



The Empty Space, the Enclosure and the *boîte à miracles*: Let's Go Back to Palladio

Some one said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know. (T.S. Eliot, 1920¹)

History as Project

There are complex reasons and forms that determine the link between Ancient and New if we examine it in view of the so-called classical architecture. This is even more the case if this link is sought in modern and contemporary architecture.

Affirming that the most significant component of a master's work lies in his ability to evoke the Ancient and transmit the spiritual and moral legacy that made architectural *inventio* possible is still an open question today. It is a complex subject of discussion in the academies of architecture, above all if one wants to face the thorny theme of the relationship with Tradition and History, both in relation to the Ancient and in its identification with a supposed and wanted spiritual continuity.

We are well aware, for example, of the value that the architects of Italian Rationalism attributed to Tradition (from Giuseppe Terragni and the Gruppo 7 and the articles published in *Rassegna*

Italiana in 1926–27 to Giuseppe Pagano and Edoardo Persico in the pages of *La Casa Bella* and in the exhibitions of the Milanese Triennale etc.) and the need to continually evoke the cultural bond of modern architecture with ancient, and in particular with the “Roman” architecture.²

It is a matter of validating a working method that feeds on memory and accepts the comparison with history as a *modus operandi*, i.e. as a research that investigates the ancient, compares it to and reconceptualizes it in the theories and culture of its time.

In this sense, the architectural project becomes a place of research and theoretical advancement that measures and substantiates the relationships that thought—Action—establishes with one’s personal history, with the culture of one’s time and with the creative process.

In investigating and studying ancient or modern places and architectures, we recognize or attribute to them a meaning which in some cases becomes a transmissible value for the architecture and the city of our time. As Works—which deeply capture concepts and techniques of the ancient lexicon—they evoke their essence and establish a “cultural” bridge of reference with us and our history.³

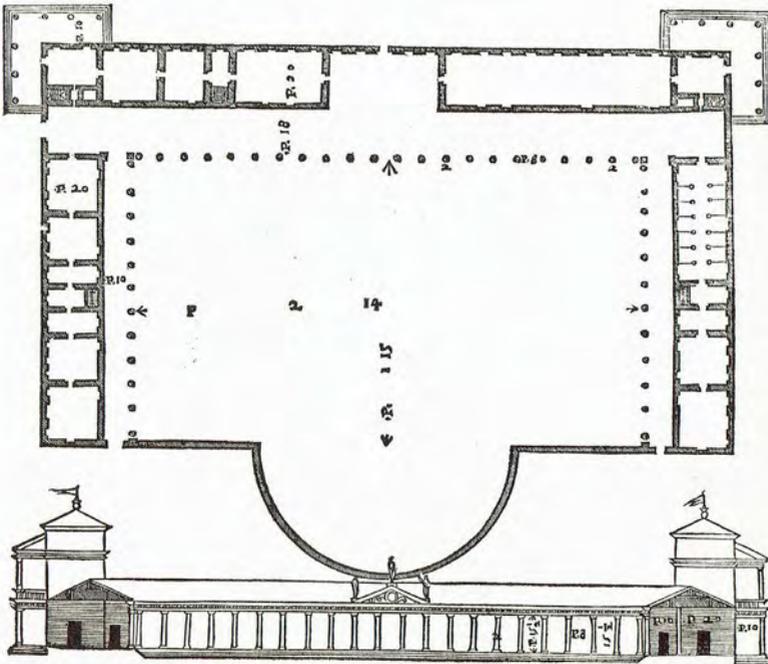
Andrea Palladio is an emblematic case of this way of looking at history and interpreting it. Still today, at a distance of time, his works continue to educate us (beyond stylistic stereotypes) and, as if we were immersed in a sort of “Siberian education”, teach, for those who know how to understand its depths, the very essence of ancient architecture.

In addition to his monumental work, as a legacy, he has left us a working method which, in the simplicity of the tools, in the geometric schematic nature of the adopted architectural types, as well as in the frankness of his observations reported in his Treatise-Manifesto, manages to face complex aspects of reality, and declines and transfigures them according to his own poetics [fig. 1].

¹
Palladio 1570,
Cover page.



LA FABRICA sottoposta è in Campiglia luogo del Vicentino, & è del Signor Mario Repera, il quale ha eseguito in questa fabrica l'animo della felice memoria del Signor Francesco suo padre. Le colonne de i portici sono di ordine Dorico: gli intercolumnij sono quattro diametri di colonna: Ne gli estremi angoli del coperto, oue si ueggono le loggie fuori di tutto il corpo della casa, ui uanno due colombari, & le loggie. Nel fianco rincontro alle stalle ui sono stanze, delle quali altre sono dedicate alla Continenza, altre alla Giustitia, & altre ad altre Virtù con gli Elogij, e Pitture, che ciò dimostrarono, parte delle quali è opera di Messer Battista Maganza Vicentino Pittore, e Poeta singolare: il che è stato fatto affine che questo Gentil'huomo, il quale riceue molto uolentieri tutti quelli, che vanno à ritrouarlo; possa alloggiare i suoi forestieri, & amici nella camera di quella Virtù, alla quale essi gli pareranno hauer più inclinato l'animo. Ha questa fabrica la commodità di potere andare per tutto al coperto; e perche la parte per l'habitatione del padrone, e quella per l'uso di Villa sono di vno istesso ordine; quanto quella perde di grandezza per non essere più eminente di questa; tanto questa di Villa accresce del suo debito ornamento, e dignità, facendoli vguale à quella del Padrone con bellezza di tutta l'opera.



LA SEGVENTE

It can be said that his work is based on a theory of Works, as an expression of a research of compositional-spatial nature, which identifies and feeds on the Works themselves. For a contemporary architect, reasoning on Palladio's method, showing possible design ways, brings about a particular investigative aspect that looks at the work in its constituent and compositional elements: the articulation of the plans according to tripartite elementary schemes, the geometric-spatial relationship between the plan and elevation of the buildings, the theme of the basement as a principle of relationship with the surroundings, the art of conceiving the façades as the superimposition of the Orders or of architectural and spatial sequences, etc.

The relationship between history and design, in Palladio, is always revealed and, in some cases, as in one of his most enigmatic works (the "metaphysic" Villa Repeta in Campiglia dei Berici which we will discuss later), takes on the most evident characteristics of Ancient architecture, to the point of identifying with it [fig. 2].

