

14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia

Manuel Orazi and Siri Nergaard

Architecture in Translation. The Mediation of Social and Urban Spaces

Weekend Specials – September 27-28, 2014

PROGRAM

Saturday September 27

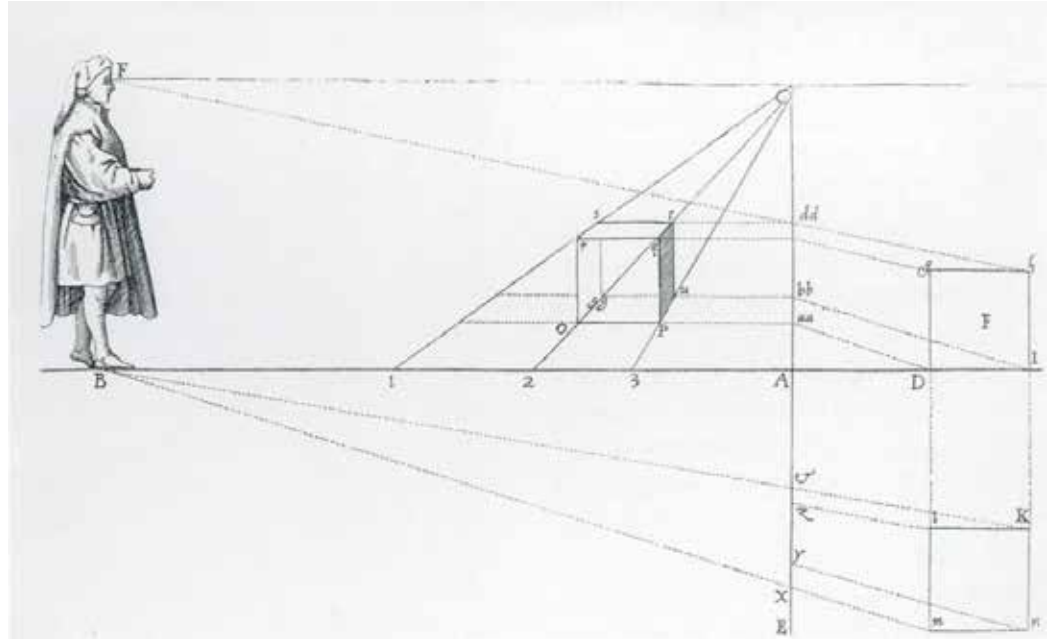
- 10:00 Opening.
Gennaro Postiglione
Christian Norberg-Schulz between Norway and Italy
- 10:30 Keynote: **Sherry Simon**
The Translational City
- 11:10 Discussant: **Daria Ricchi**
- 11:20 Debate
- 11:30 Coffee Break
- 11:45 **Gro Bonesmo**
Forms of Freedom. African Independence and Nordic Models
- 12:15 **Anna Ulrikke Andersen**
Translation Transposition Translocation: The Development of a Phenomenology of Architecture by Christian Norberg-Schulz 1973-1980
- 12:45 Debate
- 13:00 Lunch
- 15:00 Keynote: **Giorgio Ciucci**
The Architecture of Words and the Words of Architecture
- 15:40 Discussant: **Shumi Bose**
- 15:50 Debate
- 16:00 **Marina Lathouri**
The Object under Translation
- 16:30 **Mari Lending**
Invented in Translation
- 17:00 Debate

Sunday September 28

- 10:00 Keynote: **Joan Ockman**
Monuments to Scientific Error: Eisenman's "Terragni" and Other Architectural Mistranslations
- 10:40 Discussant: **Roberta Marcaccio**
- 10:50 Debate
- 11:00 **Tim Ainsworth Anstey**
Things that Move: Translation in Vitruvius and Vitruvius in Translation
- 11:30 **Gino Giometti**
The Temptation of Ethnocentrism
- 12:00 Round Table Debate. Moderator: **Cynthia Davidson**

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Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola,
Le due regole della prospettiva pratica,
Roma, Zanetti 1583.

The issue of translation is for its nature a crossroad of disciplines. Although its relevance in architecture is neither obvious, nor not commonly recognized, this conference will inaugurate a discussion on some of the many ways in which translation and architecture meet. With the conviction that the relation between the two deserves attention, we invite scholars from different disciplines and practices to discuss issues that regard architecture in translation. We welcome reflection and discussion on issues such as the classic translation of a drawing into a building¹, or of space into architectural space. We question the translatability of the language of architecture itself, how spaces and places are translated through architecture, how urban landscapes are transformed through translation, how translators are mediators of the social and urban space and place. The Biennale in Venice itself is an ideal example of this complex translating activity since its beginning².

