An aerial night view of Earth, showing city lights and terrain. The image is dark, with the continents appearing as lighter, textured shapes against the black background of the oceans. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the edges of the continents and the glow of urban areas.

Luis Fernández-Galiano (Ed.)

Atlas

Architectures of the 21st Century

Europe

Fundación **BBVA**

Atlas

Architectures of the 21st Century

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Fulvio Irace

Mediterranean Calligraphies

Italy, the Balkans and Greece, Paths to Identity

Massimiliano & Doriana Fuksas, San Paolo Church, Foligno, Italy (2009)



Architecture in Italy, the Balkans and Greece takes stock of different ways of interpreting self-identity in the shared context of globalization.

THE PUBLICATION of this *Atlas* coincides with one of the most devastating of financial and political crises that have beset Europe in the past century: the one that began in 2008 in the United States and that, because of globalization, has spread to the rest of the world like a contagious virus. Of a financial origin, it has had a direct impact on construction, giving rise to a bubble that has brought on the collapse of the real estate market, the progressive closing of practices, and a drop in the demand for quality architecture. Nevertheless the crisis has not affected all countries in the same way: while for some it has caused a sudden and drastic decrease of construction – blocking big public investments first of all –, in others perception of the consequences has been gradual and over a longer period of time.

In the Mediterranean zone of the European Union, the cases of Italy and Greece have been very different, whether for historic reasons related to the structures

of their economies and political institutions, the nature of their industrial contexts, or the way they have graduated from economies that produce goods to economies that render services. Economics aside, we have to look at other parameters – at the professional system, at collective expectations of the role assigned to architects in society – when taking stock of architecture in the Balkan countries, also included in this article, whose socio-political spheres have undergone such a profound, radical and speedy transformation as to assign architecture a completely unprecedented role of prime importance, in part recalling the historic process of Europe's reconstruction after World War II.

Italy

In the past years, Italy has seen an acceleration of its civic program, both through public institutions and through private capital. Unlike European countries



Renzo Piano, Piuma Nave, Genoa, Italy (1991)

In Italy between 1980 and 1990, the *Tendenza* school led by Aldo Rossi took up all the protagonism, cornering the likes of Fuksas or Piano, who were important but removed from postmodernity.

The start of the new millennium coincided with the consolidation of globalizing processes, which in Italy was reflected in intense policies of holding competitions for the construction of new

public facilities and infrastructures. This had the effect of opening the country's architectural market to the big international practices, including the offices of Chipperfield, Meier, Hadid, Calatrava or Pelli.

that in the decade of the 1980s carried out large-scale programs of urban regeneration and metropolitan re-planning, Italy had to wait for the 1990s to begin shedding the stigma of being Europe's Cinderella by giving form to its contribution to the re-design of its cities and territories.

Barring isolated instances, most of the stimulus comes from a private sector that, as the Milan case demonstrates exemplarily, has been capable of intuiting the great potential of re-capitalizing many of the urban areas that were condemned to disuse and abandonment in the wake of industrial reconversion. Add to this the fact that Italy was nearly a quarter of a century late in the renewal of the languages and themes of global architecture; a delay caused by a series of economic, but especially cultural factors that together had the effect of blocking any aspirations to novelty, and forcing at least two generations of architects to stay tied to ideologies long stripped of real content. Unsurprisingly, Italian architecture's last contribution to the international debate was also the start of the end, coinciding, as it did, with the consolidation of a branch of the school of Aldo Rossi, the so-called *Tendenza*, which established in the architecture faculties a true *cordon sanitaire* against any approach to the discipline that was not inspired by the formulas of typology and morphology. This explains how a real talent like Renzo Piano could have remained unknown in his country throughout the 1990s, and how charismatic and crosscurrent figures like Massimiliano Fuksas first had to make it big abroad.

The predominant ideology thus had to crumble completely before a space for opposed ideas could open up and begin to give shape, however timidly, to the first attempts to make architecture take stock, more uninhibitedly and realistically, of the great cultural, aesthetic and social transformations that have reconfigured the role of the discipline in the context



David Chipperfield, Palazzo di Giustizia, Salerno, Italy (1999)

of globalization. A fundamental role in consolidating this process has been played by the increasing presence of foreign architects, which is something we owe to the intensive policy of competitions developed by the administration and big public companies, such as Ferrovie dello Stato in the construction of high-speed railway lines or the port authorities in the re-planning of the waterfronts of cities like Trieste, Naples, Genoa or Palermo. This is how the likes of Richard Meier, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Santiago Calatrava, Frank Gehry, Ricardo Bofill, David Chipperfield or César Pelli have landed in Italy, their mediatic prestige spelling sure success in the eyes of the administrations, and constituting for them an efficient weapon for surpassing the difficulties of urban planning.