Above all, the starting point from which some reflections emerge and are placed in terms of design pretexts should be noted, just as Palladio's works express the authenticity of their existence as works of art of their time. At the heart of this thought, one remembers a significant proposition by Ernesto Nathan Rogers on the particular link between the concept of conserving and that of building. This should be taken as a principle to be read in architectural terms. Rogers observes: "[...] conserving and building are moments of the same act of conscience, because both are subject to the same method: conserving has no meaning if it is not understood in the sense of updating the past, and building has no sense if it is not understood as a continuation of the historical process: It is a question—he concludes—of clarifying the meaning of history to us".⁴

2
Villa Repeta.
In: Palladio 1570, II 61.

Open Spaces and Urban Voids

The invention of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, which will soon become the extraordinary urban backdrop of Piazza San Marco, coincides with the construction of a piece of the city. Conceptually, the project creates a dialogue with the theme of urban conservation-transformation in continuity with the history and the architecture of the city of Venice.

Looking from the entrance to Piazza San Marco under the clock tower beyond the basin towards San Giorgio Maggiore, you can see the relationship between the island of San Giorgio and the Piazzetta and the space in front of the square itself.

What is captured in Palladio's proposal is above all his idea of perceiving the value of the water space's void and of the whole part of the city. In this case the Palladian invention of replacing the modest horizon of that part of the San Giorgio island with a new monumental façade gives the spatial composition a double figurative dynamism: of the city's urban continuity, beyond the consolidated city, and—at the same time—of architectural discontinuity, the result of a great scenographical contribution [fig. 3].⁵

In 1500, Jacopo de' Barbari created the first detailed map of the city, a bird's eye perspective drawing of the roofs of Venice. One can see the city from the entrance of the basin of San Marco, the islands, and in the foreground the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, which at the time was also known as the island of Cypresses. In de' Barbari's map it appears as one of the many islands scattered across the lagoon, without any relationship with the city or monumental emphasis. Actually, analyzing the drawing carefully, it can be seen that the volume of the pre-existing church is located inside the Monastery, circumscribed, isolated and far from the city [fig. 4].



3
San Giorgio Maggiore





4
Jacopo de' Barbari,
View of Venice
[also known as de'
Barbari Map], 1500,
Museo Correr, Venezia.

Next to representative, scenic and monumental Venice—the quintessence of this part of the city that borders the basin—the island appeared peripheral. On the edges it was marked off by low and modest houses, with a limited front and devoid of urban quality. As Frederic C. Lane so effectively reports [fig. 5, 5a]: “When Palladio designed the church and monastery, nondescript structures in front of the church interfered with such a view, [...] they were removed so as to give an unimpeded view from the Ducal Palace of the façade of the church. Without such buildings as Palladio designed for San Giorgio Maggiore, that side of the Bacino San Marco would merge into the low, unstructured horizon of the island-spotted lagoon. As it is, the great sheet of water is enclosed within the architecture of the city.”⁶

The Palladian invention rebuilds the missing side of the urban scene of that part of the city: the layout of the new church rotates, the buildings in front of it will be demolished and a large square-churchyard overlooking the basin will be designed.

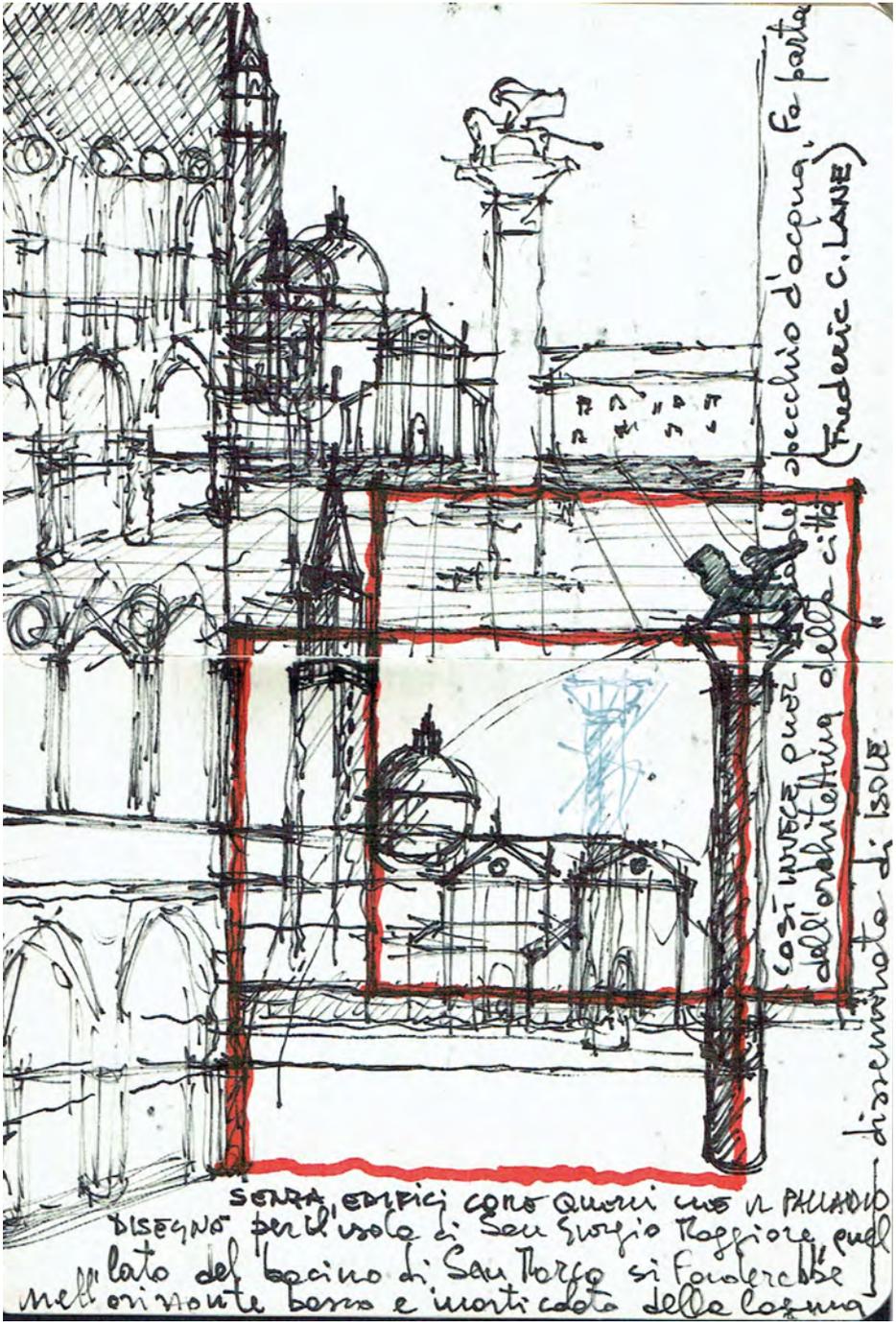
Beyond the well-known triangulation, which is created between the three monumental poles of the basin of San Marco (San Marco, Punta della Dogana and San Giorgio Maggiore), what takes on even more value today is the idea of “urban stage”, of the city as a theater, a significant and absolutely modern example of the construction of a piece of the city [fig. 6]. At that time, the only example of a church overlooking the lagoon was that of the extraordinary project by Mauro Codussi for the church of San Michele in Isola (1468–1470), with the splendid Istrian stone façade.⁷

