city, nor it is intended to be constructed. Instead, Venice's memory serves as the project's primary determinant, shaping Eisenman's interventions across the Cannaregio *sestiere*.[1] By engaging predominantly with elements absent from the urban fabric, drawing emerges as the key tool for accessing and manipulating the city's past, an "artificial excavation," as it would later be described in 1984 (Bédard, 1994a, p. 9), following the development of other projects addressing the unique pasts of 11 different cities.

This study is based on the concepts of memory (heavily employed in this project) and drawing (the medium through which it is manifested in architecture) to explore issues related to the virtual realm and their intersection with the conception of space. Can Cannaregio Town Square be considered a producer of space, despite its lack of "physicality"? This question forms the core of the inquiry, supported by insights from various authors referenced throughout the article. The discussion situates the Cannaregio project within its context, examines the spectral nature of some of its elements, and ultimately interrogates the experimental foundation of the project as a generator of space.

The Cannaregio Town Square

In Peter Eisenman's professional trajectory, the Cannaregio Town Square marks a pivotal moment of transition: the incorporation of the urban context. This project initiates a shift in the scale of his work, expanding beyond the isolated architectural object. It does so not only by being a project for a "town square," as we will see, but more importantly by absorbing elements of Venice's urban fabric, both in its formal and mnemonic dimensions. This shift represents a groundbreaking development in Eisenman's portfolio, especially when contrasted with his earlier series of numbered houses. Since the 1960s, these houses were

1 We use the original term *sestiere* to refer to the divisions comparable to the six districts or historic neighborhoods of the main islands that make up Venice. This form of partitioning is also common in two other Italian cities, Genoa and Rapallo.

centered on experimenting with the manipulation of architectural language and its inherent elements.[2] These numbered houses formed part of Eisenman's project experiments while he was a professor at Princeton, shortly after completing his doctorate at Cambridge, England, in 1963. Until Cannaregio Town Square, his projects were primarily situated within an academic framework, supported by his teaching activities and focused on exploring alternative ways of conceptualizing and engaging with the architectural object.

Rafael Moneo (2008, p. 178) regards the Cannaregio proposal as a "turning point" in Eisenman's body of work. In his book *Inquietud teórica y estrategia proyectual en la obra de ocho arquitectos contemporáneos* (translated into English as *Theorical anxiety and design strategies in the work of eight contemporary architects*), published in 2008, Moneo analyzes this project alongside others by Eisenman, highlighting a significant shift. This shift lies in Eisenman's incorporation of elements previously disregarded in his formal architectural designs, such as considerations of site—previously overlooked—as well as function, user, and material. As Moneo puts it: "Eisenman, who in the 1970s despised architecture contaminated by the outside world [...]" (Moneo, 2008, p. 159, our translation), because he prioritized form as a means to achieve what he sought during his experimentation with houses: the purity of architecture, the formation of an autonomous discipline, "[...] free[ing] it from the obligations imposed by function, place, technique and program" (Moneo, 2008, p. 139, our translation). This conception of the object transformed the architectural subject into a didactic substance, emphasizing its formal design process over the final result, which appeared merely because of the manipulation of its elemental units. These manipulations followed the logic of language, where transformations are guided by the tool of the diagram. The diagram "establishes the rules" and records the transformations applied to the object that assumes form throughout iterative stages of repetition, subtraction, rotation, and other operations performed on its components—stripped of symbolic implications.

In Eisenman's earlier houses, the diagram served as the mechanism that revealed the process of formal generation—documenting *its own history* through the operations performed. As the architect himself describes House VI, it is not "[...] an object in the traditional sense – that is, *the result* of a process – but more accurately *a record* of a process" (Eisenman, 1975b, our emphasis). However, in Cannaregio, it is the *history of the site* that begins to manifest in the forms. In other words, external stimuli are incorporated into the project's conception, functioning as operative mechanisms, as we will explore throughout the article. The term "diagrams of interiority" is how Moneo (2008, p. 178) refers to the formal self-centeredness of Eisenman's early works, citing *Diagram Diaries* (1999). These diagrams prioritized internal architectural concerns. In contrast, "diagrams of exteriority" (Moneo, 2008, p. 178) mean a later shift, introducing external concepts into the design process, such as the incorporation of the site.

