

Francesco Martinazzo  
**For a “zero degree” of forms.  
 Collage as a compositive methodology**

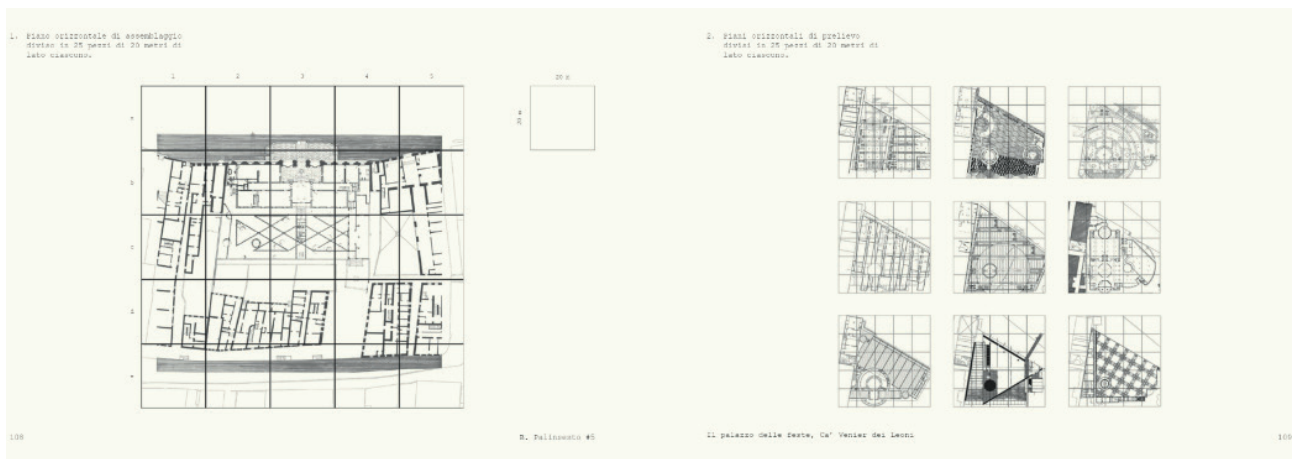
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Author: *Elvio Manganaro*  
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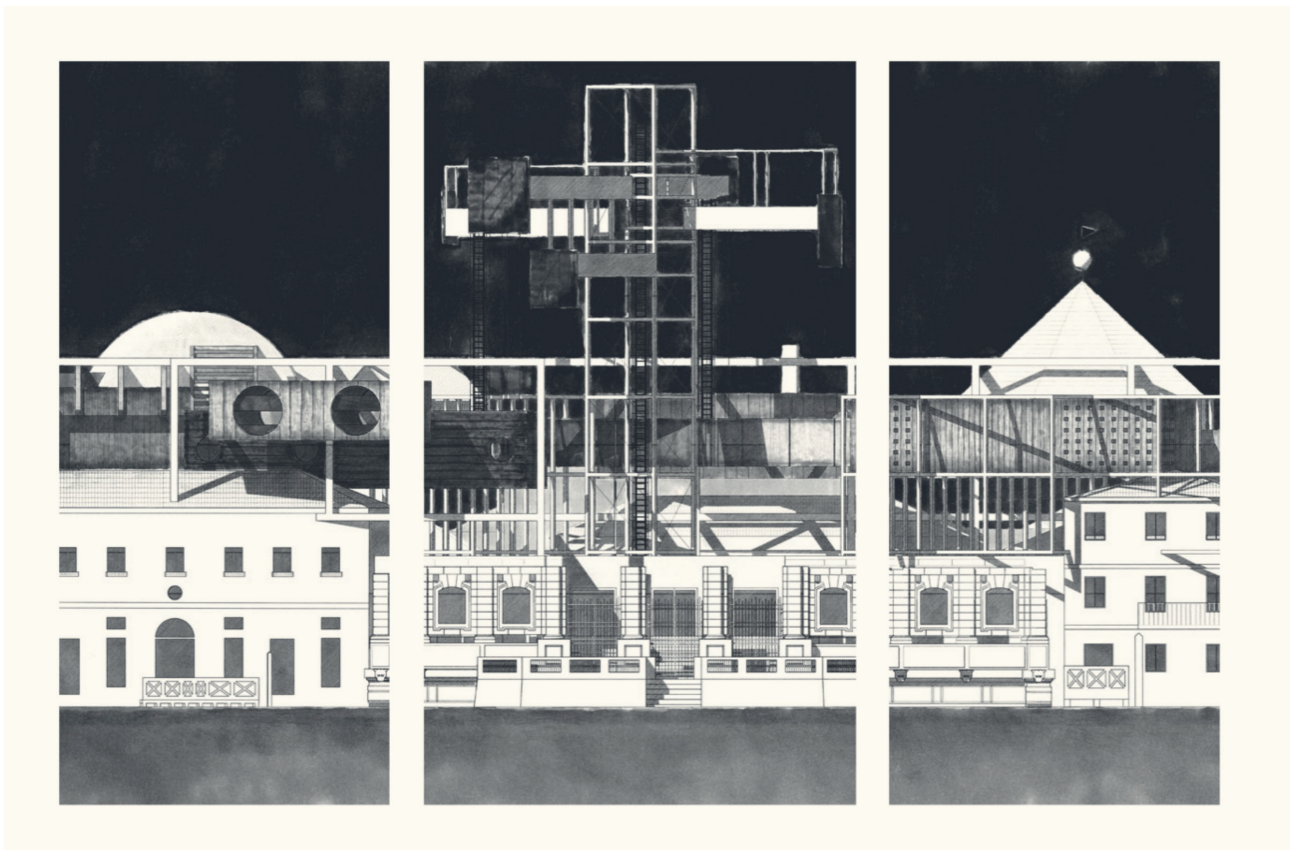


