

SPATIAL IMAGERIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



Edited by Andrea Scapolo and Angela Porcarelli

Interpreting Urban Spaces in Italian Cultures

Amsterdam
University
Press

Interpreting Urban Spaces in Italian Cultures



Amsterdam
University
Press

Spatial Imageries in Historical Perspective

This series is looking for interdisciplinary contributions that focus on the historical study of the imagined space, or of spaces and places as sensorial, experiential or intellectual images, from the interior to the landscape, in written, visual or material sources. From (closed) gardens and parks to cabinets, from the odd room to the train compartment, from the façade to the prison cell, from the reliquary to the desk, a variety of spaces in the shape of imageries and images unveils historical attitudes to history, to the object, to the other and the self and presents a subject that experiences, acts, imagines and knows. Spatial imageries and images in this sense constitute a prominent theme in various fields within the Humanities, from museum studies, intellectual history and literature to material culture studies, to name but a few.

Spatial Imageries in Historical Perspective therefore addresses a broad audience of scholars that engage in the historical study of space in this sense, from the Early Middle Ages to the Recent Past in literature, art, in material culture, in scholarly and other discourses, from either cultural and contextual or more theoretical angles.

Series editor

Dominique Bauer, University of Leuven, Belgium



Amsterdam
University
Press

Interpreting Urban Spaces in Italian Cultures

*Edited by
Andrea Scapolo and
Angela Porcarelli*

Amsterdam University Press



Amsterdam
University
Press

Cover illustration: City of Bologna Rooftop. Published on October 31, 2016 NIKON CORPORATION, NIKON D7100. Free to use under the Unsplash License.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 466 1

e-ISBN 978 90 4855 463 8

DOI 10.5117/9789463724661

NUR 648

© The Authors / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2023

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.



Amsterdam
University
Press

Table of Contents

Preface	7
Introduction	9
Part I The City as a Performative Space in Early Modern Italy	
1. Marketplace Encounters: Social Mixing on the Streets of Early Modern Florence	19
<i>April D. Weintritt</i>	
2. “Noble Edifices”: The Urban Image of Papal Rome, 1417–1667	39
<i>Matthew Knox Averett</i>	
3. Perspective Cities: Staging Transferable Spaces in Learned Comedy	65
<i>Lucia Gemmani</i>	
4. The Lure of Shopping: The Mercerie in Early Modern Venice and the City as a Permanent Mall	81
<i>Isabella Cecchini</i>	
5. Ancient Magnificence and Modern Design	111
Roman Architecture and Identity in the Printed Works of Alessandro Specchi (1666–1729) and Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778)	
<i>Abbey Hafer</i>	
Part II The City in Times of Crisis: Urban Spaces in Modern Italy.	
6. Le piazze d’Italia: De Chirico’s Prophetic Vision of Public Space in Destination Italy	139
<i>Julianne VanWagenen</i>	
7. <i>Colonie</i> Architecture and Fascism’s Cult of Youth	157
<i>Diana Garvin</i>	



8. <i>Fare la vita grigia</i> : The Industrial City of Italo Calvino and Luciano Bianciardi <i>Samantha Gillen</i>	183
Part III The City as a Space of Conflict: Landscapes of Late Capitalism	
9. Il mondo è meglio non vederlo che vederlo: Naples as Urban Dystopia in <i>Un paio di occhiali</i> <i>Brian Tholl</i>	207
10. Narratives of a 'City Under Siege': Bodies and Discourses of the 1977 Movement in Bologna <i>Danila Cannamela and Achille Castaldo</i>	225
11. Exploring Urban Space: Terzani's <i>In Asia</i> (1965–1997) <i>Ellen Patat</i>	245
Index	265



Preface

In recent years, the concept of space, its representations, and the social, cultural, and political forces that shape and inhabit it have drawn increasing attention from a broad range of disciplinary perspectives. Urban spaces in particular, have come to the fore as crucial subjects of investigation and reflection. In this sense, the history of the Italian cities offers a sort of litmus test to verify the validity and ramifications of this connection between space and cultural production, economy, and political order.

Our research trajectories, specifically the study of early modern Italian comic literature and theater, naturally led us to realize the vantage point that Italian studies offer to the research in urban studies. That realization motivated us to facilitate a conversation among scholars at the cutting edge of the field. Our goal was to track the connection between the city and modernity from its origins, in the proto-capitalist Renaissance Italian city-states, to the current globalization of urban space. At the same time, we aimed at putting Italian studies in dialogue with disciplines and perspectives at the forefront of intellectual conversation in other fields of study. Finally, we wanted to propose a trajectory of analysis that questions the national dimension of Italian cultural production by delocalizing it both at the level of its regional diversity and the global scale beyond national borders.

