ARCHITECTURE, ANXIETY, AND THE FLUID TOPOGRAPHIES OF
RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Niall Stephen Atkinson

August 2009
ARCHITECTURE, ANXIETY, AND THE FLUID TOPOGRAPHIES OF
RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

Niall Stephen Atkinson, Ph. D.
Cornell University 2007

Shared social identities, a precondition of pre-modern urban communities at
the threshold of modernity, necessitated the ceaseless readjustment of the built
environment. The discursive practices of such city dwellers, therefore, speak
volumes about how urban space and architecture are fundamentally a collaborative
project whose form, function, and meaning are ceaselessly recreated, rethought, and
reinvented. At the height of their city’s economic and cultural powers, Florentines
developed acute methods to confront, interpret, and shape the built environment.
This concerted interaction between bodies and buildings, spaces and desires, allows
the historian to articulate how buildings and spaces were understood by
contemporaries. Watching, listening, speaking, and then writing, Florentines
employed a whole range of political strategies, social rituals, and techniques of
representation in order to negotiate their built environment. In doing so, they
constructed a web of interlaced and fluid topographies which they overlaid onto the
structural grid of the city. Particularly at times of social stress, anxiety, and
transformation, interpreting the city – its monuments, its spaces, the events that shook
it, and the narratives that reconfigured it – was a matter of social survival. As a
result, urban spaces functioned as unstable sites of social memory, receptacles of
meaning, and facilitators of identity. Drawing on legislation, urban literature,
chronicles, and personal diaries, this project seeks to reconstruct the way in which
architectural form and meaning were the products of the continuous interplay of an embodied social experience that was rooted simultaneously in a sensorial and mental continuum. By analyzing how Florentines constructed personal and social itineraries – literally how they moved through, wrote about, and acted upon their physical environment – I seek to demonstrate how even the simplest movements, deeds, or memories were profoundly structured by and, in turn, continually transformed the symbolic contours of the spaces in which they lived. This Civic dialogue was based on an ethics of organizing and interpreting space. It was a set of rhetorical strategies that demand to be interpreted by an architectural history that acknowledges how the built environment is both the subject and product of a whole range of textual and social practices.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Niall Atkinson earned a B.F.A. in Art History from Université Concordia, Montréal, Québec, in 1991, during which he completed the *Cours de la langue française*, Université de Montpellier III (Paul Valéry), in 1992. He received his M.A. in Art History from York University in Toronto, Canada in 1996 with a thesis entitled: "The Bewildered Monument: Public Art, Collective Memory, and the City Square."

Upon embarking on doctoral research he won a Sage Graduate Fellowship from Cornell University for the 2000-2001 academic year. In the summer of 2001 he participated in the Newberry Library Summer Institute in the Italian Archival Sciences in Chicago, Illinois, where he studied Medieval and Renaissance paleography under the direction of Armando Petrucci and Franca Nardelli. He won a Manon Michels (Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, Institute for European Studies, Cornell University) pre-dissertation grant for archival study in Italy in 2002 and completed a Latin seminar at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada in 2004. He was awarded the pre-doctoral Samuel H. Kress Foundation Fellowship for Research at Foreign Institutions, where he was a fellow at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz (KHI) - Max-Planck-Institut, from 2004-2006. From 2007-2009, he continued his research at the KHI within the research group “Piazza und Monument,” with a doctoral fellowship awarded by Prof. Alessandro Nova, the institute’s director. He earned a Ph.D. in the History of Architecture and Urbanism in the Department of Architecture, College of Architecture, Art, and Planning at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, in 2009.
For Carol, who came with me
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finding one’s way through a dissertation is as much a collaborative effort as city-building is. Inevitably, this project has benefited greatly from the exchanges I have had along the way. It was only after it was finished that I realized that I had been following my own interior itinerary of discovery not entirely unlike those of the Florentines I thought I was following through the historical remains of Florentine urban space. And like any solitary journey of reflection, no real sense of intellectual identity can emerge without the more and less random encounters that one has with others, with a community of friends, scholars, and colleagues who nurture, promote, and validate it. This I have learned from encounters with people who traversed the city of Florence in the past as well as in the present. These exchanges, which have all left their mark on me as an architectural historian, range from brief meetings, through sustained dialogues, to deeply-rooted friendships which have led to prospects for long-term collaboration.

Serendipity can be a most powerful ally. Surrendering a passport for manuscript access led to have lunch with someone, who suggested a passage in a book and put me in contact with someone else. These encounters, which occurred soon after I arrived in Florence to look into archival sources, led directly both to my long and productive obsession with the urban soundscape and to the apartment that Carol and I happily called home for our years spent Florence.

Institutional support is the concrete foundation of most research in the humanities and those of us who study the Italian Renaissance understand the cultural importance of financial patronage. My research has been the beneficiary of grants from the Institute for European Studies in the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University, the cultural branch of the Embassy of Italy in Canada and the Italian Art Society. Research and travel funds from both the department of
Architecture and the Graduate School of Cornell University allowed me to attend a seminar on Italian paleography and present my research at several stages in its progress. My itinerary took a major turn when I received a pre-doctoral research fellowship from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, which gave me access to the vast resources and academic activities at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut. This led to a fellowship within the Institute itself, where I was able to participate in the Research Project “Piazza e monumento” under the direction of Alessandro Nova and Cornelia Joechner. I spent four happy years as a fellow at the “Kunst,” which is a rare privilege for a young and unknown scholar. Back home at Cornell I was anchored by Dianne Whitmore and Andrea Talmadge in the department of Architecture, by Shirley Weaver in the Graduate School, and the staff at the circulation desk at the Fine Arts Library.

During my time at the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Ortensia Martines, Maren Dissmann, Maggie Davis, and Lisa Hanstein in the library were tireless in locating and making available a variety of hard to find sources. Jan Simane, the library’s director, generously devoted resources of the library to acquisitions that directly benefited my own research. I am also grateful for the support of Ester Fasino and Sabine Feser in the directors’ offices, Carolin Wally, Joanna Krupinski, and Michelle Möhle for their technical support, Angelika Rispoli, Helga Zerrath, and Elisa Pestelli in the institute’s financial administration, all those in the portineria – the backbone of the institute – and in particular, directors Alessandro Nova and Gerhard Wolf, who promoted and maintained an open, dynamic, and interdisciplinary intellectual environment that always stimulated my research.

In Florence I want to thank the staff of the Archivio di Stato, the manuscript room of the Biblioteca Nazionale, the Biblioteca Laurenziana, the Biblioteca Riccardiana, and the Harvard Berenson Library at Villa I Tatti. In particular I am very
grateful to the personal advice and knowledge of Emilio Panella of the Archives of Santa Maria Novella.

For advice both practical and conceptual about how to frame my research I would like to thank Karen Barzman, Linda Pellecchia, Richard Ingersoll, Alick MacLean, Jonathan Nelson, and Marvin Trachtenberg. Philine Helas, Monika Butzek, Wolfgang Loseries, Lawrin Armstrong, Christa Gardner von Teuffel, and Nerida Newbigin listened to my ideas, problems, and aspirations and then suggested texts and sources that were critical to my project. Their generosity established the model of intellectual openness. Robert Black, Marco Campigli, Manuela de Giorgi, Michelina di Cesare, Margaret Haines, and Luca Boschetto all helped me to read, understand and interpret Latin and Italian sources. Benjamin Paul, Gerhard Wolf, Erik Inglis, Abby McGehee, John Paoletti, Sarah McHam, and Joseph Connors took the time, which, for them, is ever so short in supply, to read my work and provide much welcome criticism, ideas, and support.

On a more personal level, I have had the great fortune of maintaining more sustained interaction with a number of dear friends who were always willing to read, write, and be honest about what we were all supposed to be doing in such intellectual circles. They taught me a lot about myself and I look back already with great fondness to the time I spent with them. They were editors, critics, interlocutors, co-conspirators, dreamers, teachers, promoters, as well as providers of refuge and joy. Anne Leader, Alizah Holstein, Sarah Cree, Meghan Callahan, Patrick Baker, Patricia Rucidlo, Martino Traxler, Mark Rosen, Anna Rogasch, Shelley Hornstein, Christine Unruh, Oliver Becker, Kathrin Müller, Peter Scholz, Fabian Jonietz, Benjamin Paul, Henrike Haug, Saundra Weddle, and Carol Nisbet. Sheryl Reiss was an early supporter of my work and became a mentor as well as a good friend. I also have appreciated the continued support and wit of Dale Kent, whose own work was so
important to mine, while Saundra Weddle and Nicholas Eckstein provided the thematic basis that inspired my most important research themes. I want to thank Flora Dennis, my partner in sound and especially Douglas Dow and Robert Fredona, whose friendship helped to make my time in Florence amongst the happiest of my academic life.

I must also thank many dear friends and colleagues within the orbit of Syracuse University in Florence. Rocky Ruggiero, Elaine Ruffolo, Kirk Duclaux, Karen Wardzala, Amy Gulick, Rebecca Ben, Emily Schiavone, Camille Crites, Jane Zaloga, Evelyn McFarlane, Devorah Block, and the director Barbara Deimling were instrumental in providing the support and means to develop my skills as both a lecturer and a teacher.

I was also greatly inspired by the intellectual atmosphere generated through readings, discussions, conferences, workshops, and informal encounters between members the “Piazza e monumento” research project at the KHI. Alessandro Nova, Cornelia Joechner, Stephanie Hanke, Brigitte Soelch, Sophie Huggler, and Frithjof Schwarz represent a remarkable group of art and architectural historians with whom I have had the honor of participating in a lively and inspiring dialogue. To Elmar Kossel who has joined us, and to Melchior Fischli who will replace me, I wish all future success.

I am separating my dissertation committee from the rest of those mentioned here because all of them were involved in the entire range of activities I have been recording up to this point. From practical details to friendship, they read, reread, edited, criticized, listened, corrected, discussed, and conceptualized what I was doing in ways that helped me to conceive of a more robust and complex historical world. They were unending in their support and intellectual guidance, always available when I needed their expertise, and unbelievably flexible. Marilyn Migiel showed me how it
was possible to speak clearly without erasing the openness, multi-dimensional qualities, and play of literary texts. Her intimate linguistic sense of the *Decameron* and its readership opened up the endless possibilities of this text. In John Najemy I saw a profound love of Florentine history combined with a deeply complex way of thinking about the past and articulating it elegantly that I vainly seek to emulate.

Medina Lasansky, my advisor, never ceased to challenge my assumptions and encouraged my inclinations within the parameters of an extremely refreshing, novel, and dynamic architectural history. At the same time she instilled in me an awareness of the importance of an ethical commitment to the discipline itself through her intellectual honesty. I owe them a great debt but cannot repay them. I know it wasn’t easy. I will never match their capabilities, but thanks to them, I know in what direction I ought to go.

There are many others who would never know that an encouraging word or a tiny act would greatly help me along this long and complicated path. These were people such as Brenda Preyer, Nicola Suthor, Itae Weinryb, Julie and Bill Ballard, Lawrin Armstrong, Alberto Saviello, Hana Gründler, Urte Krass, Lia Markey, Amber McAlister, Almut Goldhahn, Ute Dercks, Angela Vannucci, Alina Payne, Areli Marina, David Rocke, and Jeanie in the manuscript room at the Biblioteca Nazionale. There are others…

I have certainly forgotten some, but not my family, nor Carol.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH............................................................................................................ III
DEDICATION ............................................................................................................................... IV
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.............................................................................................................. V
LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................... VIII
LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................................... XLVIII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .......................................................................................................... X

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................ 1

0.1 SOURCES: THE TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY ....................................................... 5
0.2 MERCHANTS AND THE CITY .................................................................................................. 7
0.3 THEMES AND STRUCTURE ....................................................................................................... 13
0.4 SCOPE AND GOALS OF THE PROJECT ................................................................................... 20
0.5 SOURCES: HISTORIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................. 23
0.6 METHODS: DEFINING URBAN SPACE HISTORICALLY ........................................................... 30
0.7 THE TEMPORAL JOURNEY OF URBAN SPACE ......................................................................... 36
0.8 FLUID TOPOGRAPHIES ........................................................................................................... 39

CHAPTER 1 THE LEGISLATED CITY: ESTABLISHING PUBLIC SPACE ..................................... 41

1.1 APPROPRIATION: TAKING CONTROL ..................................................................................... 41
1.2 DEFINITION: MARKING BOUNDARIES, DEFINING TERRITORIES ........................................... 49
1.3 REGULATION: CHALLENGING BOUNDARIES ........................................................................ 71
1.4 MOVING BOUNDARIES ............................................................................................................ 78
1.5 THE GENDERED STREET ........................................................................................................ 88

CHAPTER 2 THE SPACE OF EXPERIENCE .......................................................................... 117

2.1 FLUID TOPOGRAPHIES .......................................................................................................... 118
2.2 UNDERSTANDING URBAN SPACE WITH THE FLORENTINE MERCHANT ................................. 125
2.3 INSTITUTIONALIZING CONFLICT WITHIN URBAN PLANNING POLICIES ............................ 129
2.4 PIAZZE, STREETS, NETWORKS ................................................................................................. 138
2.5 COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN .............................................................................................. 166
2.6 RAGIONARE: TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE CITY ......................................................................... 175
2.7 VILLANI’S DESCRIPTIVE MODELS OF THE CITY .................................................................... 180
2.8 Benedetto Dei’s Lists: Counting and Measuring .................................................................... 197
2.9 Morelli’s Distrust and Certaldo’s Paranoia .............................................................................. 206
2.10 Dati’s Vision of Beauty and Bruni’s Harmonic Dream ............................................................ 216
2.11 Percorrere la città ................................................................................................................... 234

3.1 THE ACOUSTIC ART OF ARCHITECTURE .............................................................................. 266
3.2 THE URBAN SOUNDSCAPE ...................................................................................................... 274
3.3 CIVIC SOUNDSCAPES: CONSTRUCTING THE ACOUSTIC TOPOGRAPHY ............................... 294
3.4 FROM MORNING TO EVENING: ENACTING THE ACOUSTIC TOPOGRAPHY .......................... 312
3.5 THE ACOUSTIC REGIME ......................................................................................................... 326
3.6 THE EVENING BELL ................................................................................................................ 342
3.7 SACRED SOUNDSCAPES: THE HIERARCHY OF SOUND .......................................................... 356
3.8 “La quale si sente per tutta la città sonare: Constructing Space Through Sound” ................ 376

CHAPTER 4 THE SOUNDS OF EXPERIENCE: FROM VOICES TO STORIES ...................... 403
4.1 Storytelling in the Piazza ................................................................. 405
4.2 Reading and Writing: Notaries and Narrative ..................................... 434
4.3 Textual Architecture ................................................................. 448
4.4 Thresholds .................................................................................. 455
4.5 Frame/structure ........................................................................ 462
4.6 The Desiring Body ........................................................................ 475
4.7 The Art of Opening and Closing Doors ........................................... 481
4.8 The Literary Spaces of the Everyday ............................................... 489
4.9 The Body Public ........................................................................ 497
4.10 Listening in the City: Secrets, Rumors, Songs and Stories .................. 517
4.11 Information Networks .................................................................. 527
4.12 Voices in the Square .................................................................... 537

CHAPTER 5 THE SPACE OF EXPERIENCE II: COMMUNITIES AND THE SIGNS THAT BIND THEM ................................................................. 545

5.1 Precedents ...................................................................................... 549
5.2 Representational Invisibility ............................................................. 555
5.3 Excursus I: The Silent Language of Urban Signs ................................ 561
5.4 The Ciompi: The Emergence of a Visual Identity .............................. 566
5.5 Recouping the Popolo’s Image............................................................ 575
5.6 The Return of the Angel: Communication Networks in Action ........... 581
5.7 Excursus II: An Empire of Signs/An Urban Semiotics ...................... 591
5.8 La Città rifatta “per le mani del popolo minuto” ................................ 615
5.9 Afterimages .................................................................................. 628

CONCLUSION ....................................................................................... 638

APPENDIX: RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DAILY RINGING SCHEDULE IN FLORENCE ................................................................. 645

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................... 650
LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1
(For figures, refer to the attached CD)

Figure 1.1
Three public squares
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 1.1a
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Allegory of Good Government, Sala della Pace, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40
(Castelnuovo, Ambrogio Lorenzetti: il Buon Governo, Electa, 1995)

Figure 1.1b
“ben comune”
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Allegory of Good Government (detail), Sala della Pace, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40
(Castelnuovo, Ambrogio Lorenzetti: il Buon Governo, Electa, 1995)

Figure 1.2
Florentine districts within 1078 expansion of the walls
(Stradario storico ed amministrativo del comune di Firenze, 2004)

Figure 1.2a
Sestieri from 1172 circuit of walls
(Stradario storico ed amministrativo del comune di Firenze, 2004)

Figure 1.2b
Quarters after 1343 expulsion of the Duke of Athens and final expansion of city walls (1333)
(Stradario storico ed amministrativo del comune di Firenze, 2004)

Figure 1.2c
Mercato Vecchio
Elements of internal articulation of the city (detail)
(Firenze nei secoli XIII e XIV, 2002)

Figure 1.2d
Elements of internal articulation of the city
(Guidoni, Firenze nei secoli XIII e XIV, 2002)
**Figure 1.2e**
Northern border of Santa Croce as described in the 1355 statutes
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

**Figure 1.3**
1355 statutes of the Podestà, ASF Statuti, 19, 210r

**Figure 1.4**
Vestiges of the Donati enclave in the late 16th century
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

**Figure 1.5a**
public squares in the thirteenth century according to the 1355 statutes
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

**Figure 1.5b**
*Sporti*, via Sant’Elisabetta, Florence (photo by author)

**Figure 1.5c**
Piazza della Signoria and surrounding area, schematic plan of chronological development
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997) overlay added by author

**Figure 1.5d**
Piazza della Signoria and surrounding area, schematic plan of chronological development
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997) overlay added by author

**Figure 1.5e**
Church displacement
Piazza della Signoria and surrounding area, schematic plan of chronological development
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997) overlay added by author

**Figure 1.5f**
final pre-emptive destruction of remaining structures
Piazza della Signoria and surrounding area, schematic plan of chronological development
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997) overlay added by author
Figure 1.5g
Piazza della Signoria, from via dei Calzaiuoli
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997)

Figure 1.6
Plan of Piazza Maggiore with boundary markers, Bologna
(Heers, *Espaces publics, espaces privés*, 1985)

Figure 1.7
Via Calimala
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 1.7a
Street facades, via de’ Servi, Florence
(Bargellini, *Le strade di Firenze*, 1977)

Figure 1.7b
Property line walls, Florence
(Bargellini, *Le strade di Firenze*, 1977)

Figure 1.7c
fourteenth-century arcades facing the north façade of the baptistery, Florence
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997)

Figure 1.7d
Palazzo Davanzati, Florence, fourteenth century

Figure 1.7d
Giovanni Stradano, Joust of the Saracen in via Larga, late 1600s, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio

Figure 1.7d
Giovanni Stradano, Joust of the Saracen in via Larga, late sixteenth century, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio
(Salemi, *Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze*, 2001)

Figure 1.8
Giovanni di Ser Giovanni Guidi, called "Lo Scheggia." So-called *Adimari cassone*  
(spalliera panel), Accademia, Florence, ca. 1450

Figure 1.8a
Giovanni Francesco Toscani (1370-1430) *Painted Cassone*, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, ca. 1421
(Conti, La civilta fiorentina nel Quattrocento, Vallecchi, 1993)
Figure 1.9
Benches in the Piazza della Signoria
Domenico Ghirlandaio, St Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel
*Confirmation of the Rule*, 1482-85, Santa Trinita, Florence (detail)

Figure 1.10
The *ringhiera* taken from Fiesole, San Leonardo in Arcetri, Florence
(Bucchi, “La chiesa di S. Piero Scheraggio,“ Arte e storia, 1921)

Figure 1.10a
reconstructed plan and section of San Piero Scheraggio
(Sanpaolesi, San Piero Scheraggio, Olschki, 1934)

Figure 1.10b
Wedding at Cana, Byzantine fresco remains in San Piero Scheraggio
(Bucchi, “La chiesa di S. Piero Scheraggio,“ Arte e storia, 1921)

Figure 1.10c
San Piero Scheraggio
Giorgio Vasari, Siege of Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, late 1500s
(Bucchi, “La chiesa di S. Piero Scheraggio,“ Arte e storia, 1921)

Figure 1.11
Vasari Corridor as fish market, Florence, 1565
(photo by author)

Figure 1.11a
Vasari Corridor as loggia over the piazza on the Ponte Vecchio
/photos by author/

Figure 1.11b
Vasari Corridor as portico of Santa Felicità, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 1.12
Filippo Lippi, *Coronation of the Virgin* from Sant’Ambrogio, Florence, Uffizi, 1439-46

Figure 1.13
map showing the *vie mastre*, Florence
(Guidoni, *Firenze nei secoli XII e XIV*, Bonsignori, 2002 – overlay by author)
Chapter 2

Figure 2.1
Patterns of urban use and development, center of Florence
(Berardi, Della città dei fiorentini, Giunti, 1992)

Figure 2.1a
Piero di Jacopo del Massaio, Map of Florence, 1469
(Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Lat 5699)

Figure 2.2
Map showing the palio and procession routes, Florence
(Guidoni, Firenze nei secoli XII e XIV, Bonsignori, 2002 – overlay by author)

Figure 2.3
Elite properties around Porta Santa Maria, Florence
(Macci, Architettura e civiltà delle torri, Edifir, 1994)

Figure 2.4
Workshop of Pacino di Bonaguida, Giovanni Villani, Nuova Cronica, Bib. Apost.,
MS. Chigi, L. viii. 296, late fourteenth century
(Frugoni, Il Villani illustrato, Le Lettere, 2005)

Figure 2.4a
Campanile of the Bargello, Florence, fourteenth century
(photo by author)

Figure 2.5
Distribution of family towers

Figure 2.5a
Confiscated Uberti enclave
(Salemi, Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze, Nardini, 2001)

Figure 2.6
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.6a
Porta Romana, Florence
(photo by George Tatge)
Figure 2.6b
Public streets, Florence
(Guidoni, Firenze nei secoli XII e XIV, Bonsignori, 2002 – overlay by author)

Figure 2.6c
Neighborhood street, Florence
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.7
Ponte Vecchio, Florence, 1333
(Atlante di Firenze, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 2.7a
Via Calimala, Florence
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.7b
Via San Gallo, Florence
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.7c
Urban axes
(Guidoni, Firenze nei secoli XII e XIV, Bonsignori, 2002 – overlay by author)

Figure 2.7d
processional route of feast of the Epiphany
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.8
Possible sites of information relay
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.8a
ringhiera of the Piazza della Signoria: broadcast hub
(Atlante di Firenze, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 2.9
Decameron II, 5
BNF Ms. It. 63 f. 203v, c. 1430
Figure 2.9a
*Decameron* III, 3
De Gregori, tesoro 91, Fondazione Cini, 1492 b

Figure 2.10
Actual fluid topographies around Madonna dell’Orto, Venice
Jacopo de’ Barbari, *Map of Venice* (detail), 1500

Figure 2.10a
Rialto Bridge, Venice
(Atlante di Venezia 1911-1982, Circa-Iuav, 1999)

Figure 2.10b
Frate Paolino da Venezia, *Chronologia magna*
BNM, Latino Z, 399
c. 1346, copy of a twelfth-century original

Figure 2.10c
(Atlante di Venezia 1911-1982, Circa-Iuav, 1999)

Figure 2.10d
Rialto Fish market and the former site of the Ca’ Querini, Venice

Figure 2.10e
Piazza San Marco, Venice
(Atlante di Venezia 1911-1982, Circa-Iuav, 1999)

Figure 2.10f
Columns of justice, Piazzetta, Venice

Figure 2.11
Via dei Cimatori
Don Stefano Bonsignori, *Map of Florence* (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.11a
Via dei Cimatori, Florence
(photo by author)
Figure 2.11b
Anne Leader, Badia ground plan and two possible routes by the trickster

Figure 2.12
The confused route of Rinuccio’s horse, Il Trecentonovelle 159
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.13
Villani’s route around the city walls
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.13a
Map of Florence
(Guidoni, Firenze nei secoli XII e XIV, Bonsignori, 2002 – overlay by author)

Figure 2.13b
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.14
Statistical tables compiled from Giovanni Villani’s 1338 description of Florence

Figure 2.14a
Center
Veduta di “Fiorenza” (Chain Map - detail), Museo di Firenze com’era, Florence
(nineteenth-century copy)
(Atlante di Firenze, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 2.14b
Periphery
Veduta di “Fiorenza” (Chain Map - detail), Museo di Firenze com’era, Florence
(nineteenth-century copy)
(Atlante di Firenze, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 2.15
Workshop of Pacino di Bonaguida, Giovanni Villani, Nuova Cronica, Bib. Apost.,
MS. Chigi, L. viii. 296, late 14th century
(Frugoni, Il Villani illustrato, Le Lettere, 2005)
Figure 2.15a
Approximate topography of fire in 1304
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.16
Benedetto Dei’s diary
ASF, Manoscritti, 119

Figure 2.16a-2.16f
Map of Oltrarno, Florence
(Berardi, Della città dei fiorentini, Giunti, 1992)

Figure 2.17
Plan of Santa Croce, Florence
Hypothetical reconstruction of Benedetto’s route through Santa Croce

Figure 2.18
“Santa Liperata” and Benedetto Dei’s walk around the bell tower
(Rocchi Coopmans de Yoldi, Santa Maria del Fiore, Il Torchio, 1996)

Figure 2.19
Domenico Ghirlandaio, St Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel
Confirmation of the Rule, 1482-85 (detail)
Santa Trinita, Florence

Figure 2.19a
Priors on the Ringhiera
(Conti, La civiltà fiorentina nel Quattrocento, Vallecchi, 1993)

Figure 2.20
Decameron 1, 1
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. It. 482, 11r (fourteenth century)

Figure 2.20a
Execution of Savonarola (detail), Museo San Marco, Florence, sixteenth century?

Figure 2.21
Areas of forbidden games
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.22
Map of Florence, Goro Dati’s Axes
Figure 2.23
Piazzetta della Signoria, Florence, ca. 1873-1910, Alinari

Figure 2.23a
Orsanmichele, west façade
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

Figure 2.24
Goro Dati’s city centers
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.25
Dati’s sightlines from the Ponte Vecchio, Florence
(*Atlante di Firenze*, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 2.26
Brunelleschi’s perspective model, Piazza della Signoria
*Space*

Figure 2.26a
Brunelleschi’s perspective model, baptistery
*Architecture*

Figure 2.27
View of Baptistery, Domenico Lenzi, *Specchio umano*, Grain market at Orsanmichele
during a famine, Bib. Laur., Laurenziano Tempiano 3, f. 79r, c. 1320-1335

Figure 2.27a
Fresco of the Madonna della Misericordia (detail), Bigallo, Florence, c. 1342

Figure 2.28
Vault of the Judges and Notaries Guild, Florence, late fourteenth century
(photo by author)

Figure 2.28a
Sightlines and geometry in the Piazza della Signoria
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997)
Figure 2.28c
The isolated monument, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, 1299-1315
(Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye*, 1997)

Figure 2.29
Medici palace
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 29a
Borgo San Lorenzo
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 2.29c
Cross of San Giovanni
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 2.29c
Steps of the Duomo
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 2.29d
Church of the Servi
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 2.29e
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.29f
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
Figure 2.29g
San Felice in Piazza
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 2.30
Workshop of Pacino di Bonaguida, Giovanni Villani, Nuova Cronica, Bib. Apost.,
MS. Chigi, L. viii. 296, late fourteenth century
(Frugoni, Il Villani illustrato, Le Lettere, 2005)

Figure 2.31
Torre degli Amidei
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 2.31a
Buondelmonte’s route
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.31b
Site of the Buondelmonte murder
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.31c
Rucellai compound
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.31d
Rucellai façade, begun 1453
(Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo zibaldone, Warburg Institute, 1960-1981)

Figure 2.32
Palazzo del Comune (Bargello), Florence, ca. 1258
(photo by author)

Figure 2.32a
Palazzo dei Priori (Palazzo Vecchio), Florence, 1299-1315
(photo by author)
Figure 2.33
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.33
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 2.33b
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.33c
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.33d
Palazzo Vecchio, ground plan
(Rubinstein, The Palazzo Vecchio, Clarendon, 1995)

Figure 2.33e
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.33f
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.33g
Piero's uscita from Florence
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.34
Entrata of Charles VIII
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 2.34a
Movement of Swiss Troops
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
Figure 2.35
San Felice in Piazza
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
Portal
(photo by author)

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1
Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Allegory of Eloquence (detail of Amphion Building
Thebes, Palazzo Sandi, Venice, c.1724-25
(Levey, Giambattista Tiepolo, Yale University Press, 1994)

Figure 3.2
Piazza Santissima Annunziata, Florence
(Hilde Lotz-Bauer, 1940 – Kunsthistorisches Institut)

Figure 3.2a
Piazza Santissima Annunziata, Florence
October, 2008
(photo by author)

Figure 3.3
Intruding bodies, Piazza della Signoria, Florence
(Photo A. Bernoud – Kunsthistorisches Institut)

Figure 3.3a
The refuse of modern life, Piazza del Mercato Centrale, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 3.4
Central Florence, bird’s-eye view
(Atlante di Firenze, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 3.5
Mercato Vecchio
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
Figure 3.5a
Mercato Vecchio
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.5b
Piazza Quattro Novembre, Perugia
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.5c
Piazza del Campo, Siena
(photo by author)

Figure 3.5d
Mercato Vecchio, Florence, planimetric reconstruction (detail)
(Sframeli, Firenze, 1892-1895, Edizioni Polistampa, 2007)

Figure 3.5e
Mercato Vecchio, Florence, Nostalgic absence

Figure 3.5f
Piazza della Repubblica, Florence, urban renewal
(photo by author)

Figure 3.5f
Mercato Vecchio, Florence, planimetric reconstruction
(detail)
(Sframeli, Firenze, 1892-1895, Edizioni Polistampa, 2007)

Figure 3.6
The remains of urban enclaves in the sixteenth century
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.6a
Torre de’ Cerchi, Florence, thirteenth century
Note projecting corbels for temporary platforms
(photo by author)

Figure 3.7
Speaking architecture, bell towers of the Duomo and Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(photo by author)
**Figure 3.7a**
Campanile of the Bargello
twelfth century tower and thirteenth century building
(photo by author)

**Figure 3.7b**
Cathedral complex of Independent structures, bird’s eye view, Florence
(*Atlante di Firenze*, Marsilio, 1993)

**Figure 3.7c**
cathedral bell tower, Florence
(photo by author)

**Figure 3.7d**
Badia bell tower, Florence
(photo by author)

**Figure 3.7e**
Palazzo Vecchio bell tower, Florence
(photo by author)

**Figure 3.7f**
Podestà, bell tower of the Bargello
(photo by author)

**Figure 3.8**
Torre del Leone, Florence
(photo by author)

**Figure 3.8a**
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

**Figure 3.9**
San Piero Scheraggio
Giorgio Vasari, Siege of Florence
Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(Bucchi, “La chiesa di S. Piero Scheraggio,” Arte e storia, 1921)

**Figure 3.10**
Bargello, Florence, ca. 1258
(Salemi, Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze, Nardini, 2001)
Figure 3.10a
unaligned axes, Bargello, Florence
(Rocchi Coopmans de Yoldi, S. Maria del Fiore, Alinea, 2006)

Figure 3.10b
base for a ballatoio? Bell tower of the Bargello, Florence
(Rocchi Coopmans de Yoldi, S. Maria del Fiore, Alinea, 2006)

Figure 3.10c
Workshop of Pacino di Bonaguida, Giovanni Villani, Nuova Cronica, Bib. Apost.,
MS. Chigi, L. viii. 296, late 14th century
(Frugoni, Il Villani illustrato, Le Lettere, 2005)

Figure 3.10d
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.10e
Montanina, Bargello, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 3.11
Campanile of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.11a
Palazzo dei Priori
Fresco of the Madonna della Misericordia (detail)

Figure 3.12
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.13
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13a
View of Florence
(Photo by author)
Figure 3.13b
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13c
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13d
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13e
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13f
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13g
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

v Figure 3.13h
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

v Figure 3.13i
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13j
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13k
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

v Figure 3.13l
View of Florence
(Photo by author)
Figure 3.13m
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13n
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.13o
View of Florence
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.14
view of three bell towers, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 3.14a
The shape of the acoustic regime, central Florence, bird’s-eye view
(Atlante di Firenze, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 3.15
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.16
The Toiana, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(Salemi, Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze, Nardini, 2001)

Figure 3.17
Church and state, central Florence, bird's-eye view
(Atlante di Firenze, Marsilio, 1993)

Figure 3.18
Daybreak, view of Florence from bell tower of cathedral
(photo by author)

Figure 3.18a
Evening bell, view of Florence from bell tower of cathedral
(photo by author)

Figure 3.19
Domenico Ghirlandaio, Confirmation of the Rule, 1482-85
Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence
Figure 3.20  
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. It. 482, 79v  
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

Figure 3.20a  
View of Duomo and Palazzo Vecchio  
(photo by author)

Figure 3.20b  
View of Badia, duomo, and Podestà  
(photo by author)

Figure 3.20c  
*gigli* on the bell tower of the Duomo  
(photo by author)

Figure 3.20d  
bell tower of the Duomo  
(photo by author)

Figure 3.20e  
the mouth of the church, bell tower of the Duomo  
(photo by author)

Figure 3.21  
bell towers of the Podestà and Badia  
(photo by author)

Figure 3.21a  
Badia campanile  
(photo by author)

Figure 3.21b  
Fresco of the Madonna della Misericordia (detail)  

Figure 3.22  
Cathedral bells, View of Florence  
(Photo by author)

Figure 3.22a  
Early fifteenth-century bell, Campanile of the duomo  
(photo by author)
Figure 3.23
Cathedral and Badia, Florence, Religious cohorts
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.23a
Parish bell towers: The relay of religious urban acoustic expression
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.24
Easter Processions from the baptistery and the duomo: seconda, tertia, and quarta ferie
(imagined routes)
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.24a
Goro Dati’s sanctified coordinates in yellow
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.25
Bologna and Castrum Sancti Petri
Ricci, Bologna, Laterza, 1980)

Figure 3.25a
Bologna and Castrum Sancti Petri
Ricci, Bologna, Laterza, 1980)

Figure 3.25b
Castrum Sancti Petri, Bird’s-eye view

Figure 3.25c
Castrum Sancti Petri, plan

Figure 3.26
Axes of mendicant spatial jurisdiction
(Firenze nei secoli XIII e XIV, 2002)

Figure 3.27a
Bell tower of Sant’Ambrogio, Florence
(photo by author)
Figure 3.27b
Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.27c
Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.27d
The Piagnona
(photo by author)

Figure 3.27e
Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.28
Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 3.29
Plan of Florence
(Berardi, Della città dei fiorentini, Giunti, 1992, with overlay by author)

Figure 3.30
Today’s, clock bell, the Toiana
(Salemi, Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze, Nardini, 2001)

Figure 3.30a
Bell towers of the Podestà and Palazzo Vecchio
(photo by author)

Figure 3.30b
Palazzo Vecchio from via delle Farine
(photo by author)

Figure 3.30c
Palazzo Vecchio from via Vacchereccia
(photo by author)

Figure 3.30d
oblique view of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(Eugenio Loporini – Kunsthistorishes Institut)
Figure 3.31
Bell towers of the Palazzo Vecchio and Duomo
(photo by author)

Figure 3.31a
Bell towers of the Podestà and the Badia
(photo by author)

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1
Piazza San Martino
Don Stefano Bonsignori (detail), Map of Florence, 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 4.1a
Piazza San Martino
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 4.2
Piazza de' Cimatori, Florence, former site of Piazza San Martino
(photo by author)

Figure 4.2a
San Martino, Florence, remains of the original façade
(photo by author)

Figure 4.4
Giotto, fictitious architecture
Arena Chapel, Padua, c. 1305
(Jacobus, Giotto and the Arena Chapel, Miller, 2008)

Figure 4.4a
Giotto, Raising of Lazarus, detail
Arena Chapel, Padua, c. 1305
Jacobus, Giotto and the Arena Chapel, Miller, 2008

Figure 4.5
Decameron III, 3
De Gregori, tesoro 91, Fondazione Cini, 1492 b
Figure 4.6
Palazzo del Podestà (Bargello), inscription, west façade
(photo by author)

Figure 4.6a
Zodiac, Baptistry Floor
zodiac, first decade of thirteenth century
(Paolucci, ed., Il battistero di San Giovanni a Firenze, Panini, 1994)

Figure 4.6b
Baptistery Floor
Central inscription
(Paolucci, ed., Il battistero di San Giovanni a Firenze, Panini, 1994)

Figure 4.7
Site of lion stalls before the construction of the mint and Loggia dei Lanzi
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 4.7a
Lions, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 4.8
Decameron, Proem
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. It. 482, 79v
(Branca, Boccaccio visualizzato, Einaudi, 1999)
1365-67

Figure 4.8
Decameron, Proem
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. It. 482, 79v
(Branca, Boccaccio visualizzato, Einaudi, 1999)
1365-67

Figure 4.8a
Domenico Ghirlandaio
Confirmation of the Rule, 1482-85, Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence

Figure 4.9
Orsanmichele, Florence
Interior. Looking east
(Zervas, Orsanmichele a Firenze, Panini, 1996)
**Figure 4.9a**
Window depicting The Renunciation of Worldly Goods with the Virgin of Orsanmichele
Orsanmichele, Florence c. 1390s
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

**Figure 4.9b**
Window depicting the Miracle of the Ordeal by Fire at the Grain Market of Orsanmichele
Orsanmichele, Florence, c. 1390s
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

**Figure 4.10**
Ground plan of the Decameron

**Figure 4.11**
*Decameron*, Proem
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. It. 482, f. 5r, 1365-67
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.11a**
*Decameron*
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. It. 482, f. 5r (detail)
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.11b**
*Decameron*
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 63, f. 6r, ca 1430
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.11c**
*Decameron*
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 482. 6r
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.11d**
*Decameron*
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 63, f. 6r, ca. 1430
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)
**Figure 4.11e**

*Decameron*

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 482. 4v
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.12**

Florence in the thirteenth century
Approximate location of Santa Maria Novella
(Fanelli, *Firenze*, Laterza, 1980)

**Figure 4.13**

Bartolomeo Benci’s itinerary of Desire?
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

**Figure 4.14**

*Decameron* 4, 1

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 482, f. 82r
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.14a**

*Decameron* 4, 1

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 63, ca 1430
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.14b**

*Decameron* 7, 5

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 63, ca. 1430
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.14c**

*Decameron* 7, 5

Maitre de la Cité des Dames, 1415-1419
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.14d**

*Decameron* VII, 5

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Ital. 63, ca. 1430
(Branca, *Boccaccio visualizzato*, Einaudi, 1999)

**Figure 4.15**

Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
Figure 4.16
Guild Headquarters
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 4.17
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 4.17a
Ground plan of Duomo, Florence
Space of storytelling and revelation
(Rocchi Coopmans de Yoldi, S. Maria del Fiore, Alinea, 2006)

Figure 4.18
The “Great Hoist”

Figure 4.19
Official diffusion of information, from the ringhiera to the gonfalon
Bells, voices, trumpets, bells
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 4.20
Plan of the Palazzo Vecchio, second floor, Florence
(Rubinstein, Palazzo Vecchio, Clarendon, 1995)

Figures 4.20a, b
Windows of the Udienza de’ Signori, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(photos by author)

Figure 4.21
Piazza and Monument
Piazza della Signoria, Florence, ca. 1873-1910, Alinari
(Exploring David, Giunti, 2004)

Chapter 5

Figure 5.1
Baptistery of San Giovanni, Florence, completed c. 12th century
(photo by author)
Figure 5.1a
Tuscan artists, mosaics of the vault, general view, Baptistery of San Giovanni, Florence, 1240-1310
Il battistero di San Giovanni, Firenze, Panini, 1994

Figure 5.1b
School of the Master of the Magdalene, Vault mosaics, Scenes from the Life of Joseph, c. 1280-1290
Il battistero di San Giovanni, Firenze, Panini, 1994

Figure 5.1c
Artists Working in the Sienese Style, Scenes from the Life of Joseph, Stockpiling Grain, c. 1290-1295
Il battistero di San Giovanni, Firenze, Panini, 1994

Figure 5.1d
Domenico Lenzi, Specchio umano, Grain market at Orsanmichele during a famine, Bib. Laur., Laurenzano Tempiano 3, f. 79r, c. 1320-1335

Figure 5.1e
Scene of reconciliation
Baptistery vault
Il battistero di San Giovanni, Firenze, Panini, 1994

Figure 5.1f
School of Meliore and Coppo di Marcovaldo, Last Judgement (detail), c. 1260-1270
Il battistero di San Giovanni, Firenze, Panini, 1994

Figure 5.2
Mirabello Cavalori, Wool Factory, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, 1570-72

Figure 5.3
Arms of the Wool Guild, Florence
(Sapori, Compagnie e mercanti di Firenze antica. Poligrafico 1955)

Figure 5.4
Piazza della Signoria, Florence, ca. 1873-1910, Alinari
(Exploring David, Giunti, 2004)

Figure 5.4a
Watchtower of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, 1299-1315
(photo by author)
Figure 5.5
Flag of the Ciompi, 1343?
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.5a
Flag of the Ciompi, 1378?
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005, overlay by author)

Figure 5.6
Giovanni Francesco Toscani (1370-1430) Painted Cassone
cia. 1421 - tempera on panel
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy
(Conti, La civilità fiorentina nel Quattrocento, Vallecchi, 1993)

Figure 5.6a
Wool workshops

Figure 5.6b
Wool manufacturing process

Figure 5.7
Andrea di Cione (Orcagna), Expulsion of the Duke of Athens, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, ca. 1343

Figure 5.8
New arms of Justice, Florence, 1343
(montage after Villani)

Figure 5.9
Gonfalone of the Popolo

Figure 5.10
The renewed face of the regime
Ballatoio of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 5.11
Altar of St. Anne (sixteenth century), Orsanmichele
(Zervas, Orsanmichele a Firenze, Panini, 1996)
Figure 5.11a
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 5.11b
Via dei Calzauioli and Orsanmichele from the north
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

Figure 5.11c
Orsanmichele, south facade
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

Figure 5.11d
Orsanmichele, west facade
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

Figure 5.12
Palazzo del Podestà, the communal canvas
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

Figure 5.12a
Palazzo del Podestà, bell tower of the *pittura infamante*
(photo by author)

Figure 5.13
St. Anne protecting the city of Florence
cia. 1390, vault over the altar of St. Anne, Orsanmichele
(Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, Panini, 1996)

Figure 5.14
Domenico Ghirlandaio, St Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel
*Confirmation of the Rule*, 1482-85
Santa Trinita, Florence
(Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio*, Yale University Press, 2000)

Figure 5.15
Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Confirmation of the Rule*, St Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel
Santa Trinita, Florence (detail), 1482-85

Figure 5.15a
Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Confirmation of the Rule*, St Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel
Santa Trinita, Florence (detail), 1482-85

xxxvii
Figure 5.16
Santa Maria del Carmine
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 5.16a
San Frediano
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 5.16b
San Piero Gattolino
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 5.16c
San Niccolò
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)
(photo by author)

Figure 5.16d
Ognissanti
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)

Figure 5.16e
Santo Stefano a Ponte
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 5.16f
San Piero Maggiore
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)
(print by Zocchi)

Figure 5.16g
San Lorenzo
Breaking the city’s axes
(Stella, La Révolte des Ciompi, EHESS, 1993)
(Sapori, Compagnie e mercanti di Firenze antica. Poligrafico 1955)
Figure 5.17
(Frugoni, *Il Villani illustrato*, Le Lettere, 2005)

Figure 5.18
Tower battle, Uberti against the popolo
(Frugoni, *Il Villani illustrato*, Le Lettere, 2005)

Figure 5.19
Giovanni Sercambi, Lucca, *Cronaca*
Late 14th century

Figure 5.19a
Taddeo di Bartolo, San Gimignano holding his city, Museo Civico, San Gimignano
c. 1391 (detail)

Figure 5.19b
Madonna della Misericordia, Bigallo, Florence
c.a. 1342 (detail)

Figure 5.20
Sant’Ambrogio, bell tower
(photo by author)

Figure 5.21
Bell tower and community
Bell tower of the Badia
(photo by author)

Figure 5.21a
Monastery and government
bell towers of the Bargello and Badia
(photo by author)

Figure 5.22
Gonfalone of Justice
Figure 5.23
*labarum* of Constantine
(reconstruction by author)

Figure 5.24
Peruzzi coat of arms
(photo by author)

Figure 5.24a
Jacopo Pontormo, St. Anne Altarpiece
(Cropper, *Pontormo, J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997*)

Figure 5.24b
Canto alla Rivolta
(Ciabani, *I canti*, Cantini, 1984)

Figure 5.24c
Border between the neighborhoods of Ferza and Drago
(Orsini de Marzo, *Stemmario fiorentino*, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.24d
Gold florin
(Sapori, *Compagnie e mercanti di Firenze antica*. Poligrafico 1955)

Figure 5.24e
Communal arms on the gate of San Niccolò
(photo by author)

Figure 5.25
Gonfalone of Firenze

Figure 5.25a
Gonfalon of Fiesole and Florence

Figure 5.26
Vexillum romanum

Figure 5.26a
Gonfalone of Perugia

Figure 5.26b
Gonfalone of Orvieto

Figure 5.26c
Gonfalone of Viterbo
Figure 5.26d
Giglio of Florence

Figure 5.27
Masaccio, The Raising of the Son of Theophile and the Seating of Saint Peter, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del carmine, Florence, 1425
(Baldini, Masaccio, Electa, 2001)

Figure 5.27a
Priors on the ringhiera
(Conti, La civiltà fiorentina nel Quattrocento, Vallecchi, 1993)

Figure 5.28
Gonfalon, 1250
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.28a
Cavalry of the sestiere of Borgo, after Villani

Figure 5.28b
Guardia of the carroccio, after Villani

Figure 5.28c
Gonfalone of the crossbowmen (balestrieri), after Villani

Figure 5.28d
Gonfalon of the Pavesari, after Villani

Figure 5.28e
Gonfalone of the archers (arcadori), after Villani

Figure 5.28f
Gonfalone of the Salmeria
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.28g
Gonfalone of the Guastatori
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.29
Ex-gonfalone of the commune, after Villani

Figure 5.29a
Guelf gonfalone of the commune
Figure 5.29b
Gonfalone of the commune with rastrello

Figure 5.30
Arms of Clement IV

Figure 5.30a
Arms of the Holy Roman Emperor

Figure 5.31
Arms of the seven major guilds
(postcard)

Figure 5.32
Arms of Robert of Anjou, Bargello, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 5.32a
Pennone of the light cavalry (*feditori*)

Figure 5.33
Arms of the middle guilds (*arti medie*)
(Orsini de Marzo, *Stemmario fiorentino*, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.33a
Arms of magnates from San Piero Scheraggio
(Orsini de Marzo, *Stemmario fiorentino*, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.34
Palazzo dei Priori (Palazzo Vecchio)
(photo by author)

Figure 5.35
Gonfalone of Drago Verde with rastrello

Figure 5.35a
Arms of Walter of Brienne
Figure 5.36
Giovanni Sercambi, *Cronica*, Lucca occupied by foreign flags

Figure 5.36a
Mastino della Scala

Figure 5.36b
Holy Roman Emperor

Figure 5.36c
Visconti

Figure 5.36d
Pisa

Figure 5.36e
Arms of Lucca

Figure 5.37
Fall of Pisa and rise of Doge Giovanni dell’Agnello

Figure 5.37a
Fall of Doge Giovanni dell’Agnello and rise of Charles IV

Figure 5.37b
Fall of Guy de Boulogne and rise of Liberty

Figure 5.38
Sestieri
(Orsini de Marzo, *Stemmario fiorentino*, Orsiniemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.38a
Quartieri
(Orsini de Marzo, *Stemmario fiorentino*, Orsiniemarzo.com, 2005)
Figure 5.39
Fresco in the Judges and Notaries Guild palace
late fourteenth century (detail)
(photo by author)

Figure 5.39a
Arms on the campanile, Duomo, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 5.39b
Marzocco, Piazza della Signoria, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 5.40
Masaccio, Plate of Nativity (Berlin Tondo), Staatliche Museum, Berlin, c. 1427
(detail)
(Baldini, Masaccio, Electa, 2001)

Figure 5.41
Vault of the Palace of the Judges and Notaries Guild, late fourteenth century
(photo by author)

Figure 5.41a
Vault of the Palace of the Judges and Notaries Guild, late fourteenth century
(photo by author)

Figure 5.42
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Allegory of Good Government, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40
(Castelnuovo, Ambrogio Lorenzetti: il Buon Governo, Electa, 1995)

Figure 5.43
Communal arms
Vault of the Palace of the Judges and Notaries Guild, late fourteenth century
(photo by author)

Figure 5.43a
Quartieri
Vault of the Palace of the Judges and Notaries Guild, late fourteenth century
(photo by author)

Figure 5.43b
Gonfalon
Vault of the Palace of the Judges and Notaries Guild, late fourteenth century
(photo by author)

**Figure 5.43c**

Guilds
Vault of the Palace of the Judges and Notaries Guild, late fourteenth century
(photo by author)

**Figure 5.44**

Justice in action

**Figure 5.44a**

Justice bound
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, * Allegory of Bad Government* (detail), Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40

**Figure 5.45**

Building good government

**Figure 5.45a**

Dematerializing architecture
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, * Effects of Bad Government, city* (detail), Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40

**Figure 5.46**

Jerusalem, Hereford World map
later thirteenth century

**Figure 5.47**

Fire, the old and new urbanism
(Frugoni, *Il Villani illustrato*, Le Lettere, 2005)
Figure 5.48
Palazzo del Podestà (Bargello), Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 5.48a
Campanili of the Badia and Bargello from the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 5.49
Badia campanile from via de’ Cimatori
(photo by author)

Figure 5.50
Messing up the view of the palace, Piazza della Signoria, Florence
(photo by author)

Figure 5.51
Ciompi
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.51a
Dyers
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.51b
Shearers
(Orsini de Marzo, Stemmario fiorentino, Orsinidemarzo.com, 2005)

Figure 5.52
Arms of the parte Guelfa and the commune
(Artusi, Firenze araldica, Polistampa, 2006)
(Baldini, Masaccio, Electa, 2001)

Figure 5.53
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 5.53a
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)

Figure 5.53b
Mercanzia
(photos by author)
Figure 5.53c
Don Stefano Bonsignori, Map of Florence (detail), 1584
(Facsimile, Harvard College Library)
(photo by author)

Figure 5.54
old signs, new flag
(Artusi, Firenze araldica, Polistampa, 2006)
(postcard)

Figure 5.54a
Domenico Ghirlandaio, Confirmation of the Rule, St Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence, 1482-85
Cadogan, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Yale University Press, 2000)

Figure 5.54b
Domenico Ghirlandaio, Confirmation of the Rule, St Francis cycle in the Sassetti Chapel
Santa Trinita, Florence (detail), 1482-8

Figure 5.55
(Stradario storico ed amministrativo del comune di Firenze, Polistampa, 2004)

Figure 5.55a
(Stradario storico ed amministrativo del comune di Firenze, Polistampa, 2004)

Figure 5.55b
(Stradario storico ed amministrativo del comune di Firenze, Polistampa, 2004)

Figure 5.56
Sounds, images, and texts at the Bargello, Florence
(photos by author)
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1
principal public roads in Florence (statuti del capitano, 1322-25, book IV, rubric viii), p. 111
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASF: Archivio di Stato di Firenze
BAV: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
BNCF: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze
BNF: Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Archival Sources

Archivio di Stato, Florence
ASF, Statuti
ASF, Provvisioni, Registri
ASF, Provvisioni, Capitoli
ASF, Capitani, numeri rossi
ASF, Manoscritti
ASF, Consulte e pratiche
ASF, Carte strozziane
ASF, Corporazioni religiose soppressa dal governo francese
ASF, Nuovi acquisti
ASF, Prestanze

Biblioteca Laurenziana
Laurenziano-tempiano 2
INTRODUCTION

Mutual acquaintance, the precondition of communities, implied constant attention, and the ceaseless readjusting of one’s knowledge of others.¹

Through the articulation of forms of urban anxiety in Florentine architectural space, this dissertation investigates how Florentines created, responded to, and invested a developing communal identity into the built environment that surrounded them, through a variety of media and often at specific moments of social stress and transformation. Their response to social unrest, environmental disasters, as well as political crises often took the form of policies directly affecting the planning, building, and symbolic dimensions of the city. Such responses were both concerted attempts to maintain or re-establish order as well as less self-conscious reactions to crises that speak volumes about the way in which the city was understood as a symbolic ensemble. As I will argue, urban traumas were interpreted and commented upon by contemporaries as a means of both voicing concerns about, and seeking to chart social and political change. As a result, urban spaces functioned as unstable sites of memory, receptacles of meaning, and facilitators of identities. As the documentary evidence demonstrates, moreover, the inhabitants of the city possessed acute critical skills that were deployed to understand the city as a set of conventional social relationships that was also subject to moments of both general and personal upheaval. A study of these responses will provide important insights into the metropolitan condition of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Inherent to this project is the recognition that architecture and the urban environment are fundamentally social constructions. Florence was certainly not

unique in its urban development in comparison with other central Italian late medieval city-states but it did come to dominate a large territory and extend its urbanistic practices. It is also an ideal site for understanding how such cities, which were at the forefront of many social, economic, and cultural transformations that are associated with the complex urban Italian phenomenon known generally as the Renaissance, were always collaborative projects that emerged from a dialogue of engaged citizens. These citizens were very much concerned about the relationship between personal, familial, and neighborhood loyalties, on the one hand, and larger issues of the common good, on the other. As a result, the city contained within its concrete structures the contradictions at the heart of such relationships. In Florence, there was a strong tradition of textual and social practices that contain the traces of this multi-vocal dialogue. Such traces construct an image, or a collection of images of the city, not as a fixed graphic construction but as the product of political struggles, social conflicts, and strategies of representation. The city was a dynamic entity that far exceeded most conventional pictorial attempts to capture its multiple layers of spatial design systems. It was a web of fluid topographies in continuous construction and transformation. By analyzing architecture and urban space at moments of social anxiety, therefore, I seek to reconstruct the way in which architectural form and meaning are the products of the continuous interplay of competing and often irresolvable social and cultural practices. When the meaning of architectural space is in doubt, tacit assumptions and hidden presumptions that enshrouded it are laid bare and allow the architectural historian access to the mechanisms that had hitherto maintained it.

In order to trace the lasting effects that social crises had on the understanding, representation, and reordering of the urban environment, I explore how the city’s spaces, its squares and streets, were constructed both physically and symbolically.
This is manifest in the legislative and literary response to both subtle and dramatic changes in the urban landscape. Such alterations often signified distinct shifts in social struggles between individuals, families, factions, classes, and other corporate groups. They were played out within and against the symbolic power of urban spaces whose spatial configuration was also subject to such violent catalysts of change to urban form such as fires, political insurrection, or the plague. In the minds of contemporaries these dramatic events were the result of power struggles, human error, and divine intervention, and more often than not they contained some combination of all three. To Florentines, such events could never simply be random. They had to be infused with meaning. Figuring out causes, therefore, was a means to superimpose an ordered structure onto a devastated city that linked physical form to social identity.

Such dramatic transformations of the visible city testify to the importance of taking account of what one saw. However, it was equally as important to attend to what one heard. The city as a visual image was augmented by its aural configuration. The time and rhythm of urban life was regulated by a set of familiar sounds – voices, instruments, and bells – that constituted a familiar acoustic topography. Variations in these tones, in the tenor of circulating murmurs, and in the dynamics of the aural soundscape also betrayed specific moments and locations of social anxieties. The audible city was overlaid with both a verbal and non-verbal network of information flows that offered its listeners complex means of understanding and navigating through the city. Together, both sights and sounds illuminated how civic spaces were used and understood by different constituents, at different times, and for many different purposes.

The methodological consequences of recasting space as an object of the temporal infusion of social anxiety are twofold. First, the symbolic dimensions of the piazza and the monument, space and architecture, are understood to be determined by
engaged social forces continually acting on and within them. Second, a broad range of
documents and sources will be needed to evaluate and illustrate the multiple vantage
points from which the city was observed. These sources – government documents,
chronicles, private diaries, literary works, and zibaldoni – not only support a
documentary history but also participate in the social construction of architectural
meaning. Their rhetorical strategies, therefore, demand to be interpreted within the
discourse of an expanded architectural history that acknowledges how the built
environment is both the subject and product of a whole range of texts. Implicit within
this interdisciplinary architectural history, therefore, is the notion that an
understanding of architecture and space must be firmly rooted in the intellectual and
social life of the city.

City-building is always the result of complex legal, political and social
negotiations. However, beyond the concrete production of urban monumental spaces,
account must also be taken of the social production of those very spaces. This
approach acknowledges that the meaning of a piazza was the product of the discursive
forces that continued to act upon it and of inhabitants whose experience ceaselessly
transformed it into a kaleidoscope of competing images and visions. The results were
spaces that contained both relatively stable and collective meanings while they were
simultaneously inflected by more specific but ephemeral interventions. On the eve of
the modern era the city was the product of an intense social dialogue whose voices
offer the architectural historian numerous avenues through which the historical
materiality of urban space is significantly enriched.

In order to trace the lasting effects that constant spatial negotiation between
persons, families, and institutions had on the understanding, representation, and
reordering of the urban environment, I investigate how this is manifest in the
legislative and literary response to environmental, political, and social crises that are
inherent in any dynamic urban society. Space was used and understood in different ways by a range of constituents, as they attempted to make sense of often sudden and dramatic transformations of the world around them.

\[0.1 \text{ Sources: The Textual Construction of the City}\]

In order to reconstruct the historical specificity of urban space in Florence at the end of the middle ages and at the beginning of the Renaissance, I will consider three general types of textual production as documentary sources: government legislation, merchant writings, and the urban novella, a genre that represented an engaged dialogue with the experience of urban space. These sources provide a useful way of apprehending the multiple levels through which Florentines encountered, reacted to, and interpreted urban spaces. They were different moments of urban experience and, as chapter four will make clear, they were the product of the same writers and readers in their different roles as urban dwellers. The first type is comprised primarily of government statutes, which were a series of compiled legislation that formed the legal basis of how the city managed and regulated itself. Three versions were redacted in Florence between 1322-1325, 1355, and 1415 and were a common feature amongst all polities.\(^2\) Of particular interest are laws that provide multiple perspectives on how the communal government responded to the spatial practices of the city’s inhabitants; how it attempted to micro-manage some aspects of civic space, while remaining silent about others. They provided practical and ideal solutions to the kind of city the government wanted to build and made

concessions to the fact that city was already permeated by a disparate collection of traditions and ritual practices. Such legislation was also the result of intense debates, expert advice, social pressures, coercions, violence, and pragmatic compromises. In short, Florentine legislation offers clear evidence of a heterogeneous chorus of voices, a dialogue on the urban environment as a place that needed to be filled with regulations, free of encumbrances, and subject to some sort of tacit guiding principles of order and beauty.

Beyond this official dialogue, the Florentine merchant, in his capacity as a private *homme d’affaires*, constructed a more personal dialogue with this city. He overlaid possible itineraries, topographies, and interpretations onto the city and through them he found ways to arrange, know, and negotiate space. He confronted the “legislated city” with the “city of experience,” redesigning the urban world by moving through it, acting upon it, engaging with those he encountered in it, and then recounting these experiences in chronicles, diaries, family books, and *zibaloni*. Such texts form a vast corpus of merchant writing, of which a representative group will be examined for the ways in which they elucidate the experience of architecture and urban space at the dawn of the Renaissance.

The third category of texts involves popular stories that circulated throughout the city, accompanying the merchant, so to speak, as he traversed those same urban spaces. The novellas of both Giovanni Boccaccio and Franco Sacchetti, for example, perform what may be called the “narrated city” in which the urban dialogue is constituted by storytellers in the piazza, circulating stories, and personal readings and rewritings of urban novellas. Together, this ensemble of voices and texts constituted an engaged discourse on the way in which the built environment affected the character of urban experience, and what could be done about it. Such stories provided a forum for analyzing the ways in which the particular features of the physical environment –
spaces, rooms, walls, and doors – played a crucial part in establishing social categories by organizing individuals and groups spatially. There is a great deal to be learned from the assumptions these stories make about the built environment, about how it was used, who encountered whom, and what kinds of solutions to urban problems were discussed and debated. Such stories often served as a critique of existing conditions, imagining other possible forms of social relations and therefore, they participated profoundly in the way in which Florentines understood their city. These sources do not offer conventional documentary history but they were concerned, over and over, with the same urban issues that legislators were. They tackled the same conflicts, and elaborated more profoundly on the desires and ideals embedded in, but not necessarily evident in, urban legislation. One of the assumptions of this dissertation is that Florentines used a variety of media to construct a dialogue about what their city meant to them and how they understood it. Therefore, the tradition of storytelling that the Decameron embedded into the very structures of the city is crucial part of that dialogue and provides a vehicle for understanding the built environment that is unlike any other more traditionally documentary source. It contains both ideal visions and possible compromises, while it opens up assumptions that contemporaries held about the spaces they traversed. All the texts under discussion, moreover, articulate together a system of social and spatial relations that could be altered each time the city was redesigned textually, manipulated in some way, undermined, transformed, or remembered.

0.2 Merchants and the City

At the center of both the production and consumption of these three types of textual material stands the Florentine merchant, a figure who was emblematic of the
merchant culture that was active throughout the Italian peninsula and beyond. It is this figure, primarily, that mediates our understanding of the social construction of urban space in Florence, and it is through the lens he offers up that one can glean how the city was both a collective and contested enterprise, as well as how its concrete structures were inseparable from social and political relations. As a member of one of the official guilds, the merchant was expected to participate in the political life of the city, a duty he shared, theoretically, with all members of the guild community, from wealthy bankers to butchers and cobblers. Although elite merchants tended to dominate communal politics, they did not do so without shifting conflicts and alliances with members of both elite families and the less affluent, but still enfranchised, traders and artisans. Legislation was always the result of a political game of rhetoric and compromise, of deals and strategies in which merchants determined the limits of the possible. Whether or not statutory prescriptions were regularly enforced or universally followed, urban legislation provides insight into certain collectively held beliefs about the nature of urban spaces and the roles those spaces played in the ritual functioning of the state. Consequently, this allows the historian to create a framework upon which one can compare the reactions and strategies of those who brought those spaces to life.

The writings produced by these merchants in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries constitute an immensely rich documentary source for understanding how the architectural environment of the city was experienced by those who discovered and nurtured their identity within its heterogeneous places. In ricordanze, diaries, zibaldoni, chronicles and family books, merchants, or those who identified with their class, took account of their city; measuring it, describing it, organizing it and the things they found in it around themselves.
These textual practices spanned the multiple roles played by the Florentine merchant in the professional, civic and personal moments of his life. Membership in a guild defined him as a citizen and he was expected to fulfill his duties to the regime assembled by that guild system. Between the guild and the government a whole range of interconnected committees, boards, magistracies, colleges, and councils advised, recommended, enacted, announced, implemented, enforced, and reviewed legislation. This administrative dialogue was a machine for producing texts. As Robert Starn has remarked, referring to Siena, it was republic of words; words that formed an archive of texts that responded to the practicalities of shaping the city into a work of art, a civic society, and a network for trade. Beyond this collaborative enterprise of city-building, the merchant had to produce his own texts that established his relative position within this “republic of words.” For example, he had to calculate his wealth, list his debts and credits, his properties and goods, as well as family and dependents in tax declarations. All his financial affairs – partnerships, acquisitions, rents, and bequests – had to be properly organized into notarial records and made available for public scrutiny. In his business dealings he had to keep records of merchandise, partners, capital, and payments in account books, secret or otherwise. These accounts were so crucial to a merchant’s social identity that he could not be compelled to reveal their contents for cases involving legal condemnation or exile.

4 "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," II, xxxiii. "Che mercatante non sia costretto di mostrare lo libro delle sue ragioni" (That the merchant is not constrained to show his book of accounts). This law guarded the right of all merchants and artisans to keep their account books private when they are condemned or exiled, which included the quantity of his ragioni (accounts) or of his company, of the shop or the tavola. Foreign officials were fined for breaking this law out of their salary. See also "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," II, xli. "D’avere fede et dare alle scri[t]ure de’ mercatanti" (To have and give faith to the writings of merchants).
status of a letter of guarantee.⁵ In such texts, the merchant often felt it necessary to
take account of his family’s past, rendering it on a solid textual basis whose personal
and legal status preserved its legacy, material and social, in order to safeguard its
future.

It was out of these practices that certain forms of writing emerged. These
included personal diaries, didactic texts aimed at instructing future generations, day-
to-day accounts of events in the city, and scrap books containing stories, sermons,
poems, and myths.⁶ While such texts came in widely varying forms, representing
diverse strategies of making sense of the world, they were united by the systematic
methods developed by merchants in business and bureaucratic practices that enabled
them to produce knowledge about their social world. Urban space was an expansive
territory to be negotiated politically, socially, spiritually, and economically. Borders
and limits were established, redrawn, and reordered. Itineraries through the city were
imagined and played out. Upon the city that was coming into being monumentally
and the spaces that were defined legislatively, the merchant sought to overlay more
personally defined, necessarily fluid topographies. These topographies established
links and clarified distinctions from other neighborhoods, groups, families, and
individuals beyond the official symbolic spaces of the city.

⁵ “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” II, xli. “Ogni scrittura fatta nel libro d’alcuno mercantante di qualunque
mercartantia o scritta altrove o in lettere per alcuno mercatante o altri mandate, vagl[i]a et sia ferma in
ciò che si contiene in quella scrittura o lettera contro a colui che così scrisse et così sia messa ad
esecuzione come se ella fosse carta di guarantigia” (All writing entered in the account book of any
merchant of whatever kind of business or trade, or written elsewhere or in letters to any merchant or
other recipients, is valid and resolute in that which it contains in writing or as a counter letter written to
him and should be treated as if it were a letter of guarantee).
⁶ On the development of family diaries see P. J. Jones, "Florentine Families and Florentine Diaries in
the Fourteenth Century," in Studies in Italian medieval history presented to Miss E. M. Jamison, ed.
Philip Grierson and John Ward-Perkins, (London British School at Rome); Angelo Cicchetti and Raul
Mordenti, I libri di famiglia : problemi di storiografia letteraria e di metodologia della ricerca, (Rome:
Ciclinprop-coneditor, 1983); Angelo Cicchetti and Raul Mordenti, I libri di famiglia in Italia, (Rome:
Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1985).
These texts represent more and less sophisticated meditations on what it meant to be a politically enfranchised Florentine and how that identity was derived from understandings of the symbolic dimensions of the physical city. By focusing on the way in which the inhabitants of Florence responded to their urban environment in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it becomes clear that urban space was a contested zone, where inscribed identities suffered the continual instability inherent in heterogeneous socio-spatial relations. As such, the meaning of architecture and urban space was caught within a range of social practices and representational strategies that constituted a dynamic rhetoric of space that was fluid, precarious, delicate in its constitution.

This rhetoric comprised a range of sources whose goal was to negotiate, interpret, lay claim to and make sense of the urban world. It requires, therefore, a reversal of the traditional way in which architectural research has focused on isolated monuments by expanding the field to take account of the multiple images of the legislated, experienced, and narrated city. Therefore, by considering the documentary sources as comprising a dialogue concerning the construction and consumption of urban space, this method acknowledges the way all these texts are involved in, and are the result of, rhetorical strategies. In other words, I do not intend solely to mine these documents for facts, but to recognize the way they inflect and reconfigure aspects of the concrete world as “architectural material” and as mediators of space. They help to historicize, distance, and make unfamiliar, in crucial ways, the experience of spaces and monuments whose persistence into the present day has made them part of an altogether different social environment.

In the more private world of the diary, certainly, the Florentine merchant was as much saddled with prejudices, assumptions, and preoccupations attendant to his class as he was in his public duties. However, the very fact that he was compelled by
those desires and interests to engage personally and in an ethical way with his city leaves us with an earnest, strangely opaque, but always impassioned record of the complex cultural life of the city. Moreover, the tacit assumptions that determined how the merchant viewed the world emerge through his attempts, linguistic or otherwise, to come to terms with a transforming and tumultuous civic world. Implicitly held ideas about the symbolic interaction between the individual, events, and the spaces in which they occurred mark the distance between what was an imagined civic order and the anxiety produced by social, religious, and political uncertainties. At certain moments in these texts such assumptions are no longer taken for granted but are subject to a profound instability. They are taken apart and reconstituted in the act of interpreting the city and its spaces. It is at such moments that the historian can catch a glimpse of the symbolic substructures of the city precisely because those substructures are in danger of dissolution.

Such were the texts – legal and personal – that the Florentine felt it important to compile and write. What of those texts, however, that he thought important enough to collect and to read? One choice concerns a tradition of popular narrative exchange through the urban novella. This was a literary discourse that constituted an important medium through which the Florentine merchant related the city. It reveals how intimately linked urban spaces were to the construction of social identities. Such stories expressed the ways in which architecture promoted certain relationships and discouraged others and proposed ways to situate oneself in space in order to negotiate and reconfigure the landscape according to one’s needs and desires. Set against legal sources, government legislation, and merchant texts, these stories enriched the urban dialogue, where the meaning of space was in constant flux, negotiated rather than designed, and unstable rather than fixed. Merchant readers actively participated in the circulation of such stories. They listened to them in the piazza, rewrote them and
applied such narratives to their own experiences, deriving from them novel ways of ordering their surroundings. This was an urban literature, in both its production and consumption, that offered a wide range of possible urban narratives. It provided a kind of mirror for merchants in which they were able to recognize themselves as the subject of their own modes of representation. The result of this exchange was a set of irreconcilable but connected visions of reality in which the social and physical structures of daily life were taken apart and recomposed in order to set them against urban experience. Within this dynamic exchange the city was, rather than a coherent visual image or an integrated machine, a complex amalgam of overlapping fluid topographies representing a range of irreducible experiences.

0.3 Themes and Structure

In following the various itineraries of the Florentine merchant one encounters a cluster of urban motifs. Therefore, based on the interests, desires, and techniques employed in the documentary sources themselves, I have divided this thesis into a series of thematically based chapters. These themes constitute a set of issues that recur frequently in the legislative, personal, and literary documents described above and bear directly on the city’s architectural and urban structures. They reflect the expansive bodily experience of the historical city that is often rarified in more formalist and aesthetic discussions of demography, topography, and architecture. In each case, examples representing all three categories of texts will be set against each other within a common set of themes.

By juxtaposing such texts, it becomes clear that a comprehensive understanding of the historical materiality, meaning, and legacy of the urban formation and architectural structure of Florence necessitates a comparative analysis of diverse
sources on their own terms. In other words, it is necessary to recognize that the motivations, desires, and prejudices embedded in a legislative provision differ markedly from those animating a literary story. However, it is the merchant’s relationship to both these kinds of literature that makes it evident how such motivations were linked. Different forms of textuality provided different methodological means to address similar urban issues. Different modes of authorship address different audiences. However, the interpretation of one kind of text helps to both discipline and enrich the interpretation of others, creating a more complex image of the city.

For example, literary texts, by their nature, stubbornly refuse to be exploited for facts and figures by the games of meaning and strategic rhetoric they employ for particular ends. However, even the most laconic notarial text was also the product of implicit interests operating within complex relations of power mediated through the contract writer. Although their implied audiences may differ, those audiences were often embodied within the same urban individual, who performed multiple roles as both producer and consumer of texts. In addition, a common feature exhibited over and over in these texts is the manner in which the city was conceived. Florence was not only considered as a collection of objects or an ever-expanding inventory of things. Buildings and spaces, people and objects, were also seen as part of a system of relations, a series of differentials, all of which were connected in dynamic ways. Therefore, I am fully aware that the following themes are somewhat arbitrarily extracted from the narrative currents of the texts and that they are constantly interweaving with others to form links and connections. Certain patterns repeat in the rich tapestry of sights/sites and sounds of the city and invite comparison across temporal and spatial divides.
Chapter one considers how borders and thresholds were at the heart of the legislated city. Its aim is to find what places, actions, and moments of the urban terrain were the common preoccupations between governments, individuals, and writers. In general, these preoccupations arose from an underlying desire for order and a certain disquiet over certain habits and activities. They dealt primarily with official public spaces, which were defined in economic, political, and sacred terms. They attempted to control activity in streets and squares, while defining limits and restrictions, wherever people encountered others beyond the threshold of their private spaces. These statutes regulated the movement of bodies, commodities, and capital in both spatial and temporal coordinates. They defined, piecemeal, spaces that belonged under the jurisdiction of the Popolo, the dominant political force in the Florentine republic, even though that class of citizens was forced to share the city with a diverse number of other groups. It was in this context that a modern sense of the “public” nature of certain spatial networks was in the process of forming alongside emerging economic relations.

This will be placed in contrast to the tacit assumptions about the everyday spaces of the city found in the details of urban narratives, where certain attitudes about the regulation of space are implied or put into dramatic relief. It will also show how such definition of borders was immediately associated with a gendered idea of urban space, where the presence of women was often subsumed into the inventory of obstacles to the proper functioning of orderly, economic public space. From this analysis the workaday spaces of the city emerge as fundamental symbolic parts of larger network of spaces integrated by the acts of everyday life.

Chapter two introduces the “space of experience”. It analyzes the merchant practice of ragionare, while it harnesses that term’s potential as an interpretive tool for

---

7 For a discussion of the Popolo as a social group see chapter one.
both the Florentine merchant and the architectural historian. As Christian Bec has shown, this word referred to a variety of practices and things intimately associated with the way the merchant conducted his affairs, confronted others, and interpreted his world. Located at the nexus between “counting” and “taking account,” and a conception of fairness or justice, it provided a productive apparatus for organizing and fixing the material world of things and the often chaotic social world of people. The chapter then explores some of the fluid topographies constructed by several Florentine merchants. Using these terrains of the imagination, merchants negotiated the actual spaces of their daily lives, bringing meaning and purpose to the most quotidian acts. United as inheritors of the moralized geography constructed in Giovanni Villani’s monumental chronicle, they adapted their skills of ragionare to the uncertainties they faced on a daily basis. The contrasting, fragmentary images of the city that emerge speak volumes about the political and social relations at work throughout the urban milieu.

Chapter three seeks to answer the impossible question: What did the city sound like? The urban soundscape is one of the least understood but most important aspects of the experience of pre-modern space. Recent studies have begun to approach the urban soundscape from a variety of disciplines and perspectives. In my view, city bell towers were a fundamental architectural component of the visible cityscape but their symbolic importance cannot be separated from the sounds they made. Therefore, architectural historians cannot afford to ignore this emerging historical debate about the acoustic dimensions of the city, especially since it was the actual physical arrangement of architectural structures as well as the very materials from which they were made that determined the particular sonic imprint of urban spaces.

---

The chapter addresses the way in which information traversed the city through a network of conduits that facilitated and hindered its flow. For understandable reasons, this aspect of the city has received scant attention by historians of the built environment. Sounds are far more fleeting than stones and the representational system that preserves their memory, musical notation, is intimately tied to the sonic specialization known as music. Only in the twentieth century did artists expand the limits of what constitutes music to include both random and urban sounds, using recording technology to do so. The sounds of Renaissance Florence are almost unrecoverable but there are ways to reconstruct fragments of the acoustic topography of the city. The art of ringing bells contained its own rather opaque terminology for the kinds of sounds that could be made. Civic rituals were accompanied by specific sounds, both vocal and instrumental. Florentines listened carefully to bells, trumpets, speeches, rumors, and gossip, which they used as means to mark time, chart politics, fulfill themselves spiritually, and form what Benedict Anderson has called, in reference to the modern nation state, “imagined communities.” What is crucial is that these sounds were not confined by the parameters of literacy, a phenomenon that causes a great deal of difficulty for historians wishing to convey information about the overwhelming majority of pre-modern city dwellers who could neither write nor read. Listening attentively to these aural exchanges, how they were experienced, used and responded to, allows one to expand the horizons of the merchants’ world to include those whose labor was crucial in supporting their economic well-being.

Chapter four explores the textual practices of Florentines within a culture of reading and writing. It also looks at the way that the same stories and themes found in

---

10 I am painfully aware, however, that this sonic exchange is preserved only in texts, written by and for the literate minority. Although the texts still mediate our access to the everyday in a general sense, they do point indirectly to widely-accessible urban audible discourses.
popular literature were told in urban space itself, creating an aural dialogue with the very spaces that Florentines were constantly writing about. This circulation of stories within the urban environment demonstrates how that environment was both the medium and the object of a collaborative discussion about how people established their social selves. Anyone could be an author as well as a reader or listener in urban space. Stories were subject to all manner of manipulation, as Florentines attempted to make them meaningful to their own experiences. What I believe they were doing was participating in an ethical project exemplified and perhaps to some extent initiated by Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. This mid-fourteenth century work established the paradigm of how writing, reading, and telling stories were a fundamental element of building and interpreting the city. Against the onslaught of the Black Death of 1348, this work took stock of the dissolution of architectural barriers so carefully marked out by republican legislation and imagined how such structures could be re-negotiated to conform to the needs of a desiring and engaged body politic. Human desire became the catalyst to a profound reconfiguration of spatial structures, as walls and barriers disappear in the face of an extended ethical critique. It showed how the fate of architecture and urban space was tied directly to the relative stability of social relations and how, as metaphor, concrete structures sustained and gave meaning to communities in even the smallest of daily exchanges. Subsequently, other authors such as Franco Sacchetti, Paolo Veneziano, and Giovanni Sercambi, pick up on Boccaccio’s use of narrative to respond to urban crisis. Couched in the trope of giving solace to a crisis-weary audience, these stories probe the limits and possibilities latent within transactions between social identity and urban space. They illustrate, in various ways, the collective nature, the spatial dynamics, and the communicative nightmare that drove and determined the course of social and political conflicts, both large and small. These stories deploy narrative strategies to ridicule and mock the chaotic
violence produced by misunderstanding the messages at play in urban spaces. They draw upon the anxiety produced by a range of social forces that affected the spaces that bound communities, neighborhoods, and individuals together. Such stories contain a wealth of information about contemporary attitudes towards the urban environment and when set against chronicles and legislation, they offer fresh insight into a whole range of relevant urban issues.

From there the chapter moves to a discussion of how voices emerge from texts and circulate within space in the domain of gossip, hearsay, and rumor. This urban dialogue was also a crucial component of how Florentines derived meaning from the spaces around them. However, those voices could also transform the structures that bound them; causing walls that confronted them to dematerialize in the face of a sustained collective cry.

Chapter five continues to explore the spaces of experience through the topography of political conflict by using the Ciompi revolt of 1378 as the fulcrum around which many of the themes addressed in the previous chapters were borne out in actual experience. This was the moment in which the city’s disenfranchised workers succeeded in forcing the guild regime to recognize their claim to legitimate corporate status. Through a series of transgressive urban actions, this mass of mostly illiterate, unskilled workers demonstrated that they possessed an extremely sophisticated understanding of the visual and sonic semantics of the city. They were able to overturn the conventional rhetoric of the city, appropriating its architectural space in order to give a voice to those who were, officially, legally, and economically voiceless.

Their use of flags, moreover, allows for an extended discussion of the visible signs that constituted an integral part of the urban landscape in the pre-modern city. Including but not limited to communal arms, these signs made the link between
architecture and identity formation even more explicit. Like the sounds they heard, the signs that Florentines saw also required constant interpretation and suggests that they were highly adept at precisely the kind of visual analysis art historians bring to bear on images more customarily considered within the realm of “art”. Consequently, there is much to learn from how this alternate “period eye” derived meaning from the appearance, movement, interaction, and disappearance of images within this “empire of signs”.

0.4 Scope and Goals of the Project

From a comprehensive historiography of urban and civic life, the historical image of Florence stands within a constellation of contemporary city-states, representing spatial practices that were bringing the early modern city into being. Concepts related to our modern understanding of the term “public,” followed by terms such as –good, -space, -institutions, were beginning to take physical and material shape. In addition, the city was in the process of constructing its legal identity from which it gathered its authority, dressing it up in ideals of liberty and justice. New spatial categories demanded new regulations and Florentines filled such spaces with meaning from all sides in the form of laws, civic festivals, ritual games, political gatherings, and commercial restrictions, while they constructed their own personal, corporate, and communal itineraries. They developed complex ways in which an ideal of the common good (bene comune) belonged to these new spheres of civic activity and aided in determining the limits of private appropriation and the power of public expropriation. Public thoroughfares that linked public spaces were emerging within a civic ethic that linked public order to orderly buildings and the virtue of a city’s identity.
This link between a communal ethic of urban spaces and a political dialogue bound up in the spaces of Florence at the threshold of the Renaissance would continue to inform the spatial dynamics of future European cities. For example, the very idea of the Renaissance and medieval piazza persisted well into succeeding centuries, wherein the piazza and its monuments were drawn into the realms of historical idealism and specific forms of political propaganda. They were appropriated for the construction of local and national identities and made to buttress claims to political legitimacy. Investigating how contemporaries understood such spaces and their temporal relationships is crucial, therefore, in countering the use and misuse of such historical space. It is within this larger historical trajectory that I wish to situate the current investigation. The object is to explore the range of potential formations that city spaces could take and how they were constructed from experience. In so doing, one can trace the changing social and political practices – nationalist, enlightenment, democratic, and authoritarian – that would later impose the burden of new meanings onto these spaces.

New and reminiscent relationships constantly formed between the city and those who traversed it. From the spaces of revolution to the spaces of bourgeois practices of leisure, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the piazza was caught up in the discourse of the city of the spectacle. Baudelaire’s flâneur stands as a kind of alter ego to the Florentine merchant and the relationship between space and citizen in pre-modern societies. No longer earnestly engaged in the practice of everyday life, the flâneur retreated from the crowds and commodities that became a fetishized vision. As Michael Camille has argued, instead of being trapped in the spectacle of an empty sign, where city streets are a hall of mirrors that hide the bourgeois values of the city, the pre-modern city dweller was confronted by an excess of “sites of multiple and shifting identities, places, and communities, shared structures of the imaginary, which
were not imposed from above or outside, but which were articulated from within the teeming multiplicity of the body politic itself."\textsuperscript{11}

Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the city of Paris within this modern realm of desire and vision succeeded in linking the past to the act of moving through the city, noting how the observer linked space to memory.\textsuperscript{12} Even though this figure was worlds apart from the Florentine merchant in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Benjamin was participating in a tradition that linked them. They recorded, interpreted, and ruminated on the world around them by taking account of how they moved through it and what such fluid topographies offered to vision and to knowledge of the self and others.

It is my hope that the present study will help to inform subsequent engagements with the spaces of the past, defining differences and similarities that will allow useful comparisons between urban practices across regions and historical periods, enabling both general assumptions and individual specificity to come to the fore. Likewise, the analysis of engaged responses to the city is predicated on the assumption that such means of establishing urban identities define much of what urban life is. Therefore, it is also my goal that the methods employed here to interpret Florentine urban social space, as much as they have been informed by research in other areas, can be fruitfully applied to other cities, other times, and other spaces.


0.5 Sources: Historiography

Many of the spaces and monuments discussed in this study have obstinately persisted into the present, albeit in varying states of transformation. However, in no way does this analysis intend to strip away layers of encrusted history to reveal originary moments or pure states. On the contrary, one of its primary assumptions is that city-building was a collective, piecemeal project, with no single architect, planner, author, or patron and no singular completeness. It was a fluctuating series of moments, a cluster of processes with more or less cohesive relationships, always in the act of becoming. This is not to reverse, however, important work that has been carried out on late medieval cities, which have countered the dichotomy between Renaissance planning and medieval organicism. It is not to say that there were no original design initiatives in the city of Florence in the vast transformations that occurred from the late thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Instead, as Marvin Trachtenberg has proposed, Trecento planning had general goals of order and beauty, attended to the visual experience, and had its own proportional logic. However, the successful realization of large scale projects and their integration into the existing neighborhood fabric was a result of the flexibility of those goals, of engaging with space from all sides, curbing excesses, allowing certain autonomies, repressing others, and defining new kinds of spaces. In other words, planning did not happen in a vacuum but was constantly

---

infiltrated by special interests, necessary compromises, constant negotiations, and unforeseen complications.

In addition, this study takes the production of buildings and spaces out of the exclusive domain of planners, patrons, builders, and architects and sets it within the wider realm of experience of the modes of reception that carved out the changing details that gave life to those creations. This requires both enlarging the scope of what constitutes a documentary source, and reading primary sources in new ways, in order to provide a sustained analysis of both personal and collective responses by the inhabitants of Florence to the architectural world in the process of materializing around them.

In the Tuscan context, it was Wolfgang Braunfels who showed how the medieval city was the product of both aesthetic and practical design decisions that determined city forms, buildings, and spaces. In his *Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst in der Toskana* he shows how the communal ethic of participatory government was endemic to the design and maintenance of buildings and spaces.\(^1\)\(^4\) City-building was a collective enterprise over time, and could be understood through government debates, provisions and statutes. These documents are a critical part of understanding the complex responses and presumptions that drove official discussions about how Florentines imagined their city ought to be. From the standpoint of the ruling regime, it was a smoothly functioning mechanism that also demanded order and beauty as necessary ethical attributes.

Braunfels’ pioneering work opened up new avenues of research in Florentine urban studies. Paula Spilner, for example, employed documentary resources for a more focused analysis of Florentine urban development in particular. She built on

\(^{14}\) Braunfels, *Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst*, 88. The author makes the connection between medieval statutes and late imperial urban laws in the Codex Justinianae VIII, 10, 11, and VIII, 12. See Martial VII, 61, 368, Ammianus Marcellinus XXVII, 9, 10, and Caggese, *Capitano* (1322-25), IV, viii.
Franek Sznura’s earlier research on the city’s expansion in the thirteenth century and was able to analyze closely the legislative and bureaucratic apparatuses involved with large scale urban transformations.\textsuperscript{15} Like Sznura, she focused on a period in which Florence was undertaking monumental projects that included the new circuit of walls, major circulation streets, new neighborhoods, and what would become the most symbolically significant space of the city, the Piazza della Signoria. 

David Friedman, in his study of Florentine new towns demonstrated how medieval planning practices used formal, orthogonal forms that referred to and complemented social functions and organization.\textsuperscript{16} Florentine planners were conscious, therefore, about the relationship between formal organization and the social use of space, and the hierarchies endemic to it. Consequently, geometry and design were used to construct an image of Florentine authority along major trade routes. 

Kevin Lynch’s notion of the “image of the city” was a pioneering study in mapping topographies based on the experience of inhabitants as they navigated through and negotiated the spaces of their cities.\textsuperscript{17} It demonstrated how architectural monuments derived their meaning and form from the experience of the spaces and structures around them and from which they could not be torn. He showed how certain urban formations had profound effects on how people imagined themselves as part of an urban community. A provocative outcome of this focus is found in the work of Spiro Kostof, who looked at the city as the locus of human activity, linking form to the cultural conditions that created it.\textsuperscript{18} In this conception, the city does not become obsolete and is never finished, being continually inflected by the buildings and

\textsuperscript{16} Friedman, \textit{Florentine New Towns}.
\textsuperscript{17} Kevin Lynch, \textit{The Image of the City}, (Cambridge, MA: Technology Press, 1960).
monuments growing up in it. Subsequently, the place of experience in the study of urban history was discussed in a special issue of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* in 2000 by Diane Favro, whose own research on Ancient Rome uses imagined experience as a mode of historical investigation. In a similar vein, Mark Girouard’s work claims to work outward from the social dynamics that drew people into cities to the architecture that grew up to cater to them, drawing direct relationship between social need and social policy.

Trachtenberg’s analysis of Florentine urban space followed the government’s attempts to supersede and conquer the urban scene by closing down alternative options, and establishing concrete, permanent, and somewhat theatrical monumental scenographic displays. He analyzed the construction of viewing perspectives to show how the regime of the Trecento sought to graft its authority onto the vision of the city’s inhabitants through the arrangement of spaces. These spaces created visions by specifically manipulating the spectator’s possible perspectives. All this was done within a common understanding of optical theory, or at least a working knowledge of the commonality of seeing among a sophisticated visual culture. Trachtenberg shows how such re-workings of the Piazza della Signoria and the building it frames (Palazzo Vecchio) resulted from the way in which economic, social, and political relations were wedded with aesthetic and intellectual concerns at every level of discursive interaction. However, even studies as complex as Trachtenberg’s do not account for the extent to which such manipulations were actually successful in practice, so that

---


attending to the reactions of actual embodied viewers to such well-intended coercion will form a dominant part of the narrative that makes up this dissertation.