Translation can be seen as “constitutive of culture itself”, and “not only something that

¹ Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, London: Architectural Association 1997.

² See for example Franco Raggi, edited by, *Europa/America. Architetture urbane, alternative suburbane*, Settore arti visive e architettura, Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia 1978, probably the first great meeting between American and European influencing architects like Aymonino, Hollein, Rossi, Siza, Stirling, Ungers, van Eyck from one side and Abraham, Ambasz, Eisenman, Hejduk, Meier, Pelli, Stern, Tigerman, Venturi & Scott Brown from the other.

¹ Edwin Gentzler, *Translation and Identity in the Americas*, London and New York: Routledge 2008.

happens between separate and distinct cultures³ , and can even be seen as the process through which "newness enters the world"⁴. According to Umberto Eco translation is "negotiation" between different and even opposite systems and beliefs, and is always anchored in time and space⁵. Translation may create identities, but also cancel or oppress; translation is a "zone"⁶ with geographic, socio-political, and psychological dimensions. In order to create fertile discussions in which the participants can have the opportunity to meet on a common ground, exchanging and creating something new together, the organizers have selected a few themes, or questions, from which the participants are invited to develop their contributions.

The first theme is the concept of *genius loci* that relates to a specific and problematic aspect of translation that is the question of translatability vs untranslatability. In translating between languages and cultures one often encounters the difficulty, or even impossibility, of transporting meaning across borders. What is perceived as untranslatable constitutes a specific substance of a culture, of a language, or of a place, thus being often the base for identities (national, cultural, disciplinary etc). Translating a text from one language to another often gives the feeling of impossibility to capture and bring across the "genius loci" of the original.

Moreover, *genius loci*, in connection to architecture has been imposed to the general attention by the Norwegian historian of architecture Christian Norberg-Schulz who lived in Italy for many years. To him «Architecture means to visualize the 'genius loci', and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell⁷».

The translator's task, in a similar way, is maybe to "create meaningful places" through the recreation of the genius loci of the original text.

Norberg Schulz' book, *Genius loci* was first published in Italian in 1979 – a year before the first Biennale of Architecture directed by Paolo Portoghesi, "The Presence of the Past", to which he contributed⁸. The book was subsequently translated into many languages and had a certain international impact on the theory of architecture.

Genius loci may stimulate reflection and discussion on the translatability of architecture, especially if opposed to the provocative concept of *Generic City* launched by Rem Koolhaas:

Is the contemporary city like the contemporary airport- "all the same"? Is it possible to theorize this convergence? And if so, to what ultimate configuration is it aspiring? Convergence is possible only at the price of shedding identity. That is usually seen as a loss. But at the scale at which it occurs, it *must* mean something. What are the disadvantages of identity, and conversely, what are the advantages of blankness? What if this seemingly accidental-and usually regretted-homogenization were an intentional process, a conscious movement away from difference toward similarity? What if we are witnessing a global liberation movement: "down with character!" What is left after identity is stripped? The Generic?⁹.

In Translation Studies a similar issue is continuously discussed: is it so that translation, by its nature, tend to blur differences? Translation is inevitably "ethnocentric" says Berman¹⁰, and the tendency of domesticating what is foreign and different is always a risk. In our globalized world, in which the borders between languages, texts, traditions, and life styles are overlapping and even diffuse, people often coexist in spaces that are both generic and unique, with a proper genius at the same time. Are these cities and languages in a continuous process of translation? Or are they rather examples of the end of translation?

³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge 1994.

⁴ Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*, London: Phoenix 2003.

⁵ Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, Princeton, Princeton: University Press 2006.

⁶ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius loci. Paesaggio, ambiente, architettura*, Milan: Electa 1979; English transl., *Genius Loci. Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli International 1980, p. 5.

⁷ Id., *Verso un'architettura autentica*, in *La presenza del passato*, Prima mostra internazionale di architettura, Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia 1980, pp. 21-29.

⁸ Rem Koolhaas, *The Generic City*, in *S,M,L,XL*, New York: Monacelli Press/Rotterdam: 010 Publishers 1995, pp. 1239-1257.

⁹ Antoine Berman, *L'épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique: Herder, Goethe, Schlegel, Novalis, Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Hölderlin*, Paris: Gallimard 1984; English transl., *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, Albany: SUNY Press 1992.

In regards to the above, we suggest the following questions:

- 1) How do architectural styles, traditions, conventions travel across cultures?
- 2) How can we describe the cultural specificities of architectural expressions that make them untranslatable?
- 3) Why is it important – yet, if it is – that architecture “travel” through translation?