2 Between the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, Eisenman's research focused on the process of generating architectural form, conceived as a system and achieved through the complex manipulation of its elemental units. These units were treated as thin vertical and planar layers that delineate space (Eisenman, 1975a, p. 15), applied in his sequence of numbered houses, from House I to House VIII. The projects named House X and House 11a were based on a different premise for formal development, emphasizing the decomposition of form. No records exist for what would have been House IX.

According to Moneo, the role of the diagram in Eisenman's projects evolves in response to the expansion of his professional activity (such as participation in high-profile competitions), the complexity of the program, and the scale of the work: "In my opinion, the stronger the external pressures, such as the concepts of program and scale, the more necessary it is to use a concept such as the diagram" (Moneo, 2008, p. 180, our translation). The diagram ensures the arbitrariness of form, particularly in projects intended for construction that must meet specific programmatic demands. An example cited by Moneo is the Biocenter, a 1987 project for J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt. By that time, Eisenman had shifted his focus from sketching on the blackboard to working entirely on the drafting table, in partnership with Jaquelin Robertson.

The Cannaregio Town Square remains rooted in Eisenman's academic period, during which he directed the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS). Eisenman stepped down from the Institute in 1982, shortly after founding his office in partnership with Robertson in 1980. Consequently, the Cannaregio project also stems from disciplinary inquiries, shaped by practical-theoretical experiments. This proposal was presented at the *Seminario Internazionale: progetti per Cannaregio Ovest 1978* (*International Seminar: Projects for Cannaregio West 1978*), the first of many studies focused on Cannaregio. Its goal was to explore possibilities for urban revitalization in the historic center of Cannaregio—the northernmost *sestiere* of Venice—primarily through housing development, as explained by Jean-François Bédard (1994b, p. 54). The seminar, organized by the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (IUAV, University Institute of Architecture of Venice) under the direction of Francesco Dal Co, featured prominent figures from the international architectural critique and education scene. In addition to Eisenman, invited participants included John Hejduk, Rafael Moneo, Raimund Abraham, and Bernhard Hoesli. Professors from the IUAV also contributed, such as Carlo Aymonino, Valeriano Pastor, Gianugo Polesello, Luciano Semerani, and Aldo Rossi. Together, the ten proposals formed "ten images for Venice," the title of the accompanying exhibition also curated by Dal Co: *10 immagini per Venezia*.

As its name suggests, the seminar focused on the western portion of Cannaregio (highlighted in Figure 1), near the entrance that serves as the only rail connection between Venice's mainland and insular sections, leading to Santa Lucia Station, which is also adjacent to the study area. This region was in a state of degradation, primarily due to the industrial activities spurred by the introduction of the railway in the 19th century, combined with the establishment of a slaughterhouse that became the city's main meat distributor. In 1962, after the slaughterhouse had been decommissioned, the city council allocated its former site for the construction of the Venice Hospital, assigning the project to Le Corbusier (Figure 2). Even after the death of the modernist master in 1965, the project continued under the direction of his collaborator, Guillermo Jullian de la Fuente (Colonnese, 2021). However, it was never completed and was officially suspended in 1971.