The reception of works that seemed to come from another world was complex, unleashing the more or less justified objections of those who felt excluded from

the best commissions. And indeed, in many cases the arrival in Italy of transalpine 'visitors' has produced 'brand-name' products instead of high-quality buildings. Notwithstanding, this invasion has had the positive effect of putting an end to the archaic system that prevailed in the country, forcing Italian architects to adapt to the 'standards' of the new architecture. Moreover, the system of free competition in competitions has pushed the finest professionals towards a thorough re-thinking of how to conceive a project, and confronted the youngest of them with a reality whose internal mechanisms and opportunities they have begun to understand.

In the final analysis, thanks to the power of big names, competition has managed to spike up the architectural profession as well as the teaching of architecture in Italy completely, and though at first it seemed like mere provincial imitation of the foreign, in the long run it has opened up new, heretofore



Richard Meier, Ara Pacis Museum, Rome, Italy (2006)

The opening of the globalized market has in Italy come with the stepping into the picture of a generation of architects able to appropriate contemporary languages with fresh confidence or develop

new ones altogether, applying them to works that are at once original and anchored to their contexts, and which address the grand theme of current Italian architecture: acting on historic heritage.



Cino Zucchi, apartments on La Giudecca, Venice, Italy (2002)

unimagined horizons. Add to this another important phenomenon: the brain drain and the discovery of the European Union as a new job market. In a context blocked by a thousand vetoes and an implacable bureaucracy, Europe has for Italy's 'Erasmus generation' represented an opportunity to foray into the field of praxis in other ways of building, in practices more directly related to the work world and with different approaches to formalizing architecture. So much that in taking stock of Italian architectural practice, we cannot ignore the widespread presence – particularly in Spain, France and Portugal – of small young offices (sometimes in association with local partners) that demonstrate, in comparison with their elders, an uninhibited and pragmatic attitude to the project and to technical and formal experimentation.

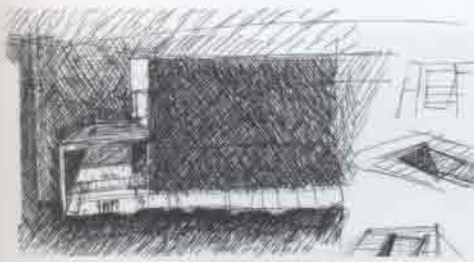
As evidenced by the third (2009) and fourth (2012) cycles of the Milan Triennale Gold Medal – which is considered a gauge

of the quality of architecture produced in Italy –, the current situation presents a rather paradoxical situation. On one hand is the small circle of international 'masters' (Piano, Fuksas, Gregotti, etc.); on the other hand, the long list of architects aged between 40 and 50. Forced to look for references abroad, young architects have had no choice but to build their own identities from scratch: the more talented ones, through a re-thinking of the legacy of modernity and experimenting with it independently and originally; the less gifted, by feeding on leading trends (the new Dutch school to begin with, then some of young Spanish architecture as well as a certain English minimalism), those that are publicized by magazines and architectural blogs under the heading of 'fashion tendencies'.

We should also point out that with the exception of Milan – which continues to be Italy's most active laboratory for experiments –, it is in the provinces or in

medium-sized centers (Genoa, Bologna, Brescia, Siracusa, etc.), more than in metropolitan areas, that architectural renewal is taking place. With their roots in the culture of the place, many provincial cities have proven to be great incubators for experimentation, offering small architectural practices the chance to draw up projects that are modest in size but remarkable for the wealth of themes inherent in them. So it is that in just a few years, Italy's professional 'park' has rejuvenated and brought to the fore personalities as vigorous as Cino Zucchi, for example, or Italo Rota, Mario Cucinella and Mauro Galantino, but above all a large group of architects under 40 years of age who are the authors of works of great elegance and confident approach. Cappai Segantini, Latina, Fidone, Guidarini & Salvadeo, Scandurre, Stocchi, Rizzi, Cosenza & Salvo, Melluso, Molteni & Liverani, Iotto & Pavarini, etc., head a growing batch of young professionals who have taken off the blinders of ideology without renouncing the strong thinking that leads to new directions in architecture.