No account of social life in Florence in this period can avoid the influence and challenge of Richard Trexler’s analysis of public life as a series of complex rituals that defined the Florentine citizen as part of many different social groups. His work encompasses a broad range of urban transactions that helped to stimulate many possible directions of research into the web of social relations that can be drawn from a wide range of documents. His understanding of Florentine social relations as entirely circumscribed by ritual acts and exchanges helped to bring about a concentration on ephemeral transformations of the city in festivals and triumphal entries. This led, according to Favro, to new interest in the sensual experience of the city. These ritualized practices and distinctly Florentine modes of processing the world turned the piazza into a contested zone in which power relations were put into play. It was where hierarchies and authority attempted to reinforce themselves in the collective psyche. However, the spaces in which such events took place never guaranteed the seamless transfer from intentions to effects. Such monologues of official power entered into a swirling mass of competing voices which, although hardly equal, always carried the potential to thwart certain attempts to subjugate, erase, exclude, or ignore gaps and challenges to the “proper” social order. The ephemeral topographies created by ritual processions and festivals, therefore, were never simply repetitions; any variations in them could turn fleeting moments into anxious cultural memory. Florentine merchants, whose lives were profoundly

\[22\] Favro, “Meaning and Experience,” 364.
\[23\] My interest is not in the symbolic import of rituals per se, but in the way that disruptions within the regular rhythms of urban life provoked certain responses. The literature on this subject is vast but I include several Florentine examples before the advent of the Medici dukes. Nicole Carew-Reid, *Les fêtes florentines au temps de Lorenzo il Magnífico*, (Florence: Olschki, 1995); Heidi L. Chretien, *The Festival of San Giovanni: Imagery and Political Power in Renaissance Florence*, (New York: P. Lang,
affected by such displays, saw to it that such gaps and slips in the representational order of urban rituals were carefully recorded.

Another lesson from contemporary trends in related disciplines has been the problem of finding the silent voices of the poor, women, and children. Practically none of these voices can be heard on their own terms, but indirect glimpses of them can be gleaned from other sources, whose authors were forced to take them into consideration, however disdainfully, at certain moments of social upheaval. Research in this area derives from the groundbreaking work on neighborhoods by Dale and F. W. Kent, which has spawned a genealogy of provocative scholarship in their students. Nicholas Eckstein has shown how even the urban poor formed social bonds, created communities and institutions to serve their needs and those of groups even more unfortunate than they were. His work lies within a larger body of scholarship that has investigated how social relations were derived from topographies of neighborhood and class in late medieval and Renaissance Florence. Similarly,

---


David Rosenthal has reconstructed the satirical ritual topographies of the sixteenth-century underclass in his study of Florentine *potenze*, which elucidates the transformation of the city through a dialogue between those classes above and below the merchant middle in ducal politics after the end of the republic.\(^2^7\)

Finally, it needs to be noted how the intersection of history, diary writing, and urban novellas is brilliantly worked out in Christian Bec’s unparalleled work on Florentine merchants, where he is able to expand and contextualize the horizons of this class’s world view and its wide range of interests.\(^2^8\) In terms of the *Decameron*, I am indebted to Franco Fido for laying the groundwork for the architectonic structure that defines that work, and has led me to many new insights into the relationship between text and architectural space.\(^2^9\) I am also indebted to the interpretive methods deployed by Marilyn Migiel, whose own engagement with the *Decameron* allowed me to see how the work was an ethical engagement with the city and its past.\(^3^0\)

This dissertation lies between the architectural, urban, and social histories outlined above. The first two, in general, have concerned themselves with what buildings and spaces meant to those who brought them into being, while the latter has concerned itself with those who inhabited such environments as social communities. Understanding one necessitates exploration of the others in order to illustrate how buildings and people were linked by urban spatial dynamics, rituals, to be sure but also

---


\(^{2^8}\) Bec, *Les marchands écrivains.*


collective engagement with the city, the act of moving through the city, looking and listening, writing about it, and redesigning it. All of these actions took place within urban spaces and provided the point at which the social was bound to the structural; this is something about which Florentine observers, as any contemporary urban inhabitant would have been, were acutely aware, as we shall see. First, however, some remarks about historicizing space are in order.

0.6 Methods: Defining Urban Space Historically

Surely it is the supreme illusion to defer to architects, urbanists or planners as being experts or ultimate authorities in matters relating to space.31

Much has been written about the dynamic world of the Florentine merchant and the culture of business in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.32 The similarly extensive transformations of the city architecturally in the same period have also received intense scholarly scrutiny.33 However, between the production of wealth and


30
the construction of buildings lie the spaces of much unexplored historical territory. This territory was imagined, formed, and traversed by those inhabitants who confronted it daily. Their architectural environment was the stage upon which they discovered and nurtured their identity. They developed particular forms of textual practices that responded to their urban experiences and provided a means for organizing that world according to their own points of view. The meanings of certain spaces were determined temporally by the more or less official ritual practices that occurred within them. This phenomenon demands that we ask not only “what” or “where”, but also “when” and “how”, when dealing with urban spaces. Such questions lead to answers about the nature of what may be called the space of experience.

The historical experience of urban space is contingent upon the body, whose presence defined the spatial interaction of buildings throughout the city. My study of architecture and space from the point of view of reception is the result of attempts to go beyond a reductive and instrumental understanding of space that is easily assumed from studies concerned primarily with production and design. In such studies, architectural space is often a mathematical abstraction torn from its identity as a locale and divorced from its relation to the body’s own spatial feeling or Raumgefühl. This rarefied space denies the messy world of difference and experience by determining

---


34 This term was central to the discussion of aesthetics. See Georg Simmel, "Der Raum und die räumlichen Ordnungen der Gesellschaft," in Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung, ed. Otthein Rammstedt, (Frankfurt: 1992, first printing 1908), 687-790. For an overview of the debate see the introduction to Robert Vischer, Harry Francis Mallgrave, and Eleftherios Ikonomou, Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893, (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-83.
space as a purely mental construct. Derived from Heidegger’s discussion of space in his essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” the possibility of this abstract space provoked Maurice Merleau-Ponty to argue for the need to recognize the body’s own spatiality and that the body was the medium that produced space.\textsuperscript{35} Without a body, there was no space.

Such notions of body and space, from which the term Raumgefühl was derived, date back to the time of an emerging modernist discourse on architecture. At the end of the nineteenth century, a conceptual analysis of space among German philosophers began to develop a coherent analysis of space and place as historical phenomena. This discourse came out of discussions of the philosophy of aesthetics and was extremely influential on certain modern architects and theorists such as Adolf Loos and Mies van der Rohe.\textsuperscript{36} However, as Adrian Forty points out, the most complex formulations of space exceeded the limits of the understanding of architectural space among architects, and had more impact on architectural history.\textsuperscript{37} It is this theoretical tradition through which I intend to explore historical space, since it has remained largely absent from Anglo-American discussions of Renaissance architecture.

In a groundbreaking study published in 1894, August Schmarsow applied the aesthetics of space to the architectural realm.\textsuperscript{38} From the theory of empathy, where the mind projected into things its own knowledge of bodily sensations, Schmarsow maintained that we acquire an intuitive sense of space from bodily experiences of the world around us. Space exists, in fact, because we have a body. Space is an emanation of the human body and mind.

\textsuperscript{35} For an analysis of Heidegger’s relations to the developing discourse of space in the 20th century, see Adrian Forty, \textit{Words and Buildings: a Vocabulary of Modern Architecture}, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 271.

\textsuperscript{36} For a discussion of this genealogy, see Ibid., 256-75.

\textsuperscript{37} Forty refers to the work of architectural historians Alois Rieg and Paul Frankl. See Ibid., 261.

Such a concept set the stage for, but was not wholly superseded by, the monumental study that looms over any discussion of space itself. Henri Lefebvre, in *La production de l’espace*, originally published in 1974, claimed that the Renaissance city was the locus of the production of modern space. This space was grounded in the way that merchants established urban systems made up of marketplaces that, presumably, were both abstract and concrete spaces of economic exchange. Lefebvre recognized that space was both conceptual and physical. It was not a neutral container into which objects or buildings were inserted, but was both a work and product, something producing and produced. It was perceived in the social relations of daily life, conceived by thought and lived as bodily experience. Architectural space, according to Lefebvre, produces living bodies. This is a process directly opposed to the space-producing body of Schmarsow, which results from the transition from a psychological reading of space as subjective experience, to a Marxist one in which the features of the society in which bodies participate are reproduced in them through such spatial structures. His theory demonstrates, nevertheless, that society and space cannot be disentangled from each other and any analysis of one is an analysis of the other. In addition, physical space (the site of scientific inquiry), mental space (its discursive construction), and lived, experienced space, which are artificially separated in intellectual inquiry, need to be integrated in order to dismantle the ideological structure of space. This is done by re-conceptualizing space as produced practically (through the ritual exchanges in the city’s streets), discursively (by governments, patrons, architects, planners, and workers) and symbolically (through the space of Florentine urban textual practices that the imagination is involved in addressing).

Space, therefore, does not precede architecture, urban planning, society or writing, but is produced by these very elements. Although Lefebvre’s account is primarily about capitalist space, which developed much later than the economy of
urban space in Renaissance Florence, the seeds of capitalist space were, none the less, present in the reconceptualization of the city from the later thirteenth century. His analysis of the way the body and its desire counter the totalizing power of capital, moreover, allows one to see both the emancipatory and oppressive practices whose conflict produced the historical specificity of urban space. The dialogue about space constructed by Florentines, therefore, demonstrates critical qualities that prevented any single powerful force from eliminating difference or of turning their city into a Renaissance rational ideal. This dialogue threatened the coherence of a totalizing image of the city whose beauty would merely conceal the radical effacement of necessary social discontinuities.\(^{39}\)

Recent study of the idea of "place" has demonstrated what Florentines already knew about their city.\(^{40}\) The possible meanings of the piazza were a confrontation between social norms, myths of the past, along with personal, sensual, and physical relationships to space. This confrontation creates “place” at the convergence of the body as a biological and social being simultaneously.\(^{41}\) Something of the carnivalesque exists in such bodies, which could never be wholly contained, and were always exceeding their own physical, psychological and social boundaries through the power of desire.\(^{42}\) For Edward Casey, pre-modern “space” is an anachronism.\(^{43}\) Modern capitalist economics had not yet succeeded in establishing the absolute infinity of a rarefied space that had alienated desire from its exuberant body politic. It

---

\(^{39}\) In this regard, for example, the Florentine practical joke, or beff\'a, which always undermined any attempt to normalize urban social relations, in order to reconstruct it in different ways, was a critical social tool. These beff\'e played on the assumptions and desires of certain persons, who in effect wanted to immerse themselves in the dominant social and political orders. Such acts kept people constantly on guard.


\(^{41}\) This idea does not take into account that fact that such confrontations were also responses to historical meanings already present in such “places.”

\(^{42}\) On this notion of the grotesque body see M. M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968).

\(^{43}\) Casey, "The Ascent of Infinite Space," 103-29.
was in such exchanges, between bodies and spaces, in which the past opened up as a
terrain of possibilities subject to manipulations that invested certain spaces with
changing identities. The “places” created demand that the historian take account of
how spaces are constantly re-contextualized throughout the processes of design and
use, giving rise to possibilities about how the past could be used to inflect the
amelioration of today’s cities. 44

Such practices bring into being an enacted sphere of social relations creating
what Stephen Milner defines as “practiced space.” 45 Therefore, if social interaction
defines the particular character of space at a particular moment and remains embedded
in its physical contours, then the description and textual construction of space on the
part of users bears the memory of what certain spaces once were and how they took on
particular attributes. In short, these voices from the past demonstrate that space itself
has a history. Rather than simply being the backdrop upon which buildings are
founded and through which people move, it has a corporeal and historical materiality.
It clings to the surfaces of things and accompanies objects in movement. It is not a
void to be filled but a presence to be encountered, separating and mediating our access
to people, communities, and institutions. 46

---

44 In legislation concerning of the regulations of Florentine urban space, the language strove for a
universal conception of space but in practice urban spaces remained tied to piecemeal and converging
agglomerations of spaces that remained rooted in local “placeness”. This tension, I believe is more
important than defining a wholesale tranformation of space between the pre-modern and moder eras.
45 Stephen Milner, "The Florentine Piazza della Signoria as Practiced Place," in Renaissance Florence:
83-103.
46 On the materiality of historical space see Paul Zumthor, La mesure du monde: représentation de
l'espace au Moyen Age, (Paris: Seuil, 1993); Michael R. Curry, The Work in the World: Geographical
Practice and the Written Word, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
0.7 *The Temporal Journey of Urban Space*

The city’s spaces is that they remain an active participant in an urban dialogue that threatens our preconceptions about the aesthetic development of the Renaissance city and requires that one reconsider the questions one asks as well as testing the limits of what constitutes the object of architectural study. Similarly, analyzing how historical observers interpreted space reveals that historical research is not merely the unearthing of facts to be interpreted but a constant game of discursive strategies that continually undermine a will to objectivity.

This demands an articulation of the apparatus within which this project derives its own interpretive strategies. There are varying moments at which meaning is invested into Florentine urban spaces. The following breakdown recognizes that such divisions are always arbitrary and never fully defined; they necessarily overlap. However, this armature helps to illustrate the position from which the historian observes his or her object and delineates the assumptions held about the built environment that will drive this investigation.

The first “moment” in the creation of space originates in the will or desire to manipulate, change, or intervene within the existing physical order. Consider, for example, the piazza, which is a clearing and arrangement of a city square. In some form, a will to order existed; it was the idea of a function, a solution, perhaps, or the control of behavior or perceptions that the new space will bring – and this does not exclude narrative spatial negotiation. The piazza may bring a series of expectations about its usefulness and beauty. In any case, this moment usually involves legislation, attempts – legitimate or otherwise – to clear away private properties, gain rights, and collaborate upon the possibilities of the design. This is the moment of builders, designers and architects, as well as discussion between magistrates and councils and
the submission of proposals. On this side of the production of space, a whole series of compromises, unexpected changes, personalities, new ideas, and obstacles confront each other to create the actual piazza. It is at this point that the piazza enters into the circulation of laws and regulations governing civic spaces in Florence.

The resulting production of space, however transformed the relations between intentions, design, and final construction were, generated what I have termed a space of experience, a locus of interaction, a stage of identity formation, a zone of communication, and a repository of collective memory. As part of a network of urban spaces and flows of communication, the piazza took its place within a hierarchy of spaces, which were defined by rituals (solemn, festive, and spontaneous), the conflicts (political, social and familial), and the narratives (stories, sermons and rumors) that circulated through them.

Such practices of space continually reconstructed the meaning of symbolic spaces within a system of spatial relations that each inhabitant had to navigate. And such individuals did this without the aid of a physical map. Instead, there were familiar geographies of friends, families and enemies, familiar sounds and monuments, all of which constituted aspects of related mental mapping strategies. There were memories of the past inscribed into the fabric of the city that gave shape to space and created knowable encounters in contrast to “other” spaces of doubt and fear. Audibility and visibility, not to mention the feel or smell of the city, created a sensual environment understood by the moving subject traversing the city in a process of constant exchange between buildings, spaces, and other subjects.

These spaces of experience breathed life into urban spaces and the architectural environment to social identities. There, in the exchange between bodies and spaces, the city emerged as an ensemble of practices and things, within which the architectural

---

47 Spilner discusses aspects of this process in Spilner, Ut Civitas Ampliatur, 44-48.
historian can discern how architecture participates in material conditions of social experience.

This point of reception is defined by the production, dissemination, and persistence of texts that interpreted, confronted, and worked through the myriad experiences that took place throughout the city. These texts, from legislation to diaries to literature, open up a historical dialogue with the spaces of experience. From them, one can draw common threads, tease out subtle relations, and reconstruct an image of how the urban environment was used as a source and repository of knowledge. They reveal who Florentines thought they were, what they hoped to be, from where they had come, and where they might be going.

These texts form a field of mediation between the present and the past, between the physical legacy of the city that has persisted and the lost shape of the past. Consequently, they are invaluable resources that need to be reinserted into the very historical context they make available. This dialogue with the past reveals how the mediating structures that stand between us and the past can themselves be the object of critique. In this way, the past offers ways of engaging with the strategic operations at play in the contemporary academic world. This is an important goal of architectural research: to engage with the contemporary urban condition, constructing a dialogue with the past that can inform ethical questions in the present.
0.8 Fluid Topographies

Split apart by the schizophrenic mechanism of determinist thinking, time and space remain frozen abstractions... A house should therefore be a bunch of places – a city a bunch of places no less

Henri Lefebvre\textsuperscript{48}

Inherent to this project is the recognition that architecture and the urban environment are the sites of physical, social, political and aesthetic conflicts. What is crucial is the way in which these conflicts and responses led to highly innovative ways to map the city. Between legislation, diaries and stories, Florentines traced, recorded and constructed a web of interlaced fluid topographies that helped them to negotiate the spaces of the city. Such topographies were an array of fragments and a set of irreconcilable images of the city.\textsuperscript{49} They were a means to carve out personal itineraries, locating realms of comfort while defining places of fear, places to avoid. These were places in which the self had to continually define its relationship to the communities to which it belonged by opening itself up, protecting its secrets, changing its comportment, or hiding its particular identity. These transactions between bodies and information are what constituted these fluid topographies, moving corporeal narratives that mapped and remapped the city making spaces conform to their desire, both collective and individual.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Forty, \textit{Words and Buildings}, 271.
\textsuperscript{49} In his landmark study, Kevin Lynch breaks down the components that make up a series of overlapping and interrelated images of the city – what I have termed “fluid topographies” – into paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Urban inhabitants reconstitute these actual elements into fragmented but useful images in order to negotiate the urban environment. Consequently, it is something urban dwellers have always been compelled to do, in various ways at various times. Understanding the specific mechanisms by which inhabitants constructed these topographies at certain historical moments and in specific urban areas, therefore, sheds a great deal of light upon the meaning of architecture,. Urban space, and visible environment. See Lynch, \textit{The Image of the City}, esp. 85-90.
\textsuperscript{50} On the powerful urban image present by the city of the Florence on which such mappings occurred see Ibid., 92.
Approaching the urban environment through the dialogue enacted by these itineraries allows the historian of the built environment to begin to define the multiple and overlapping symbolic dimensions of streets, squares and buildings. Within such textual practices, it becomes apparent that the nature of buildings and spaces was always subject to change in a state of both physical and symbolic metamorphoses that had to be accounted for by the city’s inhabitants. They mediate our understanding of historical space, investing it with lively and detailed descriptions but also obscuring it with silences and assumptions about the city that are extremely difficult to intuit. These fluid topographies are the products of authors who found it necessary to engage with the city, to find a place within it, to express and define a social identity, and derive economic, social, personal and political knowledge from the events that went on it. They bear no claim to objectivity and therefore act as opaque conduits, behind and beyond which lie not simply the neutral spaces of a city increasingly the subject of modern concepts of urban planning, but other subjects, social groups, and political forces.

The built environment itself was the site of experience but it also participated in producing that experience, the events in it and interpretations of them constitutive of the meaning of that environment. It was the place through which common bonds of sociability were established and maintained, identities formed, and collective memories stored. This environment – these streets, squares and buildings – were a network at the center of competing forces such as government legislation, social and political conflict, environmental conditions, collective memories, and narrative interpretation. These were the forces that continually created and transformed the city. By comparing these forces, one can learn a great deal about the nature of architecture and space at specific moments both in historical time and within a society whose members incessantly wrote about their world.
 CHAPTER 1 THE LEGISLATED CITY: ESTABLISHING PUBLIC SPACE

*Please note that all figures referred to in this dissertaiton can be found in the attached CD*

In days of yore, this was wisdom, to draw a line between public and private rights, between things sacred and things common, to check vagrant union, to give rules for wedded life, to build towns, and grave laws on tables of wood…51

*Appropriation, definition, regulation.* This was the tripartite pattern in which the commune of Florence created public space as a newly resurgent Popolo – a coalition of “merchants, notaries, shopkeepers, and independent artisans”52 – confronted the privatizing urban spatial tactics of an upper class elite from the late thirteenth to the early fourteenth century. Public space was a weapon in the arsenal of the communal urban planning policies that created the heavily contested and deeply symbolic spaces of the late medieval city and laid the foundations for the spatial negotiations in Renaissance Florence.

1.1 Appropriation: Taking Control

As architectural historian Paula Spilner points out, the government affirmed that no one but the commune and Popolo of Florence could lay claim to the three principal economic spaces of the city: the Piazza Orsanmichele (Figure 1.1), where the government controlled the acquisition and sale of grain; the Mercato Vecchio (Figure 1.1), the daily market of food and local goods; and the piazza of the Mercato Nuovo (Figure 1.1), the site of more elite vendors, including international bankers and


41
traders.\textsuperscript{53} These spaces lay at the heart of the commune’s self-identification with urban space. They would continue to maintain a special status as the central hubs within an expanding network of civic spaces and they will reappear, again and again, in this study.\textsuperscript{54}

The spaces created by the morass of laws that governed them, however, were social, political, festive, sacred, civic, and aesthetic spaces. Therefore, this study will treat urban space primarily at the point of reception, from the perspective of the viewer, so to speak, to reveal how responses to the urban environment turn users into producers, constructing and reacting to buildings, events, and spaces in a constant dynamic exchange. The piazza, in this context, is a privileged site of such social exchange but its meaning is never separate from the way it is intimately linked to the rest of the city, to all the in-between spaces and buildings. Such elements are linked together by the way the urban subject moved through the city, watching and being watched, listening and making noise, in an exchange of multiple viewpoints.

City spaces were nothing without the communities that brought them to life, the events that took place in them, the architecture that formed them, and the regulations that defined them. Within this configuration, somewhere between the body politic and legal provisions, lies an emerging social conception of the “public” that was embedded into urban space. This chapter concerns itself with attempts to create coherent public spaces out the dense and opaque morass of the competing interests of rival groups in the city. Successive Florentine governments tried to bring this about through the establishment of borders, limits and thresholds, asking how they were measured, defined, controlled and used. These borders were the result of a

\textsuperscript{53} Spilner, \textit{Ut Civitas Ampliatur}, 61-64. Spilner cites various provvisioni and capitoli from the 1290s.
\textsuperscript{54} Penalties for crimes committed in these spaces were doubled. Besides these three principle economic spaces were all the government palaces and area around the baptistery (spazio di San Giovanni), and the bishop’s palace, within a distance of fifty braccia. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, lxii.
concerted effort to specify a certain kind of spatial order that conformed to the desires of a certain class of merchants in conflict with opposing forces that, in contradiction with each other, wanted to both close down and extend such spatial practices. The analysis then turns to instances where such borders were subject to challenges and renegotiations through the urban experience of Florentines in order to show how public space was continually contested. The nature of public space as a negotiated, unstable category is investigated through its use as a political tool and as the site of regulation and social control. The chapter ends with an exploration of the way in which Florentines internalized the moral topography of the city through describing the urban environment and what things they saw happen in them. It takes account of how the street was gendered as a way of showing how the rhetoric of a universal free space was defined in fact by the endless regulation of bodies.

Urban space was inhabited by complicated, desiring bodies that took part in an exchange whose medium was the physical contours of the city. What they wore, what they said, and the gestures they made were all part of a system of meaning-generating signs that adorned and redefined the public realm in the making. According to art historian Michael Camille, this exchange was an important element of the concept of the *res publica*, “that which belonged to the community as a whole and was exempted from commercial exchange.”55 This was not a space of unhindered social exchange, however. As much as the public realm was an ideal concept of community, the laws that regulated it never allowed those bodies to forget that the same spaces were necessary for the movement of goods and the production of wealth.

This legislated space of Florence was the result of a series of urban design experiments carried out by successive regimes from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth centuries. These experiments attempted to facilitate, separate, and control

55 Camille, "Signs of the City," 29.
commercial exchange, military exercises, social interaction, religious devotion, and civic rituals. As a result, communally prescribed spaces had to be multi-functional, variously incorporating and excluding such practices.\textsuperscript{56} Legislation and use created a moving system of differentiated social, political, spiritual, and military spaces subject to complex, often ineffective forms of control. Consequently, the idea of urban beauty and order, praised by merchants and encomiasts, always carried within it the idea of public order, which attempted to contain those desiring bodies, if not always in fact, then at least in other modes of representation.

In effect, one could speak of two intertwined practices of public space. One was legislative and claimed control over most of the streets and squares of the city. Constant preoccupation with keeping such spaces clear for economic and ritual movements expressed an acute anxiety over the practices of other public spaces, defined by Camille as the extra-economic system of communication and social exchange. These activities included battles between neighborhoods, throwing stones at people’s houses, kicking stones in the piazza, gossip, public story-telling, preaching, and games that urban legislation often sought to prohibit, limit, and control. Such bodies also entered more intimate, private realms, whose thresholds were clearly defined and demarcated by both laws and practices of measurement from the dynamic spaces of streets and squares. However, subject as they were to changes based on temporal rhythms – different laws applied at different times – such legislation inflected such thresholds with the mutations that defined a city’s complex rhythms of micro-durées. As they did most urban activities, daily, seasonal, and annual rhythms created a moving line between the public and the private\textsuperscript{57} based on when and how

\textsuperscript{56} Spilner, \textit{Ut Civitas Amplietur}, 391ff. For example, the Piazza della Signoria excluded most commercial activity but served as the primary venue for military, political and ceremonial events.

\textsuperscript{57} I use the term private in reference to spaces in which the laws of universal access and regulation of obstacles did not apply, such as some areas, but not all, of domestic spaces, as well as churches, such as
such spaces were used. Architecture, like the bodies it enclosed and directed, was also an amalgam of multiple identities.\textsuperscript{58}

One of my goals in this regard is to historically situate an emerging conception of what the term “public” signified to Florentines between the late thirteenth and early fifteenth centuries and determine how it reconfigured the spaces of their daily lives. Was there a coherent conceptual and spatial framework built around it? More specifically, how did the piazza figure in the negotiations over the nature and meaning of the “public” in spatial terms? In the Italian city states of the later Middle Ages, these negotiations were explicitly contained within a developing body of urban legislation. These statutes were compiled from urban legislative provisions by teams of notaries. They conserved, elaborated, and transmitted the legal definition of “public” based on their training in Roman law and its medieval juridical interpretations. In the case of Florence these developments in legislation were caught up in political, economic and social struggles over to whom streets and squares belonged, who had access and rights to certain spaces and buildings, what activities could take place there, and when they could occur. Such laws and provisions, therefore, were in part reactions and strategies in disciplining both space and the bodies that occupied it. They were an intimate part of the social construction of space.

According to Roman law, that which is “public” pertained to the use of all. It established this concept before defining the types and maintenance of public thoroughfares, immediately introducing the precept that such thoroughfares and spaces could not be usurped by anyone.\textsuperscript{59} The thirteenth-century notary Brunetto Latini

\begin{itemize}
  \item[58] See Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 45ff.
\end{itemize}

“Cui libet in publicum petere permittendum est id, quod ad usum omnium pertineat, veluti vias publicas, itinera publica: et ideo quilibet postulante de his interdictur.” (Everyone can make use of public spaces, and it is forbidden to interfere with them.)
(active 1250-1295) described public things as those that belonged to the city or community of people, while private things belonged to particular persons.\(^{60}\) He emphasized the collective component bound to the idea of the “public” and how it was specifically an urban construction. Such public things had to do with rulership and dominance (signorie), government offices (officii) and the important things belonging to the commune (grande cose del commune).\(^{61}\) Cities, in turn, were assemblies or gatherings of people for the purpose of living in a legitimate order, with justice (a ragione) as a primary component. They were not conceived spatially, or geographically, therefore, as those who lived together within the walls of a city.\(^{62}\) Wherever the collective acted, there was the city.

What particular group or groups, in practice, defined the “collective will” and what was the nature of the “public” whose space they were constructing? Latini’s definition of the public makes it an exclusively urban phenomenon, locating it in the social construction of the city and its governance. Public space would be that which was claimed by the commune and the commune was composed of that group that governed itself. Those spaces and that governing group, however, were never fully fixed, so that the public status of a particular street or piazza was always at stake. Different groups were continually struggling to maintain power, to gain access to power and to disenfranchise others. An idea of a universal collective identity projected by one particular group, those capable of ruling, often legitimated the privileges accorded to that very group. Access to power also allowed regimes to dress themselves in the language of the public, to wield its power against its enemies,

---


\(^{61}\) “Publiche questioni sono quelle nelle quali si tratta il convenire [sic] d’alcuna cittade o comunanza di genti. Private sono quelle nelle quali si tratta il convenire [sic] d’alcuna spiciale persona.” Ibid., 5.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 13.
display itself, and make profits from the commerce that coursed through it. However, to maintain such legitimacy, such an idea had to be first expressed in the built environment. The notion of communal, or public, space was embedded in the struggle of those who were trying to define themselves through the way they defined communal space and claimed to be the legitimate government of the city, namely, the Popolo.

The term “Popolo” was a class that defined itself against elite families. “Side by side with the elite was the class the sometimes cooperated with it, sometimes challenged it, and which, in Florence as elsewhere, was called the “popolo.” The term itself denoted a certain group according to context, sometimes designating all Florentines eligible for public office, more often referring to wealthy non-elite citizens, and sometimes including the laboring classes (popolo minuto). In general, it referred to guildsmen not belonging to elite families. As such, the term slid across the wide middle of Florentine society, expanding and contracting, excluding fully only those at the margins, the extremes of elite and urban abject poor. It was a term in process, whose meaning Florentines struggled over to control and it was intimately linked to the struggle to determine what spaces defined this class’s base of “public” power. What was important was that Florentines knew, at any given time, to whom the term popolo was addressed; i.e. who belonged to the “public.”

This did not preclude the existence, however, of the projection of an idea that the “public” was somehow a universal category that encompassed all of urban society. Dante questioned its status in relation to familial bonds in the Convivio: “Who will say that Torquatus, who sentenced his own son to death out of love for the public

---

64 Ibid.
good, could have borne his suffering without divine assistance?" In visual terms the public good was a central element in the appeal to universal authority of a republican regime. The idea of *ben comune* as that which trumps all other interests and binds up all the virtue of the collective polity was a commonplace of the late medieval republic. However, this concept was specifically gendered for such urban communities, and this is apparent in its most famous visual evocation in the *Sala della Pace* in Siena (Figure 1.1a, 1.1b). As a venerable man with white hair, *ben comune* wears the arms of the commune, sits under the three theological virtues, and is flanked by allegories of other conventional virtues acting as a kind of council of state. Such political propaganda overlaid a universalizing principle of the common or public good onto what was a more fractious and particularist regime anxious about its representative legitimacy.

The figure’s size and position within a visionary council linked to the vision of a well functioning city, attests to the importance this concept for collective decision-making in the name of the commune. His masculine gender, however – and to my knowledge, this has not been noted – distinguishes the figure from the all-female cast of abstract concepts and links him more directly to the procession of male citizens who constitute the link between Justice on the left, and the figure of *ben comune* on the right. This link has the effect of placing the common good firmly within the more concrete and masculine world of communal government, a less abstract and ideal world in which

---


female bodies were generally denied access and whose legal presence was usually under some form of exception. Public space was emphatically masculine.

By defining limits and borders, a range of legal, social, and narrative practices created a dense topography of both obstinate and mutable territories. Through an analysis of such practices concentrated around common themes, this chapter constructs the outlines and movements of this dynamic grid that will then serve as a locus and reference for the chapters that follow.

1.2 Definition: Marking Boundaries, Defining Territories

Dividing space and creating boundaries are almost natural qualities in relation to social interactions. Sociologist Georg Simmel described the phenomenon as a way of organizing the potential boundlessness of space. He describes the way that territories created by social groups express and support the collective identity of those groups and vice versa. Like a work of art, the frame that surrounds such a space functions to close it off from the world outside while holding its shape and contents together. This creates a certain inward homogeneity among inhabitants who are

---

67 In Florence women were not even permitted access, under normal circumstances, to the spaces in which this community of men acted out their republican aspirations. “Nulla femina possa o debba accedere o andare al palagio del comune di firenze et di messer la podestà o di messer lo capitano o ad alcune corti del comune di firenze o dinanzi a messer la podestà o capitan o di loro judici, cavalleri, o notari sotto [sic] pena di lb. X di pic per ciascuna volta et quello che per lei sia fatto o piatto non vagla per la ragione stessa” (No woman may our should be admitted or go to the Place of the Commune of Florence and of the Podestà or Capitano or their judges, knights, or notaries under the penalty of 10 lire for each time and that which is done or pleaded on her behalf is not valid for the same reason). "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxxv. The presence of women seemed, to some observers, to put a stain on the rarefied world of male governance. For women’s presence as a “stain” (maculare) on masculine communal architecture, see Ulrich Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit der Macht: Der Florentiner Palazzo Vecchio im Spätmittelalter," in Zwischen Gotteshaus und Taverne: öffentliche Räume im Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit, ed. Susanne Rau and Gerd Schwerhoff, (Koeln: Boehlau, 2004), 263-64. See also Nicolai Rubinstein, The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298-1532: Government, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 43-44.

acutely conscious of boundaries; in fact, the boundary becomes a mental image that represents that imagined collective unity. Such political boundaries that place geometrical lines between neighbors are far more precisely imagined and perceived, according to Simmel, than those of natural boundaries such as mountains or rivers because they are so much more subject to shifts, expansions, or contractions. What Simmel’s understanding of space in this context does is to demonstrate how the elucidation of a polity’s ideas about itself, its relations and exchanges is located in space, or more precisely, at the borders it sets up between both itself and the outside and between its members in the dynamic engagement with thresholds that are constantly erected, reinforced, strained, and transgressed. The shape of the city, or the way it divided itself up, overlaid jurisdictions, and governed space was an image of the society that lived in it. Historical knowledge was embedded in such transactions between borders.

How did Florence, as a late medieval emerging republic, divide itself up? From the legislative statutes drawn up in Florence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a certain spatial configuration of the city emerges (Figures 1.2-1.2b). This official image was comprised of political, military and legal jurisdictions that created neighborhoods across the city. This was the topographical entity into which Florentines then inserted themselves with varying degrees of ease or difficulty.

Before the twelfth-century expansion of the city walls, the city was divided into quarters, all of which were on the north side of the Arno (Figure 1.2). They corresponded roughly to the cardinal directions and narrowed to meet near the center of the city along the via Calimala just to the south of the Mercato Vecchio (Figure 1.2c) All were named after the corresponding gates that gave access to the center of the Roman grid.

---

69 Simmel, "The Sociology of Space," 141-42; Simmel, "Der Raum," 466.
The expanded city of 1172 reoriented the city in line more with the banks of the river, and six *sestieri* were laid out. They merged roughly in the center again, though this time around the central processional way, the via Calzaiuoli and the grain market of Orsanmichele. Florentine statutes divided this city into these territories, each with its own unique visual symbol. The statutes of 1322-25 reconfirmed the subdivisions of the city laid out in 1250. The subdivided the city’s *sestieri* roughly along parish lines (The Parishes included in the districts are named as descriptors) and then subdivided those into districts (*societates*), assigning each, nineteen in all, a flag that bound together that district as a militia company.\(^{70}\) Santo Spirito comprised all of the territory across the river from the 1172 expansion of the city walls.\(^ {71}\) The final expansion of the city walls took place between 1284 and 1333 and was therefore a long term expression of the popular government’s new urban identity.\(^ {72}\)

When the bell of the priors and Standard Bearer of Justice rang in alarm, each militia member was supposed to follow the flag of his neighborhood company to whatever place commanded in the law spelled out in the statutes. This law concerned the outbreak of insurrection and organized the city’s defenses geographically, all under the authority of the city’s bell.\(^ {73}\) A similar provision was repeated in the 1355 statutes except that now the city was divided into quarters, each with four standards

---

\(^ {70}\) Caggese, *Capitano* (1322-25), V, lxxxiiii (262-64). For a more detailed look at these images see chapter five.

\(^ {71}\) Fannelli uses Villani’s description of the expanded city walls to locate the borders of the new sestieri if 1172. The quotation comes from Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta, (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo; U. Guanda, 1990), bk. 5, ch. 8. However, the date ascribed by Villani to this expansion is 1078. Davidsohn was able to prove that Villani was wrong in attributing this expansion to the 11th century through documentary evidence. See Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, trans. Eugenio Dupré-Theseider, (Florence: Sansoni, 1962), IV, 113; Robert Davidsohn, *Forschungen zur Geschichte von Florenz*, (Berlin: E. S. Mittler und Sohn, 1896), I, 113-21.

\(^ {72}\) For an analysis of Villani’s description of the final circuit of walls, see “Villani’s Descriptive models of the city in chapter 2 below.

\(^ {73}\) The statutes make reference to the bell of the lord priors and Standardbearer. This was most likely the great bell of the commune, the *Leone*, or *Grossa*. Names for bells were also fluid, in that they tended to be attached to a certain bell when it performed a certain function. See Caggese, *Capitano* (1322-25), V, lxxvii (267).
(gonfaloni). The new quarters were outlined in terms of their incorporation of the older sestieri.\footnote{"Statuti del Capitano (1355)," II, iii.} Santo Spirito was enlarged but still comprised all the territory across the river, and the remaining three converged at a single point this time, at the south-west corner of Orsanmichele.\footnote{This was not quite the geographic center of the city, the south-east corner of the Mercato Vecchio, where the north-south and east-west axes of the city met. Villani locates the center here in terms of his measurement of the city. See “Villani’s Descriptive Models of the City in Chapter 2 below.} This border followed the line of a major thoroughfare that brought goods into the market from the via Faentina, through the Porta San Gallo, then along Borgo San Lorenzo to the Mercato Vecchio and beyond to the Porta Romana, bisecting the city in two (Figure 1.2d).

The creation of the quarter of Santa Croce was slightly more complicated. Incorporating the old sestiere of San Piero Scheraggio, it extended from the piazza south of Orsanmichele at via Calimala, turning north on via Calzaiuoli, east along the present via del Corso, south on via de’ Cerchi, then east on via Dante Alighieri which the statutes refer to as “via di Santo Martino Vescovo.” The border then turned north on via San Procolo and east again along Borgo degli Albizzi, south, along via dei Pandolfini and extended along via dell’Agnolo to the city walls (Figure 1.2e).\footnote{“Il secondo quartiere sia essere debba e intendasi cio’ che è nel sexto e del sexto di san piero scheraggio fra le mura dela citta’ e anche fuori dele mura cio’ che è in alcuno overo dalcuno popolo dela citta’ del detto sexto e oltre cio’ che è dalcanto di calcaiuoli di calimala il quale risponde nela piazza dortho san michele dallato di macchi per dritta linea infino ale mura dela citta’ diverso mezzo di procedendo per la via di santo martino vescovo e per la via di sambrocolo e per la via delle fornaci e essa via infino almezzo overo in fino arigagno dessa via ilquale quartiere sia dinominato e chiamato quartiere di sante croce el quale lavventurate insegne e arme sia il campo di colore d’azzurro cum croce d’oro per tutto” (The second quarter should and ought to be that which is in and of the sestiere of San Piero Scheraggio inside the walls of the city and also outside the walls of which that which is in any or of any parish of the city of the said sestiere and beyond that which is from the Canto de’ Calzaiuoli di Calimala which is in the Piazza Orsanmichele from the side of the Macci in a straight line up to the walls of the city, proceeding in a different manner along via San Martino Vescovo and along via San Procolo and along via delle Fornace and this street up the middle or the corner of this street, which quarter called and named the quarter of Santa Croce, whose assembling banner and arms are a field of blue with a golden cross). "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," II, iii. There is no reason given for the slight derivation of the border of Santa Croce, whereby it loses Orsanmichele to San Giovanni and gains the block just to the east of the said grain market.}
All the quarters were branded with a new standard, all on a blue field. Where any of the *quartieri* reached the banks of the Arno, their jurisdiction extended out to the middle of the river, sectioning off the river into imaginary but very fluid boundaries. Each quarter was divided into four *gonfaloni*, which became the central spatial unit on which neighborhood was measured by Florentines. It was the fundamental grid upon which both legislation and citizens superimposed their own topographical territories. However, this geographic territorialization of the city had to confront other overlapping spatial boundaries of parishes, classes, trades, and family alliances, as we shall see. At certain moments, especially at times of civic unrest, it had to accommodate new divisions. For example, in times of revolt (*romore*), as the neighborhoods organized under their banners, no *popolano* was allowed to visit the house of, or congregate with, a member of the magnate class. The city suddenly became off limits for magnates as the Popolo gathered to reinforce the image of an ordered city that the statutes attempted to construct through legal means.

This was the grid that superimposed a mixture of public and private interests. Through various provisions, however, the statutes begin to outline and imagine the city as a network of spaces, streets and buildings connected by their status as belonging to the commune. A public patrimony defined by contiguous borders and

---

77 These political divisions of the city became, through social practice, integrated into the network of parenti, vicini, and amici that characterized the experience of neighborhood in Florence by the Quattrocento. On this, see Kent and Kent, *Neighbours and Neighbourhood*, 4.

78 Redrawing such jurisdictional boundaries never guaranteed the success of establishing new homogeneous communities. As Alain Corbin found in his study of bells in rural France, redrawing the map of nineteenth-century communities and parishes uprooted and disoriented people by modifying the geography of prayer and refuge. Therefore, prayer and related ritual social activities had a spatial dimension. They were attached to and derived power and identity from their attachment to particular spaces. Changes from above could cause not only unease but open conflict, as the Ciompi revolt of 1378 demonstrates. See Corbin, *Village Bells*, 53. Originally published as Alain Corbin, *Les cloches de la terre: paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIXe siècle*, (Paris: A. Michel, 1994).

79 On such laws specifically see “Percorrere la città” in chapter 2 below.
represented by visual symbols defined itself over and above, within and along private spaces, ordering and controlling what was supposed to go on there.

These statutes represent both the historical product of the self-governing commune’s promulgation of laws, ordinances, and provisions, and, crucially, the culture of interpretation of Roman law that was circulating throughout late medieval Italy especially since the rediscovery of the Digest, or Pandects at the end of the eleventh century and the subsequent creation of an independent legal science.\(^{80}\)

Within the realm of architectural history, however, the profound role of legal statutes in establishing social territories has not been fully exploited.\(^{81}\)

In reference to the three compilations of statutes that grew out of the late thirteenth-century legislative process and developed in scope and complexity into the fifteenth century, much of the following discussion will concentrate on the 1355 statutes. They are the only versions that have not been published in a modern critical edition but they were the only Florentine statutes that were ever translated into the vernacular and expressly made available to a highly engaged reading public and their effects were intimately bound to the daily experience of the city and its spaces.

\(^{80}\) The 1355 statutes, called for by law in March of 1351 in ASF, Provisioni, Registri 38, f. 196r-v, were compiled and edited by a commission directed by the jurist Tommaso di Ser Puccio da Gubbio. The process of statutory compilation is discussed in detail in the important book by Lorenzo Tanzini, Statuti e legislazione a Firenze dal 1355 al 1415: lo statuto cittadino del 1409, (Florence: Olschki, 2004). The role of jurists in the compilation of Florentine statutes has been widely discussed for the 1415 statutes because of the participation of the famous jurist Paolo di Castro; on this, see, for example, Lauro Martines, Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 184-87; Tanzini, Statuti e legislazioni. How medieval jurists understood and interpreted communal legislation was the subject of many medieval treatises, such as the famous De statutis of Alberico de Rosciate, and is the subject of a classic work by Mario Sbriccoli, L’interpretazione dello statuto: contributo allo studio della funzione dei giuristi nell’età comunale, (Milan: A. Giuffrè, 1969). The critical importance of the renewed study of Roman Law, and, in particular, of the Digest, is discussed in nearly all general histories of medieval Italian law, including Antonio Padoa Schioppa, Storia del diritto in Europa: dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007). See also the review essay by Emanuele Conte, "Droit médiéval: un débat historiographique italien," Annales: Economie, Sciences Sociales 57 (2002): 1593-613.

\(^{81}\) The work of David Friedman is an exception to this. For example, see his “Palaces and the Street”.
On November 24, 1355, Andrea Lancia, the Florentine notary, was commissioned to translate the Latin statutes of Florence into the vernacular. These laws were compiled shortly after a tumultuous decade which saw the collapse of several major Florentine banking houses, factional violence, an embarrassing political tyranny of the foreign aristocrat, Walter of Brienne, a disastrous famine, and the catastrophic Black Death of 1348. Such statutes have been used by architectural historians in the past but have not been analyzed within the context of the particular constellation of writers and readers, producers and consumers, actors and observers that collectively produced a complex web of public things, spaces, ideas, events, actions, and narratives.

According to Luca Azzetta, such vernacular editions had become more common among late medieval republics in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth century, though they were by no means the rule. They brought with them a sense of “public intelligibility” which therefore rendered the developing concepts of public space more openly and explicitly to a non Latin-educated but still literate public. Notaries had a fundamental role to play as the linguistic mediator between the lingua giuridica and the lingua parlata of the city. Competent in both languages, they were able to make the law – and other facets of Latin culture – available to an engaged public and one that could not then claim ignorance of the meaning of the various

---


84 Azzetta, *Ordinamenti*, 41ff.
aspects of communal space.\textsuperscript{85} The translated editions were exhibited to the public in the \textit{Camera dei Signori delle gabelle} of the Palazzo dei Priori and elsewhere, for anyone to examine\textsuperscript{86} – at least those who had access to governmental offices (Figure 1.3).

Notaries such as Lancia brought the wider literary culture of the Latin world to an audience not versed in Latin but which was nevertheless enthusiastic and wanted access to it.\textsuperscript{87} Therefore, such figures straddled the threshold between erudite learning and its popularization and the diffusion of legal concepts of public space. As a result, they mediated the social exchange that linked public space to a body public and that body’s access to texts, stories, and spaces which combined to produce its urban identity.

The structure of the 1355 statutes was hardly unique to Florence. They participated in a wider urban cultural exchange that defined the shape of spaces of medieval Italian communes and their Renaissance and early modern transformations. They are repetitive, conventional, and often concerned with the minutiae of civic life. However, they contain a wealth of valuable information about how Florentines – those concerned with governing the city – constructed a network of interlocked, hierarchical spaces that were meant to serve as both conduits and barriers for the orderly flow of bodies and goods as well as stages for the ritual exercise of authority, zones that would present the image of well governed, well-adorned city.

Where exactly were the public streets and squares in Florence according to these statutes? Where did they begin and where did they end and what kind of a relationship, physically, did it establish with private or domestic space? A full account is difficult due to the statutes’ generalizations, but there seems to be equivalence

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Demetrio Marzi, \textit{La cancelleria della repubblica fiorentina}, (Florence: Le Lettere, 1987), 419.
\textsuperscript{87} See “Reading and Writing: Notaries” below.
between what was owned by the commune and what was designated public. The term “publico,” therefore, had an institutional character within the language of the laws. In addition, making something public (piuvichare, publicarsi), such as those very laws, was tightly bound up with such spaces, making the public a political act and part of the discursive formation and circulation of an official common knowledge. The idea of the public was grounded in the way information flowed through urban space, each reciprocally defining the other. Not surprisingly, these streets and spaces were subjected to the most intense regulation so that there is no mistaking “public” for “free” space. From these provisions emerges a hierarchical public spatial network that controlled access, movement, and social relations based on economic, political, gendered, professional, and temporal conditions.

Within the context of political reform in Florence at the end of the thirteenth century, the demarcation, restitution, and control over what was considered to be the land, buildings, and piazze belonging to the commune was a core component of what constituted the legislative strategy of the newly victorious popular reform movement of the republic. Through a series of legislative maneuvers, the government institutionalized its desire to identify, appropriate, and document communally-owned walls, streets, and squares. It confronted the more privatizing movements of its enemies, where buildings looked inward and streets led to dead ends, in spatial terms by carving out a distinct public domain from the dense matrix of fortified neighborhoods that had characterized the topography of Florence (Figure 1.4). Such

---

88 Political reform in the late thirteenth century primarily revolved around the conflict between the Popolo and the magnates for control over the city, as well as the split in the Guelf party in the Black and White factions. On the politics of reform and the establishment of the Popolo n the later thirteenth century in Florence see Davidsohn, Storia, vol. III, chapters 9, 10; Gaetano Salvemini, Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295, (Florence: Istituto di Studi Superiore Pratici e di Perfezionamento in Firenze: Sezione di Filosofia e Filologia, 1899); John M. Najemy, Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral politics, 1280-1400, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), chapters 1, 2.
strategies embedded political conflict in public space. In common with many
communal governments, the identity of this popular movement was infused into these
urban spaces and what constituted the “public” was formed, inflected, and negotiated
in them.\textsuperscript{89} Communal governments such as Florence devised various means to then
construct a spatial regime that defined its collective identity. The achievement of this
end required an integrated network of streets and squares in which to act out its rituals
of legitimation, announce new laws, confront its enemies, enrich its members,
preserve its past, and celebrate its spectacular beauty.

The demarcation, restitution, and control over what was considered to be the
land, buildings and \textit{piazzes} of the commune played a central part of what constituted
the concrete authority of the new regime. Restoring public control over certain spatial
jurisdictions became the subject of legislation called for and adopted between 1293
and 1294, leading to the “Six in Charge of Rights”, later known as the “Tower
Officials” (\textit{ufficiali di Torre}).\textsuperscript{90} It was the duty of this magistracy to identify and
recover public control of lost properties and then maintain or alienate them in the best
interests of the commune.\textsuperscript{91} In a series of remarkable decisions and assertions, this
office affirmed the communal ownership of the city’s most important spaces and the
streets that connected them. They were also empowered to create, by expropriation,
new tracts of public spaces for the “beauty” of the city.

When the commune declared that the city’s three market squares were the
foundation of the city’s network of public spaces, it also determined the specific limits

\textsuperscript{89} Spilner outlines several examples of public agencies entrusted with articulating urban space. See
Spilner, \textit{Ut Civitas Ampliatur}, 56.
\textsuperscript{90} Spilner outlines the creation of this magistracy to reassert control over properties and jurisdictions,
within and without the city, that had been usurped by private powers, “to the detriment of both the
finances and authority of the government.” See Spilner, 55ff. Spilner points out that the establishment
of this office followed what John Najemy characterized as a revolutionary revision of the communal
statutes. See Ibid., 59. Spilner quotes Najemy, \textit{Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral
politics}, 1280-1400, 61.
\textsuperscript{91} Spilner, \textit{Ut Civitas Ampliatur}, 60-61.
of those spaces. The law also states that the commune’s jurisdiction over this space reached up to the very edges of the houses that bordered these piazzes; i.e. their exterior walls. In so far as the commune and the Popolo of Florence represented two aspects of a collective identity that exceeded any other individual or corporation in the city, the idea of what constituted “public space” was assumed to be defined within these parameters; i.e., that which belongs to the commune and popolo of Florence.92

In subsequent legislation, this public network would encompass all piazzes on both sides of the city’s four bridges, the bridges themselves, the streets around them and, finally, in the conventional formulaic terms of legal parlance, all other public piazzes and streets of the city of Florence, creating, in effect a public network that allowed one to traverse the city in a continuous and uninterrupted movement (Figure 1.5a). At the same time, the commune was in the process of linking communal rights to public space, collapsing the two into each other.93 The shape of the space that was created, however, defined the maximum limits of encroachment into networks whose main function was movement. No benches or tables were to obstruct it and overhead projections (sporti) had to exceed a certain distance from the ground (Figure 1.5b). This meant that a public street was imagined as a tunnel that pierced its way through

---

92 For example, in the 1355 statutes of the Podestà, a rubric refers to “…chi occuperà via, strada, o piazza publica…” (he who would occupy street, road, or public piazza), while the text of the law refers to “…alcuna via o piazza del commune di Firenze…” (any street or piazza of the commune of Florence), establishing an equivalence between public spaces and what belonged to the commune. See "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxxxi.

93 Spilner, Uf Civitas Ampliatur, 63. The relevant statute is ASF Provisionsi, Capitoli, 35, f. 123r-v, 28 Jan. 1295. Quoted from Spilner, the Latin text reads: “et omnes alias plateas et vias publicas… civitatis Florentie… pleno jure… pertinente ad communem et populum Florentie” (and all other piazzas and public streets of the city of Florence… full jurisdiction… belong to the commune and Popolo of Florence). The language is circular since it does not define what exactly public piazzes were, although the “Six in Charge of Rights” were given full powers to create new public spaces as well as the right to expropriate from private hands, properties that were then to become public ways, thus linking public space explicitly to communal ownership. Spilner, Uf Civitas Ampliatur, 63.
architectural barriers. It was considered in three dimensions, with a minimum height, width, as well as depth.\textsuperscript{94}

With respect to appropriation, public officials were then obliged to inspect the contours of this public network of spaces. They were to take account of public property in the form of streets, piazzas, estates, tributes, and leases belonging to the city that had in some form been appropriated, encroached upon, hidden, vacated, or forgotten and reaffirm them as public domain.\textsuperscript{95} Absent owners who did not show up to claim their title lost their land to the public.\textsuperscript{96} Banditori were sent out to announce the requirement that anyone who knew of lands or roads belonging to the commune was to notify the office of the “\textit{torre cosi publicamente}.\textsuperscript{97}

Surveyors were then required to make sure that in the transfer, sale, and construction of new buildings on private landholdings that no encroachment into public space took place. In the event that certain public streets or properties were being hidden, inhabitants were obliged to come forward and declare them.\textsuperscript{98} It was the responsibility of the Capitano to send out a team of experts to initiate actions against

\textsuperscript{94} "Statuti del Podestà (1355)." III, clxxxi. “Che le vie e piaze della città et contado di Firenze et Mercatali et Trebi del contado sieno del comune di Firenze et della pena chi li ingombrerà” (That the streets and piazzas of the city and contado of Florence and Mercatale and Trebi of the contado belong to the commune of Florence and concerning the penalty to those who encumber them). The law goes on to state that no obstacles, such as benches or tables, could be placed in such public streets. Other rubrics referring to public streets concern keeping them free of hindrances: “\textit{Della pena di colui nullo treccone di legname o che che ingombrerà piaze o vie o altri luoghi publichi}” (on the penalty that no scrap wood seller can encumber piazzas, streets, or any other public places); “\textit{Della pena di chi terrà testi o orti sopra la via publica}” (on the penalty of he who would have “testi(?) or kitchen gardens on the public thoroughfare), "Statuti del Podestà (1355)." III, clxxxii, clxxxiii. Sporti on narrow streets were banned from 1299, and also on new roads, though a complete ban was put in only in 1532 and 1540, which also prohibited resoration of existing ones. See Valeria Orgera and Loris Macci, \textit{De adificibus communibus: fonti e problemi dell’edilizia minore a Firenze}, (Florence: Edifir, 1995).

\textsuperscript{95} "Statuti del Capitano (1355)." I, cxxii.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid. This provision deals with the election and duties of the Tower Officials. Such siezures of property may have had to do with determining what lands were left intestate after the demographic destruction of the plague in 1348.

\textsuperscript{97} "Statuti del Podestà (1355)." The verb \textit{publicare or piuvichare} in the statutes refers to making public some kind of knowledge. In a subsequent rubric of the statues, the magistracies of the \textit{torre, grascia, beni de’ rubella, gabelle, strade e piazza} are all consolidated into one office. See "Statuti del Podestà (1355)." I, cxxiv.

\textsuperscript{98} "Statuti del Podestà (1355)." II, xxv.
private interests that may have expanded into public thoroughfares. The result was that the ideal line of the straight street demanded by the statutes was actually one that was forced to oscillate, bend, and conform to negotiated settlements because this statutory ideal was only an imagined topography that confronted a warren of stubborn local conglomerations. According to Howard Saalman, the irregular topography of medieval streets “testifies to the varying status and power of the individuals involved.” In other words, one could trace the concrete outcomes of political negotiations over space at the micro-level of property lines. This site of exchange between artisans, merchants, and their customers, therefore, demanded a transitional zone to facilitate economic relations. The law that allowed for tables and work benches on the via Calimala to project one braccio into the street recognized that such transitional zones were necessary to regulate the exchange between spaces of different legal, economic and social character.

In addition, the commune claimed the legal right to expropriate any property of private persons or corporations that were obstacles that prevented authorities from being able to, “lay out, straighten and widen streets and piazzas… as will be seen to result in the beauty of the city.” This last provision was crucial since it assumed a certain coherence in the overall plan based on some generalized conception of beauty. It was integral to the construction of what was to be the city’s most privileged public square, the current Piazza della Signoria, whose construction took place over the course of the fourteenth century (Figures 1.5c-1.5f). As in many cases, organizing the central, communal, public piazza in the late medieval city-state was an emptying out

---

99 Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 70.
100 This ideal is more evinced in ex novo constructions and brilliantly elaborated in Friedman, Florentine New Towns, 5-6.
102 Caggese, Podestà (1325), IV, lxviii (p. 321); Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 73. The same law also required that a six braccia border around the market squares be kept clear.
103 Spilner, Ut Civitas Amplietur, 63-64.
of space through the development of legal tools of public expropriation.104 In effect, the commune of Florence co-opted the networks necessary for the exchange of business, information and goods, and granted itself the right to expand those networks as it saw fit. As this became more entrenched, the Tower officials’ duties were restricted and redefined throughout the fourteenth century, but they still maintained vigilance over public property. That this was not a simple duty is reflected in complaints on more than one occasion about the difficulty in determining deceit and fraud by private parties.105

This highlights the fact that a central element of urban planning involved, paradoxically, not only the creation but also the destruction of architectural property. The Piazza della Signoria, which was drawn out over most of the fourteenth century and schematized by Trachtenberg (see Figures 1.5c-1.5f), is a case in point. This square was the result of a combination of destructive modes of urban planning. The destruction included the dismantling of properties belonging to public enemies, such as the Platea Ubertorum of the Uberti family (Figure 1.5c); the forced selling of private properties in the dense neighborhood around the palace (Figure 5d); the displacement of a church, San Romolo (fig 1.5e); the realignment of facades along the north side; and the questionable (Figure 1.5f) acts carried out during what Trachtenberg calls a three day weekend of “urbanistic terror” by a regime much more oligarchic than the one that began construction of the piazza.106 All this contributed to the creation of a piazza that was “to be more decorous and level than any other piazza or street of the said city, (Figure 1.5g) for the honor of the commune and the beauty of

104 Spilner sees these as an important accomplishment of the communes that was based probably on interpretations of Roman law. Ibid., 49. 
105 Ibid., 77.
106 Trachtenberg, Dominion of the Eye, 139. The government razed the final western area of the piazza without permission, and tried to retroactively receive legislative rights after the fact but were temporarily rebuffed by a recalcitrant council. See Rubinstein, Palazzo vecchio, 85; Spilner, Uir Civitas Ampliatur, 428.
the palace."[^107] The function of public space, therefore, was to act as a frame that defined a homogeneous image of the regime through the spatial coordination of the visual experience.[^108]

Armed with such spatial authority, the commune had to establish the precise borders that separated public from private spaces. The practical application of actually demarcating property lines fell to the city’s surveyors (mensuratores), who were charged with establishing limits, borders, and thresholds between communal and private territories in the city. Their importance is attested in the 1325 statutes, where their duties were laid out. They had to concern themselves with “questions… regarding boundaries, determining and also distinguishing and straightening and squaring [them] and placing boundary markers…“[^109] Such boundary markers were most probably similar in kind, organization, and function as those whose location in Bologna has been reconstructed by Jacques Heers for the Piazza Maggiore (Figure 1.6). Drawing from the commune’s “Book of borders” (Liber terminorum), Heers reconstructs this dense network of precisely measured spaces.[^110] In the case of Bologna, all measurements between markers, facades, and streets were carefully recorded in government registers so that the piazza was formalized into a written set of numerical spatial relationships. However, once such complicated precision was established, the instantaneous transition from one space to another, the precise threshold that was laid out, was immediately negated, dissolving the possibility of an

[^107]: ASF Prov. 214, f. 30v, 9 August, 1330, quoted in Davidsohn, Forschungen, IV, 502. See also Spilner, Ut Civitas Amplietur, 406.
[^108]: It is noteworthy that this law was promulgated to justify paving the Piazza della Signoria in stone and brick, emphasizing that the experience of the Palace was calibrated to ease of movement through space. On the ragged character of the square in the early 14th century and the difficulty in moving through it see Spilner, Ut Civitas Amplietur, 405.
absolute limit between the expanding realm of the public and the exclusive, inner space of the private. Instead of a fixed line, domestic and communal space in Florence confronted each other in negotiated mixed zones of varying degrees of public and private that were established through specific ritual practices. In legislation, the contours of both spatial and temporal dimensions of the late medieval city were always thick, measurable, interlocked, and had their own definable physical characteristics.

For example, although streets were to remain free of hindrances, a continuous margin of public space (Figure 1.7), close to a meter in width, ran along the edges of the via Calimala in front of workshops. This margin was reserved for limited forms of private use, allowing artisans and merchants to use it for the temporary placement of stalls to display there wares as well as benches to work on. Other legislation pertained to the way in which façades were understood as performing two complementary functions. In opposition to the way public space could be temporarily “lent out” for private use, the facades of walls that enclosed private spaces were reclaimed by statutory law as public. They were conceived as integral elements of the design of the piazza itself. They were framing devices that shaped public space (Figures 1.7a). This is illustrated by the way property owners were required to make their walls conform to the tenets of public beauty at their own private expense in at least two ways. On any un-built private property that bordered a public street (Figure 1.7b), the proprietor was obliged to construct a wall at least four braccia high to continuously define the spatial integrity of the thoroughfare, just as any construction that projected beyond the street line demarcated by the façades of neighbors had to be

---

111 The same law of 1355 that affirmed the claim of 1295/6 that determined the general parameters of public space then designates a 1.5 braccia of space in front of all workshops. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxxxi. This was in contrast to the market squares, where a 6 braccia unhindered corridor was mandated on all sides to keep traffic flowing while the central space was reserved for stalls and displays. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxxxiii.
dismantled and brought into line. Therefore, one’s personal and familial identity was bound up in the public obligation to build a facade that enclosed private space at the same time that it formed and decorated public space. The dimensions of this facade, in turn, determined one’s private obligation to pay for the maintenance of the public street it helped to define. This created a temporary transitional zone where the public and the private commingled, pointing to the double role that the merchant played as both public official and private citizen. It also shows how borders, even legal ones, were consciously blurred to facilitate actual practices. These economic and social movements through space, however, defined the public realm as one of dynamic exchange, rather than as a fixed system of streets. The “public” was defined by experience as private interests met public authorities at a moveable, identifiable, threshold.

Another means by which the borders between communal and domestic spaces were bound inextricably together concerned privileged spaces and thoroughfares such as the Piazza della Signoria, which was then the object of a series of legislative decisions concerning its shape and character. Residents whose properties bordered the square were to maintain a facade that was “beautiful and seemly” (pulchrum et decentem) Spilner goes on to claim that this 1362 provision may be one of the earliest examples of Florentine legislation attempting to impose public aesthetic standards on private buildings. However, the surfaces of the walls in question were not considered private at all. Simultaneously public and private, they were functionally and formally separate from the individual properties behind them. Their surfaces spanned continuously across multiple private homes to act as the interior walls that

112 "Statuti del Podesta (1355)," II, xxv. For building a wall to hide open land, see "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," III, xx (151v); "Statuti del Podesta (1355)," IV, xlii.
113 Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 71.
114 Spilner, Ut Civitas Amplietur, 423.
defined and enclosed the piazza and the streets themselves. In a way these facades belonged to the commune and were therefore, by definition, integral elements of public space. Even though the borders of public and private space were clearly laid out, they were intentionally blurred. They represented the point at which notions of the public and private ran up against one other, bled into each other, and mutually shaped themselves. It was at the borders and margins of public space, therefore, where the legal status of one’s private and public rights and obligations, one’s multiple identity as private individual and public actor were played out.\footnote{For example, private palaces were often used to house foreign dignitaries, often at state expense. In addition, private palaces also seem to have been used as public viewing places of the palio. This bound family palaces, through social ritual, even more intimately to the street they faced. It also dramatized the reciprocal relationship of domestic palace and communal space. See Preyer, "Planning for Visitors," 372-73. Before the entrance of the French king in 1494, houses that were to be used to accommodate higher officials were marked with chalk by French officials and Florentines had to provide room and board at their own expense, until they were later reimbursed by the state. Such laws also show how the public and private temporarily interpenetrated each other. “E a di 5 di novembre 1494, certi mandatari del Re di Francia andavano per Firenze, e segnavano le case che più gli piacevano. Andavano in casa, e per tutte le camere, e segnavano, questa per tale signore, e questa per l’altro barone.” Luca Landucci, \textit{Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516}, ed. Jodoco Del Badia, (Florence: Sansoni, 1883), 5 November, 1494.} These thresholds formed the hinge between the public as both spectacle and performance, embedding such relations into the physical dimensions of the city’s spaces. As such, close attention to such transitional zones tells us much about how public space was never fixed, but constantly negotiated. Walls, barriers, and borders had to be carefully controlled while remaining flexible and resilient. The Florentine Popolo invested its spatial world with the same kinds of tensions that were infused in politics and economics, constantly negotiating and shaping the border between its universal claims and the particularist desires of its members.

As conceptually separate from the wall that enclosed private space, the façade was the medium through which public space was framed and public monuments beautified. Streets and squares were imagined as a consistent surface of facades spanning continuously across multiple private homes. This is demonstrated by
complaints made by the board established by the silk merchants’ guild, the Calimala or Por Santa Maria, which was in charge of maintaining the space around the baptistery. Certain houses around the square were “spoiling the face and beauty of the whole piazza.”\textsuperscript{116} In response the said officials were could carry out the removal of projecting balconies and rebuild the facades around the piazza, remains of which are still visible, so that they were as beautiful and smooth as the adjacent public buildings, and had matching doors and windows.\textsuperscript{117} As the public face of the private family or clan, the palace façade mediated the transitional zone between public space and private property, locking both spaces into a series of interconnected rights and obligations (Figure 1.7d). No longer turned in upon itself, the advent of the façade masked the internal irregularity. It initiated a dialogue between wall and street in which the public and the private compromised with each other in a visual way. Ground floor workshops integrated the economic space of the street, allowing for the uninterrupted flow of movement ad labor. The private spaces of the family were set above the tunnel of public space with regularly spaced windows defining the visual interpenetration of public and private gazes. Long bars on brackets spanning the width of the façade allowed for the decoration of the wall with tapestries during civic celebrations, solidifying the bond between private citizen and public participation. Later, public benches would extend the thickness of the façade to create both a viewing platform and stage for public spectacles (Figure 1.7e).\textsuperscript{118}

Although clearly laid out by such foundational provisions, the borders and margins of public space were constantly inflected, intentionally blurred, and

\textsuperscript{116} Spilner, \textit{Ut Civitas Amplietur}, 425-26. “remanent quaedam domunculae quarundam singularum iuxta plateam predictam adeo inepte quo depturant faciem et pulcritudinem totius plate...”

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} On the architectural significance of these benches see Yvonne Elet, "Seats of Power: The Outdoor Benches of Early Modern Florence," \textit{The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians} 61, no. 4 (2002).
temporarily adjusted by overlapping legislation. Public space was never fixed but constantly negotiated through legislative responses to what were a whole range of social practices. Together, these magistracies, armed with such laws, were mapping out and attempting to maintain an official topography of the city that established the relations between government and citizen, public and private activities, and controlled how they interacted. Such attempts to mediate the boundaries of territories constantly ran up against opposition and the government was required to be constantly on guard.

The desirability of boundary markers and the constant threat of encroachment even between private parties are dramatically and comically illustrated in a novella by Franco Sacchetti (c.1335-1400), a Florentine writer who held several high public offices and was expressly exempt from his family’s exile in 1380.119 In the last decade of his life, he compiled a series of novellas into a work entitled Il Trecentonovelle. Incorporating a vast range of urban and civic themes, these stories construct an ironic and moralized world of vibrant social and political life in the late fourteenth century. In novella CCII, which is discussed below, public space is not simply an instrumental conduit for the movement of goods but a place where public justice potentially resides. This justice is categorically urban in the way it has the power to counter the “natural” or “anti-urban” law of the strong dominating the weak. The story begins with a rich and well-connected man (possente), who attempts to buy the property of a poor man (omiciatto, omicciuolo) whose land was adjacent to his. However, the poor man derives his well-being by how well he maintains his plot, and he would rather – the narrator tells us – sell himself than his land.120 Therefore, the rich man decides to take

---

120 “... perché quello omicciuolo il meglio che potea la governava, e mantenevasi la sua vita, e prima averebbe venduto sé che quella... “ Ibid., CCII. Although for my purposes the literal narrative has many important implications, there is no denying an underlying critique of class relations characteristically played out in lively confrontation. Not only does the poor man need his land but he also derives his identity from it, something he would lose by selling it. Therefore, he might as well sell himself. In the real world of Florentine politics, wealthy clans succeeded in increasingly marginalizing
the land by other means. Since the two properties were only separated by a small
ditch (*piccioletta fossa*), he was able to swallow up one or more *braccia* of his
neighbor’s land by re-plowing the ditch each season in such a way that he gained an
extra furrow or two. Without any independent or fixed boundary markers, he was able
to shift the line that separated them, he thought, with impunity.

The poor man realizes the game, of course, but dares not say a thing, except to
some friends, in secret. He could not directly confront verbally someone so
powerful.\(^{121}\) This went on for several years until the moving boundary of the ditch
reached a cherry tree. It would have been too obvious, at this point, simply to plough
beyond this tree since everyone knew that the cherry tree stood on the poor man’s
land. It is at this point that the poor man explodes into a rage, not least over the
impossibility, due to his social class, of saying anything about it. So he decides to
take drastic action.\(^{122}\)

It is significant that he takes inspiration from this obstinate tree. A fixed
marker that confronted the fraudulent fluidity of the spatial expansion of the affluent
classes and which was recognizable to all, this tree gives him the ability to confront
his adversary. Its presence represented the ideal of a well-measured city, whose
markers would fix and resist the attempts of the powerful to appropriate the land of
weak. In order to act, the poor man has to venture into public space to make his case
rather than plot any type of unjust revenge. In pleading his case to the lord of Faenza,
he explicitly refers to the importance of the tree; “…blessed be he who planted it! For

---

121 *Il buon uomo, benchè se n’accorgesse, non ardiva quasi dirne alcuna cosa*” Sacchetti, *Il
trecentonovelle*, CCII, 18-19.
122 “…veggendosi questo buono uomo così rubare, e scoppiando d’ira e di sdegno, e appena non potere
non che dolersi, ma dirne alcuna cosa; come disperato, si muove un di…” Ibid., CCII. The poor man’s
plans are significant in terms of exploiting the urban environment in order to find a public and audible
voice. These themes will be dealt with more fully in “From Morning to Evening” in chapter 3.
if it had not been there, he would have had all the land in a short time.”¹²³ Having heard this story, and verified its truth, the lord of Faenza sends his surveyors (misuratori) out to measure and redistribute the land in such a way that the poor man also received as much of the rich man’s land as had been taken away from him over the course of time.

A law reflecting this ethic is found in the statutes of the Podestà.¹²⁴ It regulated the boundaries that bound and separated neighbors. Neither any new building nor the removal of columns, walls, or structures could take place without the consent of neighbors and the intervention of the city’s surveyors. The fear was, of course, that new building would not only threaten the land of neighbors but also inch its way into the public street, since, even if the neighbors agreed to the changes, no building work could take place on the sides of the property bordering the street or the piazza; i.e. public space. In addition, the façade lines had to be flush with each other, so that no building could extend beyond one’s neighbors into the street or piazza. Sacchetti’s narrative picks up on the anxiety that the statutes expressed about knowing precisely where the bounds of communal property were, knowing full well how citizens had a propensity to encroach gradually upon it when no one was standing guard.

Punishment required the destruction of the offending structure and the space’s restitution to its original state, which of course, had to be determined and noted by statutory law on a regular basis. These boundary markers, so meticulously and laboriously marked out, were supposed to act as the stubborn cherry tree of the commune. Not only that, but the law sought to minimize the very disputes between neighbors dramatized in the story by making the city the arbiter of their spatial relations. In a city where both rich and poor lived amongst each other, such laws also

¹²³ “…. che Benedetto sia chi ‘l piantò! Chè se non vi fosse stato, e’ s’avea in poco tempo tutta la terra.” Ibid.
¹²⁴ “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” II, 25.
served as guarantors of legal recourse to those without means, in theory at least. It also allows us to attribute the blame to a wider field, reorienting Sacchetti’s critique not just against the rich and powerful man trampling the property rights of the poor, but also the responsibility of civic authorities – i.e., the lord of Faenza – of the seigniorial duties in enforcing what was a major responsibility in republican Florence: to regularly police the city’s internal divisions.

Justice, therefore, came in the form of carefully measuring the boundaries of certain territories and maintaining them by public jurisdiction over private usurpation. It was the lack of permanent markers that allowed the interests of the powerful to trample over the weak. The story also points to the fact that one needs the ability to be heard, to have an officially recognized voice, in order for the system of settling disputes over boundaries to function properly.\textsuperscript{125} Sacchetti’s story stands as an allegory of how marking out boundaries was heavily imbued with the conflicts between competing groups who needed the strong arm of the law and justice, located in the figure of the prince, to tame the excesses of greed and power.

\textit{1.3 Regulation: Challenging Boundaries}

Constant vigilance was necessary to police borders and maintain boundaries, since habitual spatial practices constantly challenged, blurred, and often exceeded those boundaries. Private family rituals often spilled out into communal space, appropriating its architectural forms and representational devices. This had been a long-held custom of elite families, whose celebrations would transform streets and spaces in private social worlds.\textsuperscript{126} In a similar but opposite motion, the “private”

\textsuperscript{125} For a discussion of the way that the poor man finds a voice, see chapter 3 below.
\textsuperscript{126} Najemy, "Florentine Politics and Urban Spaces," 22-23.
interiors of elite family palaces were frequently penetrated by visitors.\textsuperscript{127} If the public and private met at the threshold, the façade in legal terms, then in ritual practice, that threshold was the site of a constant, elastic, and even deeper interpenetration of the two kinds of urban space. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the statutes have much to say about the conduct of certain family and neighborhood gatherings. Such exchanges maintained “the harmonious atmosphere of local life” but they were also an “ideal forum for the exchange of gossip.”\textsuperscript{128} A prudent man could not afford, on account of both these aspects – harmony and gossip, to remain at a distance from them since harmony and gossip were much sought after. Neighborhood sociability had to be vigilantly negotiated and that required taking account of the spaces in which they occurred. One observed carefully, but that meant one had to be mindful of the constant observation of others in the crowded spaces of the city. The government, on the other hand, attempted to control such events by inserting its own regime of surveillance into this constant exchange of looks, glances, and rumors.

For example, statutory law limited the number of guests that could attend a wedding, a funeral, or a baptism. They determined when they could take place (\textit{dopo nona}), how many musicians could be hired, the maximum expense for clothing, decorations, and the number and kind of dishes served. For weddings, fifty men for each family (\textit{per ciascuna parte}) could attend, each accompanied by one companion, or four, if the man was a knight, a doctor, or a judge.\textsuperscript{129} Ten women for the bride and fourteen for the groom were allowed at the wedding, excluding mothers, sisters or other females resident in the household of the groom. Women were expected at

\textsuperscript{127} For family ceremony see Kent and Kent, \textit{Neighbours and Neighbourhood}. For the ritual of visits into palaces see Preyer, "Planning for Visitors," 366ff. For a response to Goldthwaite’s reading of the these palace rooms as private spaces, see F.W. Kent, "Palaces, Politics, and Society in Fifteenth-Century Florence," \textit{I Tatti Studies} 2 (1987).
\textsuperscript{128} Kent and Kent, \textit{Neighbours and Neighbourhood}, 53.
\textsuperscript{129} Marriage regulations are taken from "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," IV, lxvii.
weddings, but in order to get there special exemptions had to be made to allow them to accompany the bride.130 The number of musicians and entertainers (trombadori, naccharai, and giocolari), hired service staff (servitori) was strictly limited. Likewise, the behavior of guests was circumscribed by prohibitions on singing (carolare) and dancing (danzare, ballare) outside the house where the wedding was taking place, day or night, with or without illumination.131 The space outside one’s house was negotiable, understood at certain times as kind of temporary private piazza for the exercise of family feste since the façade that flanked it determined the dimensions of that part of the public street whose maintenance was the responsibility of that family.132 In other words, the obligation to maintain public streets seems to have created a sense of entitlement to the use of those spaces for private events. The maintenance of some streets, on the other hand, those that played a central part in the performance of civic rituals, were too important to be left to the residents that lived along them. The route of the annual palio from the Mugnone through the Porta San Paolo and into the center of the city had to be kept “uncorrupted, firmly grounded, and undamaged.”133 All windows, benches, and walls extending more than half a braccio into this route had to be removed or altered, although even in this situation the border between the street and house was still blurred by this thin margin of transitional space.

Laws also reflect the way the private weddings of Florentine elite families were linked to public display. Right from the giuramento agreed upon in a “church or other public space,” the rituals of the marriage were grounded in public space.134 The

130 See “Percorrere la città” in chapter two.
131 The rubric goes on to prescribe what could be eaten at the wedding, limiting the number of ingredients and defining what meats could be served. It ends with the maximum salary for the entertainers. See "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," IV, xlvii.
132 Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 71.
133 It is true, non incorrotta, soda e non danneggiata. “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” III, xxiii.
uneasy interaction between private ritual and public space is demonstrated by the fact that tips or bribes were a necessary expense for the groom’s family to facilitate the procession’s movement through the city’s public streets.\textsuperscript{135}

The fact that fines were doubled for crimes committed during such occasions also testifies to a certain anxiety over the public expression of private rituals.\textsuperscript{136} In the scope of the statutes, public streets were for the movement of bodies, goods, and information. Public piazzes, on the other hand, were mainly reserved for economic exchange or official civic displays, masses, political exchanges, stories, and gossip. They were both medium and stage.

Wedding processions must have constituted a breach or hindrance in the ideal flow of things and ideas since they co-opted public spaces to reconfigure private relations. This ritual movement functioned as a social mechanism that allowed the participating families to ritually express their mutual distrust and hostility, overcome it, and formally effect reconciliation through the marriage itself. Such conventions would have been anathema to a government obsessed with social order because social these rituals always had the potential of spilling over into real violence. However, such a ritual may have been efficacious in healing ruptures caused by such feuds, whose peace was finally brokered by a marriage.\textsuperscript{137} Marriages in the Decameron are often ways in which the social order is brought from chaos and confusion into harmony and order. It is the institution around which proper or preferred social relations, including amorous affairs, are (re-)constructed even while some troubling

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.: 47. Witthoft, quoting Boulting, acknowledges that for the poor, very little ceremony attended the marriage. See William Boulting, Woman in Italy, (London: Methuen, 1910), 70-71.
\textsuperscript{136} “Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, lxi. This also included funerals.
\textsuperscript{137} And example is the two-centuries long feud ended between the Bardi and the Buondelmonti in the Quattrocento by the marriage of Leonora Bardi and Ippolito Buondelmonti. Giuseppe Fatini, Novelle del Quattrocento, (Turin: UTET, 1929), 148-63. Quoted in Witthoft, "Marriage Rituals," 57, n. 48.
antagonisms may persist.\textsuperscript{138} The breach of the marriage contract in the story of the Buondelmonti murder of 1215, so important for understanding Florentine class relations, illustrates clearly how the wedding functioned as a fundamental means of conflict resolution within the psyche of a certain Florentine public.\textsuperscript{139}

The banquets that followed the processions were also ways in which the private family occupied public space, carving out a space in which to publically proclaim one’s loyalties and power by linking such expressions visually to the same representational apparatus used by the commune for civic celebrations. In the Adimari wedding portrait one can see the way the temporary canopy stretches out from the family’s loggia into the space around the city’s baptistery, perhaps the most cherished civic space of the city (Figure 1.8). It was in this piazza that the city celebrated the feast of San Giovanni, the city’s patron saint, with just such a blue canopy covering the square. A cassone panel in the Bargello depicts such a canopy, imagined as a representation of the heavens, decorated with the city’s arms (Figure 1.8a).\textsuperscript{140}

Therefore, weddings began to resemble the public events in character and place.

\textsuperscript{138} Pampinea tells a story (II, 3) in which marriage restores a Florentine’s family honor and fortune and also satisfies merchant aspirations to noble status. Emilia recounts (II, 6) how marriage restores a family’s honor, social station, and legal freedom when the son of Madonna Beriota is thrown in jail for sleeping with his master’s daughter. When his true identity is revealed, he is able to marry her and restore her honor along with her family’s. Marriage frames Panfilo’s story (II, 7), told immediately after Emilia’s, in which the Sultan’s daughter suffers a succession of male lovers, after which her virginity is restored and she is able to marry the king of Algarve’s son. A proper productive marriage of desire replaces an impotent one in Dioneo’s story (II, 10). Even extra-marital liaisons that do not hinder the functioning of an established marriage solve the problem of desire in the Decameron (III, 6). Emilia recounts a wonderful example (III, 7) of how a rejected lover acts as a kind of marriage broker, securing the release of a woman’s husband from incarceration, reconciling him with his brothers and reuniting him with his wife in a proper marriage, within which he can again function as her lover. As a foil, Filostrato tells a story (IV, 30) of how murderous violence that occurs within marriage, - as opposed to being pacified by it – leads to desitution and then death. The final story (X, 10), told by Dioneo, exposes the extremes of submission one may have to demonstrate in order to maintain the fiction of marriage as an institution capable of resolving social antagonisms.

\textsuperscript{139} See “Percorrere la città” in chapter two.

\textsuperscript{140} For the feast of San Giovanni, the city erected a canopy “or ‘heaven’, the cloth umbrella covering the whole Piazza di San Giovanni...” Trexler, Public Life, 247. In contrast, meals inside private homes were not wholly private. Two of Boccaccio’s characters, Ciacco and Biondello, were both practitioners of conversation and were able to invite themselves easily to the dining tables of wealthy Florentines. See Boccaccio, Decameron, IX, 8.

75
Whether this was actually a recollection of an Adimari wedding or not – their properties bordered the piazza of the Baptistery – the most privileged of public monuments and spaces forms the backdrop to a lavish private gathering. The line between public and private ritual was much blurred and this fact was much flaunted in the fifteenth century as private families co-opted public spaces. Such private rituals appear to have become more and more elaborate, despite prohibitions, throughout the fifteenth century. By 1466, the Rucellai could spend over 6000 lire on a wedding and advertise the fact, which included a canopy and 20 different dishes, even though the 1415 statutes still limited the number of guests and courses.\footnote{Quoted in Witthoft, "Marriage Rituals," 50, 58, n. 79.} By then such legislation may have seemed part of a long-lost civic moralism.

Marriages and funerals were often listed together in legislation concerning restrictions and controls based on the fear of violence.\footnote{For example, see "Statuti del Capitano (1355)."} If marriage rituals challenged the boundaries between private and public spaces, the appropriation of the architecture of mediation, or thresholds, was also a means used to undermine and complicate just where such boundaries could be found at any given moment. Dino Compagni records how just such a funeral gathering brought together the city’s rival clans of the Donati and the Cerchi in 1296, and how the tiniest misplaced gesture could ignite the potential for violence in a city tense with rivalries.\footnote{Dino Compagni, Cronica delle cose occorrenti ne’ tempi suoi, 1. ed., (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1993), 1, 20.} Facing each other across the piazza of the Frescobaldi, Knights and doctors of both families were sitting on benches, while others sat on straw mats on the ground. Placing them in the piazza for such an occasion injected a certain temporary hierarchy within public space. It was as if these benches brought with them part of the domestic space of honor out into the public sphere. They changed the rules by which bodies could move so that standing
up was seen as a provocative gesture; an act in which member of the audience incorrectly called attention to himself and became part of the spectacle instead. Wherever benches were placed, they marked a transitional zone. Even though benches were a common feature at such gatherings, when they exceeded a certain distance from walls, the statutes called for their removal.

Yvonne Elet has shown how these benches were an integral part of urban social space but that they first emerged in the Piazza della Signoria; i.e., in public space (Figure 1.9).\textsuperscript{144} They represented a spatial embodiment of the political ideology found in the council hall and tribune, where benches organized how various government bodies faced each other.\textsuperscript{145} In the Piazza, arranged around three sides, they faced the \textit{ringhiera}, the raised platform that mediated between the closed space of the public government and the open space of the republic. These benches foregrounded the public and private character of \textit{piazzes} as open air social space and as living rooms for citizens. They were spaces of both information and identity formation.\textsuperscript{146} However, this communal configuration would be appropriated by private palaces in order to designate private homes as sites of civic power.\textsuperscript{147} They pulled public discourse away from the political center to where families could shape urban experience.\textsuperscript{148} Permanent benches outside palaces acted as thresholds regulating the privatization of public authority. Elet evokes the image of the way men would wait for consultation with pre-eminent citizens on the benches outside their homes making them a place for both seeing and being seen.\textsuperscript{149} They were both stages and places from

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Elet, "Seats of Power," 445.
\item Ibid.: 444.
\item Ibid.: 445.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.: 459.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
which to watch the spectacle of urban life (Figure 1.7d). Florentines watched prophets, storytellers, preachers, hustlers, and other characters who mounted the benches to take hold of the oratory power this urban furniture contained within it. Similarly, moveable benches were placed in squares for specific audiences and could likewise be removed as a way of denying a potential speaker an audience. Their presence was the architectural mediator between speaker and audience. They created the conditions for public viewing and private exchange.\textsuperscript{150} From their double origins in the council hall and family ritual, benches brought with them the function of both private conversations and public pronouncements, the consultative and enunciative aspects of the republican government mixed with the daily face-to-face exchanges of individuals.

1.4 Moving Boundaries

Navigating between the interlaced dimensions of public spaces required a sustained act of concentration and vigilance in order not to be caught off-guard or confused. The statutes are a testament to the vigilance required to maintain control over public spaces, to avoid the clash of two orders of space crashing into one another. The secret was the careful manipulation of borders, regulating the interaction between them as bodies negotiated their multiple identities through them. The spaces of the city were transformed from one type of space to another by the constant cycle of civic and temporal rhythms. Spaces, objects and buildings accumulated and imparted the rhetorical and symbolic, visible and audible social exchanges and representations that they had to bear as the places of political, social, and religious life. If one was

\textsuperscript{150} Landucci was a particularly attentive bench watcher. Benches were present for preaching in Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella, and the Duomo. They were installed and removed repeatedly from the Mercato nuovo, the site of strange incidents. See Landucci, \textit{Diario fiorentino.}, 12 Jan. 1465; 6 Oct., 1478; 5 Apr., 1492; 25 Feb., 1495; 5 May, 1497; 15 Nov., 1509; 13 Jun. 1511.
distracted or inattentive, one’s very sense of self and power to act could be at stake. In a city where streets and squares were intended to facilitate and glorify movement, in the form of goods and processions, for example, what Florentines dreaded was the nightmare of immobilization, where the overlapping topographies of the city collapsed into each other, banishing and denying a subject’s ability to articulate itself. It showed how the rhetoric of space provided a range of options for Florentines to inhabit and become, as it were, themselves. Identity was not within the individual, but external, public, and open to manipulation.

As a metaphorical example, consider novella eighty of Sacchetti’s *Il Trecentonovelle*. The story probes the relations between two modes of narrative, one visual and one oral. It stages the ambivalence and instability of space as a site for the production of certain kinds of messages. The story begins by describing how, in the old days (*anticamente*), the city’s council convened in the now destroyed church of San Piero Scheraggio and it was there that the *ringhiera* was placed (Figure 10). This pulpit was part of the spoils taken from Fiesole in 1010 when it was conquered by Florentines, according to Villani. It was placed, along with the captured *carroccio* (war cart) in the church of San Piero Scheraggio. It was from this rostrum that many *consulte* were held, in which notable citizens advised the government on policy. It was the corollary to the bench, a miniature speaking architecture. It imparted the power to speak. In the novella, it was from this *ringhiera* that a certain Boninsegna Angiolini was about to address the council gathered there with a speech he had prepared to deliver.

---

151 Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*.
152 San Piero was destroyed in the construction of the Uffizi and the *ringhiera* was moved to the church of San Leonardo in Arcetri.
According to Stephen Milner, the *ringhiera* was the nexus around which a dialectic of political, social, and urban rituals and practices of an increasingly sophisticated republican ideology revolved. It legitimated speakers and was linked to the medieval concept of the *ars arringandi*.\(^{154}\) Between what he characterizes as Trachtenberg’s idea of the *ringhiera* as the site of the performative power of the regime and Rubinstein’s understanding of it as the site of the ideology of free consensus, Milner seeks to position it as a space of anxiety about the permanence of the prevailing political order.\(^{155}\) Never wholly the site of cynical political manipulations or of benevolent political paternalism, it was an ambivalent site of political negotiation. In addition, the practice of having of “wise and notable” (“*savio e notabile*”) advice the government was an important part of Florentine political practice. It formed a crucial element of the regular practice of republican policymaking and was increasingly linked to the ancient practice of rhetoric, as speakers would have refined their modes of address to persuade councils of their personal opinions. These *Consulte e Pratiche*, records of such addresses to the government, have been brilliantly exploited by Gene Brucker, who saw them as witness to the change in the balance of power as well as coherent expression of how Florentines perceived reality.\(^{156}\) Certainly, they are a testament to the way in which Florentines also attempted to shape that reality, politically, according to their needs and desires. These informal advisors represented the inner circle of elite men of the reggimento who were loyal to the public interest of the commune.\(^{157}\) By the time Sacchetti came to write the *Trecentonovelle*, he had already served as prior and had therefore intimate knowledge of such proceedings. Brucker sees, moreover, a relatively stable political


\(^{155}\) Ibid.


\(^{157}\) Ibid., 284.
order in which the post-Cionpi oligarchy continued to consolidate its power, allowing
for a wider scope of dissent on the part of speakers.