This ambitious vision lies at the core of this collection of essays by a diverse group of scholars working in North American and European institutions. Bringing this vision to fruition was not an easy task. It entailed a long process and the need to overcome numerous challenges brought about by the unprecedented circumstances of a global pandemic. The COVID pandemic has profoundly and durably changed how we inhabit and conceive of shared spaces. It also sheds light on the impact that the city space has on our life, culture, and what it means to be human. At a time when our way of life has been disrupted and dramatically limited, we looked back at the history of the representations of urban spaces in Italian culture to make sense of our present and imagine a possible future.

We believe that this volume constitutes an invaluable springboard for future research endeavors that intend to approach the study of Italy and Italian culture from interdisciplinary and global perspectives. We are deeply grateful to the contributors for their generosity, grace, and commitment to this project. We are also thankful to the amazing team at the Amsterdam University Press and, in particular, Dominique Bauer for their constant support and patience. Their vision and forward-thinking mission will help the humanities remain relevant for many years to come.



Amsterdam
University
Press

Introduction

The cultural production of the urban landscape is a complex and contradictory phenomenon as the city provides channels of interaction that affect socio-economic, political and cultural structures of society. The complex and multilayered ecology that defines the city space invites an interdisciplinary approach to its analysis. The field of urban studies has embraced this interdisciplinary perspective by bridging the social sciences with contributions from fields such as literature, history, philosophy and the like.

Humanities-based investigations bolster a deep understanding of the ways urban life shapes notions of community and identity. On the one hand, the city has always been a special object of representation in literature and the arts; on the other, these representations are key to understanding the significance of urban architecture beyond its materiality. Encoded in it are ideas, ideologies, as well as political and economic worldviews. Yet these are not presented in abstract form, but as concrete buildings and monuments, streets and squares that are themselves forms of representations. The city has a symbolic and material nature, each based on and affected by the other; its complexity cannot be captured within one single discipline.

In his seminal work, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre talks about “the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias.”¹ Joe Moran, applying Lefebvre’s view of the urban space, affirms that:

Cities are clearly material entities, products of some of the traditional concerns of geography such as labour, land and capital, but they are also textualized. In a sense, the city can only ever be understood textually, because it is far too complicated and labyrinthine to be encapsulated in its material totality: we only ever have access to a selective interpretation of it.²

1 Lefebvre, Henri, and David Harvey, *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 11–12.

2 Moran, Joe, *Interdisciplinarity* (London: Routledge, 2010), 166.

In this volume we approach the city as a textual representation, or better yet as a plurality of textual representations. We aim to capture the multifaceted identity of the city, physical and symbolic, so as to acknowledge its cultural and anthropological nature.

Our volume uses methodologies drawn from diverse disciplines to explore the life of major Italian cities, among which Florence, Rome, Venice and Naples, at specific junctures in time, when fundamental transformations in the structuring of collective identity occurred. The objective is not to offer a survey of representations of Italian cities across time, but rather to spotlight chronotopes that we have identified as particularly significant. The city is a living palimpsest; it carries in its materiality the signs of time. The volume, by consequence, emphasizes the importance of the historical context as crucial to the study of urban space. The book opens with essays dedicated to the proto-capitalist space of the Renaissance city states. It follows its development through the modernity of the Italian nation, building into the crisis of late capitalism and the contradictions brought about by current processes of globalization.

We divided this volume into three thematically organized parts. The essays making up the first unit, “The City as a Performative Space in Early Modern Italy,” each from its own original perspective, illustrate how the configuration or reconfiguration of the city affects the socio-political and economic structure of collective life.

At the beginning of “Marketplace Encounters: Social Mixing on the Streets of Early Modern Florence,” April Weintritt argues for the legitimacy and importance of using popular literary sources for historical interpretations. Comedy in particular, given its inclination to realism, reveals the social aspects of the architectural space by emphasizing customary or atypical public and private behaviors. In order to explore the life in Florence’s *mercato vecchio*, today’s Piazza della Repubblica, Weintritt concentrates on Antonio Pucci’s fourteenth-century poem *Proprietà del mercato vecchio*, and three sixteenth-century comedies: two by Giovan Battista Gelli, *La sporta* and *Lo errore*, and one by Maria Cecchi, *L’ammalata*. Referencing these texts, the author documents the plurality of the crowd attending the market square as well as the vitality and social mixing with which it was characterized. What emerges from her exploration is a special type of beauty; not one coming from the mathematical proportions and symmetries of the buildings, but one developing from the chaos of the human labyrinth that inhabits the market. The author focuses in particular on the *zanaiuoli* (“deliverymen”); these figures were at the center of social interactions and as such, they are key to understanding the complex dynamics of the marketplace.