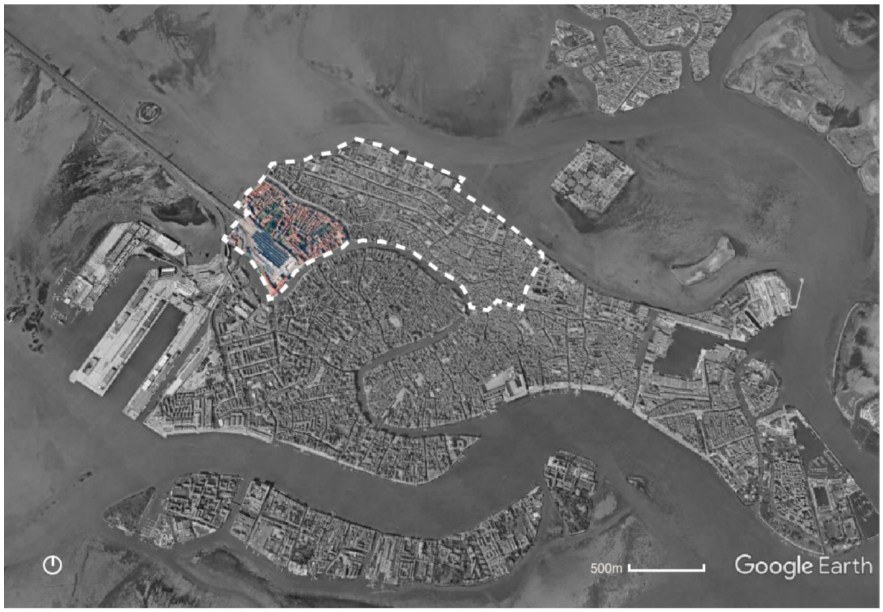

Figure 1: Satellite Image of the island of Venice, with the sestiere *of Cannaregio outlined in a white dashed line. Its western portion is highlighted in color, contrasting with the rest of the region, shown in black and white. Source: Edited by us using a Google Earth image, 2022.*

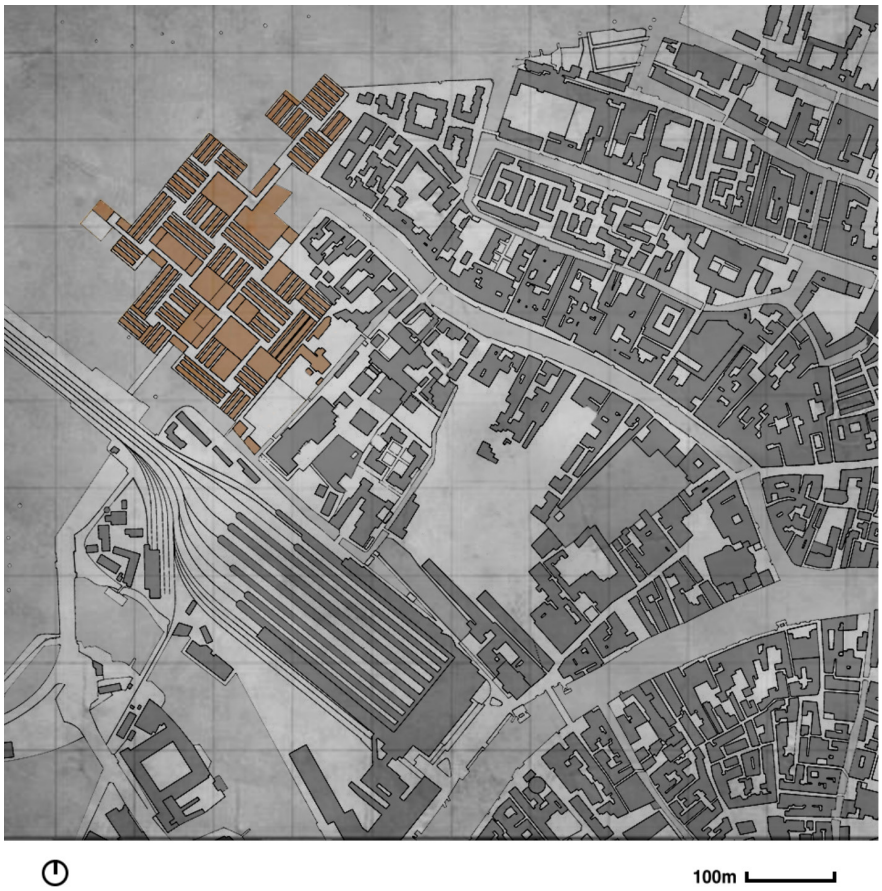

Figure 2: Map of the intervention area, with the Venice Hospital project by Le Corbusier highlighted. Source: Created by us based on an image of the project available from https://eisenmanarchitects.com/Cannaregio-Town-Square-1978, 2024.

The hospital and the slaughterhouse (implicitly) are key elements in Eisenman's proposal. Their absence in the urban fabric becomes the primary aspect of Venice that the project address — not only because they are two layers of the city's history but also because they serve as nodes, weaving the other interventions into a dialogue with the surrounding elements.