It was just around this time that the style of political discourse was becoming
more self-consciously rhetorical. Elite speakers would harangue councilors with
lengthy orations on a variety of subjects. However, still in the early fifteenth century,
few speakers were praised for actually possessing the rhetorical skill needed to sustain
a lengthy argument and some found the practice downright “boring and irrelevant.”
Sacchetti was likely attuned to the increasing importance of these policy discussions
within the regime at the end of the fourteenth century, although it is clear from
Brucker’s analysis that the level of rhetorical aptitude remained limited, which makes
perfect sense considering what was about to happen to Boninsegna in Sacchetti’s
story.

So Boninsegna began to speak, at first well and clearly (bene e pulitamente) as
he usually did but when he reached his concluding remarks, he suddenly fell silent; as
if he were somehow troubled or afraid (come un uomo aombrato). He just stood there
on the ringhiera and said nothing. The audience marveled at the sight, especially the
lord priors, and so they sent a messenger to let Boninsegna know that they were still in
fact listening to his words. Pulling on his gusset (gherone) they were able to rouse
him partially from his stupor. He then tells the audience that he is beside himself
(sono quasi uscito di me medesimo) and can’t seem to remember the rest of what he
had meant to say. In the midst of speaking he had accidentally let his gaze fall upon

---

158 Ibid., 285-86.
159 In the Priori de Palazzo, transcribed in "I Priori di Firenze (1282-1343)," an electronic text edited
by Sergio Ravegli, available at the website of the history department of the Universita' degli Studi di
Siena, http://www.storia.unisi.it/, Boninsegna is listed as prior from 15 Feb to 14 Apr 1309 as
"Boninsegna Angiolini de Machiavellis (Ultriri)"; and the Online Tratte compiled by Brown
University at the website address http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/tratte/ show him as prior 12 times
between 1283 and 1326. Although Sacchetti would not have had much information about the
consultations that far back in time, it was a crucial moment in which the popular government was
struggling against upper class forces. In addition, using the city’s past in order to comment on
contemporary issues is a common theme in both the Decameron and the Trecentonovelle.
certain figures painted on the wall of the church and these goccioloni, the largest he had ever seen, were the cause of his distraction, memory loss, and helpless silence (Figure 1.10b). He had never seen such ridiculous clothing. They had so completely pervaded his mind that unless they left (his mind and/or the church presumably), he could not continue his speech. Without ceremony, therefore, he simply descended from the ringhiera without another word.

The church of San Piero Scheraggio was located just to the south, toward the river, of where the commune’s new permanent public palace would be built (Figure 1.10a, 1.10c). This was the area that, at the time the story appears to be set, was about to undergo the most drastic urban intervention the city had seen. It was consecrated in 1068 and was the regular site of the civic assembly before the construction of the new palace of the Priors. The left aisle was demolished in 1410 to make way for the widening of the via della Ninna. It contained trophies of the war with Fiesole in the 11th century, such as the carroccio that was placed on the façade and the marble pulpit that was located inside. The collision of both sacred and civic spaces, meanings, and rituals was always possible, as we shall see.

In the aftermath of Boninsegna’s rhetorical collapse he unwittingly inspired a discussion of the images that he found so disconcerting. He prompted the priors (signori) to see these images anew, from a different perspective perhaps. He initiated a lively discussion about their identities as prophets or patriarchs. It is, of course, a farcical discussion, based on Boninsegna’s and the narrator’s declaration that figures dressed in such a way, in striped and checkered clothing, could derail many an unwitting speaker’s oratorical concentration. It is here that the narrator interjects to

---

160 According to Trachtenberg, the new palace was partially occupied by 1302. See Trachtenberg, "What Brunelleschi Saw," 15.
161 On this church see Piero Sanpaolesi, "San Piero Scheraggio," Rivista d’arte XVI (1934); Walter Paatz and Elisabeth Valentin Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz, ein kunstgeschichtliches Handbuch, (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1952), vol. IV, 662-78.
caution the would-be speaker that even the smallest distraction from without can enter into one’s mind and ruin one’s concentration, even that of the most practiced speakers (“è incontrato già a perfetti dicitori’”). Such caution resonates perfectly with the care with which both Paolo da Certaldo and Giovanni Morelli counseled their readers about acting and speaking in certain places.\textsuperscript{162}

Boninsegna began as a speaker and ended as a viewer. He was unable to remain within the rhetorical and symbolic realm defined by the \textit{ringhiera}, the physical place of political speech. His powers of speech were brought to an ignominous end by the space inhabited by a pictorial narrative, a religious, if ridiculous, one. However, arising out of his inability to talk politics, he is suddenly able to discourse on these painted images, these \textit{goccioloni}. He displays his visual critical prowess by talking about how the painter, who, based on the design of the tights, had to have been Calandrino, was killed with a knife. His remarks then inspired a spirited discussion.\textsuperscript{163} He had, quite simply, entered into another parallel rhetorical world.

The term \textit{goccioloni} referred to several things in the fourteenth century. It designated persons who constantly dripped from the nose and referred to any large drops of a variety of bodily fluids – including tears and sweat – as well as large scale painted figures executed in rough workmanship onto walls.\textsuperscript{164} Sacchetti associates the unsightly blotches, drips, and stains that emanated from unruly bodies with the equally unsightly painted blotches that were the result of the shoddy work of the one of the

\textsuperscript{162} On the advice of these two merchants see Chapter 2 below.
\textsuperscript{163} Might such a spirited but raucous discussion have also referred to what Brucker has characterized as a transition from a more corporate to a more individual and elitist political debate of the increasingly closed regime, which was relying more and more on individual performances? Sacchetti was certainly an astute political and social observer and he may have been playing, ambivalently, between a more collective 14\textsuperscript{th} century style of naïve, inexperienced but earnest politicos of corporate representatives and the emerging circle of individual personalities and opinions. See Brucker, \textit{Civic World}, 284-89.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Grande dizionario della lingua italiana}, ed. Salvatore Battaglia and Giorgio Bärberi Squarotti, (Turin: UTET, 1961), vol. X, 950. Note that this definition rests precisely on Sacchetti’s use of it in this novella so that the circulation of significations appears to emerge from his own original literary gesture.
fourteenth century’s most derided fictional artistic personalities.\textsuperscript{165} Crude and sloppy painting is therefore linked to poor speaking. Boninsegna’s critique of the visual rhetoric of the scenes depicted on the wall alludes to earnest but incompetent storytelling, demonstrating – ironically, in light of his own sudden ineptitude – just how much such crude image-making could actually hinder and confuse, rather than enhance and glorify, other forms of public discourse.\textsuperscript{166}

The story foregrounds two modes of urban public representation. It plays with the distance and irreconcilability between the rhetoric of speech and the rhetoric of the image. The breakdown in communication arises from these two imperfect systems asserting themselves simultaneously within the same ambivalent space. If one is to trust the civic officials who began an animated discussion about the identity of the images (\textit{profeti? Patriarchi?}), then it was a religious pictorial narrative that interrupted the civic political speech of Boninsegna. However, their confusion as viewers still points to the ineffective narrative power of the painted stories, whose task it was to render biblical stories and church doctrine clearly and concisely, provoking understanding and faith within the viewer.\textsuperscript{167} Two modes of communication clashed in

\textsuperscript{165} Calandrin 0 appears in no less than four stories in the \textit{Decameron} (8,3; 8,6; 8,7; 9,3) and is remembered in another (9, 4).
\textsuperscript{166} I am referring here to the way images were used by mendicant preachers as visual aids to the message contained in their sermons, most notably in the visual-verbal dialogue between sermons and pulpits decorated with scenes from the life of Christ. The Pisani pulpits in Siena, Pisa, and Pistoia are the most notable later medieval examples. In addition, Gregory the Great’s (590-604) famous response to western iconoclasm foregrounded the power of images over words by referring their efficacy for the illiterate. For a critique of this simplified interpretation, see Lawrence G. Duggan, “Was Art Really the ‘Book of the Illiterate’?,” \textit{Word & Image} 5, no. 3 (1989).
\textsuperscript{167} For example, Thomas Aquinas designated three functions of the image within the general concept of the materialization of theology. They were to instruct the ignorant, render sacred mysteries visible so they could be better committed to memory, and excite devotion. See Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae: Questions on God}, ed. Brian Leflow and Brian Davies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ?? Even the language of the discussion the priors have is confusing. Laughing and marveling at these ridiculous figures, one speaker makes an analogy to what happened to a “Sanese” in the Piazza del Campo. Someone passed by wearing white and black clothing (most likely similar to the stripes and checks of the goccioloni) and one person asked, “who is that?” The “Sanese responded with, “E’ tel dice,” which might translate as “He’ll tell you himself” or that his clothing would in fact identify him. The “Sanese” goes on to declare that he does not know who \textit{they} are (the painted Goccioloni) but they too, will tell you (“ma e’ tel dicono”). Therefore, their actual clothing and
a space that had to function as both a church and a communal council hall. Notably, Sacchetti dramatizes how rhetorical skill is still not the sole possession or skill of the speaker but resides also in the built environment, which can both facilitate and confound one’s articulation. Political rhetoric, in other words, was also a public asset, a tool derived from a well-designed city.

Such a situation was in no way unusual. Numerous sources allude to the public nature of church space and all kinds of meetings took place in them. That it was common to use churches for secular politics is affirmed by the records of the ecumenical council held at Lyon in 1274, which decreed a prohibition on any public meeting, councils, or parliaments in sacred spaces.\textsuperscript{168} Certainly there was some anxiety on the part of churchmen that secular political activity did in fact clash with the religious character and function of sacred buildings and who therefore found it necessary to maintain their “inner” peace and sanctity by keeping them free of brawls,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{168} The relevant passage is the twenty-fifth canon of the Council of Lyon (1274). See Karl Joseph von Hefele, \textit{Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux}, trans. H. Leclercq, vol. 6, (Paris: Letouzey, 1914), pt. 1, 203-4.. For the German edition see Karl Joseph von Hefele, Joseph Adam Gustav Hergenröther, and Alois Knöpfler, \textit{Conciliengeschichte}, (Freiburg im Breisgau [etc.]: Herder, 1869). The English translation can be found in Karl Joseph von Hefele, \textit{A history of the councils of the church, from the original documents}, ([New York,: AMS Press, 1972). The decree was later incorporated into canon law in the \textit{Liber Sextus} of Boniface VIII; see VI.3.23.2 in Emil Friedberg and Aemilius Ludwig Richter, \textit{Corpus iuris canonici}, Editio lipsiensis secunda / ed., (Leipzig: ex officina Bernhardi Taunzit, 1879), vol. 2, at columns 1062-63. Wolfgang Löser has remarked that the Sienese communal council abandoned the church of San Cristoforo as the site of assembly only year after having paid for restoration of the church. He cites the council of Lyon’s wide-ranging restriction on profane use of churches as the motivation. The last council held in the church was on August 30, 1274, six weeks after the closing of the ecumenical council convened by Gregory X. They later met in a private palace and would eventually order the construction of the Palazzo Pubblico. See Ingeborg Bähr et al., \textit{Die Kirchen von Siena}, ed. Peter Anselm Riedl and Max Seidel, vol. 2, (München: Bruckmann, 1992), 360. This may also form part of a constellation of factors that led to a number of projects to build autonomous communal palaces in central Italy – Siena and Florence being only two of the most prominent. I am indebted to Dr. Monika Butz for this reference.
\end{flushright}
crises, frivolous discourses, and the disorder of republican councils.\textsuperscript{169} In practice, however, there was no strict separation between sacred and civic space.\textsuperscript{170} Florentines had to be very adept at knowing how multivalent spaces were functioning at any given time, as this story makes clear. Such spaces had overlapping syntactical and temporal borders and both sacred and civic asserted themselves through the social production of that space, through its use. However, it also latently carried the memory of other narratives, fragments of which could negate, transform, and hinder the smooth functioning of this multi-functional space, just as unwanted objects and persons could hinder the smooth functioning of public thoroughfares.

I have outlined above three types of thresholds that encroached upon the public sphere – private property, family ritual, and sacred interiors – threatening its autonomy and challenging its hegemony. The statutes laid out a system of mutual reinforcement between the public and private sphere, where facades were the hinge that belonged to both. Laws also attempted to separate private from public ritual but public space had to concede to long-established traditions of public celebration and mourning. Finally, church interiors, functioning as both sacred space and the political space where such laws were deliberated, showed how public space was one rhetorical layer in a palimpsest of others existing within the same structures. In practice, public space was messy and ill-defined. The most careful demarcations of space confronted the expansive practices of bodies. In order to get an idea of the extremes to which


\textsuperscript{170} However, in light of this attempt by the church to establish the contours and borders of sacred space as well as the actions proper to it, Morelli, Certaldo, and Sacchetti, in their own writing, were connecting to a larger discussion about the desire for an architecture that defined spaces more clearly according to use, function, and community; an architecture that facilitated the specialization of emerging and transforming social relations.
architectural design had to go to create truly separate and distinct secluded zone, one has to move into the sixteenth century, where a new anti-republican regime of Medici dukes was intent upon creating not a public street, but an entirely private one.

What may be termed the “alter-ego” of the communal public thoroughfare was the creation of a much different political regime whose rhetoric and ethics were decidedly different. In 1565, under the authority of the duke Cosimo I, Giorgio Vasari created the ultimate private street: the Vasari Corridor. It realized the ideal of perfect unhindered movement but it did so at the price of the idea of the public. Unlike the public square, it was built not to facilitate the open movement of information, but to carefully guard secrets. Instead of enhancing the beauty of the city, its façade attempted to blend seamlessly into local architectural environments: it was a series of market stalls here (Figure 1.11), a loggia (Figure 1.11a), a church façade there (Figure 1.11b). Instead of displaying the spectacle of governance and reinforcing the authority of the regime, it hid the mechanics of power within an anonymous conduit that allowed the duke access over the river, even during floods, binding the places of “public” rulership (Palazzo Vecchio) with the “private” space of the ducal residence (Palazzo Pitti), destroying the complicated and meticulously measured boundaries between public and private so arduously created by the earlier commune. It was an architecture of dissimulation: something different on the outside from what it was on the inside. Now the regime claimed both public and private space for itself, dissolving the two into both the ceremonial and private movement of the court.\footnote{As an example, it was now the ducal weddings of 1539 and 1589 that competed with older communal forms of processions through the city, breaking the clear division maintained between public (palii) and private (weddings, funerals) ritual in the statutes. On the wedding between Cosimo I and Eleonora da Toledo in 1539 see Claudia Rousseau, "The Pageant of the Muses at the Medici Wedding of 1539 and the Decoration of the Salone dei Cinquecento," in "All the world's a stage ...": Art and pageantry in the Renaissance and Baroque, ed. Barbara Wisch and Susan C. Scott, (University Park, PA: Dept. of Art History, Pennsylvania State University, 1990). On the wedding between Ferdinando I and Christine de Lorraine, see James M. Saslow, The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as Theatrum Mundi, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).} It introduced
an overlapping but entirely separate topography onto the city where the battle between
the public good and private interests no longer had any relevance. Like the Palazzo
Vecchio itself, the corridor was built within a culture of fear and anxiety. The
contrast between these two extremes – absolute public and private space – also
highlights how both were heavily circumscribed by exclusion and constantly under the
pressure of competing interests. In Florence, according to Edward Muir, a constant
battle raged as successive regimes would lay claim to legitimacy by employing the
city’s rhetoric of space but constantly ran up against long and deep social ties to local
places, which always constrained the most ambitious aspirations of the expansion of
public over private space.\footnote{173}

\subsection{1.5 The Gendered Street}

Public space was also a decidedly masculine space and the borders defining
female spaces were the object of intense scrutiny and anxiety. Women were,
according to the letter of the law, banned from public buildings, the spaces of
legislation and governance. Nevertheless, the incessant legislation concerning women
on the streets was a clear attempt to regulate their presence everywhere and the ways
in which they navigated through space were themes as dominant in law as they were in
urban literature.\footnote{174} Women’s relations to the public were much more complicated,

\footnote{172 For an interpretation of Vasari’s corridor, which relates it to prototypes in the ancient world, see Leon

\footnote{173 Edward Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities," in
\textit{Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation}, ed. Steven E. Ozment, (Kirksville, MO:
Sixteenth-Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 162.}

\footnote{174 On sumptuary legislation regulating women’s appearance in public and their presence on the street, see
Ronald Rainey, "Sumptuary Legislation in Renaissance Florence" (Ph. D. Thesis, Columbia
University, 1985); Ronald Rainey, "Dressing Down the Dressed Up: Reproving Feminine Attire in
since their presence seemed to upset the delicate balance set up between public and private. Wherever they were, they had to be vigilantly regulated, as one of the several groups – magnates, wool workers, Jews, foreigners – that the popolo confronted. However, this negative legislation allows one to glimpse some of the ways in which public space was actually used in everyday practice. The women of a certain class to whom the Decameron addressed itself were affluent enough to read and were valuable enough to a family’s honor to be sequestered from the world of men. However, even these women found ways out into the street. Out there they were the subject of legislation that policed their bodies, their clothes, and where they ought to be. Their presence inflected the quality of certain public spaces, absorbing the anxieties of a moralistic merchant culture about the uncontrolled circulation of desire. Not surprisingly, just such relations of desire drive much of the narrative of urban stories. The Decameron is full of ways in which women surmounted the barriers erected between them and the world outside, and such stories are a wealth of information about the nature and function of spatial borders that separated men and women from the things they wanted.

Women who worked were necessarily on the street but their labors were limited there. They were not allowed to spin thread on a public road, nor were women who sold bread or herbs to feed their children allowed to do so on a public street.¹⁷⁵ Women were also very much involved in taverns, an industry whose spaces were also singled out for particular regulation. The morality of spaces was always suspect, and as such, no one, man or woman, who had a tavern, and no woman who sold pre-prepared food, could live or be within 200 braccia of the palaces of the Podestà or the Capitano.¹⁷⁶ Singled out in a separate law were those men or women who sold, both

¹⁷⁵ “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, cv.
¹⁷⁶ “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” IV, xxi. The distance was measured from the door of the palace, along the ground.
publicly and privately, meals that targeted a certain tendency toward gluttony, satisfying the gourmand’s appetite with such things as “tortelli, liver, spleen, roasted meats, ravioli, peas(?), aspic, or chicken or any manner of birds or any other things that are associated with extreme eating, drinking, or gluttony.” Such enterprises could not be located within four miles of the city.\(^{177}\) Industries associated with the sins of lust and gluttony, in which women figured prominently, were singled out and marginalized spatially, cleared from the city’s moral, public center. Unlike the appellation when it was associated with the actions and spaces of men – public office, public palace – when the adjective “public” attached itself to women, it turned into a pejorative designation. For example, public brothels housed women who publically (*publicamente*) loaned out their bodies.\(^{178}\)

Although officially marginalized in public space, however, the appetites, desires and bodies of women spill over into the streets of the city as much as they do onto the pages of urban *novelle*. It is clear that working women, those associated with minor artisans, claimed the streets as their own, moving through them with utter confidence. By looking at court records from the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, historian Samuel Cohn has found that women confidently defended their identity as women in public and confronted men on their own territory. However, Cohn claims that women actually lost ground between the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in terms of their status in public space.\(^{179}\) This is ironic considering that the laws regulating public space appear to have weakened over the same period. Women of the upper ranks of society begin to appear more frequently as authors and artists within the western canon, while the statues finally sanction outdoor weddings in

---

\(^{177}\) Ibid., IV, xxii. “tortelli, fegatelli, milze, rosti, raviuoli, pesa, gelatina, o vero polli o vero alcuna maniera d’ucelli o vero alcune altre cose che se appartenessero a gulosità o vero ghiottornia.”

\(^{178}\) Ibid., I, cxlviii.

the fifteenth century. However, if Cohn’s sample of court records represents a general
trend, then working women suffered a corresponding decline in control over their own
actions in public. Therefore – and I can only speculate at this point - the appearance
of women as social actors in literary and artistic circles may hide a class issue in
which wealthier women had more of a role to play in an increasingly courtly society
while poorer women paid the consequences in the streets and in the courts. This may
have coincided with a decline in working women’s status that Cohn describes, so that
the relationship between women and the law is further complicated.

In order to show how the status of women in public space was a very
complicated, nuanced, and contentious issues, the following explores the spatial status
of women according to attitudes and perspectives found in both legislation and
popular discourse concerning urban space, streets, and squares. In the cases below,
one finds women of varying classes engaged, often together, in undermining the
customs and laws that tried to restrict their movements and their desires.

Coppo di Borghese Domenichi was born in the second half of the thirteenth
century to a prominent family in the quarter of Santa Croce. He was much esteemed
for his personal prestige and erudition and was active in the communal government in
the early fourteenth century. Boccaccio paid homage to him as an exemplary
storyteller and guardian of Florence’s civic memory and mourned his death in a letter
to Zanobi da Strada in 1353.180 His memory of Florence’s past functioned to safeguard
the city through recounting tales, actively promoting intellectual exchange between
merchant readers through his patronage of literary translations and serving as a

---

180 Coppo served as prior in 1308, 1310, 1311, 1330, 1336, and 1341; as gonfaloniere di Giustizia in
1315, as well as other high ranking posts. For biographical information see Alberto Maria Ghisalberti
and Massimiliano Pavan, eds., Dizionario biografico degli Italiani, (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia
figure as material for gender relations. See below.
character within the urban novella itself. In the Decameron Fiammetta tells her listeners that one of the stories Coppo loved to tell his neighbors involved the memory of the Alberighi, an old and genteel Florentine family. Fiammetta’s story acts to preserve the memory of this Florentine storyteller, who, in turn, was remembering an even more ancient Florence whose values might be rescued from the wreckage of the plague. Cacciaquida refers to this family in the Paradiso, mentioning that they were already then an illustrious family in decline. Villani locates the family in the medieval quarter of Porta San Piero which comprised the eastern portion of the city within the 11th century walls (Figure 1.2). In his list of ancient families that inhabited the quarter, the Alberighi are the only ones that are emphatically listed as extinct. Fiammetta’s story then recounts the tale whose themes would have been familiar elements of the moral universe of the Florentine merchant.

In the story Federigo degli Alberighi learns a certain Florentine virtue through the example of an honorable woman. He had wasted his wealth through lavish banquets and elaborate jousts in a vain attempt to court the woman of his desire. His extravagant expenditure is contrasted to its chaste object, the virtue, or onestà, of the

---


183 Villani, Nuova cronica, 5, 11. “e gli Alberighi, che fu loro la chiesa di Santa Maria Alberighi da casa i Donati, e oggi non n’è nullo” (And the Alberghi; it was theirs, the church of Santa Maria Alberghi by the house of the Donati, and today there is no more of them), my translation. The church was located at the site of the present church of Santa Maria (Margherita) de’ Ricci in via del Corso. It was first mentioned in 1199 though was much older, belonging to one of the city’s 36 “ancient” parishes. It can be seen in the Rustici Codex (see image) and represented the physical memory of the family in the city in Villani’s time. See Paatz and Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz, vol. 3, 103-06. Other families, such as the Berti and the Calucci, were much reduced in Villani’s time.
Monna Giovanna, who took no interest in such ostentation.\textsuperscript{184} However, she is compelled by her maternal love and devotion to her ailing son to approach Federigo degli Alberighi to ask him for his falcon. Her son had asked to have the bird, which he had delighted in while spending time with Federigo, thinking that he would then soon recover. Not knowing that Federigo had financially ruined himself, Monna Giovanna visits him to ask him for the favor. However, she ends up eating the falcon since Federigo, reduced to near ruin by self-induced poverty, chose to kill it and serve it upon her visit. Impressed as she was with his persistent honor, even in poverty, Giovanna is still heartbroken for her son, who dies soon afterwards. It is then, on the inevitable urging of her brothers, that she decides to marry again but only if she can choose Filippo, a man without money, but who had shown her immense honor.

This story brings up several issues relevant to civic memory but also introduces gender as a theme bound to Coppo Domenichi in both Boccaccio and Sacchetti. Filippo’s financial fall in trying to spend his way into love may have emulated, in a parodic and condensed form, the ultimate ruin of such once illustrious families in larger historical terms. Such a family may have been linked to an older Florentine clan system that still persisted in the institution of the Guelf party but was very much in decline within a broader political culture of trade. In the story, which may have contained a metaphor for the eclipse of magnate power in Florentine politics, lavish spending leads to ruin and is useless in the face of an ideal virtue located in a Florentine woman. But in the aftermath he learns that she desires his virtue in poverty, disguised as it was in his riches. This virtue corresponds to an ideal implicit in the way Florentine merchant ideology placed a premium on public modesty. Giovanna is impervious to spectacular displays of wealth, and she represents an ideal of womanhood found in Florentine culture and expressed in

\textsuperscript{184} Boccaccio, \textit{Decameron}, V, 9, 6.
Florentine statutes. Megan Holmes locates this female ideal in Florentine Quattrocento culture which was made hauntingly visible by the image of Theopista, the wife of St. Eustace, in Filippo Lippi’s *Sant’Ambrogio altarpiece* (Figure 1.12). According to Holmes, this image represented a changing trend in the nature of female virtue in the early Quattrocento. From the Trecento ideal of the pure chastity of the Madonna, the anxiety over the constant threat of a demographic collapse produced new, more complex, and conflicting roles for women to fulfill. Now they had to be wives, mothers, sisters, neighbors, and saints, all at the same time. They were wealthy, beautiful, and of a certain social station but simultaneously chaste and deferential. Boccaccio’s Monna Giovanna represents a similar figure, held up as both chaste, unyielding to wealth, but simultaneously given in marriage to an honorable man, now reduced in wealth, on account of her devotion to her male child. Thus, she performs the impossible task of being a chaste but desirable woman, a good wife, and productive mother. Her later marriage to Filippo is also an act of female virtue as it suggests a practical means of saving the ancient line of the Alberighi, who would be newly enriched by a more moralistic Florentine virtue stemming from merchant ethics and embodied in a female ideal. Such ethics revolved around mothers and their devotion to the male members of the family – husbands, sons – and a woman’s duty to love a man not for his wealth but for his virtue, which she must stimulate in him by her natural beauty. Such an ideal was something to be salvaged from the ancient family lineages that had suffered a significant decline in the face of a

---

185 Holmes sees the image of Theopista as an ideal of saintliness and motherhood that was addressed to the lay public at parish masses held in Sant’Ambrogio, while the more remote figure of the virgin being crowned was intended for the Benedictine nuns of the convent. See Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi the Carmelite Painter*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 217.

186 One curious aspect of the story is how it makes no mention of Giovanna’s marital status when Federigo is courting her. She is presented as married only after his fall into poverty, when her husband emerges only to fall ill and die. In the meantime, he had left her a testament that would make her wealthy only after the death of her son if he had no legitimate heirs. Therefore, while Federigo pursues her she remains the perfectly chaste virgin, while later we find that she has also produced male offspring. See Boccaccio, *Decameron*, V, 9, 9.
rising Popolo that the *Decameron* often depicts as crass and beholden to material wealth to the detriment of familial relations. Thus, the burden of maintaining a civic sobriety necessary to prevail in the face of the destruction of patrilineages caused by the plague was placed directly onto women through representational strategies.\textsuperscript{187}

Coppo’s story, therefore, places women as important links in maintaining a viable masculine culture. Ancient, noble, disgraced and perhaps, disenfranchised families could be instilled with renewed vigor after the plague through the civic devotion to the outwardly modest family symbolized by the union of Giovanna and Filippo. However, Holmes’ contention that this ideal was a fifteenth-century phenomenon comes from Alberti’s treatise on the family and from the conclusions drawn in David Herlihy’s and Klapisch-Zuber’s statistical research into the Tuscan family. In the former, the interlocutors Gianozzo, the family patriarch, discusses how he taught his wife that her chastity and purity was the most pleasing sight in a woman to God, husband and children.\textsuperscript{188} This was immediately after he had described praying for many male children from his wife while berating her sex’s desire to wear make-up and how unchaste eyes made women ugly.\textsuperscript{189}

Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, on the other hand, saw the demographic issue as part of a reconsideration of female chastity in which the family as the social unit, as opposed to the convent, was the institution that could save Florentine society. It was a public figure, the chancellor of the republic and civic humanist, Coluccio Salutati, who refuted Petrarch’s condemnation of marriage.\textsuperscript{190} Now a good citizen had to be a

\textsuperscript{187} Perhaps Fiametta’s story alludes to the tragic potential within this ideal and the ever-present threat of family extinction since Giovanna’s only son dies. And this would suggest that the new feminine ideal discussed by Holmes might have had roots in the trauma of the plague.

\textsuperscript{188} Holmes, *Filippo Lippi*, 217.

\textsuperscript{189} It is precisely such make-up and glances that excite lust in men, though this will inevitably lead to violence. Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti, (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 272-73.

married man. Boccaccio’s story however, represents a much earlier but consonant reflection on how Florence was to emerge as a healthy society after the plague of 1348. Coppo’s family morality, evident in this story that he loved so much to tell, is projected well back into the past, long before the plague. As a result, the discourses of chastity and family were something that needed to be safeguarded in the past and brought to bear on the present.

By the end of the century, Coppo was still linked to feminine virtue by Sacchetti. When he appears in the Trecentonovelle, Coppo is a student of ancient history, reading an episode from Roman history and becoming enraged at the immodesty of Roman women marching to the Capitoline to demand the revocation of sumptuary laws passed against them. Such collective action was nothing but immoral. The specter of a large group of women moving through the city to the place where, in Sacchetti’s time, was not the religious heart of the ancient city but the civic heart of the Roman commune demanding the right to wear clothes associated with female disrepute was a matter of great shame to the city. Female action was always considered to be detrimental obstacle on public thoroughfares.

---

191 David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 228-31. Originally published as David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Les toscans et leurs familles : une étude du catasto florentin de 1427*, (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1978). The authors admit that in the Trecento a writer like Paolo da Certaldo held contradictory views of women. They were responsible for great shame, sins, and expense but also declared that the company and love of a good wife was one of the principal joys of life, while her death was one of its principal sorrows. See Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*, 229. The authors go on to cite Bruni, who refutes Boccaccio, stating that the city is the multiplication of the fundamental social union of man and woman. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*, 230.

192 That Boccaccio was still antagonistic to marriage in relation to intellectual pursuits is borne out from his biography of Dante, in which he states: “Let philosophers leave marriage to the ignorant rich, to rulers, and to peasants; let them take delight in Philosophy, a better wife than any other.” Quoted in Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*, 229.

193 Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, LXVI. This story is also discussed below in “Storytelling in the Piazza.”

194 Coppo refers to the women as whores (*puttane*), Ibid.
When Coppo reappears later in the Trecentonovelle, his former righteous indignation reappears as comic memory. The story takes place when Sacchetti (io scrittore) was serving on the Signoria of Florence as one of its priors. At the time a new judge, most competent in his field, arrives from Pesaro just after Florence had passed its own sumptuary laws against women. Consequently, this Amerigo, the judge, is mandated to attend promptly to this new law and he does so by sending out his staff (famiglia) into the city to confront women on the streets. However, when his notary returns to report on the protestations that his citations elicited from each of the women he gave them too, he was almost beside himself in frustration and disbelief. As the notary lists the succession of challenges that women made to the law, Amerigo made notes.

According to legislation of 1330 this notary was a foreign official who was hired by the Ufficiale delle Donne, the office in charge of enforcing the detailed fashion prohibitions that reacted to the invasion of foreign styles. After the banditore of the city read out lists of forbidden clothing in the usual places in the city, he was the one who had to scour the streets, bridges, and piazze of Florence and he was met with a similarly tough resistance which, however, was not linguistic but spatial. Women could not find sanctuary in piazze the way men could through certain forms of sociability because, as historian Robert C. Davis argues, the nature of the piazza as public space was a result of the way masculine authority and power were constantly restaged there through ritual games and processions, making public space

---

195 Ibid., CXXXVII.
196 “valentissimo nella sua scienza” Ibid.
198 Frick, Dressing, 183.
hostile to women. They were, however, able to access churches, which offered a kind of public stage for women to collectively display their finery.¹⁹⁹

In the story, certain citizens saw the disjunction between the law they had heard promulgated and the reality they saw on the streets. Naturally, they went to see the Priors to sarcastically praise the new judge for performing his duties so well that women had never roamed about the city wearing such things, and comporting themselves in such a manner.²⁰⁰ When called to make accounts, the judge recounts the word games that women played with his notary, confounding the law that rested on the assumption that names and things existed in fixed relationships. This was a dramatization of the fourteenth-century Florentine woman’s self-possession in public streets that Cohn found in court records. In fact, the women, by deft adjustments of their jewellery or by giving other names to forbidden clothing, were able to make a mockery of the law. A decorative band on a hat is taken off and named a garland. Offending buttons became cupels (coppelle²⁰¹) since they had no backing (picciuolo) or holes (ochiello) into which they could be attached. A woman caught by the notary for wearing ermine (ermellini) declares that it is not ermine but a similar animal (latizzi).²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Robert C. Davis, "The Geography of Gender in Renaissance Italy," in Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy, ed. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, (London: Longman, 1998), 36. ²⁰⁰ “I offitiale nuovo fa si bene il suo officio che le donne non trascorso mai nelle portature come al presente faceano” (The new official performed his duties so well that women never walked about in the manner in which they do now). Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CXXXVII. The use of the term “portature” is important here, since it refers to the manner of wearing certain clothes and ornaments, to the comportment of a person in relation to what they are wearing, and also to the posturing and positioning of one’s body. In a word, Sacchetti is able to refer to a posing, self-conscious image and attitude of women that the sumptuary laws were meant to discipline. See entry for “portatura” in Grande dizionario, vol. 13:974-75. ²⁰¹ A device for purifying gold or silver. For a glossary of Florentine fashion see Frick, Dressing, 301-20. ²⁰² It is notable that in sixteenth-century England royal proclamations concerned the policing of male clothing, and were silent, at first, on women’s. The issue was polite dress, against the vulgarity of the common, in opposition to the spirit of Italian communal laws regarding clothing. See Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," in Rewriting the Renaissance: the Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 125.
The linguistic sleights of hand staged by Florentine women must have played on Sacchetti’s own knowledge of the degree to which the statutes strained in a characteristic attempt at precision, to name and define the forbidden ornaments and where on the woman’s body they were not to appear. Against this slipperiness of things and names, the formulaic phrasing of the statutes takes on a more earnest and anxious character. No woman, of any age or condition, single (solute) or married can wear, in the house on the street, clothes or things over clothes (roba di sopra) of gold thread (tessuta d’oro) or silver, or silk, or things decorated with pearls or precious stones or any other precious material, or embellishment or ornament, etc. 203 Such conventional repetition would be easily turned into a game of piling up names upon things. Other prohibited displays included gathered fabric (panni incrampati) over the cloak, decorated belts or belts with hanging pendants (cintura, schaggiole), crowns, silver head ornaments (cerchiello), garlands, and so on. In each case, all these forbidden things were calculated based on a maximum value, though it is not clear how that would be policed. 204 Simple garments, such as gonnelle for example, could be no more than 5 florins. Such limits seem to leave a considerable margin of flexibility except for those affluent enough to have the need to flaunt their wealth. 205

However, the episode within Sacchetti’s story points to the actual problems that officials were having on the streets when they encountered the broad range of ornament and clothing that women arranged around their bodies. They were constantly running into resistance to their harassment of women on the streets. Women contested the charges against them, claiming such things as having been wearing garments of different colors than those written in the actual notary’s charges.

203 “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” IV, lxvii.
204 Women in the Trecento were required by law to register their apparel and display the lead seal of approval (depicting a lily and a cross) on the garment itself while wearing it. See Rainey, "Dressing Down," 221.
205 “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” IV, lxvii.
However, in actual cases, it was men, ironically, in contrast to the novella and Coppo’s account of Roman history, who intervened on behalf of women, either on the street, or in the courts, where women could not represent themselves.\footnote{Rainey, "Dressing Down," 224-26. Notaries also named the location where violations were spotted.} The requirement of Latin notation made clear the insufficiency of the language to “describe what they were visually encountering on the streets,” leaving any attempt at legislation woefully ineffective.\footnote{Frick, \textit{Dressing}, 183. This would not be the case with the translated statutes of course, where neologisms could be added as they emerged. By the fifteenth century the preoccupation over sumptuary laws in the context of weddings and funerals would take up increasing amounts of text. See \textit{Statuta populi (1415),} II (pp. 357-90).} By churches, on bridges, in the piazza and on the streets, the inadequacy of language helped to energize the dynamics of fashion innovation. “[I]n clothing there would be new styles, new ornaments, new \textit{everything}, to keep one step ahead of being the target for the clothing categories available to the sumptuary police.”\footnote{Ibid., 183 (emphasis in original). Frick points to the disparity in names of garments between the 1415 statutes and contemporary family ricordanze. See her glossary.} In fact, clothing historian Carole Frick refers to an explosion of terms concerning clothing, which was a reaction to harassment by sumptuary officials. Although she focuses on the fifteenth century, she believes that Sacchetti was reacting to actual experience on fourteenth-century streets where fashion was always one linguistic step ahead of the law.\footnote{Ibid., 188. Frick traces how the word \textit{latizzi} in Sacchetti’s story was a replacement for ermine. Originally invented to evade punishment, it eventually came to designate any expensive fur of indeterminate origin. In addition, there were at least a dozen names for the “glittery ornaments sewn onto the borders or necklines of gowns and into the designs of headgear in Quattrocento Florence.” Frick, \textit{Dressing}, 190.} It was representative of the way that bodies and language were impossible to pin down in urban spaces, where they slipped through the carefully constructed legislation meant to contain them. Such was the ambivalent dynamics of urban space, where the free flow of bodies and messages was a double-edged sword. It was an instance of the conscious manipulation of the expansive body, the one that constantly sought to transform its image through a stream of precious, glittering objects and shimmering fabrics that were caught momentarily on its
surfaces, only to be replaced by others. It made women difficult to pin down and, as Frick points out, points to a moment where Florentine morality clashed with the very basis of the manner in which it manufactured wealth, namely, through fine cloth.  

Unfortunately there is a large lacuna that follows in Sacchetti’s story, in which further attempts to define what women were actually wearing may have been elaborated. When the narrative is picked up again, the reader is suddenly placed in medias res of the responses of the priors, one of whom remarks that they seem to be beating their heads against a wall – “Noi abbiamo tolto a contender col muro.” Another urges them onto more important business and then finally, one of them declares that even the Romans, who conquered the world, could not contain their women, who ascended the campidoglio in protest. What then happens in the text is confusing. Sacchetti renders the retelling of the story of the protesting Roman women in the first person. Syntactically, “Io vo’ che voi sappiate ch’è Romani…” (I want you to know that the Romans…) follows the indication to direct discourse, “E infine dice uno” (and finely one of them says) This speaker most likely refers to Sacchetti the character playing the part of Sacchetti the actual prior in the past, rather than Sacchetti the narrator or Sacchetti the author. He is remembering Coppo’s complaints but that would mean he is remembering them from another story outside the narrative frame that only Sacchetti the narrator could have remembered, from the world of the reader and author, not the world of the novella itself. The “I” slips suddenly from direct discourse and is transformed into the self-conscious voice of the narrator. Sacchetti the character becomes Sacchetti the narrator just at the moment when he states that “per tal segnale, Coppo del Borghese in una novella di questo libro leggendo in Tito Livio la detta istoria, ne fu per impazzare” (with such a sign, Coppo del Borghese, reading Titus Livius in a novella in this book, was madly enraged by it.).

210 Frick, Dressing, 184.
The resistance and resourcefulness of Florentine women reminded Sacchetti the character of an episode from Roman history. As Sacchetti the narrator, he suddenly remembers that it was Coppo who had framed and preserved this story in the earlier novella. In that story he was reading this very story about Roman women in Livy when it drove him into a mad frenzy. In the Trecentonovelle as in the Decameron, Coppo is the mediator between the present and the past, the arbiter of virtue, a moral compass, and a storehouse of the narrative past. In Sacchetti however, the text itself stages the very mechanism by which Florentines understood themselves, as the inheritors of the past through the medium of their storytellers. This memory of Coppo suddenly leaves the direct discourse of this particular story and enters into the relationship between the reader and the entire corpus of novellas, jumping up one narrative frame as it were. This happens precisely at the moment when Coppo is remembered as a character “reading, in a novella of this book” (in una novella di questo libro leggendo...). Sacchetti, at this very moment, is linguistically transformed back into the moralistic narrator of the novellas because only he could remember the novella as a novella.211 In other words, what in the Decameron is a clearly defined separation of frames becomes in the Trecentonovelle a confusing jumble of narrative voices that never quite remain in their prescribed places.212 Sacchetti proves here that he is fully aware of the representational frames within which the perspectives of characters, authors, storytellers, and readers slide and merge into each other with apparent ease. Not only individual narratives of raucous and ebullient urban life but the very structure of the narrative itself dramatizes the less than perfect functioning of social relations in a city circumscribed so carefully by rules and regulations. People on the street would always slide between and get caught between the frames and

212 On the structural frame of the Decameron see chapter 4.
borders constructed around them. The authorial control, so present in the
Decameron’s structure, is nowhere to be found. The seemingly minor slippage of
voices at the end of this novella emphasizes the narrative distances between all the
actors involved in the production and consumptions of stories. This is entirely
different from the way that Coppo was remembered in Boccaccio’s story. Fiammetta
described him, praised his historical skill and ability as a storyteller but keeps him
entirely separate from the narrative she retells. He is not allowed to invade the story
with his actual presence in order to link it to other narratives.

However, between the Decameron and the Trecentonovelle there lies a textual
discourse of gender founded on a character that functions narratively to safeguard
Florentine female morality. Florentine women conquer the sumptuary laws not by
taking to the streets in protest but in confounding the law through its own reliance on
the precision of language. In effect, their arguments dismantled the carefully laid out
words in the statutes that dealt with how women could present themselves visually.213
Precious objects such as gold, silver, and pearls were outlawed and certain types of
clothing were listed and banned. The extensive lists in the statutes of the Capitano
provide a valuable source of information on contemporary fashion. Side by side with
urban stories, the statutes are enlivened by the verbal exchange between the women
and notaries in Sacchetti’s stories. The novella unMASKS the earnest futility of trying
to pacify a masculine anxiety concerning the female virtue that was increasingly the
engine of the city’s demographic survival. The attempt by a government of men to
contain the clothing of women in legal terms is posed as a verbal game of describing
the ornaments of a woman’s body. She is dressed up by the statutes in order for her to

213 Not only the types of stones, jewels, and fabrics that were banned are mentioned, but even the places
on the body on which they could not appear. See Statuta populi (1415), II, 357ff.
be undressed of such finery in the street, a textual version of the problematic dressing of Griselda in the last novella of the *Decameron.*

Already in the statutes is it evident that the problem of dressing was linked to a woman’s chastity. Opulent dress was associated with prostitutes, who were allowed to wear certain types of clothing in the city. This distinction would then allow one to distinguish clearly and visibly between honorable and dishonorable women in the street. Therefore, this anxiety was located precisely in urban space, the public space of the street. These streets are named *viae publicae* in the statutes, and this is the arena of a public construction of gender linked to the virtue, sex, work, and the movement of women in the city.

Movement, of course, was key and it may have even been their apparel that presented the most immediate hindrance. Their shoes may not have been designed for ease of movement but rather for fashion. Unlike men, women faced obstacles when moving through what has been described as the staging ground of a certain masculinity. Through ritual acts of violence, men in Renaissance Italian cities demonstrated their control over it. Games such as the Venetian Baiting of the Bulls and the human pyramids of the *forza d’Ercole* or the central Italian penchant for throwing stones were linked to lower class displays of ritual brotherhood, masculine strength, and the ever-present potential for mass insurrection. It demonstrates how public streets and squares only maintained the force of masculine identity if they were constantly the site of the ritual re-enactment of these forms of both social consensus

---


215 Davis, "Geography of Gender," 34-36.

216 Ibid.
and conflict.\textsuperscript{217} It was such ritual anarchy that hindered movement, especially for women, through the city.\textsuperscript{218} If the ideal was to hide women from view, then the reality appears to have been to make public space resonate as a hostile zone through regular ritual re-enactments that symbolically marginalized women who, in spite of the rhetoric, were seen on the street. Therefore, lower class women suffered the threats of taunts, robbery, and rape while out on the street as a lingering effect of such ritual violence.\textsuperscript{219} However, not surprisingly, women made themselves present and visible in any spaces they managed to occupy.

The ambivalence of women, clothing, and movement is demonstrated by the case of the \textit{zoccoli}, or a form of high-heeled shoe or clog worn by women. They were known in Tuscany in the early fourteenth century, but died out in the sixteenth century, most likely with the advent of urban carriages.\textsuperscript{220} However, they persisted in Venice, reaching as high as 30 inches. They kept women’s dresses, and selves, above and safe from mud and garbage but they also literally disconnected them from the surfaces of everyday life. Davis points out how they made walking difficult, slowing down and limiting the movement of women in the streets. Hobbling awkwardly, in risk of dangerous falls, women in \textit{zoccoli} moved, elevated, through the city. They have been interpreted as form of bodily control, but they also represented an extended vertical space in which women wore more expansive clothing. They were a public, moving stage, allowing women who gathered in churches to create a spectacle that towered over men. Such displays belonged, however, to the more particular culture of Venetian street life, but it dramatizes both the containment and resistance to bodily

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{217} Davis points out that these games were often prohibited by governments who feared the potential violence against their authority. These rituals formed a counterpoint to the official rituals that represent the wish for social ideals of harmony and unity. See Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 22-23.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 34.
control that women effected with the means they given. Even in Florence however, affluent women distinguished themselves by wearing platform shoes, covering themselves from head to foot with expensive clothing while moving en masse with servants and kinswomen. The latter, dressed in fabric cut from the same cloth, helped to complete the collective composition of women on the street as a “rather large, sedately moving, imposing mass of fabric.”\(^{221}\) Such a showpiece would have made reference to the economic symbolism inherent in the annual offering of silk banners on the altar of the baptistery on the feast day of the Baptist, where the spectacle linked the city’s textile industry to the protection of the city’s patron saint. Now women became a kind of mobile monument to the glory of the Florentine cloth production.

In Florence this type of foot ware, as well as pianelle (slippers) had to be visible to the buyer in the shops where they were sold by the artisans that produced them.\(^{222}\) Apart from allowing the buyer to see the merchandise, the law provided for more rigorous control of the height of such zoccoli, or platform clogs, and perhaps the richness of the pianelle, the former being limited to no more than one sixth of a braccio.\(^{223}\)

At issue in legal provisions was the marking of social place, of locating in space the status of families through women, while men’s clothing took part in a game of republican egalitarianism.\(^{224}\) Women who rented out their bodies publicly were, according to the law, required to wear gloves when going about the city. They were allowed to wear what they wanted, except for a cloak, hood and slippers.\(^{225}\) According

\(^{221}\) Frick, Dressing, 157. Some concessions were made for those getting married, but with strict limitations. See Statuta populi (1415), II, 358.

\(^{222}\) “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” I, clix.

\(^{223}\) Frick, Dressing, 291, n. 27. Frick’s source is ASF, Capitoli 12, fol. 69v, “De calzolarji.”

\(^{224}\) Ibid., 180.

\(^{225}\) “Nuna femina di disonesta condizione la quale publicamente presti il corpo suo a luxuria e per guadagnio di danari possa andare o vero stare per la citta di Firenze senza guanti messi mano [sic] vestite per o di qualunque panno vorano fuor che mantello, capuccio e pianelle le quali a esse in alcuno modo portare non sia licto.” ”Statuti del Capitano (1355),” I, exlviii. Pianelle were slippers with a low heel, or no heel, often made from precious materials that exposed the woman’s heel. However,
to a law of 1384, the commune even required prostitutes to cover their eyes with veils while wearing platform zoccoli, gloves, and bells on their heads (mantelli). This linked them to women excoriated by Isaiah for dressing up in jewels, finery, thus deceiving men.

The movement of prostitutes through the city was restricted and they were only allowed to walk the streets of the city during the day on Monday afternoons (dopo nona) to take care of any errands or personal matters. Clearly, these women who went about the city continuously offending its honor had to be restricted in space. On the other hand, their punishment was a decidedly public one. They were publicly whipped (scopato) through the city on the same streets from which they were forbidden. At the same time, the brothel where they lived was to be razed to its foundations. If they were found in forbidden places (luoghi vietati) repeatedly they could ultimately be chased and whipped through the city naked. Prostitutes held an ambivalent position within the moral discourse of the commune since they could also

---

pianelle could also be thin metal skull caps worn under the hood, which might be relevant in this context since the issue might have been the recognisability of the woman. It is not clear why gloves matter in this case. Transgressors were fined 10 lire and lost possession of the offending clothing. Women who failed to pay the fine within three days were expelled from the city.


227 Frick, Dressing, 184-85. Isaiah 3: 16-17. Diane Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City," Past and Present 112 (1986): 25. Hughes notes that Florence went further than other cities in the fourteenth century by making prostitutes not only visible, but also audible. Brackett notes that, in order to encourage more prostitutes to register, the commune took away this requirement in the 15th century. See Brackett, "The Florentine Onestà," 288. In 1325, they already were required to wear gloves, slippers (pianelle) a mantle and a head covering. See "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, cxlviii.

228 "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxi. The assumption was that they might be on the streets at night. By the fifteenth century prostitutes could voluntarily procure special licenses that they paid to let them move outside the bordellos. See Brackett, "The Florentine Onestà," 286.

229 "Ad stirpare li mali et li peccati che potrebbero advienire nella cittade di firenze della disoneste delle femmine meretrici che vanno continuo per la cittade predetta per la quale cosa in esso cittade isverognati atti et costumi et molti peccati si commetttono per le quali s’offende idio et onore si scema alla detta cittade et per le isfacciatezze di quelle possono verisimilmente pervenire exempli di male."

"Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxi.

230 Ibid.

231 Ibid. The 1325 statutes are virtually identical. See Caggese, Podestà (1325), III, cxv (p. 244).
represent the triumph of commune, and serve as a public source of honor in races designed to humiliate the enemy during sieges.  

Keeping streets clear went hand in hand with keeping them “clean.” Brothels, therefore, were relegated to more secret or hidden spaces, a term which was often understood as the opposite of public. Secrets were the enemy of the public good, public space, and public knowledge. In the same spirit, no woman or man was allowed to move through the city dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex. It was exactly this kind of disguise, however, that allowed men and women access to spaces from which they were restricted.

No one could maintain a public bordello outside the city and within two hundred braccia of a church or within fifty braccia of any of the streets listed in the statute. All the streets named are major arteries leading to gates in the new city walls. In fact, the law names them in clockwise order, from the Porta al Prato to Porta

---

232 Trexler describes the way the use of prostitutes in front of besieged troops was part of the psychological arsenal of Italian warfare. See Richard C. Trexler, "Correre la terra: Collective Insults in the Late Middle Ages," Mélanges de l'école française de Rome 96, no. 2 (1984): 870-71.
233 “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, clxi. Although the law explicitly condemns prostitution for its moral degradation, it also made practical provisions for women who wanted to get out of the brothels, contracts and debts that bound them. “Et ad’osservazione et ezecuzione delle predette cose messer la podesta sia tenuto per proprio saramento ciascuno mese mandare al bordello uno de’ suoi notari con la famiglia sua con li ministri de’ pinzocheri o con due pinzocheri li quali li ministri vorranno dare et trarre di quello bordello ogni femina che quindi di sua volontade vorrà uscire la quale seco ne possa recare li panni suoi et l’altre sue cose sanza contradizione d’alcuno non ostante che a cotale creditor elle fosse obligata in alcuna cosa.” (185v) It also restricted the freedom of proprietors, who suffered similar punishments for legal infractions.
234 Ibid., IV, cv.
235 For example, gender disguise allows for the probing of ambivalent sexual desire in the Decameron (II, 3), where a man falls in love with someone he thinks is a young abbot but turns out to be a noble daughter.
San Frediano. These were the streets that connected the city’s core to the surrounding countryside and the world beyond. Goods and people were connected to the city by these roads, which meant that they would have been traversed by all those who entered the city, either in ritual procession or on economic business. These were streets that were to facilitate movement, bodies and things coming and going, flows of goods and information. They were the principal *viae publicae*, and they corresponded almost precisely to the ten “*vie maestre*” that were named and described in the 1322-25 statutes of the Capitano (tab. 1, Figure 1.13). These latter were streets that followed the old *borghi* out of the city from the borders of the twelfth-century city that was in the process of a major fourteenth-century expansion (Figures 1.2-1.2b). The twelfth-century limits are still the limits of the central core of the city in the language of the statutes but such extra-urban roads were considered part of the commune of

---

237 “Cioè, per la strada per la quale si va per la porta d’ognisanti verso Prato [Porta al Prato, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada per la quale sesto(Sesto?) per la porta di polverosa [destroyed, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada delle donne da faenza [Porta a Faenza, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada di San Gallo [Porta San Gallo, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada della porta a Pinti [Porta Pint, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada della porta di San Niccolò [Porta San Niccolò, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada della porta di San Miniato [Porta a San Miniato, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada della porta di San Giorgio [Porta San Giorgio, see Figure 1.13]. Per la strada della porta di San Piero Gattolino [Porta romana, see Figure 1.13]. O per la strada della porta di San Friano [Porta San Frediano, see Figure 1.13].” "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, cxxi. The Porta Polverosa, now destroyed, lay between the Porta al Prato and the Porta a Faenza, at the end of the via Valle Fonda, which itself led from the via dietro gli Avelli, which led from Santa Maria Novella, and passed through what is now the Stazione Santa Maria Novella. Porta di Faenza was incorporated into the Fortezza da Basso and its remains can be seen today; see David Friedman, "The *Porta a Faenza* and the the last Circle of the Walls of Florence," in *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus, (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), 179. Porta San Gallo still stands in the Piazza della Libertà. Porta a Pinti was at the end of Borgo Pinti. Sancta Candida refers to a destroyed church located just outside the Porta alla Croce in today’s Piazza Beccaria; see Paatz and Paaatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz*, 1:409-10. Only one gate extant seems to have been passed over, Porta dei Servi at the end of the present day via Capponi, between the Porta a Pinti and the Porta San Gallo. On the names and dates of the fourteenth-century city gates of Florence, see Enrico Guidoni, *Firenze nei secoli XIII e XIV*, (Florence: Regione toscana; Bonsignori Editore, 2002); Luciano Artusi, *Le antiche porte di Firenze: alla scoperta delle mura che circondavano la città*, (Florence: Semper, 2005). Caggese, *Capitano (1322-25)*, IV, viii (p. 158). See also ASF, Capitani, numeri rossi, 105 (*Il libro della luna*), 104 for legislation on streets, bridges, and walls (*vie, ponti, mura*), and 113 for the duties of officials, which included *piazze*. For a discussion of the management and legislation of this road network that dates back to the thirteenth century “revoluzione stradale,” see *Il Libro vecchio di strade della Repubblica Fiorentina*, ed. Gabriele Ciampi, (Florence: F. Papafava, 1987), 5-59.
Florence even as they penetrated into the countryside. In a similar fashion to the legislation that created a liminal zone between the public space of the street and the private space of the domestic sphere (see above), Florentine legislation deliberately created a space of transition that made the borders between urban and non-urban less fixed and more fluid. Thus the city extended its urban space beyond the walls of the city, controlling the smooth transition of goods and things from one spatial jurisdiction to another, from contado to city that did not exactly correspond to the physical line of walls.239

---

239 Urban streets that pierced the suburban terrain included the street from Porta San Frediano lo Legnaia, from the Porta Romana to the monastery of San Gaggio, From the Porta San Niccolò to the small bridge that led into Chianti, and the street from the Porta a San Miniato to the homonymous church; see Libro vecchio, 9.
Table 1 principal public roads in Florence (*statuti del capitano*, 1322-25, book IV, rubric viii)

1. *(via aretina)* Via et strata que summitur a porta seu Burgo Sancti Niccholai per quam itur in Vallem Arni

2. *(via chiantegiana?)* Strata de Chianti que summit initium a pilastro ubi est crux ultra ponticellum de Ricorboli

3. *(via Pratese, Pistoiese per Peretola)* Strata per quam itur Pratum et incipit a ponc seu Burgho Sancti Pauli (via del Palazzuolo)

4. *(via Pratese, Pistoiese per Sesto)* Strata de Sexto per quam itur Pratum et incipit a porta de Campo Corbolino (via Faenza)

5. *(via Bolognese)* Strata per quam itur ad Sanctum Petrum de Sieve, versus Bononiam et versur Gallianum et Sanctam Aghatam, et incipit a porta seu Borgho Sancti Laurentii (via san Gallo)

6. *(via Faentina)* strata per quam itur ad Burghum Sancti Laurentii de Mucello (Borgo San Lorenzo), que summitur ab hospitali Sancti Galli (near the Porta San Gallo, and destroyed in 1529)

7. *(via Forlivese)* Strata per quam itur ad Pontem de Sieve et vadit versus Deconanum et incipit a Burgo Sancti Petri Maioris (Borgo Pietrapiana, La Croce)

8. *(via senese-Romana)* Strata per quam itur ad sanctum cassianum (san Casciano), Podium Boniççi (Poggibonsi) et Sanctum Donatum de Pocis (San Donato in Poggio – on the via romana)

9. *(via Volterrana)* Strata de Giogholis que summitur a porta seu Burgho Sancti Petri in Gattolino (via Romana?)

10. *(via Pisana)* Stata per quam itur Pisas que summitur a porta seu Burgo Sancti Frediani
These were also the streets that had to remain unencumbered and had to be maintained by those who benefited from them. They brought traffic in from the periphery to the built-up urban core within the twelfth-century walls. These were the major commercial routes of ritual movement, where visitors, foreigners, peasants, traders, and religious processions passed. Brothels were obstacles to the ideal of fluid trade routes and would have posed unnecessary distractions. They were hidden away, therefore, on secondary roads, out of sight of the main lines of communication that their presence would defile.\textsuperscript{240} However, as the treatise writers made clear (see note above) the brothels, much like women, had to be accessible to merchants, located near the piazza but hidden, concealed from view but close to the sites of power so they could be controlled. And in fact, they do not seem to have been formally banned from the city’s most sacred civic space, the Piazza della Signoria, until 1477.\textsuperscript{241} They were to be near markets and shops, performing the “triple functions of accessibility, invisibility, and control.”\textsuperscript{242}

It is important that these main streets were distinct from secondary streets that ramified from the major circulation routes and provided access to private property.\textsuperscript{243} Consequently, the bordelli would have fallen into the category of obstacles to the flow of goods, hindering the public sphere of men and their proper business on these thoroughfares but tolerated, implicitly, on streets that granted more privacy.

\textsuperscript{240} "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxi. Brackett points out that control and maintenance of prostitution was a general trend in Europe into the 15th century. The reasons for keeping it invisible had to do with the fact that the community was attempting to profit from female immorality. See Brackett, "The Florentine Onestà," 280.

\textsuperscript{241} Brackett, "The Florentine Onestà," 288.

\textsuperscript{242} Ghirardo, "Topography of Prostitution," 418. In his Hermaphroditus (II, 37), Panormita gives directions on how to get to Florence’s central bordello, with the suggestion of asking at the Mercato Vecchio, which was close by. This highlights the fact that although in the center of the city, bordelli were not marked with visible signs, but formed part of a more secret itinerary. This, along with two other brothels were planned by the comune in the early fifteenth century for the poorer neighborhoods of Santo Spirito and Santa Croce, but were never built. See Brackett, "The Florentine Onestà," 286. On prostitution in general in Florence in the Renaissance, see Maria Serena Mazzi, Prostituta e lenoni nella Firenze del Quattrocento, (Milan: Saggiatore, 1991).

\textsuperscript{243} Spilner, \textit{Ut Civitas Ampliætur}, 223.
Furthermore, straight and clear streets were tied to the moral apparatus of vision. They provided more safety because they did not hide acts or things, discouraging immoral behaviour by their very nature.\(^{244}\) The anxiety about keeping brothels out of the sight of the mechanism of trade and inter-urban movement also derives from the way in which city was a patchwork of engendered spaces. A woman in public was more dangerously feminine than she was when confined to the domestic sphere, due to the logic of the public street as the site of commercial exchange.\(^{245}\) Her presence would ultimately have a feminizing effect on space.

Already this points to a hierarchy of streets in which certain activities and bodies are restricted within certain zones. The communal palace, as the space of politics, was decidedly masculine. According to the anxieties of contemporaries, it contained spaces so sacred that all women were forbidden from entering.\(^{246}\) The presence of female bodies there caused a visible stain on the on the surfaces of the masculine spaces of politics, justice, and deliberation. Cristoforo Landino demonstrates the sacrosanct nature of the palazzo, which was the concrete expression of the heart of Florentine political identity: “won over by the allures of a young woman he transgressed to such an extent that, forgetting the majesty of that place, he brought her furtively into the palace, into his bedroom and kept her there for two days.

\(^{244}\) Ibid., 254. Spilner refers to an appeal by the nuns of Santa Caterina who requested a replacement for the street leading to their convent. They wanted it to be straight and clear, so that the nuns could be clearly seen, so that shameful and disgraceful acts would be discouraged. The issue for the government was also public safety that was aided by straight streets that denied the secrets hidden by blind corners, secrets that were part of Florentine daily life. See chapter 2. Santa Caterina di Cafaggio was located on the western side of Piazza San Marco, and the issue was the connection to the road leading to San Gallo, at the northern edge of the city. Paatz dates this Dominican tertiary convent only to the first decade of the 16\(^{th}\) century. See Paatz and Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz, I, 434-39. However, the reference quoted by Spilner comes from a provvisone, published by Gaye, from the year 1335. See Giovanni Gaye, Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI, 3 vols., (Florence: Giuseppe Molini, 1839), I:486.


\(^{246}\) Caggese, Podesta (1325), IV, lxxi; Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), II, iii (p. 77). See Rubinstein, Palazzo vecchio, 43, n. 331.
Certainly it is no small error to stain a place which should be full of solemn respect and reverence.  

Women were forbidden from all the spaces of communal government and justice. In the language of the statutes they were forbidden access the palace of the Priors, the Podestà, the Capitano, all courts, as well as the house or lodging of the Executor of the Ordinances of Justice. There were even those who were anxious about women participating in ritual celebrations. Outdoor celebrations such as weddings and parties, though domestic, familial affairs, were considered to take place within a more indeterminate and temporally bound space between the private and the public, limited as they were by public law to occur within certain prescribed times of the day. Thus, the honor of the woman was at risk in a space labeled public. The adjective “public” in this sense is modified by what it describes. Public streets are the engines of trade but “public” brothels are an object of shame because they define women’s subordinate position in these masculine spaces. 

Already in Sacchetti’s story, Coppo was enraged at women collectively descending into the piazza. Implicit is the injunction against moving through the city as a political statement. The orderly movement of men and women in the city was

---

247 “Èvinto dalle lusinghe d’una feminella è tanto trascorso che, dimenticatasi della maestà del luogo, la condusse furtim in Palagio et in camera sua due giorni la tenne. Errore certo non mediocre maculare el luogo e’ quale debba di religione et castità esser pieno.” Letter from Cristoforo Landino to Lorenzo de’ Medici, in which the former defends the lack of judgement of the commune’s herald, Francesco Filarete, who had entertained a woman in the palazzo for two nights. Rubinstein, *Palazzo vecchio*, 43, n. 331. See also Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit," 264. He notes Parenti’s anxiety about women appearing at the windows and staircases of the palace under the signoria of Piero Soderini, who were most likely attending to his wife and should have been left at home and not brought to the public palace (*publco palazzo*).

248 "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxxv. Ironically, women were only allowed inside any of these buildings when they were subject to prosecution, while if they were called to give legal testimony, it was taken at the doorway to the palace. Only in the case where a woman was to be restrained or tortured (*collata*) was she allowed entrance to the palace without being fined (*senza pena*).

249 Giovanni Morelli, in his diary, counsels that it is not such a good thing for women to attend weddings and other feasts, where there is usually a great deal of dishonor. Giovanni Morelli, "Ricordi," in *Mercanti scrittori: ricordi nella Firenze tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Vittore Branca, (Milan: Rusconi, 1986), 169.
ostensibly under the control of the government. However, the political act of Roman women taking to the streets in order to confront the politics of masculine movement through the city was certainly what enraged Coppo. In contrast, the ideal Giovanna of Coppo’s story in Boccaccio’s world is located by her proximity to the men to whom she owes loyalty. She is never really placed in the city and only concretely enters rural space when she meets Federigo later in her life where she is accompanied by an unnamed companion.

This proscription against women sat at the center of a complicated mix of laws and social norms that knocked, nudged and squeezed female bodies into a series of disconnected itineraries. In particular, there was a great deal of anxiety about keeping them out of the sight of men, and such fears chased rebellious women into liminal zones such as doorways and windows, literally, on the threshold of the architectural demarcation of space. Such zones were part of the official spatial construction of Florence, the zone between the public street and the private house and between temporal boundaries such as day and night.

Merchant writers, such as Paolo da Certaldo, participated in the production of an ideal woman in his Libro di Buoni Costumi. Her position in space marked her status as honorable or not, along with the way her body intermingled with the physical and civic world. She was to be enclosed, hidden from sight. She was not to be found outside the home, wandering up and down or here and there. She was neither to listen to nor watch idle men. In effect, she needed to be shielded from the sounds of the street while not projecting herself into the larger visually symbolic spaces of the city. All of this was to protect her chastity for the family honor and make her acceptable to

God and her future husband.  What all these proscriptions point to is a policing of the areas of the female body where elements of the public sphere – men, voices, images – held the potential to penetrate and through which that female body made contact with the world of men.

This anxiety concerning women’s sensorial fullness accords with Peter Stallybrass’s discussion of Bakhtin’s diacritical notion of the classical and grotesque body. The grotesque body, to which female bodies belong by “nature, is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits.” The surveillance of women concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, and the threshold of the house.” To this Paolo would add the ears, which also needed to be protected from unwanted aural penetration. In fact, only the nose remained as the possible site of the sensual engagement with the world. Moving from bodily orifices to architectural ones, it becomes clear that architecture was conceived as a space of enclosure and was constructed as much to contain and control, as to aestheticize the body’s natural tendency to expand itself into space to transgress other boundaries.

As this exploration of women in space has tried to show, the ways in which boundaries were laid, maintained, and enforced, was intimately connected with the way in which Florentines moved about their city, created images of themselves and interpreted those of others. Ostensibly instrumental laws had profound effects on urban culture and participated directly in its formation and spatial relations. These connections will be expanded in the chapter that follows, where Florentines overlaid the grid of borders and proscriptions that infused their built environment with a series of contingent fluid topographies that mapped out possible itineraries within a collective urban experience.

251 “...e sarebbero accettavi a Dio e a’ loro mariti e a l’alte persone con cui conversassono.” Ibid.
CHAPTER 2 THE SPACE OF EXPERIENCE

In chapter one I discussed the way borders and thresholds were constructed in Florence by governments who had both ideal and particularist motivations in the way the city was divided that created framework for urban encounters, urban vistas, the interaction of the public and the private. I then tried to show how women presented a discordant presence within this framework, testing its limits, exposing its assumptions, and unfixing its limits. Women’s footwear increased in height as a direct expression of wealth and social prestige, to the point where its absurdity is reflected in the image of such awkward movement. As this chapter will show, however, movement through the city on the part of men was integral to understanding the city, so that one needed to be able to move along streets, turn corners, backtrack, hide, and enter buildings at will. As a result of watching how Florentines moved through urban space, in both mental and actual itineraries, the city emerges as a system of spatial relations, a series of networks that overlapped each other. It traces the movement of bodies and information through these networks with the help of urban novellas, which shed light on the way Florentines made spatial connections in their urban world. It then turns to the merchant practice of *ragionare*, showing how such counting and measuring practices were a catalyst for new particular forms of spatial description, in which the city was subject to a range measuring strategies. Such “rational” constructions, found in diaries and chronicles, followed several models but were all attached, not to an idea of absolute value, where the city was a fixed ideal, but to a dynamic system of numerical relations.
2.1 Fluid Topographies

Movement was far more important for creating homogeneity in communities in the past, with much less pervasive forms of communication. In his work on the sociology of space, Simmel was referring to more dispersed communities but as Florence grew in size and territory, everything from “language, law, general ways of life, the style of buildings and objects” would have been needed to create a certain homogeneity.\(^{253}\) In the modern world social unity is possible even without the movement of people over large distances. It is established by things such as fixed institutions and written communication.\(^{254}\) Florence was, in theory, attempting to create such institutions, but within the city verbal communication seems to have predominated, and so movement was essential in maintaining a centralized administration – the *banditori* were emblematic of this phenomenon – as well as all those other more and less official communities.\(^{255}\) In general, both elites and the lowest elements of society were more mobile in the Middle Ages and early modern period than they are now because they had to bring letters, news, books, and ideas with them.\(^{256}\)

Consequently, this reflecting, reasoning, counting merchant was not the fixed ideal viewer of a panorama. Instead he was a body that moved, experiencing the city with all his senses, knowing the landscape from multiple, always partial vantage points. This moving subject, establishing relationships with the city and the objects found in it, forms the link between past and future spaces. He or she moves along streets along which

\(^{253}\) Simmel, "The Sociology of Space," 165; Simmel, "Der Raum," 503.

\(^{254}\) Simmel, "The Sociology of Space," 165; Simmel, "Der Raum," 503.

\(^{255}\) One way of helping to minimize the need for movement was communication by bells, which is discussed below, in chapter XX.

\(^{256}\) Simmel, "Der Raum," 503; Simmel, "The Sociology of Space," 165.
the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves… For many people, these are the predominant elements in their image [of the city]. People observed the city while moving through it, and along these paths the other environmental elements are arranged and related. 257

The changing modes of urban walking, wandering, searching, hiding, and communicating across the city provide moments in which the temporal distance between city spaces can be compared. They are also methods by which the historian can re-enliven lost spaces with the psychological and social exchanges that gave them meaning. In her work on Augustan Rome, Diane Favro reconstructs a walk through republican Rome on the eve of its demise, giving a palpable sense of the different sights and sounds that would emerge as one moved through the symbolic heart of the city. Such movement through space was always a journey through symbolic places. In an environment without street names, addresses, or maps, urban negotiation was always immediate and personal, forcing persons to conceptualize both urban monuments and spaces in a system of relationships to each other. 258 This required good environmental memories, memories that allowed one to make sense of an environment at the same time. The cityscape was a vast field of possible encounters to be experienced in movement, linking loci with imagines and grounding long stories in familiar locales. 259 Favro maintains that both upper class Romans and those with

257 Lynch, The Image of the City, 47.
little formal education were expert readers of their urban surroundings. The former were “predisposed to look for an underlying, coherent narrative in built environments.” The latter were involved in a culture of storytelling that relied on “visual images as organizational cues.” Familiar environments grounded stories in memory. Such locales, in ancient Rome, were also infused with anthropomorphized identities by linking them with *genii loci*, spirits that enlivened the most quotidian spaces so that every journey was a series of familiar encounters, of more or less comforting returns within a city that was understood as a living entity. Such a culture of storytelling was not entirely alien to the circulation of narratives in Florence. In such oral cultures there was a constant reciprocal dynamic of reinforcement between stories and the urban environment, through the body and memory of the city’s inhabitants. City spaces grounded urban narratives, while the city itself was overlaid with narratives that gave meaning to its topography.

There was something of this magical presence still functioning in the somewhat more rarified world of the Florentine merchant. Even without explicitly animating places with spirits, the same sites of daily experience were imbued with the memories of family, friends, past events, desires, moral judgments, fears, hopes, and strategies. As a moving subject in a dynamic dialogue with others, the Florentine merchant constructed an urban image in which to live, work, and love. Moreover, it is an implicit assumption of this analysis that city dwellers, and perhaps not only those, sanctified the places of their daily lives to give meaning to their experiences and construct an identity. Without this identity they would not be able to communicate

---

261 Ibid. It is not clear what came first, the idea that spatial memory could aid in rhetoric, or vice versa.
effectively with the people they encountered out in the streets, with the power relations that enveloped them, or the past to which they belonged.

This spatial experience of the city by a seeing, thinking, feeling subject in movement, one that organized its contents, measured its surfaces, and set the built environment in relation to itself, was the subject of a remarkable lecture given by art historian August Schmarsow in 1893. As the theme for his inaugural lecture as chair of art history at the University of Leipzig, Schmarsow chose the “essence” of architectural creation.264 For Schmarsow, what Florentines were doing in taking account of the city was part of a much larger aesthetic relationship to architecture. The phenomenon of architecture itself resided in the experience of space, which was a bodily experience dependent on sight but also on the body’s natural desire to expand into the space around it, transforming it in the process. Our sense of space (Raumgefühl) comes from an intuition of the space around us. This space accompanies us, as it were (or we bring it with us).265 We always wrap it around us, carrying it with us as the liminal zone that acts as the buffer between us and the world. Therefore, we are always at the center of these moving coordinates, which is a useful fantasy for orienting ourselves in space.

Architecture is the “creantress” of space. It orders the natural world with ideal forms.266 However, it does not come into being without a moving subject to experience it since its purpose is to enclose us, as if it were an embodied, permanent

264 Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung. Published in English as August Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," in Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893, ed. Robert Vischer, Harry Francis Mallgrave, and Eleftherios Ikonomou, (Santa Monica, CA; Chicago: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1994), 281-97.
266 Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung, 14. Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," 288. The original German term is Raumgestalterin, and the English translators maintain the gendered sense of the terms by using the word “creantress of space”, although the effects of this are not discussed.
analogy to the space we create and transform around ourselves. The innovation, in
terms of the “space debate” in art history at the end of the nineteenth century, was the
way that Schmarsow was able to do away with style and form in discussions of
architecture.267 He relocated the art of building as the experience of inner space,
enlarging it even to include urban planning, gardens, streets, and agriculture, “all of
which extend the signs of our cultural labor.”268 Architecture was the site of an
exchange but what is of most concern here is the way that architecture requires the
movement of the subject in order to apprehend it, either in person or as a mental
projection. We always give space a direction because of our bodily orientation; limbs
and face determine the front and back. This directional quality is what transforms
spatial enclosure into “living space.”269

Schmarsow is explicit about how we relate to closed interior spaces, into
which we transfer our own sense of movement as the condition of spatial experience:

The linguistic terms that we use for space, such as
“extension,” “expanse,” and “direction,” suggest
continuous activity on our part as we transfer our own
feeling as movement directly to the static spatial form.
We cannot express its relation to ourselves in any other
way than by imagining that we are in motion, measuring
the length, width, and depth, or by attributing to the
static lines, surfaces, and volumes the movement that
our eyes and our kinesthetic sensations suggest to us,
even though we survey the dimensions while standing
still. The spatial construct is a human creation and
cannot confront the creative or appreciative subject as if
it were a cold, crystallized form.270

267 On this debate see Vischer, Mallgrave, and Ikonomou, Empathy, form, and space, 1-85.
268 Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung, 25. Schmarsow, “The Essence of
Architectural Creation,” 294.
269 Vischer, Mallgrave, and Ikonomou, Empathy, form, and space, 61.
270 Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung, 19. “Schon die sprachlichen
Bezeichnungen räumlicher Weite, die wir gebrauchen, wie „Ausdehnung“, „Erstreckung“, „Richtung“
deuten auf die fortwirkende Tätigkeit des Subjektes, das sofort sein eigenes Gefühl der Bewegung auf
die ruhende Raumform überträgt, und ihre Beziehungen zu ihm nicht anders ausdrücken kann, als wenn
Taking account of the space around us is an aesthetic act, one that produces knowledge and space itself, somewhere to be satisfied, at home in, wherein we are the center of a finite universe set within other worlds. Schmarsow’s subject, therefore, is a moving body: arms outstretched, head turning, expanding to fill the space around it, and measuring the limits of the architectural or urban enclosure. This beholder remains the nexus of a convergence of directional lines of movement, telescoping in and out, sending out sonic reference points, incorporating a succession of spatial vectors over time and through space.

This is far removed from the ideal, monocular view implied by single point perspective, or the view of city as a symbolic whole. Such a totalizing view that subjects the variety of daily life – its random encounters and its local memories – to a fantasy of oblivion requires a necessary detachment from the city, in Michel de Certeau’s words, and points toward a totalitarian conception and control of space.\(^{271}\) This fixed image of the city is tempered, on the other hand, by movement. Walking allows inhabitants at the street level to reinvent the urban narrative anew each day in its specificity, with every encounter in any itinerary through the city. Walking, for de Certeau, functions in an analogous way to verbal utterances, allowing one to lay claim to the city, or parts within it, as a daily practice.\(^{272}\)


Although in the context of Florence at the threshold of the Renaissance the application of de Certeau’s dialectic between a totalizing authority on the one hand, and ground level resistance on the other, would historically distort the complicated social relations between government and governed in the city’s experiment in bringing about a unified city, it still provides a useful model of how movement and orientation in space helped to define one’s relationships to others and the city. In Florence, de Certeau’s analysis of the act of walking as the basis for perceiving helps the historian understand how even those completely excluded from officially participating in the creation and maintenance of the physical shape of the city effectively molded space according to their needs in actual practice. Both magnates from above as well as wool workers from below laid claim to the spaces of their city and understood the critical importance of how one moved through it. In other words, no matter what the form of coercion, prohibition or regulation, Florentines always attempted to find their own route around, within, or against such laws as a way of shaping space from multiple and fluid perspectives.\footnote{Laws concerning the movement of magnates will be discussed below. The way in which the Ciompi used urban space to successfully gain an urban voice will be discussed in a later chapter.}

In fact, any overall unified order of the urban world would be an imposed fantasy on the part of the beholder, who, according to philosopher Carl Stumpf, perceives the visual field as it changes through movement. There is no practice of social memory without implied movement through space. Our mind retains the memories of a whole succession of images, uniting them continually with newly perceived spaces to create a coherent, stitched narrative.\footnote{Carl Stumpf, quoted in Vischer, Mallgrave, and Ikonomou, \textit{Empathy, form, and space}, 60. Just such a succession of familiar images appearing to a moving subject but as a mental journey is the basis of the art of memory outlined by ancient authors in their discussions of rhetoric. See above.} Just as the eye fills in blind spots with information around them, so too, the unified vision of the built environment is none other than a stitching together of a series of visual and bodily
encounters with space, over time, in movement, all the while measuring and counting. The earth or ground is the fixed reference point for all subjects, and is the common ground for architecture as well.

However, in terms of historical experience, this stitching together is not a neutral action of synthetic cognition. The experience of space is necessarily connected to the interests of specific subjects who define themselves in the social order through their own spatial identities in relation to the built environment. Schmarsow’s aesthetic Raumgefühl can be historicized by the way Florentines infused socio-political and personal vectors into the experience of space. In order to explore the historical relationship between space and movement, picking up on Schmarsow’s expanded field of architecture as connected to streets, city plans, etc., the following excursus traces the links between collective memory, social ritual, urban narratives, and political events.

2.2 Understanding Urban space with the Florentine Merchant

The related disciplines of Florentine urban and architectural history have tended to create two distinct images of the early Renaissance city. Urban history has traced patterns of expansion, changing demographics, and legislation that regulated an emerging public space. Research in architectural history has focused more on individual monuments, architects, and institutions.275 The former represents the city as

275 Needless to say the literature on these subjects is vast. The following is a representative sample of key works in urban history include: Sznura, L’espansione urbana; Wolfgang Braunfels, Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst in der Toskana, 4., korrigierte und erw. Aufl. ed., (Berlin: Mann, 1979); Giovanni Fanelli, Firenze, (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1980); Eckstein, The Distric of the Green Dragon; Spilner, Ut Civitas Ampliatur; Guido Pampaloni, Firenze al tempo di Dante: documenti sull’urbanistica fiorentina, (Rome: Ministero dell’Interno, 1973); Guidoni, Firenze nei secoli XIII e XIV. For a discussion of urban policies in relation to political history see Najemy, "Florentine Politics and Urban Spaces," 19-54. For a historical study of urban demographics see A. Stella, La révolte des Ciompi. Les hommes, les lieux, le travail, (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1993). More general works on Italian urbanism include: Enrico Guidoni and Angela Marino, Storia dell’urbanistica, (Rome: Laterza, 1982);
a combination of comparable social groups and statistical sets (Figure 2.1). In the latter, we are confronted with stranded monuments in a massive urban void (Figure 2.1a).

How were these two ideas of the city linked at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance? The answer lies in following Florentines as they moved through the city, negotiating their city by constructing personal itineraries. They created mental maps in which the most quotidian spaces were charged with meaning. They understood that social and familial relations were constantly shifting and that these shifts had to be carefully recorded, interpreted and set in relation to one’s own particular psychological and social location in the city. Merchant diaries show how the city’s inhabitants constantly sought to make sense of their urban world. In addition, the stories they read, primarily those found in Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron or Franco Sacchetti’s Il Trecentonovelle also bore directly on their practices of spatial interpretation – both will be explored in this chapter. For the historian of architecture, these texts show how the meanings of both monumental and everyday spaces were not necessarily mandated by architects, patrons, or urban legislation, but by the everyday experiences of more and less ordinary people interacting with them. This demonstrates the value of studying non-elite culture for the way in which Florence emerges as a contested site and a field of shared meanings. These spaces were defined by the sound of bells, by the proximity of kin, friends and enemies. They were brought to life by itinerant preachers and professional storytellers, practical jokes and public ceremonies. However, such spaces were also

276 Christine Klapisch-Zuber, for example, has shown how the merchant Lapo Niccolini was careful to record the evolving geography of alliances created by his family marriages. See Klapisch-Zuber, "Kin, Friends, and Neighbors."
the site of local memories in which symbolic meaning was never fully fixed. Therefore, Florentines paid careful attention to how they presented themselves on the street and in the square, prudent in what they spoke about, where they said it, and to whom.

This chapter is concerned with space, not so much as a void around buildings or a receptacle into which experience is inserted, but as a dynamic network of interrelated and conflicting forces of varying mechanisms of relative opacity and transparency. It assumes a circumambient space in which the body lives, what Richard Etlin calls “existential space,” in light of August Schmarsow’s formulation of a flexible bubble of space that we carry around with us and which constitutes the primary means through which architectural space is perceived.277 Keeping in mind Edward Casey’s rejection of an absolute space in the medieval imagination,278 the new economic and political spaces created, maintained, defended, and transformed by Florentine society confirm Edward Casey’s claim for the rejection of absolute space in the middle ages. Instead, these compartmentalized spaces participated in the creation of new forms of urban spatial relations and point towards the split between imagined and lived space outlined by Henri Lefebvre.279 Therefore, not just different types of spaces converged in Florentine urban context, but different categories of space – personal, aesthetic, social, economic, and political – combined to make up the dense spatial networks of early modern Florence.

In a more localized frame of reference, Richard Trexler argues that it was not space that Florentines sacralized but buildings and objects. City spaces were profane and therefore, “legitimate dumping grounds for material and bodily waste; a ditch

---

278 Casey, "The Ascent of Infinite Space."
without a coat of arms or a cross was a place to urinate.\textsuperscript{280} However, this is to misunderstand how space was created. It was never an abstract category but always carried with it an idea of “placeness.” It interacted with coats of arms so that space was a function of the location of those arms. Profane space was not the absence of sacralization but simply another kind and urinating in it or on it was always a meaningful choice. To be sure, the incessant legislative attempts to keep public roads clear suggests that such “public” networks did not contain an inherently sacred character but at certain moments, and in memorial imagination, such rituals as the festival of San Giovanni or the city’s several official palii must have created zones of symbolic meanings that were analogous to sacred objects but lacked their presumed permanence as “holy things,” (Figure 2.2). But the temporal dimension of spatial sacredness was one of its most important components; that is, it could be manipulated and transformed through experience by different users. Non-sacred space, moreover, was not simply “a place to urinate,” since such bodily effluence was part of an individual’s relation to the urban environment. Evoking the city walls as the “first ritual edifice of the commune,” Trexler points the way to the more general elemental sacred space that was enclosed by them.\textsuperscript{281} He even alludes to a hierarchy of sacred spaces, such as the sanctification of the Piazza della Signoria when the ringhiera became both a symbolic and real altar by uniting the multiple symbolic frames of the Palace of the Priors – tower, arms, flags, seals, trumpets, and bells – to the space of the piazza itself. What Trexler does not acknowledge is that, even though objects and buildings were sacred, they needed space to enact their holy character, to set it into action, to make it visible and believable.\textsuperscript{282} The spaces beyond the official ritual

\textsuperscript{280} Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 47.
\textsuperscript{281} ibid.
\textsuperscript{282} The Madonna of Impruneta was always miraculous but was only set in motion by her procession to Florence and through the city.
network were, moreover, no less meaningful, if less spectacular. The workaday spaces of random encounters did not simply disappear but were caught up in the city’s larger overlapping symbolic spatial networks.

2.3 Institutionalizing Conflict within Urban Planning Policies

Apart from defining borders as discussed in chapter one, Florentine statutes laid out the basis of an official hierarchy of spaces in an attempt to control access and regulate movement. A certain official anxiety was infused into Florentine urban space by the memory of a culture of violence that dated back to the wars between Guelf and Ghibelline forces in the early thirteenth century. Clashes between these elite, rural based families created resentment on the part of the non-elite population of the city, who, according to Giovanni Villani (c.1280-1348), stood apart and united for the honor of the republic.\(^{283}\) Among the ways that the Popolo attempted to counter this urban condition was to institutionalize the long tradition of political conflict in Florence into urban policies themselves, so that they that hovered between the extremes of architectural construction and destruction.

The origins of the Guelf/Ghibelline struggles were turned into an urban narrative whose memory was permanently attached to certain places in the city that preserved it in the collective consciousness of Florentines.\(^{284}\) The story of the Buondelmonte murder is an account of a vendetta that became emblematic of magnate


\(^{284}\) For a fuller discussion of the Buondelmonte murder and its relationship to urban space and movement see “Percorrere la Città” below.
arrogance, buffoonery and violence that was leading Florence into civic disaster.\textsuperscript{285} An offence at a dinner party convened to celebrate a knighthood descended into insults of honor and a stabbing of one of the guests. In order to appease the honor of the insulted knight, Oddo Arrighi, a marriage contract was drawn up between Messer Buonelmonte de’ Buonelmonti, who had attacked Arrigo on behalf of a friend at dinner, and Oddo’s niece.

The place where the marriage betrothal was supposed to take place was on the north side of the Ponte Vecchio, in the heart of the neighborhood where the Amidei and the Arrighi were dominant families (Figure 2.3).\textsuperscript{286} The spaces between these family compounds functioned as neighborhood courtyards, as the family’s private life spilled out into what would be defined by the popolo as a public way. Therefore, within this story, this section of the street functioned as both exterior and interior space, depending on events occurring there. As N.P.J. Gordon points out, this place was a major communication gateway leading to and from Rome, Siena, and Pisa over the Ponte Vecchio, linking those centers to the heart of the old city within the Roman \textit{castrum} and the eleventh-century walls.\textsuperscript{287} At a time when the public world of the piazza was intricately bound up in the private rituals of families, the marriage was planned to take place around the area of Porta Santa Maria where no clear distinction was made between public and domestic, or private space.

\textsuperscript{285} The chronicle in which the Buonelmonte murder is recounted can be found in "Die Sogenannte Chronik des Brunetto Latini," in \textit{Quellen und Forschungen zur ältesten Geschichte der Stadt Florenz}, ed. Otto von Hartwig, (Marburg: Elwert, 1875-80), pt. II, 223-35.

\textsuperscript{286} Obviously, the bridge is not the current Ponte Vecchio, constructed after the flood of 1333. The chronicle of the Buonelmonte Murder, according to Nicholas Gordon, was written in the early 14th century, when the bridge was still the wooden precursor to the present stone structure and was the only crossing of the Arno around Florence. For a history of the Ponte Vecchio and the structures that preceded it, see Theresa Flanigan, "The Ponte Vecchio: Building an Urbanized Bridge in Early Modern Florence" (Ph. D. Thesis, New York University, 2006).

When the Ghibelline faction, associated with imperial interests in Italy, defeated their Guelf rivals in 1248, forcing them to retreat from the city, they “sowed the seeds of revenge by destroying many Guelf towers and palaces.” Villani describes how, in one case, the tower named Guardamorto, because it rose over the numerous tombs clustered around the baptistery, was destroyed in such a way as to fall on the baptistery itself, as an added insult to the city. At that time the baptistery was the most important monumental and most visible building in the city. Before the construction of the new town hall (Palazzo Vecchio, 1299-1315) and the cupola of the duomo (1420-1436), it was the baptistery that defined the city’s visible image and urban profile (Figure 2.4). Therefore, this deliberate act to deface it would be understood by popolani such as Villani as the Ghibellines’ total lack of self-identity with the city and its architecture, the place where all Florentines became Christians and citizens.