The second chapter, by Matthew Knox Averett, reconstructs the urban history of Papal Rome from 1427 to 1667, displaying the connection between urbanism and politics and illustrating the ways in which architectural projects were used as tools to gain, retain, and exercise power. The author begins by describing the state of decadence and neglect that took over the architectural glory of ancient Rome in the Medieval period; he draws parallels with the growing political instability of the Papal States and their decline in power. To restore the glory of the papacy it was necessary to bring back the architectural splendor of Rome; to transform the city into a place apt to represent, visually and symbolically, its role as a major European capital. The death of Pope Alexander VII in 1667 signaled the end of one of the most successful building campaigns of early modern Rome.

In “Perspective Cities: Staging Transferable Spaces in the Learned Comedy,” Lucia Gemmani discusses the use of perspective in the stage settings of *comedia erudita* (“learned comedy”). Scenographies, commissioned to actual painters such as Pellegrino Prisciani and Girolamo Genca, were initially rather rudimentary, but by the sixteenth century the *sceanae frons* had given way to perspectival representations. The scenes of the plays were used to promote the political ideology of the court’s elite, their idea of city space and its internal socio-political organization. This was achieved mainly by presenting the city on stage both symbolically and realistically. The cities in the sceneries had familiar features; the audience could recognize in them their own urban spaces. As a consequence, the spectators would relate the events of the play to their own personal experience.

In “The Lure of Shopping. The Mercerie in Early Modern Venice and the City as a Permanent Mall,” Isabella Cecchini describes how the urban route of the *Mercerie* (“streets of mercers”) marked the identity of the city and established it as a powerful political and commercial center. The concentration of shops around Rialto and along the road from Rialto to St. Mark constituted, according to Ennio Concina’s argument, the “umbilicus” of the city where, as Cecchini writes, its two hearts would meet: the commercial one of Rialto and the political one of St. Mark’s. In her case study of the Venice *Mercerie*, by using as evidence contemporary guides, archival documents and the existing literature on the subject, the author demonstrates how an urban route became the essence of an early modern economy and society.

In the first part of her contribution, “Ancient Magnificence and Modern Design: Roman Architecture and Identity in the Printed Works of Alessandro Specchi (1666–1729) and Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778),” Abbey Hafer illustrates how Specchi, through his representation of early modern architectural masterpieces, exerts his influence as a pedagogue



to contemporary architects; he teaches them to use the heritage of ancient Rome's architectural achievements as a basis for developing modern architecture. She then illustrates how Piranesi, similarly to Specchi, sees the history of ancient Rome as essential in shaping theories and practices of modern architecture.

The second section of the book "The City in Times of Crisis: Urban Spaces in Modern Italy," investigates the ways in which historical processes as well as the socio economic and cultural transformations of modernity both shape the physical appearance of the urban landscape and are, at the same time, shaped by it.

"*Le piazze d'Italia: de Chirico's Prophetic Vision of Public Space in Destination Italy*" by Julianne VanWagenen offers a compelling interpretation of De Chirico's *Piazza d'Italia*. The author reads the empty space characterizing the paintings in relation to the phenomenon of the mass-tourist gaze of the *fin de siècle* in Italy. When looking at the urban landscape, tourists remove the human presence to see only the monuments, as happens, as Barthes noted, in tour-guide books where the city appears as an uninhabited space. The author demonstrates how mass tourism affected the architectural design of the city by causing its commodification. This phenomenon is reflected in De Chirico's piazzas where the artist on one hand has erased the negative presence of the tourists, and on the other he has projected in the landscape their alienating gaze.

Diana Garvin's chapter focuses on the *colonie*—fascist summer camps—some of which still mark the Italian landscape today. In her analysis, Garvin connects the architectural features of the buildings and their functions with the political ideology of the Fascist regime. The cult of racial health and physical fitness led the regime to create holiday hostels where children from low social classes could take advantage of the benefits of the outdoors and practice physical activity. This mass organization of the children's play time allowed Fascism to exercise its power at the microscopic level of the personal individual life. By the end of the chapter Garvin has successfully demonstrated the ways in which the *colonie* constituted a powerful means to mold and control the new generation, as well as an extremely effective tool for propaganda.