Certainly, Palladio understood its urban value due to the audacious position that the church assumes with respect to the lagoon and in relation to the water shore. The Fondamenta Nove had not been built yet and that part of the city facing north showed the signs of an unadorned and fragmented back side, “a border still largely undefined, both from a functional point of view and in a physical sense” from which stood out, unique in its kind, the icy Codussian profile [fig. 7].⁸

5 a
Bonifacio De' Pitati,
*Annunciazione e Padre
Eterno in Piazza San
Marco*, 1540–1545,
detail.

5
Bonifacio De' Pitati,
*Annunciazione e Padre
Eterno in Piazza San
Marco*, 1540–1545,
Gallerie dell'Accademia
di Venezia, sala XII.





specchio d'acqua, fa parte
(Frederic C. LANE)

così invece, per
dell'architettura delle città

disseminate di ISOLE

SENZA edifici, come quelli che il PALLADIO
disegnò per il uso di San Giorgio Maggiore, quel
lato del bacino di San Marco si farebbe
nell'orizzonte basso e inarcato delle loggiate



6
Drawing of the
composive scenes of
Bacino San Marco, 2016.
Drawing by the author.

7
Mauro Codussi,
San Michele in Isola,
1468 and following.

Even more extraordinary, in terms of composition and scenography, will be Palladio's project for the island of San Giorgio Maggiore overlooking the basin of San Marco. Its spectacular scenography, a large composition is dominated by the relationships that the buildings interweave at a distance from each other.

That architectural space will become a theoretical point of reference for understanding both the role of urban voids within the city and the visual value attributed by Palladio to his own architecture in the context of Venice and the Veneto.



Again, Lane reminds us how even Palladio’s villas were positioned so as to be perceived from afar.⁹ Much later, Giuseppe Samonà will understand the compositive value of that water space and theorize—taking inspiration from the Palladian experience—the theme of urban voids as a design approach to the complexity of the contemporary city.¹⁰

Palladio, with the invention of San Giorgio Maggiore and later with the project for the church of the Zitelle and the construction of the church of the Redentore on the Giudecca island—following the example of Codussi for San Michele in Isola—will show a new vision of the lagoon city’s space. Paraphrasing Bettini, one may speak of a worthy example, albeit still *in nuce*, of the “poetics of the open form” which represent a clear signal for the future development of the city of Venice and its theorization [fig. 8].¹¹

In Dialogue with the Ancient

While he designs, Palladio writes and draws. In the *Quattro Libri dell’Architettura*, together with the drawings of the ancients—studied and redesigned—he will publish a summary of his projects. This will be a further affirmation of his working method: “The *Quattro Libri* (Venice 1570) constitute his authoritative architectural legacy, in which he establishes the formulas for

8
 Perspective view along
 the Canale della
 Giudecca, highlighting
 the Palladian
 architectures of San
 Giorgio Maggiore, Zitelle,
 and Redentore.

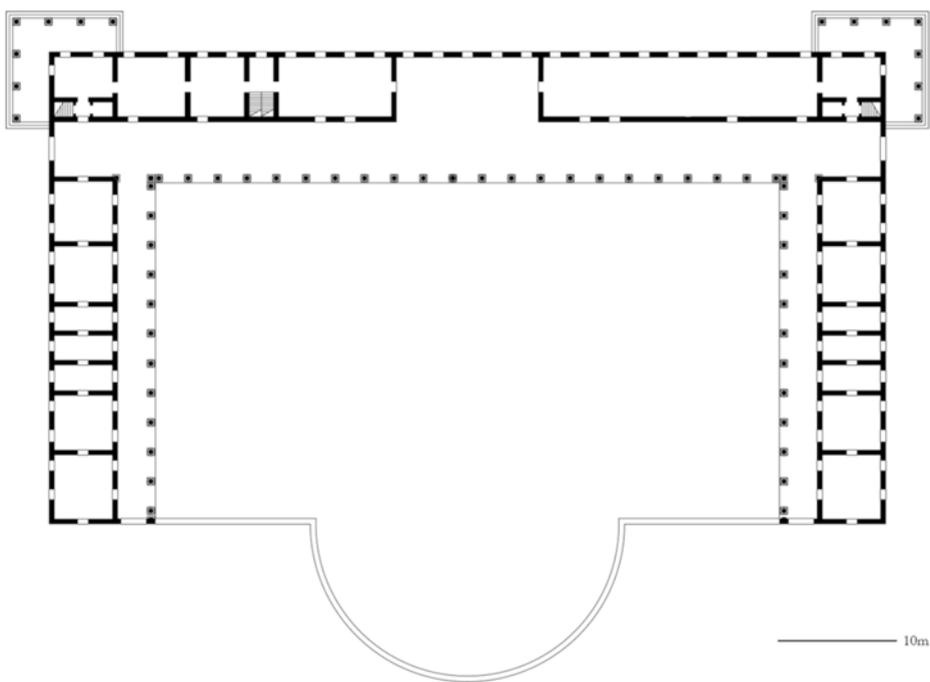
the orders, for the dimensions of the rooms, for the stairs and for the design of the details. In the *Fourth Book* he published the renderings of the Roman temples which he had carefully studied, and in the *Second* and *Third Book* (as no architect before him had done) he offered a sort of retrospective exhibition of his own projects. Of clear and concise language, effective in the communication of complex information thanks to the combination of tables and texts, the *Quattro Libri* represent the most valid illustrated work of architecture published up to that time.”¹²

From this also comes his major influence on the world known at the time, i.e. the Nordic and overseas world which would adopt the Palladian style as its *koinè* for its most representative buildings. But what is still perceived today in Palladio’s *Quattro Libri dell’Architettura* is this modernity as a product of synthesis that expresses, in some cases even radically, the relationship between tradition and innovation, between history and design.