---

289 Villani describes many of the towers and who they belonged to in this chapter, as well as the urban warfare in which they engaged. In addition, his tendency to ragionare leads him to measure and compare the heights of those towers in the context of the clash of powerful families. “...da una vicinanza ad altra, e alle torri l’una a l’altra (che molte n’avea in Firenze in quegli tempi, e alte da C braccia in suoso); e con manganelle, e altri edifici si combatteano insieme di di e di notte... Ancora mostraron o i Ghibellini maggiore empiezza, per cagione che i Guelfi faceano di loro molto capo a la chiesa di San Giovanni, e tutta la buona gente v’usava la domenica mattina, e faceansi i matrimon. Quando vennero a disfare le torri de’ Guelfi, intra l’altra una molto grande e bella ch’era in sulla piazza di San Giovanni a l’entrare del corso degli Adimari, e chiamavasi la torre del Guardamorto, però che anticamente tutta la buona gente che moria si soppeviva a San Giovanni, i Ghibellini facendo tagliare dal piè la detta torre, si lla feciono puntellare per modo che, quando si mettesse il fuoco a’ puntelli, cadesse in su la chiesa di Santo Giovanni; e cosi fu fatto. Ma come piacque a Dio, per reverenza e miracolo del beato Giovanni, la torre, ch’era alta CXX braccia, parve manifestamente, quando venne a cadere, ch’ella schifasse la santa chiesa, e rivolsesi, e cadde per lo di sotto della piazza, onde tutti i Fiorentini si maravigliaro, e il popolo ne fu molto allegro. E nota che poi che lla città di Firenze fu rifatta, non v’era disfatta casa niuna, e allora si comincio la detta maladizione di disfarle per gli Ghibellini” (...from one neighborhood to the other, and with the towers, one to the other (that many there were in Florence in those times, as high as 100 braccia); and with mangonels, and from other buildings they fought each other both day and night... Still, the Ghibellines displayed great wickedness, since the Guelfs would gather at the church of San Giovanni, all the good people used to go there on Sunday morning to celebrate weddings. When they came to dismantle the towers of the Guelfs, there was among the others one that was very tall and beautiful in the Piazza di San Giovanni at the entrance of the Corso degli Adimari [via de’ Calzaiuoli], and it was called the tower of Guardamorto, since traditionally all the good people that died were interred at San Giovanni, the cutting out the foundations of the said tower, they propped it up in such a way that when they set fire to the
Such symbolic and calculated acts participated in a long tradition of architectural destruction. The fortified properties of the elite families that battled for control of Florence as far back as the twelfth century were a measure of their power. In 1177, in the midst of intense political struggles between the Uberti and other elements of the inner circle of consular families, these encounters involved barricading streets between warring neighbors and mounting assault mansonels on fortified towers to destroy the surrounding architectural fabric. However, these accepted methods of urban destruction did not prove sufficient in this particularly fierce exchange. Two fires broke out in the city that year and were generally considered a targeted attack based on the way the flames devastated the properties of Uberti enemies.\textsuperscript{290} The Uberti had hoisted the flag of the empire in their struggles, demonstrating how even such internecine violence was symbolically linked to a larger idea of a more global authority through the use of visual signs.\textsuperscript{291} Eventually, this partisanship would be organized into the Guelf and Ghibelline factions under whose terms the towers and palaces of the Guelfs were destroyed in 1248.

When the regime of the Primo Popolo consolidated its power in 1250 it brought a revised vision of how to regulate and harness the power of the urban environment. They also, in effect, succeeded in institutionalizing a Florentine urban tradition. The expropriation of property, the destruction of architecture, and the radical reconfiguration of the urban environment would become an entrenched, if piecemeal, weapon in the arsenal of an expanding popolo. This practice would also

\textsuperscript{290} Davidsohn, \textit{Storia}, vol. 1, 825.
\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
guarantee that “public” space was not a neutral zone, but a politicized space at the
very heart of social exchange and political conflicts. It was also partly in response to
the situation in which the emerging popolo found itself, hounded as they were from
place to place by the Uberti clan as they sought safe space in which to hold council.292
In a series of council meetings held in properties belonging to Anchioni family and
then the Badia, the city’s oldest Benedictine monastery and an institution deeply
involved in the city’s urban affairs, this regime then attended to the problem of a new
geography of the city.293 The institution of twenty militia companies, each with its
own particular standard and defined by local neighborhoods, linked those
neighborhoods together into a larger urban whole while encouraging certain
topographically based allegiances.294 In response to the practice of destroying enemy
property, the popolo claimed that privilege for the state, trimming down the physical
expression of private power across the board. They passed laws with profound
implications for a city that had been defined by a vertical profile of densely packed
family towers, some reaching a height of 120 braccia (Figure 2.5). They were

casa degli Uberti e tutti gli altri nobili ghibellini tiranneggiavano il popolo di gravi torsioni e forze
e ingiurie. Per la qual cosa i buoni uomini di Firenze rauenandosi insieme a romore, e feciono loro capo a
la chiesa di San Firenze; e poi per la forza degli Uberti non v'ardio a stare, si n'andarono a stare a la
chiesa de' frati minori a Santa Croce, e ivi stando armati, non s'ardivano di tornare a l loro case, acciò
che dagli Uberti e gli altri nobili, avendo lasciat e' arme, non fosson rotti, e da le signorie condannati”
(…and beyond that, those of the house of Uberti and all the other noble Ghibellines heavily tyrannized
the Popolo with extortions, overwhelming force, and injuries. On account of which the good men of
Florence gathered together in revolt, and chose their leader in the church of San Firenze; and then due
to the strength of the Uberti they dared not stay there, and they went to the church of the friars minor at
Santa Croce, and there remaining armed, they dared not return to their houses, so that by the Uberti and
the other nobles, having set down their arms, they were not defeated, and by the signorie condemned).
293 “Si n'andaro armati alle case dell' Anchioni da San Lorenzo, c'h'erano molto forti, e qui armati
durando, co'loro forza feciono XXXVI caporalì di popolo, e levaron la signoria a la podestà ch'allora
era in Firenze, e tutti gli uficiali rimossono. E ciò fatto, sanza contasto si ordinaron e feciono popolo
con certi nuovi ordini e statuti, e elessiono capitano di popolo messer Uberto da Lucca; e fu il primo
capitano di Firenze; e feciono XII anziani di popolo, due per ciascuno sexto, i quali guidavan il popolo
e consigliavan il detto capitano, e ricogliansì nelle case della Badia sopra la porta che vae a Santa
Margherita, e tornavansi alle loro case a mangiare e a dormire.” By these conditions the government
was forced to negotiate the spaces of the city right from its inception, learning, certainly, how to read
294 Ibid.
ordered cut down to fifty braccia (29 meters, 96 feet) while the law also imposed the authority of the public tower of the Palazzo del Popolo (Bargello), whose height could not be challenged by any other tower (Figure 4a). In one remarkable legislative stroke they sought to deny the elites the means to wage effective battles, level the architectural playing field, and turn what was a partisan method of urban design into a universal privilege of the state. It turned factionalism’s own weapons against itself through the usurping of urban space into a “public” realm of universal laws.

In 1258, the Uberti would suffer the consequences of their own tactics turned into government policy. The family was involved in a failed attempt to take the city and members were called to explain themselves to the authorities. When they failed to appear, the Podestà sent members of his guard to the towered complex of the family, between what was then San Romolo and San Piero Scheraggio, within the present Piazza della Signoria. The guards met with angry fire, and the cavaliere and two berrovieri were killed in the ensuing exchange. The popolo rose up in anger, entering the houses and killing a member of the Uberti family. Two others were arrested, tortured into confessions, and executed in the piazza at Orsanmichele. The properties of those involved in the conspiracy were confiscated and demolished (Figure 2.5a). This act, however, distinguished itself from mob destruction by formalizing itself into an official ritual. Three notaries had to superintend the destruction of the palaces and record everything accurately in their registers.

---

295 “E come il popolo ebbe presa signoria e stato, si ordinaro per più forza di popolo che tutte le torri di Firenze, che ce n'avea grande quantità alte CXX braccia, si tagliassono e tornassono alla misura di L braccia e non più, e così fu fatto; e delle pietre si murò poi la città oltrarno.” Ibid. Note the practical but symbolic reuse of the building material to fortify the city itself, in a gesture toward public, rather than private defences. The original document no longer exists but this particular provision is repeated in the statutes of 1325. See Caggese, Podestà (1325), IV, 41. Here, the common reference point for maximum height was the campanile of Santo Stefano.


297 Ibid., vol. 2, 653. At the time, no one could have conceived that they were laying the foundations for the Piazza della Signoria.
The decisions that emanated from the Primo Popolo would reach far into the future, guiding republican administrations as they continued to regulate space in terms of social conflicts. For example, special protections were made for the Popolo assembling and there was a strict spatial separation imposed between magnates and popolani at times of civic unrest that was signaled by a bell that rang from a tower near the Ponte Vecchio. At such moments, the nature of the urban environment was transformed into carefully policed zones that separated certain defined groups and cleared the streets of the Popolo’s enemies. Such spatial separation was reiterated later in the two sets of statutes redacted in the fourteenth century, prohibiting the presence of members of one class in the households of members of the other. Such laws were linked to the political conflict between the popolo and the elites, the latter a class that would be formally created, named, and disenfranchised in the 1293 Ordinances of Justice.

In the late thirteenth century, magnates were to be confined to their neighborhoods when the militias of the popolo were assembling. They were quarantined within spaces where they were not likely to do damage. The law seems predicated on the fact that magnate enemies were distributed in different neighborhoods so that restraining their movement prevented them from taking effective action, while the popolo reserved for itself the ability to maintain links established across the whole city.

298 For a description of these laws see Ibid., vol. 2, 512. Note that it was under this regime where the idea of legally and physically separating the magnates from popolani originated. See also Daniela De Rosa, *Alle origini della repubblica fiorentina: dai consoli al "primo popolo" (1172-1260)*, (Florence: Arnaud, 1995).
300 See the laws listed and described below in “Percorrere la città.”
In 1293, the Ordinances repeated the prohibition on *popolani* visiting the houses of magnates, but this time the law does not make an exception for one’s own neighborhood.302 These also formalized the spatial relations of the magnates with respect to the sites of government. Magnates were forbidden to approach the palace of the Podestà with or without horses when the communal courts were in session.303 They were forbidden access to the councils of the Capitano, wherever they were held, unless their presence was expressly requested.304 Conversely, however, the Capitano was explicitly required, under the authority of the Standard of Justice, to move against any magnates in any place of the city.305 Those same spaces, however, were immediately off-limits to any magnate once the Capitano had sanctified it by arriving there with that very standard. Clearly, the movement of the flag was crucial for creating temporary zones that excluded magnates. The laws created multiple layers of legal spaces based on certain conditions that arose from the anxiety over controlling magnates in the city. When bells rang and flags were visible, Florentines had to read their urban landscape with great care to determine who ought and who ought not to be caught in certain places. When they heard the bell ring *a martello* by the Podestà or Capitano, it meant that a grave crime had been committed, summoning the militia to destroy the malefactor’s property.306 The development of these laws would be repeated and expanded in the fourteenth-century statutes. Temporal borders were immediately erected at times of insurrection and the architectural threshold was charged with giving access to some, while denying it to others.307

303 Caggese, *Podestà (1325)*, III, lxxxii (p. 222).
305 Ibid., rub. xlvi, p. 423.
307 These prohibitions are outlined more fully in “Percorrere la Città” below.
Therefore, from the spatial politics of the primo popolo a long tradition of laws developed that concerned the limits and thresholds that coordinated concrete spatial relations between classes, regulating movement of magnates, curbing their sphere of influence by restricting their movements in space. In the end, the laws that created zones off limits to the grandi were the ways in which the new regime found practical responses to elite violence. They recognized the way in which power was embedded in urban space and developed ways to combat these internal enemies through the regulation, division, and hierarchical ordering of space.

However, the web of hierarchies created through these struggles would develop into a semiotics of space that responded to the social identities of those who “interpreted” that space. As Lauro Martines has remarked, Florentine middle- and upper class families derived their identity from “property, trade, kinship or neighborhood ties,” where their attachment to a locality summed up in the well-used triad of parenti, amici vicini. Much of this information could be derived visually from their dress and audibly from their forms of address to others. Public space itself “assigned or elicited true identity.” One’s dress, tools, spaces of work and leisure all combined to define who one was as a function of one’s visibility to others. Without these visual codes, Florentines began to lose their sense of self. If no one recognized or acknowledged you, you weren’t who you thought you were. Interrogating aspects of how such identities were indeed derived from an urban spatial rhetoric has generated the main themes of this chapter.

---

308 Both the magnate propensity to violence and the Popolo’s paranoia of it are mocked in a story by Sacchetti, where a certain Ugoletto answers his door at night with a sword in response to the provocations of Ballerino, who howls in fright like an injured dog. Alarmed by the scream, the night watch intervenes and Ugoletto is fined under the Ordinances. See Sacchetti, Il Trecentonovelle, LXXVIII.
309 Lauro Martines, Strong Words: Writing & Social Strain in the Italian Renaissance, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 175.
310 See Martines on pronouns in Ibid., 171-72.
311 On the public nature of identity, see the discussion of the novella Il grasso legnaiuolo in chapter 4 below.
2.4 Piaze, Streets, Networks

Be banished to strange streets!
Benedetto Accolti\textsuperscript{312}

The ideal circulatory system to which the statutes addressed themselves was one of straight streets, uncluttered by immobile objects or lurking persons. It was efficient and spectacular, abundant and unified, transparent and beautiful. Its citizens easily navigated through it while it carefully defined the relationship between public duties and private rights. How did Florentines respond to these demands and what kinds of networks, topographies, or systems did they overlay onto those they were participating in constructing. This section explores the way in which the city was a network of streets and squares that facilitated or hindered the movement of people, goods, and information within official channels and in overlapping informal but no less customary ones to see how Florentines negotiated such networks.

Imagine a Florentine returning to the city from the countryside to the south. He might be arriving from such communities as Giogoli, San Donato, or San Casciano, whose roads all led to the Porta and Borgo of San Piero Gattolino, now known as the Porta Romana (Figures 2.6, 2.6a). It was roads such as these that led out from the city’s gates into the territory beyond the city. They linked the city to its vital system of farms, villas, religious institutions, pievi, as well as to foreign territories. Up to a certain point the commune placed the maintenance of these roads and bridges under its own jurisdiction, requiring all residents of the contado and distretto of

\textsuperscript{312} Quoted in Martines, \textit{Strong Words}, 194.
Florence to correctly pave and maintain them. They had to be kept free and clear, and it was up to the city’s officials to determine what communities had what responsibilities. This was the beginning of a network of public thoroughfares, bridges, gates, water sources, ditches, piazze, and markets that made up the city’s spatial networks and facilitated the flow of bodies, goods, food, animals, and the transmission of news, rumors, gossip, and misinformation.

These roads would have brought the traveler, whether on foot or horse to the city’s gate, emblazoned with the city’s coats of arms, patrolled by the city’s guards, and attended by tax officials. These gates punctuated the proud new rhythm of towers and walls of the city’s newest defensive system and urban borders. They had to regulate all goods and people coming in as well as going out. Once inside, our traveler would have been confronted with the continuation of the regional road, now

313 Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), IV, 8 (p. 158). Florentine statutes identify ten vie mastre and usually note where they begin as well as their destination. They are the same streets listed in the law concerning the prohibition of brothels along them but are described as roads that lead out into the countryside from city gates, rather than as internal streets that led to gates. See Chapter 1, “The Gendered Street,” above. The law describes two roads that led from the Porta Romana: “Strata (via Romana) per quam iter ad sanctum cassianum (San Casciano), Podium Bonici (Poggibonsi) et Sanctum Donatum de Pocis (San Donato in Poggio).” “Strata (via Volterrana) ad Giogholis (Giogoli) que summitur a porta sue Burgho Sancti Petri in Gattolino (via Romana/Senese).” The vernacular of the 1355 statutes repeats the law: “La strada per la quale si va a San Casciano e Poggibonsi e San Donato im pozio; la strada di Giogoli la quale si prende dala porta overo borgo di Sampiero ingattolino” (The road by which one goes to San Casciano and Poggibonsi and San Donato in Poggio; the road to Giogoli, which one takes from the gate or neighborhood of San Piero Gattolino). By the time these streets were defined in the 1322-25 statutes, construction on the final circuit of walls was coming to a close. For example, the street that led to San Piero a Sieve, towards Bologna, began (incipit) at the porta or Borgo San Lorenzo, which recalled the twelfth-century circuit of walls. This is repeated in the 1355 statues, after the new walls had been completed. Similarly, the road to Pontassieve began at borgo San Piero Maggiore, where there was a gate though it is not mentioned. Therefore, even though the walls expanded and incorporated these main arteries into the city, these roads maintained their integrity from the point where they emerged from the 12th century grid. This was the case even though new public roads, such as the via Palazzuolo, were already laid out by 1279, possibly in anticipation of the new gates. This situation blurred the boundaries between urban and extra urban streets See also Libro vecchio, 9.

transformed into an urban thruway. Along this road would have been houses, palaces, shops with artisans working, signs designating the location of certain crafts, taverns, as well as people moving about. These were the principal routes of what David Friedman defines as a tripartite scheme of public, neighborhood, and private streets. *Viae publicae* were the “real theater of government activity.” They were, in general, the widest by law, accessible to all, and led, via city gates, beyond the confines of the city itself. In Florence, these were the streets whose often gentle sinuous curves intersected with what remained of the roman grid and led out to the *vie mastre* indentified in chapter one (Figure 2.6b). *Vie vicinali*, on the other hand, led into neighborhoods, or into dead ends (Figure 2.6c).

The bodies that moved between public and private roads were crossing boundaries that was, as the previous chapter has shown, never fully fixed but continually shifting. It became clear in the previous chapter that boundaries between public and private space were a constant focus of negotiation. It was subject to alterations and adjustments, and the surveyors, as the official topographers of the commune, were only one among many forces in play. Boundaries shifted under certain forces that were constantly exerting pressure from conflicting domains: public, private, collective and personal. Consequently, the ideal line that divided the private home from the public street was, in the eyes of surveyors and government officials, a straight one. Such a line was, in theory at least, most easily maintained, extended and reconfirmed.

Such lines are identified as both useful and beautiful. Never explicitly defined, these concepts of utility and beauty were, nevertheless, often paired,

---

315 Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 70.
316 See Ibid., 69. The distinction between private and neighborhood streets is difficult to fix for Florence.
implying that the one guaranteed the other, and vice versa. This was the case even if, admittedly, they functioned also within the formulaic rhetoric of the Florentine chancery.318 According to Spilner, “a city of broad, straight streets attested to the government’s authority and ability to impose and maintain order – not only of the urban fabric, but in the civil life of the community.”319 The straight line (recta linea), however, was an ideal, one that did not run roughshod over the concrete realities of a complex urban core. It functioned as a guideline, bending around private privileges and tracing practical compromises as the merchants expanded and reconfigured the city in the late thirteenth and fourteenth century.320 Certainly, this was partly due to the fact that both legislators and property owners were often one in the same person, who were playing multiple roles. The straight line also had a moral character, in addition to its utility, which constituted part of its beauty. Straight streets also provided safety because they allowed maximum visibility. Twisted streets, on the other hand, concealed violence and crime, as well as shameful and immoral acts.321

As our traveler continued along the via Romana, he would encounter the smaller piazze of San Felice and Santa Felicità and cross over the Ponte Vecchio (Figure 2.7). This bridge was also a street and included its own central piazza. It was built by the public works committee, the Tower Officials, whose public sign, the tower, can still be seen carved in low relief on the shops bordering the central piazza. This entire route was also that of the palio route of Santa Reparata and led into the

318 Ibid., 256. Spilner refers to a series of petitions the government heard concerning the laying out of a new street in Santa Croce along the Arno. In the opinions delivered, it is clear that the twin pillars of utility and beauty, in the service of the "city," were a part of a common understanding of the nature of an urban thoroughfare.
319 Ibid.
320 Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 72. Friedman notes that the ideal street was straight, paved, graded, and lined by a continuous row of buildings or walls covering vacant lots. However, "except in areas developed on the urban periphery, the streets of cities, at least until the later fourteenth century, fell far short of this ideal."
321 The visibility of the nuns at Santa Caterina was supposed to have encouraged more communal self-policing. Spilner, Ut Civitas Amplieetur, 254.
heart of some of Florence’s most powerful families on the other side of the bridge. From there it led past the Mercato Nuovo with its bankers’ tables and elite international traders, past the headquarters of the powerful wool guild, on to the Mercato Vecchio (via Calimala) where produce, meat and dairy, textiles and household goods were sold (Figure 7a). It continued past the bishop’s palace, through Borgo San Lorenzo and that church’s piazza, then along via San Gallo past seven convents sheltering hundreds of nuns.322 Finally, he would reach the Porta San Gallo, the point at which the urban thruway was transformed back into a regional public road that led into the Mugello, and beyond to Bologna or Faenza.

Along the route a Florentine or any traveler, depending on the time of day and year, could witness and take part in a number activities: any number of masses, monetary exchanges, the buying and selling of goods and food, as well as taking advantage of the charitable services of female religious institutions, such as the hospital at San Gallo, destroyed in the 1530 siege.323 He could have picked up any number of rumors and pieces of information in the markets and along the streets and could, towards evening, converse with friends or listen to self-declared prophets or second-rate storytellers in the Mercato Nuovo, perhaps lucky enough not to be the butt of the youthful exuberance of a Florentine beffa.324

---

322 Trexler, Public Life, 51.
323 “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” III, 20. The statutes mention this hospital as the starting point of the road to Borgo San Lorenzo.
324 Rumors and information gathered from the streets are the lifeblood of the anonymous author of a late 14th century diary, of which, more below. See Alle bocche della piazza: diario di anonimo fiorentino (1382-1401), ed. Anthony Molho and Franek Sznura, (Florence: Olschki, 1986). On prophets in the piazza see Ottavia Nicoli, "Profezie in piazza. Note sul profetismo popolare nell'Italia del primo Cinquecento," Quaderni storici 41 (1979). On storytelling in the Mercato Nuovo see the novella of Bianco Alfani in Lauro Martines, An Italian Renaissance Sextet: Six Tales in Historical Context, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 95-116. On practical jokes in the piazza see Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, LXXVI. In this novella a group of youths storm into the Mercato Nuovo chasing a mouse with a broom while old, fat, and badly-dressed Matteo di Cantino is telling stories there as the mouse runs up inside his breeches.
What is important in this itinerary through the city is that it does not pass through the main squares of any neighborhood, or any of the city’s most important civic and religious ceremonial spaces. It passes through economic and service zones and by and large cuts a straight line through the city. It is almost a closed system that can distribute things throughout the city without interrupting its other urban activities. Within this new context, there was a desire on the part of the commune to bring such streets in line with this ideal of order, as the statute states, “…ad augendum decorum et utilitatem civitatis Florentie et precipue de pulcri et rectis viis….”325 Utility and beauty were inextricable. In most urban centers in Tuscany, however, streets fell far short of this ideal due to pre-existing architectural monuments and privileges conceded to the interests of private property.326 This did not, however, stop the government from writing into law a provision that via San Gallo, used by merchants bringing in grain from the Mugello, was to be set straight from the Bishop’s palace all the way to the Porta San Gallo (ad cordam et recta linea).327 The goal, as always, was to facilitate bodies and goods moving into the heart of the old city. Such routes, therefore, could not be littered with activities getting in the way of the necessary flow of goods to market. No vendors or butchers could set up stalls at the city gates leading to these streets and no one could live adjacent to the gate in order to allow merchants, who were bringing grain, food, and other necessary items, easy access to the city’s markets.328

The east-west axis that led from the Porta al Prato towards San Piero Maggiore, Sant’Ambrogio and the Porta alla Croce, met the north-south axis at the

325 “…to enhance the beauty and the utility of the city of Florence and especially by beautiful and straight streets.” Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), IV, viii (p.162).
326 Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 72.
327 Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), IV, vii (p. 163).
328 “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” III, xxxvi. The statute singles out the “porta ruggieri da cuona” which appears nowhere else in the statutes.
Mercato Vecchio. As throughways, both were unhindered by the religious and civic
nodal points of the city, such as those spaces around the duomo and the Palazzo
Vecchio, which were more important symbolically. They function less as conduits for
efficient movement and more for ritual processions that lingered in such spaces as
they circled around and turned corners in their much slower progression, as French
King Charles VIII did when he entered in 1494. Such processions linked the large
piazzes of the city (Piazza della Signoria, del Duomo, San Marco), which were points
at which participants in processions would circle, stop, and listen to entertainment.
They largely avoided the main axes of trade and races (Figure 2.2, 2.7d). Therefore,
the city’s street patterns and public spaces separated urban movement generally into
functional and ritual zones. Two overlapping topographies were built into the city’s
street pattern through movement. Both facilitated distinct types of movement. On the
one hand, the daily movement of commerce and trade skirted past the edges of the
city’s monumental core, while processional movement dramatized the city’s most
important structures as a backdrop for symbol-laden spectacles. The systems, of
course, were never completely independent. They overlapped one another at certain
points but they the separation of spaces did serve the commune’s desire to reserve the
Piazza della Signoria and the area around the duomo for political, civic, and religious
ritual.

The topography of trade was a network of movement linking the central
markets as efficiently as possible to producers and consumers. It was an extremely
important aspect of how Florentines understood their city and it promoted a certain
way of reading and describing the urban landscape; not as an object but as a
network.329 In contrast, the particular movement of civic and religious processions
highlighted the monumental character of the city’s most important buildings and

329 Villani provides a model for this type of description and will be discussed below.
squares, described as a series of moments along the route by Florentine chroniclers. Such movements would tend to emphasize monuments and therefore influence the way architectural history reads the city as a collection of monuments, rather than a network of interrelated movements.\textsuperscript{330}

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the street network described above would be any less symbolic to Florentines than the monumental symbolic landscape of civic ritual, though it was more likely to have more local variations that rendered it opaque to foreigners. For example, Weddle has shown how the author of the Codex Rustici sanctified his urban environment by counting and naming the churches, their altars, and spaces that he passed in his daily movements. There is no doubt that this cataloguing was anything but an instrumental list since the author appeals to Florentine poets whose spirits inhabited city gates and compares his own sanctified spaces to those he encountered on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Strikingly, though not entirely surprisingly, he derives much more spiritual satisfaction from spaces of his own city than he does from Jerusalem itself.\textsuperscript{331}

Therefore both topographies were linked in the minds of the city’s inhabitants. Both were elements against which one could define one’s self and through which one could navigate, moving through spaces as a series of encounters with familiar objects. What combined them in practice was the movement of news and information. The government had a regulated and hierarchical way of disseminating official information that highlighted the symbolic importance of certain spaces, from center to periphery, and recreated the procession as a carefully staged series of moments.\textsuperscript{332}

\textsuperscript{330} Gregorio Dati’s description of the city’s monumental edifices fits this model and is discussed below. \textsuperscript{331} Saundra Weddle, “Saints in the City and Poets at the Gate,” in \textit{Florence and Beyond: Culture, Society and Politics in Renaissance Italy: Essays in honour of John M. Najemy}, ed. Daniel Ethan Bornstein and David Spencer Peterson, (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 179-94. \textsuperscript{332} This reverses the movement of an official \textit{entrata} from periphery to center.
Official information was carefully regulated and it attempted to create a monologue radiating from center to periphery. Bells rang to announce important news and gather the city into the center, where more detailed news was read out by the city’s official spokesmen (chancellor, herald). They formed the hinge around which representative announcements were exchanged between government and citizens. For example, the chancellor was responsible for reading out new laws and decrees, but he also gave voice to attempts to reform government decisions. From here, the verbal news was carried by the city’s banditori. Like the city’s surveyors, who measured, defined, and maintained the spatial contours of public space, the banditori or bannitores (heralds) of the commune were charged with the correct spatial diffusion of public information. Important information was read out from the ringhiera, often by the city’s herald or chancellor, but the banditori were charged with announcing laws and regulations in specific corners, piazzes, borghi and other “customary” places in each of the city’s districts. The places were a mix of more and less defined places. In the early Trecento, each public announcement (pubblco bando) had to be read out in the usual places of the city, in at least six places in each sestiere in the said customary places, eight places in Santo Spirito and San Piero Scheraggio. Citizens who were to be exiled from the city received message at the entrances to their homes, while foreigners were named as enemies of state at the grain market at Orsanmichele and at the Palace of the Podestà (Palazzo del Comune). The latter was the city’s site of justice while the former was the important grain exchange, amongst the most important public spaces of the city, located directly between the Mercato Nuovo and the Mercato Vecchio. Making information public there provided

---

333 A useful illustration of the duties of the chancellor can be found in an account of the political turmoil in 1382, when he was often on the ringhiera reading petitions to the people assembled in the piazza. See Alle bocche, 28, 34, 35.
334 Caggese, Podestà (1325), I, xi. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," I, xlii.
the maximum diffusion since this was the economic crossroads of the city.

Information let loose here would quickly make the rounds of public discourse as is dramatized in the Decameron’s novella of the Franciscan from Faenza who is undone by the way news circulated at lightning speed through the market spaces of Venice.\footnote{For a discussion of this story see below.}

In the familiar built-in redundancy common in the statutes, the announcements were also to be made in any parish (parocchia, canonice, populo) or contradà, borgo, in each sestiere but especially in certain named places specific to each district in the city in an attempt to spatially distribute the bandi throughout the district or to makes sure the announcements were made in what seems to be places of gathering (Figure 2.8).\footnote{Caggese, Podestà (1325), I, xi (p. 38). For example, the banditori had to make sure the bandi were read at the intersection of roads next to the church of San Niccolò, at the Canto ai Quattro Leoni, and across from the houses of the Rinuccini.} New roads were automatically assumed to belong to this list, as well those places specifically mentioned in individual statutes. However, by the mid-century Florentine statutes had to redraw the map from where bandi were read out since the new city walls had been built in the meantime, and the city itself had been reconfigured into quarters. Announcements had to be read out in at least eight places in each quarter.

Uniformed, mounted, and blowing a silver trumpet, the banditori were the official voice of the city where it concerned the behavior of citizens in public places, marking out the limits of legitimate public actions. They were, therefore, a crucial vocal medium that had to be carefully watched, both by the city’s inhabitants and by the government itself. Transferring messages, of course, was a tricky business, considering the way that stories were transformed with each retelling.\footnote{Aspects of this kind of storytelling are discussed below in chapter four.} Preventing corruption and maintaining clear diffusion meant regulating and modulating carefully
those voices that spoke on another’s behalf. Unclear messages could lead to confusion.

One can see this entire apparatus at work in merchant diaries, where various rituals created an integrated urban whole. Spaces gained varying degrees of public status through a combination of statutory decree, regulated commercial exchange, and the surveillance or prohibition of dubious activities. Highlighting the hierarchy of public space, laws and public announcements were first proclaimed in the central piazza before their dissemination into the periphery (Figure 2.8a).\textsuperscript{338}

This was the proper circulation of information and it reinforced the hierarchy of spaces, sounds, and buildings from center to periphery. It overlaid the rhetoric of state onto a specific kind of urban network of one-way communication. This was not the only network in force, however. There was another one, more intimately linked to that other system of daily urban activities. In this network, information, lies, rumors, gossip travelled along streets and swirled around squares in a more unfiltered, less choreographed chaotic mass and, as such, had to be decoded and analyzed by attentive listeners. It could be set against official pronouncements in order to penetrate into secrets and much sought after knowledge.

Benedetto Dei was an attentive witness to the way that information was always a mix of official and local transmitters. He stood at the center of vast network of information that he then disseminated to various places in the form of broadsides called \textit{nuove}. Such contacts were the result of his extensive traveling in the Venetian empire and to the Levant.\textsuperscript{339} In these pamphlets he described his experiences, making comparisons to Italy and the spaces he knew. As such, Benedetto was highly

\textsuperscript{338} Alle bocche, 54. This episode is described in chapter 4, “Constructing Space with Sound: The Acoustic Topography.”

sensitive to the way information flowed through space and was disseminated at the level of the street and the workshop. In his description of the conflict between Florence and the combined forces of Siena, Lucca and the Duke of Milan in 1430, he increases the drama and heightens the realism by describing how information about the sudden surprising victory of the Florentines reached and circulated through city. Information arrived in two successive waves, as news of the initial Florentine defeat was followed quickly by news of a sudden victory.

...that Florentine forces were at first defeated, and the news traveled to Siena and to Milan and the Florence, where there was sorrow and where there was joy... but benign fortune, friend of the Florentines, showed her favor at the 22nd hour, or thereabouts... And the news traveled to Siena, and reached there as the Sienese were making bonfires and dancing and the peeling of bells throughout the city, that they had news that their own forces had been routed, just as those of the Duke of Milan had been; and little by little, they heard and had news of who was taken, and the quantity, and who the prisoners were.³⁴⁰

Benedetto gives the sense of how quickly, relatively speaking, the second wave of information followed on the heels of the first. The Sienese were in the middle of an outburst of civic celebration with bonfires, bells and dancing when the news came of their ultimate defeat at the hands of the Florentine forces. However, this time, the news trickled into the public domain in the form of piecemeal messages, fragments that, little by little (di mano a mano) began to circulate through the city,

³⁴⁰ “...che ‘l chanpo de’ Fiorentini daprima fu roto; e andarono le novelle a sSiena e a Milano e a Firenze, e dov’era dolore e dov’era letizia... ma benigna fortuna, amicha de Fiorentini, si mostrò favorevole alle 22 ore vel circha ... E ando la novella a sSiena, e giunse che ’ Sanesi facievano fuochi e balli e stornegiamenti di champane per tutta la città, cched egli[ ] ebbono nuove che ‘l chanpo loro era stato roto, e chosi quello del ducha di Milano; di mano a mano sentirono ed ebbono nuove di chi era preso, e la quantità, e di chi erano prigionieri.” Benedetto Dei, La cronica: dall’anno 1400 all’anno 1500, ed. Roberto Barducci, (Florence: F. Papafava, 1985), 49.
constructing an image of mounting horror for the Sienese as they learned first of
defeat, then who had been taken, and then the number and identities of prisoners that
amounted to very painful and terrible news.

These two systems – official news and fragmented rumors – determined the
possible modes of movement, of bodies, things and words, through the city.
Understanding how they worked and using them was indispensable to keeping
informed about events, understanding one’s surroundings and interacting with others
in the city. Consequently, it allows the architectural historian a means to see how
monumental architecture was integrated into a network of streets and squares that
inflects their meaning with respect to the movement of people, the sale of goods, the
flow of information and the changing dynamic symbolic systems they represented.

In a time where maps were not generally used to find one’s way through a
city, its inhabitants relied on mental maps that were constructed out of memory and
driven by needs, desires, and anxieties. Intimate knowledge of an urban territory gave
one certain control over manipulating circumstances. Ignorance, on the other hand,
left one powerless and alone. This situation testifies to how much one’s relations to
others were caught up in understanding the physical environment. For example, in the
eighth story of the fourth day of the Decameron, Girolamo, in order to gain access to
the woman he desires “from a neighbor was informed how her house was arranged.”341
From this narrative detail emerges an analogy between access to language and access
to spaces. Controlling the way one’s messages circulated in public space, whom they
reached and how they were interpreted was a constant struggle, as the merchants
Paolo da Certaldo and Giovanni Morelli will teach us below. The ability to speak

341 “da alcuno vicino informatosi come la casa di lei stesse.” Boccaccio, Decameron, IV, 8, 17.
effectively in certain spaces allowed one to fulfill one’s desire.\textsuperscript{342} Girolamo, therefore, with the aid of a kind of map (or more precisely, a mental floor plan) of the house, is able to penetrate the threshold that divides the street from the domestic space beyond. He possesses a graphic translation of the hidden layout of the house. This knowledge is a key that unlocks the barriers between him and his desired object who resides in the house.

As Martines points out, public spaces in the Renaissance city acted as giant reflecting mirrors. When people went out into the streets they put themselves on constant display since they were known to everyone. They were known by things such as their dress, their trades, kinships, names, local reputations, palaces, and coats of arms.\textsuperscript{343} They were an amalgam of public personas which, when taken away, left something much less than an individual. They had to step out into public to reaffirm who they were everyday. However, such mirrors could also be turned into distorting ones, for better or worse. Appearances then could be deceiving as they are now, and it hinged on the disjunction between public perception and interior dispositions. In literature at least, there was always an anxiety about how secure an outward set of identities was and whether one’s interior held secrets that ought to be revealed.

In the \textit{Decameron} this often involves a protagonist’s perception that sees through the outward display of a certain social status to recognize a hidden nobility or vileness within.\textsuperscript{344} A simple plan, a route to get to a beloved, marks many of the urban

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{342} Consider, for example, the story in the \textit{Decameron} (III, 5) in which Zima tries to move the wife of Francesco to respond to his desire for her. She has been silenced by her husband and therefore has no recourse to protect herself in the domestic sphere.

\textsuperscript{343} Martines, \textit{Strong Words}, 193.

\textsuperscript{344} Pamphila’s novella about Cisti the baker begins by discoursing on this theme. “Belle donne, io non so da me medesima vedere che piu in questo si pecchi, o la natura apparecchiando ad una nobile anima un vil corpo, o la fortuna apparecchiando ad un corpo dotato d’anima nobile vil mestiero, si come in Cisti nostro cittadino e in molti ancora abbiam potuto veder avvenire; il qual Cisti, d’altissimo animo fornito, la fortuna fece forno.” VI, 2, 3. “My good women, I do not know myself who errs more in this case, whether Nature furnishing to a noble soul a vile body or Fortune endowing a body gifted with a noble soul a lowly (disdainful) occupation. As it is with Cisti, our fellow citizen and in many others still that we have been able to see happen.” (my translation)
\end{footnotesize}
negotiations that characters face in the *novelle*. Familiarity with such structures allows one the confidence to manipulate them, just as Boccaccio’s own readers felt the confidence in reassembling the *novelle* in ways that suited their own desires. A well-understood architectural complex allowed one to manipulate one’s environment without destroying its structural integrity.

In contrast to Girolamo, Andreuccio possesses no framework, map or plan that allows him to move confidently through the dark spaces of Naples. Andreuccio is a merchant from Perugia who has come to Naples in order to buy horses. A woman notices him flashing his purse and decides to relieve him of it. From an acquaintance who knew Andreuccio’s family in Palermo, the beautiful Siciliana finds out enough information to play the role of Andreuccio’s half sister whom he never knew. She leads him to a particularly nasty part of town – *Malpertugio* – which he does not seem to recognize as such. Going out on a makeshift ledge above a narrow alley between her building and the next in order to relieve himself, he is locked out, his money now in the Siciliana’s hands (Figure 9). After falling into the excrement, a new series of wholly unrelated events befall him as he stumbles unaware through the night getting caught up with two would-be grave-robbers. He has completely lost control and is at the mercy of the city.

---

345 II, 5. Andreuccio does not recognize that the house, to which his “sister” brings him in order to defraud him of his money, is in a notoriously dangerous neighborhood. Later, he moves through the city at night without any useful sense of where he is.

346 We never find out her name, even though her ruse is predicated on playing the role of Andreuccio’s long lost half sister. Ironically, she is able to name all the members of his family, asking about each by name. Clearly she is playing her own memory game.


348 This narrative break between two unrelated series of events marks the random nature of encounters in the succession of time. There is no point to the passage of time, no sense of beginning or end, of a cyclical motion, of relations between actions and the time in which they occur. Time passes.
Andreuccio regains his fortune after suffering a succession of other misfortunes.\textsuperscript{349} However, success for characters in the \textit{novelle} of the \textit{Decameron} at times requires that they create and manipulate a medium without which they would not be able to succeed. Much of the narrative drive in the \textit{Decameron} is the result of barriers placed between characters and the thing they want to possess. These barriers can be related to class, marital status and gender separation but are often interlaced with architectural and spatial divides that have to be overcome as well. Characters have to figure out the linguistic key to open the door to a potential lover’s heart but they also often have to demonstrate the mental and physical agility to traverse urban spaces and pass through walls in unconventional ways. They have to work on and against language in relation to a particular listener and through the medium of a particular servant/go-between. They have to study the walls, gardens and urban spaces that separate them from their goals. They have to redesign the urban environment by making holes in its walls, turning windows into doors, balconies into bedrooms, locked bedrooms into spaces of fulfillment. They have to understand the way language operates in urban space, how it travels through physical media (servants and streets) in networks that include other language and information users occupying similar frequencies. What follows is an attempt to read certain stories of the \textit{Decameron} in order to see the way they respond to each other through the medium of urban space and architecture that actively works with and against the temporal and spatial flow of words, language and information.

In III, 3, a woman seeks a lover of true quality because of her disposition toward her rich but undeserving husband; “for which she judged no man of base condition, however rich he were, to be worthy of noble woman, and seeing him still

\textsuperscript{349} Later, Dioneo will tell a story in which a merchant is masterfully relieved of his money by a Sicilian woman. However, in his retelling, the merchant is able to get his money back from her.
with all his riches he could go no further than recognizing the elements of a piece of fabric.” In order to get the message to her prospective lover she has to modulate, or even deform her speech so that it passes through the medium of a trusting but oblivious friar without losing its intended meaning. The story she tells to the friar is a falsehood whose believability – to the friar – seems to rest on his masculine anxiety about the penetration of – in this case barren – domestic space of matrimony by the gallant young lover. She invents a scene in which her honor is accosted by the very lover she hopes to procure, telling the friar that he ought to leave her alone, and describes the kind of advances he was supposed to have made on her. The friar is able to transcribe this message because the codes of honor, chastity and matrimonial fidelity are constantly reiterated in the *Decameron*, whether to be restored or undermined. After hearing the message from the friar, “the capable man [the prospective lover], more aware than the holy friar, without too much delay, understood the shrewdness of the woman.” He understands that the part he is to play is exactly that laid out by the unwitting friar (Figure 2.9a). The message therefore, arrives in an unadulterated form, a product of the desire or fantasy of transparency. In effect, the woman has to manipulate the social structures through a modulated language that circumscribes the limits of her desire. She demonstrates that she is aware of the potential violence that can result from women who do not speak for themselves:

I had it in my heart several times to tell my brothers, but then I though that men sometimes send messages in a way that provokes terrible responses, of which words are

---

350 “per lo quale estimava niuno uomo di bassa condizione, quantunque richissimo fosse, esser di gentil donna degno, e veggendo lui [il suo marito] ancora con tutte le sue richezze da niuna altra cosa essere più avanti che da saper divisare un mescolato.” (my translation) III, 3, 6
351 “il valente uomo, più accorto che il santo frate, senza troppo indugio la sagacità della donna comprese.” (my translation) III, 3, 18
born, and from words one arrives at deeds; for which, in order not to cause evil and scandal, I remained silent.\textsuperscript{352}

The same careful prodding and readjusting of the architectural structures that determine the spatial limits of characters allows them to undermine structures that were designed to control their movements in specific ways. Both space and architecture are opaque physical and social media that must be worked on, manipulated, “redesigned” as the characters move through them. They form barriers that separate the desiring subject from the object desired. But, again like language, they contain conduits and fissures that are susceptible to that desire, through which a character can access that object.

In the case of the friar, the women play on his moral expectations which prevent him from interpreting the message, of penetrating the surface of things. As the storyteller Pampinea tells us, such religious men thought themselves more knowledgeable than anyone else, which makes him blind, of course, to the real intent of a woman whose surface accoutrements – good manners, fine breeding, beauty, and high birth all together would have constructed the public image of an honorable woman which the friar had no reason to question. It is his very ignorance therefore that makes him a perfect medium. He does not interpret or question the message. He does not inject any of himself into it and is not at all affected by it. He functions as a perfectly efficient medium that carries messages back and forth between two lovers who decode each other at either end of the conversation. There is no static, no resistance from the volatile spaces of the city that both Certaldo and Morelli feared. It is a desire or dream of perfect communication. One only had to know the desires and

\textsuperscript{352} “Hommi posto in cuore di fargliele alcuna volta dire a’ miei fratelli, ma poscia m’ho pensato che gli uomini fanno alcuna volta l’ambasciate per modo che le risposte seguitan cattive, di che nascon parole, e dalle parole si perviene a’ fatti: per che, accio’ che male e scandalo non ne nascesse, me ne son taciuta.” (my translation) III, 3, 12
wants and assumptions of others. Then a woman could find a way to speak privately, bypassing the effects of the predominantly masculine world of the street. In Boccaccio’s city, whose social relations were severely strained in the wake of the plague, it made sense to contemplate the nature of communication in the urban environment, riddled as it was with numerous distorting mirrors that could be put to use in rebuilding and transforming those relations.

That same desire for a utopia of perfect communication networks underlies another story in the Decameron (IV, 2), which takes place in Venice. This anxiety over the smooth functioning of a city’s economic, political, and communication networks that had to traverse heterogeneous social spaces was caught between the extremes of an ideal perfect transparency and the nightmare of a menacing opacity. The former is dramatized in the Decameron (IV, 2) by the city of Venice itself, which is comprised as bristling network of information flows and acts as a powerful corrective medium that roots out fraudulent and foreign elements that disrupt the proper exchanges of the city’s moral topography.353

Architectural historian Deborah Howard has characterized the medieval street and canal networks of Venice as two independent systems (Figures 2.10, 2.10a)354 In the earliest known plan of the city from the mid-fourteenth century, the medieval fabric of the city was already a dense land-mass traversed by canals (Figure 2.10b).355 Canals and streets literally overlapped each other in a way that a city like Florence could not hope to do. Each facilitated the different kinds of movements and

353 Boccaccio, Decameron, IV, 2.
355 Ibid., 26. It is significant that a medieval city map of Venice exists not as an ideal plan but as a topographical approximation. Since Venice was a city built on the sea, the portolan maps that sailors used to navigate Mediterranean coast lines may have been at play here. On the portolan map see J. B. Harley and David Woodward, Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). On its possible relationship to Florentine town planning see Friedman, Florentine New Towns, 133-38.
connected public thoroughfares to institutional and private buildings at different points. Services often used streets and back doors, while canals were generally for supplies and more ceremonial entrances. The street network was based on cellular parishes and, with the assistance of local bridges, provided faster internal neighborhood navigation, while the canals were based on natural shipping channels and always connected the heart of Venice to the larger Mediterranean world. The latter led to front doors, where people, rather than goods entered. Both systems developed with relative independence but with complementary functions. Bridges literally lifted one network over the other. Therefore, Venice provided a multi-level topographical matrix that would have allowed the circulation of competing messages that would not necessarily come up against each other, as they would have in Florence. Boccaccio exploits this Venetian particularity in order to probe how the integrity of such communication networks could be maintained by those who used them, independent of those who were in charge of creating and maintaining them (public magistracies) in a city that was just as preoccupied with the clogging up of such networks.

In the Decameron’s vision of Venice, misplaced sexual desire and religious treachery stand in for political fraud and the economic abuse of public space so feared by authorities. Voices, streets, and canals all collaborate in the creation of a discursive space that traps the lies of a philandering friar, allowing justice to be meted out in public, in the piazza.

The open spaces of the second novella of Day 4 are a potent contrast to the closed spaces of Day 1 in which love labors to overcome the solidity of social boundaries. In Venice, Frate Alberto has come in order to hide the malignity of his

---

357 Ibid.
358 Boccaccio, Decameron, IV, 2.
past in the city of Imola. There, the social communication networks of his native city had become saturated with his lies so that his language had become meaningless. His “shameful acts, many of which were known by the Imolese, so much so that even when he was telling the truth, let alone lying, there was no one in Imola who would believe him”\(^{359}\) In desperation, he moved to Venice: “the receptacle of every kind of filth.”\(^{360}\) He joins the Friars Minor and adopts an exterior pretense of extreme piety, which serves to let him continue his shameful works. He quickly becomes a great preacher and through his ritual acts of affective display he lures prominent Venetian society into his trust. He plays on the visual and aural modes of signification to create a reputation that conceals an inner sinful nature. His acts respond to the ethical question posed over and over in the *Decameron*: after peeling away the layers of one’s social identity, what would one be left with? The speed with which Alberto is able to become the executor and trustee of many citizens, confessor and councilor to the majority of men and women in the city, alludes to the way information traveled in a city like Venice, a city that subordinated its networks to the needs of trade and civic ritual.

David Wallace makes the point that the “pleasure of this novella comes from our sense of release in moving north from the confined spaces of a feudal castle to the open spaces of the city-state of Venice.”\(^{361}\) That Alberto has managed to saturate Venetian discursive space with his feigned piety hints at how lines of communication, literally, mouths that pass on information across urban space, penetrating public spaces through the network of streets, are not at this point terribly different from the information saturation of his vices that occurred in his native Imola. However, as

\(^{359}\) “vituperose opere, molto dagli imolesi conosciute, a tanto il recarono che, non che la bugia, ma la verità non era in Imola chi gli credesse ” (my translation) IV, 2, 8.

\(^{360}\) “d’ogni bruttura ricevitrice” (my translation) *Ibid*.

Wallace remarks, it is the city-state of Venice itself that is the hero of the novella. It is “a social structure that is able to identify and uncover the ‘thief, pander, swindler and murderer’.” The communication networks within the urban space of trade and commerce have the ability to correct erroneous information and avoid being duped.

This occurs when Lisetta lets slip her secret sexual liaison with the person she believes is the archangel Gabriel but is in fact Alberto in disguise. Predisposed to shameful acts, he has convinced the vain Lisetta that the archangel Gabriel has fallen in love with her and wants to come and have sex with her. However, since Angels lacked a concrete body that could perform such an act, Alberto will happily allow Gabriel to enter his own body in order to carry out the necessary deed, which he succeeds in doing:

Lady Lisetta was all fresh and soft, and she discovered that his ride was altogether different from that of her husband. He flew many times that night without his wings, which caused the lady to cry aloud with delight, and in addition, he told her many things about the glory of Heaven.

Of course the vain Lisetta cannot help but tell her neighbor that she was so beautiful that the angel Gabriel had fallen for her. He has played on her vanity in order to enter her bed while her husband is away on business in Flanders.

Later, Lisetta is with one of her neighbors (comare) and can’t help but tell how her beauty has rewarded her with angelic love. It is here that something significant happens. The neighbor, wanting to laugh, holds it in so that she can get more information. After the conversation: she couldn’t wait to be in a place where she

---

362 Ibid.
363 „per la qual cosa con donna Lisetta trovandosi, che era fresca e morbida, altra giacitura facendole che il marito, molte volte la notte volò senza ali, di che ella forte si chiamò per contenta, e oltre a ciò molte cose le disse della Gloria celestiale.” IV, 2, 32-33.
could recount the story. She finds her opportunity at a party in which there are a number of women to tell:

These women told the story to their husbands and to other women, and those to others, and in this way in less than two days Venice was filled with this story [information]. But among the others to which this thing came to be heard were her relatives/in-laws, who, without saying anything, decided to find this angel and find out whether he knew how to fly.

The acceleration of this transfer of information is inscribed in the narration itself. Lisetta’s initial exchange with the comare takes place over 5 paragraphs (5 comme and about 21 lines). In the next four lines, the comare manages to tell the brigata of women, who, in turn, spread the information to their husbands and other women in a single line of text. Finally, in the same sentence, a single clause reduced to two repeating pronouns (e quelle a quell’ altre – “and those to those others”) suffices to expand the information flow exponentially. The telescoping of the narrative mimics the telescoping of time it takes for the explosion of this information to cross the spatial expanse of the city.

In a trading city like Venice, lines of communication – literally, mouths that passed on information across urban space – penetrate public spaces through the interlaced networks of streets and canals. Access to information was crucial to making well-timed decisions about trade that spanned a large geographic area, involved numerous currencies, cultures and languages, and demanded that

---

364 “...Gloria celestiale.” IV, 2, 32-33.
364 “...le parve mille anni che ella fosse in parte ove ella potesse ridire.” (my translation) IV, 2, 44.
365 “...Queste donne il dissero a’ mariti e ad altre donne, e quelle a quell’ altre, e così in meno di due di’ ne fu tutta ripiena Vinegia. Ma tra gli altri a’ quali questa cosa venne agli orecchi furono i cognati di lei, li quali, senza alcuna cosa dirle, si posero in cuore di trovar questo agnolo e di sapere se egli sapesse volare.” (my translation) IV, 2, 44.
information be as updated as possible for profit to accrue into the hands of the merchant.\textsuperscript{366} The exchange of this business information in Venice occurred, for the most part, around the Rialto markets (Figure 2.10c). This was the site of daily exchanges, of commodities and opportunities. It was a place of feverish activity and deal making,\textsuperscript{367} where one would come to find out the latest news of the city and places beyond. Ultimately, such a story like the one let loose by Lisetta would end up here, swirling around within the nexus of a mass of narratives, intermingling with discussions of trade and politics. Lisetta’s story began in an exchange in private between her and a neighbor. It penetrated into other female domestic spaces and jumped across the threshold to the public world of men. In Venice, a city without defensive walls, it is the manner in which information flows that makes architectural barriers porous. Within this novella is the image of a perfectly transparent mercantile city.\textsuperscript{368} The medium of the flow is the network of streets and canals, but these networks need information-bearing bodies to traverse these spaces in order to allow information to jump from site to site.

Like Naples, Venice is portrayed with a realism that demands a degree of familiarity. Giorgio Padoan concludes that Boccaccio had to have visited Venice before writing this novella. He makes the case that Boccaccio visited the city before he met Petrarch there in 1363.\textsuperscript{369} Boccaccio characteristicallwy weaves together

\textsuperscript{366} The prosperity of the trading system centered around the Rialto depended on timing. See Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, \textit{Venice Triumphant: The Horizons of a Myth}, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 154.

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., 150-62.

\textsuperscript{368} The distance between the ideal and the actual functioning of the market was always fluctuating. “Regulation and renovation proved unable to keep up with growth, and there was so much confusion amid the many installations and so many impediments to circulation that a new inspection commission was named in 1341. It had the dual charge of combating general disorder in the market and facilitating transactions, but it was also expected to reconcile aesthetic imperatives with economic modernization. Although it sought an ideal city and a central market area organized for the common utility and propitious to business and profits, public policy also strove for harmony and beauty,” Ibid., 152.

historical figures and spaces into a narrative that is all his own. He introduces the feast of the Annunciation held in Venice, to which he links Alberto’s disguise as Gabriel. Lisetta’s family name, da Ca’ Quirino, evokes one of the most noble and ancient mercantile families in the city which had been recovering from the economic hardship inflicted on the main branch of the family by the legal proceedings against the Tiepolo-Querini conspiracy of 1310. Padoan claims that a contemporary reader would catch this precise allusion, even the reference to Flanders, a region with which Venice had strong links through the trading city of Bruges.

The accelerated movement of information in Venice reacts against the closed spaces of the first novella in Day 4 discussed in the previous chapter. There, Ghismonda was not able, due to social constraints, to pass on information in a courtly space that was built upon secrets.

In such a way, therefore, the one loving the other secretly, the young woman desiring no other thing as much as to find herself with him, not wanting to confide this love to anyone, and having to find a way by herself, she thought of a new trick.

She could not confide in anyone and could barely speak to her lover. It is only in her bedroom that the secret could be discussed. When Tancred discovers the secret, he himself has to keep the information secret, and this forces him to leave not by the door, but by the window, that is, secretly. He then secretly captures Guiscardo. Ghismonda is never sure, although she assumes that Guiscardo has been caught or is

371 Ibid.
372 “In cotal guisa adunque amando l’un l’altro segretamente, niuna altra cosa tanto disiderando la giovane quanto di ritrovarsi con lui, ne’ volendosi di questo amore in alcuna persona fidare, a dovergli significare il modo seco penso’ una nuova malizia” (my translation) IV, 1, 7.
already dead. She is alone in confronting her father. She has to rely on her own language and fortitude.

In Venice, retribution is meted out in public. Secrets are publicly exposed. Inevitably the story of the angel Gabriel’s love for Lisetta would reach her family as they succeed in uncovering his ruse in her bedroom. It was precisely at the Rialto market that the *buono uomo*, who had taken in the fleeing Alberto without recognizing him:

heard it say how the angel Gabriel had gone that night to enjoy himself with the lady Lisetta, and found there by her husband’s family, and had, through fear, jumped into the canal, nor did anyone know what became of him: and quickly he realized whom he had let into the house.“373

Alberto had attempted, in his escape from Lisetta’s bedroom – again, from a window – to exploit the communication network of Venice by literally riding the information flows to his freedom. He succeeded, temporarily, but the information that passed through, literally flowed through the canals, travelled faster than he could swim. Jumping into the canal, he rode the information flow not to his escape, but was borne along it to his own demise.

According to Padoan, the Ca’ Querini occupied the site of the current Rialto fish market, having been partially destroyed in retaliation for the failed conspiracy against the government in the early fourteenth century (Figure 2.10d).374 Thus, he maintains, the contemporary reader who had a certain familiarity with Venetian

373 “... diri dire come l’agnolo Gabriello era la notte andato a giocere con madonna Lisetta, e da’ cognati trovatovi, s’era per paura gittato nel canale, nè si sapeva che divenuto se ne fosse: per che prestamente s’avvisò colui che in casa avea esser deso.” (my translation) IV, 2, 48.
374 The current Loggia della Pescaria on the grand Canal was built in a neo-gothic style. However, behind it, on the Campo delle Beccarie, are the remains of the Querini palace which is again the site of the daily sale of fish.
topography was invited to reflect on this architectural memory, on a site that once
was. It alludes to the way urban space is constantly reconfigured through the way it
was both used and imagined in narratives. It was a constant discursive exchange
between the urban world and the realist aspects of storytelling. Architecture and
urban space were never a fixed background upon which stories were hung, but active
agents in shaping meaning and identity.

Moving from the Rialto, the site of business and exchange, to San Marco, the
site of government and religion, Alberto meets his demise within the space of public
ritual in the piazza. Just before he is led there unwittingly, the good merchant “sent
someone to the Rialto to proclaim that whomever wanted to see the angel Gabriel,
should go to Piazza San Marco.” Here, the story plays on the public proclamations
– Venice’s version of Florence’s banditori – that were read out in the square from the
top of a carved stone podium used expressly for that purpose. In such an ideal city,
the mechanism for diffusing public information appropriated the pure dynamics of
speed. The entire city is able to assemble in Piazza San Marco and witness the
unveiling of a story they had just heard described both in the unofficial circulation of
the rumor mill and in the official language of state. And with those who followed
the disgraced but disguised Alberto to the square were “also those who, hearing the
proclamation, from the Rialto had come there, where there were enormous crowds.”

Alberto is led to San Marco as a savage (uom’ selvatico), smeared with honey and

375 Padoan, “Sulla novella veneziana,” 27. The author also finds the will of an Elisa in the Archivio di
stato – Atti Andrea da S. Cassiano 1024.22. This was apparently an uncommon name but Lisetta was
the diminutive. The document is dated 1313. She left much to city convents, including the Frari, under
reconstruction in 1347 (the convent of frate Alberto), where this Elisa wanted to be buried. She was the
wife of Niccolò, who was of the branch of the family living in the palazzo "mazor" until 1310. See
376 “mandò uno al Rialto che bandisse chi volesse veder l’agnolo Gabriello lo andasse in su la
piazza di San Marco.” (my translation) IV, 2, 52.
377 Note that the message only had to make the ironic statement that the angel would be on display in
the square without having to explain either his disguise or the story that led up to his capture.
378 "quegli ancora che, udito il bando, da Rialto venuti v’erano, erano gente senza fine.” (my translation)
IV, 2, 53-54.
covered with feathers, a club in one hand, dogs attached to the other, a chain around
his neck and a mask on his face. He is about to take part in the bear hunt (*caccia del
orsore*) but it is he who will be the object of the crowd’s violence. A Venetian civic
festival is exploited by the *buon’uomo* in order to expose Alberto’s crimes. This ritual
took place around Carnival and often involved a bear hunt. It culminated between the
columns on the *piazzetta*, where, in fact, Alberto is tied and subjected to the screams
and taunts of the crowd, “saying the most disgraceful words and the foulest words
ever hurled at any scoundrel, and on top of this one by one they began to throw
garbage at his face” (Figures 2.10f, 2.10g).

This novella assumes that information can travel unimpeded through disparate
networks of speakers across complicated spaces that involve gender divisions, though
it is silent on questions of class. In discussing the novella of the friar as medium (III,
3), I attempted to show how a language game was able to protect itself from
corruption as it passed through an unknowing medium (the friar) to its intended
receiver (the potential lover). My assumption in that case was that the social
constraints that confined a woman to certain spaces – the confession box and her
home – required that she also modify her speech in order to control how it was
transferred and consumed in the public sphere. Alberto, on the other hand, attempted
to control the flow of information in a large and complicated city – Venice – but the
overwhelming number of speakers and listeners that participated in that urban
dialogue quickly undermined his deceit.

Both *novelle* explore the limits of transmitting information and desire across
urban space. Venice is constructed as an ideal conduit for information that is
corrected by the interventions of so many different voices and speakers whose

---

380 "dicendogli le più vituperose parole e la magior villania che mai a alcun ghiotton si dicesse, e oltre a
questo per lo viso gittandogli chi una lordura e chi un’altra.” IV, 2, 56.
collective cacophony acted not unlike an open commons of self-correcting audible discourse. Such justice was collective and popular and did not involve in any way the vast and imposing apparatus of the state’s forces of order. Unlike the single friar, a communal body of engaged citizens can eradicate deceptive messages. This story becomes less about Venice itself and more about how the city on the lagoon provided a model for understanding possible socio-spatial relations. This was a lesson for the social and architectural collapse of the city of Florence described in the Decameron’s introduction, as the brigata discuss how the social networks of a city could be both aided and undermined by the topographical matrices. This story shows how a well-functioning urban justice was located neither wholly with the state nor with the mob but in a symbiotic interaction of the two facilitated by integrated urban spatial networks

2.5 Communication Breakdown

Sacchetti appears to reject the confidence Boccaccio places in the ability of urban information flows to establish stable meanings within urban space. His novellas return time and again to the problem of communication in urban spaces, which are often the site of garbled messages and misquotations, the stage of a continual breakdown in social interaction and human movement. The narrator mocks a communal atmosphere of paranoia, petty deceptions, and chastises a political class which, everywhere it looked, saw conspiracy and threats. Sacchetti focuses on the apparent randomness of urban experience. In contrast to the barriers and walls that separate desiring subjects in the Decameron, it is the opacity of space that often confronts and hampers the way subjects communicate in the Trecentonovelle. The spaces of the city are places of misrecognition, where an insignificant event leads to
insurrection, a simple word undermines the authority of the law and a tiny act can
change a character’s life. The urban environment, despite the constant vigilance of
the mercantile state and the supposed recourse to the law, remains an unruly,
boisterous but ultimately familiar place. It appears to randomly redirect narrative as it
resists being the transparent medium of communication that the Decameron
constructed out of stubborn hope.

Sacchetti reminds readers that the spatial networks the Florentine government
was trying to establish were not always achieved. It involved constant negotiation
and compromises. There was no seamless network through which the voice of the
popolo could reach the extremes of its economic and political utopias. Urban
planning and the carefully worked out details of laws required to maintain control
over streets and squares was never far removed from more or less overt political
strategies of an emerging popular government in the later thirteenth and early
fourteenth century. Widened, straightened, and obstacle-free streets were also part of
the project of literally driving a wedge between magnate factions. New public streets
took their property and facilitated the quick response of communal militias to warring
parties.\textsuperscript{381} Consider, for example, the truncated street leading from Orsanmichele to
the Badia, the present day via de’ Cimatori (Figures 2.11, 2.11a). The original desire
to link the city’s grain market with the new and extended palace of the Podestà would
not only have made an impressive urbanistic link between public institutions, it would

\textsuperscript{381} Najemy argues that the street project of the commune that ran from Orsanmichele and was truncated
at the Badia, along with the extension, widening, and straightening of the street running east from the
via del Proconsolo to the walls (present day via de’ Pandolfini and via dell’ Agnolo) separated and
penetrated into the heart of magnate factional power and helped to bolster the regime and its supporters.
Open, wide public streets were needed to carry out the demolition of magnate properties and
demonstrates further how the idea of public space was developing out of political needs and was one
important weapon within an ever-expanding arsenal. See Najemy, "Florentine Politics and Urban
also have destroyed the integrity of the Benedictine monastery that both stood in its way and had provided space for the communal government to meet. 382  

Although the project was never realized, the street’s attempt to create direct and quick access between monumental communal spaces survived within the popular imagination, which is attested to in novella 221 of Il Trecentonovelle. In this story, Sacchetti makes what seems like a reference to this failed street project when he tells the story of how a certain trickster is able to procure a silver plate from the ambassador of the emperor. 383  Claiming that a friend and gentleman of his wanted to offer the ambassador some sweets, the trickster is able to get the ambassador to send a servant with a silver plate to retrieve them. However, the trickster, whose identity will never be known, brings the servant to the Badia, tells him to wait, brings the silver plate inside and exits into the via San Martino on the other side and disappears. The servant, thinking that the monastery was the home of the gentleman, waits futilely until the evening bell is sounded. The same trope of the foreigner confused by the topography of the unknown city is at play here. It also shows how, through the lens of deceit, one could actually move directly from the Palace of the Podestà into the street that the city had built a century before. The badia was a porous architecture. The trickster is able to effortlessly traverse the monastery that had presented such stubborn obstacle to the commune’s grand plans (Figure 2.11b). Treachery – rather than Boccaccian desire – dematerializes architectural barriers. The thief is able to make it an extension of public space to those who know, while it remains a barrier to those who don’t. What the commune could not do by legal means, the trickster does

383 Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CCXXI.
through deception.\textsuperscript{384} In contrast to Boccaccio’s flowing networks, Sacchetti’s city is the compromise of difficult negotiations, advances and retreats, deception and lies. There is no self-correcting mechanism that the city possesses to catch the perpetrator. Not even those in charge, the Podestà and his men can render justice when they pick up the servant vainly waiting in front of the badia after the evening curfew.

The ambivalent city of Sacchetti’s novellas does not inspire hope but is an incomplete project careening on the brink of chaos. One finds such an image of the city in Macerata, at the time when Florence is fighting the papacy in the Marche.\textsuperscript{385} After suffering a breach in its walls by attacking forces, a great flood came to the city and flowed through all its streets. Unlike the efficient conduits of Venice however, these waters bring refuse into the streets and plug up its sewers and drains. Not being able to exit the city and run its course, the water entered into people’s houses. In one of them, a woman looking for food descends down to where the wine is kept and sees the water filling her house

“Accurrumo!” She cries for help. Her husband rushes to her but as the lights go out he finds himself suddenly immersed in water. So he cries out, “Accurrumo!” The call for help alerts the neighbors to the commotion and they descend to find out what the problem is, but their doors are blocked by the water coursing through the streets. They too, begin to scream for help, trying to warn others of the flood. The local officer of the watch begins to call the other guards, who, in turn, call the chancellor and the priors to inform them, erroneously, that shouts of “all’arme” were being heard at the gate of San Salvadore. Hearing that the people were saying that the enemy was inside the city, the priors order the bell to be sounded. Guards in the

\textsuperscript{384} As Anne Leader has pointed out, the Sacchetti family had property immediately adjacent to the badia. It is also likely that members of his own family would have often used this short cut through the monastery. See Leader, Reforming the Badia, 6.

\textsuperscript{385} Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CXXXII.
piazza take up arms and pull chains across the entrances, all the while crying out the alarm.

In the relay of messages from periphery to the centre, a call for help is transformed into a call to arms and the confusion of rallying cries mounts as people descend upon the blockaded piazza in a sea of noise that drowns out any possibility of hearing any message whatsoever. There in the piazza, they wait for the enemy, who never came. So the priors send out messengers to the edge of the city find out what was going on. Many go, but none return. Among these was a certain Frate Antonio, a comic buffoon-like character who falls on his shield and was injured by the bell clapper around his neck. In the clamor he is mistaken for the enemy but he is finally able to tell the authorities about the flood and the priors finally regain their composure – “ritornò loro il polso che quasi aveano perduto” – and send everyone home. As the narrator says in closing, a cat knocking over a basin can become the noise identified as the enemy, especially in a city traumatized by war. The flood had impaired the city’s streets as a network of information exchange, garbling the message until it was literally turned into an incomprehensible noise of fear and panic that gives no small measure of pleasure to nearby rival towns.

In novella 159, Sacchetti revisits the theme of misrecognizing urban chaos, this time dressed in the language of urban revolt. Rinuccio di Nello has horses, each of which is as ungainly and awkward as the next. One in particular, old and misshapen, he took out and hitched in the piazza where they sold wood in preparation to go riding. In farcical fury, a mare is loosed in the piazza and upon hearing the noise, Rinuccio’s old horse swings his head around with such force that he breaks his collar and begins to pursue the female with the fury of a stallion towards Santa Maria

---

386 In perhaps a nod and a biting allusion to Boccaccio’s amorous pursuits, the cause of the misunderstandings is the sudden colpo d’amore of a broken down old horse.
Maggiore (Figure 2.12). Rinuccio, having been informed of the escape by a shoemaker, chases the horses into the Mercato Vecchio, where the old horse’s rope is undone just as a mare has entered the piazza. The merchants there, mistaking equine love for a political insurrection, begin the ritual closing up of their shops.  

As Rinuccio’s horse tries to mount the mare, the horses cause mayhem in the market square, upsetting all the veal of one poor butcher named Giano, who flees in fright into a workshop of an apothecary. Rinuccio gets into a scuffle with the owner of the mare, who had beaten his horse trying to save the meat, and the whole “romore” reached the Calimala, where the cloth merchants are also already throwing their wares inside and locking up. There is now a large crowd following, with confusion and violence mounting as the horses enter the Piazza Orsanmichele, where they cause havoc among the grain dealers. And the blind, who would gather there at the pillars of the loggia, being knocked about and chafed in the confusion, begin lashing about them with their sticks. 

It would not be long before a full scale brawl would break out. It is, therefore, no surprise that when this pulsing mass of bodies arrives at the Piazza della Signoria, government officials, who watch the scene from the windows of their palace in absolute terror, lock up the palace and arm their guards. Some were now fighting with fists, but a large number of Rinuccio’s friends and relatives were trying to help him catch the horse. The two horses ended up in the cortile of the Esecutore, who, cowering in fear, believed the furious crowd had come on account of

---

387 “I rigattieri cominciano a serrare le botteghe, credendo che ‘i romore sia levato’” (The cloth merchants began to close up their shops, believing an insurrection was underway). Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, CLIX, 44-45.
388 “…e molti seguirono le bestie, le quale, voltesi per lo chiassolino che va in Orto San Michele…” Ibid., CLIX, 67-69.
389 “E di quelli ciechi, che sempre ve ne stavano assai nel detto luogo a Pilastro, sentendo il romore, ed essendo sospinti e scalpitati, non sappiendo il caso del romore, menavano i loro bastoni, dando or all’uno e or all’altro.” Ibid., CLIX, 72-75.
390 Li quali Priori e chi era in palagio, veggendo dalla finestre tanto tumultuoso popolo giungere da ogni parte, ebbono per certo il romore essere levato. Serrar si il palagio, e armati la famiglia… Su la piazza era tutto pieno, e parte combatteano con pugna…” Ibid., CLIX, 87-92.
someone held in his custody. Imagining his own death, he cowers under the bedding of his notary. Palace officials are sent out to calm the crowd once the horses are finally caught and, when they saw that the confusion had finally subsided and that there was no danger, the Capitano and the Podestà mount their horses and rush into the square to “bring back order,” only to receive insults and abuse.\footnote{Il Podestà e ‘l capitano, essendosi armati, quando sentirono le cose non essere di pericolo, e la cagione del romore, e come già era cheto, salirono a cavallo, e con le loro brigate quasi a un’ora giungono su la piazza. Fu fatto beffe di loro quelli che v’erano rimasi, che pochi erano…” Ibid., CLIX, 120-24.}

The story ends with the lone figure of the Esecutore, who, now two hours after the event, had managed to summon up the courage to exit from the bed under which he had been hiding, shake out the mice nesting in his helmet, put on his uniform full of cobwebs, and mount his horse, only to lurch helplessly around the almost empty square, where those remaining simply tell him to go home.\footnote{“E mettesi una barbuta, che della farseta uscirono, com’è la prese, una nidiata di topi… Pur così fatta se la mise in testa; ha salito a cavallo con una sopravvesta di ragnateli, profilata di paglia, usci in su la piazza, là dove di due ore ogni cosa era finito. Quelli che vedeano costui, diceano: ‘Buono, buono! A bell’otta! Costui deè essere pazzo’…” Alcuni gli s’accostano, e dicono: ‘Messer l’esecutore, andatevene a casa, ch’egli è spento.’” Il Trecentonovelle, CLIX, 155-178 (p. 386). The…quanto è leggiera cosa quella che fa muovere a romore i popoli!” Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CLIX, 197-98.}

The brilliance of this story is the way it is able to narrate the increasing spatial sweep of pandemonium as the crowd swells into a critical mass that suddenly deflates into a stinging parody of urban politics and an ambivalent representation of the misplaced power of collective action to topple nervous regimes.\footnote{…quanto è leggiera cosa quella che fa muovere a romore i popoli!” Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CLIX, 197-98.} In all these stories, the carefully laid out plan for clear unhindered movement through streets that facilitated the regime’s protection and effective policing of the city appears incomplete, broken down, and incapable of maintaining order. Actions and words are misunderstood from all sides while the apparatus of state is exposed as a sham of incompetence, broken defenses, and chaotic misrecognition.
Of course, neither the desire embedded in legislation nor the social critique performed by such stories offers a comprehensive image of how Florentines actually encountered their city. However, given that both laws and stories are often concerned with the same phenomena, they both represent different modes in which social conditions and spatial aspirations are interrogated, maintained, and subjected to detailed scrutiny. Much of this social dialogue revolved around access and control over urban spaces and it is certainly true that it was crucial to interpret correctly what was going on there. Therefore, looking at these sources together makes sense for creating a series of common themes around which a clearer picture of spatial meaning emerges. Official pronouncements needed to be tempered with the rumor mill. At least that is the lesson given by the Anonimo fiorentino, who, in his diary, records the information leaking from the government’s palace into the public culture of the piazza where it circulates with the voices there, expressing the hopes and fears of the popolo. And his editors show how he then records the official pronouncement of such news.\textsuperscript{394} Setting these side by side with the events he witnesses allows both him and the reader to piece together a coherent picture of what is going on within the city. Like Dante in Sacchetti’s story, he is reading and interpreting space through observation and investigation. His evocation of the sounds and tenor of events allows one to take stock of the relative importance and functioning of certain moments and actions. What is recorded is the urban conversation itself, a multitude of mingling voices unfiltered by the author whose main method of representation seems to be one of juxtaposition. Much perhaps, in terms of historical situation, is missed or lost.\textsuperscript{395} However, what is gained is a series of historical fragments of a city, as well as fear of unknown spaces and their impenetrable secrets.

\textsuperscript{394} Alle bocche, xxix.
\textsuperscript{395} Ibid., xli.
Sacchetti’s story mirrors, in a general way, the context of political tensions in around the mid 1380s – just before he compiled *Il trecentonovelle* – in which rumors of insurrection and treachery abounded and were recorded by an anonymous author. In the text of the Anonimo fiorentino – whose language resembles Sacchetti’s own street-level descriptions – processions, political blackmail, jousts, and tense elections intermingle in the urban narrative. Battles between rival gangs of youths break out at the border between their neighborhoods of Santa Spirito and Santa Maria Novella, namely, on the Ponte Santa Trinita. The *Grossa*, the city’s largest bell, sounded the 24th hour, and the city’s officials, the Eight of the Watch, the Twelve Good Men, and the Standard Bearers of the Militias could not do much but watch as street battles raged on in the city. The forces of order were helpless to stop the battle that continued in the night with torches and lamps blazing as stones and clubs flew.\(^{396}\) Shouts began and the calls to arms sounded in the night while chants were heard calling for fires to be set upon enemies. In the end, enough of both sides were taken and condemned.\(^{397}\) However, at such moments, the government’s position was shaky, and such calls to arms were worrying. Only a week or so later, the city’s priors suppressed the sound of the fire bells at the Badia when a fire did break out based on rumors that conspirators were forcing the issue to use it as a signal to revolt.\(^{398}\) With only minor rearrangements and narrative restructuring, such events could very easily form the basis of a Florentine novella as bridges, squares, streets, and churches fall victim to the chaos of factional violence and fear.

\(^{396}\) Here is an instance where the anxiety of regime was reflected in its incapacity to enforce the law. Statutes specifically forbade battles with sticks or stones. See "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, xxvii.

\(^{397}\) *Alle bocche*, 64-65.

\(^{398}\) Ibid., 66.
2.6 Ragionare: Taking Account of the City

Io gli sguardo di sberfia da un buco
Poi metto a casa tutti quelli attucci in prosa
E dopo in un sonetto gli riduco.

Questi plebei di virtù nimi
Domenico di Giovanni, detto Il Burchiello\textsuperscript{399}

From things seen to things written, Florentine merchants developed a variety of ways of turning the city they saw into a known entity. As Burchiello’s poem, quoted above, makes clear, perspective matters but it always changes. He both identifies and is repulsed by the \textit{popolo minuto} of Florence, who remained an ominous memory for the early Quattrocento. They torment him on the street, whispering awful insults to his ear, mocking his fine French clothing. Burchiello tries to hold his head high, “tra gli uffici,” but he ends up spying on them, from a “\textit{buco},” perhaps a hole in a wall or a gap in a doorway. In other words, the interpreter of the visual cityscape is both participant and voyeur, caught within the daily struggles and conflicts, but who also steps back to write within a personal solitude. As will become clear in chapter four, there is a clear collective dialogue between merchant texts and stories. Florentine merchants read Villani and Boccaccio to help them interpret social conditions and describe the city in vibrant ways, and they rewrote texts, adapting the work of others in constructing a personal but connected civic voice. However, they also developed a strong sense of their own presence as individual writers. They were proud of the time and effort spent in such textual practices.\textsuperscript{400}

\textsuperscript{399} “I watch them secretly from some dark doorway/Then at home put all their nasty ways in prose/And afterward reduce it to a sonnet.” Quoted in Renée Watkins, "Il Burchiello (1404-1448) - Poverty, Politics, and Poetry," \textit{Italia Quarterly} 14, no. 54 (1970): 30.

\textsuperscript{400} See, for example, the personal exhortations that Dale Kent finds on the flyleaves of certain \textit{zibaldoni}. D. V. Kent, \textit{Cosimo de’ Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: the Patron’s Oeuvre}, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 71.
Florentines developed highly complex ways of reading their urban environment, cataloguing the things they saw, heard and imagined. Their economic, political and social interests created a kind of merchant space that was specific to their world view, defined by an emerging ideology of the merchant traders. The space produced by the merchant’s discursive practices is fundamental to understanding modern conceptions of space, a space that in turn helped to bring the modern public into being. Such space was never the free space of rational debate, but was caught within structures of power, desire, and interests that those who brought it into being imbued it with, so that it necessitated inventive strategies on the part of inhabitants to be able to accessing a voice in the piazza and lay claim to one’s urban identity.

The late medieval merchant was very careful about locating things specifically in time and place, developing a kind of realism of details, of trivialities, which creates a certain type of functional objectivity. The merchant writer Giovanni Sercambi (1348-1424) can be taken as an example. Events and actions in his novelle are positioned precisely in space and time to heighten realism, introducing a story with spatial coordinates. It is a kind of pleasure derived in recounting the journey taken through a known, remembered territory, measuring precise distances. This is complemented by the precision in the age, year, time and season of the action. Like the spatial locations, he zooms in upon details that are often not linked or necessary for the drama, but simply ways of marking time and space as frames of reference linking the world of experience to the world of the text. People too, are identified with names, families and professions, nationalities and sometimes even by age. Such cataloguing comes from merchant accounting techniques of creating meaningful arrangements of numbers and counted things. Details heighten the realism but do not

---

401 See Bec’s discussion of Sercambi in Bec, *Les marchands écrivains*, 175ff.
402 Ibid., 178.
403 Ibid., 179.
really direct any narrative or adhere to any major themes. Measuring space allowed
the merchant to express his surprise in the face of extraordinary spectacles, instilling a
certain poetry into his calculations rather than emphasizing the rational mathematical
value alone. Numbers provided the terms of reference for understanding complex
spaces, objects, and situations.

The Florentine chronicler Dino Compagni (c. 1255-1324), on the other hand,
opens his chronicle by proposing to tell the truth about certain things he saw and
heard. More importantly, however, he understands how the truth is corrupted in its
telling through the medium of sinful desires, and his text will stand as a defense
against the circulation of debased stories about the events he will describe.
Immediately then, he links the understanding of events to the spaces in which they
occurred:

And so that foreigners may better understand the events
which took place, let me describe the form of that noble
city in the province of Tuscany, built under the sign of
Mars, rich and ample with a regal river of fresh water
which divides the city almost in half, temperate in
climate, sheltered from harmful winds, poor in land,
abundant with good products, its citizens bold in arms,
proud and combative..."

Then he locates the city in space, recording the distances it lies from
neighboring cities, first locating those cities that form the grand axes of Tuscan
circulation. As Bec points out, such a conception did not consider space as simply an

404 Ibid., 317.
Published in English as Dino Compagni, Dino Compagni's Chronicle of Florence, ed. Daniel E.
406 “…la quale è nella provincia di Toscana, edificata sotto il segno di Marte, ricca e larga d'imperiale
fiume d'acqua dolce il quale divide la città quasi per mezo, con temperata ari, guardata da nocivi venti,
povera di terreno, abondante di buoni frutti, con cittadini pro' d'armi, superbi e discordevoli…”
Compagni, Cronica, I, 1.
entity in and of itself, but as function of the possibilities of movement.⁴⁰⁷ Space was always an action of moving through, constituted by the movement of things and people.

According to historian Christian Bec, measuring was not so much a process of mechanical precision, as it was a product of the visual experience of the observer. The merchant viewer, trained as he was in the applied mathematical processes, was able to approximate spatial measurements by estimating and reordering three dimensional perspectival distortions.⁴⁰⁸ Numbered measurements tamed and controlled a marvelous world, not as mathematical certainties but as creative responses to overwhelming sights. Bec recounts how the merchant Simone Sigoli deploys numbered measurements to temper his stupor in front of the pyramids at Giza. He was able to reduce the enormous scale to a set of plausible numerical relations, so that it could be compared. Proportions were experienced physically, rather than rationally, numbers always having a qualitative value rather than a quantitative one.⁴⁰⁹ What is important in this vision was that it was not absolute but built upon comparisons, internally, with the object itself and set in relation to the viewer’s position from which such relations were derived.

This was the way in which the merchant saw his city, not as a series of discreet objects and spaces, but a set of dynamic inter-related comparable forces, in movement. Bec discussed how the merchant made calculations and referred to them as a ratio (ragio), and that the verb, ragionare, was a kind of accounting, taking account of, accounting for, and settling accounts with the city. It was a method by which the differences between things were conceived and it was a skill derived from

⁴⁰⁷ Bec, Les marchands écrivains, 317.
⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁰⁹ See discussion of Villani below
his daily business practices.\textsuperscript{410} The term \textit{ragionare} is crucial in understanding the apparatus that the merchant used as an aid to calculate space and time, measure and remember, interpret and make judgments about the events and things that surrounded him.

It is this taking account, a practical response to a complex urban world, from which the Florentine merchant developed an apparatus of description and interpretation. It provided a way to contain the spaces of the city. Just as it allowed him to temper the overwhelming experience of the pyramids, his skill at \textit{ragionare} relieved the anxiety produced by the often extraordinary, sometimes violent but always dynamic, events happening in Florence. It gave a structure to the flux of daily life and could be adjusted for new information, unexpected changes, and the settling of scores, just as his account books were adjusted to provide information on current economic status.

There was, therefore, an economic aspect to space as understood by the merchant. Distances to the great centers of business were measured by Saminiato de’ Ricci in terms of the number of days required for a bill of exchange to reach its destination and be executed.\textsuperscript{411} Numbers were never just instrumental, but were connected to the state of the merchant’s soul, who kept track of his salvation in terms of religious sites visited and benefices received.\textsuperscript{412} Counting the altars or churches or religious institutions of Florence was therefore not simply an expression of the city’s wealth and its piety, but also the merchant’s numerical, and therefore physical, proximity to holy territories. Such proximity, while one was alive, was part of a larger network of sites that guaranteed the salvation of one’s soul. This was one

\textsuperscript{410}See Bec, \textit{Les marchands écrivains}, 320-25. He translates \textit{ragio} as calculation and \textit{ragionare} as a kind of accounting, always incorporating within it an idea of justice.
\textsuperscript{411}Ibid., 319.
\textsuperscript{412}Sigoli in Ibid., 320. Villani, Rustici and Dei also count the sacred through altars and churches.
possible topographical configuration that sanctified the daily wanderings of Florentines, who remembered such holy sites as they negotiated the city.

In his discussion of the use of the term *ragione* and its variants in the writings of Florentine merchants, Bec discovers that its meaning comprised the capacity to evoke the past, penetrate the present and predict the future. The term held within it the promise that measuring, counting, estimating, and keeping accounts was simply a way of coming to terms with the world in which they lived. Ultimately, this would allow the merchant to distinguish between the order of things and appearances, so that he might control it in spite of the inevitable hazards of fortune. By possessing the skills of *ragione*, the world could be measured, reconstructed and explained. Through this act of reasoning the merchant was able to compile a series of coded grids. Each of these grids could then be held up to the visible city where it framed and organized specific social and political knowledge about spaces, buildings, events, and people.

### 2.7 Villani’s Descriptive Models of the City

Ancora vi voglio pregare che mi faceste cercare d’una cronica di Giovanni Villani che sia bella e costi che vuole.
Francesco Buondelmonti

*Walking around walls.* Villani’s chronicle offers several ways in which the merchant’s skills in *ragionare* could produce new knowledge about the city for

---

413 Ibid., 324.
414 Ibid., 324-25.
415 “Again I beseech you to look for a copy of Giovanni Villani’s chronicle for me, which should be a handsome copy, cost what it may.” Letter to Giovanni Acciauoli, archbishop of Patras, 13 July, 1360. Francesco Buondelmonti was the nephew and agent of Nicola Acciauoli, *gran siniscalco*, and he was writing from Ancona to Florence. Quoted in Vittore Branca, *Un secondo elenco di manoscritti e studi sul testo del "Decameron" con due appendici*, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958), 163.
contemporaries and shed new light for the architectural historian on how cities were experienced. As David Friedman has observed, when Florentines described their city in words they transformed it into an ideal and harmonious geometry that “glossed over specific topographical details, giving a generalized account of regular and recognizable shapes.” The harmonic order in such geometric relationships expressed the foundational geometry of Florentine new towns founded throughout the fourteenth century. They were the urban analogue not to the physical form of the mother city but “invoked, instead, the ideal Florence of contemporary imagination.”

Therefore, it is imperative that the architectural historian pay attention not only to the physical form of the city but also to the ideas and assumptions with which Florentines imagined it. The disjunction between some “true” physical form and its misrecognition by contemporaries is not a distortion to be corrected but is precisely the location of architectural meaning.

Such descriptions of the city represented not only a type of idealism, but also the inability of available surveying technology and language to reproduce such a spatially and historically dense geography. However, for writers such as Villani and the fifteenth-century chancellor Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), “invented” historical connections to Rome were also crucial to understanding the city in topographical terms. The similar placement of churches and streets defined a relationship of analogy that expressed a profound mental flexibility with regard to architectural and topographical affinity between prototypes and copies. It also highlighted the fact

---

416 Friedman, Florentine New Towns, 201.
417 Ibid.
418 Ibid.
that, despite a geometrical limitation, Florentine merchants, with their education in the
abacus schools, possessed enough spatial acuity to see meaningful relationships in the
multiple topographies of their city. In addition, certain details of more complex
spatial ensembles – measurements, special features, names – sufficed as a shorthand
way of recalling or evoking the original experience in a meaningful way. It was a
way of generating a personal, meaningful relationship with the built environment and
giving it a sacred quality. Therefore, measuring and counting, walking around
buildings and walls, were not purely instrumental exercises but had deep moral and
social implications.

A series of economic, environmental, and political disasters in the 1340s set
the stage for particular forms of heightened social anxiety that further determined the
ways in which merchants wrote about their city. After the experience of the Black
Death in 1348, struggles between more and less popular regimes continued until the
watershed moment of the Ciompi revolt in 1378. Subsequently, the political franchise
suffered a prolonged, general contraction, where the violent maintenance of a
repressive oligarchic regime would eventually give way to the *reggimento* under
Medici dominance in the fifteenth century. It was in this period that, according to
Bec, the Florentine merchant looked back on the time of Villani, before the plague, as
a lost golden age, in comparison to a present fraught with uncertainty of all kinds.
Such a temporal stance engendered a sense of dislocation but at the same time that
newly distant horizon of the past offered a way to critique the present. Certainly

---

420 In these years there were crop failures, bank collapses, and the first wave of the Black Death. On the
crises of the 1340s see Najemy, *A History of Florence*, ch. 5.
421 Bec, *Les marchands écrivains*, 26-28. According to Bec merchants in the latter half of the
fourteenth and early fifteenth century felt that they lived in difficult times. Whether or not the
economic crises of the mid Trecento were responsible for the long malaise or not, historians agree that
there is a long economic contraction in Europe between the second quarter of the Trecento and the last
quarter of the Quattrocento. Merchants constantly feared making bad business moves as they saw their
peers’ enterprises collapse. Why did they become writers? Was it an attempt to control their world
through the rationality of their account books? Was the model of counting a way in which they sought
to relieve the economic anxiety, transferred to political and social anxiety?
social anxiety was not specific to this age, but its particular forms elicited an intense scrutiny by merchants who needed to constantly take account of their changing contemporary urban world. It was Villani who provided the model for certain ways of describing and interpreting the spaces around them, through which they forged links, determined limits, and defined borders of communities in which they could live. If we listen carefully to these voices, we can discern acute interpretive strategies brought to bear on the spaces of the city.