To understand the Italian situation we have to keep in mind two fundamental questions. The first involves heritage; the second refers to Italy's alleged 'marginalization'. To speak of heritage is above all to tap the question of 'memory' and the country's relationship with history, ever the *leitmotiv* of modern Italian architecture, even when the link to European rationalism seemed to require a kind of international language. In this sense the rationalism of Giuseppe Terragni should not be approached as simply an indigenous variant of Corbusian language, but as an oeuvre connected to the grand classical tradition and to artistic research; two things without which we would not be able to understand the most original part of his creative spirit, as revealed with precision by Peter Eisenman in his famous studies on the architect from Como.



Vincenzo Latina, Artemision, Siracusa, Italy (2006)

As for the relationship with history, it is not just a metaphor. In a country whose historic heritage is perhaps the most continuous and extensive in the world, working on the built realm is a structure-creating activity that cannot be ignored. Many young architects have understood this, so instead of rejecting it for the sake of an 'iconic architecture' of the kind that aspires to be an isolated place of reference, they have started to work with subtlety and ingenuity on gaps in the urban fabric, whether regenerating city fragments in dense and stratified contexts or superposing new layers on existing structures. Re-modeling existing buildings and adapting them to new functions has opened up a field for a painstaking, patience-demanding, almost artisanal kind of work where Latina, Fidone, Stocchi, Cappai Segantini and Cusenza + Salvo, to name a few, have shown that the path of dialogue with the pre-existing not only does not cramp creativity, but actually enriches it. Renouncing the immediate recognizability of 'icons' is to make the true qualities of the project define not the unique object, but the landscape: unable to rise from scratch, architecture takes on the capacity to work from relationships and transformations; it reacts to pre-existences, highlighting the pre-existing while taking on a value of its own. Interventions like Vincenzo Latina's in the Artemision of the island of Ortigia in Siracusa and Cappai Segantini's in Sant'Ersamo at the Venetian Arsenal are from this point of view exemplary: in them, heritage is not a petrified or 'museified' piece of data, but a cultural legacy, an asset to be activated, brought from the past to a new life in the present.

This also explains the second attribute of the excellence of young Italian architecture: the still eminently artisanal nature of the projects, which rejects the stereotypes of standard solutions in favor of always addressing specific conditions. The works of Italo Rota or Cino Zucchi are a case in point:

each is unique, not resolved with an ad hoc formula, and in them, Milan's great modern tradition – that of the generation of Ponti, Di Albini, Di Caccia Dominioni, Di Magistretti, etc. – is revived in an autonomous way and in its most profound sense. Refusal to accept the rich catalogue offered by a sophisticated market of contemporary architecture thus translates into a rare interest in the design of components – also in claddings –, through which spatial invention is combined with all the complements that help to express it, turning the idea of the project into a habitable and practical reality. In Milan, the re-planning of the Museo del Novecento's modernist Arengario building – in accordance with a design of Italo Rota and Fabio Fornasari – illustrates the sophisticated quest for total perfection that is involved in the painstaking approach to each element, almost as if this were more an object of design than a mere complement of the idea of the project. In the same way, Cino Zucchi

in the dwellings in Portello and Guidarini & Salvadeo in the Center for Motor Rehabilitation in Milan keep alive the legacy of Milanese masters like Caccia Dominioni and Gardella by reinterpreting their finest works in a contemporary language.