The relationship with Le Corbusier's hospital is more explicit. Eisenman adopts its structural grid and extends it across the western portion of Cannaregio, stitching together as a series of "voids" — "holes in the ground" (Eisenman, 1980, p. 9) which he places along the axes of the grid, contrasting with Venice's irregular urban fabric. The seminar's objective centered on proposing housing, and the hospital project occupied the site of the former slaughterhouse. Thus, these voids are subverted from their conventional role as housing foundations and reimagined as graves: "These holes are potential sites for future houses or potential sites for future graves. They embody the emptiness of rationality" (Eisenman, 1980, p. 9). The "emptiness of rationality" can be interpreted as marking the absence of Le Corbusier's project, transforming a symbol of healing into markers of death.

Another important component is Venice's own form and the buildings that define it. In dialogue with these, blocks are introduced that appear to belong to the existing context. However, "Upon close examination these objects reveal that they contain nothing – they are solid, lifeless blocks which seem to have been formerly attached to the context" (Eisenman, 1980, p. 9). Simultaneously, another group of objects is added—this time conforming to the context created by Eisenman and situated within the voids (Figure 3). These objects, consequently, relate to the hospital and the slaughterhouse as well. They are identical in form but presented in three different (and undefined) scales, with the smallest being slightly below human scale. The objects are nested within one another: "the first object is a replica of the exterior of the second object. Is it a house, or a tomb for itself, or for a model of itself, or for a real object?" (Eisenman, 1980, p. 9). In other words, the larger objects contain their smaller versions, with the smallest being unable to accommodate a user, rendering occupation, function, or even naming impossible. "The fact of the change in name, house to mausoleum, changes the reality of the first object from model to house" (Eisenman, 1980, p. 9). Because no standard scale is applied, Eisenman (1980, p. 9) asks us: "which one is the real object?".

Figure 3: Map of the intervention area, highlighting the Venice Hospital, the voids derived from its grid, and the objects interacting with them (in red). Source: Created by us based on an image of the project available from https://eisenmanarchitects.com/Cannaregio-Town-Square-1978, 2024.

In addition to the previously mentioned elements, Eisenman takes another local reference into the form of his project. This time, it is not a structure that once existed or was planned for Venice—such as a building or a promise of one (in the case of Le Corbusier's hospital)—but rather an *event*: the imprisonment of the philosopher and alchemist Giordano Bruno. He was captured in Venice by the Inquisition for questioning geocentric theories and the dictates of the Catholic Church. This event is revealed through the tracing of a diagonal across the square, which gradually takes shape through the voids, contextual blocks, and undefined objects (Figure 4). The diagonal acts as a cut across the surface of the ground: "the earth's surface is peeled back slightly, as if the skin of some unknown body, suggesting that there is another level, some 'inside' which cannot forever be suppressed by or submerged under the rationality of an axis" (Eisenman, 1980, p. 9). This event, obscured in Venice's history, stems from Giordano Bruno's invitation to the city by a nobleman, Giovanni Mocenigo, who sought lessons in memorization. Following a denunciation, The polymath was captured and handed over to the Holy Office. He was burned in 1600 at the stake in a public square

in Rome, a martyrdom for his defense of Copernican ideas that challenged the Church's belief in a geocentric universe. However, his betrayal occurred in Venice, a fact that remains uncelebrated. In addition to his skills in memorization, Giordano Bruno was also known for his work as an alchemist. One of the models for the Cannaregio project—its only way of materialization beyond the drawings—is painted gold, referencing Venice's trade and Bruno's alchemical pursuits. Meanwhile, the undefined objects positioned within the voids are painted Venetian red, symbolizing the philosopher's martyrdom (Eisenman, 1980).

Figure 4: Map of the intervention area, highlighting the Venice Hospital, the voids derived from its grid, the objects interacting with them (in red), and the diagonal cutting across the site. Source: Created by us based on an image of the project available from https://eisenmanarchitects.com/Cannaregio-Town-Square-1978, 2024.

A virtual Venice

Eisenman's approach to the urban context of Venice makes it clear that his interest does not lie in the city's *apparent reality*. Rather, it is the absent elements of the city that truly take center stage in his project. His work engages more closely with

what we might call "urban memories" than with physical determinants or even a specific imaginary of the city. For instance, the Venice Hospital plays a significant role in constructing this imaginary. Fabio Colonnese, a researcher at the Sapienza Università di Roma, highlights the importance of Le Corbusier's unbuilt hospital project: "Despite this 'interruption' (or perhaps precisely because of it), the project became one of the icons of contemporary architecture" (Colonnese, 2021, p. 497). Its existence endures as a kind of memory—never materialized, yet capable of influencing generations. This influence extends not only to architects, such as Francesco Venezia and Steven Holl (Colonnese, 2021), but also to fictional narratives. One example is *Celestia* (2021), a graphic novel about a dystopian, fictional city inspired by Venice, which breathes "life" into shelved projects by renowned architects.