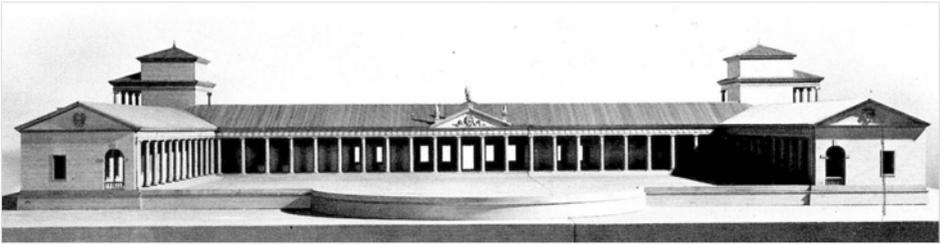
This is an attitude common to all Italian architectural culture from Vitruvius to Leon Battista Alberti, from Palladio to Terragni, and which is expressed in the contemporary world, with different intentions and interpretations, even by some masters of the modern and contemporary architecture: from Ignazio Gardella to Aldo Rossi, from Guido Canella to Gianugo Polesello, just to name a few.

In other words, this affirmation will be the expression of a spirit shared by a certain design culture interested in searching the relationships between the history of architecture and architectural design, in a relationship of continuous typological transformation between tradition and innovation, between new and ancient. Between our present and our past.¹³

“Italian architecture thus becomes, at least from the Renaissance onwards, an architecture of transformation, as it establishes a relationship, different from time to time, between the conservation of the existing and the design of the new, between project architecture and historical architecture, between tradition and



9
Villa Repeta, Piazza
Vecchia, Campiglia dei
Berici (VI), ipotesi
ricostruttive della pianta
(redesign of the plan).



9 a
Model of Villa Repeta, colonnade.

9 b
Model of Villa Repeta.

10
Model of Villa Repeta.

innovation, along a path of experimentation that has always valued, even in times of apparent detachment, memory and history.”¹⁴

Another example of extraordinary modernity and somewhat “singular in Palladio’s production” will be the project for the villa of Francesco and Mario Repeta built in Campiglia dei Berici in the mid-16th century. It will be a further proof of the Palladian *res aedificatoria*.¹⁵

Of this project, nothing has survived except the plan and elevation drawing of the villa and the description in the *Quattro Libri dell’Architettura*. What emerges with unprecedented relevance is the figure generating the overall plan, a repeated sequence of colonnaded porticoes that run along the sides of the various buildings without interruption, like a colonnaded square, or rather a *forum* in the manner of the Latins:

“Ha questa fabrica la commodità di potere andare per tutto al coperto; [...] quanto quella perde di grandezza per non essere più eminente di questa; tanto questa di Villa accresce del suo debito ornamento, e dignità, facendosi uguale à quella del Padrone con bellezza di tutta l’opera”.¹⁶ (Engl.: “This construction has the convenience of allowing to walk everywhere indoors; [...] how much one part loses in size by not being more eminent than the other; so much does this Villa increase its due ornament and dignity, making itself equal to that of the master with the beauty of the whole work.”)

The elevation drawing shows the villa which actually differs from the other buildings only by the presence of a timid tympanum—with statues—erected in the center and aligned with the courtyard. The general layout presents itself as an inhabited enclosure apparently without scale distinctions.

It is a project in which the absence of a main volume predominates as if Palladio had chosen to renounce spectacularization. Looking closely at the plan and elevation of the villa, however,

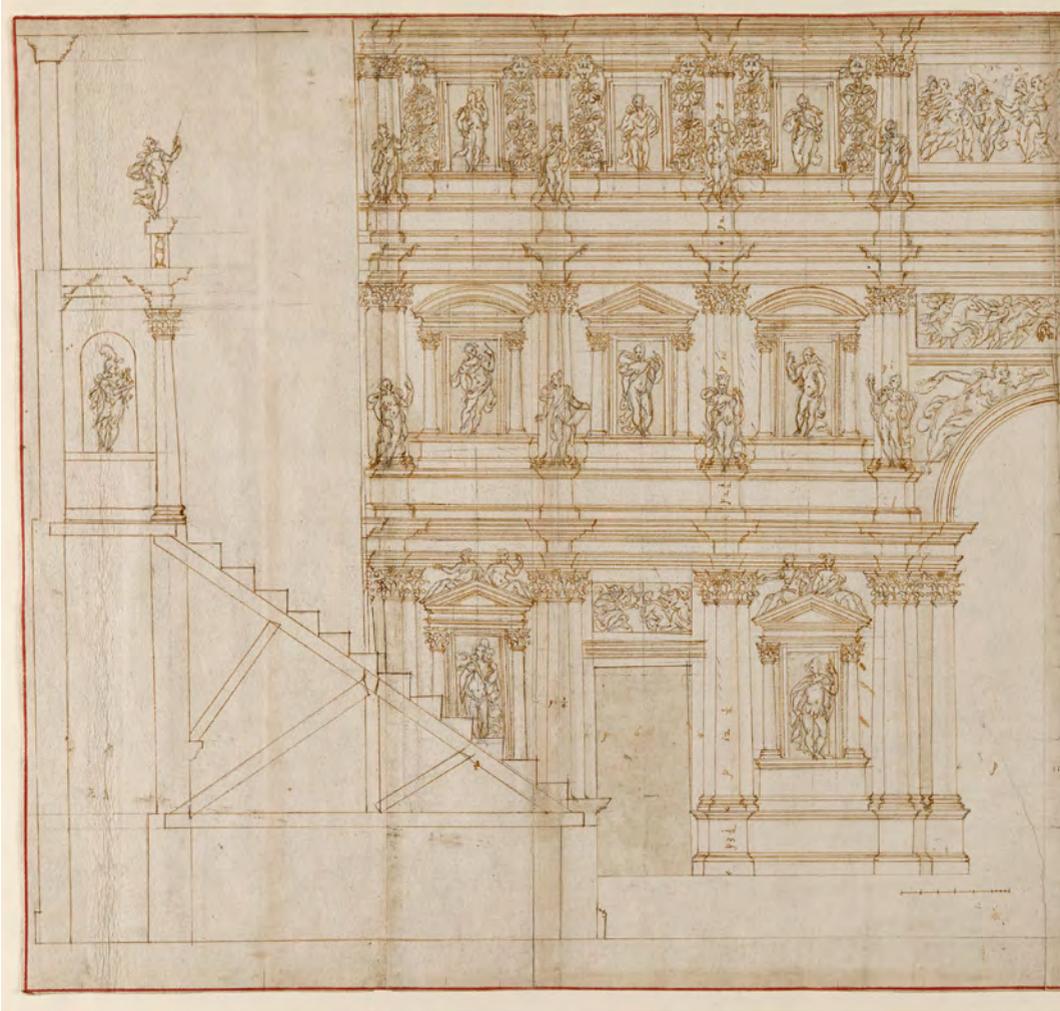
some variations can be noted: such as the choice to differentiate the depths of the porticoes (18 Vicentine feet for the main body and 10 for the side buildings, while the volumes of the buildings remain unchanged inside), or the two twin corner solutions, with small towers (two dovecotes) with open and superimposed loggias set against each other [fig. 9, 9a, 9b, 10].