This is how we define a subtle architecture that plays with proportions, with the small scale, with margins. There are no dazzling gestures, but these works are able to draw attention through the slow gaze: they require a certain way of approaching them that leaves aside the idea of charismatic icons on which the mediatic success of architecture of the past 25 years was based. Pushing downward in its lateral movement with respect to Great History, Italian architecture today is going through a vibrant renewal that goes back to its roots. The youngest generations have understood – perhaps better than their predecessors – that what pays is not to follow the myth of modernity like a continuous stream of



Iotti & Pavarani, Domus Technica Center, Bressello, Italy (2010)

The end of war in Yugoslavia and entrance into the sphere of the European Union have for countries like Slovenia and Croatia brought on a spurt of economic and cultural development in which architects have

played a leading role, as evidenced by the success of young practices like Bevk-Perovič, Sadar Vuga, Ofis and Njirić+Arhitekti, all of which have been selected for the Mies van der Rohe Award.

images, but to work on the edges and build new landscapes. In the final analysis, this is nothing new in Italy, especially if we focus on the exceptional case of Carlo Scarpa, the Venetian architect who has best expressed the link between Italian architecture and its territory. A 'local' architect par excellence, Scarpa knew how to construct, from images, a poetic of universal value that speaks to the world from a tiny fragment of the territory.

The Balkans

On 2 March 2012, the Republic of Serbia officially became a candidate for membership in the European Union. Since 2009 its citizens have been allowed to travel in Europe without a visa. That same year Albania joined NATO, ending the isolation that has traditionally separated this country, the last Stalinist dictatorship, from the rest of Europe since 1946. Now waiting to become part of the EU, Albania has an economy that is growing with respect to the average of the

past, but more importantly, its population is Europe's youngest. Among the Balkan countries, Slovenia was the first to enter the EU (2004) and make the euro its currency, as in Montenegro and Kosovo, countries where the euro has been in circulation since 2012, without official approval from Brussels. Along with other countries of Eastern Europe and members of the former Soviet bloc, the Balkans have in the past fifteen years seen great economic and social changes that, combined with the opening of their doors to the rest of Europe, have had a huge impact on architecture, both in cultural terms as in those specifically related to how the profession is organized and how it implants itself in each of the countries.

The term 'Balkan' is reductive – as rightly stated by Kai Vöckler, curator in 2009 of the traveling exhibition 'Balkanology. New Architecture and Urban Phenomena in South Eastern Europe' – because it takes the countries of that geographical area as



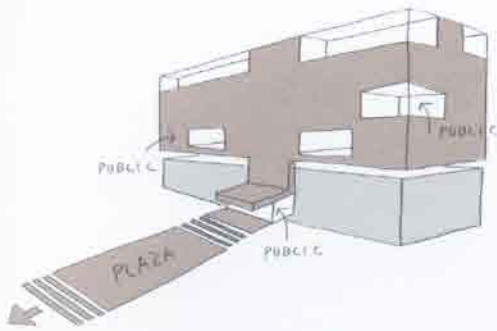
Njirić+Arhitekti, MIB Kindergarten, Zagreb, Croatia (2005)

one, ignoring their historic peculiarities in political and social terms. Though they have in some way shared the effects of the 'turbo-urbanism' provoked by the acceleration of urban dynamics caused by war, immigration, incoming foreign capital, etc., Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Albania and the other countries of the region have in reality developed widely divergent policies of urban transformation and planning, and have stimulated the growth of professional markets at different paces.

The economies – such as Slovenia's or Croatia's – that have best known how to use the new situation to create jobs, reorganize city infrastructures and try to improve environmental quality have contributed to creating a climate of great optimism and vitality that has then been quick to translate into unprecedented confidence, matured – especially in the case of the younger architects – into a capacity to engage in dialogue with the rest of the world. The end of isolation has served to revive structures that had been in hibernation for decades, creating conditions for the emergence of a crop of young practitioners educated at home and abroad, preferably in leading trendy schools like the Architectural Association in London or the Berlage Institute in Amsterdam. It is probably from these institutions that they have imported a freshness of ideas and an informal approach to the project that for decades had been denied their predecessors, but more importantly, the conviction of being part of an international context, and with this, the prospect of broadening their cultural and professional ties and, through competitions, of pitting themselves with total liberty against other places and conditions. This is most patent in Slovenia, which has of late begun to be seen as a country of great opportunities, one where young people dominate the architectural scene and already have a place in the group of nations that enjoy the attention of architectural media.