Villani’s chronicle was an important text for Florentine merchants who wished to know their city through the grid of one of its most authoritative merchant “ragionatori.” Villani provided various models for taking account of the complex urban world of Florence. He taught Florentines how to love their city and sing its praises. His was not the first but was certainly the most comprehensive and widely disseminated chronicle of the city.\footnote{On early sources of Florentine historiography, including Villani, see Pietro Santini, \textit{Quesiti e ricerche di storiografia fiorentina}, (Florence: Seeber, 1903); Otto Hartwig, \textit{Quellen und Forschungen zur ältesten Geschichte der Stadt Florenz}, (Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1875); Alfredo Schiaffini, \textit{Testi fiorentini del ducento e dei primi del trecento}, (Florence: Sansoni, 1926); Louis Green, \textit{Chronicle into History: An Essay on the Interpretation of History in Florentine Fourteenth-Century Chronicles}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Paula Clarke, “The Villani Chronicles,” in \textit{Chronicling History: Chroniclers and Historians in Medieval and Renaissance Italy}, ed. Sharon Dale, Alison Williams Lewin, and Duane J. Osheim, (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).} Fragments of his text were also copied into Florentine scrapbook compilations, variously called \textit{ricordi} or \textit{zibaldoni}. It was widely acquired and carefully guarded.

Villani proves an expert in \textit{ragionare}; of recording, keeping, taking, and settling accounts. He transforms the city into an amalgam of numbers and measurements. It is a profusion of things; things produced and things consumed. Rather than a fixed entity, Florence is a dynamic system of relations, always in flux. The passages analyzed below are well-known to scholars of Florentine history but the
particular method of description, the integration of diverse urban sectors of activity, has not been fully taken into account.

The new circuit of walls that Villani describes had recently enlarged and redefined the city’s internal topographies. The walls that surrounded the medieval city were never only the definition of borders or the defense against enemies. Gates were an integrated part of the network of internal streets and spaces and regulated the manner in which things and persons entered and exited the city. Therefore they were also part of the symbolic network of fluid topographies enacted by the various rituals that circled around the walls and paused at gates. Couriers bearing news of significant events were crowned at the city gates. It was at this place that city officials met the cortege of Florentine citizens accompanying an honored guest into the city and it was at the gate the guest swore to respect the freedom of the city. Official welcomes were read out at the city’s threshold. Gifts were exchanged and as the procession was about to cross the threshold, the city’s baldachin was raised above the visitor.

It was the gate that was the object of scrutiny for observers in determining the honor accorded to certain visitors, making explicit the link between reading architecture and space in order to understand events. Gates could be opened or ritually torn down. Such ritual destruction showed the visitor the “spontaneous magnanimity of the host” and was Florence’s way of refusing not to submit to

---

423 Davidsohn mentions two processions that specifically addressed the walls and its gates. One was the “Processione de’ quartieri” that preceded the feast of San Giovanni and a processione dedicated to S. Agata, whose processional image was to protect the city from fires. Davidsohn, Storia, I, 1070-71. The double-sided image still maintains its processional frame with long handle. That, along with the fact that it contains both a thirteenth- and a fourteenth-century image, attests to the long-term use of this image. It now forms part of the collection of the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo.

424 Trexler, Public Life, 283.

425 Ibid., 309.

426 Trexler notes that on the occasion of Martin V’s entry in 1419, the lattice of the gate was removed, an event noted by observers. For other important guests the gates were flung fully open or the hinges removed on doors in order to accord more honor. Ibid., 309-10.
foreign potentates by offering keys and insignia to the city. It was also the location
that returning armies had triumphal entries that “glossed the regime’s ability to
control urban residents.”

Morelli recounts how defeated Pisan captives were made
to kiss the ass of a young lion at the gate of San Frediano before they entered the
city.

The complicated interlocking system of boundaries, borders, limits and
thresholds outlined in chapter 1 functioned within the encircling walls of the city that
enclosed and separated Florentine urban space from the world around it. According
to Trexler, walls were the ultimate enclosing of sacred space, the first ritual edifice of
the commune. Walls were built by religious officials, they framed public processions,
and they sanctified by the placement of public symbols (segni publici).

They represented the ultimate boundary, beyond which was a zone of subjection. Like all
borders within the city, the communal walls were a thick transitional zone, comprising
cleared internal and external spaces along the entire route, a system of gates, each
with the city’s arms, frescoes, tax offices (gabelle) and offices of weights and
measures of the commune, watering holes, and a moat.

Invoking the metaphor of
the city as a body, a functioning organism, Camille describes the gates in the city
walls as mouths, having to regulate the influx of goods, while the sluice gates were
this body’s anus, flushing “away detritus and pollutants” from the city’s industries.

---

427 Trexler, "Correre la terra," 894. Such honorable entries contrasted with the insults and shame
accorded the arrival of defeated enemies, which, in turn, was an echo of how the powerful needed to
insult the marginal to maintain their own honor. See Trexler, "Correre la terra," 897-99.
428 Giovanni di Paolo Morelli, Ricordi, 2. ed., (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969), 312. See also Trexler,
"Correre la terra," 895.
429 Trexler, Public Life, 47-48. According to Trexler, these signs fell off in 1501. However, Cerretani,
the ultimate source for this information, squarely puts them within the sacred symbolic system of city
signs – along with the cross on the column of San Zanobi and two fingers from a sculpted image of San
Giovanni on the Baptistery – all of which fell in thunderstorms in 1494. See Bartolomeo Cerretani,
430 Fanelli, Firenze, 36.
431 Michael Camille, "At the Sign of the 'Spinning Sow': the 'Other' Chartres and Images of Everyday
Life of the Medieval Street," in History and Images: Towards a New Iconology, ed. Axel Bolvig and
Phillip Lindley, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 251.
The circuit and walls and gates had to act as a careful set of valves regulating the transition between inside and outside the city. I have already discussed how Boccaccio’s characters sought to breach and transgress walls through their desire. The way in which walls, gates, and doors functioned together was an integrated and complex system of access and denial. The city’s statutes regulated the entrance of livestock, while taxes were paid there on goods entering the city.

The walls were also a matter of great civic pride. They provided the setting and source for Villani’s certainty of the greatness of the city. They also served as the basis for a certain understanding of the city as a set of relations, measurements, numbers, and possible itineraries. Later in his chronicle, he will pause again from his historical narrative to describe how those very walls functioned within the larger realm of economic, social, and spiritual life. The two descriptions he devotes to his city represent two moments of measuring and counting that transform the city into a monumental set of numerical relations. They set the model for the descriptive possibilities of the accounting tools available in the merchant’s confrontation with the physical world.

In 1324, he takes the reader on a tour around the walls and through the main axes of the city.432 We are led to imagine him turning around corners as he systematically names and measures each tower and gate, describes the topography and even comments on the design.433 The journey starts in the east, on the north bank of the river, with a 60 braccia tower built on the foundations of the bridge (Ponte Rubicone, renamed Ponte alle Grazie) (Figure 2.13 – section 1). The first gate, the Porta Reale or Porta San Francesco, was 90 braccia north of this tower and its tower

---

432 The description of the walls is found in Book 10, chapters 256 and 257 while that which later the describes the city’s abundant production is in Book 12, chapter 94.
433 Villani, Nuova cronica, 10, 256, 57. He explains that he diligently made these measurements while serving on the committee in charge of construction of the wall.
was also 60 braccia high (Figure 2.13 – section 1a). In the middle of the next 442 braccia, midway to the Porta Guelfa – 60 braccia high, 22 braccia wide – was another tower.\footnote{It is not clear but this section of the walls may have run along the river. However, it is more likely Villani jumps to the outer wall up-river, where the wall turns north-west.} Within the next 384 braccia, running to the Porta alla Croce, or Sant’Ambrogio, which led into the Casentino, was another tower (Figure 2.13 – section 2). In the next 630 braccia, three towers punctuated the route to the great five-sided tower (Guardia del Massaio), which had no gate. Here, the wall turns toward the west... (Figure 2.13 – section 3)

And so on. The reader is taken past the gates named Fiesolana, Pinti, Servi, and San Gallo. He pauses at times to inform us that such and such gates lead out to places like Bologna, Lombardy, Prato, Pistoia, and Lucca (Figure 2.13 – section 4). In this way the city is imagined through its borders which carefully along it with the places beyond, situating it within a larger network of urban centers, regions, and spatio-economic relationships in a distinct but related way to Compagni’s situating of the city in terms of distances to such places. The text evokes a very clear visual image of where the reader is, and where things lead. He continues in this fashion until he hits the Arno, having traced the edges of a large polyhedron, noting the turns to orient the reader in space. He has described and moved us through the space that contains five of the city’s sestieri in detail and now takes stock of the overall picture. Summing up, he measures 7700 braccia of walls, not including the 500 braccia of the river.\footnote{This seems an excessive measurement in an otherwise accurate account but it must include both sides of the walls, so that he has added the two measurements together as part of the circuit. He measures the widest expanse across the river possible, since the current embankments did not exist and measurements were most likely from tower to tower.} In total there were nine gates with a height of 60 braccia, each with an ante-gate, four of them main gates, five minor (postierle). There were a total of 45 towers, including the gates, and the distance traveled along the river measured 4500 braccia.
The distance across to the Oltrarno walls is 350 braccia, measured from towers as end points, which, Villani explains, do not face each other directly across the river, the walled section of the Oltrarno not being as long as the Citrarno (Figure 2.13 – section 5).436

In the next chapter he begins his walk around the walls of the Oltrarno.437 He does not begin, however, at the first tower of the circuit but describes the route from the Ponte alla Carraia, precisely at the place across the river where a person on foot would have crossed the river, after having walked from the tower last described. From there, going toward Verzaia, he notes that one passes the remains of a ruined tower constructed in the Arno itself, which was washed away in a flood, before arriving at his starting point, the Porta da Verzaia, or San Friano (San Frediano), whose road leads to Pisa (Figure 2.13 – section 6). It is just such a trajectory by the text that heightens the experiential realism as one reads. It is almost akin to the strong mental image created by reading a pilgrimage account that was meant to stimulate a feeling for and an immediacy to the holy journey for those who may not have been able to perform it themselves.438 Such a comparison also underlines how even the most carefully calculated measurements were not simply instrumental recordings, but were sanctified, symbolic journeys, as all recounted walks through the city were. Villani does not simply measure; he moves – mentally at least – not simply cataloguing his city’s grandezze but evoking the experience of them for the reader.

---

436 According to Fanelli, the citrarno walls cut back in towards Ognissanti to the torre della Sardegna – named after the island it faced in the river, and close to the wool sheds on the river. This means the diagonal line drawn to the Oltrarno tower on the other bank actually makes it seem that the Oltrarno extends beyond the Citrarno at this point. See Fanelli, Firenze, 47.

437 Villani, Nuova cronica, 10, 257.

marking each gate and tower as part of a larger itinerary of civic shrines and sacred measurements, noting their power by measuring their greatness.439

As he begins this route, however, he notes that the wall along this stretch – immediately across the river on the western flank of the Oltrarno – is badly ordered, with too many turns, built too much in a hurry and founded on ditches not properly straightened (Figure 2.13 – section 7). From the Porta Romana he climbs up the Boboli and the Porta San Giorgio (Figure 2.13 – section 8), where new construction merged with the old walls made in Ghibelline times, and descends to the minor gate leading to San Miniato (Figure 2.13 – section 9). He ends at the Porta San Niccolò (Figure 2.13 – section 10) crossing back over the river to the Torre Reale, built on the Ponte Reale (most likely today’s Ponte alle Grazie), where he had started, closing the circle. Summing up, there are five miles of walls, 3 braccia thick, and a twenty braccia height to the merlons that grace the corridor along its top.440

From this point, Villani can then enter the city, having constructed its exterior image. He then proceeds to measure and name the principle axes (croce) of the city (Figure 2.13a):

From the Porta alla Croce to the Porta del Prato
d’Ognissanti, along the straight street through which the palio is run; 3350 braccia
From the Porta di San Gallo to the Porta Romana there are 5000 braccia
From Porta alla Croce to Mercato Vecchio, 2200 braccia, almost the same from there to the Porta a Prato
From San Gallo to the Mercato Vecchio, 2200 braccia
From Porta Romana to Mercato Vecchio, 2800 braccia

439 Walls were intimately bound up in the sacred dimensions of the built environment. As an example, Trexler, quoting Davidsohn, refers to the Sienese attempt to have a priest ceremonially exorcise the porta Camollia, which, of course, led to Florence and the enemy, in 1230. See Davidsohn, Storia, vol. 2, 242; Trexler, Public Life, 48, n. 8.
440 Villani leaves blank the total braccia for the whole circuit, but it works out to 8500 meters (c. 14,565 braccia), Fanelli, Firenze, 36.
This makes the point of convergence the south east corner of the Mercato Vecchio, one of the city’s commercial hubs, and by doing so Villani highlights how the new walls are faithful to the original Roman center of the city. It was still part of the economic heart of the city for food and general items, but Villani, as a major guildsman, notes that the center was *almost*, therefore, where the headquarters of the wool guild was located, between the via Calimala and Orsanmichele (Figure 2.13b). He stretches the topography just enough, therefore, to link it also to the great productive engine of the Florentine economy. The magic numerology continues; with four stone bridges, 100 churches, and at each gate was a church, a hospital, or a monastery.

What is more, by mentioning the *palio* that runs through this route, he links the street not only to its economic but also its ritual function in uniting the city’s inhabitants to each other and to the city itself by establishing identity through competition.441 By noting that it is straight and by emphasizing how the distance to the center from these gates is more or less equal in all directions, he is able to combine accurate accounting with symbolic symmetry, creating a particular kind of ideal city whose real analogue was anything but. However, considering that no contemporary of Villani would have access to an actual topographical view of the city from above, this symmetry provided just such a workable ideal image for those walking through it, providing an overall order of a well-designed city to graft onto their own piecemeal vistas. Not coincidentally, these axes were the armature supporting the network of trade and movement through the city created by the statutes and discussed above. Villani succeeded in giving it some numerical and spatial poetry.

---

441 Competition in Florence was meant to bind people together and establish civic pride. Trexler, *Public Life*, 270-71. The unity of the city was also the goal of the urban planning process.
Fusing accurate measuring and counting to symbolic significance provided a model for describing a city well-suited to the merchant’s tools of ragionare. It linked daily work to the city’s form, wealth, grandeur, and sacred character. It established the sanctity of a local pilgrimage, a way to make meaning out of one’s daily movement through the city. It connected merchant numbers and accounting practices to the sacred measurements that pilgrims would take from the Holy Land.\(^{442}\) It was also a certain way of producing knowledge about one’s own city, a kind of panorama based on the careful succession and combination of details, measured and counted.

*The city as a machine for living.* Villani’s next description of Florence appears at a moment when the author pauses from recording events in the year 1338 to take account of the city. It follows two extraordinary lists of both the income and then the expenditures of the city itself. The city’s grand accounts figure as a model themselves in calculating the health and well-being of the populace. Not only does Villani place importance on understanding the city synchronically within numerical relations, but also across time and space. He explains his narrative shift as a means for future generations to compare the relative ebbs and flows of the city’s fortune and power and population across time.\(^{443}\)


\(^{443}\) “Dopo ch'avemo detto dell'entrata e spesa del Comune nostro di Firenze in questi tempi, ne pare si convenga di fare menzione dello stato e condizione di quella, dell'altri grandi cose della città; perché i nostri successori che verranno per li tempi s'avegghino del montare o bassare di stato o potenza che facesse la nostra città, acciò che per li savi e valenti cittadini, che per li tempi saranno al governo di quella, per lo nostro ricordo e asempro di questa cronica procurino d'avanzarla inn istato e podere” (Since we have described the income and expenditure of the commune of Florence during this period (ca. 1338), it seems fitting to mention other important features of our city so that our successors in later times can be aware of any rise or decline in the condition and power of our city, and so that the wise and worthy citizens who rule in future times can advance its condition and power through the record and example of this chronicle) Translated by Paul Halsall. Villani, *Nuova cronica*, 12, 94.
Villani claims that 90,000 mouths (*bocche*) were fed by 146 bakers/ovens (*fornora*) who ground 140 bushels of grain a day. As many as 6,000 children were baptized in the year, adding to the eight to ten thousand boys and girls learning to read, giving way to 1,000-1,200 boys who are learning the foundations of mathematical accounting in six schools. At the level of higher education, the city was providing as many as 600 students with the fundamentals of grammar and logic in three separate schools. The author then turns from the city as machine for learning to the city as the provider of massive amounts of charity and the site of a monumental piety. He places the total number of churches (110), within which the religious spaces are broken down by type; 57 parishes, 5 abbeys with 80 monks, 24 convents with 500 nuns, 10 mendicant orders with 700 friars, and 30 hospitals with more than 1,000 beds for the poor and the sick. In the world of trade, the enormous production of woolen cloth is related to its monetary and labor value; 200 workshops, 70 – 80,000 pieces of cloth valued at more than 1.2 million gold florins, an industry supporting the lives of 30,000 persons. Exchange banks (80) are then juxtaposed to the amount of money minted per year (350,000 florins). He then lists are the numbers of practicing judges, notaries, physicians, surgeons, and spice merchants. Here even his powers of *ragionare* cannot estimate the number of the merchants that go out of the city to conduct business.

The relentless mechanism of Florentine consumption then takes the form of the vast amounts of wine (55,000 vats or more), livestock (4,000 cattle, 60,000 sheep, 20,000 goats, 30,000 pigs) and produce, which entered through the city gates to provision the city. Then he represents Florence as a list of foreign officials, local

---

444 However, he immediately compares this to even higher production rates 30 years previously. Ibid.
445 The overall minted total is set at four million florins. Ibid.
446 “Mercantanti e merciai, grande numero, da non potere bene stimmare per quelli ch’andavano fuori di Firenze a negoziare...” (Merchants and traders in great numbers, which one cannot estimate due to those who have gone away from Florence on business). Ibid.
magistrates, and religious leaders. Finally, he notes that other magnificent things of the city should not be neglected, so that it remains in the collective memory of the city long into the future.\textsuperscript{447} This turns out to be the continuous edification and expansion of the city; its houses and palaces, churches and cathedral, and all manner of monasteries and convents. In opposition to the abundance of provisions that enter the city gates, the architectural grandeur of the city is rooted in the center and spills out into the countryside.

In this description, Villani saw a natural virtue in abundance. His city’s prestige was directly linked to the absolute number of countable things in it. However, counting the excessive wealth of the city in terms of country villas and city palaces (Figure 2.14a, 2.14b) exceeded even Villani’s confidence in the moral power of numbers. Buried within this profusion of statistics, institutions, production and consumption was the anxiety over the production and display of private architecture. It caused the narrator to stumble and his optimism to slightly falter as he admitted that these pursuits were widely considered to be the products of sinning, ostentatious madmen.\textsuperscript{448} However, he picks himself up and, acknowledging that the costs were

\textsuperscript{447} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{448} “Oltre a cciò non era cittadino che non avesse possessione in contado, popolano o grande, che non avesse edificato od edificasse riccamente troppo maggiori edifici che in città; e ciascuno cittadino ci peccava in disordinate spese, onde erano tenuti motti. Ma sì magnifica cosa era a vedere, ch'uno forestiere non usato venendo di fuori, i più credeano per li ricchi difficil d'intorno a tre miglia che tutto fosse della città al modo di Roma, senza i ricchi palagi, torri e cortili, giardini murati più di lungi alla città, che inn altre contrade sarebbono chiamati castella. In somma si stimava che intorno alla città VI miglia avea più d'abituri ricchi e nobili che recandoli insieme due Firenze non avrebbono tante: e basti assai avere detto de' fatti di Firenze.” (Beyond this, there was no citizen, Popolano or Grande, who had not built or was not building a large and rich estate in the countryside, with an expensive mansion and other buildings even better than those in the city. Each one of them was sinning in this respect, and they were considered mad for their inordinate expenditure. It was such a marvelous thing to see that most foreigners unfamiliar with Florence thought, when they came from abroad, that the sumptuous buildings and beautiful palaces occupying a three-mile area around the city were a part of the city itself, in the manner of Rome, to say nothing of the sumptuous palaces, towers, courts and walled gardens farther from the city, which would have been called castles in any other territory. In short, it was determined that, within a six-mile radius of Florence, there were more than twice the number of sumptuous and noble mansions found in Florence itself. And with this we have said enough about the situation in Florence). Ibid. It is significant that Villani’s confidence fails in the face of individual magnificence, and not at all on the collective projects of the commune.
excessive, maintains that it was a magnificent thing for a foreigner to see.\footnote{Ibid.} And there lies the anxiety over the urban terrain wherein one was always caught within the moralizing gaze of other interested parties.\footnote{It is precisely this anxiety that finds a much fuller elaboration in the writings of Giovanni Morelli and Paolo da Certaldo, discussed below.}

This slight chink in an otherwise consistent encomium to the city reveals that Villani subscribed to and took part in creating a moralized topography of the city. He counts people, churches, and workshops, which he subdivides into endlessly smaller units that produce enormous sums of goods, charity, and wealth. He saw the city not as an idle, static image of indolence, but as a process, a system of relations with a multitude of moving, interrelated parts concerned with the production of the common good. The result is an enormous social mechanism for learning, preaching, producing, and consuming.

\textit{The Politics of Space.} A third descriptive strategy emerges from Villani’s account of the catastrophic fire of 1304 (Figure 2.15). It involved the interpretation of spaces in order to understand changing social and political relations. He was able to link the fire’s destruction to factional violence set within the moral universe of sin in need of violent purgation. The topography of fire showed clearly to Florentines how political relations were transformed through strategies of violent, urban renewal as the properties and influence of certain families went up in flames. Out from the chaos emerged the demonic figure of Ser Neri Abate, clergy and prior of San Piero Scheraggio, a corrupt and impious man (\textit{mondano e dissoluto}). Neri represents a world turned upside down, where so-called churchmen, rather than acting as agents of God, enter into a city from which either God has fled from in horror over the evil let loose there or has allowed the devil’s forces to purge the collective sins of a city.
tearing itself apart.\textsuperscript{451} He carries with him a flame that he uses to destroy the houses of his own faction (“ribello e nimico de' suoi consorti”) moving from Orsanmichele through the Calimala to the Mercato Vecchio, the very heart of the city. With an obliging wind the real destruction began bringing with it the cathartic climax of violent exchanges between rival factions within the party of the Black Guelfs through the prism of the Guelf/Ghibelline dichotomy. In its wake, it leaves a trail of wasted names interspersed with places dear to Florentine memory (\textit{cari luoghi}) and buildings lost (Figure 2.15a).\textsuperscript{452} The fire destroyed the heart of the city as an economic engine and as public space. At a time when the Palazzo Vecchio was under construction in the Piazza della Signoria had not yet been laid out, all three markets went up in flames along the principal north-south axis of the city, destroying the city’s network of trade and center of public wealth. This would have heightened the importance of understanding such violence in terms of upper class apathy towards the public spaces and networks constructed by the merchant regime.

The description acts as the corollary of the profusion of goods and buildings discussed above. The loss of families, their homes and thus their power, the markets

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{451} ‘E come erano in sul fiorire e vincere in più parti della terra ove si combatteva i loro nimici, avenne, come piacque a Dio, o per fuggire maggiore male, o premise per pulire i peccati de’ Fiorentini...’ (And as they were rising and conquering in more parts of the places where they fought their enemies, it happened because it pleased God, either to flee from a great evil or decided to purge the sins of the Florentines). Villani, Nuova cronica, 9, 71.
\textsuperscript{452} ‘...che in quello giorno arse le case degli Abati e de' Macci, e tutta la loggia d'Orto Sammichele, e casa gli Amieri, e Toschi, e Cipriani, e Lamberti, e Bachini, e Buiamonti, e tutta Calimala, e le case de' Cavalcanti, e tutto intorno a Mercato Nuovo e Santa Cecilia, e tutta la ruga di porte Sante Marie infino al ponte Vecchio, e Vaccereccia, e dietro a San Piero Scheraggio, e le case de’ Gherardini, e de’ Pulci, e Amidei, e Lucardesi, e di tutte le vicinanze di luoghi nomati quasi infino ad Arno; e insomma arse tutto il midollo, e tuorlo, e cari luoghi della città di Firenze, e furono in quantità, tra palagi e torri e case, più di MVIIlc” (on that day the houses of the Abatii and the Macci burned, and the entire loggia of Orsanmichele, the houses of the Amieri, and Toschi, and Cipriani, and Lamberti, and Bachini, and Buiamonti, and all the Calimala, and the houses of the Cavalcanti, and all around the Mercato Nuovo and Santa Cecilia, all along the way from Porta Santa Maria to the Ponte Vecchio, and Vaccereccia and behind it to San Piero Scheraggio, and the houses of the Gherardini, and the Pulci, and Amidei, and Lucardesi, and all the neighborhoods of the places named almost as far as the Arno; and in short, the core of the most precious places of the city of Florence, and in total, between palaces, towers, and houses, more 1700). Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
where Florence’s wealth was produced and traded, all those machines, fortunes, and goods \textit{(arnesi, tesauri e mercantantie fu infinito)} to which Villani will later give praise as proof of the city’s magnificence, were always threatened by the violence that lurked within the alleyways and spaces of the city that its legislation so desperately tried to control. Villani is explicit that the damage was horrific because it was in these spaces that almost all of Florence’s production and trade of things took place, and what was not burned was looted by petty rogues.

It was precisely this destruction of property and buildings, so many palaces and storehouses, that led to the destruction of some of the most powerful families of the city, such as the Abati, Macci, Amieri, Toschi, Cipriani, Lamberti, Bachini, and Buiamonti. All this, declares Villani might have allowed the \textit{grandi} to smash the order and justice out of which the Popolo had so carefully constructed the city. But with their forces split up and in disarray, each of the factions embraced the Popolo in order not to lose power completely.\textsuperscript{453} In this episode Villani demonstrates the importance of paying attention to acts carried out on buildings and spaces and taking account of the movement of people through them as a means to determine the complicated interlacing between social classes, families, enemies, allies, within the framework of the struggle to hold together a state with laws, prohibitions, and regulations.

\textsuperscript{453} “Questa pistolenza avenne a la nostra città di Firenze a di X di giugno, gli anni di Cristo MCCCHIII, e per questa cagione i Cavalcanti, i quali erano de le più possenti case di genti, e di posessioni, e d'avere di Firenze, e Gherardini grandissimi in contado, i quali erano caporali di quella setta, essendo le loro case e de' loro vicini e seguaci arse, perdero il vigore e lo stato, e furono cacciati di Firenze come rubelli, e' loro nemici raquistaronlo lo stato, e furono signori della terra. E allora si credette bene che i grandi rompessono gli ordinii della giustizia del popolo, e avrebbo fatto, se non che per le loro sette erano partiti e in discordia insieme, e ciascuna parte s'abbracciò col popolo per non perdere istato.” Ibid.
2.8 Benedetto Dei’s Lists: Counting and Measuring

Outlined above are three – certainly there could be more – descriptive strategies for taking account of the city. The first two involve a translation of the merchant’s accounting onto the urban grid; counting and measuring, and understanding space as a system of dynamic production and consumption. Buried within the second, moreover, is the anxiety that always clung to the proliferation of wealth, where the city and its spaces emerge as a moralized topography in which everyone is implicated. The third example suggests that urban space was a semiotic field, a complex text through which the attentive viewer and listener can take account of changing social dynamics. It is my contention that future diarists, chroniclers, and merchants, who found so much inspiration in Villani’s text, built on his techniques of interpretation, his lists, figures, calculations and judgments, in order to make sense of their place in the city and its history. In the following I will look at specific examples of these modes, which will reappear in many different forms.

Such models show how architecture and space were the stage for establishing social identities and relationships, which were in turn embedded in those very spaces. In the examples that follow, these identities and relationships will be the focus of an interrogation into how the meaning of architecture and space is contingent upon the actions and desires of its users. What emerges from these analyses is that urban space is crucial as a medium for determining one’s relationship to larger communities. Personal itineraries had to be overlaid onto the general urban armature, creating what can be termed “fluid topographies.” These temporal and spatial road maps were as much mental as physical, generating – against others, against legislation and
governance – heterogeneous places that formed an interlaced network of colliding memories, experiences, desires, fears and frameworks for understanding.  

Although Villani’s expansive technique of chronicling would eventually be transformed into a more professional critical historiography, the contrast between recording events, piling up lists of things, and cataloging measurements was not a spent force in the Quattrocento. Benedetto Dei (1418-1492), whose chronicle of Florence was begun around 1473 but spans the entire century, contains elements of a description closely linked to Villani’s model. By the mid to late fifteenth century, in a city whose politics were much more privatized under a Medici regime, the piazza no longer seemed to be a primary site for the exchange of information. Basking in the glow of Medici protection, Benedetto Dei, a much travelled merchant, was at the centre of a large network of informants, whose information he redirected in private letters to various leaders. Benedetto’s diary reveals its author as an inveterate listmaker. His lists were different modes in which the topography of Florence was subject to systematic analytical description. Narratives of events are constantly juxtaposed to lists of things, places, and people. He takes Villani’s spatial and social portraits of Florence and dismantles them into an array of fragmented images that describe an engaged, highly personalized series of overlapping topographies. His scope was both wider and narrower. He does not provide a comprehensive view of the city so much as express the fragmented ways in which it could be experienced. His lists create a kind of scaffolding, an architectonic armature that recasts buildings, streets and spaces into textual form. (Figure 2.16). Under the heading 1472, for example, he begins the first of many rather monotonous, hypnotic, but strangely

---

454 The city’s topography was also moralized by the government. Carol Lansing quotes a thirteenth century document that declares that it is evil, hidden men hanging around taverns that cause magnates to commit crimes. See Lansing, Florentine Magnates, 199.

455 That Benedetto was familiar with Villani’s chronicle is confirmed by his inclusion of information regarding income, expenses and the social demographics of his city in 1338. Dei, Cronica, 178-79.
compelling series of repetitions, a rewriting of Villani’s city of production and consumption. The phrase, in a red ink heading that visually recalls those of the 1355 statute rubric titles, “Florentie bella;” initiates a series of numbers as he counts all manner of Florentine buildings, bridges and spaces.

Florentie bella; 1,545 years of liberty, five miles around with 80 towers in its walls. Florentie bella; 406 towns that open and close each morning and evening under its authority. Florentie bella, 360,000 florins collected in taxes for wars, but also for dowries. Florentie bella; 3,600 palaces outside the city, 108 churches that mark the holy offices of the church, 23 government palaces and 21 guilds. Florentie bella: fifty piazze within the city, of which he patiently names forty. They are surrounded by palaces and churches, merchants, and workshops, and it is in these spaces, he tells us, that Florentines pursued their leisure (vi si dà piacere). These pursuits, a mix of spectacle and participation, included jousts, dances, and dramas, but also games of throwing and kicking various objects around the square, dice games, tables, and spinning tops. This is typical of the sequence in which Benedetto’s lists are constructed. He counts the squares, names them, fills them with buildings and then enlivens them with the ritual acts people performed in them. From here, Florentie bella offers 20 great things to show the foreigner, which are architecture, spaces, and infrastructure. It begins with the campanile, the dome, the public palace, paved streets, the Annunziata, the hospital for the infirm, a river and fresh wells, the two great mendicant churches, San Lorenzo, the convent of Le Murate, the Pazzi chapel, the tombs of the Medici and the Rucellai – a veritable Florentine Medieval and Renaissance itinerary.

---

456 Ibid., 77-84.
457 Cronica di Benedetto Dei, in ASF, Manoscritti, 119. See Ibid., 77-80.
Benedetto continues to reformulate lists on an ever-expanding matrix of themes. He lists the great building works carried on by private citizens for the honor and glory of the city, including all the major architectural undertakings in the time of Cosimo a generation earlier, public and private patronage side by side. This list includes the dome, palaces, churches and convents. This leads to a list of affluent citizens, ambassadors, famous Florentines, exiles (i.e. Medici enemies).

At this point in the text, the author suddenly zooms in to make a technical analysis of the streets and squares of his own city district. His method is similar when he turns to analyze his native Santo Spirito, a series that hinges on the repetition of “una via.” As a Florentine merchant was inclined to do, he reduced the chaos that surrounded him – that profusion of people and goods, spaces, exchanges, institutions, taverns, trades, gardens, and festivals – to organized quantitative groups. He puts names, households, bridges, streets and squares into spatial relations by the rhythmic repetition of a series of phrases that move from one end of a street to another. “Una via,” he writes, “from the Gate of San Frediano to the gate of San Niccolò, full of gentleman,” (Figure 2.16a) describing the east-west axis of the neighborhood. “Una via, from the Ponte Vecchio to the gate of San Piero Gattolino, the porta Romana (Figure 2.16b). Un via, from the ponte Santa Trinita to the column in via Maggio (Figure 2.16c). Una via, from Ponte alla Carraia to the Porte delle Fornaci, the Porta Romana (Figure 2.16d). Una via, from the Ponte Vecchio up the gate of San Giorgio, which goes to Arcetri (Figure 2.16e).”

---

458 Ibid., 91.
Una via da la porta a San Friano a la portta a Sa’ Nicholò, piena di zentilomini
Una via dal ponte Vecchio infino a la portta di San Piero Ghattolini, porta Romana
Una via dal ponte a Santa Trinita infino a la cholonna di vie Maggio
Una via dal ponte al a Charaia infino alla portta delle fornaci, porta Romana
Una via dal ponte Vecchio infino a la portta di San Zorzo, va in Archietri
entire street network of the Oltrarno. The limits of other streets are defined by such things as wells, hospitals, or the families that frame them.  

He follows almost exactly Villani’s description of the city’s main axes but at the neighborhood level. He gives the main east-west, then north-south axis, then the routes from bridges through the neighborhood and gives the most brief but very illuminating information about the street or gate he names. It is the rhythm of the language, the repetition of terms that helps to order and build a striking image of the topography. The reader experiences a criss-crossing itinerary through the network of neighborhood streets. Benedetto traverses all 27 of them, accumulating 33,000 braccia, 11 miles (Figure 2.16f)\(^{459}\) that he connects to each of the adjacent piazze and churches, intimating what activities took place there. “Una piazza, called Santo Spirito, where the wool is stretched in the quarter and where ball games are played. Una piazza, of San Felice, where the Ridolfi, Capponi, and Lippi reside.”\(^{460}\) And there are churches: Una chiesa, of Santo Spirito, the principal church and biggest of the quarter. Una chiesa, of Santa Maria del Carmine, where the hours of the church are celebrated both day, and night.\(^{461}\)  

“Una piazza... una chiesa... una chiesa e munistero... uno ispedale...”\(^{462}\) At first, these accumulative lists appear as abstractions, a view that separates space from social experience. But on closer inspection, the details of the text point to a more intimate connection between the author and the spaces he describes. In Santo Spirito, he marks streets by physical landmarks such as bridges, wells, hospitals, city gates, gardens and squares. However, he also marks them with the names of the households that bordered these streets. It proves that Benedetto was intimately familiar with both  

\(^{459}\) Like Villani, he states that each mile contains 3000 braccia. Ibid., 92.  
\(^{460}\) Ibid.  
\(^{461}\) Ibid.  
\(^{462}\) Ibid. 40 wool botteghe, 30 shoe-makers, barbers, apothecaries, butchers, wood workers, 25 bakeries, a bath, a bordello, schools, painters, taverns, etc.
the physical and social topography of his neighborhood, and that he was able to graft one onto the other. He locates houses and families in space, and we know that some of those names bore more significance than others. Some of the houses – Manetti, Capponi, Guicciardini, Soderini, Fantoni – show up later in his text in lists of enemies and friends and some of those, such as the Capponi, show up on both.\textsuperscript{463} Therefore, this was a charged topography for Benedetto, and even though his technique strives for comprehensiveness of description, we can see in the details how certain spaces may be off-limits or centers of refuge. It is an intensely personal topography that takes account of friendly and hostile places even as it enlivens social space with bodies and activities.\textsuperscript{464}

With such a systematic survey of the communication networks of his neighborhood, Benedetto traces the lines of movement through spaces. He gives the distinct impression of having meticulously traversed these streets he already knew so well, in order to render them comprehensible. He was taking account (\textit{ragionare}) of the spaces of his most intimate social life, transforming them into the language of an account book. Now the neighborhood had an enviable rationality into which he could then insert the people, institutions and daily activities that gave meaning to those spaces. The description, therefore, moves from measured space, through a social topography of the neighborhood, up to the social rituals of a larger civic narrative. He fills the \textit{piazze} and streets with the city’s festivals, naming eighteen both religious and civic, and the place where they took place. Again, the rhythmic repetition imparts a discrete structural intensity to the list. \textit{Fàsì in prìma}, the great festival of Saint John the Baptist in the month of June. \textit{Fàsì la gràn festa} of the joust in Santa Croce, in the

\textsuperscript{463} Ibid., 137-38.
\textsuperscript{464} Although Benedetto may have had access to tax records to count the number of tradesmen in his neighbourhood, his careful attention to certain details of urban life would indicate that he was familiar with many of the people who populate his statistics, considering he had built up networks of contacts for information gathering in Florence, Italy and beyond. See James, "News, Rumour."
month of January.  *Fàssi la gran festa* of Sant’Onofrio in the square of the Alberti and the Tintori.  

In the following pages, the lists begin with the repetition of the year, followed by a list of seemingly unrelated events. For example, in 1470, Benedetto names valleys and rivers by which mills are powered to produce the cloth that drives the engine of the economy. He notes the burning of the church of Santo Spirito, formal entries into the city, export quantities, deaths, burned houses, an earthquake, a found crucifix, a poor harvest, the prices of wine and meat, and news from all around Europe. The overall effect gives the city a kind of unceasing energy amid events that intersperse its daily activities at random intervals, dramatizing the way the multiple worlds of the Florentine merchant collided within the space of the city.

At first Benedetto, in comparison with Villani, seems more randomly effusive rather than mechanistically abundant. In the constant accretion of disparate events arranged in this way, one often has the impression that he wrote down things as they happened or as he remembered them, in no apparent order. However, as his description of the quarter of Santo Spirito shows, he was a methodical organizer of space and distance. In his description of Santa Croce, moreover, he demonstrates through measurements how architectural space could be experienced. This is not, however, a purely rational translation of ratios into abstract relations but a personal itinerary through the topography of the Franciscan complex, in which he takes account of what he sees. Again, it is a list, each line beginning with a numerical measurement, followed by a brief description of the object. He begins at the steps to the church, measuring their length and the pavement’s width, then that of the façade itself. He goes on to measure the width of the church and the number of doors, then

---

465 Dei, *Cronica*, 93.
466 Ibid., 94-105.
467 Ibid., 107-8.
its length to the high altar.\textsuperscript{468} He then turns to measure the width of the crossing and count the number of surrounding chapels. He lingers around the choir, and then starts counting altars and sepulchers. Going out to the first cloister, he sees the chapterhouse and Pazzi chapel, admires the columns, enters the refectory, then encounters the second cloister in which he circumnavigates the space, measuring in terms of \textit{braccia} and counting the columns all the while. He gazes at and numbers the friars’ cells, guest rooms, windows, doors, and stairs. Then, after visiting the crypt and its tombs, he returns to the piazza in front of the church and measures its length. The entire itinerary is circular – much as visitors experience it today - starting and ending in the square but only noting the piazza at the end of the journey, which links the whole experience to the larger urban environment, which is characteristic of the way the text constantly traces larger and smaller worlds, and the points at which they make contact.

The description ends with a coda. He inserts the living bodies into the spaces thus adumbrated, just as he did in the diagram of his own neighborhood. He fills in the space with nine flagellant companies, 8 wells, a refectory and chapterhouse amid the two cloisters, a beautiful garden, a barber shop, an apothecary, salt stores, and kitchens. Finally, there is a magnificent library of Greek, Arabic, Chaldean (\textit{chaldeo}), Turkish, Latin and vernacular texts, which the (certainly envious) friars of Venice, Milan, Siena and Naples well knew.

Benedetto’s description of the Florentine duomo is similar in its trajectory (Figure 2.18). Starting outside, he records measurements as he moves toward the altar, looking up to the height of the cupola, noting that it is lacking both wood and iron for support. He alternates by switching to the \textit{campanile}, in order to make

\textsuperscript{468} It is noteworthy that he measures to the distance to the main altar, and not to the back of the church. This tends to emphasize the spiritual nature of the topography he traverses, the one that mattered in terms of symbolic meaning, rather than the expression of a pure rationality.
comparisons between two independent but linked monumental structures. He ritually walks around the campanile, noting its 100 braccia circumference, similar to the way in which he traversed the cloisters at Santa Croc

Typically, his description of Santa Croce constructs a rational outline of the space in terms of measurements and counted objects (Figure 2.17). This provides the basis for the personal topography that can then be adapted to changing conditions, different itineraries and mental comparisons. It makes such topographies fluid, but not random, malleable, but not completely coincidental to the actual experience of space.

Benedetto continuously merges measurements with information and anecdotes, which act as snapshots of daily life, combining the civic and sacred, work and play. It is less a sacred itinerary than a kind of textual map of the city set within historical and geographical narratives. It contains echoes, however faint, of medieval cartography, in which history is located in space, where events are narrated in the places where they occurred. In Benedetto’s text, events of world history become local people, neighborhood landmarks, and everyday activities attached to a detailed topographical description of buildings, streets, and squares. All this is juxtaposed to historical narratives, political events, travel accounts, and lists of families, foreign words, and mercenary captains. The effect can be disorienting on the one hand, with the in comprehensible accumulation of numbers, names, and things, but on the other the effect is not unlike the random encounters and circulation of information in actual practice. Rather that a transparent medium of perfect communication, as it was in Boccaccio’s Venice, one had to move through the city, taking account of things familiar and strange, meeting friends, performing tasks, looking for information,

---

469 Dei, Cronica, 109.
responding to others, working; all the things that stimulate one’s thoughts and memories.

Benedetto, therefore, attempted to take account of his city as a means to construct a familiar itinerary through spaces that were heterogeneous by nature, and he was using Villani to help him. Both of these merchants, in taking account of the social dynamics surrounding them, documented the different ways of negotiating a city that was increasingly becoming a zone of restricted access. Benedetto Dei’s political position allowed him the privilege of careful inspection. His disparate lists – places, streets, religious itineraries, lists of friends or enemies, chronologies of events, measured streets, numbered squares and wealthy houses – recreate, through textual juxtaposition, the manner in which urban spaces were actually experienced. As one moved through the city, one encountered a variety of irreconcilable viewpoints that were always inflected by both one’s social and spatial position. The Florentine merchant had to find ways to negotiate through these competing interests, to carve out personal topographies that allowed each, in some way, to access and participate in the construction of urban space.

2.9 Morelli’s Distrust and Certaldo’s Paranoia

Florentine statutes express a desire for order and beauty, the anxiety over conflict, and a certain gender-inflected moralism that were built into the mechanism of public spaces. Having defined the contours of a legal, public space in such a way, it remained for the government to maintain and control it as a well-functioning network. In order to keep these spaces free of encumbrances, unhindered by refuse, unobstructed by architectural projections, unpolluted by waste, sounds, noises, putrid smells, and undesirable human elements – indeed, anything that would poison the
body public – they had to be pervaded by regulations: sanctions, prohibitions, obligations, restrictions, and exemptions. The result was a complicated web of temporal and spatial zones for the myriad activities carried on outdoors in public spaces. Such regulations controlled games of chance and games between rival communities, the slaughtering of animals, the movement of bodies and the sale of goods. They defined zones of access and prohibition during fires, insurrections, horse races, weddings and funerals. 470 Taverns, gaming, and other vices were banned from both religious and civic sacred spaces. It controlled voices that advertised goods for sale while prohibiting speech against the regime. Such regulations found in the statutes evoke an indirect image of the daily activities that infused the streets and squares of Florence with life.

This elegant, complicated, concrete, and textual architecture of public space was then supposed to integrate seamlessly with the elaborate ritual of communal statecraft. The thick walls of the palace were to keep secrets of state from leaking out into the swirl of information coursing through piazza. The decision to build the ringhiera in 1323 created what was the most privileged liminal zone of the city that mediated between the piazza and its monument (Figures 2.19, 2.19a). It was the stage for the proper dissemination of information and upon which the government constructed the image of its authority. 471 Raised above the piazza but connected to it, it was site of the performance of a certain tripartite hierarchy among three levels of the public domain. From the tightly restricted space of the palace, through the carefully orchestrated transitional theatre of the ringhiera, to the relatively open space

---

470 For the creation of restricted zones during fires see "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," I, lxx. For those created during insurrections and weddings see the discussion below in “Percorrere la città.” See also "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," IV, xliii. For fire policy in general see Maria Pia Contessa, L'Ufficio del fuoco nella Firenze del Trecento, (Florence: Le Lettere, 2000).
471 On the ringhiera as the site of political exchange in the piazza see Milner, "Citing the Ringhiera," 53-82.
of the piazza, the architecture of this public space was supposed to mediate the exchange between rulers and ruled while simultaneously regulating the constant rotation of different individuals, who were at various times advisors, public servants, ritual actors, public voices, beneficent representatives, and loyal citizens. However, the anxiety over unauthorized persons – namely, magnates, women and the poor – entering the palace, stones thrown at the ringhiera, as well as armed battles in the square constantly interrupted the ritual exercise of power.\(^{472}\)

Consequently, the “publica fama” (common knowledge)\(^{473}\) and the “decorum civitatis” (the honor and beauty of the city) had to squarely face that other creature of public space that was always clogging up the streets and seeking to uncover secrets, namely, an unruly public sphere, which, from what can be gleaned from the statutes, was made up primarily of rumors, gossip, deceptions, secrets, and lies. The government was caught between maintaining the secrets of its own deliberations and controlling the diffusion of public information. By the sixteenth century, Francesco Guicciardini described the boundary separating the palace from the public spaces under its jurisdiction not as a mediation but as a dislocation. In his *Ricordi*, number 141, he tells the reader not to be surprised about the difficulty of reconstructing knowledge of the past or of things that happened in distant lands, since:

> if you think about it carefully, you will find we do not have any true information about the present or about the things that happen everyday in our own city. Often there is such a dense cloud or a thick wall between the palace and the market place that the human eye is unable to penetrate it. When that is the case, the people will

\(^{472}\) On magnates, see discussion below in “Percorrere la città” below. On prohibiting women from entering the palace see "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III. clxxv. On public reaction to female presence in the Palazzo Vecchio see Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit," 263-64. On the poor see the discussion concerning the Ciompi in chapter 5.

\(^{473}\) This concept will be explored in more detail in “Reading and Writing: Notaries and Narrative” in chapter 4.
know as much about what the rulers are doing or the reason for doing it as they know about what is happening in India. And thus the world is easily filled with erroneous and idle opinions.474

He recognized that there was a link between the opacity of historical time and the opacity of urban space. The fog that separates us from knowledge in the present also contributes to the impenetrable veil between us and things already past. The piazza was, therefore, defined as a temporally modified space, easily filled with erroneous information. This image was in direct conflict with the one that the statutes had attempted to construct. Walls dissolved into fog so that the boundaries laid out in the statutes only confused and hindered the transactions between private and public space. Secrets were the opposite of the notion of the public, of making something public. Their proper domain was behind the thick walls of the public palace.475

The government’s careful manipulation of its monologue of power was an effort to counter the slippery and illusive face to face exchange of information on public streets. It also ran up against citizens like the merchant Paolo da Certaldo (c. 1320-after 1370), who wrote his Libro dei Buoni Costumi sometime in the 1360s. He was trying to overlay a more personal topography of open and closed zones within the larger matrix of publically appropriated space. Against the actual chaotic movement of information in public space, where rumors and gossip had to be weighed and

474 “se considerate bene, non s’ha vera notizie delle presenti, non di quelle che giornalmente si fanno in una medesima città; e spesso tra’ palazzo e la piazza è una nebbia si folta, o uno muro si grosso, che non vi penetando l’occhio degli uomini, tanto sa il popolo di quello che fa chi governa, o della ragione per che lo fa, quanto delle cose che fanno in India; e però si empie facilmente e il mondo di opinioni erronee e vane.” Francesco Guicciardini, “Ricordi politici e civili,” in Opere inedite, (Florence: Barbèra, Bianchi e Comp., 1857), 124. English translation in Francesco Guicciardini, Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman (Ricordi), [1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 76-77. Translating “piazza” as “market place” alludes to the exchange of information in economic spaces of the city but excludes that other element of the piazza that incorporates political ritual. It ignores the powerful apparatus of obfuscation provided by the ringhiera as an imperfect medium of information exchange. In the context of Florence, it would be impossible to imagine that Guicciardini was not thinking explicitly of this spatial dynamic.

475 “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, xiii. Secrets told in the palace were to stay in the palace.
measured against official pronouncements and silences, Paolo took account of the lively interchange in streets and squares through a lens of moral anxiety. In his diary he demonstrated an acute awareness that one’s actions and words were let loose in public spaces in a way that divorced them completely from their original intent. They began to circulate within a domain accessible to everyone and as a merchant he was concerned with secrets and how to keep them so while necessarily acting in the public domain. He was less interested in how one constructed a personal façade vis-à-vis others than in analyzing how information moved across boundaries and within certain spaces, all of which contained competing forces. For Paolo, the public square and the public information it facilitated and preserved were crawling with people secretly hiding behind bushes and curtains, lurking around corners and listening behind walls, tropes that fill the pages of the Decameron, with which he was surely familiar (Figure 2.20).476 Upon entering a room one was not to speak until everyone in the room was accounted for, in order to preempt someone from listening secretly from behind a curtain.477 He also counseled his readers not to trade in secrets along streets, hedges, or thin walls.478 Secret things, therefore, had to be uttered softly behind a very thick wall.479 But since walls inevitably spring leaks, Paolo also proposed, paradoxically, telling secrets in the middle of the open square (Figure 2.20a). He knew that one was always subject to the watchful gaze of others and that even the most quotidian spaces

477 È simile, s’entrassi in una camera, non favellare e non dire niuna cosa se prima non sai bene certamente che è ne le detta camera, però che dopo la cortina o in altro nascoso, ch’udrebbero i tuoi fatti e detti” (And similarly, if you enter a room, do not talk or say anything if you do not know for certain who is in the room, in case there is someone behind a curtain or hidden elsewhere, who could hear the things you say.) Ibid.
478 “Ancor ti guarda di non dire cosa lungo la via o lungo parete d’assi o di sottile muro, che tu non voglia che ogni uomo il sappia” (Also make sure that you do not say things along a street or along walls of a road or a thin wall, that you do not want anyone to know). He then makes reference to a Florentine proverb, in which he warns those on the street not to speak falsely: “...[chi sta] lungo via non dica fallia,” Ibid. The proverb is a quotation from Brunetto Latini’s Tesoretto, 1635: “È chi sta lungo via guardi di dir fallia” See editor’s note.
479 “Se vuo’ parlare cose celate, di piano, in luogo che tu abbi tanto largo di mura, che t’avvisi che ‘l tuo favellare non sia udito fuori del più pressimano muro...” Ibid.
were charged with the volatility of misapprehension. However, it was there that secrets could be revealed because one had a clear view of any enemies who might be listening within audible range.\textsuperscript{480} This was the place of discourse, facilitated by the public benches that ringed the city’s main piazza. The public transparency of the piazza allowed Paolo to win back a certain domain of privacy and security within communal space from the enemies that haunted him. Clear sightlines and orderly spaces were not, first and foremost, aspects of a beautiful city, but necessary elements of a nervous and anxious one. One can deduce from his words that the spaces of the city were contested zones where information was the prize of the resourceful and was potentially a weapon to wield or an asset to sell.\textsuperscript{481}

Paolo was grappling with the ambivalent nature of walls and spaces, seeing in them various degrees of porosity and opacity. He interrogated the ways in which walls could hide, but also reveal, while at the same time \textit{spaces} rendered visible a variety of points of view even as they allowed secrets to be controlled and hidden. Walls were barriers to some, ways of accessing information to others. In short, their functions were fluid and ambivalent. One had to be constantly aware of one’s relative position in space, in a system of relations with other interested and implicated parties, in order to determine just how a certain space or wall would contain, transform or redirect the meaning of one’s actions and words.

For the wool merchant Giovanni Morelli, on the other hand, the piazza no longer provided a robust setting for open social and political confrontation. He is the abject alter ego to Goro Dati’s hopeful conformism – discussed later in this chapter. Therefore, in his diary, he withdrew into a reconstructed private refuge based on the topography of local social relations and the construction of a moral façade in public

\textsuperscript{480} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{481} Secrets are often the opposite of public in the city’s statutes, and they were supposed to be the purview of the government, except merchant account books, which were protected secrets.
places. Transforming the city’s careful establishment of proper limits and borders into a personalized itinerary, Morelli drew his own social map within the limits that the city’s laws had set. He instructed his family to acquire friends in the immediate neighborhood for whom one could do favors. He advised honoring them with dinner invitations, always having at hand some cool dry wine on a hot day, or a variety of good vintages to offer them on feast days. In pursuing a young woman, he writes, “go to her neighborhood at a proper hour;” that is, after one’s shop was closed. “Do not go alone”, he continues, “but with trusted friends, and make your virtue known to her indirectly through the gossip and reports of others.” Thus, one had to make intimate relations with the people who populated her neighborhood spaces in order to create a certain localized persona, a public reputation.

For Morelli, it was important to construct, or as a last resort simply buy, bonds of trust and friendship that created a zone of familiarity out of one’s immediate surroundings. Morelli dramatizes the multiple layers of public spaces that could be arranged in the city. Within the larger political and economic zones of the city outside one’s neighborhood lay an alien territory, where one’s comportment was to be of a more dissembling nature. One was to obey, follow, and not speak badly of those who ruled the city despite their character. Although he heard murmurs circulating in the city, instead of tuning in to the sounds of the street, he simply tuned out. He recommended silence unless one was ready to utter words of commendation, deafness

---

482 Morelli, Ricordi, 253.
483 Ibid., 260-61.
484 “…vavvi all’ore compitenti, quando se’ uscito da bottega. Abbi uno compagione fidato che faccia compagnia volentieri; piglia dimestichezza nella sua vicinanza con persone da bene; sia costumato e piacevole, usa cortesia con que’ giovani suoi vicini; fa cotai operazioni virtuose e che a lei sieno rapporte…” Ibid., 261.
485 Reputation was everything to a Florentine but such carefully constructed neighborly relations could also be used to one’s benefit. In one of his novelle, Sermini recounts how a woman circulates the information around the neighborhood that she is related to her love interest so that they can legitimately be seen together. See Gentile Sermini, Le novelle, (Livorno: F. Vigo, 1874), 2, 573ff.
486 Morelli, Ricordi, 253.
against the seditious words of others, and refutation to any criticisms of the regime.\textsuperscript{487}

Since there were a lot of nasty people in Florence, Morelli counseled his readers to simply speak well of everyone.\textsuperscript{488}

In contrast to the intimate comforts of the neighborhood corner, Morelli exhibits an intense apprehension about the way in which social discourses were let loose into public spaces. Outside one’s neighborhood, little capacity existed to control the circulation of verbal exchanges, so he advocated an alert façade of amicability, a surface of consensus and good-natured gullibility. To combat the deceitful, he proposed another kind of deceit, aware, perhaps, that language and speech in the urban environment produced unstable games of meaning in which each utterance was ripe for misunderstanding. Morelli was exposing his own awareness of what Simmel referred to as the distinct borders one has to create between one’s body and one’s psychological self and the world outside. Like the physical boundaries erected in the built environment, these personal boundaries had to be both fixed and flexible because it was precisely the interaction between bodies, selves, and space that put pressure on such borders. Personal boundaries never lost their relative fluidity. This is “easily revealed when we leave our accustomed relationships behind, in which we have staked out a fairly definite area for ourselves through gradually expanding rights and duties, through the understanding of others and being understood, and by testing our powers and our emotional reactions.”\textsuperscript{489} Morelli was dramatizing Simmel’s critique of the spatial orders of society. Leaving the familiarity of the neighborhood was crossing into an unknown territory because one was not certain what could be said there, what needed to be kept quiet, how one needed to act in order

\textsuperscript{487} That this was as much practical as moral advice may be intuited from a provision that made by the government in 1394 that encouraged secret denunciations of any defamatory messages posted in the city by offering 400 florins as a reward.

\textsuperscript{488} Morelli, \textit{Ricordi}, 275.

\textsuperscript{489} Simmel, “The Sociology of Space,” 163.
to maintain the “proper image” of one’s own sense of self. In a new environment one loses the solidity of identity which is fixed in the space of one’s neighborhood, and inevitably lapses into inner insecurities.\footnote{Ibid.}

Morelli’s anxiety about defamatory speech may have also been the result of the fact that such speech was formally forbidden. No one was to utter injurious words about any of the commune’s officials. Such words shouted out in public were punishable with a fifty \textit{lire} fine and, depending on the extent of the slander, the character of the person involved, and, most tellingly, the place in which such words were uttered, the Capitano or Podestà had full arbitrary power to render fitting punishment.\footnote{“Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, lxxxv, f. 151r. The rubric of the statute reads as follows: “della pena di colui che dirà alla podestade o contra officiale parole ingiuriose.” In a law concerning insurrection, malicious words (“alcune parole villane, soze o disoneste”) are expressly forbidden. See “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, xxx. See also Caggesi, \textit{Capitano (1322-25)}, II, iv.} Trexler points out that the chronicler Stefani complained that in 1378 people were punished more for injurious speech against the lords of the Parte Guelfa than against God or the government, for which there were laws on the books but which were, in general, ignored.\footnote{Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 51, n. 24. Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, \textit{Cronica fiorentina}, ed. Niccolò Rodolico, vol. XXX, (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1903), rub. 767.}

Such questionable activity as “gambling, whoring, and drinking” were prohibited in the vicinity of the city’s sacred topographies; churches, convents, and governmental buildings.\footnote{Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 51. There was a ban on taverns and food vending within two hundred \textit{braccia} of the palaces of the Podestà and Capitano. See Caggesi, \textit{Capitano (1322-25)}, V, xxvii. In the prohibition on taverns and food sales around the palaces of the Podestà and the Capitano, the distance was measured from the entrance. Prostitution was forbidden in the same area. See Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 51, n. 23. See also ASF, Provvisioni, 65, f. 71v. Buffoons and civic heralds were banned from having conversations in the palace as well. See Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 51, n. 23.} Morelli counsels his readers to not participate in games of chance – “\textit{non giuquare a zara}” - that involved money but to play games that kids do, such as spinning tops, cards, and throwing the lance.\footnote{Morelli, \textit{Ricordi}, 258. Morelli was referring to the dice game, common throughout medieval Europe, called “\textit{zara},” which consisted of three dice. Players attempted to predict the sum of the three} Such games were forbidden
but the law specifically attempted to ban it from the piazza at the Ponte alla Carraia and the gate that led to Ognissanti, within a distance of fifty braccia (Figure 21). Both players and the swindlers (barattieri) who cheated them were to be publicly chased (scopato publicamente) through the streets of the city. Clear$\textsuperscript{495}$ly there was a moral dimension to the ban on games of chance involving the hazardous exchange of money between people who chased financial gain in the transactions of pure risk. Considering that the statute mentions loans by the shadowy figures that lurked at the edges of the piazza, such games entered into the mechanism of interest and usury. They were echoes of the anxiety that bankers in particular, and merchants like Morelli in particular, felt over the morality of international finance.

Singling out the piazza around the bridge of Ponte alla Carraia suggests that this space had become the usual venue for such activities. Even within the expanding city walls, the site was still at the edge of the built up centre of the city and was in proximity to the church of Ognissanti, which had been a center of industrial production since at least the thirteenth century. Added to that, the Ponte alla Carraia gave direct access of to the neighborhood of San Frediano, and therefore linked a sector of wool production to a sector comprising the bulk of its workers. As such, the piazza lay at the crossroads of an industry whose workforce endured chronic poverty and was heavily regulated by the city and the wool guild. Such laws may have geographically singled out social groups who were not supposed to gather in large groups in public space.$\textsuperscript{496}$

---

$\textsuperscript{495}$ “Statuti del Capitano (1355).” The law goes on to state that those who play at the edges of the piazza (“giuochano fra lati dela detta piazza”) are prohibited from lending money or dice or anything for the purposes of playing such games and those found guilty were to be fined. The capitano was supposed to police the area once a month while having the law publicly pronounced in the piazza by the city’s banditori.

$\textsuperscript{496}$ For laws against wool workers (Ciompi) see “Rumori” below.
Negotiations between public and private revolved around related dialectic couplings such as the silent and audible, things hidden and visible, secrets and communication. Such laws were part of a whole range of more and less temporary and interpenetrating systems of mobile spaces that created zones within zones, at certain times, for certain people. They included fires, feast days, nighttime, churches, taverns, prostitutes, and both private and public places.\textsuperscript{497}

Giovanni Morelli may seem to have internalized his own subjection to authority and Paolo da Certaldo may appear on the verge of paranoia. However, Morelli was also pragmatically trying to deal with the social facades that people always constructed in the face of the inevitable uncertainty of daily face-to-face relations. Negotiating space for him meant developing a mask that was impenetrable to those who traversed the city in search of information, stories, and secrets. The image we get of the everyday spaces of the city is not one of the free exchange of ideas. These texts do not depict a transparent, coherent picture of urban life. These city spaces were highly contested, fluid in meaning, unstable from one moment to the next. The city was not a unified whole, but an endless series of both random and staged encounters, connections and possibilities that had to constantly accounted for, anticipated, or circumscribed.

\textit{2.10 Dati’s Vision of Beauty and Bruni’s Harmonic Dream}

Imagine the figure of Goro Dati (1362-1435), standing at the edge of the Piazza della Signoria, gazing at the Palace of the Priors sometime in the early fifteenth century (Figure 2.22). In the eighth book of his \textit{Istoria di Firenze} He recorded the memory of what he saw, in the eighth book, amid the narration of events of the city’s

\textsuperscript{497} All of which are part of the general themes of this dissertation.
ongoing struggles against its enemies. However, at this point he breaks from the narrative in order to recount what he now declares is the consensus around the truth of the origins of the city, which was founded by the Romans. In this origin myth Dati locates Florence’s historic virtù even deeper back in time and within an even larger territorial entity than Dante’s chaste and sober center evoked in the Paradiso. In Dati’s text, the moral virtù of Florentines was a product of Tuscany itself, so much so that it was this attribute that Roman families hoped to instill in their children by sending them to friends in this region. Therefore, by linking Tuscan virtù to the region itself, which then nourished Roman children in ancient times, Dati’s story upends the conventional relations of influence between Rome and Florence by attributing the great cultural production of the Romans – “divennero vaghi e desiderosi e grandi autori” – to Tuscany, which gave them a moral ethos that allowed them to conquer the world and rule it in peace with a strict sense of justice.

499 “Come che tutti s’accordano che dai Romani fussa posta, costoro dicono meglio la verità del tempo e della cagione.” Ibid., 260.
500 This passage of the Comedia will be discussed below. See “Constructing Space with Sound.”
501 “Que’ Romani che si volevano avanzare e trarre innanzi le loro famiglie a onore mandavano i loro figlioli, come avevano intendimento, a certi loro amici in Toscana perché quivi si allevassero e nutricassonsi in virtù e in buoni costumi perché in Toscana s’esercitavano le virtù morali, e belli costumi e nobili gentilezze più che in altra provincia del mondo...” Dati, “Istoria,” 260. “These Romans who wanted to advance and draw their families forward to honor used to send their children, were they were able to understand, to certain friends they had in Tuscany to have them raised and nurtured in good morals because in Tuscany they practiced such moral virtues and there, more than in any other province of the world, good morals and noble kindness existed.”. Note that the Romans did not bring in Tuscans to educate their children, suggesting that the virtù in question was somehow also a product of the land itself.
502 “They became graceful and yearning and great creators.” Ibid., 260-61. “...tutte le province del mondo e reami e signorie erano ridotti a sicura amicizia co’ Romani... o erano distrutti...veggendosi i Romani nella maggiore tranquillità e riposo che mai più per adietro fussino stati” Dati, “Istoria,” 261. “...all the provinces of the world and realms and dominions were subordinated and to secure relations with the Romans... or they were destroyed... finding themselves in a state of maximum tranquility and calm they had never before had.” Here Dati appears to be using this story to contrast with the upheavals that characterized his experience.
In Dati’s \textit{ragionamento} Florence is a monument, a memorial to the enduring \textit{pax romana} its inhabitants helped to bring about.\textsuperscript{503} It was a marvelous and beautiful city, founded on the Arno with the best air and water. Romula, it was called, “Little Rome,” and it was populated by some of the noblest families of Rome itself, who made it such a beautiful thing that it blossomed into the most beautiful flower, taking on the lily as its symbol.\textsuperscript{504} In this narrative, the city welcomed Totila (Attila), four hundred years after Caesar Augustus, with great honor ad characteristic kindness, only to watch as his forces razed – \textit{col fuoco e missela tutta in ruina} – the city to the ground.\textsuperscript{505} When Florentines came back to rebuild their city they did so only in a piecemeal, haphazard way. In doing so they brought into being that forest (\textit{selva}) of towers that was the concrete symbol of the medieval city of factional strife.\textsuperscript{506} It was the commune that rescued the city from this architectural maze of confusion and conflict by forcing these towers to be cut down to fifty \textit{braccia}.\textsuperscript{507}

The city was then rebuilt, but this time there was a coherent, unified plan. This plan, described by Dati and reminiscent of Villani’s description of the city plan,

\textsuperscript{503} “…questo fusse loro venuto fatto per cagione di due cose… l’altro per lo esercizio della giustizia e di tutte le oneste virtù e buoni costumi che di principio avevano imparati in Toscana… E però deliberarono per comune consentimento e legge che in quello tempo di pace e riposo e di tanta grandezza di loro stato facessono una bella opera per merito e memoria delle sopradette cose, e questo fusse fare nel mezzo di Toscana, in quello luogo che fusse migliore aria e più atto e dilettavole e migliore acqua che altro sito che vi fosse, una città bella a maraviglia…” Dati, "Istoria," 262-63.

“…this [peace] had come to them for two reasons… the other [reason] was for the exercise of justice and of all the honorable virtues and good morals that in principle they had learned in Tuscany… and therefore, they deliberated by common consensus and law to undertake, in that time of peace and tranquility and of much greatness of their state, a beautiful work for the memory of the above mentioned things, and this was to make, in the middle of Tuscany, in that place which had the best air and was the most suitable and delightful and had better water than any other site there was, a beautiful and marvellous city…”

\textsuperscript{504} Ibid., 262.

\textsuperscript{505} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{506} “…ritornarono e rifezionarono la città, non tutta nel primo luogo ma in parte, e in parte si stesono più verso il ponente…” Ibid. “…they returned and rebuilt the city, not entirely in the first place but in part, and they extended mostly towards the western part…”

\textsuperscript{507} “…poi venne che per comune deliberazione tutte furono tagliate e recate a basso d’altezza di \textit{braccia} cinquanta e non più.” Ibid. “…then it came that by communal decree all [towers] were cut and brought down to a height of fifty \textit{braccia} and not more.”
constitutes a particular Florentine topography that sanctified the city through its resemblance to the image of Christian, rather than pagan Rome. He begins by linking the two cities together through four specific churches and their spatial arrangement. San Piero (Maggiore), he writes, lay just inside the (twelfth century) walls at the entrance of the city, in a clear reference to the basilica in Rome.\footnote{It is not clear whether the comparison has to do with Saint Peter’s location just within the Vatican walls or not.} From here, following a straight street (via diritta) across the expanse of the city one encountered the church San Paolo, just outside the walls (fuori della città), linking it to Peter’s companion apostle buried just outside Rome in San Paolo Fuori le Mura (Figure 2.22).\footnote{Dati was most likely referring to San Paolino, originally called San Paolo, which was founded either in 335 CE, according to a 15th century inscription, or in 805 by Charlemagne (Villani) in front of the west gate of the city, near the present day via Palazzuolo. Paatz even suggests that the church was a conscious “copy”, at least in terms of placement, of Saint Paul’s in Rome. See Paatz and Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz, IV, 591 and n. 2.} Dati then bisects the line drawn between these churches to form a cross – he is explicit about this – with the straight street that ran from the church of San Lorenzo, at the northern edge of the twelfth century walls, to Santo Stefano a Ponte, near the Ponte Vecchio.\footnote{For a discussion of what would have been considered a “straight” street, see the discussion of Villani’s description in “Walking Around Walls” above.} Where these two lines cross, he notes, is Florence’s own capitol (campidoglio), the Roman Forum, known in his own time as the Mercato Vecchio, at the very center of the city. From here the aqueducts extend the city out to the countryside, which used to bring water to the entire city.\footnote{Dati, “Istoria,” 263.} 

Several aspects of Dati’s account of the origins of his city are especially striking in terms of how they compare to two communal narratives that characterized the competing visions of which social class embodied the Florentine urban ideal; the Chronica de origine civitatis and the story of the Buondelmonte murder.\footnote{These texts are dealt with in the next section, “Percorrere la Città.”} The former provided a collective legitimating identity for the elite magnates, while the
latter countered that narrative with the blame put upon those same elites for the city’s factional violence by a merchant class whose values Dati would inherit over a century later. Dati, by contrast, maintains the noble Roman origins of the city described in the *Chronica* but empties the narrative of the violent war that preceded the founding of the city.513 Instead, the city is the emblem of a “republican empire” basking in peace and prosperity after bringing Tuscan *virtù* to the entire world. Such *virtù* is then memorialized in the city as monument, an urban environment that is both symbol and living memory of just such a peace.

As a popolano merchant, Dati most likely was drawn to a story whose main narrative emphasized peace, prosperity and architectural harmony. Being a man of the first decades of the fifteenth century, however, when the regime of oligarchs was rediscovering the trappings of nobility – its pretences and its tastes, if not completely its ideology – the stricter orthodoxy of the Popolo’s utilitarian street designs as a weapon in the arsenal of class conflict may no longer have held much appeal.514

That same recourse to a peaceful city becomes even more apparent by the contrast drawn between the honor shown by Florence to Totila when he entered the

\[513\] In the Chronica, the war was fought between the rebel general, Catulus, holed up above the Arno in Fiesole, and Fiorino, the military commander sent from Rome to defeat him.

\[514\] On the general trend toward such a lifestyle interns of festivals, games, and jousts see Jacques Heers, *Fêtes, jeux et joutes dans les sociétés d'Occident à la fin du Moyen Age*, (Montréal; Paris: Institut d'études médiévales; Librairie J. Vrin, 1971); Riccardo Truffi, *Giostre e cantori di giostre: studi e ricerche di storia e di letteratura*, (Rocca S. Casciano: Cappelli, 1911). On the phenomenon in Italian princely courts see Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy*, Johns Hopkins paperbacks ed., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 218-40. Martines remarks that bourgeois Florence would have seen such extravagance as time and money wasted. Even so, the Cosimo de’ Medici enhanced the family’s lordly ways, Martines, *Power and Imagination*, 238. For specialized studies on Florentine games see Paola Ventrona, ed., *Le Temps revient = l' Tempo si rinvuo : feste e spettacoli nella Firenze di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 1992); Carew-Reid, *Les fêtes florentines au temps de Lorenzo il Magnifico*. Trexler makes the claim that although the joust was the most emblematic activity of a courtly society, the Florentine commune continually sponsored such events. However, it was the “proto-courtly” Medici who used it to glorify themselves rather than the commune, which was more in keeping with the courtly ethic. Trexler distinguishes between the courtly joust and the civic armeggeria. See Trexler, *Public Life*, 233-35. Nerida Newbigin has shown that the city’s civic feste suffered a decline and rebirth under the manipulations of Lorenzo de’ Medici who was interested in his own dynastic legacy. See Newbigin, “Piety and Politics.”
city, and his subsequent violent destruction of it. Violence in Dati’s universe is now a foreign, rather than an internal destructive force. After recounting how the commune intervened to order the dismantling of the destructive patchwork of defensive towers erected in the wake of Totila, Dati suppresses that era of urban violence under the carefully rebuilt city that emerges, his own city of God.

The axes he traces through the city hang on four carefully chosen churches, which are crucial in both symbolic and spatial terms (fig 2.22). All of them were dedicated to the earliest and most important Christian martyrs and all were founded, or believed to have been, in the early Christian era. Therefore, spatially, Dati simultaneously grafts the city’s merchant geometry – the via Calimala, Mercato Vecchio, the Corso of the Palio, a reduced version of Villani’s earlier abstracted but carefully measured grid – onto both the sacred axis of Florence’s earliest Christian shrines and the center of the underlying Roman grid. Such a topography bound the classical to the Christian, and both of these to the mercantile, making them integrated harmonious parts of how the city was rebuilt: the repetitive genius of Ancient Rome, the specificity of Florentine Christianity, and the ragione (reason and justice) of the merchant economy. No conflict, no anxiety.

Notably, writing after Villani, Dati’s early fourteenth-century grid no longer marvels over the sheer size of the enlarged city but is more interested in the way the various levels of the past are intertwined with one another. This brief history of Florence in five and one half episodes serves as the prelude to his discussion of how

515 As noted above, Paatz dates San Paolino to the 4th century, under the auspices of Pope Sylvester and emperor Constantine. The first mention of San Piero (Maggiore) dates to 1067 but Paatz believes its origins date back to before 400 CE, Paatz and Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz, IV, 629. San Lorenzo was the oldest large church in the city, dating back to the late 4th century and founded, according to legend, by Saint Ambrose himself, Paatz and Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz, II, 464-65. Santo Stefano was most likely founded in the first Christian millennium but it was believed that Charlemagne had built it, Paatz and Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz, V, 210. On the four churches and Rome see Charles Davis, "Topographical and Historical Propaganda in Early Florentine Chronicles and in Villani," Medioevo e rinascimento: annuario del Dipartimento di studi sul Medioevo e il Rinascimento dell'Università di Firenze II (1988): 33-51.
the city was situated in his own time, which will include, among other things, its structure of government and its apparatus of communication. However, when he describes the city itself, its monuments and its straight and open road network, Dati’s ideal Florence turns out to be, just as Dante’s before him, based on the past. This time however, it is supported by the armature of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century city that was coming into being in Dante’s lifetime. He describes Palace of the Priors and its monumental loggia (Figure 2.23), the grain market – Orsanmichele – (Figure 2.23a), the cathedral, and the great mendicant churches, passing over any contemporary projects that might have interested his contemporaries, not to mention modern architectural historians. He does this even though he had professional and social connections to the most revolutionary artists and architects of his day.\footnote{In 1419 Dati was elected consul of the silk merchants’ guild (Por Santa Maria) for the ninth time, in which capacity he served as an opereio of the Ospedale degli Innocenti whose construction the guild was overseeing, which the guild was overseeing its construction and this would have brought him into contact with the project’s architect, Filippo Brunelleschi. Gilbert documents his connections to Donatello, Masaccio and Ghiberti, mainly through his closeness to his brother, General of the Dominican order and in charge of building at Santa Maria Novella, and whose tomb was sculpted by Ghiberti. See Creighton Gilbert, "The Earliest Guide to Florentine Architecture," Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz 14, no. 1 (1969): 36.} Gilbert points to how Dati was active in the most modern artistic projects of the city and fully aware of all the urban schemes at play in the city. However, as a new man in the Florentine ruling class he is described by Gene Brucker as traditional and conservative, a “representative of older values”, embodying the “traditional political virtues of loyalty, patriotism and service” idealized by the Florentine patriciate.\footnote{Gene A. Brucker, Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence: the Diaries of Buonaccorso Pitti and Gregorio Dati, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 18.}

From there, Dati’s description moves around the encircling walls and their 13 great gates. All the streets inside are wide, straight, open and have an exit.\footnote{Based on his method, direction, and measurements, Dati is likely following the text of Villani with his own additions. Noting an exit may be a reference to how public roads do not lead to dead ends unlike the way private ones do.} He reiterates and expands Villani’s grand axes that criss-cross the city by declaring that

222
there are also other streets that lead from one city gate to another by a straight line
\textit{(per diritto)}. Instead of containing one central point, Dati’s Florence is a city of
multiple and fluid centers. The great north-south and east-west axes "make a cross in
the middle of the city, or almost."\footnote{Through the center of the city, or almost, flows
the Arno," and "in its center are the marvelous mills" of the Florentine textile
industry.}\footnote{And finally, “almost in the center of the city,” on a great and paved
piazza, stood the Palace of the Priors.}

This is his description of the Palace. Dati considered the Palazzo Vecchio as a
beautiful object, an early expression, according to Creighton Gilbert, of the
aestheticization of architecture.\footnote{He confronted the palace from the standpoint of a
transfixed body, whose eyes move from the lower massive block up to the slender
tower above:}

\begin{quote}
...and all made of stone of marvelous strength and
beauty, sixty braccia high; and upon its projecting
gallery of corbelled brackets and crenellations is a
fortified tower above the palace another sixty braccia,
and above it, on its summit is a beautiful balustrade [of]
corbelled brackets covered and crenellated.\footnote{In describing
the Palazzo Vecchio, Dati creates a stylistic unity in his
alternating repetition of terms, his language mimicking the architectural repetition he}

\end{quote}

\footnote{“...che fa croce in sul mezzo della città, o quasi...” Dati, "Istoria," 263.}
\footnote{“E per lo mezzo della terra, o quasi, passa il fiume d’Arno…” “sono in sul fiume, dalla parte di
mezzo, di molte muline di maravigliosa bellezza...” Ibid.}
\footnote{“Quasi nel mezzo della città...” Ibid.}
\footnote{Gilbert, "Earliest Guide," 40. Gilbert remarks that art historians have generally ignored Dati’s
descriptions for their lack of factual information – names and dates – but claims that their allure is not
in the content but in the method of describing. He is sensitive to the way architecture frames the river; i.e., how the city was imagined in visual terms by its planners.}
\footnote{“...è tutto di pietra di maravigliosa forza e bellezza, alto braccia sessanta; e sopra il suo ballatoio
di beccategli e merli è una rocca alta sopra il palagio altre bracce sessanta, e nella sua sommità è uno
bello ballatoio sopra ‘ beccategli e poi coperto e merlato.” (My translation) Dati, "Istoria," 263.}
sees between the palace and its tower; both sixty *braccia*, both corbeled, covered and crenellated. In his descriptions, both elements of the palace appear as a poetic architectural repetition, the one an echo of the other. Gilbert proposes that Dati would have the observer’s eye move kinaesthetically over the surface of architecture from bottom to top. In conjunction with his description of Orsanmichele, Dati’s description evokes a “series of swift upward motions of the eye, each ending in a decorative release.”

Dati’s perception of the palace as a beautiful object, as an aesthetic ensemble, is confirmed by his description of the Ponte Vecchio (Figures 2.25, 2.25a):

Next in the city are four bridges, all of very finely cut ashlar, and among the others there is one in which on all sides are beautiful artisan workshops made of stone so that it does not appear to be a bridge if it weren’t for fact that in the middle of it is a piazza, whose banks frame the [the view] up- and down river.

Here, the emphasis is on the pleasure of the surprise, of stumbling upon a piazza that frames two views. It represented the ordering of a certain vision, of the river which flows through the entire length of the city. The river bisected it while the bridge, which did not seem like a bridge at all, reunited it, carefully choreographing

---

524 Gilbert, "Earliest Guide," 40. Dati’s description divides the palazzo into two parts to form a poetic repetition of design elements. This is manifested in the repetition of the *ballatoio* (gallery), *merli/merlato* (crenellations/crenellated) and *beccategli* (arched brackets that support the wider structure above). He turns the slender tower into an echo of the more massive base. Gilbert sees an echo of contemporary descriptions of fireworks, a particularly civic expression of communal joy.

525 “Poi nella città sono quattro ponti tutti di pietra concia lavorati molto gentili; e intra gli altri, ve n’è uno in sul quale da ogni parte sono bellissime botteghe d’arte dei lavorate di pietra, che non pare che e’ sia ponte se non in sul mezzo d’esso, dove è una piazza con le sponde che dimostra il fiume sopra e di sotto.” Dati, “Istoria,” 263. Note how Dati uses *sponde*, a term that refers to the banks of the river, grammatically so that the text elides the piazza with the river itself.
the view as revelation. Dati was transfixed by the Palazzo Vecchio, but here, like Villani before him, we can imagine him walking along the via Calimala that led to the bridge, not aware of the transition from street to bridge, until he reaches the piazza, where, turning his head, the landscape opens up before him, just as it still does today.

Goro Dati proves himself an expert reader of the built environment and of the relationship that a viewer constructs with the space around him. The question remains, however, of what Dati was trying to do with these descriptions of the great public monuments, both built and under construction by the popolo to enact its idea of a well-functioning city. Certainly he was making the case for Florence, but beyond a general sense of political chauvinism, was there more at stake in his detailed descriptions of buildings, magistracies, and public servants?

Part of the answer may lie in following Gilbert’s lead and looking to Leonardo Bruni’s Panegyric to the City of Florence.\footnote{Leonardo Bruni, Laudatio Florentine urbis, ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarri, (Florence: SISMELE edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000). Translated into English as Leonardo Bruni, "Panegyric to the City of Florence," in The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl, Ronald G. Witt, and Elizabeth B. Welles, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).} Bruni was a civic humanist and apologist for the oligarchic regime of Florence. He served as Florentine chancellor from 1427-1444 and wrote his Historiarum florentini populi under communal auspices.\footnote{See the introduction to Leonardo Bruni, History of the Florentine People, ed. James Hankins, trans. James Hankins, 3 vols., vol. 1, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).} According to Gilbert, Bruni’s visual description of Florence is based an abstract geometry; a series of concentric circles centered on the Palazzo Vecchio.\footnote{Gilbert, "Earliest Guide," 41.} This “unity of geometric composition with all detail subordinated, might be compared to the architectural imagery of the new perspective.”\footnote{Ibid.} Gilbert then states that the first recorded instances of this new technique of visual representation – perspectiva artificialis – date from Donatello’s Siena relief, begun in 1423, and Brunelleschi’s
legendary views of the two Florentine piazzes sometime earlier (Figures 2.26, 2.26a). Dati’s description, on the other hand, is compared with “older” images, the biadaiuolo miniatures of 1340 and the Bigallo fresco, which he dates to 1445 (but this is surely a mistake) (Figures 2.27, 2.27a). In effect, Gilbert is comparing Dati’s way of looking to an older, communal, fourteenth century vision of the surfaces of secular structures. Bruni, in his subordination of detail, sees in the manner of the new, clear “science” of perspective. Paradoxically, Gilbert prefers Dati’s type of description, which has more to do with the way the eye sees or experiences architecture than Bruni’s abstract rings. Bruni’s text initiates a way of describing that is concerned with surface aesthetics and diverges from medieval accounts such as Villani’s which are longer and wholly devoted to measurements and placements. Dati begins to react with his own perceiving eye. This is why Gilbert finds him so much more modern, though grounded in a fourteenth century frame of mind. Why was Dati at once more advanced and less so than Bruni, in terms of describing their city? Bruni most probably wrote his panegyric sometime in the first decade of the fifteenth century, just around the time that Brunelleschi demonstrated his new technique of representing urban space.

Bruni’s abstract and static “perspectival” aesthetic, on the other hand, is complicated by its relation to older forms of representation of urban configurations.

---

530 The date of the Bigallo fresco is from the mid-fourteenth century. Dati was dead by 1435, and so was this visual mode of representation in Florence.
531 Gilbert never explicitly states it, but Dati is in fact also embedding that eye into a body.
533 Based on the placement of the bronze statues at Orsanmichele, Gilbert dates Dati’s text to some time after 1423. Gilbert, “Earliest Guide,” 38. Hans Baron concluded that the bulk of Dati’s text was finished by 1406 and that the final ninth book was added by 1410. See Baron, The Crisis, 166 (cf. note 1, p. 500). This creates a problem for the dating of the description according to Gilbert’s evidence. Is it possible that Book VII was written after Book IX but placed before it? Could Book IX have been written much later than the rest of the work?
In the guildhall of the Judges and Notaries in Florence, for example, there is a fresco that depicts a schematized map of the city based on concentric rings (Figure 2.28). It spatializes the administrative structure of the commune into an abstract topography. In the center are the priors along with the arms of the Capitano and the Podestà. Surrounding these are the symbols of the gonfalon, the administrative districts of the commune. Around these are represented the symbols of the major and minor guilds that represented the corporate structure of the enfranchised population. Finally, the walls of the city form the outermost circle and contain all of these elements. Even if Bruni did not draw inspiration from this medieval image of the city, there is certainly an affinity in the abstract geometry, its static, eternal intimations:

So here we see the regions lying like rings surrounding and enclosing one another. Within them Florence is first, similar to the central knob, the center of the whole orbit. The city itself is ringed by walls and suburbs. Around the suburbs, in turn, lies a ring of country houses and around them the circle of country towns. The whole outermost region is enclosed in a still larger orbit and circle.

Bruni’s text extends the circular emanation of Florence’s governance to the entire region. It also speaks about the urban scene as a series of functions and networks. Florence is clean. In fact, “every other city is so dirty that the filth created during the night is seen in the morning by the population and trampled under foot in the streets.” There is nothing so filthy or offensive in Florence. The “great diligence of its inhabitants ensures and provides that all filth is removed from the streets, so you see only what brings pleasure and joy to the senses.”

---

534 For a more detailed discussion of this fresco, see chapter five.
536 Ibid., 138.
537 Ibid.
is removed from the streets by an efficient system of gutters. He notes how the bridges both highlight and deny the river, allowing the uninterrupted flow of streets, commerce and communication. Bruni’s city is the merchant ideal of uninterrupted space brought to the level of myth through its foundation on classical prototypes.

Indeed, it would be difficult to say whether the river that flows through the city gives more utility or more pleasure. The two banks of the river are joined by four bridges magnificently constructed of squared blocks, and these are placed at such convenient intervals that the river never seems to interrupt the several main streets that cross Florence.539

This text recalls the two overlapping but completely independent communicative networks of Venice as they were imagined in the Decameron and discussed above, where bridges lift roads over waterways. Florence is imagined as a well-functioning machine and not as a series of framed vistas, as it was for Dati. Bruni’s viewing apparatus for the city is located in an abstract series of telescoping of views. He moves out from close up to the panoramic views seen from the hills in the contado, amidst all manner of country villas. In “the center of the city there is a tall and handsome palace.”540 It “was so magnificently conceived and looms so toweringly that it dominates all the buildings nearby.”541 This “fortress” gives way to the walled city that is the surrounded “on all sides by many buildings,” so much so that it would be more proper to call the city the fortress and these outlying suburbs the city.542 He then moves out to the hills and the magnificently designed villas he finds there. Finally, he turns back from this vantage point to turn his eye

538 Ibid.
539 Ibid., 139.
540 Ibid., 141.
541 Ibid.
542 Ibid.
back upon the city below in the distance. “Surely anyone who comes to Florence is amazed when at a distance he sees from the top of a mountain the massive city, beautiful and splendid, surrounded by many country houses.” Then he telescopes back in:

Nor does Florence’s beauty at a distance become more sordid when you come close, which happens when something is not really beautiful. But all things are so arranged and gleam with such true beauty that the closer you come to this city, the greater grows your appreciation of its magnificence. Thus the villas are more beautiful than the distant panorama, the suburbs more handsome than the villas, the city itself more beautiful than the suburbs.

Unlike both Villani and Dati, Bruni does not evoke a figure walking around walls or through the city. Bruni denies the effusive body a role in experiencing the city as marvelous machine since he describes its harmonious human movement through it from a detached vantage point. Dati moved from site to site, stopping to revel in each space in turn, allowing the reader to experience the building’s form through his method of description. Bruni, instead, floats above it, from an impossible perspective, as a disembodied all-seeing eye capable of overcoming both time and space, zooming in, zooming out.

His way of knowing through seeing is connected to his contention that “it is better to know things in comparison with other things than from themselves alone.” This statement runs to the core of the perspectival system invented by Brunelleschi.

---

543 Ibid., 142.
544 Ibid.
545 Ibid., 137-38.
546 Ibid., 137.
Its efficacy resides in the way it displays disparate objects in an infinite space, which are recognized by their spatial relationships to each other.

Bruni too, manifests contradictory ways of seeing within a single text, if one accepts my reading of his medieval abstract geometry of the rings that is combined with a series of functional relationships and telescoping of vision. The problem may arise from our own historical position, safe in the knowledge that the perspectival system systematized by Alberti later in the fifteenth century would come to dominate representation and form analogous relationships to other disciplinary pursuits. In posing the long and complex history of fourteenth and fifteenth century pictorial representation as an ontological development toward a perspectival visual truth, Bruni’s and Dati’s textual descriptions seem to fall into a transitional phase where multiple viewpoints were still available. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century commentators were certainly aware of the innovations instituted in painting by Giotto, who was considered a consummate practitioner. In Day VI of the Decameron, Pamphilo describes Giotto as:

“…a man of such genius that there was nothing in Nature – the mother and moving force behind all created things with her constant revolution of the heavens – that he could not paint with his stylus, pen, or brush, making it so much like its original in Nature that it seemed more like the original than a reproduction. Many times, in fact, while looking at paintings by this man, the observer’s visual sense was known to err, taking what was painted to be the very thing itself.”

547 Boccaccio, Decameron, VI, 5. “…uno ingegno di tanta eccellenzia, che niuna cosa dà la natura, madre di tutte le cose e operatrice col continuo girar de’ cieli, che egli con lo stile e con la penna o col pennello non dipignesse si simile a quella, che non simile, anzi più tosto dessa paresse, in tanto che molte volte nelle cose da lui fatte si trova che il visivo senso degli uomini vi prese errore, quello credendo esser vero che era dipinto.”