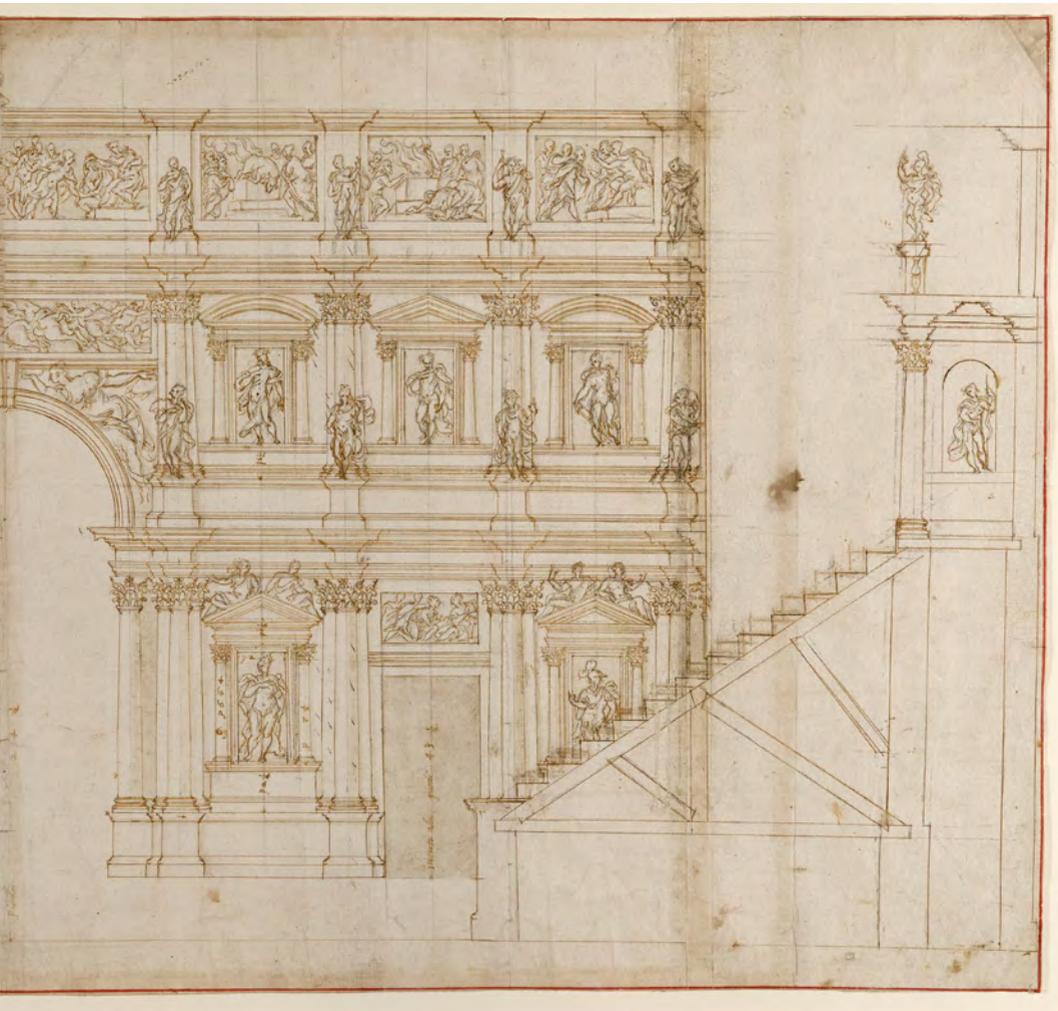
Once again, the reference to ancient architecture and the interest in archeology are evident, and in this case also corroborated by the collaboration with Daniele Barbaro who, precisely at the time of the Villa Repeta project, was completing the annotated translation of the *Dieci Libri dell'Architettura* by Vitruvius: “It is therefore an invention [that of Villa Repeta; Armando Dal Fabbro] from the same period as those inspired by studies on the Books of Vitruvius and on ancient Roman villas. In fact, in 1556 the architect had completed the drawings for the Commentaries of Barbaro to the Ten Books of the Latin treatise. Therefore, the master from Vicenza developed his idea by imagining a large courtyard with architraved porticoes on three sides, with a single Doric order of twenty-one intercolumns in front and eleven on each side.”¹⁷

It is another distinctive sign of Palladio's vocation to express the value of architecture in few repeated modular elements, by “[...] making use of the simplest, most normal and measured, indeed chastised, forms and common and often humble materials.”¹⁸

An Ancient *boîte à miracles*

Of a different nature, but equally representative of his poetics, will be the extraordinary reinvention of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, located inside a pre-existing building: By adapting the three constituent parts—cavea, orchestra and scene—of the ancient theater to the existing rectangular lot, deduced from the Vitruvian canons as well as from the study of the existing remains, it seems to prefigure its transition to the modern theatre, marked by a duality between space of the show and the spectator's space.