To some extent, the role played by the hospital within the context of Venice resembles Aldo Rossi's concept of the *analogous city*. This idea was incorporated into the second edition of his book *L'architettura della città* (*The architecture of the city*, as translated into English), originally published in 1966, with a second edition in 1970. In essence, an analogous city consists of a mental or graphic creation of a recognizable landscape associated with a particular city, despite its nonexistence. This landscape is not necessarily real but believable, as it presents an architectural synthesis that captures the essence of the forms that persist within the urban fabric and encapsulates the uniqueness of a given urban form. In other words, it is the ability to identify a city through architectural elements, even if those elements are not actually part of its physical landscape. Rossi (1984, p. 166) describes it as "[...] a compositional procedure that is based on certain fundamental artifacts in the urban reality around which other artifacts are constituted within the framework of an analogous system."

Rossi uses the city of Venice itself as an example, referencing Canaletto's *Capriccio* (1745), a painting in which the artist places three of Palladio's monuments along the banks of the Grand Canal. The scene is easily recognizable as a Venetian landscape. However, none of these monuments are *really* located in Venice. They are, instead, associated with its history: the bridge is merely a project, while the *Palazzo Chiericati* and the Basilica of Vicenza are in Vicenza. "The geographical transposition of the monuments within the painting constitutes a city that we recognize, even though it is a place of purely architectural references", as Rossi (1984, p. 166) explains. This would create an *analogous* Venice, as the buildings are tied to its history and recognizable as such, regardless of their physical or geographical *reality*.

In the book, Rossi employs the concept of the *analogous city* to reinforce his argument about the uniqueness and interrelationship between architectural objects and the formation of cities. He focuses on analyzing forms through a systematic study of their elements, treating the city as a structural system. In this systematization of the city, akin to the approaches of structuralist thinkers, *types* function as elemental units—akin to "ideas" in the Platonic sense—that are

intrinsic to the form of buildings. These logical principles precede architectural form itself. Among these types, monuments play a central role in shaping the city, as they serve as records, *permanences* through time and laden with symbolic functions. Monuments articulate the formal dynamics of the urban environment, embedding a city's history and memory within its fabric. The importance of analogy lies precisely in the use of symbolism embedded in monuments. They act as reaffirmations of pre-existing cultural codes associated with the objects, shaping a social imaginary through collections of images—even if these images are not rooted in reality.

We do not intend to frame Eisenman's use of Le Corbusier's hospital as the construction of an analogous Venice, as it does not necessarily produce an *image*. Instead, we interpret its application as a (re)construction of the *imaginary* surrounding Venice—a latent memory of an 'unrealized' artifact. The hospital establishes a dynamic interplay with other elements that are "brought to the surface" to create this *another* Venice. As Eisenman (2006, p. 76) states: "Rather than trying to reproduce or simulate an existing Venice whose authenticity cannot be replicated, the project constructs another, fictitious Venice."

The reference to the capture of Giordano Bruno is evoked in a similar way: as a memory—perhaps better described as a repression—revealed by the diagonal that cuts across the Earth's surface. In psychoanalytic terms, "repression" can be briefly defined as the act of archiving a memory in an inaccessible area of the human psychic apparatus. This concept goes beyond mere forgetting. Marco Antônio Coutinho Jorge, a professor at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), offers a more precise description relevant to our discussion, distinguishing between "repression" and "forgetting":

> In forgetting, the door between the conscious and the pre-conscious, much like a room connected to an antechamber, remains open and can be crossed at any moment. In repression, however, the passage from the conscious to the unconscious is hermetically sealed, and the key is not in the lock, it must be sought! (Jorge, 2010, p. 42).

Thus, the hospital and the capture of Giordano Bruno can be regarded as repressed elements of a kind of memory of Venice. As we have seen, according to Eisenman (2006), the project does not aim to reproduce an existing Venice but rather to construct a fictitious one, which we might also describe as *virtual*. This characterization stems from both the elements used in the project's conception (absent in their physical form) and the way architecture itself becomes *real*—through drawings and models.