230
As Marvin Trachtenberg has claimed, Trecento modes of representing incorporated their own coherent logic.\textsuperscript{548} He claims that these coherent yet flexible modes of vision also participated in the way the two late medieval piazzas of Florence were laid out and the way they set up points of view that framed the urban scene (Figure 2.28a). By comparing the measurements from the corner of the palace and the tower, along with a theory about certain acceptable viewing angles of tall structures from the ground, Trachtenberg determines that Palazzo Vecchio was part of a civic scenography that organized itself around the views from the main streets that entered the piazza. It was a way of addressing the viewer upon entering the square and forcing him to take account of the magnificent authority and civic power represented by the structure.\textsuperscript{549} It is precisely these points of view, I claim, that allowed Dati to find a way of describing his experience of seeing the Palazzo Vecchio (Figure 2.28c). He inserted himself into the scene as he was invited to, as an observer predisposed to merge the government’s ideals into the pleasure of architectural experience. The space that Dati as a perceiving, embodied subject reach out to enveloped him with the comfort of a narrative of unity, authority and order.

Although it cannot be absolutely determined, his description conforms perfectly to the oblique view from the end of the Via Calzaiuoli because it allowed him the best opportunity to see the way the building was constructed. Trachtenberg is concerned only with the pictorial composition that appealed solely to the eye, in the manner of the pictorial regime embodied in practices of representation. However, Dati shows that the experience of the scene in space is always about transfixed and dazzling a body, whose eyes then ran over surfaces, up walls, over balustrades, and

\textsuperscript{548} Trachtenberg, \textit{Dominion of the Eye}.

\textsuperscript{549} The principal view is, according to Trachtenberg, the oblique one from the Via Calzaiuoli, the subject of so many postcards and tourist photographs.
back out to the city. He is an embodied viewer, taking in the upward sweep of the government palace.

Both Dati and Bruni belonged to a generation that saw the completion of the long construction history of the Piazza della Signoria in 1399. Although Dati was not part of what Brucker describes as the inner circle, he was still a member of the popolo, the merchant class, and was, therefore, the target audience for Bruni’s Laudatio. Techniques of representation are validated and produced by ideological positions. Not only measurements, design, and beauty were at stake in Dati’s experience of the piazza and its palace. He was not only responding to scenographic design. He was also responding to a scene constructed for someone just like him; one loyal and looking for signs and symbols of inclusion. It demonstrates how he tacitly accepted the validity of the design and the ideological power structure it represented. He internalized his own reaction and thus was able to recreate a responsive topography through other monuments of the regime’s authority because the scene had taught him how to see, and what to find beautiful. In fact, learning how to interact aesthetically with space and architecture, to describe beauty in a poetic way, would certainly have dove-tailed perfectly with the politicization of space that the regime sought to control. Beauty, therefore, the beauty that was assumed in legislation that dated all the way back to the founding of the Piazza della Signoria, was inextricably linked to the propaganda of the state. It belonged to the state because if its

---

550 For a description of the successive regimes of the 14th century, in particular the oligarchic reggimento after 1382 and lasting through the first decades of the 15th century, see Brucker, Civic World.

551 John Najemy argues that Bruni’s text was motivated primarily by an ideological drive. It led him to represent the city as a harmonious integration of tranquil class relations. Therefore, his method of textual description is determined by these aims. Instead of the narrative pleasure that Dati has in describing, Bruni is constructing a normative understanding of the city that may have less to do with ways of seeing and more with a didactic humanism aimed at legitimizing the status quo. See John M. Najemy, "Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics," in Renaissance civic humanism: reappraisals and reflections, ed. James Hanks, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
expression, in terms of architecture and space, was ever torn from the regime’s
control, it was immediately transfigured into ugliness and dishonor.552

Dati had internalized the game of power and was willing to play, so that the
whole encounter was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dati wanted to believe, was
predisposed to understand this authority as beauty, this harmony of parts as the truth
of a peaceful state. Bruni’s text was concerned more with subsuming that regime’s
authority into the perfect functioning of the city, its cleanliness. Bruni’s text was an
accessory to architecture, diverting the gaze from the city’s inconsistencies and
focusing it on a fictive ideal. It functioned in the same way as the palace and the
square. Like architecture, it is effective only insofar as the audience was willing to
suspend its independence and look here, but not there, which is not difficult to do. It
allowed one to see the city as a collection of superb monuments, whose connection to
ancient virtue and power allowed the fantasy of participation for those willing to
obey. The question remains, even if Trachtenberg is correct – and his argument is
often compelling - in deriving a visual dominion imposed by fourteenth-century
planners: was there any other way of seeing and experiencing the piazza? Was there a
visual or experiential regime of meaning beyond a certain geometry and ideological
expression?

Bruni too, had begun by locating Florence geographically and describing it
physically, before moving on to the analogous harmony of Florence’s civic
institutions and laws. Is it possible that Dati was reacting to the ideological
maneuvers of the ruling elite characterized by a text like Bruni’s? Dati’s text was
more than a personal statement; it was part of discourse that was larger than him and
played a part in the way he constructed it. He may not have fully been aware of the
game in which he was involved as he attempted to create a topography of the city. If

552 For an example of such ugliness see “La città rifatta…” in chapter 5.
he did indeed play the role set out for him by the Trecento planners of the piazza, then he inscribed himself within certain relations of power that were attempting to impose on him a particular visual regime. The architecture taught him how to see the visible expression of the ideology to which he was already submitting. It reinforced his faith rather than created it. Florentines were always trying to assert themselves geographically, deriving their sense of who they were, and ought to be, from the urban fabric of the city. Even Bruni instructs his readers not to simply pass through like a temporary guest or a hurried tourist. One should pause and poke around and try to understand what one is seeing. The city is a text or a thing to be gradually revealed – as well, apparently, as immediately appreciated – revealed through careful study.\textsuperscript{553}

\textit{2.11 Percorrere la città}

Much of this chapter has explored the way in which movement through the city was implied in certain texts, which begs the question of what exactly different kinds of movement meant. Consider the remarkably detailed image of urban movement written down on November 23, 1494, by Luca Landucci, a Florentine apothecary. He followed the movements of the French king Charles VIII through the city and noted them down in his diary. He watched the king ride out from the Medici palace (Figure 2.29) with a great troop of horsemen, making his way through Borgo San Lorenzo (Figure 2.29a) to the Cross next to the baptistery (Figure 2.29b). Then, at the steps to the cathedral (Figure 2.29c), he suddenly turned back and proceeded toward the Servite Church of Santissima Annunziata (Figure 2.29d). After going only a few paces, however, he turned back again, returned to the cross and then continued behind the baptistery, through a narrow alley, the Chiassolino of San Giovanni, and

\textsuperscript{553} Bruni, "Panegyric," 141.
under the arch of San Giovanni (Figure 2.29e). Finally, he rode through the Mercato Vecchio (Figure 2.29f), crossing into the Oltrarno as far as the church of San Felice in Piazza where a festa was being performed in his honor (Figure 2.29g). Arriving at the door however, Landucci tells us that the king did not want to enter.554

What exactly was Landucci doing by following the king’s movements around the city? What did such movements mean to contemporary Florentines and what kinds of relationships between movement and urban space were being constructed? In order to shed more light on this dynamic of looking, moving, and recording, the following analysis looks at several different kinds of movement through Florence from several points of view. Watching how Florentines watched themselves and others move through the city allows the urban historian access to the symbolic dimensions of space and architecture as they were experienced by those who had to confront them on a daily basis.

To do this, however, one needs to take a closer look at what moving through the city in different ways meant to Florentines. In a 1963 essay entitled the “Der Stadtgrundriß als Geschichtsquelle,” urban historian Erich Keyser exhorted urban historians not to look down on the city from a high vantage point – from a hill or a church tower – nor to wander through it randomly.555 Instead, he suggested that one

---

554 “E a di 23 detto, domenica, el Re andò fuora a cavallo con molta cavalleria, e venne per Borgo Sa' Lorenzo e alla Croce di San Giovanni; e quando fu presso alle scale di Santa Maria del Fiore, girò e volsesi in verso e Servi; e andando pochi passi, si rivolò un' altra volta, e andò dalla Croce di San Giovanni, e entrò dietro a San Giovanni, per quello Chiassolino stretto, e venne sotto la Volta di San Giovanni, da' Cialdonai... E andonne per Mercato vecchio, e andonne infino a San Felice in Piazza per vedere la festa di San Felice, che allora la facevano per suo conto, e giunti alla porta non vi volle entrare.” Landucci, Diario fiorentino, 118. “The king rode out with a great troop of horsemen, and came to the Croce di San Giovanni; and when he was near the steps of Santa Maria del Fiore, he turned back and went towards the Servi; but having gone a few paces, he turned around again, and again went to the Croce of San Giovanni, going at the back of San Giovanni, through the narrow chiassolino, and coming under the Volta di San Giovanni, d' Cialdonai; and those who saw him laughed, and said slighting things of him, causing his reputation to suffer. The he went through the Mercato Vecchio, and on as far as San Felice in Piazza, to see the festa of San Felice, which they were having on his account; but when he reached the door he would not enter.” Luca Landucci, A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516, trans. Alice de Rosen Jervis, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1927).

move through the urban expanse slowly and attentively, looking for patterns and structures. He also recommended that one not look at the city in the evening or on Sundays, with its empty streets, but precisely when people were moving through it. Only in this way, he argued, could one see how different elements of the city were used, how they facilitated certain kinds of activities and not others. What Keyser was positing was that a clear concept of the city’s overall organizational structure – its ground plan, for example – combined with a methodical itinerary through it constituted, especially in the face of a lack of historical documentation, a rich source for the production of historical knowledge. Consequently, the city was nothing without the movement of people and things in it.

This movement combined, therefore, two grids of knowledge about the city, one a perspective of the city’s plan, which is a prerequisite for informed movement, and the other an engaged, alert itinerary through it. This dual practice, bound to social life, was increasingly separated in the development of certain forms of representation bound up with media such as cartography, modern painting, absolutist regimes, and the myth of the individual’s ideal, separate, detached position with respect to an increasingly visual – to the detriment of other senses - modern world.

That the idea and power of the panorama were not part of the visual repertoire in the Middle Ages is refuted by Bonvesin del Riva’s late thirteenth-century description, and encomium, of the city of Milan.556 In a similar spirit to Villani’s description of Florence in 1333, Bonvesin counts and catalogues the city’s economic, agricultural, spiritual, and architectural wealth. Within this discussion, he counts 120 bell towers and 200 bells in the city, but he hesitates and admits that he does not dare to know the precise number. The text goes on to state that:

If someone had the desire to see the form of the city and the vast number of its houses and palaces, one ought to climb to the top of the tower of the city's court: from there, turning one’s glance all around, one can admire a truly marvelous spectacle.\footnote{Ibid., 43 (ch. 9). “si quem postremo civitatis formam et eius palatiorum atque ceterarum domorum qualitatem et quantitatem videre delectat, super turrem curie comunis gratulanter ascendat; inde oculos circumquaque revolvens poterit miranda mirari.}

The panorama was a useful form of knowledge but it was in no way privileged above other forms. Although it did require a concrete physical detachment in the manner outlined by de Certeau, it was conceived of more as a way of overwhelming the viewer with the city’s abundance and wealth rather than allowing an totalizing apprehension of it. It was part of the complex way of knowing and describing a city through the profusion of things that, in the end, were too numerous to count. Viewed from a communal tower rather than a religious one, this was not the attempt to usurp the all-encompassing view of God from a fixed position but was still considered as seeing in movement: “\textit{inde oculos circumquaque revolvens}” was a refusal to fix either the city as an image or the viewer.\footnote{Ibid. “and from that place turning one’s gaze all around one will be able to admire a truly marvelous spectacle.” (my translation)}

In the face of mass tourism, the combined method called for by Keyser might not be adequate for Florence today. The city’s historians of all stripes do not, in general, suffer from a lack of documentary sources. However, Keyser’s model, as Bonvesin’s description suggests, does find a historical corollary that confirms, and complicates, its claim to understanding the past. Florentines in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries already knew that understanding the spatial relationships of their urban environment and taking account of the movement of others was critical to successfully navigating through it as well as deriving useful information from it. Such movement through the city was the object of intense scrutiny. It was carefully

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item 557 Ibid., 43 (ch. 9). “si quem postremo civitatis formam et eius palatiorum atque ceterarum domorum qualitatem et quantitatem videre delectat, super turrem curie comunis gratulanter ascendat; inde oculos circumquaque revolvens poterit miranda mirari.
\item 558 Ibid. “and from that place turning one’s gaze all around one will be able to admire a truly marvelous spectacle.” (my translation)
\end{itemize}

237
regarded, analyzed, and prodded. They mulled over what they saw, reflected upon it, and wrote it down in order to remember it. It is not surprising, therefore, that moving through the city was at the centre of a range of interrelated social, political, legal, memorial, and narrative practices.

One of the foundational myths of the Florentine popular imagination revolved around the preservation and retelling of the Buondelmonte murder of 1215 (Figure 2.30).\footnote{Die Sogenannte Chronik., "Cronica fiorentina compilata nel secolo XIII," in Testi fiorentini del Dugento e dei primi del Trecento, ed. Alfredo Schiaffini. (Florence: Sansoni, 1926).} The Buondelmonte narrative recounts an emblematic narrative in which the expression of elite Florentine pretence to noble status, which, in this case, began at a banquet and ended in a knife fight; how a playful insult to one man’s honor triggered a descent into shameful buffoonery and violence. The story placed the blame for Florence’s factional struggles squarely on this vendetta culture. The Buondelmonte story has been considered a critique of an earlier Florentine origin myth, the \textit{Chronica de origine civitatis}, the earliest extant version of which dates to 1264.\footnote{Three versions of this text exist in Hartwig, \textit{Quellen und Forschungen zur ältesten Geschichte der Stadt Florenz}, 37-65.} The latter recounts how Florence was founded by noble Roman families after Fiorino defeated the rebel general Catallus and founded the city on the Arno. The consciousness of Florentine elites was embedded in this lineage and was used to justify their exclusive right to govern the city.\footnote{On the Buondelmonte narrative as critique of upper class violence see Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 11-20; Gordon, "The Buondelmonte Murder."} The Buondelmonte narrative, however, starts at a banquet celebrating the knighthood of a certain Florentine where a hired entertainer suddenly and playfully snatches away the plate of food in front of Messer Oddo Arrighi, one of the guests. In an almost farcical intensification of insults, Oddo Arrighi’s shame-faced wrath is stingingly rebuked by another guest, which eventually leads to an all out brawl where he was wounded in the arm by the young knight Buondelmonte de’
Buondelmonti. The resolution to such a dilemma, not surprisingly, was a promise of marriage between the knife-wielding Buondelmonte and a daughter of the Amidei, allies of the Arrighi, who lived at the head of the Ponte Vecchio (Figure 31). Soon afterwards, the most famous snub in Florentine collective consciousness occurred on February 10, 1215, when Buondelmonte passed right by, without stopping, the Porta Santa Maria, where members of both parties – men with names that recalled the very distant past and its most prestigious families for Florentines: Arrighi, Gangalandi, Uberti, Lamberti, Amidei – were assembled for the betrothal of reconciliation (Figure 2.31a). Since the time that the pact had been made, however, Guadralda, wife of Messer Forese Donati, a different clan, sent for Buondelmonte and, playing on his vanity, promised him a beautiful daughter of her own who was worthy of his status, to which he agreed without informing his kin.

The insult, therefore, comprised a deliberate movement through a specific place, as Buondelmonte was on his way to make a vow to the Donati daughter. The young knight’s gesture transformed the space that should have reestablished the Arrighi clan’s honor – with a marriage contract signed on their neighborhood street – into one that would “memorialize their dishonor by recalling his momentous act of defiance.” According to N.P.J. Gordon, the topography through which Buondelmonte moved was crucial to the power of the insult. Architecturally, this was an area of extremely high density, marked by the conglomeration of family defensive towers that both symbolized and spatially located the clan networks whose power

---

562 “Quando venne l’altro giorno, al mattino per tempo, giovedì die x di febraio, e la gente dall’una parte e d’altra fue rau-nata, venne messer Bondelmonte e passò per Porte Sancte Marie, e andò a giurare la donna di Donati.” "Cronica fiorentina," 118.
563 Ibid.
tended to spill out into the streets themselves. 565 This was the busiest thoroughfare because it alone traversed the river in 1215.

The insult was further compounded by Buondelmonte’s next move, which was to cross the bridge from the Oltrarno on a white horse, at Easter, garlanded, and ready for marriage. Naturally, he was stabbed to death as he attempted to ride headlong once again through the heart of his enemies’ territory (Figure 2.31b). It is no surprise, then, that the narrative has first an enraged Oddo Arrighi calling a meeting of parenti and amici in the local church of San Maria Sopra la Porta. This was followed by the reprisal murder of Buondelmonte who crossed the bridge into Amidei and Arrighi territory. 566 All of these acts, from shame to rage to violence, are perpetrated within the same local neighborhood, representing opposing spatial memories for the families whose identity was inscribed within it. This story would have been remembered in spatial terms, the acts occurring given specific meanings by their location in social spaces connected to certain families and the modes of vendetta they followed. Destructive elements of the Florentines society are therefore, linked to a specific place through narrative.

Both Buondelmonte and the story’s narrator – the former as a member of this caste, the latter perhaps as a voice of critique – must have known exactly how his movements would have been understood. 567 This narrative overlays a particular space

565 Ibid.: 463.
566 Gordon points out that crossing the bridge appears to have been a deliberate provocation, since it was out of Buondelmonte’s way to go from his own neighborhood around Borgo Santi Apostoli to the Donati stronghold east of the Mercato Vecchio in the heart of the old city. Gordon assumes that Buondelmonte would have been coming from his own properties. The knight could have avoided the neighbourhood of the enemy altogether but the most direct route to the Donati would most likely have taken him through the heart of Por Santa Maria in any case. See Ibid.: 464.
567 Gordon points out the discrepancy between where Buondelmonte lived, in the citranno, and his decision on this occasion to cross the bridge from the Oltrarno, which meant a conscious decision and a more complicated movement. He goes on to show how this text sets up Buondelmonte as a Christ-like figure riding to his martyrdom and wearing a white mantle and the garland that became a kind of crown of thorns. Since this chronicle is read by Gordon as an anti magnate tract that turns the “noble” origins of the city, represented by the Chronica de origine civitatis, into a circus of buffoonery and violence, this Christological imagery would fittingly belong to that faction that would, according to this narrative,
with an unfolding series of insults, pacts, snubs, deceit, and violence through which
the larger factional violence plaguing the city was collectively remembered and
explained.\textsuperscript{568} It was not so much a \textit{genius loci} as the place where the unfriendly ghosts
of the past resided. Encounters with this place would have spurred a collective
memory of the social trauma that legitimized the Popolo’s ongoing spatial campaign
of disciplining the city’s social elites and relieving any anxiety the Popolo may have
had about its own particular relationship to space and violence.

The via Por Santa Maria formed part a larger network of thoroughfares
through which goods, people, and expressions of civic ritual moved. As Spilner
points out, by the later thirteenth century, these principal thoroughfares were
becoming overcrowded with goods and traffic. Efforts to ease traffic on the via San
Gallo, the extension north of the via Por Santa Maria, by laying out the current via
Cavour were carried out in the first public works project of the new guild regime in
1285.\textsuperscript{569} It was part of an expansion of four major radial streets from the dense urban
core of the city to the newly established periphery of walls then under construction.
These new radiating streets served as supplements to existing thoroughfares as nearby
parallel route.\textsuperscript{570} As Spilner makes clear:

\begin{quote}
Efficient circulation was an inescapable requirement for
an economy increasingly dependent on the movement of
goods and people to and within the city from sources of
supply and production to points of exchange and
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{568} This feud was the mechanism through which the Florentine popolo explained the origins of the split
between Guelfs and Ghibellines in their own city. It was how they localized the larger pan-Italian
violence, justified their own civic authority, and developed more or less effective policies for
disciplining the privatizing tendencies of this class.

\textsuperscript{569} Spilner, \textit{Ut Civitas Amplietur}, 226.

\textsuperscript{570} For a discussion of these new streets, see Ibid., 223-42.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushleft}
consumption. By the late thirteenth century, the column of traffic, not to mention the use of public ways for private purposes like selling, storing and manufacturing, must have threatened to overwhelm the existing network of thoroughfares.  

The via Por Santa Maria also sat at the core of the elite culture that the Buondelmonte narrative condemns. This street, although a busy thoroughfare, provided the stage for the private enactment of clan rituals that recognized no clear boundaries between domestic and communal space. Buondelmonte attempted to pass through it, as if on a public thoroughfare, when he was expected, by the assembled parties, to have entered into it as domestic space. Thus, the insult was a direct confrontation calculated to effect the collision of two spatial systems. Such symbolically over-determined spaces were, by this piling up of significant acts in certain spaces, representative of just the kinds of obstacles that such neighborhood dynamics posed to successive Florentine governments. Private family rituals spilled out into the streets where they attracted a public audience, spread rumors, enriched neighborhood life, encouraged violence, and impeded the movement of others. Unsurprisingly, Florentine statutes have much to say about both keeping public streets clear of such hindrances, controlling the movement of disenfranchised elites, and regulating the conduct proper to certain family and neighborhood gatherings.

According to Brucia Witthoft, the marriage procession of wealthier families in Florence often functioned within a constellation of ritualized hostility between newlyweds, families, and the community.  

\[571\text{ Ibid., 233-34.}\]

\[572\text{ Witthoft, "Marriage Rituals," 47.}\]
particular contract, was often meant to purge. It involved the familiar Florentine trope of the youthful “brigata” who ritually abducted the bride and accompanied her through the city, protecting her from the indignity of the stones, filth, and insults that would rain down on them from the neighborhood windows lining the processional route as the community expressed a ritualistic animosity.\textsuperscript{573} Often, the brigata, all of whom were on horseback,\textsuperscript{574} encountered a symbolic barrier, perhaps a ribbon, stretched across the street, which interrupted the party’s movement\textsuperscript{575} To the gang of youths that guarded it, a bribe was paid. The ribbon was then cut and the procession was allowed to continue. The culmination of the ritual was the banquet at the groom’s house, often out “in the piazza”, where the games, music, dancing, and heavy drinking expressed the family’s political and economic power.\textsuperscript{576}

At each moment in the whole process, the potential for actual violence was never far away. Symbolically blocking the street underlined the continual struggle over control of and access to public thoroughfares by individual, familial and corporate bodies. In light of incessant legislation about ridding public streets of all kinds of both temporary and permanent obstacles, limiting the expense, time, place, and size of weddings, this ritual resistance and disapproval of the procession by the community could also serve as a reminder that those streets were a continual zone of contention: the site of negotiation between the private spectacle of elite movement and the public theatre of ritual disdain. Throwing stones at or in the newlyweds’ house was forbidden by law. No other elite-led, armed brigata was permitted to

\textsuperscript{573} Such practices were also part of collective urban warfare. See Cerretani, \textit{Storia fiorentina}, 218-19, where Pier Capponi threatens the king with bells and trumpets.
\textsuperscript{574} Statutory law allowed the bride to ride mounted to the groom’s house accompanied by up to ten mounted female companions as well. She was to return on foot, escorted by two men or two women. See "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," IV, xlvii.
\textsuperscript{575} Withoft, "Marriage Rituals," 48.
\textsuperscript{576} That this practice was common is borne out by the law that specifically forbids stone throwing in or at the house during weddings. It is grouped around several laws that treat certain social rituals of noise, shame, and ritualized violence. See "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, xxx, xxvii-xxviii, xxxi.
attend a wedding outside its own neighborhood.\footnote{Statuti del Capitano (1355)," IV, xliii.} In this way, the wedding procession dramatized civic discord and private resolution rather than appealing to the overarching authority of the commune, and it did so by moving through the public spaces that separated the two domestic enclaves. As such, it also dramatized the way in which the built environment was the place that allowed for the meaningful confrontation between several different social forces through ritualized violence, and it inscribed family and social memory together into the symbolic dimensions of the city.

Weddings could only begin after Nones was struck\footnote{Ibid., IV, lxxviii.} and the vow itself had to be made in a church. Everything from the number of guests, musicians, serving staff and permissible dishes was specifically limited. In the fourteenth century, it was expressly forbidden to sing and dance outside the groom’s house at any time, day or night\footnote{Ibid.} and penalties were also doubled for crimes committed in the vicinity of weddings.\footnote{Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, lxi. This also included funerals.} By 1415, the wedding celebration in the marriage household had to cease with dancing, music and singing at the sound of the evening bell,\footnote{Statuta populi (1415), IV, 5 (vol. II; 370). The implication appears to be that such celebrations were assumed still to have been held inside the home, although evidence, such as that of Rucellai, seems to contradict this.} a concession that may have been linked to long term changes in attitudes concerning the place of elite culture in public space.

In the fifteenth century, the increasing acceptance of expressions of family wealth and power inscribed into the unitary visual aesthetic of the emerging Renaissance palace suggests that these new facades represented an ambivalent spatial threshold. They presented a private concession to the legislatively-mandated continuous vertical surfaces that defined the city’s streets. For weddings, they also
provided the backdrop for the extension of private ritual back into public space. One needs only to think of the Rucellai wedding of 1466, described by Giovanni Rucellai, in his *zibaldone*. Giovanni’s biographer wrote that “they celebrated in public for three days… in the piazza in front of the palace of the Rucellai” and whose effect was to turn it into a *de facto* public festival, “in a way that enlivened not only the extended family but all the Florentine people.” The Medici bride came on a horse, accompanied by a brigata of four and the party was held outside. Giovanni is explicit that the space outside his house was a piazza, or piazzuola, and that it was linked to, or in fact linked together his house, loggia and street (Figure 2.31c). This is important because it is a clear illustration of the relations assumed by Florentines between the palace façade and the street. Giovanni even boasts about, among other things, the fact that he was able to close off the street running along the side of his palace all the way to the canto at San Pancrazio. The invasion of the street by the affluent wedding was explicitly praised for the way it privatized the hard won public thoroughfares that the statutes had created in conflict with the *ottimati* who, as the Buondelmonte story dramatizes, considered the street part of the interior domestic space of the clan’s larger extended kin group. However, Rucellai’s usurpation of the space of the commune was not on the level of casual daily proceedings and meetings but on that of the monumental ceremonial display of wealth and magnificence.

---

583 “si fece festa in pubblico che durò tre giorni… nella piazza dinanzi al palagio de’ Rucellai,” “in modo che se ne rallegrò non solo il parentado ma tutto il popolo fiorentino.” G. Marcotti, *Un mercante fiorentino e la sua famiglia nel secolo XV*, (Florence: G. Barbera, 1881), 80, 81.
584 Ibid., 81.
586 “La cucina si fece nella via dirieto alla casa nostra, facendo chiuderla con assi dalla via della Vigna infino al canto che voglie a andare a S. Brancazio…” (The kitchen was set up in the street behind our house, closing it off from the via della Vigna up to the corner that leads to San Brancazio). Ibid., 28-29.
Therefore, this change in the relationship between elites and public space hinges on the façade’s relationship to the street – where these two elements meet (Figure 2.31d). That is to say, those facades represented a transformed relationship between walls and streets. In thirteenth century urban culture the streets that ran through familial architectural agglomerations were in some sense, at certain times, considered interior spaces rather than external thoroughfares. They represented specific symbolic spaces for the families that used them as private places to meet and conduct family business.\textsuperscript{587} It was laws redacted throughout the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that attempted to keep such streets clear of obstacles, forcing public displays of private life back into family homes. Certainly, by the late fourteenth century, the nature of streets as conduits, rather than as private staging grounds, was embedded in the popular imagination, a case I will make through an example of urban literature below.

It is at this time that David Friedman locates the emergence of the term “facciata’ to designate the public “face” of the private palace. According to Friedman, the vernacular “faccia” was applied to architecture in the fourteenth century but “facciata” entered the language exclusively in connection with domestic architecture. The central concept of the neologism was the orientation, or relationship of the palace to the street. The façade belonged, therefore, to the street and not to the structure it announced and which lay behind it.\textsuperscript{588} Therefore, the formal language of the Florentine palace façade conceded to the structural logic of Florentine street

\textsuperscript{587} One need only think of the how the Por Santa Maria was used as a kind of courtyard for neighborhood families to gather for such purposes.

\textsuperscript{588} Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 94. Friedman points out that the phrase “facciata dinanzi la strada” (the façade in front of the street) is used 16 times in the 1340 so-called Sansedoni contract’, a Sienese document that includes an elevation of the palace façade, with explanatory phrases attached to the term gradually diminishing each time.
As Friedman reminds us, a beautiful street was one continuously enclosed by buildings and walls in front of vacant lots. The new facades also did away with jetties (sporti) – which were a constant focus of legislative restrictions – articulating the surface of public space and referring, indexically, to a private consensus. However, this concession came with a cost, as the private magnificence of wealthy families was expressed in the architectural language developed for the façade. It is clear in Giovanni Rucellai’s description of his son’s wedding that the decoration included the façade of the house, the loggia and the piazza created between them. In this way, the integral connection between façade and street as public space was redirected to act as the stage and backdrop of a private ritual publicly conceived: “se ne rallegrò…tutto il popolo fiorentino.” The reconfiguration of the palace façade was therefore also an engagement with and a response to legislative ethics on what constituted communal space, and represented also the integration of compromised elite ideals into a more functional urban ethic. It was a kind of détente that modified the reach and absoluteness of ideal public thoroughfares, dressing it up in a new kind of beauty. It was a response to legislation that mandated beautiful facades for the new piazza in the process of formation around the communal palace that attempted to fix, pacify, and perhaps normalize that long conflict played out in legal, social, and violent spheres.

This façade replaced – or covered up – the antisocial behavior of Florentine elites that had been previously embedded in both their architecture and their attitudes toward space. Such practices were consistently condemned in architectural

---

590 Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 71.
591 On this legislation, see the discussion of public space in chapter 1.
restrictions dating back to 1250. Still in the 1390s, such practices continued to be satirized in urban literature. Take, for example, novella 114 of Franco Sacchetti’s *Il Trecentonovelle*, where just such an ethic led Dante to condemn a certain knight who had asked him to intervene with the authorities concerning an unwanted fine. In this story Dante confronts a blacksmith whose singing of Dante’s poetry was less than music to the poet’s ears. However, in this instance I am concerned with larger frame of the story, how it begins and how it ends, because it enlarges the dimensions of Sacchetti’s understanding of movement, public space, and private property.

According to statutory law, the young knight would have found himself at the centre of a web of converging restrictions on his movement through the city. Not only was he forbidden to appear before the city’s tribunals, he was also forbidden to enter the communal palaces, their courtyards, or even to loiter about their entrances (Figures 2.32, 2.32a). Such restrictions would have made it more difficult for the Adimari knight to advocate on his own behalf and this difficulty was compounded by explicit restrictions on giving evidence against members of the popolo without permission. So Dante, as a friend and *popolano*, was asked to play mediator between the knight and the Esecutore. As an expression of the class-based political ritual of republican Florence, the Esecutore represented the restricted access to communal justice available to, or imposed upon, the Florentine magnate.

---

592 Spilner, *Ut Civitas Amplituer*, 25. Spilner refers to the statutes of the Podestà where towers were not to exceed the height of the campanile of Santo Stefano al Ponte. See Caggese, *Podestà (1325)*, IV, 41. The Original legislation made reference to the height of the campanile of the palazzo del popolo (Bargello). See Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 69.

593 Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*.

594 For a more detailed discussion of this part of the story see “Frame/Structure” in chapter 4.

595 “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” II, xlviii; Caggese, *Capitano (1322-25)*, II, xi. Exceptions were made, of course, for various testimonies required of the magnate class. Other laws further restricted the movements of magnates at times of political unrest. See below.

596 “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” IV, i. Even acting on behalf of a magnate was considered a suspect practice. Gonfalonieri, the company commanders who organized the militias of the city and formed one of the government’s advisory colleges, were forbidden to go before any of the city’s rectors, which included the Executor of the Ordinances of Justice (*Esecutore degli ordinamenti della giustizia*), on behalf of any “grande”. See “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” II, xxxi.
On his way to the palace, and after a confrontation with a certain hapless blacksmith, however, Dante began to think about the rather ungracious way this knight moved through the city (andava per la città), especially on horseback. He remembered how he would ride down the narrow streets with his legs spread apart, so much so that those on the street – backed up against the wall, presumably – could only serve to polish the tips of his shoes as he passed by. And Dante saw how much displeasure this gave to those who encountered him. It was the particular way in which the knight usurped public space in motion, on horseback, which began to unsettle Dante. He declares as much, in the linguistic idiom of the statutes themselves, to the Esecutore when he states: “I believe that to usurp that belonging to the commune is a very grave crime.” The Esecutore asks him what exactly was that thing belonging to the commune that the knight was usurping, to which Dante replies that he rode through the city so widely that often people were forced to turn around and abandon their own journey completely. What he was usurping, in effect, was the network of communal space, the space of the crowd, of labor, civic processions, races, transport, and commerce. Such spaces were the result of new demands for the accessibility of the administrative, economic, and religious networks of the city, primarily the town hall, the markets, and the mendicant orders. It was the large piazze of the Signoria, Santa Maria Novella, Santo Spirito, and Santa Croce, that facilitated multiple functions – political, ritual, and religious festivities. The new administrative,

597 See chapter 1 for a discussion of this encounter.
598 “…era un giovane altiero e poco grazioso quando andava per la città, e specialmente a cavallo…” Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CXIV. It is important that he moved in a similar manner even when walking.
599 “…che andava si con le gambe aperte che teneva la via, se non era molto larga, che chi passava convenia gli fornisce le punte delle scarpe…” Ibid., CXIV, 35-40.
600 “era quella del comune che usurpava.” Ibid., CXIV.
601 “io mi credo che usurpar quello del Comune è grandissimo delitto.” Ibid. “Quello del comune” reiterates the language by which the statutes defined public space. For similar language use see "Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, clixxi. See also the discussion of public space above, chapter 1.
602 “Quando cavalca per la città, e’ va si con le gambe aperte a cavallo, che chi lo scontra conviene che si torni adrieto, e non puote andare a suo viaggio.” Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle.
religious, and ritual topographies overlaid onto them demanded new streets and points of access for bodies to gather in them. It was for this that the grand avenues were opened up in cities like Florence, where the government needed, for its own spectacular display, places designated for assemblies, popular preaching, military formations, games, and ceremonies, meetings, exchanges, new public palaces, all the things that made up a multi-dimensional urban social life. The new streets, piecemeal however they may have been, confronted and inflected the city’s central Roman grid as they branched of at angles more in concert with the topography of the landscape.603

As Dante was moving through these spaces of the Popolo, they brought about in his mind a profound change concerning the ethics of the knight’s relationship to space.604 Dante was reading space, in other words, as a field full of images that triggered his social memory. The knight had become a concrete symbol of the very obstacles to movement that urban legislation attempted to severely restrict. The knight had transgressed the assumption that a public street was defined by universal access and freedom of movement. His presence was disruptive to the free flow of bodies through the city as he physically encroached upon public space, wrapping it around himself as if it were his own private mantle. This attitude was present when he walked as well but it was amplified when he was riding a horse. The space that he projected beyond him, the liminal spatial zone that linked his moving body to the city’s architectural surfaces and through which he experienced space, in Schmarsow’s terms, is here infused with the local content of political conflict. It gave that experience a meaning beyond the merely private aesthetic awareness Schmarsow described and infused it with historical social dynamics. Such bodies, moving

604 Notably, it is precisely after his encounter with the hapless blacksmith that Dante begins to ruminate on public space and private property. See above, chapter 1, “Frame/Structure.”
through space, projected their particular social assumptions and anxieties directly through movement, onto architectural space.

It was within these intersecting spatial topographies that Dante found himself. Some classes, it seems, took up too much space. This novella stages the dynamic interplay between the wider public and the more private spaces that clung to the bodies of members of different classes within the tangle of urban legislation. The ideal circulation flows of the mercantile economy, envisioned in straight and peaceful streets, stand in marked contrast to the fits and starts of communication dramatized consistently in the Trecentonovelle and brought to life in diary of Benedetto Dei. The collective civic spirit that established Florence as, in legislative terms, a network of goods and exchange was not, in actual practice, an ideal force of efficiency, but an obdurate social framework of conflicting interests. Such narratives dramatize how, at the level of daily exchanges, class conflict, again, remained the wedge that impinged upon the orderly and harmonious movement of people through the city.

Public space had to be protected from the usurpation of the magnates but Sacchetti reminds us that on the other side of the economic divide from major guildsmen like Dante were similar threats such as semi-literate guildsmen, not to mention the illiterate gente minuta. What we are presented with is an allegory of the perilous position in which the popolo found itself; surrounded, as it were, or split, between elite and popular tendencies within and without, both of which demanded concessions of their own within the public sphere the popolo was creating for itself. The popolo had driven a wedge between them through a public space meant to restrict them both. Public space and its mechanisms belonged neither to the grandi, nor to a class of Florentines who wanted Dante, but who wanted him on their own terms, within their own idiom. Sacchetti alludes also to the “danger” and pokes fun at the
notarial literary culture that participated in the translation and diffusion of classic literature to a hungry and engaged merchant class.\footnote{See chapter 4, “Reading and Writing: Notaries and Narrative,” below.}

At the end of the fourteenth century, this particular image of an arrogant knight riding through the city may also have recalled an earlier moving image that was imprinted on the Florentine popular psyche. Contemporary readers may have noticed an echo of the figure of Buondelmonte arrogantly crossing the Ponte Vecchio on horseback and sauntering provocatively into the territory of his neighbors.\footnote{“Die Sogenannte Chronik,” 225.} Here were insults that could only be understood as movement. In Sacchetti’s narrative, however, it is not the particular location that defines the arrogance of the knight, as it had in Buondelmonte’s provocation, but the manner in which he moved. After listening to Dante’s complaint, the Esecutore agrees, stating that this crime, the crime of “riding widely” (cavalcare largo), was indeed much more serious than the original one.\footnote{“E parcitì questo una beffa? egli è maggior delitto che l’altro.” Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CXIV. The original crime is never specified but it did carry a one thousand florin fine, which was substantial.} And so, having been sent to lessen his friend’s fine, Dante succeeded in having it doubled. It was this image – of arrogant knights riding through the streets of Florence – that was ingrained into the city’s collective memory through its successive reiteration. It linked a certain class of families to the origins and maintenance of Florence’s social divisions in almost everything they did on horses in the city. Such associations and memories were bound to inflect the meaning and response to the emerging genre of equestrian statues that were beginning to infiltrate the piazzes of Italy. Giambologna’s Cosimo I in Florence, along with the Verrocchio’s Colleoni monument in Venice both emphasize the arrogant gesture. Is it a coincidence that these Florentine sculptors would have flaunted such a pose in contrast to that of the
only known large scale bronze equestrian statue to have survived from the ancient world, that of Marcus Aurelius now on the Capitoline in Rome.\textsuperscript{608}

Weddings, funerals, legends and literature all demonstrated how such images continued to frame the understanding of political violence well into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Sacchetti’s variation of the Buondelmonte narrative explicitly states, in the customary intervention by the narrator at the end of the story, how this episode made it impossible to quell the wrath of the Adimari clan and led to the expulsion of Dante, along with the White faction to which he belonged, to the great shame of the city.\textsuperscript{609}

Sacchetti’s story, which ends with an even greater outburst of upper class violence, differs from the Buondelmonte story through its expression of how, in the popular imagination, the spatial identity of the elite family clan had undergone a profound change in the Florentine psychology since the thirteenth century. No longer were these families imagined as menacing entrenched barriers to commerce but were now annoying hindrances in an established network of thoroughfares. The principal north-south axis of the city, from the Porta Romana to the Porta San Gallo, was singled out in the statutes as a primary route of both civic ritual and commercial exchange.\textsuperscript{610} It gave direct access to the city’s two principal markets and it formed the route of the palio of Santa Reparata. From its thirteenth-century existence as a commercial and travel route hindered by the way the dense clusters of towered

\textsuperscript{608} Notably, Donatello’s early 15\textsuperscript{th} century version of the classical equestrian statue, the Gattamelata in Padua, as the earliest re-evocation of this ancient type, does not display any overt arrogance.

\textsuperscript{609} “onde mai non lo poté sgozzare né egli, né tutta la casa degli Adimari. E per questo, essendo la principal cagione, da ivi a poco tempo fu per Bianco cacciato da Firenze, e poi morì in esilio, non senza vergagna al suo comune,” (Where never would be quelled the wrath of he, or of the entire Adimari clan. And for this reason, it was not long before he [Dante], as a White, was expelled from Florence, and then died in exile, to the shame of his city). Sacchetti, \textit{Il trecentonovelle}, CXIV. In my reading of Sacchetti’s novella, Dante and the Adimari knight are a rewriting of the Buondelmonte murder not in terms of the violence within the magnate class but of the assault by both the magnates and the lower guilds on the authority and liberty of a more restricted idea of the Popolo.

\textsuperscript{610} As an economic thoroughfare see Caggese, \textit{Capitano} (1322-25), IV, viii. On the route of the Santa Reparata palio, see “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” IV, cxix.
families co-opted the space for their own private vendettas, the street was now appropriated by a government with pretensions to universal authority. Its ritual and economic significance expanded out beyond the congested center and linked the city to its outlying areas; the palio of Santa Reparata began outside the Porta Romana at San Gaggio and was run directly through Villani’s north-south axis up to the palace of the bishop, while the route of the palio had to be kept clear, just as the street from the Porta San Gallo on the opposite side had to be for the men and goods flowing to the city’s two principal markets (Figure 2.2).

Historian Jacques Heers points to the way that civic games and festivals, especially horse races, were another means by which authorities attempted to carve out, regularize and maintain public spaces for specific activities that traversed the boundaries of older social structures, attempting to unite separate neighborhoods through movement. Visually, they provided the opportunity to see oneself as belonging to a single and united urban community. Such open spaces allowed people to gather beyond restricted neighborhood zones, and consequently, outside of more restricted social groups. In effect, such entertainments and contests were integrated into a developing urban policy. They were meant to prevail over familial rituals, the very ones continuing to contest public spaces throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; but were they successful? Heers suggests that horse races and jousts may have replaced the urban wars of earlier times as more institutionalized rituals with rules laid out in statutes.

In Florence, the contests were not based on neighborhood rivalries. They symbolically showcased the larger unified city, unified by the movements of the riders rather than fragmented by the rivalries between contrade. Such routes through the

---

611 "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," IV, ccxx.
612 Heers, La città, 393-402.
613 Ibid., 395-96.
city actually helped to break the isolation of urban enclaves in which the commune attempted to establish its administration as well as securing more efficient routes from the center to both the gates in the new circuit of walls and the large mendicant institutions at the edge of the old city.\textsuperscript{614} Races were also originally participatory, celebrating military victories while performing ritual acts of humiliation on the poor, prostitutes, and other marginalized groups. However, by the later fourteenth century they had become more highly formalized spectacles rather than participatory ceremonies.\textsuperscript{615} Most importantly for this argument, however, was that the horse race delegitimized anyone else’s right to use that space at that time.\textsuperscript{616}

Beyond such organized civic rituals, however, there is evidence that communal governments in Italy set aside and maintained, through negotiation, certain open spaces that were not exclusively dedicated or connected to politics, religion, or commerce. Instead, they served to underpin a certain culture of leisure; pursuits such as games or \textit{passeggiate}. In Lucca, the communal lawn (\textit{prato comunale}) was, according to official regulations (\textit{bandi}), reserved for games and promenades, and had to be safeguarded from any abusive occupation.\textsuperscript{617} In Florence, in the later thirteenth century, a vast grassy area was laid out near the Church of Ognissanti. It required the displacement of a leper hospice, the demolition of a row of houses, and included some sort of artificial pond fed by diverted water from the Arno. However, according to Heers, the plan was only partially successful because no trees were planted, the roads through it were badly maintained, and it continued to serve as a market for livestock

\textsuperscript{614} Ibid., 399.
\textsuperscript{615} Trexler, "\textit{Correre la terra}," 872.
\textsuperscript{616} Ibid.: 879. This points to the central contradiction at the heart of the ideal and practice of public space. It was accessible to all but increasingly its ritual forms became more orchestrated, designed more to be watched than to offer the right of participation just at the time when the Florentine reggimento was consolidating its power into fewer elite families.
\textsuperscript{617} No carts were allowed to pass through and both pasturing and dumping material were forbidden. See Heers, \textit{La città}, 395.
and horses for those who rode them. This was also coupled with plans for a matching green space on the eastern edge of the city along the Arno.\footnote{Ibid. Heers also points to spaces of leisure in Siena, Lucca, and on the Prato della Valle in Padua.}

Unfortunately, Heers does not make reference to any sources for this urban policy, and a search for documents would be necessary to confirm the validity of a claim to thirteenth-century urban leisure policies. According to Sznura, the area around Santa Lucia al Prato was developed as a collaborative venture between the Umiliati of Ognissanti and the commune. It created, \textit{ex novo}, a new borgo, street, city gate, and area for new housing; i.e., a new neighborhood. Sznura speculates that the commune initiated the project in tandem with its projected plan (\textit{progetto tendente}) to construct a green space in the western suburbs reserved for public strolling (\textit{passeggiopubblico}) and animal market.\footnote{Sznura, \textit{L'espansione urbana}, 80-81.} According to a 1278 document cited by Sznura, the Umiliati ceded land to the commune to construct a new city gate if the commune agreed to realize the prato and a “\textit{burgus novus}” (Figure 33). They also wanted to reserve one hundred \textit{braccia} of land in front of their church to create a piazza. The artificial pond (\textit{gora}) however, seems to have been motivated by plans for the construction of industrial installations for washing and fulling wool (\textit{gualchierie}).\footnote{Ibid., 81. The document quoted by Sznura is found in Pampaloni, \textit{Firenze al tempo di Dante: documenti sull'urbanistica fiorentina}, n. 58. It is a transcription of ASF, \textit{Capitoli}, 39, f. 356.} Therefore, the area would be integrated into the city as a mixed use neighborhood of housing, commerce, manufacturing, and leisure, a remarkably complex program of land development.

Such urban creations formed part of a larger network of spaces that were conduits of both ritual \textit{and} economic movement that attempted to sweep away the stubborn blockages of the private vendetta. Moreover, in comparison with the Buondelmonte story’s critique of the violence within and among elite families, Dante
and the Adimari knight restage that conflict as an assault by one class on the spaces – exemplified in the careful social and economic planning of Borgo Ognissanti – that now were assumed to belong to another. Sacchetti’s Dante realized that public space, by definition, was a mercantile creation, a tool and weapon with which the popolo confronted the fortified, private, neighborhoods of powerful magnate consorsterie and it even strengthened Dante’s fidelity to the topography of the commune. In fact, Dante’s personal bond with the knight (amistà) is lost precisely when he realizes that they do not, literally, live in the same mental, civic, or even legal space.\textsuperscript{621} Space was not infinite. Instead, fluid topographies were overlaid upon each other, forming disparate itineraries that flowed along streets and squares but were often deflected by divergent ethics of urban living. Fast-moving horses, on the other hand, were associated with the running of the communal palii, or horse races, such as those officially sanctioned for Santa Reparata, San Barnaba, and San Giovanni Battista. On such occasions, no one had a right to the streets along which the race was run.\textsuperscript{622}

At play, of course, were the social relations established in the late Dugento by the passing of the Ordinances of Justice in 1293. They created, directly by naming families, an entire class of disenfranchised elite citizens. Under these provisions, no magnate could address the government directly, on his own volition. The movements of disenfranchised elites – magnates or grandi – through the city were severely curtailed by statutory law during times of political strife. Clear class divisions emerged at times of unrest, prohibiting popolani from gathering at the houses of

\textsuperscript{621} Dante also refers to him as a neighbor (vicino) which emphasizes the spatial and personal bonds that, in Florence, were very strong, so that their negation was a notable event. Sacchetti himself had advocated against mercy for his own brother, who was executed for conspiracy in 1379. See ASF, Consulte e pratiche, 18, f. 22r (12 October 1379): “In consilio maximo... Franchus Sacchettis dixit quod capitanus faciat iustitiam contra omnes et contra Giannozum qui cum in patriam pectaverit mortis supplicio dignus est.” (“That the Capitano ought to do justice against Giannozzo and the others who, having sinned against the fatherland, deserve the death penalty.”) I would like to thank Robert Fredona for sharing this information and providing his translation.

\textsuperscript{622} Trexler, “Correre la terra,” 849.
grandi, forbidding grandi from leaving their households and visiting other grandi, and denying anyone the right to go through the city on a horse. Magnates committing crimes at any time were denied access to their family compounds, and their names were listed in the statutes by the quarters in which they lived.\footnote{Statuti del Podestà (1355)," II, xxi, xxii, xxiii, xxxi; IV, xli, xlii, xliii, xlvi. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, xiii, clxvi.} Clearly intended to control the potential for magnate violence, these laws created temporarily prohibited zones of restricted movement. They alluded to the fact that, armed and accompanied by their own private guards, the magnates took over the streets of the commune through a specific kind of movement that tended to privatize space in such a way that it impeded the movement of the popolo. In this light, Sacchetti’s story acts as a kind of allegory of spatial anxiety about the control of the city’s streets and, therefore, the ability to control movement through them.

As a result, social memory, urban narrative, family ritual, and urban legislation were tightly bound up with watching, describing, and interpreting contemporary events. As an example, consider the movements of Piero de’ Medici at the time of his exile in 1494, and those of the French King, Charles VIII, who entered the city a week later.

The Florentine regimento was outraged with the unilateral concessions Piero offered to the French king as his forces steamrolled their way through the peninsula to claim his right to the Neapolitan throne.\footnote{Piero, in imitation of his father’s legendary diplomacy with the Neapolitan king, went out to me the French king to surrender the fortresses of Pisa, Livorno, Pietrasanta, and Sarzana, and therefore cede control of the entire western half of the Florentine dominion. See Piero di Marco Parenti, Storia Fiorentina, ed. Andrea Matucci, (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 103-14.} When Piero returned to Florence from Pisa, entering the Porta San Frediano, there was little description of his procession to the family palace (figs, 2.33, 2.33a). Piero di Marco Parenti saw some festive fireworks and heard the Medici rallying cry, but what was more important for
chroniclers was that upon arriving at his palace, very few citizens came to support him, even as he threw bread, wine, and sweets to ingratiate himself with crowd.\textsuperscript{625} That area had become a dead zone, with no movement towards it. This is contrasted with the Piazza della Signoria, into which citizens were repeatedly pouring throughout the month of November, 1494. As events played out between these two architectural sites, the movements of people between them dramatized the transfer of power from the Medici household to the communal palace.

That evening, Piero made his way to the Servi and then to the Palazzo Vecchio (Figure 2.33b). As he did so, both Parenti and Bartolomeo Cerretani constructed the image of a mounted procession being abandoned and attacked as it moved through the city as the community expressed its disapproval. They openly cursed Piero, who was hemmed in by mounted henchmen, protecting him as he fled the Palazzo Vecchio.\textsuperscript{626} It was through these spatial encounters that Piero learned just where his status in the city was heading.

The next day he attempted again to gain access to the communal palace but only made it halfway up the stairs and was told that the signori were dining (Figures 2.33c, 2.33d). Returning at the sound of vespers he was once more locked out. Having been rebuffed in this way, he bit his finger in the sign of the vendetta, turned around and left, crossing the piazza with his men as the call to arms for the popolo was heard from the palace window.\textsuperscript{627} Landucci describes Piero’s actions in the piazza as a series of movements, of starts and stops as he tried unsuccessfully to

\textsuperscript{625} “Pochi amici incontro li andorono: da Villani e altra gente, in pruova oradmate, in sull’entrare alle porte festa con fuochi si li fece, cosi al passare ‘palle’ da quelli si gridava,” (Few friends went to meet there: from peasants and other people, in an ordered demonstration, to enter at the gates to celebrate with fireworks, and they shouted “palle” as they passed). Ibid., 121. “...e quando giunse in casa, gittò fuori confetti e dette vino assai al popolo, per recarsi benivolo al popolo...” Landucci, \textit{Diario fiorentino}, 8 Nov. 1494. “And when he reached his house, he threw out confetti (sweatmeats), and gave a lot of wine to the people, to make himself popular.” Landucci, \textit{Florentine Diary}, 60.

\textsuperscript{626} Cerretani, 205, Parenti, 121.

\textsuperscript{627} Cerretani, \textit{Storia fiorentina}, 206.
regain the support of the crowd and make his way through it. Landucci was carefully following Piero’s movement in order to understand the narrative of power as it was being played out. As the alarm bell of the commune began to ring, a terrified Piero was hastily brought back to his palace where not more than twenty armed citizens, of the vilest sort, would join him. Cerretani notes that many people rushed to the piazza, a few went to Piero, but that “most people remained in their homes to see the outcome of such great movements.”

The grossa, or Leone, the largest bell of the commune, began to sound the alarm. Cries of “popolo e libertà” were heard from the palace windows, and within an hour the piazza was filled with the flags and men of the district militias. Mounted and with an armed guard, Piero’s brother, the 19 year-old cardinal Giovanni, attempted to pacify the piazza. However, in an altogether real and menacing re-enactment of the gang of youths that blocked the movement of the wedding procession, Giovanni’s entourage was attacked and thwarted by none other than just such a band of youths at the Canto al Giglio, who forced him to retreat to the Medici compound (Figure 2.33e). One of the city’s heralds (banditori) was handed nine black beans from one of the priors, signaling the unanimous decision to declare Piero a rebel of the state. Amid the confusing mass of sounds emanating from the piazza – the sound of the commune’s alarms bells, trumpets blown by the city’s mounted banditori while dressed in communal uniforms, the people crying for the

---

628 “E Piero montò a cavallo per venire in piazza colla sua giente; e più volte si mosse e poi stava fermo. Credo che non si vide accompagnato da troppi cittadini, e anche gli dovette esser detto che la piazza era piena di cittadini armati.” Landucci, Diario fiorentino, 9 November, 1494. “Piero then mounted his horse, to come into the piazza with his men, starting several times, and then stopping again. I think that he perceived how few citizens were with him, and also he must have been told that the piazza was full of armed men.” Landucci, Florentine Diary, 61.
629 Cerretani, Storia fiorentina, 206.
630 Ibid. “...ma la mag[i]or parte si stavano a le case loro a vedere il successo di si gran movimento,”
631 Ibid., 206.
632 Landucci, Diario fiorentino, 9 November, 1494.
633 Where via Calzauioli meets Orsanmichele.
death of Piero,\textsuperscript{634} – the proclamation announcing Piero’s rebel status was then issued at the \textit{Canto alla Macina} and in via Martelli,\textsuperscript{635} allowing any citizen to capture or kill Piero de’ Medici (Figure 2.33f).\textsuperscript{636} The choice of these two sites could hardly be coincidental, located as they were on opposite angles of the Medici palace itself, marking the two main north-south axes – via San Gallo and via Martelli/Larga – one old and one new, that facilitated movement in and out of the city. Surrounded by all these sounds of the noisy commune, Giovanni, disguised as a Franciscan, and Piero, mounted on a large horse, fled into exile along city’s central axis and exited from the Porta San Gallo (Figure 2.33g).

At this point it is important to emphasize that all the movement being described here is definitively about the movements of men. In contrast, where female movement does occur within the events described, it is precisely when they are forcibly removed from the Medici Palace by men. Piero must have left his wife and mother-in-law behind in the palace, as several citizens were ordered by authorities to take both women to the convent of Santa Lucia in the via San Gallo, having first relieved them of their jewelry.\textsuperscript{637} Women appear at the windows along the Borgo Ognissanti to repel the Swiss troops in Cerretani’s account of the events.\textsuperscript{638} Such an

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Cerretani, \textit{Storia fiorentina}, 207.
\item Landucci, \textit{Diario fiorentino}, 9 November, 1494.
\item Banditori were to wear communal uniforms specifically defined by law, blow there trumpets of silver before making their announcements, all while mounted. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," I, xliii.
\item Cerretani, \textit{Storia fiorentina}, 208. "Nel palazzo dove abitava Piero in sul principio della via Larga v’entrò per ordine della signoria alcuni ciptadini e quali ne trassono la donna di detto Piero et la sua suocera, tutta dua degl’Orsini, et prima trassono loro di dita tutte le gioie e tritamente cerchato le mandorono piagnendo nel monastero di Sancta Lucia in via di S. Ghallo..." (In the palace where Piero lived at the beginning of the via Larga, some citizens entered by order of the signoria and took the wife of Piero and his mother-in-law, both of the Orsini family, and first they removed all their jewellery from their fingers and sent them weeping to the convent of Santa Lucia in the via San Gallo). I am grateful to Sheryl Reiss for pointing out the importance of how movement was gendered and contrasted in these sources. She also points out that the Suocera would have to be Alfonsina’s mother, Caterina Sanseverino, since Piero’s mother, Clarice Orsini, died in 1488. On this episode, see also Natalie Tomas, \textit{The Medici Women: Gender and Power in Renaissance Florence}, (Aldershot; Burlington, Vt: Ashgate, 2003), 108.
\item On this episode, see below.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
image raises the question about the visibility of women on the streets to the “eye-witness” chroniclers. If women were present, and there is nothing to say that they were not, perhaps their invisibility arose from the fact that they had to conform to certain gendered spatial tropes in order to play a meaningful role in social and political events. That is to say that women at windows would certainly have registered as meaningful to any Florentine observer. Women at windows populate the romances of Boccaccio and were a common theme of anxiety for urban moralists.\(^{639}\) Therefore, their presence at windows had conventional meaning, and the resistance and hostility they expressed was already grounded in the cultural image of marriage processions. As such, they could enter only at certain points into the narrative of urban conflict.

Compare the events surrounding Piero’s entrance into and exit from the city with those accompanying Charles VIII, who, amid much fanfare and ceremony, reached the same Porta San Frediano on November 17th, just over a week later. With decorated facades, explosions, fireworks, songs, and instruments, the procession moved along Borgo San Frediano to Ponte Santa Trinita, along Borgo San Jacopo, across the Ponte Vecchio to the Por Santa Maria, right on Vaccherieca and into the Piazza, through Cartolai to the Canto de’ Pazzi, behind the cathedral, and into Piazza San Giovanni where the king dismounted to pray in the duomo. The procession concluded by following via Martelli to the palace that used to belong to Piero de’

Certainly the symbolism of this movement was lost on no one (Figure 2.34). As rumors quickly circulated about the king’s intentions to take the city, his demand for Piero’s return, his demands to have rights of conquest over Florence according to French law, his movements over the next ten days were carefully observed. One incident, in particular, offered the spectacle of a very offensive movement, as French soldiers led bound Florentine prisoners through the city, threatening to kill them if they weren’t ransomed. This provoked outbreaks of fighting and the simultaneous and opposite movement of the French returning, in formation, to what was now referred to as the “Casa Reale” and not the Medici Palace, while the Florentines assembled in the Piazza. Hearing the romore, five hundred Swiss troops attempted to march from the Porta al Prato through Borgognissanti (Figure 2.34a). Inhabitants of the neighborhood, most of them women, attacked the soldiers from the windows of their houses, raining down on them “bed boards, chests, benches, burning embers, boiling water, stones, tiles, and other

---

640 Cerretani and Parenti follow an identical itinerary. Cerretani makes reference to Piero’s absence in the phrase: “...alla chasa che fu di Piero de’ Medici si chondusse’” (he was taken to the house that was, in the past, Piero de’ Medici’s). See Cerretani, Storia fiorentina, 212-13; Parenti, Storia Fiorentina, 133.

641 Occupying the recently vacated Medici palace would have been a singularly symbolic act in the eyes of contemporaries, although no one remarks upon the property as expropriated. Symbolically, the city had “surrendered” the Medici palace much as Piero himself had surrendered Florentine fortresses in western Tuscany. However, another connection may have helped to legitimize the move. According to another source, at the head of Charles VIII’s entrata was none other than Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, who had allied himself with popular forces against his kinsman. Perhaps he had appropriated the rights to the palace and hosted the French king, but it is not at all clear what his status would have been when the king suddenly became a public enemy. For the account of Lorenzo at the head of the procession see Marino Sanuto, La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia, (Venice: Tip. del commercio di M. Visentini, 1883), 134. On the role of Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici on the overthrow of Piero de’ Medici see Alison Brown, “The Revolution of 1494 in Florence and its Aftermath: A Reassessment,” in Culture in Crisis, ed. Jane Everson and Diego Zancani, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For the artistic implications of Charles VIII’s entry into Florence see Patrizia Zambrano and Jonathan Katz Nelson, Filippino Lippi, (Milan: Electa, 2004), 476 ff. I would like to thank Jonathan Nelson for sharing his insights into this episode.

objects,” successfully preventing the soldiers from accessing the center of the city.\footnote{Cerretani, Storia fiorentina, 218. “Gl’habitatori adunque dello ingrexo di detto borgo, et la mag[o]re parte donne, gitate a terra delle finestre nella via litiere et ca[s]se et panche, dipoi con cenere acqua bollita saxon tegholi et altre artigl[i]erie...” (The inhabitants at the entrance to the said street, and the majority of them women, threw down, from the windows onto the street, bedboards, crates, and benches, then burning embers, boiling water, stones, tiles and other projectiles).}

When the Florentine authorities presented the king with an accord drafted in opposition to his impossible demands, his “maestà cristianissima” rejected it with threatening words (parola minatoria). On hearing all these terrible words being uttered by the French lords, Piero di Gino Capponi took the accord and ripped it into a hundred pieces, uttering the following: “Most Christian Prince, we shall sound the bells if you sound the trumpets, and we shall show you this people in arms.”\footnote{Ibid., 219. The English translation is taken from Najemy, A History of Florence, 380.}

The king’s gradual loss of power, therefore, can be vividly traced through the watchful gaze of attentive Florentines; which brings us back to Landucci’s description of the king’s hesitant movements on November 23\textsuperscript{rd}. The king seemed confused, forcing his whole cavalcade to turn back on itself, in a series of truncated movements, until he finally traversed the city, only to hesitate again at the threshold of the church (Figure 2.35). He was afraid to enter, Landucci tells us, because he feared being trapped inside, so completely stripped was he of his authority.\footnote{...e giunti alla porta non vi volle entrare; e fectionla più volte e non vi entrò mai. Molti dissono che egli aveva paura e non si voleva rinchiusedere, e questo ci mostrava che egli aveva più paura di noi...” Landucci, Diario fiorentino, 23 November, 1494. “But when he reached the door he would not enter; and they repeated everything several times, but he did not enter once. Many people said that he was afraid, and did not wish to be shut in, and this proved to us that he was more afraid than we were.” Landucci, Florentine Diary, 69.} These fits and starts, the confusion and hesitation, were in stark contrast to the order, pomp and visual eloquence of the King when he entered Florence. Now the city’s would-be liberator was confused by its topography. He was not sure how to move through it, as if it had become a strange and foreign place. Bystanders did not suppress their ridicule as they

264
watched his reputation sink with every misplaced step. Landucci saw this travesty as representative of the King’s anxiety and political confusion. He interpreted this farcical odyssey as proof that the king feared the city much more than the city feared him, and he confirms the circulating rumors that the king simply did not know what he wanted. The last image we are given is of a disgraced king, exiting the city from the Porta San Giorgio, hidden amongst his many horses, hemmed in much as Piero was before his own unceremonious flight.

What was wrong with men on horses? Equine movement through the city carried with it deep associations for Florentines, who regarded and scrutinized it, contained and sanctioned it through a range of linguistic, legal, and memorial practices. It formed part of a larger conventional and endlessly repeating vocabulary of urban movement that grafted fluid topographies onto the fixed networks of streets and squares. Almost universally, the city plan – the physical network of streets and squares – is the most persistent element of a city’s spatial history. Therefore, reading it historically requires that one take account of the movement of things and people through it. Spatializing such movement demonstrates how historical knowledge is embedded in the contours of urban space, adorning its surfaces, inflecting its edges, and coursing through its circulatory systems.

---

647 “...molto si bisbigliava infra ‘l popolo con grande sospetto dicendo: questo Re non sa quello si voglia, non è ancora sottoscritto l'accordo.” Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 24 November, 1494. “There was much whispering amongst the people, who said suspiciously: ‘This king doesn’t know what he wishes; he has not yet signed the agreement.” Landucci, *Florentine Diary*, 70.
CHAPTER 3 THE AUDIBLE CITY: SUONI

3.1 The Acoustic Art of Architecture

In the first two chapters my discussion revolved around the spatial ordering of the city and how Florentines developed their own methods of rearranging and measuring it. Building on this spatial construction of the city, the present chapter seeks to open a discussion about one of the most important but least understood elements of the urban experience of the past: the urban soundscape. The sounds that one heard in Florence were as crucial as the sights one saw in a culture where information was a product of the full sensorial experience of the city.649 Listening to the city was a critical practice for Florentines and architectural historians cannot ignore the knowledge produced about buildings and spaces by the sounds that emanated from and within them. Based on these new avenues of research and on the confrontation of official and popular sounds within the built environment of Florence, this chapter will reconstruct elements of the urban soundscape from a range of legislative and private documents. Of course, these sounds are necessarily buried in texts, which, within our own cultural sphere, only contain traces of the oral culture that produced them.650 Texts were rarely silent in the past and neither was the urban culture that produced them.651 Florentines were constantly making noise, as was their city, and this required that they be attentive listeners. By listening closely, so to speak,

649 The experience of the city was at the intersection of the body’s entire sensorial apparatus, not just those of sight and sound, however. Michael Camille describes how medieval city dwellers moved through their city by different signs: visual, aural, and olfactory. Camille, “Signs of the City,” 24.
650 I am referring here to the almost completely silent culture of silent reading we share. This was not always the case, and clearly texts often provoked memories of vocal utterances. See the discussion of Storytelling in the piazza above. For a historical interpretation of reading see Paul Henry Saenger, Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).
651 Although medieval writing practices laid the groundwork for the possibility of silent reading through developments such as spaces between words and word order, books were still precious objects and illiteracy was still a factor. In this case, merchant texts of Florence would not have been exclusively linked to a silent reading culture since many of their entries were attempts to save oral experiences. On the origins of silent reading, see Ibid.
to these texts one can derive a sense of what the city sounded like as a medium for sounds, voices, and variety of urban noises.

It serves well, by way of introduction, to begin with a myth, one that links the organizational precision of music to the ordering of stones into walls. The stories that a city’s inhabitants told themselves about the origins of their city speak volumes about how they understood their past, who they imagined themselves to be in the present, and where they hoped to go. The previous chapter explored such original myths in terms of the way that social groups defined themselves against each other in competing claims of legitimacy. Similarly, visions of far off cities could coincide with a desire, on the part of urban residents, to transpose a certain harmonics of design onto the spaces that surrounded them. In this way, the city in which they lived existed as both a mental idea and a physical experience. All of the descriptions of Florence encountered so far hold in tension this dichotomy of ideal and real. For Florentines in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance it demonstrated a will toward understanding the city as a social experiment whose coherence was derived from its connection to ancient myth or old stories. In an autograph copy of the *zibaldone*\(^{652}\) of the Florentine poet Antonio Pucci (c. 1310- c. 1388), he imagines the mythical origins of Thebes, a city built, ordered, and designed by the music made by its founders:

> Amphion was son of Jove and husband of Niobe and builder of the city of Thebes. He was an expert and very well educated and with the help of the sciences he ordered and made that city, especially through the science of music because he and his wife played and sang so sweetly that according to the poets the stones picked themselves up, and moved and arranged

---

themselves one on top of the other, and in this way he walled the city... 653

Pucci was transcribing the ancient myth of Amphion, who walled the city of Thebes by the power of music (Figure 3.1). 654 In this narrative, which is found in several ancient sources, Amphion, erstwhile king of Thebes, son of Jove and Antiope, husband of Niobe, and twin brother of Zethus, built the walls with their seven legendary gates around the city of Thebes. 655 He did this not, however, through any human sweat or physical toil but through the intellectual power of the liberal arts, the human sciences, and most particularly that of music. The creation of cities, therefore, relied on the intellectual power of the mind to organize matter through the mathematical acoustics of music. In the most extensive reference to the myth, Horace emphasizes how

---

653 “Anfione fu figliuolo di Giove et marito di Niobe et d’edificatore della cipta di Tebeed era molto isperto et molto scienziato et coll’aiuto delle iscienze ordinò et fecie quella cipta ispezialmente per la scienza della musicha però ch’egli et la moglie sonavano et cantavan si dolcemente che secondo i poeti le pietre prese medesimo si moveano et aconiavansi l’una sopra l’altra, et in questo modo murò la cipta...” An autograph copy of Antonio Pucci’s Zibaldone can be found in Bib. Laur., Laurenziano-tempiano 2, f. 103r. “The building of the celebrated seven-gated wall of Thebes is usually attributed to Amphion, who is said to have charmed the stones into moving by the playing of his lyre.” “Thebes,” Encyclopedia Britannica (2008), http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9071965.

654 Raped by Zeus, Antiope had twin sons, Amphion and Zethus, who were raised by shepherds. Amphion became adept at music and was presented with a lyre from Hermes, to which he added three strings to make seven in total. Conquering Thebes was revenge for the twins whose mother had been imprisoned by its Regent, Lycus. After having conquered the city, Amphion played his lyre with such magical beauty that the stones followed him and fitted themselves into place, showing his brother how it was a better aid to building that his own physical strength. See “Who's Who in Classical Mythology,” (London: Routledge, 2002), s.v. ”Amphion and Zethus,” http://www.credoreference.com/entry/772866/. (accessed October 23, 2008).

Amphion, builder of Thebes’ citadel, moved stones by the sound of his lyre, and led them whither he would by his supplicating spell. In days of yore, this was wisdom, to draw a line between public and private rights, between things sacred and things common, to check vagrant union, to give rules for wedded life, to build towns, and grave laws on tables of wood; and so honor and fame fell to bards and their songs.\textsuperscript{656}

In other words, the importance of the ideal city lay in the harmonic way it defined borders and separated elements in an orderly and rational way. As I have tried to show, this was how the city ought to have been, although other ties of neighborhood, family, economics and memory tended to blur such borders.

Pucci’s interest in the classical past was a way of interrogating how it spoke to his own present circumstances. Based on the number of copies and the contents of this manuscript, scholars have determined that this zibaldone, like so many others similar to it, provided a repertoire for the public performance of such narratives. As such, it overlaid the fantasy of the ideal city onto the imagination of an urban populace. This narrative fragment is set amidst stories copied from Ovid, discussions of Greek gods, passages from Dante, and references to events taking place in Florence itself. It follows Pucci’s description of the very first city, the origins of Venice, the foundation of Rome, as well as all manner of Italian, Persian and “Saracen” cities, all based on the travel writings of Marco Polo. There is a city built on water, one where the inhabitants make wool from the bark of trees. He counts rooms and houses, measures the wall of the tower of Babel and the steps of Babylonia. He describes how Alexander the Great founded twelve cities and finally he arrives at the foundation

\textsuperscript{656} Horace, \textit{Ars poetica}, 394-401. This is the most extensive reference to the Amphion myth and occurs in a discussion of how he and Orpheus civilized men with their music: “dictus et Amphion, Thebanae conditor urbis, - saxa muovere sono testudinis et prece blanda – ducere quo vellet. Fuit haec sapientia quondam, - publica privatis secermere, sacra profanis, – concubitu prohibere bago, dare iura maritis, – oppida moliri, leges incidere ligno. – sic honor et nomen divinis vatibus atque carminibus venit.”
myth of his own city of Florence,\textsuperscript{657} followed eventually by comments on Arezzo, Perugia, Todi, and Venice. It is a mix of the real and the fantastic, all destined for dissemination in the public square.\textsuperscript{658} Such emphasis on describing the origins of a whole range of both fabled and real cities relates directly to the urban setting in which these stories were heard by Florentines. As such, these tales would have echoed within actual urban spaces, imbuing streets and squares with the most fantastic associations and a richer cultural memory.

I will return to Pucci and his \textit{zibaldone}, but first I would like to explore why the experience of the city and its architecture is profoundly linked to the sound of Amphion’s lyre and why the acoustic dimensions of architecture are crucial in understanding how people experience space in general and how Florentines understood their city in particular as an ensemble of meaningful sounds.

This origin myth of the acoustic art of city-building and wall construction plays out in stark contrast to the conventional practice of architectural history, where the stunning silence of pictures of nearly empty spaces is the medium through which the architectural past is normally interrogated (Figure 3.2). Architectural photography, in general, visually displaces most of the social experience of buildings and spaces, reaching for an ideal image of pure form. It renders architecture as the pure expression of design, grafting onto it the isolation and emptiness of what might be termed the “museum effect” and allowing its aesthetic attributes to dominate in a rarefied and unobtrusive environment that permits careful and intimate visual investigation. This is, after all, hardly surprising, ensconced as the discipline is in an

\textsuperscript{657} Antonio Pucci, "Zibaldone," in \textit{Laurenzano-templiano} 2 (Biblioteca Laurenziana), 70v ff. This is a version of the story concerning the Roman General Fiorino, which is discussed in chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{658} According to Dale Kent, Pucci’s zibaldone was one of the most popular “manuals” used by street entertainers as source material for narrative performances. See Kent, \textit{Cosimo de’ Medici}, 80; D. V. Kent, "Michele del Giogante’s House of Memory," in \textit{Society and individual in Renaissance Florence}, ed. William J. Connell, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 116.
architectural camera obscura of after-images where modern bodies, vehicles, and the refuse of modern life clutter the distance between the historical eye and the visual traces of the past. Unlike stones, which persist and can be photographed, sounds from the past, along with the effects produced by them, died with their utterance – or did they (Figure 3.2a, 3.3, 3.3a)?

As much as they are apprehended by the various manifestations of the “eye” – the period eye, the perspectival eye, the naïve, the critical, and the interpreting eye – space and architecture are also experienced aurally. When one turns toward to the historical dynamics of urban space not only as a problem of design, an expression of ideology, or a medium for public ritual – the production of a determined will to order – but also as a social and psychological phenomenon – the zone of social action and exchange – then one senses something beyond vision precisely at the moment when architectural production merges with the site of its experience. The question is: what kind of viewer is presupposed by architectural history and how does this relate to the experience of historical viewers who found themselves confronted with the city that was simultaneously the product of certain myths, the protagonist of urban narratives and an actual collection of structures and spaces contained within a circuit of walls?

One of the founders of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, August Schmarsow, provides a useful key to understanding how the concept of “shaped space” is the key to understanding architecture. He alluded to the close proximity of the creation and experience of space in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Art History at the University of Leipzig, in 1893. “At the outset,” he wrote, “the creative and the appreciative subjects are one and the same; they therefore constitute the starting point for our genetic explanation.”659 Schmarsow suggested that all

individuals position themselves in space by constructing an extended perceptual field that reaches out beyond the body to allow them to come to terms with their physical environment.660 Within this apparatus it is only necessary for the imagination to speak, as it were, and lines would become walls.661 It was almost as if everyone played the part of Amphion by mentally ordering and bringing into being protective, knowable, spatial borders that always established the reference points of an inside and an outside.

If this experience of space, for Schmarsow, was at the heart of architectural creation; that creation, and that experience of space never detached themselves from the body. As an art historian, he squarely laid the primary perception of space on vision but he was well aware that such perceptions arose from “residues of the body’s sensorial experience; [to which] muscular sensations, the sensitivity of the skin, and the structure of our body all contribute,”662 not least of which is the vertical and horizontal meridian of the body itself.663 However, the assumption of the primacy of vision bound this construction of the subject to the inherent limits of sight and the urban design ideals that privilege it. Schmarsow’s embodying of the architectural experience, however, points to the way in which he reoriented the perception of architecture as the spatial enclosure of the body. For him, the magical power of Amphion’s lyre was in the body’s will toward organizing the space around it – the imagination thinks and lines become walls and that leads to ever more permanent and physical demarcations of space: fieldstones, hedges, etc. This goes hand in hand with

661 "...der Machtspruch der Einbildungskraft richte Wände auf, wo nur Striche sind...." Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung, 12; Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," 287.
a will toward regularity, to the ideal proportions found in mathematics, and would
ultimately lead to the desire to create a harmonic built environment. In effect,
whether he was conscious of it or not, Schmarsow rewrote the Amphion myth as a
necessary, long-term, collaborative desire to order space based on a fundamental
dynamic between the body and its perception of the spaces it moved through. This he
then integrated into a theory of architectural creation.

Schmarsow does not place music or sound at the point of architectural creation
but he does link the two, comparing architectural plans to musical scores and buildings
to performances. The relationship between these two modes of creation is
anticipatory; the score can evoke the piece, while the plans can intimate the building
before it is built, linking both to an interpretive performance of ideas and design.
However, the major distinction, he warns, comes from the apparently fleeting nature
of sound itself where “the musical performance thunders forth and fades away almost
in the same instant in which it comes to life.” Architecture, on the other hand,
persists. Even so, Schmarsow makes a crucial remark that, although he himself will
not pursue it, poses the question about just exactly where the threshold of the ‘artistic
work’ lies. In doing so, he links the experience of music to the experience of
architecture: Is it the hewn stone, joined beams or arched vaults, he asks, that
constitute architecture, or does it “come into being only in that instant when human
aesthetic reflection begins to transpose itself into the whole…” ensemble? The
implication is that there is no architecture without experience. For Schmarsow this

664 Schmarsow describes how this will to order leads to architectural creation. Schmarsow, Das Wesen
der architektonischen Schöpfung, 12-17; Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," 287-89.
665 "...die musikalische Aufführung vorüberauchst und fast im Augenblick, wo sie ins Leben tritt, auch
wieder verklingt..." Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung, 8; Schmarsow, "The
666 "...oder entsteht dies nur in jedem Augenblick, wo die aesthetische Betrachtung des Menschen
beginnt, sich in das Ganze hineinzusetzen..." Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen
Schöpfung, 8; Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," 285.
experience remains in a pure and free vision, but the musical analogy itself persists, intentionally or not, of architecture as performance. While listening to a piece of music in a concert hall, the audience listens not only to the composer’s harmonic order, but also to the harmonic order of the concert hall itself, the actual sound that the concert hall helps to make. In effect, the audience is also listening to the building.

3.2 The Urban Soundscape

By following the implications of this embodied, experiencing subject one can augment the necessarily fragmentary spatial apprehension of the sense of sight. One “sees” over time, through an implied movement, as if in motion based on the suggestions of our vision and the kinesthetic sensations. Such a complex entity as a city is grasped, therefore, only in fragments. The omni-directional nature of sound, on the other hand, distinguishes it from vision. Instead of a fixed, even a moving, searching eye on a quest for a point of view, it is the ear that fully perceives architecture as an enveloping and global enclosure of space. It is an integrated part of the multi-dimensional and embodied modern subject – the searching, thinking, desiring, interpreting, and wondering “I”. The embodied subject senses space not only by looking but also – perhaps more deeply and intimately – by listening.

According to acoustics specialist Barry Blesser, the sounds we make and hear while moving through the city allow us to perceive the dimensions of the built environment, its materials, and its spatial form. Our sense of space depends heavily on our ears, which, unlike our eyes, we cannot close. A street or a square, like any urban space, is a “composite of numerous surfaces, objects, and geometries,” that

---

667 Schmarsow, Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung, 19; Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation,” 291. See also chapter 2, “Percorrere la Città.”
creates a complex environment that is a comprehensive “aural architecture.” 669  By the
nineteenth century, the primacy of vision in post-Renaissance urban design only
served to make the ensuing silence of historical spaces grow more intense, suppressing
the body’s necessary role in the intuition of space and impoverishing our historical
understanding of the city and its space, which were always much more than simply a
vision of beauty.

Needless to say, architectural historians have not usually been engaged with
the aural landscape of the past. The ephemerality of sound contrasts radically with the
concrete media they learn to study, and the location of architectural history within a
visually based discipline has tended to downplay the other “weaker” senses. What is
more, buildings and spaces are ideally photographed and studied without the presence
of bodies for whom they were built and whose aural presence – the noise they make –
is as offensive as their visual one. Bodies often obscure a clear perspective of design
principles, geometry, light, and shadow (Figure 3.3). Nevertheless, cities were noisy
places and buildings made and inflected sounds in active and meaningful ways. This
has been made apparent by recent scholarly interest in the pre-industrial sonic
environment.670  Part of the contemporary resurgence of interest in the urban

---

669 Ibid., 2.
670 The composer R. Murray Schafer was the first to consider the urban soundscape as an object of
study from the point of view of musicology. See R. Murray Schafer, The Tuning of the World, 1st ed.,
(New York: Knopf, 1977). This work was reprinted in 1994 as R. Murray Schafer, The Soundscape:
important collection of essays for both music and urban historians, one that sought to establish the
methodological groundwork for future research as well as a useful review of the historiography, is
found in a special issue of Urban History from 2002. See especially David Garrioch, "Sounds of the
City: the Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns,“ Urban History 29, no. 1 (2002): 5-25; Tim
18; Peter Borsay, "Sounding the Town," Urban History 29, no. 1 (2002): 92-102; Fiona Kibby, "Music
74-82. Since then, other more specialized studies have emerged. See, for example, Eric Wilson,
"Plagues, Fairs, and Street Cries: Sounding out Society and Space in Early Modern London," Modern
Language Studies 25, no. 3 (1995); Reinhard Strohm, Music in Late Medieval Bruges, (Oxford:
the O-factor, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Richard Cullen Rath, How Early America
Sounded, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); Emily Ann Thompson, The Soundscape of

275
soundscape may have to do with a general trend in interdisciplinary academic interest in the “city” as a cultural phenomenon in the late twentieth century as well the shift towards discussing the concept of embodiment in the 1980s. One general result of this research is the assumption that something fundamental to our social identity has been irredeemably lost with the profound change in the nature of the urban soundscape since the industrialization and electrical amplification of environmental sounds. The evocation of a simpler, fuller, richer, and more genuine aural past is contrasted to the apparent meaninglessness of the current, constant, monotonous, drone of the high-level “white noise” that clogs our current metropolitan condition.

This wall of sound, made possible by electricity and the internal combustion engine, works to mask low-frequency sounds. By reducing their spatial range, this broad frequency of background noises actually shrinks what Bruce Smith calls the “‘acoustic horizon’… producing for the listener a relatively constricted sense of space.”671 It is this transformation, resulting from the necessary connection between sound and space, that has separated us from a concrete world punctuated by more contrasting sounds and silences, so that, set adrift, sounds have become less meaningful. In the past, there were fewer high-intensity noises so that one lived in a more varied sonic world and was able to participate within it to a greater degree. This

671 Smith, Acoustic World, 51.
meant, of course, that noises too, like streets and squares, had to be controlled by meticulous rules and regulations.

Of the loudest noises pre-modern communities were likely to hear – thunder, cannon-fire, and bells\textsuperscript{672} - only the latter constituted a regular, rhythmic, if complicated pattern of sounds. Bells were arguably the most important urban sounds in the pre-modern world since they connected inhabitants to the most meaningful aspects of their lives: to their religion, their spiritual expression, their past, their dead, their government, their safety, their civic duties, their labor, and their collective celebrations.\textsuperscript{673} Most sounds were meaningful but bells in particular formed an intricate syntax, a recognizable field of signs, and an almost universal auditory language. This is crucial. Despite the fact that large numbers of Florentines could read and write at a basic level, everyone, literate or not, seems to have understood the language of bells.\textsuperscript{674} More importantly, bells were a form of mass communication with which no other media in pre-print culture could compete in terms of speed, if not

\textsuperscript{672} Ibid., 49.

\textsuperscript{673} The best study of how intimately bells were integrated into past societies, ironically, deals with rural society in 19\textsuperscript{th} century France. See Corbin, \textit{Les cloches de la terre}; published in English as Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}. However, it is evident from Corbin’s research that similar social dynamics of bells were still present in rural France on the cusp of modernity in many ways that they had been in earlier urban societies. For an extremely incisive historical study of the bells of medieval Rome see Sible De Blaauw, "\textit{Campanae supra urben: sull'uso delle campane nella Roma medievale}," \textit{Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia} XLVII, no. 2 (1993). The literature specifically on bells, as Corbin has remarked, is often confined to local antiquarians and was also part of a nineteenth century scholarly interest in an object that was, perhaps not coincidently, beginning to disappear as an important form of mass communication just at that time, like so much else. Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}, 5. As an example see J. D. Blavignac, \textit{La cloche. Études sur son histoire et sur ses rapports avec la société aux différents ages}, (Geneva: Grosset & Trembley, 1877). Much of the subsequent research that deals with bells is rooted in studies concerning the history of clocks, time keeping, and the night. See, for example, Francesco Novati, "La 'squilla da lontano' è quella dell'Ave Maria?," in \textit{Indagini e postille dantesche}, ed. Francesco Novati, (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1899); Alessandro Lattes, "La campana serale nei secoli XIII e XIV secondo gli statuti delle città italiane," in \textit{Indagini e postille dantesche}, ed. Francesco Novati, (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1899); Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

complexity. Bells were an extension of the voice, most often of collective or corporate voices, such as the church, religious orders, guilds, the courts, and the governing regime. Unlike visible urban signs, moreover, messages sent by bells could travel around corners and pass through walls – much to the chagrin of a merchant like Paolo da Certaldo. The communal bell and tower, an architecture that spoke and gave voice to a community, its past and its future, was a monument that could, therefore, stand for the city itself. It was an architectural ensemble that, more so than any other, represented the universal claims of an urban community’s autonomy and collectivity. Surprisingly, this ensemble has not been given the kind of sustained analysis it deserves.

Consider Florence and its urban layout (Figure 3.4). The width of streets and the buildings that immediately bordered them maximized the efficiency with which one could move through it, especially on foot, minimizing distances between points. That same design, which relegates green spaces to areas behind streets and sought to maintain a smooth and continuous vertical surface along streets, carried sounds further, a fact that makes electrified and engine noises today even worse than it seems in larger North American cities with many more cars and people.

Before proceeding, however, I want to outline just exactly what is meant by the urban soundscape: who and what composed it, what were its variations, its counter-rhythms and pauses, who participated in it, and who did not. I believe, therefore, that the best way to approach it is with an open and flexible general model, or models, about how the urban soundscape can be a relatively coherent object of investigation and interpretation. The contents of the soundscape can literally be anything, but for obvious reasons only those sounds that can be gleaned from the sources can constitute

675 See “Morelli’s Distrust and Certaldo’s Paranoia” in chapter 2.
676 Dohn-van Rossum, History of the Hour, 197.
the historical sonic field. Therefore, it remains incomplete and allusive, but its contours can nonetheless be tentatively sketched out. None of these sounds were random; all were interpreted as having some sort of particular meaning. In the case of Florence, these included all manner of human voices; from whispers and murmurs to shouts and cheers. They emanated from single persons and from assembled crowds. They were official and unexpected, planned and spontaneous. They included instruments that both announced and played music, stories that enchanted audiences, and choruses that praised visitors. And there were bells, ringing from towers throughout the city as a virtual symphony of distinct sounds and messages. Elements of the former – rumors, whispers, shouts, and stories, will provide subject matter for the following chapter. This investigation seeks to present the soundscape as an aesthetic mode of production in general, and then place the complex acoustic orchestration of bells within it. The only stipulation concerning these sounds, in the context of the soundscape, was that they were heard in, were uttered within, addressed to or from, the urban public spaces defined in the previous chapters. This was the theater of action.

R. Murray Schafer was the first to identify the soundscape as a sonic environment, which, not unlike the natural environment, had historical and natural attributes that could be studied, analyzed, and set within a larger historical trajectory. For Schafer this environment was contaminated or polluted by unwanted and unhealthy noises in the post-industrial world. As an ethically engaged composer – an acoustic environmentalist one might say – and a musical theorist, Schafer was concerned with the damaging effects of the technological urban soundscape and was active in trying to promote anti-noise legislation, proposing the idea that “good” soundscapes, like good landscapes, could be properly designed. 677 Interestingly, he

677 Schafer, The Soundscape, 3-5.
takes his cue from what he believes was the most “important revolution in aesthetic education in the twentieth century,” the Bauhaus movement.\textsuperscript{678} For him, it was an architectural movement that provided the key, not to destroying or eliminating industrial sounds, but embracing them and subordinating them to modernist aesthetics so that the new technologies could be beautiful and exciting, rather than terrifying and dehumanizing. In doing so, Schafer almost makes the direct link between architecture, the soundscape, and urban design, a premise upon which this chapter depends.

However, Schafer’s interest in natural sounds led more to an aesthetic distaste for post-industrial sounds that threatened human society rather than a more comprehensive theory of how the soundscape function as a cultural mode of perception and knowledge. In the pre-modern environments to which he looked back, on the other hand, the content of sounds as potential messages was crucial for listeners in developing and maintaining links to their city. According to Emily Thompson, Schafer’s soundscape can be complicated and nuanced by Alain Corbin’s conceptual linking of it to the representation of landscape:

If one can agree that landscape is a way of analyzing space, of loading it with meanings and emotions, and of making it available for aesthetic appreciation, the landscape defined by various kinds of sound fits this definition particularly well.\textsuperscript{679}

Corbin draws an analogy between the soundscape and landscape as perceptual categories, both of which function as aesthetic modes of production. Landscape painting, for example, is a way of reading, constructing and making sense of the world. Similarly, reading and participating in the auditory landscape was a way of

\textsuperscript{678} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{679} Corbin, Village Bells, ix. Originally published as Corbin, Les cloches de la terre.
doing the same. Florentines confronted and took account of their sonic environment with similar assumptions and they responded to it with other sounds, transcribed what they heard into other media, and used what they heard to establish, through multiple soundscapes, the communities that bound them to civic space.