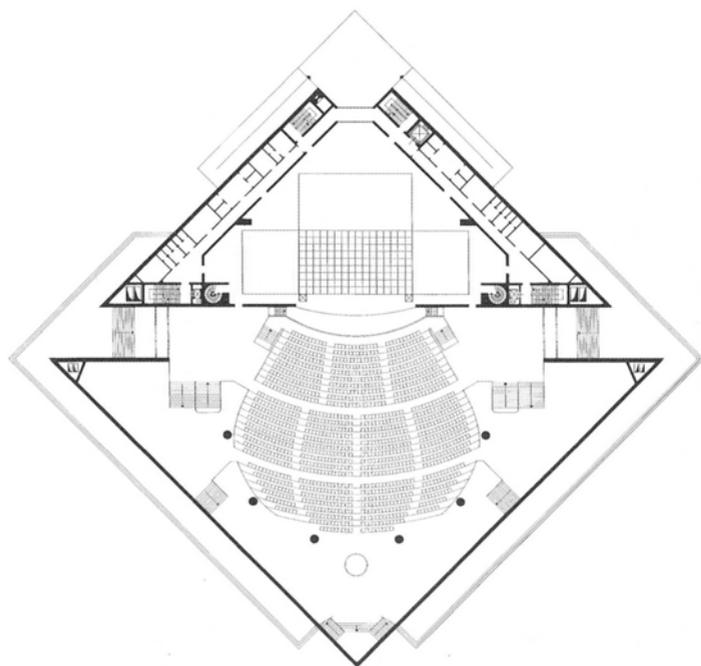
11
Andrea Palladio, Interior
façade project for the
stage of Teatro Olimpico,
Vicenza, 1580.

This occurs by transforming the semicircular auditorium of the Roman theater into a semi-elliptical one, thus drastically reducing the orchestra and enlarging its scene. In addition to the typological experimentation that places this work as a moment of transition from the ancient to the modern theater, it presents another peculiarity, in the relationship with the place. The theatre, inserted in the walls of the old prison, is not visible from the outside. For those who enter, the effect is that of surprise, wonder, in the ‘discovery’ of an admirable theatrical space [fig. 11]. As Manfredo Tafuri writes: “[...] in the space of the Olimpico one can only ‘sink’: not surprisingly, it renounces giving itself a façade in front of the city. A theater without a façade: an extraordinary choice by Palladio, who was an inventor of façades.”¹⁹

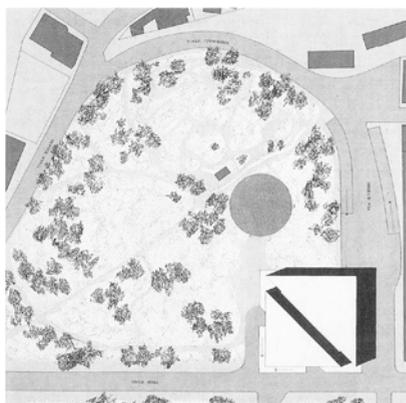
Almost five centuries later, on the occasion of the competition for the new Teatro Comunale in Vicenza (1968–1980), Ignazio Gardella will propose a similar solution. Boxed in a completely solid volume with a square base, cut diagonally, he will re-propose the compositional duality of the theater plan, separating “the (illusionary) space of the show from the (real) space of the spectators”²⁰ [fig. 12–14].

For Gardella “[...] the comparison with Palladio’s Olimpico was inevitable, a perfect model of the classical theater of the Renaissance and repeatedly taken up: auditorium with steps and fixed stage, architectural and perspective, which could be used for tragedy and, with small variations, for comedy. [...] Gardella must have thought a lot about the presence of that masterpiece in the city: his solution takes it into account but is dialectically opposite. In fact, his theater has a plastic compactness that places it in the context as a strong closed and squared block.”²¹

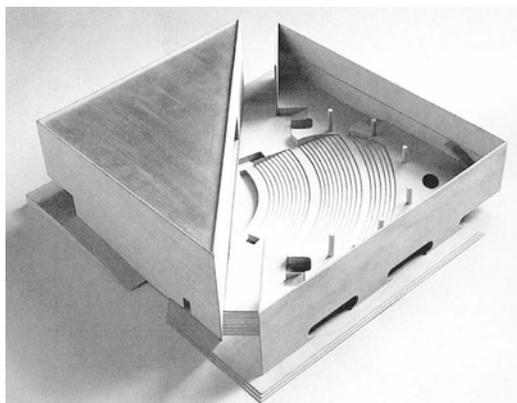
In any case, beyond the certainly acceptable contextual differences, also in the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza Palladio designs a modern idea of architecture for the city, managing to give shape and character to a pre-existing building. The challenging conviction is to imagine it as an ancient Le Corbusian *boîte à miracles*, which in the totality and eloquence of its constituent elements



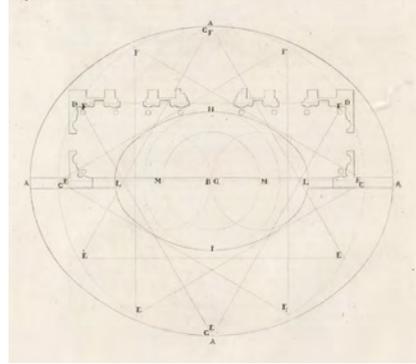
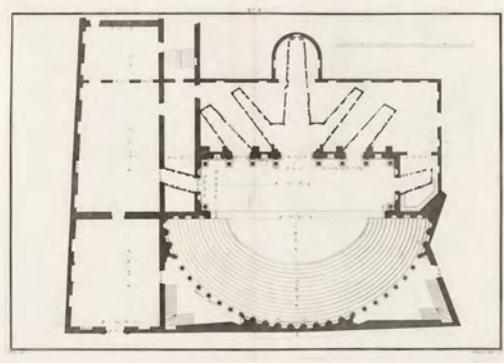
13
 Ignazio Gardella, Project
 for Teatro Comunale di
 Vicenza, first solution,
 floor plan at stage level,
 1968-69.