K. Michael Hays's comments contribute to understanding Eisenman's projects through the lens of virtuality. In *Architecture's Desire*, published in 2010, Hays

emphasizes the importance of the hospital's symbolic order within the Venetian context, a significance amplified by its absence:

> In the absence of a *real* place to begin, Eisenman reproduces the missing original in hallucinated form, not as an object of architectural desire but as a setting for the emplacement of a Symbolic order that is also a realm of absence and lack (Hays, 2010, p. 63, emphasis from the author).

This involves the appropriation of the Symbolic order of the Venice Hospital, highlighting its presence in Cannaregio precisely through its physical absence. It appears in the project through an almost spectral relationship with the site, much like the manifestation of Giordano Bruno's imprisonment.

Three decades after Eisenman's project, Giorgio Agamben also reflects on the spectral condition of Venice. In the essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living Among Specters", published in the book *Nudità* (translated into English as *Nudities*), Agamben (2010) revisits a 1993 lecture by Manfredo Tafuri. In it, the architect criticized the mega-events planned for the City of Water. Tafuri (2020) portrays Venice as a cadaverous city caught in the accelerated pace of modernity while attempting to survive—and being exploited—within its unique temporality: "[...] Venice, even in its cadaverous state today, poses an unbearable challenge to the modern world" (Tafuri, 2020, p. 143, our translation). This provocation stems from its attempt to resist the pressures of contemporary acceleration, mummified in its own temporality.

Unlike the cadaverous condition perceived by Tafuri, Agamben envisions Venice as a specter—not merely a dead, motionless entity without agency. He captures this notion succinctly: "Such is the nature of the specter: a dead being that suddenly appears, preferably during the night hours, groans and gives signs, sometimes even speaks, though not always intelligibly" (Agamben, 2010, p. 52, our translation). In contrast to the cadaver, whose body remains in a passive state, the specter can manifest its presence while being absent and establishing a form of communication.

The communicability of the specter is thus evident, as it continues to whisper through the marks it leaves behind—the permanences through the urban artifacts, as Rossi (1984) might describe them—whether in the form of Venice's street grid or in the repressed traces recently brought to light by interventions such as Eisenman's.

The specters evoked in the Cannaregio Town Square also possess a voice: The hospital serves as a critique of the architectural functionalist approach—ironically manifesting as an *absence*, embodying an unbuilt rationalist project by one of modern architecture's leading figures, and transforming it into graves. Its appearance diagnoses the morbidity of the city (and of functionalism, once again)

through lifeless contextual objects (empty and lifeless) and the undefined-scale elements. Without an appropriate scale, what uses can these objects have? They serve as tombs for themselves. Moreover, the project unearths buried memories, such as the betrayal of Giordano Bruno, bringing to the surface the recollection of a vile act. This is echoed in the model: Venice is not made of gold alone, for its history is also marked in red—by blood. It is a voice that recounts what was silenced. After all, for Agamben, this is the essence of a specter. "What is a specter made of?", he asks. It is made "of signs, or rather, more precisely, of marks, i.e. of those signs, ciphered names or monograms that time scrawls on things" (Agamben, 2010, p. 52, our translation).

More powerful than the whispers of everyday Venice described by Agamben (2010, p. 52, our translation), where "[...] along the deserted slabs, the Giudecca, as if babbling, drags and leaves dead algae mixed with plastic bottles on the foundations" the Cannaregio square shouts its critique. Not through concrete or physical alterations to the landscape, but by preserving its spectral condition through the virtuality of *drawing*. Ultimately, it is from Le Corbusier's drawings that the other cries resonate, and it is through Eisenman's drawings that they manifest, because

> [...] the project is undestood to be a drawning as such and not a drawn representation of a hypothetical building construction; it is the *drawing* of Le Corbusier's hospital in Cannagerio that is the site of Eisenman's project (Hays, 2010, p. 63, emphasis from the author).

Considerations on space [?]

After discussing the virtual nature of the Cannaregio project, in which Eisenman manages to embody certain absent elements of Venice through architecture, we pose the following question: Can the Cannaregio Town Square be considered a space?

