

## Giovanni Vio

Università Iuav di Venezia [giovio@iuav.it](mailto:giovio@iuav.it)



Architect Phd IUAV and photographer. He taught urban design at IUAV between 2001-2003 and 2006-2010. He is the author of *Timeless. Cinque architetture di Roelof Uytenbogaardt* (Il Poligrafo, 2006) and of some writings on South African architecture. Both in 2008 and in 2009 he was appointed with Peter Rich to hold one of the design Summer Workshops at IUAV. In 2009 he led a tour of IUAV students to Mapungubwe, South Africa and, later, he published *Case Fuori. Out of home\_in africa*. He is the author of *Stella d'acqua. Policies for and reflections on the regeneration of Forte Marghera in Venice* (Cleup, 2009). He is the co-author of *Alla scoperta di Mestre* (Ediciclo, 2009).

His professional activity is dedicated to the built heritage. He recently won the design competition for the *Gallerie dell'Accademia* in Venice. His addition for a new bell tower to the nineteenth's Century church of Poleo, near Vicenza, is listed in the Guide to contemporary architecture of the province of Venice. He designed the renovation of *Palazzo Roverella* in Rovigo to house the collections of the *Pinacoteca dei Concordi*; the conservation of *Palazzo Angeli*, also in Rovigo; of the well known *Palazzo della Ragione* in Padua; of the *Teatro dei Rinnovati* in Siena; and of the *Abbazia della Vangadizza* in Badia Polesine.

As landscape and architecture photographer he is the author of the celebrated *Venezia, Marghera, Mestre and back. An everyday journey* (Marsilio Editori, 2005). His black and white work is in *Marcon. Paesaggi di Transizione* (Cicero editore, 2007). In 2008 he exhibits in Mestre *What am I doing here*. In 2011 he works with the South African artist Angela Buckland on the project *Quiet Place*, published in *Angela Buckland\_Giovanni Vio. Quiet Place* (Cleup, 2010). *Quiet Place* exhibited in 2014 at the Durban Art Gallery, South Africa, as an event of *Architecture Otherwhere*, within the XXV world conference of UIA. He recently published *Il terzo poema della basilica di San Marco* (Cleup, 2014).

### ***The second life of architecture between apartheid and democracy***

Giovanni Vio



Mabenge from Mthunzi, southern mabe  
Resident 18 yrs



Thandeka from Mthunzi, southern mabe  
Resident 12 yrs



Mngqoshu from Mthunzi, street trader  
Resident 14 yrs



### *abstract*

What happens to a building when the society that built it has changed, as it is in the case of South Africa's transition to democracy? After twenty one years since the end of apartheid we can consider the situation and project some useful thoughts to develop a methodology toward the built heritage. What maintains a building in use does not coincide, sometimes, with the expectations for which it was originally designed. Arguments and reasons brought by current criticism may fail, on the other hand, in estimating the quality of a building. Ideology often is a cause of refusal of artefacts if considered on the *wrong side*. In these situations the life of buildings may become difficult, if not brought to an end.

My reflection is meant to be an introduction, with questions, to the discourse on conservation of Johannesburg heritage of architecture and built environment, a theme that the speakers of the conference are dealing with, directly or indirectly.

I will focus around two South African iconic cases. The first is the affaire of Werdmuller Centre, a former commercial building in Claremont (Cape Province). Since 2006 it is under the threat of demolition. The official reason for tearing it down, that the building is a commercial failure, is conflicting with positive visions brought by a whole range of interested parties, including former users. They believe that the building offers a strong synergy with the local network of public transport and inspires a model of small scale, informal trading. The second case is the story of Thokoza, a former women hostel in Durban. As direct product of the segregation policies of apartheid, it was expected to be bulldozed on the first day of democracy. The recent documentation by the South African artist Angela Buckland describes the way this building is instead very intensely utilized. It has turned to be a space very much needed by poor women, a very fragile component of contemporary South African society. Both these buildings are declared negative products of modernism and segregation. Both are expressing a lively inner life, a strong attitude toward survival. Both belong to a legacy that deserves a more careful examination. Because of informal life that finds place in them, and due to cross disciplinary visions, mainly by artists, these architectures generously offer new occasions of usage, renewed imagery, and start an independent life of their own. In order to diachronically evaluate a building it is useful to compare the results of two methods. One deals with the theoretical approach to the artifact and helps understanding the relationships between small and large scale, local and international realms, cultural and ideological positions. The other, that helps surveying the spontaneous qualities and the inner potentials of the building, is based on the direct reading of the place, its agents, its practices, the perception of the environment, the collection of the different narratives that it conceals.