Regulations, legal cases, chronicles, and diaries, however, may not seem, at first glance, to amount to objects or texts offered for aesthetic appreciation. However, their complicated negotiations and reactions to the aural landscape describe a certain type of poetics of living in the tension between the sonic dimensions of official rituals and local responses. Corbin only affirms what Florentine sources reveal: that reading the auditory environment involved the construction of identities, of both individuals and communities, and gave rhythm to forgotten modes of social relations, making possible collective forms of expressions, such as rejoicing and conviviality, which are now lost to us.680

Such conviviality, in all its complexity, finds direct expression in another text by the same Antonio Pucci quoted above. In a fourteenth-century verse poem, Pucci describes the Mercato Vecchio of Florence as a social and political space overabundant in goods, people, sounds, smells, and chaotic activity (Figure 3.5, 3.5a). He is able to enliven space in a way that allows the reader to imagine the dynamic sensorial spaces that pre-modern squares were. This jumbled acoustic phenomenon evokes the lively oral culture of a pre-modern city and it also existed within a series of narrative frames that ran from story to urban space since it was also destined to be recited, sung, copied, or repeated in the public square. It was a poem evoking one type of auditory environment in the context of another that was more consciously

---

680 Corbin, Village Bells, XIX.
performative in nature, making the soundscape both the subject and the medium of the narrative itself.\textsuperscript{681}

The poem begins with Pucci’s claim that he had seen many other piazzas in different cities.\textsuperscript{682} The one in Perugia was beautiful (Figure 3.5b), he declares, but the Campo in Siena (Figure 3.5c), a veritable wash basin – frighteningly cold in the winter and blazingly hot in the summer – was a climatic disaster.\textsuperscript{683} Neither of these, nor any other, however, measured up to the beauty of the piazza that he so ardently desired to speak of in rhyme. Unsurprisingly, this piazza is located in his native Florence but Pucci was not speaking of the Piazza della Signoria, which was under construction for most of the fourteenth century. On the contrary, he was referring to a piazza that, for various reasons, has left the weakest visual imprint on the rhetoric and representation of Florentine urban space. Its image runs the gamut from meticulous planimetric reconstruction, through nostalgic absence, to linguistic and sculptural memory within a brutal nineteenth-century urban renewal (Figures 3.5d-3.5f).\textsuperscript{684}

Historically, however, the Mercato Vecchio figured most prominently in the daily lives of Florentines. Legally, it was amongst the oldest and most important

\textsuperscript{681} Contemporary audiences would have been familiar with the trope of successively contained narrative frames by the popularity of the Decameron as a work subject to public performance. The performative space of storytelling will be pursued in more detail in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{682} “I’ ho vedute già dimolte piazza/per diverse cittâ.” (I have already seen many piazzas in different cities.) All quotations are taken from Giuseppe Corsi, ed., Rimitori del Trecento, (Turin: UTET, 1969). Dale Kent designates this compilation as a popular repertoire for storytellers, “cantimpanche,” who often performed in the Piazza at San Martino. She also notes that a certain copyist of the poem commented on how it “strives to combine pleasure with profit.” See Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 81. The manuscript in question is Riccardiana 1185.

\textsuperscript{683} Corsi, ed., Rimitori del Trecento, 870-71. “Bella mi par quella de’ Perugini/di molte cose adorna per ragione… Quella di Siena, che si chiama il Campo/par un catino, e di freddo, di verno,/vi si consuma e, di state, di vampo.”

public spaces of the city, declared as communal property by the late thirteenth century popular regime.\footnote{See “Was there a Public Space?” in chapter 1.} It was also the geographic center, the site of the Roman forum, the zone of prostitution and the heart of daily social life. To Pucci, it was this piazza that was more valuable, more dignified, more esteemed, and more precious\footnote{The term he uses is “pregio”, which connotes economic, moral, and aesthetic value (“si chè d’ogni altra piazza il pregio serra”).} than any other piazza, not because of its visual beauty, but because of its functional virtue.

Ma queste e l’altre, se ch’è chiaro dicerno,  
Niente son di frutte e di bellezza  
e di ciò ch’è la gente dà governo.\footnote{Corsi, ed., \textit{Rimitori del Trecento}, 871. “But these [piazze] and the others, if I clearly discern, are nothing of the fruits and beauty of the one that governs the people.”}

Brief though it is, this is, nevertheless, a remarkable statement that Pucci makes. Beauty is linked not to viewing pleasure but to moral action. Not only did the piazza nourish the world – “Mercato Vecchio al mondo è alimento” – it also indicated how people ought to behave as a political community. Urban space directly took part in governing the city. Architecture played a didactic role. For Pucci, the piazza’s value as urban space lay in its direct involvement in civilizing urban society.\footnote{Alberti makes a similar case when discussing the forum, where the gaze of elders helps to discipline the actions of youths. One of the functions of the piazza, therefore, was to provide sightlines for just such disciplinary vision. See Leon Battista Alberti, \textit{On the Art of Building in Ten Books}, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), VII, 6 (p. 263).} As such, Pucci points to an important historical link between the city as a series of buildings and spaces and the city as a social phenomenon.

In Brunetto Latini’s political theory, which I alluded to briefly in chapter one, the city was first and foremost a political community and not defined geographically by its walls. However, in practice, cities needed walls and spaces. They were a necessary element in the playing out of civic drama and this was made clear as much
by the experience of Florentines as it was intuited by acute social observers like Pucci. Political communities defined their existence as communities in various ways but those communities could only be understood through their interaction in space, urban spaces, such as the Mercato Vecchio. Those spaces, in turn, inflected and transformed those same communities, giving them a particular tenor and shape.

How did this mechanism work? Frustratingly, Pucci doesn’t even bother to tell us what this piazza looked like. Bounded approximately on the south by the present via degli Speziali, the space was most likely comprised of a mobile clutter of temporary stalls erected by vendors to sell their wares. Sacchetti gives a sense of the temporary character of the Mercato in a novella where spooked horses cause mayhem by upending vendors’ tables and stalls, while fearful merchants quickly retreat with their wares into their workshops, which must have surrounded the piazza directly. However, unlike the grain market at Orsanmichele, its alimentary economy was not bound precisely to its borders. On the contrary, the Mercato Vecchio overflowed its own boundaries, spilling out into the city at large. There were specific laws that actually prohibited impediments to selling certain foods in other spaces of the city. In other piazzas, at the foot of bridges, and other customary places, one could find herbs, chickens, eggs, straw, fruit, and fish, among other necessities. Unlike the vast majority of laws that governed the conduct proper to public spaces, which constituted a negative array of bans, restrictions, and prohibitions, the statutes that concern the Mercato Vecchio reinforce it as a fluid space that envelops spaces

---

689 “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” I, cxxiii. There was also a law that only allowed these covered stalls to remain at night if it rained.
690 Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CLIX. This story is discussed in “Communication Breakdown” in chapter 2.
691 The piazza at Orsanmichele was the subject of a whole range of meticulous regulations that governed the selling of grain. See, in particular, the law that forbade selling grain outside the piazza within four miles of the city. "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, xii.
692 "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, cxv.
throughout the city at large as a spatial phenomenon linked to an idea of increasing abundance. It seems to allude to and reinforce Pucci’s assertion of the piazza as a direct and positive form of governance. When Pucci describes its activities, therefore, he was also aware that this piazza, like Latini’s idea of the city, was also metaphorical. It had a concrete location but was not overtly contained. This piazza could also be found wherever the commerce in human sociability took place. This helps to explain Pucci’s lack of interest in fixing its visual image, since its presence was displaced throughout the city. As such, it also shows how Pucci’s piazza was contained by and interchangeable with the city at large.

As a crowded and jumbled place of the sale of a wide range of food and other items, there was a clear attempt to keep at least the streets that passed along the edges of the mercato clear of temporary stalls and it was regularly cleaned.693 It was also a space of evening sociability, where innkeepers placed benches each Thursday evening.694 The city’s brothel, the Gran Postribile occupied the northern edge of the mercato.695 By the time the Bonsignori map was printed in 1581, there appears to have been a permanent structure in the center of the mercato, transforming its status from a multi-use and changeable open space to a more dedicated space that now incorporated the newly established Jewish ghetto immediately to its north (Figure 5a).696 The mercato maintained this profile right through the intervening centuries, evoking the image of a crowded chaotic place rather than a clear and open piazza.

In light of these characteristics, it was more important for Pucci to describe those things about the piazza that struck the tangle of his senses; what he saw,

693 Ibid., III, clxxxiii.
694 Ibid., IV, xlvi.
695 According to Salvadori, the neighborhood brothels were surrounded by high crenellated walls. See Roberto G. Salvadori, The Jews of Florence: From the Origins of the Community Up to the Present, (Florence: Giuntina, 2001), 36-37.
696 On the location of the ghetto see Ibid., 36-38.
certainly, but also what he heard, tasted, and smelled – “di raccontarvi con parole preste/Le proprietà che nel Mercato sento.” In this narrative the piazza was the end point of a vast circulatory regime of seasonal food production and consumption. Every morning the streets leading into it were jammed with carts and animals burdened with a ceaseless flow of provisions. In the piazza itself, well-stocked food vendors jostled against a vibrant commerce of fraud. Bankers’ tables stood next to gaming tables. The shrieks of insults traded between garrulous female vendors – “vi stanno treccie;/diciam di quelle con parole brutte/che tutto il di; per due castagne secche/garrono insieme chiamandosi putte” – clashed with the sounds of mocking banter aimed at willing young girls – “vengon le forsette/con panieri/di fichi, d’uve, di pere e di pesche/se le metteggi, ascoltan volontieri.” The piazza is also compared to a garden, nourishing both the eye and one’s sense of taste – “There was never such a noble garden as the Mercato Vecchio in that time, that nourished the eye and taste of the Florentine.” Gentlemen and women look on as swindlers and sellers, prostitutes and pimps, cantankerous rustics and bon vivants, delivery boys and scabrous beggars, all become entangled in scuffles. One hears the wheezing, puffing, and curses of those who recoil from the exchange of blows. And if the occasional murder shattered the beauty of the piazza, one could still contentedly fritter away the time and

697 “to recount to you with quick words the things that I smell/taste/hear in the market.” Corsi, ed., Rimitori del Trecento, 871. The sensual ambiguity of the term “sentire” is crucial here.
698 Laws forbade carts with wood to be brought to the Mercato Vecchio only on Saturdays. See “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” IV, xiv. Live pigs were banned, “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” IV, xvii.
699 Corsi, ed., Rimitori del Trecento, 872-73. “there are female vendors: we speak of them with nasty words the entire day for two dried chestnuts argue and call each other whores… there come young girls with baskets selling figs, grapes, pears, and peaches, if you mock and tease them, they listen willingly”
700 “Non fu gia’ mai cosi’ nobil giardino / come a quel tempo gli è Mercato Vecchio, / che l’occhio e ‘l gusto pasce al fiorentino.” Ibid., 873.
701 Ibid., 874 “Gentili uomini e donne v’ha dal lato,/che spesso veggion venire a le mani/le treche e’ barattier c’hanno giucato./E meretrici v’usano e ruffiani/battifancelli, zanaiuoli e gaglioffi/e i tignosi, scabiosi e cattani.”
702 Ibid. “E vedesi chi perde con gran soffi/biastimar con la mano a la mascella/e ricever e dar di molti ingoffi.” (and one sees who loses with great wheezing to curse, with the hand recoiled to their jaw and give many blows of their own)
sing as arrogant youths gambled and dined next to a wretched humanity that went
naked and begging in the middle of so much alimentary abundance and acoustic
mayhem.\footnote{Ibid., 874-75. “E talor vi si fa con le coltella/ed uccide l’un l’altro, e tutta quanta/allor si turba quella
piazza bella/E spesso ancor vi si trastulla e canta./pero’ che d’ogni parte arriva quivi/che e’ vagabondo e
di poco s’ammanta./E per lo freddo v’ha di s’ cattivi/che nudi stan con le calcagna al culo/perche’ si
son di vestimenti privi/e mostran spesso quel che mostra il mulo:/pescano spesso a riposata
lenza/perch’e’ ciascun di danar netto e pulo.” (Sometimes one is there with a knife and kills another,
and disturbs so much that beautiful piazza. And often still one fritters away the time and sings since
from all parts arrives here he who is a badly dressed vagabond. And for the cold there are those so
wretched that they go naked with their heels in their ass because they hae no clothes and they often
display that which a mule shows. Only with difficulty do they provide themselves with food because
each is entirely devoid of money)
zolle, vengono a farsi a' cittadin vicine.” In Florence, the term *vicini* brought with it strong associations within the triad of the most important ways in which Florentines understood their personal social relations: *parenti, amici, vicini.* Such terms were never neutral. Neighbors were part of an extremely ritualized mode of social behavior and such relations required special and attentive administration.

The last citation from the poem also begins a short series in which the liturgical calendar is linked to the agrarian one, as carnival fowl are followed by a meatless Lent of parsnips, garlic, and onions, which then leads to the later winter harvest of fava beans, herbs, and *fritelle.* It was at Easter however, fittingly, when the market again began to overflow with life: lambs, goats, calves and ultimately birds that sang. The final image of the piazza that Pucci gives us is as the staging ground for the masculine swagger of the members of a *brigata,* who dine, gamble and warm themselves by the fires of the market – mostly at the expense of others – until, having wasted any wealth they might have had, they are reduced to eating leeks and roots, with only the memories of abundance to sustain their tuneful irony. Pucci ends by

---

704 Ibid., 876. “For Carnival capons and hens / departing from living among the clumps of dirt / come to make themselves the neighbors to these citizens.”

705 On this triad see the groundbreaking socio-historical analysis by Klapisch-Zuber in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “Parenti, amici, vicini: Il territorio urbano di una famiglia mercantile nel XV secolo,” *Quaerenden storici* 33 (1976). Published in English as Klapisch-Zuber, "Kin, Friends, and Neighbors." These concepts are elaborated in Kent and Kent, *Neighbours and Neighbourhood."

706 This did not, significantly, include swine. Statutes prohibited the presence of pigs in the mercato Vecchio, as well as the Mercato Nuovo and the Piazza del Popolo (Signoria). The presence of pigs was most likely relegated to the area around Ognissanti, where large and small animals were slaughtered Thursdays and Fridays respectively. See "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," IV, xvii; "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," IV, xii.

707 Da quella sera in là fan senza cuoco, però che, forse per le borse vote, non è chi più per loro accenda fuoco, ma ricommincian dolente note tornando al pentolino con tal tenore, che ‘n pochi di sottigljan lor le gote e posson dir «nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice ne la miseria» e ciò disse l’autore:
invoking the ambivalence of Fortune and by making a conventional admonition against arrogance, but this morality play seems to speak more about how the cyclical nature of rising and falling fortunes is a function of the Mercato Vecchio, which contains all of the abundance, pain, joy, memories – and noise – that accompany the mechanism of random fortune.

Pucci’s description of the piazza, his piling up of words designating things – animals, vegetables, people – his excess and irony, his delight in the sounds, sights, and tastes of the Mercato, and his moral restraint in describing all the scoundrels, lowlife, and unfortunate who populated it, demonstrates just how intensely embodied the experience of the piazza could be; how messy, cluttered, and uninviting. Perhaps this is why, on perfectly justifiable grounds, architectural historians – myself included – feel compelled to clear the piazza of the offending bodies, noises, and jumble before we can begin to make sense of the physical substructure of such confusion.

But the piazza that Pucci describes, literally refuses to be silenced. It was both the landscape and the soundscape, not to mention the jumble of smells, of the piazza that allowed him to analyze space, to load it with meaning and emotions, and make it

ché dove avean capponi e le pernice,  
la vitella e la torta con l’arrosto,  
hanno per cambio il porro e la radice,

(From that evening there, they do it without a cook, since, perhaps for the empty purses, there is no longer anyone to light the fire for them,

but they begin again the sorrowful notes returning to repentance with such a tenor, that in a few days they have thinned their cheeks

and they can say “no more pain than to remember happy times in misery” and so said the author [Dante]:

since while first they had capons and partridges, the veal and the tart with the roast meat, they have in exchange leeks and roots.)
available for – dare one say it – aesthetic appreciation. None of its sounds were meaningful; all formed part of a larger auditory landscape, an urban sensual dialogue, whose rhythms formed a certain type of poetics of space, a collective expression of the tension of the conflicting sounds that characterized the pre-modern piazza.

Pucci’s idea of the cacophonous beauty of the piazza dispels any nostalgia one might have for a lost sonorous past represented by the harmonic construction of Thebes by Amphion (Figure 3.1). But the version of the Amphion myth with which this chapter began was precisely the one that Pucci himself transcribed into his own zibaldone. And, as any self-respecting fourteenth-century Florentine would do, after copying down this story, Pucci immediately appeals to his fellow Florentine Dante for clarification of the story’s significance. Using the Commedia as a compendium of knowledge, Pucci finds in the Inferno, canto 32, that Dante has recourse to the same muses of the human sciences that had helped Amphion to build Thebes so that they might also give him the linguistic power to construct, through words, the enveloping textual frame around the hell into which he was descending. Pucci, quite capable of spotting a musical metaphor when he saw one, concludes that the stones did not actually move and transform themselves into walls at all, but that the city was

---

708 I am interested primarily in the soundscape because of the way architecture is directly involved in producing it. However, this does not mean that smells, tastes and other sensorial experiences are any less a part of the urban system, as Pucci has clearly demonstrated.
709 The Zibaldone format was well-suited for juxtaposing such diverse texts, the pairing of which could evoke unimagined associations. Pucci’s text formed part of the Florentine tradition of the zibaldone, a kind of journal or scrapbook, where persons recorded their favorite tales, proverbs, sermons, memories, passages from Dante, contemporary events, classical fragments, rumors and gossip; all of which amounted to a kind of haphazard intertextual experiment that was the corollary to the random encounters and fragmented vistas that characterized a society that relied so heavily on face-to-face oral communication.
protected and maintained by the wisdom and good judgment displayed by Amphion.711 In doing so, Pucci was following a general trend in Dante scholarship that argued that Amphion’s metaphorical power of building lay in his absolute gracefulness as a speaker. Therefore, the commentator of L’ottimo commento, whose author has been identified as the Florentine notary and translator of the 1355 statutes upon which this dissertation so heavily depends, Andrea Lancia, claimed that, although the story recounts how Amphion played and sang so sweetly with the help of the muses, this was a figurative image, and that it was not the songs or the music but the sound of Amphion’s voice as a wise speaker that allowed the city to grow and be conserved. It was the men of the city that were sweet and capable of being shaped, but also rugged like the stones that were guided by his words into place.712 For the Anonimo fiorentino, artisans built the city without suffering any physical fatigue while listening to the sonorous sounds of Amphion’s lyre. But in truth, Lancia explains, Amphion’s auditory power was actually in his speaking voice, a voice capable of moving the souls of men to make what he desired.713 For Jacopo della Lana, the workers refused any payment for building the city other than the sweet sound of his voice,714 and, as a final example, Guido da Pisa too identified the stones as symbolizing recalcitrant bodies,

---

711 Pucci, "Zibaldone," 103v. “Quelle donne cioè le scienze aiutin così lui nela sua Commedia. Ma deli credere non che le pietre si murassono elle medesime, ma che per lo senno suo quella città era guardata, conservata e murata.”

712 Alessandro Torri, ed., L’ottimo commento della Divina Commedia [Andrea Lancia]. Testo inedito d’un contemporaneo di Dante... (Pisa: N. Capurro, 1827-1829), 32, 10-12. “Avegna che questo è figurato, però che quegli muri non si ordinaron né per canti, né per suoni di stromenti; ma conciofossecosachè Anfone fosse savissimo e ornatissimo parlatore, per lo suo savio e ornato parlare lo stato e la salute della città di Tebe felicemente cresceva, e si conservava. Onde non solamente uomini dolci e trattabili, ma duri e aspri come pietra condusse con li suoi sermoni a l'acrescimento e fortificamento di quella.”

713 Commento alla Divina Commedia d'anonimo fiorentino del secolo XIV, ora per la prima volta stampato a cura di Pietro Fanfani. (Bologna: G. Romagnoli, 1866-74), 32, 10-12. “et i maestri che vi muravano, era si dolce et si dilettevole il suono della sua citera, che niuna fatica vi duravono; et così, con quello suono et collo ajuto di certe donne che gli atavono sonare, si fece la città di Tebe... La verità di questo, come d'Amfion, i poeti non vogliono altro sentire, se non che gli uomini, parlando bene et pulitamente, egli fanno muovere gli animi degli uomini a fare quello ch'elli vogliono.”

714 Jacopo della Lana, Inferno, 32, 10-12. “ch'elli era si pulito e grazioso parlatore, che ogni persona, quando si murava quella cittade, v'andava lavorare, e altro prezzo non voleano se non udirlo parlare.”

291
men that were enticed to obey laws and follow customs by the enchanting sound of reason itself.\textsuperscript{715} In each case, Amphion’s rhetorical power, the sheer eloquence of his voice, lay in motivating people, inciting souls to action, literally civilizing men into cities in the first place. It was the corollary to the sound of Pucci’s rather less melodious mercato. Pucci was able, however, to make the connection between what he understood in the Amphion myth and what he read in Dante, with what he saw and heard in the city square. He was able to see in the prism of difference between them meaningful strains in the confusion.

This ancient myth, invoked by Dante, mediated through his commentators, and transcribed by Pucci, along with his own poem describing the Mercato Vecchio, make a direct link between two modes through which the city was understood in pre-modern Italy: as both a physical \textit{and} a social phenomenon. I refer back to Brunetto Latini’s seemingly anti-spatial definition of cities, which, for him, were assemblies or gatherings of people for the purpose of living together under the sign of justice, what we understand as \textit{civitas}.\textsuperscript{716} They were not citizens of a single commune simply because they were gathered together inside a wall, which is the other aspect of the city defined by the Latin term \textit{urbs}.

The above sample of Dante’s commentators understood, however, how such communal ideas were the building blocks of a city and how such ideas depended on spatial metaphors to give them coherence. In a kind of material inversion, the Amphion myth showed how the metaphorical fashioning of the concrete physical structure of the city infused city walls with such ideas and with the rhetoric of the city.

\textsuperscript{715} Vincenzo Cioffiari, ed., \textit{Guido da Pisa's Expositiones et Gloss super Comedium Dantis, or Commentary on Dante's Inferno}, (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1974), 32, 10-12. “Sed veritas ista est: Amphion, qui fuit vir Niobe, de qua habetur in secunda cantica, cantu [XXII], fuit optimus cytarista et optimus prolocutor, qui sua affabilitate et dulci loquela homines lapideos et petrosos ad civiles mores et leges induxit; quibus hominibus civitatem Thebanam replevit; et ista est vera et stabilis muratio civitatis.”

\textsuperscript{716} See chapter 1 above.
If the “real” city was a collective idea (justice), then it was made apparent through the grafting of a semiotics of that collective symbolic system onto the stones themselves. Walls became symbols and ideas became concrete building material. One’s sensorial experience of the city was always symbolic because Amphion’s voice, the power of his words, was permanently linked to the walls with which the city was built. Pucci understood this. It did not matter how the mercato was built. Its civilizing power lay in the way it reflected and imposed, however distortedly, a common, if messy, idea of urban justice.

This interdependency shows how the civilizing power of the city was the result of the interaction between an urban dialogue and an urban spatial structure. The rhetoric of words was transformed into the rhetoric of stone and the materiality of stone was transformed in the materiality of words.\footnote{Such an exchange was particularly pertinent to the inhabitant of the late medieval Italian city-state, which Randolph Starn has referred to as a republic of words, an experiment in city-building that required the endless production of texts. See Starn, "Room of Peace," 4-11.} The one was the symbolic alter ego of the other, where walls became human bodies and civic dialogue became urban design. What bound these modes together was sound; the power of speech, both the sweetness of a single voice and the confusion of many. Sonic harmony created a spatial one, motivating bodies, inspiring minds, all of which resonated off the very stones with which the city was built. Words uttered had both meaning and a spatial echo. Sounds, in the urban environment, did not completely disappear at the moment of their pronouncement. Like words on a page, they reflected off walls, maintaining, imperfectly perhaps, the memory of the dialogue that arranged those stones in the first place and continued to echo within them.
3.3 Civic Soundscapes: Constructing the Acoustic Topography

In order to examine the different networks through which the urban soundscape was formed, the following discussion begins by looking at the architectural foundations upon which it rested and the principal means by which it was put into effect. In this case, it involves, primarily, the sound of bells, which were the single most important communal sound in the pre-modern city. Reconstructing the way the city was supposed to sound, according to a series of provisions regarding bells and the social relations they governed, will set the stage for a discussion of how such a will to sonic order was inflected, rearranged, and redeployed in a number of historical variations in the practice of urban life.

The concrete means by which the rhetoric of stones was broadcast within the city lay in the configuration of certain towers. Like many central Italian communes, Florence presented a dense vertical topography of towers that determined the overlapping borders of private, public, and sacred zones that was constantly renegotiated within the city. The private medieval towers of Florence’s historically fractious clans demarcated dense urban fortified zones that often protected private neighborhood churches and courtyards (Figure 3.6). Unadorned, they projected a mute and faceless profile into an urban skyline plainly visible from the surrounding territory and countryside (Figure 3.6a). Fortified, they stood defiantly as an image signifying defensive military and political power. Outfitted with temporary balconies, they stood as a testament to the constant threat of urban violence. As topographical nodes, they were a countervailing force that threatened to redraw the political jurisdictions of the city that had been laid out in statutes with a contentious topography of alliances, feuds, vendettas, and pacts. These towers were at the forefront of

---

718 Fanelli locates 173 such towers documented between the 12th and the 14th centuries. See Fanelli, *Firenze, architettura e città*, 30-31. For a description of the main features of the visual profile of the city before the building of the communal towers, see Davidsohn, *Storia*, I, 1087-88.
experiments and conflicts that constituted the urban development of Florence, intimately linking planning and politics, primarily, but not solely, in the conflict between tower societies (*consoriterie*) and the corporate groups that were formed out of trades (*arti*).\(^{719}\)

Amid this ominous architectural silence, the city’s public buildings – its communal palaces, its cathedral, its mendicant orders, and its parish churches – responded with the emergence of a speaking architecture, an architecture of sound, a network of bell towers – *campanili* – that were the principal sonic markers of the dense urban soundscape.\(^{720}\) In the central Italian skyline its more decorative profile and its necessary openness contrasted visually with the older, blank facades of private defensive towers (Figure 3.7). Both religious and civic bell towers created a daily

\(^{719}\) For an analysis of the relations between political conflicts and urban development see Loris Macchi and Valeria Orgera, *Architettura e civilità delle torri: torri e famiglie nella Firenze medievale*, (Florence: Edifir, 1994).


295
dialogue of sacred and secular sounds that constituted the heart of the urban soundscape. They confronted the closed, defensive towers of the medieval urban enclaves that turned in upon themselves to create private spaces of exclusion. In fact, both religious and civic towers in Florence were structurally and symbolically distinct from the buildings to which their bells called people on various occasions.721 Of the four principal Florentine campanili, those of the cathedral and the Badia are separate structures, while those of the two communal palaces were private family towers that pre-dated the construction of those palaces (Figures 3.7a, 3.7b)

As an architectural monument the Florentine bell tower enacted the concrete, audible voice of what was, considering the way in which Florentines reacted to it, a common urban language. It was indeed this language that sought to both supersede and subordinate the overlapping neighborhoods of socio-spatial bonds that fractured the city in order to create a cohesive audience for the spectacle of authority. These bell towers were the central architectural noise makers, though not the only ones, in a complex acoustically defined series of distinct but ephemeral horizontal territories. They functioned not only as monumental vertical visual nodes but also as horizontal spatial acoustic transmitters – radiating messages out in successive, intensifying and receding sonic waves. The resulting temporal territories, emerging, expanding, contracting, and fading, created and reinforced this hierarchically arranged and temporally defined soundscape. Through their auditory expansion, these bell towers arranged the spaces and buildings around them into endless variations of the city square, rendering the piazza the spatial organizing principle of the city. They inflected the way the piazza, in particular, but also the way urban space in general, was formed, experienced, and recorded: they injected such spaces with a temporal dimension,

721 This was a distinctive feature of the Italian church campanile, which was, by and large, an independent monument with no fixed topographical relationship to the church it served. See Priester, “The Italian campanile,” 259.
creating multiple zones of legal exclusion, spiritual community, political anxiety, and social identity.

In light of this, I want to introduce the four principal protagonists that formed the nucleus of this urban dialogue. Four towers dominated the sonic rhythms of the daily life in Florence – two civic and two religious – and although they were governed by separate authorities, and their use, meaning, dialogue, and choreography were closely intertwined and never completely distinct: the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio – the city’s town hall from its completion in the early fourteenth century – the tower of the Podestà – today’s Bargello, historically the seat of the city’s civil and criminal courts; the campanile of the cathedral – “Giotto’s Tower;” and the hexagonal tower of the Badia – Florence’s ancient Benedictine monastery (Figures 3.7c-3.7f).

How did this particular configuration of towers and bells come about? One of the founding acts, according to the description by Giovanni Villani, of the primo popolo in 1250, was to have a bell made: “And they had a bell made, which the said Capitano kept in the tower of the Lion.” (Figure 3.8, 3.8a).” This act follows a series of political decisions that began to distill the political identity of the Popolo in both visual and aural terms. After the creation of certain elected bodies and the installation of civic officials, the “first and most basic of their innovations was the reorganization of urban space.” This reorganization, in terms of visual representation, involved the creation of flags that defined twenty district militia companies “that served as a symbol of neighborhood identity and solidarity.” It is precisely in this context that Villani mentions the casting of the bell. Although most of this chapter is devoted to describing the design of the company standards (discussed

---

722 Villani, Nuova cronica, 7, 39. “E feciono fare una campana, la quale tenea il detto capitano in su la torre del Leone.”
724 Ibid., 67.
below), the terse reference to the casting of a bell hides an extremely costly,
complicated and time-consuming undertaking on the part of the new government.\(^{725}\) It
is a testament to the importance of a bell and tower, in tandem with visual
representation, for the constitution of a distinctive voice, an urban sound that would
speak to and for the new popular regime. When it sounded, the Popolo was to
assemble. according to a new configuration of legal reforms, into new civic bodies
within a transformed sonic space that was brought to life as the neighborhood
companies lined up under their banners, organizing around the flag of the popolo
which was held by the Capitano and who had rung the bell in the first place.\(^{726}\) It was
sound, vision, space, and politics that together simultaneously brought into being the
new political space of Florence in 1250.\(^{727}\)

Although Villani does not specify where the companies may have assembled,
it seems possible it could have been at the palace of the Capitano, which was located
to the east of what would become the Palazzo Vecchio and whose later expansion
ultimately swallowed it up.\(^{728}\) More importantly for my purposes here, however, is the
location of what may have constituted the first truly public or civic bell of Florence.
Villani places it in the torre del leone, which belonged at the time to the powerful
Amidei family, whom we have already met in Chapter two, and was located in the
heart of the Ghibelline neighborhood just north of the Ponte Vecchio on via Por Santa
Maria (Figure 3.8a).\(^{729}\) Placing a bell in this tower, within this neighborhood, not only

\(^{725}\) On historical methods of bell casting see Elisabetta Neri, *De campanis fundendis. La produzione di
campane nel medioevo tra fonti scritte ed evidenze archeologiche*, (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2006).
Bells were still a major but necessary expense in the 19\(^{th}\) century. See Corbin, *Village Bells*, 80-93.
\(^{726}\) Davidsohn, *Storia*, 512-13. Villani describes the original standard of the popolo like this: “e ’l
gonfalone principale del popolo, ch’avea il capitano, era dimezzata bianca e vermiglia.” Nuova
Cronica, VI, 39.
\(^{727}\) At the moment it is not exactly clear where this space may be.
\(^{728}\) Rubinstein cites the sources that locate the palaces of the Capitano and the Esecutore. See
Rubinstein, *Palazzo vecchio*, ??
\(^{729}\) For the identification of the tower, see Davidsohn, *Storia*, II, 512; Davidsohn, *Forschungen*, I, 122;
Macci and Orgera, *Architettura e civiltà*, 112-14. The latter locate the tower, reconstructed after the
had the practical advantage of maximizing the circular spatial imprint the bell’s sound, such a placement was also caught up within the spatial memory of one of the defining moments in the Florentine political past.730

The tower dates back at least to 1165 and it was one possible site of the gathering of the Amidei and their allied clans to plan the murder of Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti.731 According to the Pseudo-Latini chronicle, on the other hand, the conspirators met at the church of Santa Maria Sopra Porta (Figure 3.8a).732 Either location would respond spatially to the offence perpetrated by Buondelmonte’s snub, as he rode through the neighborhood on his way to claim a rival bride and would have reinforced the collective nature of the pact made to counter it. Where the dishonor occurred was important because that familial space needed to be ritually cleansed and this was brought about at the foot of the bridge on the edge of the neighborhood, where the murder took place.

Therefore, placing a public bell, one that symbolized the popular wedge driven between the elite Guelf and Ghibelline families, in the geographical heart of their power, in the very place where the collective memory of the Popolo located that class’s inherently violent way of life, on one of the most heavily traveled routes through the city, was similarly an act that would acoustically cleanse the violent factional justice of rival clans with the more universal order of an assembling popolo, whose geography would now extend out from and beyond these fortified enclaves.

---

730 Uccelli believes that this tower was the one referred to when Florentine statutes named the tower near Santo Stefano to represent the height limit for towers; i.e., fifty braccia. This would just add to the increasing appropriation and symbolic burden the tower was assuming as it was being transformed into the alter ego of the Platea Ubertorum. See Giovani Battista Uccelli, Il palazzo del podestà: illustrazione storica, (Firenze: Tipografia delle Murate, 1865), 109.

731 On the documentary evidence see Davidsohn, Forschungen, 1, 122; Macci and Orgera, Architettura e civiltà, 112. Macci and Orgera cite no evidence for this claim. For an analysis of this murder, see “Percorrere la Città” in chapter 2.

This location was also one of the earliest indications that the popolo was establishing a presence in an area that would eventually become the center of its regime when the decision was made in the later thirteenth century, to build the palace of the priors next to San Piero Scheraggio (Figure 3.9).\textsuperscript{733} It was away from the religious center, from the geographic and economic center of the city – the Mercato Vecchio – but was still geographically central enough within the soon-to-be constructed final circuit of the walls – “quasi nel mezzo della città” as Dati described it.\textsuperscript{734} Before the long and complicated process of dismantling the actual properties of the families whose houses were crowded around this part of the city, the sound of the Popolo’s first bell had already established an initial zone of civic authority, military organization, and judicial administration. When the rights of the Popolo were threatened, the Capitano was obliged to ring this bell.\textsuperscript{735} The sound of the Popolo was now used to discipline the tower of the Amidei, the class they represented, and the territories in which they resided.\textsuperscript{736}

What this act led to was the establishment of a new civic soundscape that was formed alongside the emerging political developments of the Florentine republic. Legal statutes concerning the proper use and meaning of civic bells grew increasingly

\textsuperscript{733} Now destroyed, San Piero Scheraggio stood just south toward the river from the Palazzo Vecchio until the building the Uffizi.
\textsuperscript{734} See chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{735} Davidsohn, \textit{Storia}, II, 513. This had strong historical symbolism, since the palace of the Amidei was attacked by Guelf partisans, not long before 1241. See Pietro Santini, "Studi sull antica costituzione del commune di Firenze," \textit{Archivio Storico Italiano} V, no. XXXII (1903): 315-16. The spatial symbolism of the struggle against the upper classes was already part of the topography of this area. Combined with the proximity of the Buondelmonte murder and the destruction of the Uberti Property, this zone was fast becoming a memorial zone of the popolo’s long struggle. This may also have played a part in the unresolved issue of why the Palazzo Vecchio was built where it was. It was also a monument to battles lost.
\textsuperscript{736} The \textit{Torre del Leone} seems to have initiated the Florentine tradition of turning private defensive towers into public \textit{campanili}, which was both a political statement and a practical way of saving time and money. Joining it were the two main civic towers of the city, the Foraboschi tower (Palazzo Vecchio) and that of the Bargello (Volognona). The name of the largest civic bell named in the 1355 statutes that was hung in the Palazzo Vecchio, the \textit{Leone}, may be a reference to the memory of this first bell.
complex throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries while Florentines began to redefine their own spatial horizons within this new acoustic environment that attempted to include all others.

The Bargello, originally the Palace of the Commune, was the most exceptional architectural expression of the political program of the Primo Popolo (Figure 3.10). It replaced a more migrant administration – more sympathetic to the Ghibelline cause – of the early thirteenth century councils, which met in, among other places, the houses of the Amidei, the proprietors of the torre del leone. The campanile of the Bargello was built over a pre-existing tower - the building is consciously set to a different axis (Figure 10a) – which was called the Volognana after Geri da Volognano, who, along with other Ghibellines, was imprisoned there in 1267. According to Uccelli, the Tower Officials met here, and he describes an image of a tower, sculpted in low relief, like that seen on the Ponte Vecchio, on the architrave above the entrance to the tower, which was removed in the 19th century.

The first bell cote was at the level just above the present roof line and is now filled in. The present height of the tower was not necessarily the end of the project, however, since the merlons at the corners are actually pilasters, which would have

---

737 The Bargello may not have been the first communal palace in Florence. Santini refers to the destruction of the palace of the commune and the residence of the Podestà in political battles in 1236. See Santini, "Studi," 58. Santini quotes a Latin chronicler who refers to the “palatium communis florentini et palatium filiorum Galigai” but makes the point that the text might refer to the same edifice, since the Podestà and the councils were meeting in various places throughout the city. According to Villani’s geography of Guelfs and Ghibellines in Florence, they were always meeting in the houses of Ghibelline families. See Villani, Nuova cronica, 6, 39.

738 Luca Giorgi and Pietro Matracchi, "Il Bargello a Firenze. Da Palazzo del Podestà a Museo Nazionale," in S. Maria del Fiore: teorie e storie dell’archeologia e del restauro nella città delle fabbriche armolifane, ed. Giuseppe Rocchi Coopmans de Yoldi, (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 2006), 125. Other families in whose properties the councils met were the Galigai, the Abati – whose houses were located around the Mercato Vecchio – and the Soldanieri, whose tower was on the present via della Scala.

739 According to recent interventions, the first two levels of the tower are believed to belong to this pre-existing structure. See ibid., 132.

740 This is the first recorded mention of the tower. Uccelli, Palazzo del podestà, 50-54.

741 Ibid., 161.

742 Giorgi and Matracchi, "Il Bargello," 132.
allowed for an overhanging structure to be mounted on top, not unlike the projecting arches of the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio (Figure 3.10b). The tower was raised to its present height not later than the beginning of the 1330s, a dating based on the traces of the fire left in the intrados of the vaults underneath the second belfry erected there to support it.

It is not clear when the first bell was hung in the Palazzo del Podestà but it was certainly no later than 1285, when there was already discussion of a bell ringer and in that year it rang as the Florentine army preparing to fight against Pisa. The provision states that the bell of the commune (campana communis) was to ring daily for the army according to the usual sequence observed. There was also another smaller bell (campanellam) referred to in October 1290 in the palace of the Podestà, one that called the councilors together and which was already in need of repair, while as many as six bell ringers were appointed to attend to this bell of the councils – “sex campanari campane d. Capitanei.”

Already, therefore, before the political reforms of 1293, the bells that resided in the palace of the Podestà functioned according to customary uses, which included the army assembling to confront foreign enemies (as opposed to the militias, who were

---

743 At some point, however, this project was abandoned, possibly because of the extent to which the tower leans to the east, where it was necessary to reinforce it by the construction of the walls along via Ghibellina. See Ibid., 141.
744 Ibid. On the fire see Villani, Nuova cronica, 10, 172. Such a date is significant since it corresponds to the time, in 1330, when the Badia had rebuilt its bell tower after having suffered its destruction in 1307 by order of the commune. These two towers are literally across the street from each other and they represent a kind of symbolic confrontation between two institutions that were intimately bound to urban life. When the monks rebuilt their tower in 1330, with financial help from the commune, they built it to a height just beyond that of the Bargello. This was assumed to have been a prudent assertion of institutional identity. However, since the commune raised its own tower just around this time to its present height, it may have had plans to supersede the height of the Badia’s tower entirely, which would have changed the dynamics of height entirely.
746 This must have been the successor to the Martellina, now housed in the recently raised tower of the commune.
called in emergencies to protect the government from internal threats) and for
meetings of communal officials in that palace.\footnote{In 1295, a decree ordered the casting of a bell for the Palace of the Commune, the common way of referring to the Podestà, although the decree was actually made by the Capitano, who resided elsewhere Uccelli, Palazzo del podestà, 162. Since the Bargello always seemed to have to functioning bells, older ones may have been recast or moved but it is not clear.}

By this time the bell known as the Martinella, had already been relegated to the realm of memory (Figure 3.10c). Up to the defeat of Florence in 1260 at the battle of Montaperti this was the bell that rang for the assembling armies of the commune. The movements of this bell will be investigated more closely below. However, what is relevant at this point is that, when it rang for the Florentine forces, it was placed on the Porta Santa Maria (Figure 3.10d), a location which, from 1250 to 1260, spanning the full decade of the Primo Popolo’s regime, made it act as a pendant to the bell cast by the Popolo in 1250 that hung in the torre del leone and assembled the popolo militias to protect the government. It helped to reinforce that space as the center of an emerging corporate identity. It is not at all clear when the Martinella was cast or what regimes had used it in the past, and for how long. What is clear, however, is that by the time of its loss on the battlefield in 1260, it was permanently ingrained within the collective psyche of the Popolo’s aural memory of collective shame.\footnote{See below.}

However, it was in the early fourteenth century that the arrival of another bell in Florence signaled a new sound on the acoustic landscape that arose from military victory. In May 1303, Florentine forces captured the well-fortified Pistoian fortress at Montale – “era molto forte di sito, e di mura, e di torri” – and after razing it to its foundations and sparing only its bell – which had particularly fine tone – they mounted it in the campanile of the Podestà.\footnote{Villani, Nuova cronica, 9, 65. “…ch'era molto buona, la feciono venire in Firenze, e puosesi su la torre del palagio della podestà per campana de’ messi, e chiamossi la Montanina.” “…which was very
Taking bells as war trophies was a common practice in European society. Not only their expense, but also their quality, was something that was difficult to predict in casting. In addition, the certain ring of a bell was a powerful way in which the legacy of such victories could be regularly and generally diffused throughout the city in order to allow successive generations to participate in a collective civic memory.

Communities jealously guarded their bells for such reasons, and bitter disputes over stolen, appropriated, destroyed, and missing bells were a common theme throughout European urban and rural culture. The loss of a bell threatened the dialogue of a culture and therefore, when bells were moved, silenced, rung from alien towers, rung at an improper time, in an improper way, or by an improper person, the result was often confusion, fear, violence and legal repercussions. Such anxieties revealed how bells not only created but also symbolized a society, making the fate of both inextricably tied together.

The Montanina obviously also took over the task of sounding when the Florentine armies prepared and left for battle. This task seems to have been too onerous for the beloved bell because it broke under the stress of continuous peeling in 1325 when it was sounded for the assembling of Florentine forces preparing to go out to battle against Lucca. This was considered a particularly bad omen. It most likely remained in a ruinous state until it was melted down and recast in 1384 and inscribed

fine, and they had it brought to Florence, and they mounted it up in the tower of the palace of the podestà as the bell of the messengers, and it was called the Montanina.” In this capacity, the Montanina may have rung to call the Podestà’s emissaries. See Uccelli, Palazzo del podestà, 163. This was most likely only one of the bell’s functions.
751 According to Leonardo Bruni, Florentine forces, allied with Lucca, besieged the city of Pistoia once again in 1303, where the White faction’s exiles had sought refuge and were controlling the city. However, since the exiles refused to come out and fight, the Florentines laid waste to the territory instead. Leonardo Bruni, History of the Florentine people, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), I, 415. Therefore, the destruction of Montale and the abduction of its bell was carried out in a spirit of frustration in order to weaken the enemy’s defenses as well as damage its sonic identity.
752 This will become more apparent in chapter 5.
753 Corbin, Village Bells, 69.
754 Uccelli, Palazzo del podestà, 162.
with the names of the entire Signoria and their trades.\textsuperscript{755} Later, under Cosimo I, it assumed the name of the “\textit{campana delle armi}” when it rang at the fifth and fourth hour of the night in winter and summer respectively. Those servants caught out in the city with arms, in the absence of their patrons, lost their hands. It also sounded as the condemned were led to the gallows and when capital sentences were carried out.\textsuperscript{756} By the time it sounded exclusively for public executions, Florentines called it the \textit{Campana del Bargello}, giving rise to the saying: “essere come la campana del Bargello che suona per il vitupero.”\textsuperscript{757} In 1333 the tower underwent modifications to allow the bell to be rung more easily\textsuperscript{758} and by 1337, Uccelli claims, the other bell that rang from the campanile was called the Mangona, similarly named after the fortress of that name from which it was taken.\textsuperscript{759}

In 1294, we begin to see a series of legislative maneuvers that take us into the realm of the communal bells destined for the tower of the new seat of the popular government, the Palace of the Priors (Palazzo Vecchio, Figure 3.11). This time the bells concerned the popular government rather than the civic bodies that had been functioning around the Podestà. Significantly, this activity again followed on a wave of popular reform instituted by the popolo in 1293 and embodied in the drafting of the

\textsuperscript{755} Ibid. It was recast by Ricco di Lapo, the same bell maker who had recast a bell at San Miniato al Monte in 1398. The inscription is significant since bells are conventionally inscribed with the names of saints, the Virgin, and the forger.

\textsuperscript{756} Ibid., 163-64. Uccelli identifies the times it rang under Cosimo I as 10 pm in the winter, midnight in the summer. He also writes that this bell was rung from 10:45 to 11 am up to 1847, for those condemned to forced labor or to the stocks between 10 and 11. It was finally taken down in 1847 when the events for which it rang ceased to occur. It was saved from destruction and raised from the vault in the tower where its excessive weight made it a potential hazard and was re-mounted in the belfry,\textsuperscript{\textdegree}, where it still hung in Uccelli’s time, that is, in 1865. It was baptized with the Madalene’s name and therefore was often referred to as the Maddalena. Popular rhymes, as in this case, also testify to the pervasive role that the sounds of bells played in Florentine daily life. “Ti dia la Maddalena” meant that one was going to be subjected to the \textit{forche}. It was also referred to as the \textit{Margherita, la furba, il tabellaccio} (likely from \textit{tabelliones} = messengers, or the pejorative of \textit{tabella} for its ear-piercing tone, which would have made it the antithesis of the Montanina that was first brought to the city).


\textsuperscript{758} Uccelli, \textit{Palazzo del podestà}, 161.

\textsuperscript{759} It was sold to the Florentines for 1700 florins by Pietro de’ Bardi, the owner of the fortress. However, this bell was placed on the roof of the Palazzo Vecchio, according to Villani.
Ordinances of Justice.\textsuperscript{760} In the Council of 100 (consiglio dei cento), several decisions were made to cast a bell for the new institution of the priorate. Although, at the time, they had no permanent architectural home, and no tower of their own, the priors obviously felt it important enough to place a bell at the houses in which they gathered, which belonged to the powerful Cerchi family, properties located not far from the current Palazzo Vecchio.

On August 31, 1294, six hundred lire were set aside to cast the bell (campana facienda pro comuni).\textsuperscript{761} On October 9 of the same year, the council authorized the expenditure of 225 lire for the bell of the priors (campana Priorum),\textsuperscript{762} a provision repeated on 9 November.\textsuperscript{763} Then, on December 31 twenty-five lire were to be spent to build a wooden structure (edifitio lignaminis) in which the bell of justice (campana Iustitie) was to be placed.\textsuperscript{764} On October 8, 1295, three hundred lire were set aside to repair the bell of the popolo (reparatione campane Populi), and to cover it and repair the structure supporting it, which was in the palace where the priors lived. However, confusingly, three hundred lire are also mentioned in relation to the “campana iustitie” on the very same day for the repair of its housing. Both bells were located at the palace where the priors lived.\textsuperscript{765}

The various appellations given these bells do not fully rule out that certain repairs may have been carried out on an existing bell – perhaps still extant from the torre del leone. The multiple names heaped onto a bell (pro comuni, priorum, iustitie,
populi) could still also refer to the same bell. This is made all the more complicated by the various references to the Popolo – who were represented by the priors – the priors themselves, the commune over which they sought to govern, and justice, the civic goal embodied in the Standard Bearer of Justice (Gonfaloniere della Giustizia), himself the executive prior; in short, all of the key signifiers of the civic regime. In other words, beyond the confusion that might arise from linking a bell to a specific name, all of the terms in use link these core conceptual categories of communal identity to the sound of bells, revealing just how important these bells were in giving voice to those ideals. However, the appearance of two distinct names in the same piece of legislation points to the existence of at least two different bells.

Ambiguity is also a product of a particular feature of bells and their relationship to the temporal rhythms and the spaces over which they presided. Often bells would have official names but they also acquired popular ones based on what they rang for, when they rang, and how they were rung.766 This arose from the way in which sound is experienced in the urban milieu. Most bells were placed in towers and, more often than not, were not seen when they rang. They were heard. The quality of their sound, furthermore, was a result of the physical constituents of the spaces in which they reverberated.767 Therefore, their materiality as an object was often dissociated from their function as a sound. They existed within those bodies and spaces that heard them. Thus, depending on the time, the reason, and the manner of ringing, Florentines applied different names to the same bells based on temporal coordinates.768 This must be borne in mind as this chapter attempts to give shape to the soundscape of Florence. Sounds proliferate, expand and divide, while the number

766 A perfect example is the recast Montanina, whose various names resulted from the things for which it was rung. See the discussion above.
767 Blesser and Salter, Spaces Speak, 2.
768 This will be discussed below.
and name of particular bells, as physical objects, are extremely difficult to fix precisely and follow their own dynamic logic.

Some sort of wooden structure housed the bell that the legislative council had made for the priors and the Standard Bearer of Justice. Evidence that this bell had taken over the duties of the bell placed in the tower of the Leone by the Primo Popolo is given by Dino Compagni, when he recounts how, in 1301, the priors rang the bell that was on their palace but notes that, in the climate of fear while the leaders of the White party were in custody, the people did not assemble.\textsuperscript{769} Therefore, it is possible that the original bell for which the Popolo assembled under their flags was lost, or had been melted down and recast into a larger bell. In any case, this bell was now the principal sound connected to the strength, or weakness, of the Popolo.

It is also unclear where the bell was placed, and whether it was brought outside the Cerchi properties and rung from a window or from the roof, since the sonic range of a bell is greatly increased by the height of its placement. In 1301, Compagni’s reference to the bell seems to indicate that the bell used to hang where the priors met, but at the time he was writing about these events it was already in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio itself.\textsuperscript{770} According to Trachtenberg, the priors had transferred their council meetings to the new structure by 1302, a year later.\textsuperscript{771} In 1304, a bell, which provisions state had been on the tower of the palace of the Capitano,\textsuperscript{772} was moved to

\textsuperscript{769} Compagni, Cronica, II, 19.
\textsuperscript{770} Gotti, Storia del Palazzo Vecchio, 29.
\textsuperscript{771} Trachtenberg, "What Brunelleschi Saw," 15.
\textsuperscript{772} Evidence that the Capitano had his own bell and tower comes from legislation authorizing the construction of an “edificio campane” for the Capitano for as much as sixty florins in 1290. See Gherardi, Le Consulte, II, II, 434. The Capitano’s tower is referred to as the “Bocca di Ferro” by Artusi and Lasciarrea, who also believe that the bell of the Popolo originally hung in this tower of the Capitano. See Luciano Artusi and Roberto Lasciarrea, Campane, torri e campanili di Firenze, (Florence: Le Lettere, 2008), 35.
the incomplete tower of the Palazzo Vecchio.\textsuperscript{773} This could have been the original bell, or its replacement, of the Primo Popolo.

In 1304, this bell of the priors was placed in a wooden belfry on the as yet incomplete tower of the Palazzo Vecchio (Figure 11a).\textsuperscript{774} However, if, as is suggested, two bells were now located in the tower, one, the bell that the priors had made for themselves, and the other, the bell that had been rung from the tower of the Capitano, then by 1306 they both may have been judged insufficient in size and volume, because a much larger bell (campana magna)\textsuperscript{775} was commissioned by the consiglio dei cento from the Pisan master Vannes campanarius and his son Bentivenni, a bell that would weigh 16 000 pounds (5 700 kg) and was completed by 1307.\textsuperscript{776} Trachtenberg points out the probable embarrassment attached to having to erect a wooden belfry in the square itself, since the tower was not yet ready to accept it.\textsuperscript{777} By 1308, the decision was made to raise the bell onto the roof of the palace and funds were allocated during the completion of the tower.\textsuperscript{778} This bell cote is located in the Bigallo fresco of the Madonna della Misericordia – dated by Trachtenberg to 1342 – and is visible in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century renderings of the palace.\textsuperscript{779} The campana magna is first recorded in the newly completed tower in 1318.\textsuperscript{780} It was most likely replaced by the campana del Popolo, which rang for the councils, on the roof of the palace. The

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{773} Gotti, Storia del Palazzo Vecchio, 29. Gotti believes that the palace of the Capitano referred to here is the in fact the palace of the Cerchi where the priors were meeting. However, why would the provision refer to tower (turris) in this case and not otherwise? According to John Najemy, it is unlikely that the Capitano and priors would meet in the same place.

\textsuperscript{774} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{775} Davidsohn, Forschungen, IV, 501. Trachtenberg points out that this is the first mention of the large bell in the completed tower. The document also refers to the campana populi, which will figure as the second major bell of the same tower in the statutes drawn up at mid century.

\textsuperscript{776} Ibid., IV, 500. See also Trachtenberg, "What Brunelleschi Saw," 17. Trachtenberg, citing Davidsohn, uses these documents to argue for changes in the design of the palace’s tower.

\textsuperscript{777} Trachtenberg, "What Brunelleschi Saw," 17.

\textsuperscript{778} Trachtenberg cites the relevant documents. Davidsohn, Forschungen, IV, 500; Carl Frey, Die Loggia dei Lanzi zu Florenz, (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1885), 198, doc. 74.

\textsuperscript{779} Trachtenberg, "What Brunelleschi Saw," 18.

\textsuperscript{780} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
original bell of the Capitano might have been recast into the larger bell and may have
lived on in the name of the new large bell, which would become known as the Leone.

Therefore, by the time of the drawing up of the statutes in 1322 the campana magna
was up in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio. It was joined by the campana del
Popolo,781 which sounded to assemble the councils, and was transferred from the roof
in 1344 “… so that one better heard from the Oltrarno, and throughout the city, which
was of a noble sound and grandeur.”782 In other words, to increase its audibility in an
expanding city, the bell was placed in a more prominent position, once again,
precisely at the moment when a popular government was asserting its authority in
response to a crisis in elite governance.783 Precisely at this moment of social anxiety,
after Florence had been rocked by an elite conspiracy, the collapse of the Bardi and
Peruzzi banks, the fiscal crisis brought on by protracted wars, and finally the
unfortunate and hated regime of the Duke of Athens, the popular government
reinforced its civic voice by raising the prominence of the bell that carried its name,
which caused the corresponding enlargement of the spatial jurisdiction that the
Popolo’s official voice reached. This bell of the Popolo was the one that was rung, by
force, to assemble the Popolo against the elite conspiracy of 1340, not the Campana
Magna.784

The Campana del Popolo was replaced on the roof of the palace, according to
Villani, by the bell taken from the Castello di Vernio in 1337.785 It was to ring only in

---

781 In all likelihood, this was the original bell of the priors that had been on the Palazzo de’ Cerchi.
782 “acciò che s’udisse meglio Oltrarno, e per tutta la città, la qual era d’uno nobile suono della sua
grandezza.” Villani, Nuova cronica, 13, 36.
783 For an analysis of the rise of the popular government of 1343-48, which was formed on the heels of
the expulsion of the Duke of Athens amidst a series of financial and political crises brought on by elite
policies, conspiracies, and political decisions, see Najemy, A History of Florence, 138-44.
784 Villani, Nuova cronica, 12, 118.
785 This may be the same bell that Uccelli refers to as the “Mangona,” since both were bought from
castles in 1337. However, Messer Benuccio Salimbeni da Siena sold the castles of both Vernio and
Mangona to the Bardi clan. Ibid., 12, 74 and 118. After the conspiracy of 1340, in which the Bardi
were implicated, the castle, in which the Bardi were besieged, was forcibly sold to Florence, for 4 860
the case of fires that broke out, at nighttime, to alert the *maestri* in charge of fighting fires.\textsuperscript{786} This bell, whose sound referred to the memory of the taking of a fortress, was joined by the bell taken as a trophy of war from the fortress of Toiano in 1363, which became the signal for mealtimes; "*per segno a’ Mercanti dell’ora del mangiare.*"\textsuperscript{787}

The bell that sounded the new time of the mechanical clock, the sound that would so fascinate Goro Dati,\textsuperscript{788} was placed in the tower in 1353.\textsuperscript{789} A new bell for this clock was cast in 1397 by Simone di Lorenzo and Piero, his son, who hailed from the parish of Sant'Agnolo a Legnaio.\textsuperscript{790} This one was replaced in 1452 with bronze from another bell taken from the duomo of Santa Reparata.\textsuperscript{791}

The tower itself, similarly to the Bargello, pre-existed the building of the palace. This was not the usual case in Tuscany, as Trachtenberg points out, as most communal towers were built after the palaces they adorned, or were not built at all. Trachtenberg attributes the proliferation of civic towers in the fourteenth century to Florentine influence, with the dominating profile of the tower establishing the indispensability of the genre.\textsuperscript{792} However, Florence is almost alone in truly embedding its communal ideology into architectural space through its consistent practice of

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{786} Ibid., 13, 36.
\textsuperscript{787} Rastrelli, quoted in Gotti, *Storia del Palazzo Vecchio*, 30.
\textsuperscript{788} See “Constructing Space with Sound” below.
\textsuperscript{789} Ser Reccho di Domenico Spinelli, "Diario di Ser Reccho di Domenico Spinelli," in *BNCF Codice Magliabechiano, Xxv, 422*, 38v.
\textsuperscript{790} Mario Fondelli, *Gli "oruolo mechanici" di Filippo di ser Brunellesco Lippi. Documenti e notizie inedite sull’arte dell’orologeria a Firenze*, (Florence: Le Lettere, 2000), 5. On July 1, 1390, Jacopo di Biagio da Scopeto was commissioned to construct another clock for the Palazzo Vecchio. On July 1, 1397, the communal government commissioned a new bell for the clock from Simone di Lorenzo and his son Piero; "*maestri di campane.*" Note the dates of the legislation. July 1 marked one of the six inauguration days of the Signoria’s two month rotating terms, meaning that these two projects were among the first acts of the new government, and therefore were considered to be of the utmost importance. The documents that Fondelli refers to are found in ASF Carte strozziane, seconda serie, 78, 45-47.
\textsuperscript{791} Gotti, *Storia del Palazzo Vecchio*, 33.
\textsuperscript{792} Trachtenberg poses the examples of the formal similarity between the later towers built in Siena, Volterra, and other towns. Trachtenberg, "What Brunelleschi Saw," 16.
visually transforming private buildings into public assets, whether they were destroyed enclaves made into public space (*platea ubertorum*) or private towers made to speak with the voice of the commune. Incorporated into the site of the Palazzo Vecchio was the tower of the Foraboschi family, although at the founding of the palace there was no “mandate” to turn it into the “extravagant” tower it became.\(^{793}\) In a similar manner to the Bargello, a smaller, simpler tower had held the more modest bell in 1304, only to give way to a wooden structure built on the newly paved piazza which allowed work to proceed on the expansion of the tower.\(^{794}\) This expansion, which relies on a complex system of infill and massive corbelling due to the narrow base that the Foraboschi tower provided, seems to be the result of an increasing sense of the importance of communal bells as part of the arsenal of public power, since both an enormously costly bell and the greatly increased size and complex design of the tower necessitated each other. It was most likely part of a more coherent plan to use the auditory landscape to complement the manner in which the city was spatially divided up into separate but connected jurisdictions (*sestieri, gonfalonii*), acting to make concrete how these individual regions were part of a larger entity. Only sound, 16,000 pounds of it – in the form of a gigantic bell – could dissolve such spatial borders while leaving them topographically intact. The government was beginning to coordinate the city and its inhabitants not only within a visual regime, but also an aural one.

### 3.4 From Morning to Evening: Enacting the Acoustic Topography

The general pattern of bell ringing was similar throughout Italy and Europe but each city had its own particular internal rhythms that distinguished it as much as its

---

\(^{793}\) Ibid.

\(^{794}\) The original Foraboschi tower rises to the beginning of the palace block’s corbelling. On this expansion and a detailed account of the tower’s physical elements see Ibid., 17 ff.
local architectural permutations were linked to larger regional and national styles.\footnote{The evening bell, common in cities since the late middle ages, was still rung in a triple sequence in 19th century France when reconstituted after the revolution. Corbin, *Village Bells*, 38.}

So familiar to past generations and despite the very conservative nature of bell rhythms, these sounds are barely comprehensible to us now. When bells ring now they make less of an impression and their sound is often reduced to signaling a particular mass or the marking of time found more easily through other media. Their sound continually re-iterates and draws attention to the anachronism of the buildings they peel for and in doing so points vaguely to a distant other world on the horizon of the past. Its sound in fact, for many, signifies the very loss of memory that bells had for so long maintained; a densely meaningful but unintelligible sound.

When Florentines heard a bell, on the contrary, everyone knew what it meant by the way it was struck, by how many times it was struck, and in what sequence.\footnote{Davidsohn, *Storia*, vol. IV, pt. 1, 310.} Nostalgia may be driving the historian to re-evoke a past now muted in memory, myself included, but Florentines were, nevertheless, intimately bound up with the noises their city made. They were enmeshed in urban sounds; listening to them, interpreting them, creating them, manipulating them, moving toward them, or fleeing from them. Bells were the principal element of a cluster of urban sounds, often in dialogue with them, that appeared on the surface of what was never a neutral or uncontested sonic environment, but a raucous symphony with multiple composers and many more performers, legitimate and not, all displaying some kind of will to organize space.

A provisional chart in the appendix lists the city’s principal bells as well as various appellations designated to them, both popular and official, along with any information about their casting dates and general functions. The most useful information derived from it is that it demonstrates the difficulty is defining precisely
the reference to bells in various sources because of the fluidity of popular and official names. In the following section I attempt to lay out the general attributes of the urban soundscape as it was orchestrated through the framework of the ringing of the bells whose topography was discussed in the previous section.

According to what can be reconstructed from historical sources, everyday life in Florence in the fourteenth and fifteenth century was deeply permeated by the sound of bells. This dense acoustic environment created by the city’s bell towers, both religious and civic, meant that hardly one day sounded the same as the next.\textsuperscript{797} As the dominant sound that formed the acoustic topography, they were, naturally, the subject of meticulous legislation. However, as much as bells were an instrument of control over urban space, they were also immersed in a hierarchy of competing interests and traditions. At stake was the control and meaning of urban space through a sonic world that was bound by a series of conventions, laws, and regulations that emanated from both civic and religious authorities in the form of statutes as well as ecclesiastical prescriptions. At the point of reception, moreover, Florentines confronted such legislation by navigating through the city in order to construct an auditory dialogue through which they interpreted and laid claim to those spaces. They left traces of the ways in which they responded to the sounds they both made and encountered in their city. It was part of a larger process in which they understood its exceptional character, how they linked it to their ordinary lives and interests, and how they treated its effects as tools for various purposes.\textsuperscript{798} Somewhere between these modes of production and reception lies a historical space enlivened by a complex semantics of sounds and architecture, the understanding of which will, I believe, shed more light on our understanding of the social and symbolic dimensions of space.

\textsuperscript{797} Dohrn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 209.
\textsuperscript{798} Gilbert, "Earliest Guide," 34.
This complex aural dynamic would have been second nature to Antonio Pucci, who was something of an expert in the urban soundscape. His supposed father, Puccio, and his brother, Giovanni, were bell casters, the former responsible for the fourteenth-century bells cast for Santa Maria Novella in 1305 and 1310 and the latter for San Leone in the Ghetto.799 He himself may have engaged in this trade if in fact, as Manni claims, his family owned furnaces in via Ghibellina, across from the convent of Santa Verdiana, in a part of the city known as the “città rossa” (Figure 3.12).800

He was appointed bell ringer of the commune in 1334.801 In this capacity he was responsible for maintaining a sonic regime that choreographed the daily activities of the city’s inhabitants throughout the day. Bell ringing was no simple matter. The large bell, *la grossa*, that the commune of Florence had cast in 1307 for the new town hall weighed in excess of 16,000 pounds and required the efforts of twelve men to ring. This must have been a cause for concern, so much so that in 1322 a Sienese master was hired to construct a mechanism that reduced that number to two persons.802 In addition, a certain number of staff had to be readily on hand to ring the bells of the commune whenever the Capitano found it necessary.803 The Podestà must have had his own staff ringers because he was charged with ringing the bell that signaled the

---

799 See the introductory text, Domenico Maria Manni, "Notizie storiche intorno ad Antonio Pucci celebre versificatore fiorentino," in Delle poesie di Antonio Pucci celebre versificatore fiorentino, ed. Fra Ildefonso di San Luigi, (Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi, 1772-1775), viii-ix. Manni also speculates on a certain Francesco Pucci, who was the bell ringer for the church of Santa Maria Nipotecosa and who also forged a bell for Santa Margherita a Montici in 1356. If the said Puccio Pucci is the father, he may also have been a bell ringer, “campanarius”, listed in the parish of San Michele Visdomini. However, W. Robins has pointed out that Antonio Pucci’s name was patronimic, - Antonio di Puccio – and that his family may not have belonged to the Pucci house. On this, see William Robins, "Antonio Pucci, guardiano degli atti della Mercanzia," Studi e problemi di critica testuale 61 (2000): n. 1 (pp. 29-30).

800 Manni, "Notizie storiche," x.


802 Gotti provides the text of the provision. "magister Lando Pieri de Senis" - per l'opera da lui posta - "in ordinando et componendo campanam magnam Comunis Florentie existentem super turrim Palatii Populi, ita quod de facilci pulsatur et pulsari potest." See Gotti, Storia del Palazzo Vecchio, 30.

803 See the reference in the 1322 statutes of the Capitano to an able and sufficient staff. Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), I, xlv (p. 35).
double fine each evening. Working the communal bells was a ceaseless activity, since both the Capitano and the Podestà had to be able to call their respective councils whenever they needed, and bells were the only immediate means of doing so.

The cathedral bells rang daily and created their own complex rhythms based on the cycle of feast days. Even parish bells had to be constantly manned for they were required to ring in certain emergencies, such as the outbreak of fires, where the nearest parish church had to sound the alarm to which the bell of the priors in the Palazzo Vecchio responded in a certain manner so that everyone in the city could hear. Bell ringers of the commune also had to be extremely attentive to the other sounds of the city to which they were duty bound to respond. For example, they had to ring the communal bell six times after hearing the triple ring from the Badia at dawn and they had to abide by a strict sonic dialogue between the towers of the Podestà and the Palazzo Vecchio.

Just as it is difficult to pin down the exact number of bells at any time, the number of bell ringers is frustratingly vague or contradictory. In the early Trecento, the Capitano was charged with having a sufficient staff to ring the bells when needed. Six were mentioned in relation to a single bell in 1290. The Podestà, on the other hand, was simply ordered to ring the bells at the proper times, suggesting he

---

804 Caggese, Podestà (1325), III, xl (p. 184). This bell was still rung in the fifteenth century, see Statuta populi (1415), III, xxxiv. On the double fine see “The Evening Bell” below.
805 Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), I, xl (p. 35); Caggese, Podestà (1325), I, i, (p. 13).
806 The sacred soundscape is treated below.
807 Caggese, Podestà (1325), I, xxviii, (p. 68); ”Statuti del Podestà (1355),” I, lxx.
808 On the daily sonic rhythms see below.
809 Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), I, xl (p. 35). “Statutum et ordinatum est quod sonatores campane domini Capitanei et Defensoris iisam campanam domini Defensoris debeant pulsare, quando pulsatur dicta campana Communis, in tertio sono tantum et in ultima vice rintocchos dare, et etiam quando pulsatur de mane, ita quod homines sciant campanam pulsatam esse, et prope diem, quando pulsatur campana Communis, pulsare similiter teneatur; et si predictam campanam non pulsaverint, predictis horis, condemnetur quilibet eorum in solidis quinque pro quilibet vice, in quibus dominus capitaneus et Defensor eos condemnare teneatur et debeat; et dominus Capitaneus, per suos familiaries ydoneos et sufficientes, dictam campanam pulsari faciat dictis horis, et etiam quotiems et quando fuerit opportunum.”
810 See above.
was in charge of hiring his own ringers from the body of his staff.\textsuperscript{811} By 1415, only two Florentine citizens with good Guelf credentials are referred to as being elected to the posts of communal bell ringers. The office was for a duration of one year and they were custodians of the four major communal bells – and several minor ones – that were housed in the two communal towers, whose names were the following: the \textit{Leone} and \textit{Popolo}.\textsuperscript{812} According to these same statutes, at least one bell ringer was to be present on the roof of the Palazzo Vecchio in order to scan the horizon visually for signs to which he was legally required to respond.\textsuperscript{813} Such duties united the function of the \textit{campanile} as both visual and aural architecture, governing the territory around it by vision and sound. That sonic and spatial regime was intimately bound up with the vertical architectural configuration of the city.

The following is an attempt to reconstruct textually – and therefore, in a wholly inadequate way – the sonic framework that once characterized daily life in late

\textsuperscript{811} The Podestà was to ring the bells of the palace at his own expense in order to call the Council of the Commune at any time, day or night, Caggese, \textit{Podestà (1325)}, I, i (p. 13). He was also charged with ringing the bell in the evening and the morning for the entire time of his regime, Caggese, \textit{Podestà (1325)}, III, xl (p. 184).

\textsuperscript{812} In the 1322 statutes, reference is only made to the bell of the Commune and the bell of the Capitano, the latter of which had to sound when the former rang in the evening and the morning, Caggese, \textit{Capitano (1322-25)}, I, xlvi (p. 35). Both the 1355 and the 1415 statutes establish the fixed importance of the four major bells, which are named as such: the Leone and the bell of the Popolo in the palazzo Vecchio, the bell of the Podestà and the Montanina in the tower of the Bargello. All the rest play minor roles at different times. See "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, clxxiii; "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," V, xlii (vol. II, p. 545). There may have been as many as eight communal bells by the late 14\textsuperscript{th} century, so that the daily rhythms would have included the \textit{Campana del di}, which may have been a separate bell and is mentioned in both the 1355 and the 1415 statutes, the \textit{Vernio}, taken from Vernio – rung for fires – in 1337, as well as the \textit{Toiano}, which was taken from a Pisan fortress in 1362. There was also the bell that was attached to the communal clock, which was installed for the first time in 1353. Dati mentions three bells (\textit{Grossa, Consiglio, Oriolo}) in the Palazzo Vecchio alone, without mentioning either the Vernio or the Toiano in his description of the palazzo Vecchio. However, he also mentions three bells when describing the office of the bell ringers (\textit{campanari}) of the commune, who rang the \textit{Grossa, Consiglio}, and the \textit{Campana del di}, the clock bell most likely being automatic. See Dati, "Istoria," 263 (VIII,3), 81 (IX, 15).

\textsuperscript{813} This is a tantalizing reference to what could either have been a long-range visual system of communication or at the very least a technical instrument used for surveillance of the surrounding countryside. The extent of such duties and the physical effort required to ring such large bells seems well beyond the powers of two men and suggest that the 1415 statutes simply copy earlier texts rather than actual practice. Some vague references in the 1415 statutes to what might be assistants may point to a resolution to the discrepancy, however.
medieval and Renaissance Florence. It seeks to elucidate how the city’s buildings and
spaces can be understood as integral parts of a larger urban dialogue that one could
actually hear and that one could not ignore. That dialogue is crucial for any attempt to
gain a deeper understanding of the symbolic dimensions of the city’s architectural
history.

Therefore, in brief, the Florentine day sounded something like this 9Figures
13-13o). It began, sometime around daybreak, with three strikes of the bell of the
Badia, the city’s Benedictine monastery, followed by six strikes of the Leone in the
tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, the city’s largest communal bell. Around the same
time, the bell of the Podestà rang and was answered by the bell of the Popolo. Some
time before Terce, which was rung by the Badia and by the cathedral for a duration of
one half hour, the so-called “tocchus iuris” (strike of justice) was heard: a six-ring
sequence rung by the Leone. The Montanina was required to anticipate this sequence
with a single ring before the first and last strikes of the justice bell, which opened the
city’s tribunals at the Bargello. After Terce, the Toiana rang continuously, a distesa,
for one hour. Midday, likely somewhere Sext and None, was also rung by the
Badia, and the sonatores (the commune’s trumpet players) played to announce that the
city’s executive council was about to eat lunch. After None, which was rung from the

814 Unless otherwise noted, the following daily schedule of communal sounds was compiled from the
three redactions of Florentine statutes found in Caggesi, Capitano (1322-25), I, xlv; Caggesi, Podestà
(1325), III, xli, lxxi; "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, clxxvi; Statuta populi (1415), V, xlii (vol. 2, p.
545ff). A more detailed investigation of these daily acoustic rhythms will be provided below.
815 Davidsohn states that the little bell of the Badia rang at in the morning, followed by three hits of the
bell of the Podestà and this announced the daily commencement of labor, Davidsohn, Storia, IV, I, 311.
However, based on a close reading of the statutes, it appears that the Leone in fact, responded to the
morning mass. According to the statutes of 1322, the Capitano was required to respond to the bell of
the Podestà in both the evening and the morning, to let the City know that day was at hand, Caggesi,
Capitano (1322-25), I, xlv (p. 35). By 1355, with the bells of the Palazzo Vecchio firmly ensconced
within the daily auditory schedule, this pattern was expanded so that the sequence of rings was Badia-Ne-Leone-Podestà-Popolo.
816 Davidsohn, Storia, I, 1069.
817 This was referred to a the “ora del Toiano”. I would like to thanks Margaret Haines of the Opera del
Duomo of Florence for her invaluable help in deciphering the statutes and in bringing my attention to
this particular daily moment to my attention.
Badia, and before Vespers, the Bell of Justice (the second *Tocchus Iuris* rung by the Leone) and the Montanina opened the afternoon session of the courts in the same way they did in the morning. The dinner of the priors was sounded by the trumpets towards evening and soon afterwards the sound of the evening prayer of the *Ave Maria* was heard, rung by the Leone. Finally, as the sun set, the bell of the Podestà, just as it did to begin the day, rang to end it. It was answered this time by the Leone, whose reciprocal triple sequence marked the cessation of daytime sounds as they were muffled by the silent regime of the night, where even the popular strains of love songs and the accompanying instruments and voices of love-struck youths were prohibited.\textsuperscript{818}

This was only the foundational sonic matrix that gave Florentine urban spaces, like any comparable city, their particularly dense cadences. This daily rhythm outlined above served to highlight the contrast between these and more infrequent events, such as the entrance of new priors into the Palazzo Vecchio every two months. On these occasions, all the bells of the commune – those in service in its two towers – were to ring *a martello*.\textsuperscript{819} On this occasion, the bells were rung not only to accompany the solemn ritual but also to signal that the collective voice of the city’s government belonged to the building, its tower and what it symbolized. They gave voice to what was, essentially, a silent regime.\textsuperscript{820} Nor does this daily sonic rhythm include the bells that rang to assemble the advisory colleges of the Twelve Good Men and the Standard Bearers of the militia companies – when the bell of the Popolo rang one hundred times or for about an hour\textsuperscript{821} – nor even the election and death of popes,

\textsuperscript{818} There were fines for participating in *a mattenata* between the evening and morning bells and the offending instruments were confiscated. See "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," III, c. However, numerous popular narratives attest to the nighttime practice of courting, see above. In my view, these laws were on the books much longer than their enforcement seems to have merited. It appears that such laws remained on the books so that tolerated practices could be prohibited without having to invoke special powers.

\textsuperscript{819} No doubt the ringing a martello was to highlight the solemnity of an event that was at the heart of the regime’s ritual visual performance. Ibid., I, clxxi; *Statuta populi (1415)*, V, xlii (vol. II, p. 546).

\textsuperscript{820} On the silence of the regime see chapter 4 and Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit."

preparations for war, \textsuperscript{822} the inspection of communal security forces, \textsuperscript{823} military victories, \textsuperscript{824} insurrections, \textsuperscript{825} homicides, murders and violent crimes, \textsuperscript{826} executions, \textsuperscript{827} excommunications, fires, \textsuperscript{828} parliaments, \textsuperscript{829} the passing of laws, the announcement of victories, \textsuperscript{830} treaties, rebels, news from abroad, or any time that the people were called both to arms and to celebration. \textsuperscript{831} So much depended on the sounds that bells made that ringing them at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons, was severely punished. \textsuperscript{832}

This regimen determined the daily aural character of the city of Florence. It was a combination of sacred and civic sounds common to many European cities but, in a similar way to the dispersion of an architectural style, it contained its own regional and local variations and therefore gave the city and its spaces their particular stamp as “experienced places.” In discussing some examples of the way in which sound created certain spatial territories it is worth scrutinizing these acoustic patterns more closely in order to integrate them into an urban spatial order within which they organized space and time. First, however, an analysis of the mysterious qualities and history of bells in general is needed.

\textsuperscript{822} Until 1260, the Martinella, Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VII, 75, 78. from 1303, the Montanina. Davidsohn, \textit{Storia}, III, 1004; Uccelli, \textit{Palazzo del podestà}, 162.
\textsuperscript{823} Montanina. "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, clxxi.
\textsuperscript{824} Leone, \textit{Ibid}; \textit{Statuta populi (1415)}, V, xlii.
\textsuperscript{825} Leone. Davidsohn, \textit{Storia}, IV, I, 312. In times of crisis both the Leone and the bell of the Podestà could ring together \textit{a martello}, see \textit{Alle bocche}, 34.
\textsuperscript{826} Residents were compelled to shout for such crimes and ring the bells of the nearest parish church in alarm, to alert the authorities. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clvi.
\textsuperscript{827} Montanina. Artusi and Lasciarnea, \textit{Campane, torri e campanili}, 30. The Podestà rang this bell of “chondanagione” at the same time a \textit{parlamento} – al citizens of Florence gathered in assembly and whose decisions carried full authority – whose decwas held in February 1382, see \textit{Alle Bocche}, 28. This bell was deliberately not rung for executions carried out later in the same month 1382, see \textit{Ibid.}, 30.
\textsuperscript{828} Vernio. Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, XII, 74, 118; XIII, 36; Stefani, \textit{Cronica fiorentina}, Rubric 609 (p. 221).
\textsuperscript{830} Leone. "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, clxxi; \textit{Statuta populi (1415)}, V, xlii.
\textsuperscript{831} Both the Popolo and the Leone. \textit{Alle bocche}, 54-55.
\textsuperscript{832} See the discussion of the ringing of bells by the Ciompi in 1378 in chapter 5.
The most immediate problem that arises in the creation of a topographic and
temporal map of bells and their auditory jurisdictions is the sheer confusion and
fluidity of their names, their dates, their functions, and their messages. Such
confusion would not seem likely with an object that was often inscribed with its
casting date, its caster, and a dedication to patron saint. Even the durability of bronze
is belied by the way bells were constantly melted down and recast, often to repair
cracks and breaks caused by the punishing force of the hammer that struck them.
Such fluidity was increased by the fact that bells acquired both official and popular
names, which multiplied and changed over time according to the particular reason for
a certain ring, the particular way the bell was hit, or the particular sequence of its
peels.

In this way, bells were remembered more as a series of sounds rather than as
objects. They lasted longer as a particular sound or a name in the collective memory
of a community than they often did in physical reality. Names and functions were
heaped upon bells, demonstrating how their relationship to their listeners was as
elastic as it was intimate. It was a product of the space in which they were heard,
since one rarely saw the bell ring, or at least, did not need to.\footnote{This is not to
deny that the object itself was important, since its specific sonic quality was at stake
and destroying, stealing, and defending bells were at the heart of the maintenance of social identities.
However, bells were more intimately known through their sonic interaction with the built environment,
than they were adored as objects of visual presence. On the fierce attachment to bells still active in the
19th century, see Corbin, \textit{Les cloches de la terre}.} The sound of a bell
was detached from its presence as an object and attached to specific urban places, as
they echoed off walls and ricocheted around corners. As such, one has to understand
bells not simply as objects that performed functions but as a conventional and
repetitive set of sonic configurations that produced a discordant chorus of meaningful
urban moments all of which were somehow detached from any fixed relationship to
the concrete object but whose significance was, nevertheless, invested into the bell itself.\footnote{This helps to explain the strength of the insult involved in depriving a community of its bell and the status a stolen bell had as a trophy, while recasting bells was not considered to compromise their identity as such but may have enhanced it. See Ibid., chs. 2, 3.}

In contrast, the ephemeral nature of the sound was given a concrete existence through its repetition within the built environment. These sounds inhabited spaces, creating spatial zones and transforming their identities. If the materiality of bells was lost in their recasting, in their virtual invisibility, it was rediscovered in the corresponding persistence of their name and in the way they linked listeners intimately to buildings, streets, and squares. With a long history shrouded in mystery, bells carried with them special supernatural powers that reinforced their symbolic connections to their maintenance of communities in very real ways. In the popular imagination, the origin of the bell was an event significant enough for Giovanni Villani to describe in his chronicle. Recording events around the year 750 CE, Villani recounts the heroic campaign of the recently-converted Lombard king of Puglia to win back the True Cross from the king of Persia.\footnote{Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, 3, 11.} To honor the occasion, a metal sculpture of the king was cast and set in the city of Barletta. Meanwhile, the first ever bell (\textit{campana}) was cast in bronze by an unknown master in Nola, in Campania, and was brought to Rome and hung in the portico of the Lateran,\footnote{In fact, according to the Liber Pontificalis, Pope Stephen II (752-757) donated three bells and erected a tower on the west side of the Atrium of St. Peter’s in Rome corresponding to the principal entrance to the basilica. See Neri, \textit{De campanis fundendis}, 11.} where the church ordered it to sound, for the honor of god, the hours of the night and of the day.\footnote{\textit{...e la prima fu recata a Roma e posta nel portico di San Giovanni Laterano di piccola e grossa forma. Ma poi cresciute e migliorate, fue ordinato per Santa Chiesa si sonasse con quelle, a onore di Dio, l’ore del di e della notte.”}

Villani was recounting a legend that originated with The Benedictine monk Walafrid Strabo (c.808-849) who may have been attaching the term “\textit{campana}” as an adjectival form of “Campania” to a specific region when he located the original
production of bells at Nola. It is not surprising either, that Villani’s version of
the story immediately attaches the liturgical origins of bells to the cathedral of Rome.
This original bell was small and coarsely made, but over time bell casters learned how
to produce higher quality ones that, notably, in Villani’s version of the myth, despite
being placed in a church, did not call the faithful but marked the ceaseless flow of
time. Therefore, Villani emphasizes the function of a bell that was most universal in
its application – time keeping – and reached out with the same message to the entire
city. In doing so, Villani seamlessly makes the transition from the historical origins of
the bell to his own sanctified urban soundscape. Marking time may have been the
function of bells that most interested him as a merchant, concerned as it was with
marking the opening and closing of the day, as well as markets, and not least the
announcement of the liturgical hours. This was most likely the earliest use of the
Christian bell: regulating the daily spiritual exercises and practical duties of monastic
life and a popular legend attributed the “public signaling of the Hours or the time of

838 Neri, De campanis fundendis, 3-5. Neri points out that in this region there is evidence of late
republican and early imperial bronze casting of what was known as the *vasa campana* which denoted a
certain shape and provenance of a household object. However, there is no archaeological evidence that
bells originated there although the term “campana” dates back to the sixth century and is found in the in the
*Anecdota Cassiensiensia*, 1. Bells were also called *signum*. Later, in the ninth century, San Paolino of
Nola was designated as the inventor of the bell and bells of small dimensions were called *nolae* from
the ninth century. *Tintinnabula*, or small bells, were used in ancient Rome to open markets and baths,
which is attested to by Martial in his *Epigrammata*, XIV, 163, v. 1. As late as the 4th century, John
Chrysostom warned against the use of bells, suggesting that their liturgical use was not yet established.
839 Documentary evidence links bells to the call for prayer only as far back as the ninth and tenth
centuries, though an earlier date seems possible and may have come from the exchange between the
Islamic and Christian world in the Near East where there are numerous indications of religious
buildings with towers. See Ibid., 10.
840 A bell on the column of the Mercato Vecchio opened and closed the market. Mariano Bianca and
Francesca Di Marco, *I mercati nella storia di Firenze: dal forum romano al centro alimentare
polivalente*, (Florence: Loggia de’ Lanzi, 1995), 139. I would like to thank John Ritter for referring me
to this source.
841 Neri, De campanis fundendis, 6. The first evidence of the liturgical use of bells dates to the sixth
century in the monastic setting and is found in the Rule of Saint Benedict (529-543). It was not until
the papacy of Sabinian (604-606) that bells are included specifically as Christian symbols.
day to Pope Sabinianus (604-606),\textsuperscript{842} before any mention of calling the faithful to assemble.

However, the bell quickly took on several other major functions as it migrated to places throughout the sacred topography of the church. From marking time and regulating work, it also assembled the faithful. It gave voice to collective joy and sorrow by mourning the dead and celebrating feasts\textsuperscript{843} and it served as an acoustic mnemonic device, anticipating holy days for the faithful and reminding them when to pray.\textsuperscript{844}

Marking time, assembling, expressing collective emotion, and preserving memory were the primary functions of the bell and tower configuration within the realm of the sacred, a configuration whose earliest secure documentation dates back to the eighth century.\textsuperscript{845} However, by the fourteenth century, the communal bell tower and its bell were among the most important communal attributes,\textsuperscript{846} making Florence an early protagonist of this sonic regime’s role in legally creating a communal identity and against particularist forces. This would make the communal bell a practical and

\textsuperscript{842} Dohn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 39.

\textsuperscript{843} First located on small elevated structures next to the church, on its gable or façade. By the eighth century the use of bells was widespread, and the increasing references to towers suggest that the bells were getting larger in order to gather people from farther afield. In 1380 an inscription was found in documents that recalled that on the tower of San Martino. It was from the founding of the bell tower by Stephen II, and mentioned that the tower was located where Pope Stephen had called the people (\textit{turris unde Stephanus vocat populus}). See Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, \textit{Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie}, (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907), 1978. Gregory of Tours refers to a bell hanging in a tower that St. Martin used to call the people in the fifth century church of St. Martin at Tours. Priester speculates that this was a lantern tower above the crossing, surmounted by a wooden turret for the bell. She refers to an inscription above the entrance to the church that exhorted the faithful to lift their gaze to the tower, from where St. Martin called the people. See Priester, "Bell Towers", 116.

\textsuperscript{844} This is evident in the collective peeling of Vespers on evenings before feast days, which themselves had a unique sequence of rings from the bells of the Florentine cathedral and the wide-spread practice of sounding the Ave Maria in the evening, signaling a time of collective prayer. See "Mores et consuetudines ecclesiae florentinae," (Florence: Petri Alegrinii, 1794), 1-2.

\textsuperscript{845} Nert, \textit{De campanis funendis}, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{846} Dohn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 197.
symbolic response to the problem of Florence’s internal political struggles. The communal bell tower could stand in for the city itself.

As the voice of a now secular regime, the communal bell carried with it both a long-standing familiarity and a pre-determined authority linked to its history of constructing, organizing, and defining religious communities. Its ringing would be integrated into the sonic regime of the church, appropriating and sharing its various functions in an expanded topography that sought to unite a specific kind of political community. These sounds too would mark time, assemble citizens, exalt and mourn the city’s fortunes, as well as recall its own past through civic rituals and anniversaries. Florence’s subtle but careful choreography of both sacred and civic sounds within urban space bound Florentines together simultaneously as an independent sacred and secular community that was nevertheless linked to larger religious and communal geographies. The urban soundscape was, therefore, decidedly local but it referred to a larger universal order; namely, the global church and European urban society in general.

The ringing of bells throughout the day, linking prayer to action, meals to masses, and work to salvation, demonstrates how both space and time were amalgams of the sacred and the secular. Meticulously choreographed, these sounds functioned as the acoustic analogues to the legislation that divided public from private spaces, that governed thresholds, but whose effect was to bind the two within a series of constantly overlapping, temporal borderlands. This created multiple zones that impinged upon each other so that there were no precise spatial or temporal borders. However, the sound of bells helped to mediate these complexities by uniting different groups and creating certain places at certain times, none of which had an entirely fixed meaning but whose spatial coordinates, physical characteristics, and robust longevity were a product of their regular recurrences, their repetitiousness in a schedule and a
configuration announced, defined, accompanied, and circumscribed by the sound of bells.