The second theme for the conference, although connected to first, is the question whether architecture needs a meta-language in order to be translated, or if architecture is a language itself, and as such, already translatable into other and different cultures and places. Is it so that architecture for its nature requires to be experienced and reflected through a verbal meta-language?

The dissemination of the Palladian and Neo-Palladian buildings all over the British colonies is maybe an example of the fact that their “language” had been meta-linguistically translated into Palladio’s *I quattro libri dell’architettura* which had a wide diffusion in England thanks to Inigo Jones and Lord Burlington¹¹.

The publication of the treatise by Vignola, *Regola delli cinque ordini d’architettura* (Rule of Five Orders of Architecture) in Amsterdam in five languages (Italian, Dutch, French, German and English)¹² made possible the constitution of an international canon for classicism that lasted until the XXth century and could maybe be considered as another example of this meta-language that enables architecture to travel and translate. It is not by chance that Le Corbusier elected Vignola as his ideal rival as the main representative of academicism: «Why Vignola? What infernal pact binds modern society to Vignola? I descended into the academic abyss. Let us not delude ourselves: academicism is a way of *not* thinking¹³».

Finally the global spread of Modern architecture in the first half of the last century has also produced many examples of adaptation or corruption of the so-called “International style” into a huge variety of new categories of architecture related to the concept of translation and meta-language: vernacular, everyday, rural, industrial archaeology, participated architecture, critic regionalism, junkspace and so on. Giuseppe Pagano, Bernard Rudofsky, Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown, Hassan Fathy, Giancarlo De Carlo and Kenneth Frampton are only a few great authors that we can mention here¹⁴.

We invite the participants to prepare their contributions departing from the suggestions above, so that the event can develop into an organic and stimulating discussion and exchange.

¹¹ Rudolf Wittkower, *English Neoclassicism and the Vicissitudes of Palladio’s “Quattro libri”*, in Id., *Palladio and English Palladianism*, London: Thames and Hudson 1974, p. 73-92.

¹² Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola, *Regola de’ cinque ordini d’architettura... Regel van de vijf ordens der architecture... Reigle des cinq ordres d’architecture (sic)... Regel der funff orden von architectur... The rule of the V. orders of architecture...*, Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius 1642.

¹³ Le Corbusier, *Entretien avec les étudiants des écoles d’architecture*, Paris: Denoël 1943; English transl. *Talks with Students*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press 1999, p. 60.

¹⁴ See also the recent Esra Akcan, *Translation in Architecture. Germany, Turkey and the Modern House*, Durham and London: Duke University Press 2012.

Manuel Orazi in 2007 got a PhD in History of Architecture and of Cities at the Foundation for Advanced Studies in Venice (SSAV). Since 2002 he works for the publishing house Quodlibet based in Macerata, where he edits the architecture books. He teaches Theories and History of contemporary architecture at the Dipartimento di Architettura in the University Bologna and Ferrara. He writes for the magazine "Log" and collaborates with Agora, Biennale de Bordeaux (11-14 September 2014). Among his recent essays there are those published in the Italian edition of R. Venturi, D. Scott Brown, S. Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Macerata, Quodlibet 2010), in AAVV, *Ugo La Pietra. Habiter la ville*, (Orléans, Editions HYX 2009), and is going to be published his PhD thesis *The Erratic Universe of Yona Friedman* (Zürich, Park Books 2014).

Siri Nergaard teaches Translation Theory in the Masters in Publishing program directed by Umberto Eco at the University of Bologna, and Norwegian at the University of Florence. In addition, she teaches Semiotics and Text Theory at the University College of Buskerud and Vestfold in Norway. Her fields are semiotics, translation theory, and cultural studies. Nergaard is the author of *La costruzione di una cultura: La letteratura norvegese in traduzione italiana* (The Construction of a Culture: Norwegian Literature in Italian Translation), published in 2004 by Guaraldi, Rimini, Italy. She has translated two volumes of essays by Umberto Eco into Norwegian, and has edited several books in Italian on translation theory, including *La teoria della traduzione nella storia* (Translation Theory in History, 1993) and *Teorie contemporanee della traduzione* (Contemporary Translation Theories, 1995), both published by Bompiani. She has guest-edited two issues of the Italian journal of semiotics *VS*, one of which is dedicated to inter-semiotic translation. More recently, she co-edited with Cristina Demaria *Studi cultural. Temi e prospettive a confronto* (Culture Studies: Themes and Perspectives, McGraw-Hill, 2008). Forthcoming is a book, tentatively entitled *The Third Way of Translation*. Nergaard is Editor of the journal, *Translation. A transdisciplinary journal*.