THE BURDEN OF THE CEREMONY MASTER

IMAGE AND ACTION IN SAN MARCO, VENICE, AND IN AN ISLAMIC MOSQUE

The Rituum Cerimoniale of 1564

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2000
PREFACE

Some years ago I came across an article with the provocative title, *Die Grenzen der Koranforschung*. My reaction to such a surgical proposition was: *So ein Ding müssen wir auch haben* (to stay in the language). For in Art History a lot of things are done but one does not know very clearly what, since limits of scope and possibility are rarely on the agenda. And yet, in some circles, mostly in the US, there is an increasing discomfort with the way the discipline has been traditionally conducted and still seems to dominate some recent large-scale ventures.

Since the mid-1970s I had at my disposal a large and well-documented material concerning San Marco in Venice: the *Rituem cerimoniale* in the Marciana library (in my transcription sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council) and the *Citogna 1659* in the Correr library (in photo), both in Venice. I thought such a material would be suited for discussing limitation issues, and the present book, the first version of which was written in 1996, is the outcome.

My book comments, and presents in the Appendix, the main part of a ceremonial document written by the Ceremony Master of San Marco, Venice, whose name was Bartolomeo Bonifacio (he died in 1564). It took considerable time and care to transcribe the manuscript. This work was sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities: *NAVF*. The manuscript, *Rituem cerimoniale*, today is in the Biblioteca Marciana. The document is in great demand among scholars in several fields. It is very hard to read, almost every page containing sections that have been, in part overwritten, crossed-out or corrected in the margin. Very many additions inserted later than in the sixteenth century have been crossed out; a few additions have been completely obliterated (the other extant copies do not have these illuminating extras). It is my hope that my publication of the *Introduction, Index and Liber Primus* (*Dominicale*) may be of use to scholarship, even though, as I hasten to add, I publish it as I read it, without any critical apparatus, which it would be outside my competences to provide; on the recommendation of the Rev. Don Bruno Bertoli, rector of the Studio Cattolico Veneziano.

On the *piano nobile* level this book is about research and analysis of complex situations involving visual media; and which situation does not? On the *altico* level, as a consequence, it is about the fuzzy triangular relationship “real world” — Science — the Humanities. Its main tenet is that all situations are complex. Writing, we create largely unsurveyable universes packed with slippery things. The attitude facing this that is recommend is the attitude taken by Cardinal Nikolas von Kues (*Cusanus*: 1401-1464) concerning a more measurable but, in his time, equally evasive subject: cosmology. In the summary of the superior historian Marie Boas (in her classic *The scientific Renaissance, 1450-1630*), Cusanus is reported as holding such radical views as these (in his *De docta ignorantia* of 1440 — published before cosmology became a dangerous subject): cosmos represents a
complexity whose order we cannot conceive; nothing is fixed, all is relative (the centre is everywhere and nowhere); all things are in motion, even the centre of the universe; nor is there a constant uniform motion. And Boas comments: *Though Cues worked out his system in some detail, he intended only to show the philosophical necessity for breaking with the concept of an ordered universe...*

At all crucial points I am using models. The reader should realize that such models are not illustrations to verbal texts but tools of argumentation in their own right; the general picture is a product of the interaction between graphic and verbal discourse.

The gist of what I am trying to say, is this. You cannot deny that the situations we are facing in our ordinary research are at least as complex as I am showing. So you cannot deny that the possibilities for our handling them that I propose represent a maximum of what we can do–in principle, for I am not saying there are not better specific methods than those that I am presenting. Thus scope and range of Humanities and the Social Sciences are severely reduced in comparison with what is being usually claimed or, indeed, taken for granted. Galileo Galilei's realistic attitude is recommendable: we can describe how things work but are not in the position of providing any deeper interpretation and explanation: ...perchabere ardezzza, per non dir temennta, la mia, se dentro a gl'angusti confini del mio intendere volest mi circumscrivere l'intendere et l'operare della natura (1611; quoted by De Santillana, p. 63). This, let us hope, should reduce the number of pontificating professors on the European Continent.

In the Sciences they take you through an argumentation; in the Humanities they try to convince you. I have opted for the former tack, not wanting to demonstrate anything but attempting to structure an argumentation. This applies especially to the graphic models I am using for monitoring my argumentation. For most cases, there will be available or one may design a vast number of alternative and equally useful graphic models; all of them will be inadequate or insufficient in one or several places, partly because of their static, non-processual character. The purpose of using them in this book is to indicate what kind of structure we are trying to handle. We cannot discuss this if we disregard the very existence of structures, as when, for example, some connoisseurship nostalgics still try to restore the role of the artist against well-documented and professionally indispensable programming ventures on the part of commissioners or their advisors; not grasping the simple fact that the way to "restore" their role is to give them a role instead of a panegyrics; give them a role in an articulate account that doesn't leave too many crucial issues unexamined.