*Durand incontra Balestrini a Venezia*. At first glance, a well-packaged book, with sophisticated graphics, which already from its title - erudite and enigmatic at the same time - reveals all its disorientating, amphibious nature, oscillating on various borderline planes. A book that immediately presents itself as imaginary, invented, BORGESIAN. It is indeed an impossible encounter, the one devised by Elvio Manganaro (with the careful curatorship of Riccardo Rapparini), between Jean-Nicholas-Luis Durand and Nanni Balestrini, in Venice. Neoclassicism and Neo-avant-garde compared, it might seem strange; and two methods, both contemplating a norm and a ‘discard’, both we might say automatic, both combinatorial: one architectural and one literary. It is the logical-mathematical spirit, the repetitive and mechanical aspect, that dominates the pages, as well as the physical form. The long history of the *Ars combinatoria* comes to mind: from Raimondo Lullo to Giulio Camillo, to Giordano Bruno and the avant-gardes of the 20th century. And yet, unexpectedly, not a digression on the dynamics of such a “collision” (between Durand and Balestrini), but a *merzabau* generated from its fragments. It is only by retreating, “sheltered”, into one of the “caves” sedimented by the dust, that we discover that from this cosmic, elliptical image (made up of literary, cinematographic, poetic or artistic citations), little by little it is revealed, gradually blurred, what the book actually is, nothing simpler (at least on the surface): it outlines the results (or rather the workings) of an architectural composition workshop (at the Politecnico di Milano) in the second year of the bachelor. The work of the teacher-author with the students in fact starts from a depot-warehouse of Venetian architectures: projects built or left only on paper, then disassembled, mutilated and put side by side (or superimposed) according to different logics (always following a clear method, however), and finally recombined through the technique of collage within the perimeter imprint of the geometries of the *First Prototype of Venetian Palace* by Andrea Palladio (1570). Thus the seven resulting *palimpsests* (or exercises), starting from the “playful abstraction” of the collage in the configuration of plans, elevations and sections; find a functional reliability in the reference context, testing its possibilities as an operational tool. So, in the face of an increasingly technocentric discipline, where composing seems to be tied to profit and the aestheticisation that comes with it, «Invece



**Fig. 1**  
 Images taken from the volume, *Planimetria Ca' Venier dei Leoni*, developed from the materials of the 1985 competition (on the left). Projects for the Italian Pavilion at the Biennale Gardens 1988 (on the right).