Sadar Vuga, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ljubljana, Slovenia (1999)



Bevk Perović arhitekti, Faculty of Mathematics, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2006)

In 2007, with his building for the Faculty of Mathematics in Ljubljana, Vasa Perović received a special mention in the 'emerging architects' section of the Mies van der Rohe Award. Born in Belgrade, where he went to architecture school before graduating from the Berlage Institute in 1994, he paired up with Matija Bevk to establish Bevk Perović arhitekti, one of the most brilliant practices in the current Slovenian scene along with those of Dekleka Gregorič, Sadar Vuga & Ales Vodopivec, Dusan Ogrin, Davorin Gazvoda (selected for the Mies van der Rohe in 2008 and 2001, respectively), Njiric+Arhitekti (selected for the same prize in 2009, for their MB Kindergarten), Kopecky & Studeny Architects/ksa., Elastik, Macchtig Vrhunc, Ofis, Arhitektura Krušec (selected for the Mies with their New Market in Celje), and so on.

The success of this batch of architects – which received its first significant recognition with Sadar Vuga's Chamber of Commerce, dated 1999, a building that would come to symbolize the architecture of the new generation – is no accident. It comes from a great tradition that is rooted in the *koine* of 19th-century *Mitteleuropa* and is nourished by an active cultural tapestry of which the magazine *Piranesi* – founded by Vojteh Ravnikar, among others – and the Dessa Gallery in Ljubljana are significant parts. The name Dessa, which is an acronym for 'Delovna skupnost somostojnih arhitektiv' (Association of Freelance Architects), speaks of the objectives upon which the gallery was founded in the year 1982: to foster independent professional practice in the fields of architecture, urban planning and design. It organized exhibitions and printed publications that were not solely of national interest, but also contributed to Slovenia's cultural integration with the rest of the world.

The Croatian architectural scene presented a similar vitality. Though a part of its history is shared with Slovenia, Croatia has

characteristics of its own, beginning with its population, which is twice that of its neighbor. Slovenia is a young state; Croatia on the contrary already has a consolidated and extensive professional base that protects the status of the architect with respect to commissions, and, importantly, a tradition of public competitions that has made it possible for many young and unknown architects to make a name for themselves (such as Sasa Randić & Idis Turato, honored in 2011 with the Mies van der Rohe Award for the Katarina Francopan Elementary School on the island of Krk). It was also a competition – for the High School in Koprivnica, in 2003 – that brought a duo of architects under 30 years of age, Lea Pelivan and Toma Plejic of Studio Up, out of anonymity, and with this project they would go on to win a special mention in the 'emerging architects' section of the 2009 Mies van der Rohe Awards. Significantly, on accepting the prize Lea Pelivan stressed

that the merit was not the studio's alone, and she attributed it to the success of a model and a situation that had taken solid form in the Croatia of the last decade.

Now that the crisis has started to affect even these countries, giving rise to substantial cuts in the building sector, we have to trust that confidence in architecture as an instrument of change will stay intact, that the competence, freshness and enthusiasm inspired by this vibrant landscape of new identities will not be thrown overboard.

Greece

The scenography crafted by Santiago Calatrava for the Olympic Games of Athens in 2004 was the backdrop of Greece's entrance into the Mount Olympus of contemporary architecture. When the lights went on in the Olympic Stadium, illuminating the metal structure designed by the Spanish architect, the eyes of the world



Ofis Arhitekti, social housing, in Izola, Slovenia (2005)

The origins of the acute crisis currently afflicting Greece must be sought, many say, in the lavish pageantry of the 2004 Olympic Games, held in Athens and swiftly followed by an overall paralysis in architecture.

Only a few large-scale institutional projects have been exempted from the general collapse, like the new Acropolis Museum of Tschumi or the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center of Piano, to be completed in 2015.



Santiago Calatrava, Olympic Ring of Athens, Greece (2004)

could contemplate it with an emotion that had been latent for many years, so much that some went so far as to dub the OAKA (the Olympic complex of Athens) the new Acropolis. Works like Calatrava's bridge at the exit of Kateraki Station, the metro network with its stops resembling bona fide museums of old and contemporary art, or the bridge over the Gulf of Corinth (the world's longest suspension bridge, stretching 2,883 meters) were admired by millions of visitors, convinced that Greece was finally ceasing to be just a tourist destination and heading for the 21st century.

Alas, the current picture seems to be proving right those who even back then, during the Athens Olympics, warned about the Greek economy approaching the beginning of the end: uncontrollable budgets creating a debt that would be impossible to pay, buildings immediately abandoned and left to fate, decaying in no time. Greece's troubles therefore go back

to a period preceding the onset of this long crisis that is afflicting the eurozone, and the consequences of that Olympic pageantry serve to explain a continued process of contraction, when not paralysis, that has affected the building market in general, both public and private.