12
 Ignazio Gardella, Project
 for Teatro Comunale di
 Vicenza, plan of the first
 solution, 1968-69.



14
 Ignazio Gardella, Project
 for Teatro Comunale
 di Vicenza, first solution,
 model views, 1968-69.



leads us to the origin of architecture and of the ancient city. This was also the case for the Palladian villas scattered in the countryside which with their “small town-planning” filled with humanism and rural rationalism give shape and expressive quality to the landscape of the Veneto [fig. 15, 15a, 16].²²

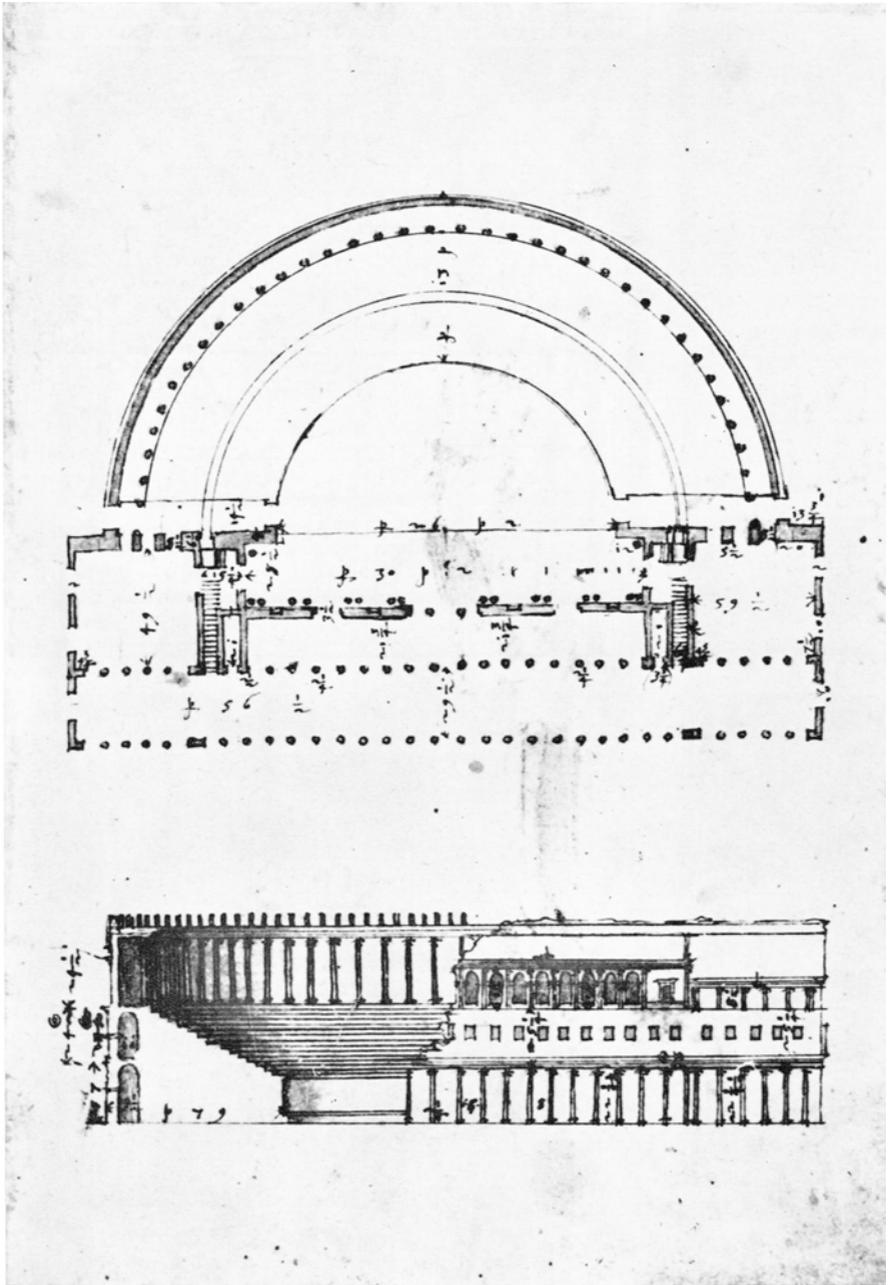
As can be seen from the Palladian examples considered here, starting from the invention of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice as a modern example of the transformation of the city, up to the extraordinary modernity of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza “closed in itself where everything is architecture”²³, the remote dialogue with the Ancient and with some universal and necessary rules of Art never stops.

The Palladian lesson invites us to see the links that can be established between history and design as an expression of a research that does not give up on measuring itself with the spatial characteristics of the city and architecture. This was the case for Palladio (and, we could add, for a large part of the great classical and modern art) who in his research path encountered the Ancient, studied and measured it, interpreted and transformed the Ancient, in dialogue with it.

15
Bertotti Scamozzi, Plan of the Teatro Olimpico building complex, drawing 1776, in: Bertotti Scamozzi 1776–1783, libro I, tav. I, pianta dell'intero complesso.

15 a
Bertotti Scamozzi, Plan of the Teatro Olimpico building complex, drawing 1776, in: Bertotti Scamozzi 1776–1783, libro I, tav. [1]. Testo di riferimento a tavole I–V.

16
Andrea Palladio, Plan and section of the Teatro romano on Mount Zaro in Pola, drawing, 1540, London.



Endnotes

If not indicated otherwise, all translations are by the author of this paper.

Some of the thoughts in this article are inspired by conversations made at different times with Prof. Pierluigi Grandinetti on Palladian themes and on the dialectical comparison between Andrea Palladio and the Modern in general, as well as comparing his work with the projects of Giuseppe Terragni. The essay is also indebted to a typescript of the lecture presented by Grandinetti on the occasion of the seminar *Italian architecture between tradition and innovation*, held at the IUAV Università di Venezia on 31.03.2022. See also on these topics: Grandinetti (ed.) 1985. Some useful reflections on the themes of designing in relation to the role of composition in the contemporary world can also be found in: Grandinetti/Dal Fabbro/Cantarelli (eds.) (2019).