Approaching historical and social "real world" material is like trying to appreciate some Baroque music: only the external, or top and bottom, levels are fixed and unambiguous, while the middle ones are open to situational variations for which we cannot account in general terms: *Bien que les cinq parties [voices] soient écrites, on peut constater de grandes divergences d'une source à l'autre pour les parties intermédiaires, l'essentiel de la substance musicale étant concentrée dans les parties de dessus et de basse* (Catherine Massip).

On the surface the book might seem to focus mainly on perception. This is not so. Accessing or retrieving concepts or information from some source or storage is the crucial operation behind media perception and media planning, creation and communication.

The main purpose of my book, then, is to discuss analysis methodology. Some experience in the field of Art History, inciting collaboration with my colleagues Diana Gisolfi, New York, and Åse Ødegaard, Stavanger and Trondheim, Norway, and my nu-
merous rounds of teaching in New York, these factors have all alerted me to the need for clearing up some issues that seem to me crucial and critical in our field of scholarship. I also gratefully acknowledge opportunities for presenting and discussing my ideas granted me by the University of Strasbourg, the École des hautes études in Paris, the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (the Krems institute) and a few places in the United States.

I have tried to discuss my views with other people in Art History in Norway, but with varying success: the issue is not a popular one. A colleague blamed me in flaming words for wanting us to re-educate ourselves; but I have always thought this was exactly what scholarship was all about. In a local art-historical association I was met with the comment that it had been more fun if I criticized other people instead of identifying the shortcomings of what I had done myself; and that finding The Truth was the real issue. I asked permission to discuss my views, presented in an Abstract, before an interdisciplinary audience in an Academy of sciences of which I happen to be a member, and was met with the very positive reaction that, yes, they would like something on architecture (my daily job is teaching architecture students in Norway).

Fortunately I have found good advisers, first and foremost the anonymous reader called in by the very helpful Norwegian Research Council. Her or his comments were of such an importance that I shall come back to them in my text. The same applies to comments, linguistic and otherwise, by my colleague and collaborator Prof. Diana Gisolfi: always to the point and blessedly unhampered by traditional art-historical conventions; furthermore a born Catholic and thus having many things at her finger tips with which so few art historians after the last war have even elementary conversance. Collaboration in several other connections, also concerning San Marco, with Prof. Åse Ødegaard, also has been very stimulating and in many respects eye-opening. By literally dragging me into problems of modern art, far beyond my competences, she has made me take issues seriously that I had formerly tried to ignore and which plays an indirect role in the present book: a strong and continuous encouragement for my “modernistic” venture.

To my old friend Herbert Lindenberger at Stanford I have a great debt of gratitude for his continuous presence – across that great distance in miles – and for the inspiration and encouragement I have had from his books, his conversation and letters – and emails! He has an uncanny ability of absorbing a mass of ideas and perspectives, digesting them and sending back to you a synthesis through which you discover things about yourself you were not aware of.

Professional help I have enjoyed also from the widely-oriented Prof. Roy Eriksen, who represents a strongly needed interdisciplinary factor at the Norwegian Institute in Rome (University of Oslo). Fortunately, today not to welcome other people into one’s field of scholarship would be considered a sign of superficiality, not to say ignorance. My thanks also to the Director of the Norwegian Institute, Prof. J. Rasmus Brandt.

Staying in institute context, I must record the comradeship and help from the members of the Institute of Architectural History in Norway (my working basis): Knut Einar Larsen, Dag Nilsen, Kerstin Gjesdahl Noach, Astrid Waage and Ellen Woldseth; and the unfailing helpfulness from other staff and colleagues at the Faculty of Architecture of my school in Norway. I will always remember, with thanks, the friendly teaching I have enjoyed from the architects. Collaboration with them also took me into involve-
ments in modern urban problems: a chair job in a "pilot" city renovation project under our Ministry of Environment; a consultation paper on urban conservation in Europe commissioned by the Council of Europe. I mention these urban subjects, for I believe they have helped me indirectly in my attempt to come to grips with such a complex system as presented in this book.

But I have been even more lucky than accounted for so far. I have shared a relatively long life with a person endowed with a series of constructive properties, from human richness over analytical acumen to philological and linguistic expertise, that have been always crucial factors in my professional life. So the book is hers; it is for Liv Erstad (in Sinding-Larsen, as we say in Italy).


S. S.-L.