The only deviation from the generalized tone of paralysis is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, a complex with an area of 170,000 square meters that houses the National Library and the Hellenic Opera House, designed by Renzo Piano and due to open in the year 2015. Situated at the port, a few kilometers from the city, the SNFCC of Kalithea aspires to be the Acropolis of the 21st century, in combination with other projects that have recently been subjected to competition, such as the re-planning of the port of Piraeus – to make this old infrastructure a crucial point of reference in this part of the city – and the Museum of Submerged Antiques, which will be

accompanied by a theme park and some new exhibition spaces. With the exception of Piano's project, of course there is much doubt that an intervention like the masterplan of the new Piraeus, so complex and costly, could ever push through, however vital it is to a rebalancing of metropolitan Athens, which is increasingly congested within the limits of an obsolete and overloaded physical structure.

A more successful work has been the one that accompanied the restoration of Greek pride, nourishing the legitimate claim for London's marble pieces of the Parthenon: the Acropolis Museum. As with the Olympic works – where the real star was Santiago Calatrava –, the protagonist in the Acropolis Museum is a foreigner, the Swiss-French Bernard Tschumi. Located in the Dionysiou area, right in front of the Parthenon hill, the museum is the realization of a dream nourished for fifty years, and it is a very important piece in the re-launching of an



Renzo Piano, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (2008-2015)

economy based on cultural tourism. If the result has not yet stirred up consensus, that is because of an imposing presence which, while emphasizing one's perception of the Parthenon by replicating its geometry and way of taking root in the topography, it takes up one of the few neighborhoods that still maintained a remembrance of the atmosphere of neoclassical Athens, ignoring the constructions that had been going up there, through the years, in an unprecedented and valuable mix that struck a contrast with the dull, monotonous character of metropolitan conurbations. The inside of the building has a completely different tone, thanks to the extraordinary sculptures exhibited and the long ramp from which to contemplate the archaeological riches. The ramp is the *coup de théâtre* of a *promenade architecturale* that begins in the atrium – where the visitor is welcomed by a mute choir of caryatids –, continues on to the gallery of marble pieces from the Parthenon, and eventually reaches the glass box on the top floor, giving rise, so to speak, to a journey through space and time that also takes stock of the excavations on view on the lowest level of the building. Severely criticized by artists, architects and intellectuals because of its brutal way of inserting itself in the urban fabric, the Acropolis Museum may well be a last breath of the iconic and mediatic architecture that characterized financial capitalism for two decades.

Since then, with a few exceptions Greece's architectural output has centered almost exclusively on a single type, the vacation house; an obvious catering to what continues to be the country's main economic activity. The fact that the clientele is essentially cosmopolitan and international is inevitably reflected in the stylistic options taken by the designers of these houses, architects who have completely forgotten the noble tradition of Mediterranean rationalism, and who thus often resort to a minimalism

that is as sophisticated as it is aseptic, but able to satisfy diverse tastes without too violently interfering with the scenery of Greek isles and coasts.

Unlike in the Balkan countries that were in the Soviet bloc, like Croatia and Slovenia, in Greece architecture has not gone through a real generational change. The professional scene shows a coexistence of representatives of the older generations – for whom fidelity to Hellenic rationalism seems more like a banner than a true conviction – with architectural practices that aspire to join the cosmopolitan web of relations, such as the offices of Stephen Buerger & Dimitra Katsosa, Dionyssi Sotovikis, Konstantinos Lambrinopoulos, Sotiris Chainis or Tilemachos Andrianopoulos, builders of a kind of architecture that is founded less on ties to modern tradition than on the optimistic modernity that characterized the euphoric decade of the 1990s. Representing the Internet generation, these architects

express themselves effortlessly in blogs and websites, in traveling exhibitions and in conventions, seminars and laboratories connected to galleries or university research institutes abroad. Speaking of links to new technologies, we must end with mention of Spyros Papadimitriou, head of a veteran group of architects (often also university professors) who have done much research on digital design: studies based on experiments carried out in other places by figures like Gregg Lynn and Marcos Novak.