- 1 T.S. Eliot in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. In: Eliot 1920, 43.
- 2 The essays by Gruppo 7 have been published in *Rassegna Italiana* from December 1926 to May 1927, later in the reprint of *Quadrante*, no. 23 and no. 24, March–April 1935. Briefly quoted here is a passage from the article that raises the question of the relationship between Tradition and Modernity: “Between our past and our present there is no incompatibility. We don’t want to break with tradition: it is tradition that transforms itself, takes on new aspects, under which few recognize it.” / Ital.: “Tra il passato nostro e il nostro presente non esiste incompatibilità. Noi non vogliamo rompere con la tradizione: è la tradizione che si trasforma, assume aspetti nuovi, sotto i quali pochi la riconoscono.” On the relationship between tradition, Italian rationalism and rurality, see also Pagano/Daniel 1936.
- 3 To endorse this interdependence between critical ability and creativity, see the theses of T.S. Eliot in: Eliot 1920.
- 4 Rogers 1997/1958, 292: “[...] conservare e costruire sono momenti di un medesimo atto di coscienza, perché l’uno e l’altro sono sottoposti a un medesimo metodo: conservare non ha senso se non è inteso nel significato di attualizzazione del passato e costruire non ha senso se non è inteso come continuazione del processo storico: Si tratta—conclude—di chiarire in noi il senso della storia.”
- 5 Dal Fabbro 2022.
- 6 Lane 1973, 445.
- 7 McAndrew 1995, 204.
- 8 Tafuri 1985, 281: “[...] un ‘bordo’ in gran parte ancora indefinito, sia in senso funzionale che in senso fisico, [...]”
- 9 Lane 1973, 444.
- 10 Samonà 1971.
- 11 Bettini 1962.
- 12 Burns 2000, 9: “*I Quattro Libri* (Venezia 1570) costituiscono il suo autorevole testamento architettonico, in cui egli stabilisce le formule per gli ordini, per le dimensioni delle stanze, per le scale e per la progettazione dei dettagli. Nel *Quarto Libro* egli pubblicò le restituzioni dei templi romani da lui attentamente studiati, e nel *Secondo* e nel *Terzo Libro* (come nessun architetto prima di lui aveva fatto) offrì una sorta di mostra retrospettiva dei propri progetti. Di linguaggio chiaro e conciso, efficaci nella comunicazione di informazioni complesse grazie alla combinazione di tavole e testi, *I Quattro Libri* rappresentano la più valida opera illustrata di architettura pubblicata fino a quell’epoca.”
- 13 See Eliot 1920.
- 14 Grandinetti, Pierluigi, from typescript of the lecture held at the IUAV Università di Venezia on 31.03.2022: “L’architettura italiana diventa così, almeno dal Rinascimento in poi, un’**architettura della trasformazione**, in quanto stabilisce un rapporto, di volta in volta diverso, tra conservazione dell’esistente e progettazione del nuovo, tra architettura di progetto e architetture della storia, tra tradizione

appunto e innovazione, lungo un percorso di sperimentazione che ha sempre dato valore, anche nei momenti di apparente distacco, alla memoria e alla storia.”

- 15 Beltramini 2000, 171.
- 16 Palladio 1570, II 61.
- 17 Zorzi 1969, 120: “Si tratta quindi di una invenzione [quella di villa Repeta; Armando Dal Fabbro] dello stesso periodo di quelle ispirate agli studi sui libri di Vitruvio e sulle ville antiche romane. Infatti l'architetto proprio nel 1556 aveva ultimato i disegni per i *'Commenti'* del Barbaro ai dieci libri del trattatista latino. Perciò il maestro vicentino svolse la sua idea immaginando un grande cortile con portici architravati su tre lati, con un unico ordine dorico di 21 intercolunni di fronte e undici per ogni lato.”
- 18 Cabiati 1980, 3: “[...] servendosi delle forme più semplici, normali e misurate, anzi castigate, e dei materiali comuni e spesso umili.”
- 19 Grandinetti, Pierluigi, from the typescript of the lecture held at IUAV Università di Venezia on 31.03.2022: “[...] adattando al lotto rettangolare già esistente le tre parti costitutive—cavea, orchestra e scena—del teatro antico, desunto dai canoni vitruviani oltre che dallo studio dei resti esistenti, sembra prefigurarne il passaggio al teatro moderno, segnato da una dualità tra spazio dello spettacolo e spazio degli spettatori. Il che avviene trasformando la cavea semicircolare del teatro romano in semiellittica, riducendo così drasticamente l'orchestra e ampliandone la scena. Oltre alla sperimentazione tipologica che colloca quest'opera come momento di transizione dal teatro antico a quello moderno, essa presenta un'altra peculiarità, nel rapporto con il luogo. Il teatro, inserito nel recinto murario delle vecchie prigioni, non si mostra all'esterno. Per chi vi entra, l'effetto è quello della sorpresa, della meraviglia, nella “scoperta” di uno spazio teatrale mirabile. Come scrive Manfredo Tafuri: “[...] nello spazio dell'Olimpico si può solo ‘sprofondare’: non a caso, esso rinuncia a darsi un volto al cospetto della città”. Un teatro senza facciata: una scelta straordinaria del Palladio, che è stato un inventore di facciate.” Tafuri is cited from: Tafuri 1976, 30.
- 20 Grandinetti, Pierluigi, from a typescript of the lecture held at the IUAV Università di Venezia on 31.03.2022: “[...] lo spazio (illusorio) dello spettacolo da quello (reale) degli spettatori.”
- 21 Argan 1979, 92: “[Per Gardella] [...] era inevitabile il confronto con l'Olimpico del Palladio, modello perfetto e più volte ripreso del teatro classico del Rinascimento: cavea gradinata e scena fissa, architettura e prospettiva, da poter servire alla tragedia e, con piccole varianti, alla commedia. [...] Gardella deve aver molto riflettuto sulla presenza in città, di quel capolavoro: la sua soluzione ne tiene conto ma è dialetticamente opposta. Il suo teatro, infatti, ha una compattezza plastica che lo inserisce nel contesto come un forte blocco chiuso e squadrato” See also Guidarini 2002, 196.
- 22 Franco 1959, 19: “[...] ‘piccola urbanistica’ [...]” The concept was taken up and quoted in: Bettini 1962, 96.
- 23 Tafuri 1976, 30.