Our inquiry is inspired by questions previously raised by Bernard Tschumi in his provocative 1975 essay with a fittingly suggestive title, "Questions of space":

> 1.6 Is architecture the concept of space, the space, and the definition of space?
>
> 1.61 If the concept of space is not a space, is the materialization of the concept of a space a space?
>
> 1.611 Is conceptual space then the space of which material is the concept?

> 1.612 Incidentally, is the experience of the materialization of the concept of space the experience of space?
>
> (Tschumi, 1996, p. 55)

In his text, Tschumi formulates 65 questions, organized into up to four levels, about the nature of space. The provocation begins with an ostensibly simple and unassuming question: "1.0 Is space a material thing in which all material things are to be located?" (Tschumi, 1996, p. 53). As the sequence unfolds, the questions evolve to incorporate ontological, social, and even political themes, expanding the reflection on space and architecture's role in this process. The questions are concise and synthetically phrased, capable of generating a logical chain that disrupts traditional considerations about architecture and the production of space. In light of the themes raised by the Cannaregio project, one particular question stands out: "3.5 In any case, does the concept of space note and denote all possible spaces, both real and virtual?" (Tschumi, 1996, p. 61). Building on the nature of question 3.5, if we consider that the Cannaregio Town Square is *realized* through its drawings and models—tools traditionally used to *represent* a building intended for construction—its existence *as architecture* is fully achieved through the drawing itself. By extension, does this architecture also constitute space? Certainly, it does not do so in a conventional sense.

As we have seen, the Cannaregio square plays a role in fostering discussion around themes deeply tied to Venice, bringing to the surface what we are calling memories. These are conveyed, in a sense, through the spectral condition associated with Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital project. It is spectral because, even in Eisenman's design, the hospital manifests itself through absence. It serves as a matrix for positioning the graves, contextual objects, and undefined elements, as well as providing the axes for the diagonal that recalls the capture of Giordano Bruno.

Of the four elements mentioned, the groups of objects seem to challenge our understanding of "reality," given how their indeterminate scale affects our ability to name them and, consequently, to interact with them as either real objects or representations. In the context of this project, what is considered real is not strictly tied to physical materiality. The first and last components, however, belong to the realm of virtuality in their relationship with what could be described as Venice's "psychic apparatus." Both played an active role in "constructing" its past: the hospital, in its state of expectation or even *fantasy*, which still inhabits the imagination of many—particularly architects—and the imprisonment of Giordano Bruno, an event that actually occurred. This imprisonment is a vexing memory, one that cannot be denied, no matter how much it is repressed or forgotten. It is also the role of monuments to bear the marks of a people's suffering, serving as reminders of pain. On the opposite side of the Cannaregio Canal lie the origins of Venice's first ghettos, though this is not mentioned in Eisenman's texts. Not all memories are of triumphs or joy. This is precisely what Eisenman's project encapsulates: the remembrance of a less-than-glorious past. While the seminar's

goal was to rethink the *sestiere* in a state of degradation, what the Cannaregio Town Square does is highlight the very conditions of that degradation.

Judging by the reflections of Tafuri and Agamben, nearly two and three decades after the Cannaregio proposal, respectively, Venice transitioned from a state of degradation to one of morbidity, confining itself to its own temporality. As early as 1978, Eisenman had already turned Cannaregio into a cemetery for the doctrines of architecture—or at least for the disembodied functionalism of Le Corbusier's hospital. However, burial is an act of respect, or even of love. "What do we owe to the dead?" Agamben (2010, p. 53, our translation) asks, and immediately answers, paraphrasing Søren Kierkegaard (*apud* Agamben, 2010, p. 53, our translation): "The act of love of remembering a dead person is the most selfless, free, and faithful act of love."

We persist in reflecting on memory because it is a fundamental element in the formation of urban spaces and in strengthening the sense of belonging. Perhaps Cannaregio Town Square cannot be strictly characterized as a *public* space, given its lack of physical concreteness and its resistance to predefined users or programs. However, as a repository of memories and events, it fulfills the same role of transposing from one plane to another—of recording and preserving what constitutes a city. Much like Rossi's notion of *permanences* (to reference him once again), the project performs this exercise in sensitivity and connection to place, which is so intrinsic to the architect's craft and to the production of architecture. Through its conceptual, virtual, and spectral bases... it spatializes this *other* Venice.

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