In "*Fare la vita grigia: The Industrial City of Italo Calvino and Luciano Bianciardi*," Samantha Gillen focuses on the greyness that covered the industrialized cities during the time of the economic boom of post war Italy. Gillen illustrates how Italo Calvino and Luciano Bianciardi attached to the color grey a symbolic value and turned it into a feeling that effectively translates the malaise of modernity. Although in different and original ways,



both Calvino's *La nuvola di smog* / *Smog* (1958) and Bianciardi's *La vita agra* / *It's a Hard Life* (1962) render in their narratives the process of transformation that turned Italy into a consumerist society; the grey, *il grigiore* of the industrial landscape becomes the visible trait of the moral degradation that leads to the conformity and submission to the new neo-capitalistic ideology.

The third and final section, "The City as a Space of Conflict: Landscapes of Late Capitalism," deals with the many and contradictory directions the evolution of the city space and its representations have taken under late capitalism: from the dystopian disarticulation of social spaces to their precarious rearticulation in the cultural production of political movements to their projection onto a new globalized urban space.

In "Il mondo è meglio non vederlo che vederlo: Naples as Urban Dystopia in *Un paio di occhiali*," Brian Tholl focuses on Naples in the aftermath of World War II through analysis of the short story by Anna Maria Ortese, "*Un paio di occhiali*," and its film adaptation by Carlo Damasco. In both works the dystopian representation of the city develops from the very nature of the utopia that precedes it. In the process of this transformation the qualities of the physical space marking the divisions existing among social classes become more and more evident, as does the impossibility of crossing them. When the protagonist Eugenia wears her glasses and sees the reality of her environment, she is overcome by nausea. This is the moment when she leaves childhood behind and enters the disillusionment of adulthood. As in the etymology of the word utopia, based on the Greek words *ou* "not" + *topos* "place," the city she imagined is a "no place;" its counterpart is the more concrete dystopia of the *bassi* where the protagonist and her social class are confined.

"Narratives of a 'City Under Siege': Bodies and Discourses of the 1977 Movement in Bologna," by Danila Cannamela and Achille Castaldo, takes the reader into the urban landscape of Bologna in the late seventies, when the city became the stage for political activism organized around new forms of social aggregation. During this time, some areas in the city become laboratories for creative ideas, as in the case of the *Traumfabrik* (the "factory of dreams"), an apartment in Via Clavature occupied by the musician Gianpiero Huber together with Filippo Scozzari and Dadi Mariotti. By telling the story of the political and artistic activities that took place in squares, streets, university buildings or private spaces, the authors illustrate the complex dynamics of communal existence within this political movement of the seventies. They reveal the vital creativity of this movement as well as the self-destructive impulses which developed in response to the trauma of the violent repression it experienced.



The last chapter of the book, “Terzani’s cityscapes of Asia: *In Asia* (1965–1997),” by Ellen Patat, takes the reader outside Italy. The author analyzes Tiziano Terzani’s narrative of his travels across Asia. Patat illustrates how the author, looking at the landscape from a space of otherness, inevitably over-imposes on it his knowledge, sensibility and expectations. Terzani combines the information on twentieth-century East Asia he accumulated over the years as a war correspondent, to the sensibility and subjective view of a traveler who narrates his first-hand experience. As a result, the cities described undergo a transformation when transposed on the page. Terzani’s narrative is not a chronicle nor a personal diary. His prose deconstructs the cities into fragments, and only after the author projects his personal experience into them, are they reconstructed in a literary elaborated portrayal of the complex and rich reality of the Asian continent; the emotional involvement of the writer affects the reader and succeeds in raising cultural sensitivity and awareness that would not emerge from a merely informative account. Furthermore, from Terzani’s pages emerges the image of an Orient where opposite forces face one another: the effect of the globalization process and the consequent disappearance of local culture, and the efforts to resist and oppose such a process.

With its last essay the volume finally approaches the present time, inviting further investigation of the global dynamics of current society. After this journey through the history of the representations of Italian urban space, the reader will be better equipped to appreciate the complexities, contradictions and possibilities that mark the city today.

This volume presents a collection of distinct snapshots of Italian city spaces taken at different times in history and through the lens of multidisciplinary perspectives. Each picture gains depth from its dialogue with the others. The reader, like a post-modern *flâneur*, is invited to gaze at some of the most memorable *scorci* of the Italian urban landscape. Through this process, an image of the city takes shape, not as a unified whole, but as a mosaic of voices and narratives inscribed into its materiality and social fabric across space and time.

About the Authors

Angela Porcarelli is Associate Teaching Professor of Italian at Emory University. Her research focuses on Medieval and Renaissance literature, theories and literary expressions of comedy, Modern Italian literature and Italian cinema.



Amsterdam
University
Press

Andrea Scapolo is an Associate Professor of Italian at Kennesaw State University. His research focuses on drama-based pedagogy, the theater of Dario Fo and Franca Rame and the reception of Gramsci in post-war Italy.