qui, per una volta, [scrive Manganaro] si sarebbe voluto presentare allo studente di architettura solo il metodo o il Procedimento, limitandosi alla strumentazione, ai meccanismi interni, ai dispositivi operativi, al libretto delle istruzioni insomma, castigando la malia delle parole e le seduzioni della retorica. [...] [Un] piccolo manuale di architettura automatica. Un prontuario per fare poesia a partire da altre poesie [...]. È questa dimensione antisoggettiva a sembrarmi l'unica cosa che valga la pena oggi essere perseguita, facendo violenza ai nostri mondi interiori, che sono tutti uguali, appiattiti sulle medesime frustrazioni e vanità»<sup>1</sup>. To free oneself, therefore, from all causality with the 'happy' disenchantment of the dialectical materialist, from all mercantilistic or historiographical impulses. This would seem to be the point: to limit the semantic scope of images, to return to a zero degree of forms, understood as signs emptied of meaning, taken for what they are in their combinations and balancing acts, in the chasing game of signifiers.: «Queste reliquie eteroclitiche di una tassonomia scombinata, e perciò grifagne, museali, diventano gli attrezzi di un giocoliere»<sup>2</sup>. Here is the breaking point, anti-academic if you like. If I may. This is not a book that provides answers or clear-cut outcomes; on the contrary, it dodges any teleological ambitions in a roundabout way. If in fact distinctive principles, order and demonstrability constitute the foundations of the method, «[...] producono conoscenza, e non di rango inferiore, anche gli sviamenti, gli attimi di pura fascinazione per ciò che non stavamo cercando e che ci viene incontro con la felice impertinenza della casualità, interpellandoci come un enigma esigente»<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, there remains an open question, which the book, almost like an amulet, poses to us, and we do not know what it is. We could say, in a Pasolinian sense, that this book is a 'scandal', even though it is not scandalous at all, since provocation is no longer of any use, it is always swallowed up by the system. Here, on the other hand, we witness this obstinacy in rejecting every form of stale doctrinaireism, every claim to scientificity, and every wrapped-up taxonomy. We witness a veritable desecration, where even the reference is used not in a biographical way, nor pertinent to anything, but hallucinated, distorted, as if inserted into a kaleidoscope gone mad. Thus, the readiness of the fragment to present itself as an apparition, to evoke entire worlds, the heteroclitic nature of the text, its bringing into play a "palinestuous reading" (cf. Philippe Lejeune), even of the masters, whether architects or poets, and the transdisciplinarity that derives from it, are configured as places of epistemological uncertainty in which to sink, to experience their very formation, their composition, their stratification. It is no coincidence that the battle that the book enacts takes place on an



**Fig. 2**

Images taken from the volume, *Venezianella and Studentaccio*, the palace of the parties, Ca' Venier dei leoni, project by Benedetta Scarano, Caterina Solini.

aesthetic level: to the detriment of the 'bulimia' of images by which we are submerged daily, which is atrophic, here «Alla negatività del non-sense e dello sberleffo (DADA) si accompagna la volontà di costruzione, e quindi un modello di lavoro artistico metodico e scrupoloso»<sup>4</sup>. What remains?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Manganaro E. (2022) – *Durand incontra Balestrini a Venezia*, Lettera Ventidue, Siracusa, pp.11-12. «Instead, here, for once, [writes Manganaro] one would have liked to present the student of architecture only with the method or the *procedure*, limiting himself to the instrumentation, the internal mechanisms, the operational devices, the instruction booklet, in short, chastising the malice of words and the seductions of rhetoric. [...] [A] small manual of automatic architecture. A handbook for making poetry from other poems [...]. It is this anti-subjective dimension that seems to me the only thing worth pursuing today, doing violence to our inner worlds, which are all the same, flattened on the same frustrations and vanities».

<sup>2</sup> Ripellino A. M. (1987) – *Scontraffatte chimere*, Pellicanolibri, Roma, p.7. «These heteroclitel relics of a discombobulated taxonomy, and therefore grimy, museum-like, become the tools of a juggler».

<sup>3</sup> Tartarini C. (2011), presentation of the book of Georges Didi-Huberman, *La conoscenza accidentale. Apparizione e sparizione delle immagini*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino. [online] Available at: [https://r.cantook.com/edgt/sample/aHR0cHM6Ly9lZGlnaXRhLmNhbnRvb2submV0L3NhbXBsZS83NTElL3diY19yZWFKZXJfbWFuaWZlc3Q\\_Zm9ybWF0X25hdHVyZT1lcHVl](https://r.cantook.com/edgt/sample/aHR0cHM6Ly9lZGlnaXRhLmNhbnRvb2submV0L3NhbXBsZS83NTElL3diY19yZWFKZXJfbWFuaWZlc3Q_Zm9ybWF0X25hdHVyZT1lcHVl) [Last accessed: 31 may 2023]. «[...] also produce knowledge, and not of a lesser rank, the diversions, the moments of pure fascination for what we were not looking for and which comes to us with the happy impertinence of chance, questioning us like a demanding enigma».

<sup>4</sup> Nicastri A. , quoted in Cortellessa A. (2009), “Angoscia dello spazio”, in Grazioli E. (edited by), *Kurt Schwitters*, «Riga» n.29, p.15. «The negativity of non-sense and mockery (DADA) is accompanied by the will to construct, and thus a methodical and scrupulous model of artistic work».