The comparison made between countries in this text throws light on a Europe where, despite globalization, the different identities linked to history have not disappeared: a magma in turmoil in which we have to work with the context of historic relations in mind, but where many betray their own roots. Only through comparison can this living picture of protagonists and architectures take shape and be a rightful testimony of what the European Union is today.



Bernard Tschumi, New Acropolis Museum, Athens, Greece (2009)

Cappai Segantini
Law Court Office Building
 Venice (Italy)



Client
 Comune di Venezia
Architects
 Carlo Cappai, Maria Alessandra Segantini
Consultants
 Studio CM; Technimont spa (masterplan); Technimont spa, Studio Greggio, Progin (structures and MEP)
Photos
 Pietro Savorelli; Alessandra Bello (p. 75 left)

DESTINED TO house the offices of the Law Courts of Venice, this building that is the outcome of an international competition is conceived as a sort of graft in the complex Venetian urban system that shapes the vicinity of Piazzale Roma, the only square through which it is possible to enter the city by car, and that recently incorporated a new urban landmark: the so-called Constitution Bridge, designed by Santiago Calatrava, which connects the Piazzale to Santa Lucia Train Station.

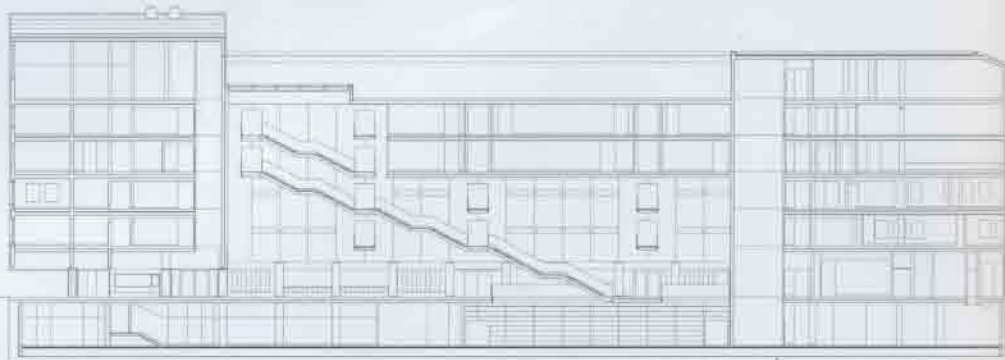
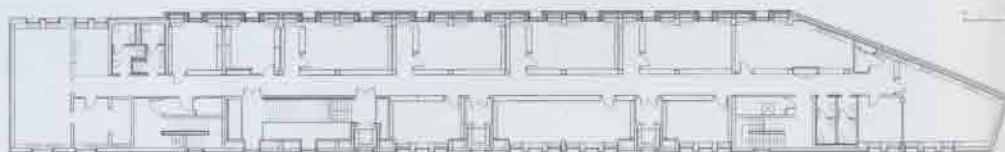
The building unfolds from a bold spatial gesture that serves to welcome the visitor: a five-story space that acts like an urban gate left open during the day. At ground level, this space features a series of commercial facilities that will service the exterior public premises, to eventually also give access to the sequence of public plazas which the future restoration of the neighborhood's buildings is likely to generate.

The new volume has a simple and

compact archetypal shape that results from the compositional manipulation of the construction typology of Venetian industrial buildings, all the while also keeping in mind the huge parking lots of Piazzale Roma, which it is visually connected to.

Suspended over the Piazzale, a five-meter-long cantilever marks the entrance to the building. The shadow that it casts attracts the fluxes of passers-by, luring them into either of two complementary circuits: one horizontal, corresponding to the new urban scheme created by the building, and the other vertical, leading to the higher floors and reached via a linear staircase and a battery of elevators.

The interaction of materiality and light is the building's aesthetic statement. A punctuation of windows producing a special natural light fills an envelope clad with panels of preoxidized copper, a material that appropriately echoes the roofs of many institutional buildings in Venice.



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The new offices for the courthouse are located on Piazzale Roma, the only vehicular access to Venice, the vicinity of which has recently also seen the construction of Constitution Bridge, a work of Calatrava.

The building's shape and implantation is defined by its special position in the urban system, flanked as it is by the huge parking lot of Piazzale Roma on one hand, and by the historic fabric on the

other hand. This context determines a good part of the volumetry and spatiality of the building: while the former echoes the surroundings typologically, the latter helps prolong and upgrade the public space.