3.5 The Acoustic Regime

Having described the general framework of the daily soundscape, it is now worth taking a closer look at the bells and the towers from which they rang throughout the day in order to give a more tangible shape to it. Most of this framework has been disentangled from the confusing language of the statutes. However, unlike some of the bold urban legislation enacted by the regime of the Popolo against its enemies as it sought to solidify its power in the later thirteenth century and the bold statements that brought public space into being, the legislation pertaining to the urban soundscape was a codification of what was already a series of developing and expanding customary practices. Compiled from legislation that went back decades or more, the statutes consolidated clusters of legislation into composite rubrics that are themselves repetitive and confusing even as they attempt to render the sounds of the city into a comprehensible linguistic sequence. Pieces of legislation are extracted and combined, actual practices are defined and transcribed, creating a kind of palimpsest of accumulated laws growing in complexity with each successive redaction. This is clear in both the increasing detail with which the ringing of bells is described and the confusing repetition of those descriptions in the statutes from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century.  

---

847 I am indebted to Margaret Haines of the Opera del Duomo di Firenze for helping me to conceptualize this aspect of Florentine legislation and for her expert help in interpreting the language of the statutes themselves.  
848 Statuta populi (1415), V, xlii (vol. II, p. 545ff). This is clear in the separate descriptions of the same ring of the Leone after None but before vespers, which called the city’s officials, announced the hour of weddings, and was also called the tocchus iuris. Similarly, the anachronism of some of the information in the 1415 statutes is evident in the unclear number of communal bell ringers hired. Two are noted,
The small bell of the Badia, ringing at daybreak for the holy office of Prime, the first hour of day, which followed the mass that followed the offices that ended at dawn – Matins and Lauds – accompanied the coming of light. This was most likely the dawn mass referred to in the statutes that was celebrated *sotto voce* or *submissa voce*,\(^{849}\) which the Palazzo Vecchio answered with six strikes (*tocchi*) of the Leone.\(^{850}\)

but each of the two communal towers seems to require at least two bellringers to ring any given bell and more to carry out the wider duties assigned to them, such as the 24 hour watch from the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio. Confusion is further increased by the vague reference to what might be assistants and by Goro Dati’s statement, in the early fifteenth century, that four bell-ringers were on staff in the Palazzo Vecchio alone. See Dati, "Istoría," IX, 15 (p. 281). Further research into the salaries paid out to communal bellringers is needed to arrive at a precise figure.

\(^{849}\) "Ac etiam cum praefata campana leonis pulsetur in mane celebratis missis, quae dicuntur in aurora diei, submissa voce, videlicet VI. Tocchi…" Statuta populi (1415), V, xlii (vol. II, p. 545). The Italian translation from 1355 describes it this way: "E anche cho la predetta campana del leone si suoni la mattina dette le messe le quali si dicono nel aurora del di’ com voce sottomessa sei tocchi…” "Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, cixxi. Since Matins and Lauds ended precisely at dawn and the low mass of Prime was celebrated shortly after, it is impossible to tell which of these masses was the one “celebrated at dawn.” However, masses celebrated *submissa voce* appear to literally have been celebrated in hushed voices, behind closed doors, in a private manner, and often in the context of interdicts. I would like to thank Benjamin Brand for his clarification of the liturgical cycle. Davidsohn believes it to be Prime, see Davidsohn, *Storia*, IV, I, 311. I have come across nothing that rivals the complexity, confusion, range of variations, and even similarity, of the hours of the day as they were linked to the canonical hours in the Middle Ages. The liturgical cycle originally followed the double 12 part division of the day and night by the Romans. Prayer times were linked to the four main divisions of day and night. The division of the Christian day was linked to the narrative of the passion and each of the divine offices serves as a memorial of those events. There are seven: Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. The civic day was usually restricted to the middle four, with the addition of Compline. Matins seems to have been either just before dawn or as early as midnight. Sext designated midday. Compline was sunset, though it could take place after dark. Some of the confusion may arise from the fact that these were not points in time, but three-hour segments, with the prayers coming towards the end. Even the bells that rang for them created a space of time, a duration. Obviously, without the terror of modern time precision, schedules were blurred and rounded off by the sounds that bells made over a period of time, which was crucial. Therefore, the hours of prayer and the hours of time often drifted apart and each city had its own variation, since there were no strict rules to fix them. In general, throughout Europe, there was a gradual time shift. None migrated to the first hour of the afternoon, or right after the end of Sext, eventually reaching midday itself. As a result Sext disappeared as an indicator of time, but was exercised just before None. Vespers moved forward in time and became important for indicating pauses in work or the end of a day preceding a feast day. As a prayer it moved to the third hour of the afternoon. This apparently occurred by the thirteenth century. What is also important is that the particular way an office or hours was sounded linked it to the right time, so that aurally there was most likely less confusion. It has been speculated that the backward drift of the hours was the result either of the human weakness for food – on feast days the main meal had to wait until after None – or pressure from laborers, whose work day ended at None on Saturdays and days before holidays. For Dante, None was the 7th hour of the day; i.e., the first hour after midday. Matins moved from just after midnight, to morning, perhaps from a fear of the night. For these explanations see Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour*, 29-35. That Dohrn-van Rossum’s detailed explication is not the last word was very vividly revealed to me when I posed the question of the hours on a medieval
Around that time, the bell of the Podestà rang from the Bargello and was immediately answered by the bell of the Popolo. This latter exchange was referred to as the “day bell” (campana del di) and in the words of the statutes it rang to let men know that day was at hand. Florentines awoke, therefore, to the beginning of a daily spatial colloquy of sounds that ushered in the new day gradually, from the hushed sounds of a dawn mass to the official announcement of the arrival of the day.

This is a feature that characterizes the temporal journey of the day, insofar as it was a function of the acoustic rhythms of the city. Time was heard and not seen. It began at dawn and ended around dusk and it was based on the Roman division of the day into two periods of twelve hours for day and night. The liturgical offices followed the standard division of the day into four parts and these were bracketed by the five New Testament indications of the time of day, which corresponded to the main events of the day of Christ’s passion – the high priests at council in the early morning, the crucifixion at the third hour, the darkness that lasts from the sixth to the ninth, and the entombment at dusk. Since the number of canonical hours remained constant, the time between them expanded and contracted with the seasons. These were known as the unequal hours and they are described, in comparison to the equal hours used by astrologers, by Dante in the Convivio. These built-in undulations of temporal

---

850 Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, clxxi; Statuta populi (1415), V, xlii (vol. II, p. 546).
852 Dohn-van Rossum, History of the Hour, 29. These liturgical hours were marked, therefore, at the first, third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth hours of the day, and developed into the seven canonical hours of Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline, which were reminders of the passion of Christ.
853 Alighieri, Convivio, III, vi, 2-3. Since the number of canonical hours remained constant, the time between them expanded and contracted with the seasons. These were known as the unequal hours and they are described, in comparison to the equal hours used by astrologers, by Dante in the Convivio. These built-in undulations of temporal
periods were further adjusted by the gradual floating of the later hours of None and Vespers back into earlier times of the day.\textsuperscript{854} This general shifting of time, along with local variations, demonstrates just how flexible and arbitrary time was, considering that it coexisted with a more regular astrological time. It would make sense, therefore, that space itself could be just as malleable, especially in its connection to the sound of bells.

Even with the introduction of the mechanical clock in the early fourteenth century,\textsuperscript{855} time was more a function of sound that sight since, even when clocks received visible faces, they were heard in many places in which they could not be seen.\textsuperscript{856} There was an attempt to bind the new scientific instrument to the importance of sundown as the end of one day and the beginning of the next. Clocks began counting twenty-four hours from nightfall, which, of course, meant that clocks had to be regularly reset as seasons changed.\textsuperscript{857} This double system, which first appeared in Italy in the fourteenth century, only makes references to time more confusing from

\textsuperscript{854} Dohrn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 31. Over the course of three centuries, None shifted to the middle of the day and Vespers to the third hour of the afternoon.

\textsuperscript{855} The first recorded public clock is at Orvieto in 1307-1308. See Ibid., 129.

\textsuperscript{856} Giuseppe Brusa, "L’ Arte dell’ orologeria in Italia - I primi duecento anni," \textit{La Voce di Hora}, no. 2 (1996): 10. According to Brusa, the first clock faces only appear in the later 14\textsuperscript{th} century and even then it was easier to count time by the number of rings rather than by looking at what were increasingly complicated astrological clock faces.

\textsuperscript{857} Dohrn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 113-14. However, these hours were decoupled from the liturgical hours in a phenomenon that Dohrn-van Rossum calls the laicization of time. Therefore, as Florentine sources began to mark events within the system of 24 hours, they were responding to the clock which then had no fixed relationship with religious time. It is evidence of the archaism of the statutes that it sets bell ringing within the parameters of religious time even in the fifteenth century, suggesting that the clock hours may have been less reliable or that the city’s daily rhythms were still intimately bound up in a sacred-civic network parallel to the counting of equal hours.
documents that record the events happening at Terce as well as at the 23rd hour, the latter not being fixed to a canonical hour.

Some of that confusion, however, is a result of our own modern preoccupation with precision. Time measured to the second and beyond tends to reduce the experience of the present to a single point that constantly flees from the horizons of the past or future. Time is incessantly passing by in a relentless flow that makes losing it and wasting it necessary features of the anxiety built into it. On the contrary, the time of the present rung by a series of bells from various towers represented a literal opening up of a “space of time” so that the break of day did not suddenly intrude only to be gone in an instant. Instead, it opened up a transitional zone permeated and circumscribed by a network of sounds emanating from the centre of the city that accompanied the duration of certain activities, such as waking and crossing the city to work, eating, praying, socializing, getting married, going home and to bed. Like space, according to historian Christian Bec, time was not considered a thing in and of itself, but as a function of gestures, of something that was done within and across it. In fact, it was just such gestures, movements, and acts that linked space to time, so that one did something for a period of time in a certain place.

The beating of time mimicked the way that darkness faded slowly into light, as prayers gave way to the sound of bells and the civic authorities took legal possession of the secular regime of the day, acoustically integrating themselves with the salvific power of the mass. This dialogue was an acute acoustic condensation of the way that the official urban soundscape of Florence was imagined: as a series of exchanges between sacred protection and secular authority, the one always intimately intertwined with the other.

---

858 Bec, Les marchands écrivains, 319.
It was precisely the spaces between the Badia, the Palazzo Vecchio, and the Bargello that formed the network of this spatial dialogue that began the day, and it registered the deeply-felt common bonds between sacred and civic sounds (Figures 3.14, 3.14a). A civic bell, the Leone, responded to the early morning religious mass, as the jurisdiction of the city acknowledged, incorporated, and finally superseded the religious marking of time by the exchange between the juridical and legislative centers of civic power – the Bargello and the Palazzo Vecchio. In a similar mix of holy sounds and profane activities, it was the liturgical offices ringing from the Badia that signaled the schedule of labor for guild workers of Florence.859

However, for the mass of workers in the wool industry, who were subject to the Lana guild’s statutes but who were not members of that guild, the situation was reversed. The bells that governed their labor fell under the jurisdiction and cost of the wool guild itself and were detached from the communal-sacred soundscape. The guild maintained a bell in each of the four principal districts (conventi) where wool production was heavily concentrated: Oltrarno, San Pancrazio, San Piero Scheraggio, and Porta San Piero (Figure 3.15).860 and it was this sound that created a subordinate zone of labor time within the larger framework.861 In these zones that surrounded Dante’s chaste and sober centre, these bells were part of an elaborate mechanism that attempted to circumscribe the urban experience of subjected workers. An acoustic marginalization created a spatial one in which one kind of labour was subordinate to

859 According to Jacopo della Lana, in his commentary on the Dante, the Badia rang both Terce and None and the other hours to which the guild workers entered and exited from their labors. “Sulle ditte mura vecchie si è una chiesa chiamata la Badia la quale chiesa suona terza e nona e l'altre ore, alle quali li lavoranti delle arti entrano ed esceno dal lavoro.” Luciano Scarabelli, ed., Comedia di Dante degli Allaghieri col Commento di Jacopo della Lana bolognese (Bologna: Tipografia Regia, 1866-67), Paradiso 15, 97-99.
861 Anna Maria E. Agnoletti, Statuto dell’ Arte della lana di Firenze (1317-1319), (Florence: Le Momnier, 1940), I, xiv (p. 31); IV, xxiii (p. 198).
and literally surrounded by the more general aural topography that opened and closed workshops and markets.

Wool workers were specifically punished for not arriving to work at the sound of these bells.\textsuperscript{862} Such separate bells ringing for large-scale industrial work was not extraordinary, since large masses of workers had to be organized together. This was also a feature of the Venetian soundscape where the hours of the workers of the Arsenale were rung by bells that distinguished their schedule from other skilled workers.\textsuperscript{863}

One of these separate Florentine work bells was located at the church of San Martino, in the center of the city and the center of a major concentration of wool production within the convento of Porta San Piero (Figure 3.15a).\textsuperscript{864} The bell itself was rented and, therefore, would likely have also been used for San Martino’s own liturgical cycle. Nevertheless, the wool guild paid the church ten \textit{lire} per year to ring the small bell to signal the beginning and end of the work day of wool workers. In doing so, its sound created a subordinate space of labor within the larger configuration of towers that were announcing the day and coordinating the actions of others schedules.\textsuperscript{865}

If that was the way the day officially began, the time that followed was also a series of acoustic exchanges across the city center. In the morning at half Terce and in the evening after None but before Vespers, the Leone was rung in its guise as the bell of Justice (\textit{tocchus iuris}). At the same time, for both the morning and evening courts,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{862} Ibid., III, xlii (pp. 178-79).
\item \textsuperscript{863} Dohrn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 208-09.
\item \textsuperscript{864} Davidsohn, \textit{Storia}, 128.
\item \textsuperscript{865} “l’arte della lana tiene a pigione la campanella de Santo(?) Martino la qual suona per é’ussire e l’entrare (entrare) trare dei lavoranti e pagano per ciascheduno anno lire diece. Comincia l’anno di 30 de luglio mcccclxxxii.” ASF, \textit{Corporazioni religiose sopresse dal governo francese}, 78, 295, f. cii. I am extremely grateful to Anne Leader for directing me to this source. See also Fiorella Facchinetti and Maria Rosaria Trappolini, "Il campanile della Badia Fiorentina," in \textit{S. Maria del Fiore e le chiese fiorentine del Duecento e del Trecento nella città delle fabbriche arnolfiane}, ed. Giuseppe Rocchi Coopmans de Yoldi, (Florence: Alinea, 2004), 78.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the bell ringers in the Bargello had to anticipate this triple sequence, six strikes organized into three pairs of rings, with the Montanina, which had to ring a single sequence just before the first and last ring of the *tocchus iuris*. This spatial auditory exchange was the sound of the opening of the city’s criminal and judicial courts and the rendering of justice (*a rendere ragione*). All the Podestà’s judicial staff had to descend into the courtyard, open the doors of the Bargello and be available to citizens at the public benches by the end of the third sequence of rings. It is noteworthy that the sound of justice was broadcast not by the courts or its representatives but by the city’s most important political bell, one that rang for insurrections, parliaments and military victories. This may have been partly due to the fact that the afternoon ring of the *tocchus iuris* also assembled the city’s government officials to their offices but this may have simply been added as a convenience. It was the smaller Montanina at the Bargello, on the other hand, that relayed the sound of justice to the courts themselves so that the auditory configuration reminded those tribunals that justice belonged to the city at large, as the Popolo imagined it and on whose behalf those officials exercised it.

The idea of justice as a public good that was projected onto the public spaces of the city by the sound of a bell was well-rooted in the popular psyche. It finds its narrative corollary in a novella in the popular medieval compilation known as the *Novellino*. In Novella 52, the crusader King John of Acre has a bell cast so that anyone who had suffered wrongly could ring it to assemble a group of wise judges so that justice might be done. This bell lasted a long time in silence, so much so that a vine took root and clung to the rope that was wasting away. Enter a horse which had

---

866 *Statuta populi (1415)*, V, xlii (vol. II, 546). “Et quod campanella vocata la montanina existens in turri palatii domini potestatis pulsari debeat in mane, & in sero post nonam, quando pulsantur tocchi iure [sic] secundum formam supradictae provisionis iam firmatae singulis vicibus, videlicet ante primam, & ultimam pulsationem ipsorum tocchorum...”

nobly served its master until it was carelessly abandoned when it had grown old and
lost its worth. It began to chew on the vine, causing the bell to sound, whereupon
hearing it, the judges assembled and immediately understood the horse’s petition for
justice. They ordered that the knight, whom the horse had served when it was young,
should care for it now that it was old.

The bell of justice, therefore, acted as a kind of advocate on behalf of those
who could not voice their injuries themselves. Its sound was the universal language of
just retribution and was therefore, accessible, theoretically, in any case, to all. This
may have been why the *tocchus iuris* in Florence rang from the tower that symbolized
the authority of the Popolo, whose ideology presupposed a certain idea of universal
public justice that was one of the hallmarks of this class.\textsuperscript{868} In addition to the practical
effects of the commune’s largest bell announcing that justice was being exercised, it
simultaneously created the spatial zone – the entire city and beyond – in which those
judgments were relevant, to whom they mattered, and where they should be enforced.
It was a sound that offered the official promise that the courts themselves were being
watched, and that ultimately justice was, in the end, also in the hands of the Popolo,
which could respond to the bell’s call, just as it did in 1287. When Corso Donati
wanted to strip a condemned prisoner from the Podestà’s staff the bell was rung and
the “good people of Florence” gathered *en masse* at the palace and began chanting
“justice!” In doing so, they were responding to and amplifying the sound of the bell
itself into a crescendo of popular strength, allowing justice – in this case decapitation –
to be rendered.\textsuperscript{869}

\textsuperscript{868} Starn has pointed to the anxious obsession with justice in the propaganda of the late medieval Italian
Commune in discussion of the frescoes in the Room of Peace in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, where
the image of justice is rendered three separate times and referred to in inscriptions (often in contrast to
her enemy, tyranny) at least six times. See Starn, "Room of Peace," 6-7.

\textsuperscript{869} Villani, *Nuova cronica*, VIII, 114.
The reality of justice, therefore, was crystallized in the way that the sound of the bell acted as a potential call to action. Silence conspired with the wicked, while the noise of the crowd calling for justice was the force that the bell could draw on. This episode was a case in point, in which justice was not just an ideal symbolized by a sound but the product of the inherent practical potential of the bell’s ring to remind and assemble citizens to ensure that justice could in fact be carried out. It shows how bells fit into the rhetoric of the government’s attempts to make public (piuvichare) its official agenda.\textsuperscript{870} Considering its constant invocation in the rhetoric of the republic, this episode was perhaps narrated by Villani as much for its exceptionality as for its exemplarity.\textsuperscript{871}

In light of this anxiety over the sound of justice giving voice to the dilemma of the voiceless, bells that acted as such mediators abounded as protagonists in popular literature. As an example, I refer to a story already discussed in chapter one in terms of how it dramatized the importance of establishing and maintaining borders.\textsuperscript{872} In that story, a rich man had been gradually plowing his own field into the property of a poor man, usurping, bit by bit, the land of his neighbor. The poor man realized the game but could not directly talk back to someone so powerful.\textsuperscript{873} Taking inspiration from the obstinate cherry tree that confronted the rich man with his underhandedness, the poor man formed a plan. He gathered together two florins and went to all of the great churches of Faenza, begging and paying officials to ring their bells at a certain hour. Having been paid, the churches rang their bells vigorously so that, upon hearing it, the \textit{faentini} began to look around them in confusion, asking here and there what this noise

\textsuperscript{870} This desire to make certain official decisions public is reflected in the duties of the banditori, who were a crucial part of the mechanism in which news was made public in Florence. See "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," I, xliii.

\textsuperscript{871} It is worth noting that the regime would have to have enough legitimacy for the sound of the bell to work as a popular aid to justice and one could never guarantee the reaction of the crowd.

\textsuperscript{872} Sacchetti, \textit{Il trecentonovelle}, CClII.

\textsuperscript{873} "Il buon uomo, benché se n’accorgesse, non ardiva quasi dirne alcuna cosa..." Ibid.
could mean – “Che vuol’ dir questo?.” The poor man, in a frenzied state, dashed about the city and when someone asked him what the bells were sounding for, he responded; “for the spirit of justice, which is dead,” or “because reason is dead.” Now he was able to respond, but he needed the voice of the bells to initiate the dialogue.

The story’s narrator is explicit in stating how this phrase announcing the death of reason/justice was dispersed throughout the entire city by the bell itself acting as a surrogate of the voiceless peasant – “and so with the sound of the bells he cast this expression throughout the city.” As a consequence, the lord of the city set out to discover the cause of this extraordinary ringing. Hearing only that there was a crazed man coursing through the streets yelling that reason/justice was dead, he summoned him and listened to his story. Consequently, he restored the poor man’s lands and gave him as much of the rich man’s land as the latter had been taken, as well as the two florins paid to have the bells rung.

In this case, an economically marginal figure, who had no effective or official political voice, found an urban voice in the sonic semantics of bells, which would, depending on how they were rung, be able to call for reason/justice. He understood how bells were used to mourn death and that appropriating their symbolic system was

---

874 What does this mean?” Ibid.
875 “per l’anima della ragione ch’è morta,” or “perché la ragione è morta.” Ibid. The term ragione would have had strong resonance to a Florentine merchant audience. As I discussed in chapter 2, it was tightly bound up with skills in accounting – keeping accounts and taking account. However, it was also understood as the concept of justice, connecting reasoned business practices to reasoned judgment. The phrase used in the statutes for judges to sit in communal courts was “rendere ragione” (render judgment, or justice). Therefore, both significations would have been at play in such a narrative, where usurping someone’s land was both unjust and the product of poor business practices.
876 “e così col suono delle campane gittò questo detto per tutta la terra.” Ibid.
877 “vedendo il Signore... e saputa e fatta vedere la verità del fatto, fece restituire la terra sua a questo povero uomo, facendo andare là misuratori, e darli di quella del possente allato a lui tanta quanta tolta gli avea della sua; e fecegli pagare due fiorini che avea speso in fare sonare le campane,,” (the lord listening, and having found out and made to see the truth, he restored the land to the poor man, sending his surveyors, and giving to him as much of the land of the rich man as the latter had taken from him; and he made him pay also the two florins he had spent to ring the bells). Ibid.
one way of being heard. However, there is a subtle aspect of the acoustic dimensions of the death and life of justice that might escape the modern reader. The narrator ends the tale by stating that just as the bells were ringing (sonavano) for the death of reason/justice, one could also say that they rang (sonorono) to resuscitate justice, while today they could well sound (potrebbono ben sonare) that it had indeed been brought back to life.878 There is a gradual shift in the mood and tense of the verb from the imperfect indicative, the simple past, to the present conditional that leads from death to a potential reawakening of justice by the capacity of bells to create and maintain complex significations to a rebirth of reason/justice itself.

What, among other things, would have been evoked by these last phrases in the mind of a contemporary reader was the fluid but powerful nature of the sound of bells. This has to do with the two basic ways in which bells were rung. There was the regular, incessant sound of the bell rung a martello, or a stormo, in which a hammer struck a stationary bell in regular cadenced beats. Ringing a distesa, on the other hand, meant that the bell itself was swinging, while the clapper inside struck it in a more syncopated, irregular, and random rhythm. The former usually was an index of alarm or death, while the latter was more often connected to celebrations. In other words, the former was usually bad news; the latter was often good news.879 Therefore, what should have begun as the slow death toll of all the church’s bells transforms itself first into a bell that revives the memory of justice, which always had a close relationship to the sound of a bell, to the joyful pealing of a fully resurrected civic

878 “...e dove dicea ch’elle sonavano per la ragione che era morta, e’ si potrebbe dire ch’elle sonorono per far resuscitare la ragione. Le quali oggi potrebbono ben sonare che ella resuscitasse,” (and where it was said that they sounded for reason/justice that was dead, one could say that they sounded to revive it. And today they could well sound to resuscitate it). Ibid.
879 There must have been some subtle but significant difference between “a martello” and a stormo,” the latter used primarily to assemble men together but armed, the former for danger and general assembly. They are listed separately in a Bolognese manual, but only the method of “a martello” is described specifically, leading one to believe that they were similar. See Evaristo Stefanelli, Campanili, campane e campanari di Bologna, (Rovigo: Istituto padano di arti grafiche, 1975), 2?
justice. Therefore each of these phrases would have evoked the mental acoustic crescendo, in the mind of the reader, that dramatized the rebirth and linked it to the customary sound of all the city’s church bells ringing for the resurrection of Christ on Holy Saturday after they had been silenced on Good Friday. What is important is that only a bell could properly make real both messages, since it was the voice of a bell that spoke to death on behalf of the city, and it was the sound of a bell that also united it in celebration. For the poor man, this was the most direct and effective way to redress the wrongs committed against him. He only needed to link justice to the bell in order for his grievances to be understood by the people.

This story follows immediately upon one in which Sacchetti had explored a similar theme of justice imagined, this time, in terms of gender, rather than class. While the Decameron’s heroines can send messages through servants across urban spaces, they rarely venture out into the streets themselves – the theme of female enclosure runs through the entire text. Streets were noisy and unpredictable places, especially for women. Sacchetti writes that out there women were like lambs among wolves. Ordinary discourse does not function well in the chaotic spaces of the Trecentonovelle but, as in the story just discussed, there were ways in which characters could manipulate spatial symbolic systems. Bells offered the most accessible form of intervention for those who needed to send a message through urban space. They represented the medium through which the powerful and voiceless could confront each other in a dialogue of wills and through which certain truths could be exposed.

In Novella 201, Madonna Cecchina, the widow of a relatively wealthy merchant is gradually wrested of nearly all her possessions by the most powerful men of Modena. She had no recourse to the law, since it was the powerful that controlled
by force and not by right – “la forza pasce il prato”.\textsuperscript{880} However, she, too, had a plan in which she would appropriate both the visual and auditory language of the street in order for her case to finally be heard. She organizes a procession in which a friend holds one fish inside the mouth of larger one while her son strikes repeatedly a portable bell he carries through the streets. As this mock procession of relics wends its way through the city, to anyone who asked what it meant, Cecchina would answer simply; “e’ pesci grandi si mangiavano i piccolini.”\textsuperscript{881} This composition of fish, accompanied by a single utterance and the regular rhythm of a bell created a kind of exemplum that had to be interpreted by those who witnessed it. Unlike the women in the Decameron, Madonna Cecchina was caught within the open space of the city, where women did not have access to intimate manipulations of speech as a wife does alone in the home with her husband or in the confession box.\textsuperscript{882} The street presented its own mechanism of spatial constrictions, and this forced Cecchina to appropriate a conventional language that preceded her, and which, despite the convolutions of its regulations, belonged to the urban environment itself.\textsuperscript{883} However, as in the case of the poor man ringing the bells for the death of justice, the message is at first confusing to its audience, since these sounds were clearly outside of the regular acoustic rhythms of the city. In the former case, however, a prudent ruler searched for the reasons behind the noise. Madonna Cecchina was not so fortunate. Even though she had combined the forces of a voice (the repeated expression), a bell (campanella), and a visual

\textsuperscript{880} “the powerful feed on the pasture.” Sacchetti’s editor explains this line with the phrase, “chi aveva la meglio era la forza e non il diritto” (He who had the better had the power if not the right). See Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, 516 (editor’s note).

\textsuperscript{881} “it is the big fish who eat the little ones.” Il Trecentonovelle, CCI, 51.

\textsuperscript{882} This is a common theme in the Decameron, where wives and daughters can sometimes speak directly and effectively to men. Many of the women in the Decameron reside within domestic space, over which they extend varying amounts of control, orchestrating events, if they can, outside the home. Normally, women on the street are servants acting as go-betweens, bringing messages back and forth. For example, see the third story of the third day, discussed in chapter 2, “Piazze, Streets, Networks.”

\textsuperscript{883} This had to do with the fact that the customary ringing of bells preceded and exceeded any legal attempts to place limits and restrict the urban relationships that bells had developed.
exemplum (esempio), either no one could read it or they could not understand the
message and so the three processionists had no alternative but to return home and eat
the fish themselves. The narrator believes that the lords of the city, the Pigli, refused
to interpret the message, thereby rendering the message of the procession prophetic
when the reader learns that those who allow widows and children to be robbed will
soon lose their power, as the lords of Modena did, shortly after, to a much bigger fish
whose name was Gonzaga.884

All of these associations meant that when Florentines heard the tocchus iuris
ring from the Palazzo Vecchio, it was not simply a sound that signalled the opening of
the courts at the Bargello. It was more of a command that justice be done there, a will
toward a more ideal form of justice to which the bell appealed on behalf of the Popolo
and the regime that wanted to represent them. It was a signal that the Popolo was
watching and that the Podestà, who had to ring the Montanina in anticipation, was
subjecting himself to this will. Together the exchange of bells staged the relationship
between two government bodies in terms of their claim to the idea and the mechanism
of justice. Justice had a sound that governed all of Florentine territory, reminding
Florentines of the space within which its courts had jurisdiction and that injustices
committed there were within its sonic reach.

Between these two ad hoc rings for justice was a configuration that surrounded
the midday meal. After Terce, the Toiano, the bell taken from a Pisan fortress in

884 “Io credo che assai intendessono la donna, ma feciono vista di non l’intendere. Sia certo
ciascheduno che chi sostiene che le vedove e’ pupilli siano rubati, con doloroso fine vengono a perdere
il loro stato. E ben si dimostrò in questi che erano signori; chè ivi a poco tempo, perdendo la signoria,
venne la terra sotto a quelli da Gonzaga,” (I believe that they well understood the woman, but they
made it seem that they did not. Be sure that those who allow widows and orphans to be robbed will end
up losing their status painfully. This was well demonstrated by these lords; because in a short while,
losing their power, the land came under the domination of the Gonzaga. Il Trecentonovelle, CCI, 57-63
(p, 518).
1362, rang continuously for one hour (Figure 3.16). This expanded moment was known as the “ora del Toiano” and it signaled mealtimes for merchants. It was the commune’s *sonatones* (with trumpet and pipes), however, who had to announce to the city that the priors themselves, cloistered in the Palazzo Vecchio, were dining in the palace. During their evening meal, those same musicians were also required to make their way through the city playing their instruments to announce it to outlying neighborhoods.

By now it appears to be a familiar pattern. The bells that rang daily in Florence were not an abstract succession but clusters of sonic exchanges that echoed across space. They were sequences that conversed with and for Florentines, marking certain times with an indelible acoustic imprint. While the sonatones were playing to announce the government’s meal, the high mass after Terce, rung from both the Badia and the cathedral, was followed by the constant sound of the Toiano. It too, was an exchange between the sacred and the secular.

Bells in Florence were emblematic of the way in which those two aspects of urban life were profoundly intertwined in action even as they were distinct in space. It is a commonly remarked upon feature of Florentine urban space that the civic government was an urban configuration that was consciously isolated in space from the jurisdictional reach of the church. The two complexes stand at opposite ends of the original Roman grid of the city (Figure 3.17). However, just as in processions, they were then reunited by a dialogue that dramatized that spatial divide by crossing it. Civic bells responded but did not organize the ringing of sacred bells, and, similarly,

---

887 Statuta populi (1415), V, xl.
the city’s sacred bells responded to civic events in their own hierarchies and configurations. They emphasized this urban separation even as they bridged it. Conversely, there is evidence to suggest that the cathedral complex was conceived as public space, while the Palazzo Vecchio and the square that surrounded it were draped in a legislative aura of sacred prohibitions. This interpenetration and distinction of sacred and civic spaces are crucial for understanding the fluid nature of those relationships.

3.6 The Evening Bell

Nowhere was this sacred and civic exchange more intensely felt than in the series of sounds that made up the evening bell. The evening bell had many names in Italy that were often associated with the different kinds of things for which it was ringing. These names include the “campana dei custodi” or “della guardia,” because they called the night watch to duty; the “campana dei ladroni” (thieves) referring to night’s association with crime; the “campana della doppia pena,” for the institution of double fines for crimes committed after it rung; or “dei tavernai,” for the closing of taverns. It signaled the coming of darkness and it also accompanied inhabitants as they prepared for it. When it had finished, it was officially night, and in general the streets were supposed to be clear of bodies, lights were supposed to be placed in windows, and people on the streets were required to be unarmed and visible by the lanterns they carried. Although it differed in each city, the evening bell was usually a

---

888 Fore example, in the novella known as Il Grassaiuolo, the cathedral is depicted as a place of casual conversation. On this story see chapter 4. In statutes, the Piazza della Signoria had the same status as the area around churches, where certain activities were forbidden. The presence of women inside the Palazzo Vecchio provoked a great deal of anxiety in the eyes of Florentines. On the latter see “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, clxxxv.
889 Lattes, "La campana serale," 164.
triple sequence of ringing that lasted for a certain amount of time as dusk approached. It was a ceremony that contained within it more or less aural constituents – strikes, bells, patterns – and in a city like Florence it the evening sonic sequence spanned across time and space in a complex series of acoustic exchanges. The statutes never refer to an evening bell *per se*, the way they do to the day bell (*campana del di)*. Instead, they describe a series of moments in which certain things occurred in a gradual transition from light to darkness. Just as in the morning, the city was eased into another topographical zone by the intertwining of religious and profane announcements. There was no single evening bell, therefore. Instead, it was an interactive performance.

The evening bell was arguably the most important daily sound in any city in Europe and was already a fact taken for granted by the early thirteenth century. It combined promises of salvation, security, and order, while it opened up a space for specific kinds of sociability. The problem of identifying the evening bell and its association with the evening prayer of the Ave Maria, the double fine bell, and the curfew, arises from the fact that all these sounds could be gathered into the ring of a single bell but were, more often than not, especially in a city like Florence, taken apart and organized as a series of related sonic sequences. Rather than a single bell at a single time, the evening bell was a series of sounds that governed a set of activities and prepared the city for darkness, the passage from one day to the next. They marked the end of labor, the evening meal, a collective prayer, the closing of the gates, the clearing of public spaces, and the separate legal regime of the night. This sound was as universal in its general form – the repeated triple sequences – as it was local in its infinite variations. It was an exchange of sounds that choreographed a set of

---

890 Ibid., 163.
891 At a synod on November 25, 1326, Jean de Rossillon prescribed that three hits of the bell be sounded the hour of Compline for 40 days of indulgence for reciting the Ave Maria three times. This may have
evening activities as the city began to shut down, and its performance was an
important element in establishing close links between inhabitants and their city, its
spaces, and communities.

This evening configuration began after Vespers with the Leone, which
announced the evening prayer of the Ave Maria, struck and recited three times in
unison. It was followed by the bell of the Podestà, which rang its own triple sequence
to announce the time of double fines for any crimes committed.\textsuperscript{892} This was answered
by a triple sequence, again from the Leone, which actually ushered in the night and the
time when no one was allowed to be out in the city, with or without a lamp, until the
sound of the \textit{campana del di} the next morning (Figures 3.18, 3.18a).\textsuperscript{893} It repeated
precisely the spatial choreography of the morning, with bells ringing in dialogue from
the Badia to the Palazzo Vecchio, the Bargello and back to the Palazzo Vecchio.

Given the fact that this whole process began sometime after Vespers, the
constituent elements of the evening bell must have rung for certain durations, allowing
for specific tasks to be carried out and for movements to various locations over an
extended period of time.\textsuperscript{894} Such sequences gave a spatial complexity to the beginning
and the end of the day, since it could never be reduced, in the experience of
Florentines, to a single point in time with only a before and an after. It was an
acoustic and spatial ritual where prayers and legal sanctions, spiritual solace and

\textsuperscript{892} According to the 1355 statutes, the double fine bell (\textit{campana per doppia pena}) was that of the
Podestà, which sounded after Vespers, though it does not specify how long after. This meant that the
double fine was instituted within the configuration of the evening bell. “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III,
lxi.

\textsuperscript{893} \textit{Ibid.}, III, lxxxvii.

\textsuperscript{894} As an example see the tentative duration of rings for the bells in Venice offered in Dohrn-van
Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 208-09. A bell ringing for a half hour was not uncommon.
secular warnings enfolded the city in a complex aura of collective calm – prayer mixed with social anxiety – over the fearful potentialities brought on by darkness.

Even as the Leone evoked the threatening space of the night, however, its familiar sound would also have comforted those who identified with the regime that all was well. The configuration of the evening bell was a repetition with slight variations of the morning’s spiritual sound of the mass at dawn that led to the secular regime of the day. However, instead of the closed and muted mass of the morning, the Ave Maria in the evening was a private prayer made communal by the sound of the bell that followed the office of Vespers, which rang from the badia and the cathedral. Instead of announcing a mass, it accompanied a mass prayer, uttered privately by individuals as they paused at that time to recite the prayer three times, with each sound of the bell guaranteeing the ten-day indulgence.895

It was commonly believed that the annunciation of Gabriel to Mary occurred at twilight.896 Popular legend also attributed the church’s ringing of this hour to Pope Urban II (1088-99) on his proclamation of the first crusade, after which the practice was abandoned, only to be revived by Gregory IX (1227-41), or instituted for the first time by St. Bonaventure.897

---

895 The evening bell lamented the passing of the day but it also was a kind of friend that greeted one from afar. Dante’s *squilla da lontano* from the *Purgatorio*, thrilled the heart of the pilgrim as it mourned the expiring twilight because it re-enacted the annunciation of Gabriel to the virgin. This evening office of the *Ave Maria* was given a specific indulgence by John XXII ins 1327. Therefore, for the traveler it turned a strange place into a familiar territory of salutary promise., For the worker in the city, it sacralized the time and space of the city as he or she made their way home. By the 15th century, we know from Saint Antoninus’ *Summa*, that the *Ave Maria* was announced both in the morning and evening, by three rings of the bells of the churches. And if, as Charles Singleton believed, the *squilla da lontano* was the evening bell rung for Compline, then the space opened up at twilight was one in which both civic and sacred time came together, were overlaid upon each other, neither reducible one to the other, nor ever fully distinct. The end of the day was full of sound coming from all directions. The Ave Maria was re-appropriated for civic purposes during the siege of 1529, when the government of Florence ordered all those not fit to fight, to stop and kneel and pray for the Florentine forces. See *Commedia*, Purg. VIII, 1-6, Novati, p. 140
896 Novati, ”La campana serale,” 140.
897 Ibid.
Despite the legends around it, the sound of either the Ave Maria or the evening bell – or both – were ones that were imagined to travel widely in space, accompanying both the peasant in the fields as well as the traveler on the road. It was a sound that actually left the urban milieu in which it was born and carried its comforting message to those at the margins, or in transit. For Dante, this hour awakened fond desire and melted hearts at sea and mourned the expiring day even as it quickened the heart of the traveling pilgrim. Attached to the ringing of Compline, which followed closely on the heels of Vespers, the Ave Maria began the long sequence of evening into night. Rung by the Leone, it was a secular, communal bell that responded to the late afternoon offices with a sound that unified the entire city into a sanctified zone. It was one way in which the government linked itself to an idea of universal identity, the bell bringing about what was so difficult in actual urban legislation, namely, to convince Florentines that they all belonged to a specific central authority.

It then gave way to the fully secular bell of the double fines, making the transition from holy rite, through communal prayer, to legal prohibitions. When the Leone sounded again to announce the arrival of night, the legal announcement of the

---

898 See the poem quoted by Novati in Ibid.
899 Purgatorio, VIII, 1-6. “Era gia l'ora che volge il disio/ai naviganti e 'ntenerisce il core/lo di' c'han detto ai dolci amici addio; e che lo novo peregrin d'amore/punge, se ode squilla di lontano/che paia il giorno pianger che si more.” (It was the hour that turns seafarers' longings homeward-the hour that makes their hearts grow tender upon the day they bid sweet friends farewell).
900 Although technically celebrated at sundown, Compline often followed soon after Vespers, which itself was approaching on Sext. See Herbert Thurston, “Angelus Bell,” in The Catholic Encyclopedia, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907). This forward movement had the tendency of attenuating the time of twilight.
901 Novati, "La campana serale," 141 and n. 14. Although official papal recognition of the ten-day indulgence only dated to 1327, there is evidence from inscriptions on surviving bells themselves that the practice of ringing the triple Ave Maria prayer in the evening was already widespread by that time. Novati refers to a bull of 1318 that established the Ave Maria at dusk for the single town of Saintes, in France and declares on that evidence that the practice was not widespread, since the document does not mention any other town as an example. He also quotes the text of the 1327 bull, which was supposed to stimulate still more the zeal of the faithful, just as it did Dante’s pilgrim. This suggests that the bull was only codifying what was already the popular attachment of the divine to the sounds at the end of the day. On the inscriptions see Thurston, "Angelus Bell." The morning or “little Office of Mary” was established by 1330, but the midday Ave Maria only appeared in Florence by 1518. See Gargani, Dell' Antico Palazzo, 34. The 1325 Florentine statutes, notably, make no reference to the Ave Maria.
curfew was likely enhanced in its authority by the way its repeated triple sequences (even the morning six strike were rung in a triple pattern) always associated the regime’s authority over space and bodies with its sanctification of Florentines as a Christian community. In the way that all Florentines derived their civic and religious identity from the baptistery, the government was associating itself as a partner, along with religious institutions proper, in the maintenance of souls. The two were not separate systems, but merged and defined themselves in relation to each other, just as the city’s inhabitants navigated and established the links between the private and public, the sacred and the secular.

This partnership was at the heart of the dialogue of bells laid out by the statutes but it also served a more practical purpose. Fines directed at the Podestà and the commune’s bell ringers for failing to ring the evening bell (this was also the case for the morning) suggest a certain anxiety that the sound of bells had to mediate. Surrounded by rules and regulations, the evening bell of the statutes demarcated the threshold of proscriptions and prohibitions, evoking the threatening space of the night as the time of conspiracy and crime. But the final acoustic exchange of the day also created a sonic choreography that linked the two centers of government, the legislative and the judicial. It confirmed that that governmental structure was functioning properly, that civic authority was intact, that the spaces of the city were under its control and surveillance as darkness fell. However, if either of these bells failed to ring or were confronted with silence, then authorities would have been alerted to something gone wrong, a failure in the system and an alarm could be sounded to fill that silence.  

---

902 The relevant statutory rubrics list the fines for the various infractions.  
903 This is suggested by the strict legislation governing the ringing of the bells that mandated fines to the Podestà and the communal bell ringers in the Palazzo Vecchio for failing to maintain these particular rhythms. Caggese, Capitano (1322-25), I, xliv (p. 35). “Statutum et ordinatum est quod sonatores campane domini Capitanei et Defensoris ipsam campanam domini Defensoris debeant pulsare, quando
A trace of the profoundly integrated acoustic exchange that ended the day remains in the language of the statutes used to describe this pattern. Of course, Statutes such as these certainly do not participate in anything that might be called a literary tradition but in what can only be imagined as a transcription from something heard to something read, they performed an evocative, if simple, linguistic condensation. They dramatize the close interlacing of sonic sequences, so much so, that were it not for several more prosaic repetitions elsewhere, the grammatical interlacing of bell sounds would be almost impossible to disentangle from each other:

And in the evening the Ave Maria is rung with the bell of the Lion, and also the third ring, having first rung so that the third ring of the bell of the Podestà.904

It is difficult to say where the third rings of either bell fall with respect to the other, except to say that they almost overlap textually, which they were supposed to do sonically.905 The central point, however, was that this was a transcription of something heard into something read, something so familiar it needed little explanation. It is not overstating the point that even in this most technical form of writing, the description of

pulsatur dicta campana Communis, in terto sono tantum et in ultima vice rintocchos dare, et etiam quando pulsatur de mane, ita quod homines sciant campanam pulsatam esse, et prope diem, quando pulsatur campana Communis, pulsare similiter teneatur; et si predictam campanam non pulsaverint, predictis horis, condemnetur quilibet eorum in solidis quinque pro qualibet vice, in quibus dominus capiteus et Defensor eos condemnare teneatur et debat; et dominus Capitaneus, per suis familiares ydoneos et sufficientes, dictam campanam pulsari faciat dictis horis, et etiam quotiens et quando fuerit opportunum.” The last phrase may allude in general to the bell’s use in measures of security. Note also that the sequence for the beginning and the end of the day does not seem to reverse itself in the earlier statutes. Here, the Podestà initiates both sequences.

904 Statuta populi (1415), V, xlii (vol. II, p. 545). “Et quod ipsae campanae pulsetur modo, & ordine, ac temporibus infrascriptis., ut cum campana leonis pulsetur de sero ave maria, & etiam tertium sonum, pulsato primo tertio sono cum campana domini potestatis.” It is clear from later rephrasing that the Leone followed the triple ring of the Podestà.

905 The bell announcing the day is clear on this point: “Et cum campana domini potestatis primo & immediate cum campana populi pulsetur campana diei.” Ibid. This phrase also emphasizes how even the campana del di was not a specific bell but a specific configuration. The statutes do not refer to a corresponding campana serale.

348
the bells’ functions follows the rhythm of their ringing. The text follows the choreography it sets out, moving back and forth between bells and the towers from which they rang in the daily rhythm that framed the city’s opening and closing hours. It was precisely the fact that bells were part of a communicative network – and not simply isolated sounds – that is staged in the very description of their function. The vernacular Italian version of 1355, translated with a keen sense of the contemporary literary culture, is just as allusive, and therefore, just as confusing.\footnote{Statuti del Capitano (1355)," I, clxxi. “cho la campana del leone si suoni da sera a venie (ave maria) et anche il terzo suono sonato imprima il terzo suono cho la campana di messere la podestà.”} Nevertheless, Andrea Lancia, as the mediator between the general authority of the Latin statutes and the local proximity of the vernacular ones, is a reminder that these statutes were also part of a larger culture of reading and writing.\footnote{Caggesi, Podestà (1325), III, xli (p. 184); "Statuti del Podestà (1355)." III, li.}

What followed the last ring of the evening acoustic exchange was the night. During the day, penalties for crimes committed in certain spaces – markets, courts, bridges – were already doubled, but under the cover of darkness these individual topographies were gathered up and blended into a single zone that was blanketed by the universal geography of darkness.\footnote{Statuti del Podestà (1355)." III, lxxviiii (f. 162v). In typical fashion, the law begins by banning everyone from being out in the city at night to then listing exceptions for certain groups and the kinds of lighting persons were supposed to have if they were on the street at night.} Night brought with it a particular psychological identity that criminalized certain activities and was assumed to promote others. It was the time of secrets and was therefore surrounded by rules and regulations specific to it. Carrying a lamp was obligatory for anyone out at night,\footnote{Dumping various noxious or dirty materials at night was forbidden, but cesspools could only be emptied at night. Ibid., IV, cx} gatherings were forbidden, and certain activities were singled out for prohibition or specific permission.\footnote{Statuti del Podestà (1355)." III, lxviii (f. 162v). In typical fashion, the law begins by banning everyone from being out in the city at night to then listing exceptions for certain groups and the kinds of lighting persons were supposed to have if they were on the street at night.}
In addition, there was also a certain anxiety about the unofficial noises associated with the night. In the early decades of the Florentine republic, the law officially prohibited young men from going through the city in the dark singing love songs to their beloved, with or without instruments. However, the mention of love disappears in the language of the 1355 statutes and reference is made only to the playing of various instruments and professional singers (cantatori) who make music dishonorably (disonestamente).

The tradition of the mattinata, the musical satire of re-marrying couples and a celebration of youthful love, to which the later statutes seem to be referring, was obligatory in communal Italian culture of the late Middle Ages: “singing was obligatory to courtship and the tone-deaf lover hired a professional.” The honorable pursuit of love may have been increasingly tolerated at night but such noise at night was regularly banned in communal statutes. Traditionally one had to defend the mattinata by paying others to celebrate on one’s behalf and keeping the musical racket from assaulting one’s house at night. However, the fear of the authorities was the possibility of violence that always threatened to break out in such moments of strident satire and “shameful” songs. The mattinata was a public display based on love that honored young women or beautiful couples or satirized disapproved forms of love. Its various celebrations brought large numbers of people together, institutionalized a joyous laughter and celebrated bouts of drinking and ironic festive spectacles. The victims had to take it good heartedly, in the spirit of carnival. However, such ritual behavior constantly assaulted the line between satirical adulation and cruel derision.

---

911 Caggese, Podestà (1325), III, cxxi.
912 “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, c.
914 Ibid., 269-70.
915 Ibid., 270.
Laws against it seemed to acknowledge its ambivalent duality between honor and insult, nuancing the prohibitions by adjusting fines for words uttered in certain spaces; “in front of one’s own house, in church, or in the municipal council,” or at certain times: at “a funeral, a wedding, or a baptism… or if the uproar took place at night.”

Dissonant music, insults, and general noise were ritually performed at the doorways of newlyweds, although this practice was increasingly proscribed. The threshold as a spatial zone was increasingly becoming defined as a separate entity with its own rules, and lovers and pranksters were forbidden, however ineffectively, to participate.

It was a particular kind of silence, on the other hand, that took advantage of the darkness, to fend off the evil that might be carried out at night. It was when bells that were supposed to ring did not that fear was struck into the minds of Florentines, who acutely perceived that a different type of space was created at night by the sounds that punctuated the darkness or those that did not. It was obvious that, just as people used sound and memory to navigate the familiar spaces of their domestic interiors at night, Florentines used the sound of bells to navigate through the darkened city, sometimes in ways that were threatening to those in power. In 1387, for example, in a climate of political fear on the entrance of a new government into the Palazzo Vecchio, the bells that sounded the hours of the night were ordered suppressed until daylight. As one diarist noted, this was done in an attempt to prevent the city from rising in revolt. The following night a fire broke out in a shop under the Badia and rumor quickly spread that it was deliberately set in order to force the fire bells to ring so that armed groups could coordinate a planned insurrection. Upon hearing this rumor, the priors forbade both the Badia and Sant’Apollinare, the two churches closest

---

916 Ibid., 272.
917 Ibid., 273.
918 As the marriage ritual in chapter 2 makes clear, such nighttime acts of love took place.
to the fire, to sound the alarm. In the uncertain realm of the night, what was clearly the reaffirming sound of authority during the day became, in this instance, the sound of a potential spatial organization of a political conspiracy in the borderless confusion of the night. Such confusion was hoped for in March 1382, when the hours were not rung from Friday to Sunday under severe anxiety.

Such official anxiety over the night may have come from the way Simmel understood night as determining a different spatial sense. As it closed in on the individual, space almost disappeared and consequently so did boundaries. This fantasy expanded the darkness into the space of exaggerated possibilities. All the meticulously laid out borders of the daytime, all the careful divisions between the public and the private, magically disappeared. This perceived disappearance of boundaries demanded that night be separated from daytime topographies as a total zone of potential transgression and mischief.

Between Vespers and nightfall, therefore, a series of bells coordinated a set of communal activities in which people prayed, ended their labor, went home, ate dinner, gathered together, and went to bed. However, this complex and gradual descent into darkness was not exclusively experienced as the ominous sound of a fearful night and the restricted liberty of individuals. The evening bell had much more resonance

---

920 Alle bocche, 66.
921 Ibid., 42. “Da venerdì in qua non sono sonate è’ore nè di nè di notte.”
923 Exceptions existed, necessarily, for those who could be out at night, with a light. In Florence this included the government’s staff and security forces, the militia company standard bearers, those charged with night illumination for guards (lanternieri), the night watch, accompanying notaries and other officials, those maestri charged with putting out fires. In the end, people could be out at night with torches of a certain size (at least three pounds of wax) as long as they were in groups of no more than four, "Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, lxxxviii. Clearly the main concern was groups conspiring in large numbers. There were numerous exceptions that allowed citizens to move through cities at night. In some communal statutes, one could search out priests, doctors, and barbers, who would have seen bakers on their way to work and scholars off to their lessons. One was able to relieve oneself at the street corner at night, and if in some towns taverns had to stop selling wine, Siena, for its part, allowed such institutions to remain open so long as the night watch did not enter during hours of vigilance. In Venice, because the Germans needed to have as much wine as they desired (habere vinum quociens volunt), otherwise they were liable to tear their hosts to pieces, (alter frangerent hostum),
than just disciplining the social body. It was a much more ambivalent sound, which is why it could inspire the pilgrim in Dante’s *Purgatory* as much as it could sink the heart and fortunes of a lone traveler who does not make it inside the walls before the closing of the gates. The “squilla di lontano”, the sound heard from afar, had the power to turn unfamiliar territory into a zone of consolation because it united all who heard it into a certain spiritual community, extending, symbolically, the protective power of the city itself. It was both the sound of an accompanying companion and the limits of access. As long as its bells were ringing, there was still time. Through a whole series of sonic markers, the evening bell opened up the city as a sequence of both sacred and civic moments in which the populace was united both politically and spiritually.

The temporal duration of the evening bell reveals just how intimately sound and space were integrated within the urban environment. Its tripartite structure was a series of acoustic signals that coordinated potential movements in space. The statutes of the town of Chieri, near Turin, are the most explicit on this point. The three rings of the evening bells were supposed to be separated by intervals long enough so that persons of high standing could dine at their leisure during the first and any man or woman could traverse the city from one place to another, without haste, during the second. What this description makes explicit is what was implicit, customary,

wine was often exempt from commercial restrictions if it was for immediate consumption. See Lattes, “La campana serale,” 168-69.

924 Purg. VIII, 1-6, On Dante’s passage see above. For a literary narrative driven by the missed curfew see Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 2, 2. The merchant Rinaldo d’Asti, having been robbed on the road, arrives after dark and therefore too late to enter a nearby fortified town.

925 One of Dante’s early commentators was more prosaic in his exclamation, believing that the sound was simply the evening bell signalling the closing if the city gates, so that the quickened pace was not from a stimulated heart but from an anxious mind trying to reach the town before nightfall: “quando fit sero, si peregrini audiant pulsatre unam campanam, quae vocatur in Ytalia squilla, quae significat finem diei, pungunt se, idest conantur velocius ire, propter applicare ad portam antequam claudatur,” Johannis de Serravalle, *Translatio et comentum totius libri Dantis Aldigheri*, ed. Marcellino da Civezza and Teofilo Domenichelli, (Prato: Giachetti, 1891). See also Novati, "La campana serale," 143.

926 Lattes, "La campana serale," 166. "L’uno a notte fatta (*il*) successivo dopo tanto tempo che bastasse ad una persona d’importanza, "miles vel aliqua magna persona", per cenare a suo agio, l’ultimo quando
widely assumed, and expected of every evening bell in whatever city it rang. The end of the day was not an abstract point in time, with only a before and an after. The evening bell opened up a transitional space that choreographed specific rituals of daily life. It was a suspended moment, an expanded field, in which bodies traversed the city in various acts of urban sociability.

For a range of social classes, there must have been a number of choices about what to do in the evening. I have already mentioned the benches that innkeepers placed in the Mercato Vecchio on Thursday evenings. Taverns, of course, were places that generated a great deal of statutory unease, and often the evening bells were linked to their closing, but that seems generally to have been linked to a fear of certain nefarious types gathering behind closed doors. Such gatherings out in the piazza, however, appear to have been much more actively condoned. This sociability was linked spatially and concretely, to sitting down, in public, on temporary or permanent benches. In the background of one of Domenico Ghirlandaio’s Sassetti chapel frescoes, figures appear in casual exchanges on the benches that surrounded the Piazza della Signoria (Figure 3.19). Benches were at the core of Florentine urban dialogues, since they were crucial elements in governmental debates, political spectacles, social rituals such as marriages and funerals, outdoor feasts, and professional storytelling and singing. They were also the site of more intimate but still public speech, in contrast to the impossible trade in secrets that Paolo da Certaldo was bent on maintaining. Florentines would gather in the city’s various squares to tell each other stories, listen to others, make fun of them, sing songs to the Virgin, listen to

fosse trascorso un intervallo sufficiente, perché un uomo o donna potesse andare quietamente da un punto all' altro della citta’.”

927 Ibid., 168.
928 For an urbanistic and political reading of these benches see Elet, "Seats of Power."
929 Ibid.: 448-50.
preachers, or meet with neighbors.\textsuperscript{930} Such activities transformed those spaces from centers of commerce, trade, political or religious ritual into much more intimate living spaces. At a time when it was neither day, nor night, the meaning of these spaces changed from moment to moment, and they need to be interpreted on their own terms, just as Florentines took account of their city by the noises it made.

In this way the day was bracketed by an exchange between religious and spiritual auditory cadences. It began with the lone murmur of the morning mass inside the city’s most venerable religious institution, to which the commune responded before enacting its own civic exchange. It ended with the collective murmur of the evening prayer as urban performance. The triple ring guided one through a personal spiritual exercise while it guaranteed the knowledge of a collective orientation towards salvation for the city as a whole because this was the particular Florentine sound of the Angelus. When the Leone was heard again, its triple ring for the end of the day echoed the triple sequence it rang for the Ave Maria. Marking the setting and the rising sun, this dialogue enveloped the day with an auditory beginning and end. Bells rang in successive patterns, punctuating the day with a synchronic pattern. Some sounds followed on the heels of others, some anticipated the ringing of others, and all of them derived meaning from their position and cadence along a syntactic chain of daily events as church and state gave audible form to their individual authority and their collective integration. When Florentines went home for the evening it was the sound of bells that guaranteed their sense of both spiritual and civic security.

The sound of a bell could certainly evoke ambivalent reactions, but it could never be ignored. The acoustic environment in Florence on the threshold of the Renaissance contained enough sounds, and enough bells, through which a whole range of social identities could be expressed. It confronted Florentines with an ambivalent voice that, on the one hand, disciplined their labor and regulated their movements, but on the other, also called them together to celebrate and to pray, allowing them to imagine larger collective bonds beyond family and friends. Bells told them where to go, and when to do it, but they also told them how to get there and what to expect when they did. Therefore, the sounds that emanated from bell towers were memory markers and landmarks in the most quotidian sense, sonic reference points that helped Florentines navigate within and around the spatial configurations of social hierarchies. They established certain acts as communal ones, as fundamental elements of who they were as a complex social body.

3.7 Sacred Soundscapes: the Hierarchy of Sound

If the sacred and secular sonic rhythms of the city formed an integrated reciprocal partnership, then a similar integration occurred at the level of social practice. As the music historian Blake Wilson has made clear, it was the singing of religious devotions that bridged the gap between public liturgy and private acts of contemplation, just as the sound of the evening bell bridged the gap between public order and individual prayer. It is this capacity to link disparate spaces and actions that makes sound a crucial component of the built environment. It dressed the most

---

931 Blake McDowell Wilson, Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence, (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1992), 70. Again, Antonio Pucci remains an emblematic figure in this case, as Wilson understands his literary output facilitating a cross-fertilization through his authorship of sensuous love lyrics and variations on the gospels for popular singing.
important and the most quotidian spaces with meaning. It bound the humble
workaday noises of the neighborhood to the eternal rhythms of the cosmos. If the
church’s bells rang within a synchronic exchange with the bells of the commune each
day, then its own internal sonic dimensions were founded on a hierarchy of exchanges,
of privileges and deference. These sounds punctuated the daily repetitions with a
weekly cadence of religious feasts, which was, in turn, subsumed within a yearly cycle
of feast days celebrated in Florence. Each one had its own unique rhythm isolating
and framing it as an acoustic ensemble. The following discussion seeks to situate
these sequences within a series of sacred topographies that sanctified the spaces
through which the community moved.

There is no need here to repeat either the construction history of the campanile
of Florence’s cathedral – Giotto’s Tower – or the symbolic rhetoric of its decorative
program, both of which have been the subject of extensive investigation. But
between 1334 and the 1359, this tower replaced an earlier one that was on the opposite
side and to the rear of the older cathedral of Santa Reparata. It was torn down in 1357
after damage from a fire and both towers are pictured in a fourteenth-century drawing
from an early copy of the Decameron (Figure 3.20). The laying of the foundation
stone of the new tower on July 18, 1334 was the scene of a solemn ceremony,

932 Here is a list of some of that bibliography. On the tower’s construction history and iconographical
interpretations see Giuseppe Rocchi, "Interpretazione del campanile," in S. Maria del Fiore: rilievi,
documenti, indagini strumentali: interpretazioni: piazza, battistero, campanile, ed. Giuseppe Rocchi,
(Florence: Dipartimento di storia dell’architettura e restauro delle strutture architettoniche, Università
degli studi di Firenze, 1996); Trachtenberg, Giotto’s Tower. On finances see Margaret Haines, "Firenze
e il finanziamento della Cattedrale e del campanile," in Alla riscoperta di Piazza del Duomo in Firenze:
saggi per una lettura storico-artistico-religiosa dei suoi monumenti., ed. Timothy Verdon, (Florence:
Centro Di, 1994). On the meaning of the sculpture program see Margaret Haines, Santa Maria del
Fiore: the cathedral and its sculpture: acts of the international symposium for the VII centenary of the
Trachtenberg, Giotto’s Tower, Wolfgang Braunfels, "Giotto’s Campanile." Das Münster I (1948); Julius
von Schlosser, "Giustos Fresken in Padua und die Vorläufer der Stanza dell Segnatura," Jahrbuch der
kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses XVII (1896).
933 Since the tower on the left displays no openings, it appears, at first, to be a more regular tower with
battlements, unless the vaguely defined shape on its top is, in fact, a belfry.
recorded by Villani, headed by the bishop, and attended by all the clergy, the priors, and many people in a grand procession. This tower should have been the one that united all Florentines (Figures 3.20a, 3.20b). Unlike the towers of both the Bargello and the Palazzo Vecchio, it was not built on the ruins of a destroyed or humbled family. It was not fortified in a climate of internal political conflict and its bells did not play a formal part in the game of political legitimation. In other words, it had no associations with factionalism or any particular group. Therefore, it could potentially represent a united polity, marking the days in which the city collectively venerated its favorite saints.

Yet, early descriptions of the tower invariably turned towards its status not as a civic monument but as a work of art and its association with the dominating presence of one of the artistic superstars of the fourteenth century – Giotto di Bondone – behind whom the tower inevitably recedes. Tied to such a singular personality, not least likely because he was also a Florentine of international stature, the tower may not have been associated as closely with the collaborative nature of city-building that had characterized the understanding of Florentine monumental architecture to that point. If the tower was the product of such a prominent personality, could it also be appropriated by Florentine urban identity? For fourteenth-century commentators, it was a mixed bag of options, and since the tower was connected to a specific artistic personality it gave rise to a critical response appropriate to aspects of its individual design features and suppressing interpretation based on a larger urban architectural configuration.

Villani, however, contrasts the social dimension with the individual. He foregrounds the civic ritual that surrounded the laying of the bell tower’s foundation stone deep into the excavated foundation hole that descended as far as the water table.

---

934 Villani, *Nuova cronica*, XII, 12.
He praises Giotto’s consummate skill as a painter and how this skill (*virtù*) and excellence (*bontà*) were recognized and rewarded by the commune in his salary as superintendent of the cathedral works (*proveditore*). Later in the century, the chronicler Coppo di Marchione Stefani paraphrases Villani, mentioning the solemn procession and stating that the bishop laid the first stone. He does not bother to mention Giotto.⁹³⁵

In Pucci’s versification of Villani, the interrogation of the work and the artist really begins. He is much less interested in the momentous founding than in narrating how Giotto’s inspired initial design was subsequently mishandled by Andrea Pisano - who was removed from his job – and then left unfinished by Francesco Talenti when the works committee (*opera*) turned its attention to the completion of the cathedral building itself (*fu abbandonato, per dar prima alla chiesa compimento*).⁹³⁶ Pucci seems to be somewhat troubled by the design, a subject on which Villani is completely silent, since it began well but faltered with Giotto’s successors. Even as late as the turn of the fifteenth century, the Anonimo Fiorentino, in his commentary on Dante, openly criticized what was a very expensive construction project. According to the author, Giotto, not his successors, committed two errors: the design did not have a proper projecting base (*ceppo da piè*) and it was too narrow (*stretto*). Such wrongs weighed so heavily on his heart, so the story went, that he became ill and this hastened the death of the beloved painter-turned-architect.⁹³⁷

It was not until the early fifteenth century that commentators dispensed with adjudicating Giotto and his followers as well as the troubling building history in order

---

⁹³⁵ Stefani, *Cronica fiorentina*, r. 503.
to transform the tower into a symbol of Florence’s dazzling beauty. Goro Dati ignores Giotto and the problem of authorship and design and instead describes the campanile’s rich marble incrustation, its numerous figures, and then contrasts its circumference to its height: 100:120 braccia. In Dati’s text this richness, along with the tower’s soaring dimensions combined to overwhelm the capacities of the imagination to apprehend it – *che non si potrebbe imaginare sua bellezza* ⁹³⁸ – transposing the experience of confronting the tower from what had up to that point been close to a costly mistake, into the territory of the sublime. ⁹³⁹

In Benedetto Dei’s chronicle, the tower’s polychrome marble exterior pointed to the three regions from which the stone was quarried and its measurements – height, circumference, and the dimensions of the inner meeting room – are subsumed into a typical exhaustive list of measurements of numerous features of the duomo, turning the cathedral complex into a multi-dimensional series of axes in space. It is no longer a singular work of art but part of a larger cathedral complex of monumental structures in a series of numerical relations. ⁹⁴⁰

In Bruni’s official history of Florence, slightly earlier than Dei’s description, the tower was the now the sole, coherent artistic expression of the distinguished painter, Giotto. All the confusion and doubt about design, authorship and completeness have been brushed aside, leaving the tower as the one he designed, a work of extraordinary magnificence. ⁹⁴¹ Effectively, this development shows how issues about design and authorship were crystallized into an unproblematic one-to-one relationship between a name and a work of art, making the tower more smoothly part of the canon of art history. For Bruni, it functions as a brief interlude between

---

⁹³⁸ Dati, "Istoria," VII, 5, (pp. 264-65).
⁹³⁹ Ibid., VIII, 5 (pp. 264-65).
⁹⁴⁰ Dei, *Cronica*, 108-09.
⁹⁴¹ Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, VI, 47 (p. 198).
accounts of Florentine military movements around Parma. It interrupts the narrative, interjecting a kind of set piece, a notable event in and of itself for Florentine artistic developments.

Finally, Giotto’s epitaph, written by Angelo Poliziano, inside the Duomo makes reference specifically to the heroic individualism of the Florentine artist not in painting but in his capacity as architect of the campanile. This is the only description that even makes an oblique reference to the fact that the tower was built to make sounds. However, it was not the sacred word of the mass or the preacher’s voice that was heard in air. The bell tower as a mechanism, linked by scholastic ideas, for spreading the word of God had been transformed into the transcendent message of beauty and artistic ingegno, on the part of Giotto, that the tower now resounded:

You will admire the famous tower sounding in the sacred air. It also grew from my model to the stars.942

In terms of the cathedral tower’s relationship with the communal bell towers, there may have been some political motivations behind its placement so close to the baptistery and the numerous reliefs and images of the city’s lily (giglio) on its lower registers (Figure 3.20c).943 It was the only tower of the city to have a systematic decorative program, one of the most extensive of the Italian Trecento.944 Through cycles celebrating creation, human creativity, labor, and intellectual pursuits, the cosmos and the virtues, there is a definite iconographic attempt to link Florentine virtù

---

943 Rocchi, "Interpretazione del Campanile," 129.
to the city’s productive manufacture.\footnote{There is only a single relief that refers to sound: the old testament figure of Jubal, the father of musicians and the inventor of musical instruments, set amidst the Genesis cycle of the founding of animal husbandry, metal working, and wine.} It sets weaving and wall construction next to medicine and astronomy, aggrandizing manual labor that was at the heart of the city’s wealth. In the weaving scene a woman sits at a loom next to a figure identified as the Roman goddess Minerva. In the scene depicting the building of a wall, God himself plays the role of capomaestro, linking the architect’s creativity to the divine.\footnote{For interpretations of the cycle see Verdon, "Turris davidica.", Trachtenberg, Giotto’s Tower, 86-106. Trachtenberg sees the tower’s imagery as a celebration of Florentine urban culture guided by divine forces from above, representing a visual analogue to Villani’s exuberant description of Florence in 1338.}

In the weaving scene, the city’s most important industry, the complicated and messy production of woolen cloth and its attendant exploitation of the city’s laboring classes makes a claims for virtue through the allegory of female labor and mythological patronage (Minerva). It is as remarkable in its promotion of such labor as it is in its suppression of the conditions under which that labor was performed. It seems to have offered the city’s manufacturing elite a way of ennobling their business pursuits by appropriating and transforming traditional images of peasant agrarian labor attached to the months of the year into a decontextualized scene of manual labor amongst several other human pursuits.\footnote{Such sculptural cycles exist on the baptistery in Pisa, the cathedral of Lucca, and the Pieve of Santa Maria in Arezzo, to name only several in the vicinity of Florence.} The female weaver is linked to her male counterparts by the solitariness of her work, separating it from the concentrated zones of mass labor located throughout the city that such an image ostensibly represented.

Although not represented as a solitary figure, wall construction was connected to its divine creativity and its reference to the city’s dynamic expansion. The final circuit of walls had just been completed in 1333, several years before the bell tower’s construction was begun. It would have been impossible for a Florentine audience not to understand the connection. Villani had celebrated the city’s dimensions in his
chronicle, giving his readers a virtual tour of the circumference of the city’s new walls. They were a concrete monument to the city’s expanding wealth as well as the ultimate enclosure of sacred space. The sounds made by the *campanile*, which had to reach out to the limits of the walls, were a crucial part of the maintenance of that sanctification (Figures 3.20d, 3.20e). The *campanile* bound sound to stone, marking the threshold of the divine protection afforded by the fusing of the cathedral’s bells to the commune’s walls. This helps to explain why the circumference of the *campanile* was so important to its identity as an architectural structure and mentioned explicitly by both Dati and Dei. The circumference was one of the most important measurements of the circuit of walls for Villani and it testifies to how the *campanile* was conceived as a symbolic enclosure of space itself, mimicking, in an ideal and abstract way, the topography of the walls that surrounded this central node. Therefore, the themes of the first order of decoration, along with the way the bell tower bound sound to walls and represented an alternative way in which the *campanile*, this time a sacred one, could stand as a symbol for the city not only by its vertical visible height, but also by the way it was conceived as a horizontally enfolding structure by those who described it.

With the new tower almost complete, the old *campanile* of Santa Reparata was finally torn down on September 19, 1357 and the bells were moved to their new home several months afterwards. One of the last ceremonial events they may have witnessed (July 12, 1357), before being moved, was placement of the first column of

---

948 See chapter 1.
949 On the sacred aspects of city walls see “Villani’s Descriptive Models of the City 1: Walking around Walls, in chapter 2.
950 Trachtenberg interprets the tower as a folded facade whose dimensions intertwine spatially with the baptistery and cathedral facades. See Trachtenberg, *Giotto's Tower*, 98.
951 Ibid., 123. The order to hang them dates to January 30, 1358 and on February 16 the contract was drawn up for the actual hanging. See Cesare Guasti, *Santa Maria del Fiore*, (Florence: M. Ricci, 1887), 116.
the body of the church itself after the interlude of the bell tower construction, which was accompanied by the sound of organs, trumpets, and the voices of the singing clergy.\textsuperscript{952} In the new construction, precautions had been taken to neutralize what would have been the strong lateral thrust of the swinging bells by making sure that the masonry for the upper section of the tower was precisely cut, in large blocks, and reinforced with metal clamps and iron chains in the masonry.\textsuperscript{953}

Although it dated all the way back to the founding of the monastery in the tenth century and had undergone successive building campaigns that are stratified in its vertical sections from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, the bell tower of the Badia (Figures 3.21, 3.21a) had also been polychromed. Evidence for this is found in the depiction of the tower in the Bigallo fresco of the Misericordia and traces of pigment found in the recent restoration (Figure 3.21b).\textsuperscript{954} Therefore, there was at least one precedent for the decoration of sacred bell towers in Florence.

It is also difficult to determine the number and names of the bells housed by the campanile of the cathedral. The early fourteenth century ordinal, preserved in the archives of the Opera del Duomo\textsuperscript{955} and in an eighteenth-century edition,\emph{ Mores et consuetudinis canonice florentine}, names at least four bells – two are referred to as “Squilla”, another as the “Clero”, and the largest as the “Cagnazza.”\textsuperscript{956} This text, which is one of three pre-fourteenth-century service books that survive for the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{952} ASF, Carte stroziane, serie II, 78, f. 45-47, 6. The construction site of the cathedral also had its own special work bell, which rang around the 24\textsuperscript{th} hour (at night fall) before which workers on the site could not leave work. This suggests that the usual hour for the cessation of labor was not always at darkness. See Torri, ed.,\emph{ L'ottimo commento della Divina Commedia [Andrea Lancia]. Testo inedito d'un contemporaneo di Dante...} 40.

\textsuperscript{953} Trachtenberg, \emph{Giotto's Tower}, 119.

\textsuperscript{954} Facchini and Trapolini, "Il campanile della Badia Fiorentina." 273. It is a matter of conjecture just how much destruction the bell tower suffered in 1307 when the commune ordered it to be cut down.

\textsuperscript{955} AOSMF, I.3.8.

\textsuperscript{956} "Mores et consuetudines ecclesiae florentinae." According to a 16\textsuperscript{th} century manuscript held in the Florentine state archives, there were seven bells in the 1520s. See ASF, \emph{Nuovi acquisti}, 987. I am indebted to Nicholas Eckstein for referring me to this manuscript. As study of this complete survey of Florentine inhabitants in the 1520s is forthcoming.
\end{flushleft}
cathedral of Florence, contains detailed information on the bell-ringing practices of the duomo.

The two Squilla would have been smaller bells, while the Clero would likely have been larger, corresponding to the “mezzana” often mentioned in bell towers containing multiple bells and charged with the task of ringing specific sequences. It was used to call all the clergy from all the churches in the city for festival functions.\textsuperscript{957} The Cagnazza, so-named, presumably, for its less than sonorous sound, may have been replaced in 1300 by the Ferrantina, named after its donor, Ferrantino de’ Ferrantini. According to a contemporary chronicle, amid the narrative account of the clashes between the White and Black factions in Florence at the beginning of the century, Ferrantino had it cast in honor of St. Zenobius, martyr and first bishop of Florence.\textsuperscript{958} This was, therefore, an extremely important act at such an explosive time to have been recorded in such a text. It may have marked an attempt, on the part of the diarist, to find sources and symbols of Florentine unity at time of fractious political uncertainty. It can be compared to Compagni’s attempt to use architecture and space – the baptistery, as a means to rhetorically persuade an audience about who they were as an urban community.\textsuperscript{959} In a similar manner, the gift of a bell for the cathedral, a building that no faction could claim as its own, might have been a gesture towards a unified notion of Florentine identity and would have followed the Florentine practice of casting a bell in times of political crises.

Sacred bells, in particular, had their own magical power that was located in the sound it made (Figure 22a). The religious bell was considered by scholastic thought to be the Christian answer to the silver trumpets of the priests of Moses, which

\textsuperscript{957} Robert Davidsohn, Firenze ai tempi di Dante, (Florence: Bemporad & Figlio, 1929), 104.
\textsuperscript{959} See “Precedents” in chapter five.
assembled the tribes to sacrifice. At Jericho, under the prophet Joshua, they were the trumpets that had the power to knock down city walls and therefore embodied the unified power of the church as it now sounded the truth of the New Testament.\footnote{Trachtenberg, Giotto's Tower, 106-07. The scholastic sources quoted by Trachtenberg are Hugh of Saint Victor, Speculum de Mysteriis Ecclesiae, I (Patrologiae Latina CLXXVII), Gulielmus Durandus, The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum: the Foundational Symbolism of the Early Church, its Structure, Decoration, Sacraments and Vestments, (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007), I, 4; IV, 6; Honorius of Autun, De campanis significatio, (H. Augusto-dunensis, Gemma anamae), Bk. I, 5 (Patrologiae Latina, CLXXII, 544 ff).}

Beyond this rather forced symbolic apparatus, religious bells were also rung to stave off the demons that threatened in the immediate atmosphere: phantoms, storms, and lightning. In order to unleash this power, bishops would, in the Middle Ages, perform a ritual exorcism, washing the bell with holy water, drying it, singing psalms and reciting prayers over it, covering it with unctions and oil, invoking the power of the silver trumpets for it, dedicating a saint to protect it, while lighting incense and putting myrrh under it.\footnote{On the ritual of symbolic, rather than actual baptism, see the entry on bells in the Catholic Encyclopedia, Herbert Thurston, "Bells," in The Catholic Encyclopedia, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907).} All of this – names, dedications, prayers, songs, smells, ritual purification and historical invocation all led to the protection of the community from harm. It shows why urban communities were so intimately connected to the bells that rang for them, enveloping them in a protective aura as they awoke to face yet another day. It was then the civic bell, the Leone that absorbed this promise by answering with six rings.

From the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance the diocese of Florence was a multiple and interlocking hierarchy of diverse privileges and exemptions, according to historian Richard Trexler, within which the bishop sought to assert his authority by unifying disparate liturgical practices, and this included the regulation of bells. Essentially, this meant affording primacy to the cathedral bells in ringing for divine
offices. This and several other characteristics of the Florentine soundscape emerge from the Mores. The first is that the bells of the campanile activated a corresponding weekly and annual rhythm of sounds that punctuated the daily soundscape. The cathedral bells all rang in a particular sequence to mark Vespers on Saturday evenings and Matins early on Sunday mornings to give a distinct sound to the day of the Lord, a day which was reserved for the church with the prohibition on labor.

On Saturday evening and Sunday Morning, therefore, these divine offices sounded like this: the first Squilla sounded for a long interval, joined then by the other Squilla in the same way. The Clero then joined them, ringing in a similar manner. After a pause, the Cagnazza was rung as well. When this sequence was finished, all four bells were rung together (Figure 3.22). The sequences began the same way but the Clero, which was associated with calling the clergy, was absent, and there was no celebratory ringing of all the bells together.

Weekdays had their own particular sub-rhythms, though it is not completely clear if they were rung at Vespers and Matins, or just Matins. Similarly, the sequence began with the sole voice of the squilla for a long interval, then the other Squilla continuously, but then the Cagnazza chimed in. The fourth sequence required a pause, after which the “squillonem” rang alone. The sequences began the same way but the Clero, which was associated with calling the clergy, was absent, and there was no celebratory ringing of all the bells together.

The regulations that governed the bells of the cathedral would also punctuate the regularity of the daily soundscape by giving a specific sonic quality to individual feast days that had a special significance in the Florentine liturgical calendar. These were masses, as opposed to canonical hours, but they marked the intersection of a larger seasonal calendar and the daily one. The most solemn feast days were defined

---

964 Ibid., 2. The Squillonem may have been a larger but still relatively modest bell.
by much more elaborate aural sequences than the weekly Sunday markers. The four part rhythm began with all the bells ringing together. The second part was the small bell alone, while for the third part these two bells were rung together. The fourth part repeated the first, with all the bells ringing together.

Easter, however, was highlighted by the sudden silence of all the city’s bells on Good Friday, which then reached its climax with the peals of joy that followed on Holy Saturday. The sequence however, really began with Lent, embracing the season in a gradual sonic crescendo leading to the holy day itself.\textsuperscript{965} It sounded like this: bells rang for the office of Sext, then the mass that followed. At None and Vespers the first and the second squilla were rung separately after the \textit{Sanctus Sanctus Sanctus} was said. They rang from that point until the recitations of the \textit{Pater Noster} began and after that prayer the third bell was rung (clerus?). The fourth bell (Cagnazza?) was rung after the \textit{Agnus Dei} but if it was a feast of the \textit{novem lectionum}, or Saturday, then all four bells rang together.

However, despite the fact that deferring to the cathedral’s priority in ringing bells was a conventional acoustic way of rendering honor to that institution and was enshrined in law, ancient privileges accorded to the Badia must have been the reason for its right to ring first for Vespers, after which the cathedral could ring for the same divine office.\textsuperscript{966} In Dante’s \textit{Paradiso} it is the sound of the bell of the Badia ringing the canonical hours, and not the cathedral, that stirs the memory of an echo of a Florence long past.\textsuperscript{967} Due to its venerable status within the Florentine community, the Badia

\textsuperscript{965} The various regulations concerning this season can be found in Ibid., 5-28.
\textsuperscript{966} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{967} \textit{Paradiso}, XV, 97-99. This passage will be discussed in “Constructing Space with Sound” below. According to Davidsohn, along with Terce and None, the Badia also announced Sext, what was theoretically the middle of the day. However, as was common throughout Europe, None and Vespers shifted gradually to an earlier time of the day by the later Middle Ages. See Dohrn-van Rossum, \textit{History of the Hour}, 30-33. In other words, these represented the principal divisions of the secular day, since most activities of state and labor were calibrated to them, such as the opening and closing of the courts and the beginning of the work day. See Davidsohn, \textit{Storia}, IV, 1, 312.
was exempt from certain synodal laws. For example, along with the parish churches under its jurisdiction, it did not have to wait for the cathedral bell to ring for the canonical hours, a privilege encoded in 1327.\textsuperscript{968} It was, according to Trexler, part of a series of provisions that demonstrated the federative character of the church’s hierarchy, where priories, chapels, and pievi would all exhibit the same honor to their superiors. This meant that, in some sense, the bell tower of the Badia was on an equal footing with the cathedral in terms of the authority of its aural announcements.

The last bell to be heard before Good Friday was the one that rang for the masses held in the baptistery for the Last Supper on Thursday.\textsuperscript{969} Unlike the anxiety and confusion produced by the silence of communal bells, silence was not a sign that the city’s ecclesiastical authorities were faltering but was part of the annual aural rhythm of Holy Week, where the minute and complex regulations governing the cathedral bells that spanned the distance between Lent to the Monday after Easter, were silenced on Good Friday, in imitation of the Apostles, who were also silent at that time. This even included the bishop’s mass at None, where the holy oil of unction was prepared. Toward the hour Sext on Holy Friday, instead of a bell, only the sound of wood was heard, so that the people could assemble, until the celebration of the divine mystery.\textsuperscript{970} At that time, a messenger was sent to the church of Santa Maria Sopra Porta, to light the candles and return with them to the cathedral, where the mass was celebrated in which the priest sang the \textit{Gloria in Excelsis Deo}. It was at this point that the silence of bells was broken and all the bells of the cathedral rang together,

\textsuperscript{968} Trexler, \textit{Synodal Law}, 31. Mendicant churches were also exempt.
\textsuperscript{969} “Mores et consuetudines ecclesiae florentinae,” 7-8.
\textsuperscript{970} Ibid., 8-10.
only once, and not more that day. Only when this single sound in unison was heard, could all the other churches ring their bells in response.

The editor of the Mores notes that it was Leo X, a Florentine pope, who issued the decree in 1521 that no church could ring before the cathedral on that Saturday, as a matter of honor owed to the mother church, and by extension, the Holy See. He points out that this provision was already in force in Florence by 1327 from decisions made under the authority of the first Synod, suggesting that Leo X consciously transferred a Florentine acoustic detail to Rome and made it law for the rest of Christendom. The same synodal law also forbade the ringing of any church bells (the Badia’s exception noted) for a divine office before the cathedral. This meant that everyday, instead of an acoustic exchange that was determined by a dialogic relationship between more or less equal partners, as was the case with the communal bells, Florentine churches enacted the hierarchy between center and periphery established by the official auditory dissemination of information in the city. In the case of the sacred soundscape, the motive was subordination rather than communication, since the bells were effectively sending the same message to each other in order to aurally display the vertical organization of religious institutions (Figures 3.23, 3.23a). The rectors of individual churches, moreover, had to be constantly taking account of the city’s sacred sounds. Each church that answered the cathedral bells acknowledged this over-arching acoustic hierarchy, defining the borders within which they submitted to the spatial authority of larger bells.

---

971 The time of this ring is not specified but most likely would have been toward evening, after the long and complex liturgy of Holy Saturday. Therefore, the sound of the bells would have been opening up Sunday, the first sacred sound of the day of resurrection.
972 “Mores et consuetudines ecclesiae florentinae,” 10-14.
973 Ibid., 14 (author’s note). Since the ordinal itself is older, the custom was practiced in Florence at least since the thirteenth century. For the dating of the ordinal, see Marica Tacconi, Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria del Fiore, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97-98.
974 See “Information Networks”
On Easter Sunday, Vespers and Matins were rung in the four sequences of the holiest feast days. The following Monday began a long and complicated day of activities that were punctuated by the sound of bells. The large bell rang after the popular mass in the baptistery, which led to another mass in the cathedral, which was followed by a long single pattern of all the bells ringing together to assemble the clergy and the populace. After a certain interval, all the bells rang again while the cross and vestments were being prepared. A third lengthy sounding of all the bells then followed, which led to the recitation of the Stetit Angelus during which, the procession, with all the clergy and the congregation, began to make its way to San Piero Maggiore to celebrate Terce, the high mass, and Sext. The text then makes it clear that in all such processions the bells of the churches along the parade route had to ring while the procession was passing by.\textsuperscript{975}

The sound of the remaining four feasts after Easter was much the same. However, in order to emphasize the point that the more bells that sounded, and the more often, and for the longer period they sounded, were sonic indicators of importance. For example, to the fourth day after Easter was added sound of all the bells ringing together, at length, for the procession to San Lorenzo itself.\textsuperscript{976}

Considering all of the other conventional and procedural rings that occurred, this had to be the noisiest week of the Florentine calendar (Figure 3.24). One only needs to add the procession to Santo Stefano a Ponte to complete the sacred itineraries which gave spatial imprint and sacred meaning to Dati’s spatial coordinates outlined in chapter two (Figure 3.24a).\textsuperscript{977}

\textsuperscript{975} "Mores et consuetudines ecclesiae florentiae," 21. The text also refers to singing during the procession of certain feast days.
\textsuperscript{976} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{977} Ibid., 34.
The *Mores* goes on to describe the sequence of sounds that characterized the major feast days and they all share several common traits. The practice of sounding Vespers on the day before a feast day, along with ringing for Matins on the following morning, the day of the fest itself, functioned as a mnemonic marker that reminded Florentines of the relative sanctity of any impending day. Even if such minute changes in ringing would have made it impossible to know what the exact feast was, its general qualities would have been clear. These sounds prepared the way by serving as devices that sanctified the whole city together. In addition, the bells were also part of a sacred dialogue that was constituted by the sounds of the mass and the singing of prayers. Bells interacted with voices in a formulaic incantation that spanned space and time. They linked masses between the baptistery and the cathedral, ritual illumination between the cathedral and Santa Maria Sopra Porta, and many churches to the cathedral during solemn processions. The voices chanting in rhythm inside the church were relayed by the rhythm of bells outside the church. They brought the sound of the holy office, the mass, or the prayer to city as a whole, sanctifying its spaces, caring for its souls, and calling bodies together.

Bells also linked the movements of the faithful around the city. They sent out, welcomed, and followed formal processions that wound their way through the city. Spatially, this is crucial to understanding the way that the sacred overlaid its own topography onto the city. If the civic topography was one governed by institutional dialogue that sought to construct an informational monologue, the sacred topography represented the hierarchy of churches while it bound together local sacred spaces. The civic soundscape attempted to erase the differences of community, replacing them with a common Florentine voice, while the diocese acknowledged those differences even though it subjected them to an inferior status. When the bells of other churches rang at the approach of the procession, they were responding to the authority for the
cathedral that had honored them with its presence. These bells had their own particular sound and the spaces in which they rang had their own particular architectural configuration. Therefore, each site constructed its own unique aural architectural imprint that signified the relations between parish and cathedral. It made present local difference within the context of a procession that had united all the clergy and the populace together to hear that difference as part of a larger integrated whole. That larger whole was different from the one that was constructed by the Leone or the bell of the Podestà, whose sound sought to bind an ideal common civic identity. That difference was made clear to everyone as they moved through several sonic subscapes along the procession route. At the same time, Florentines could map out the sacred topography of their city by listening to ebb and flow of bells as they rang in sequence throughout the city, following the parade aurally and knowing just where the holy procession was at any given moment.

The relay of sounds between the cathedral and its subject churches, between bells and the parallel movement of the procession, was a way of extending the sacred power of the ritual liturgy to sanctify individual neighborhoods of the city and generating a sense of what it meant to belong to a hierarchy of sacred communities within the city of Florence. It bound neighborhood affiliation in a symbolic way to a central authority in a similar manner that the city’s militias, organized by neighborhoods, assembled to defend the central government in times of crisis. In the latter case, militias had to follow their neighborhood gonfaloni (standards), while in the former, parishioners followed the sound of their local bells. The visual relationship of the flags was transposed into the aural relationship of sounds but both systems symbolically demonstrated the proper relationships between government and

978 The manner in which local spiritual communities were bound up in the liturgical calendar may have been the result of a new “spirit of canonical order and codification promoted by the Florentine bishop.” Tacconi, Cathedral and Civic Ritual.
governed, church and the faithful, between central towers and neighborhood ones, all of this in decidedly spatial terms.

Despite the hierarchy, Florence remained a fundamentally de-centered urban ensemble. What the sacred topography of the procession demonstrated was the way in which the sacred character of the city had to be mobile and flexible. As Edward Muir has stated, this mobility of the sacred “conspired to give every major neighborhood and its chief lay patrons a chance to demonstrate their charisma to the entire city.”979

The interchange between the aural dimensions of the sacred and the civic cycle was augmented by the rising swell of the Lenten season and the intrusion of a variety of feast days. Between the Badia, the Bargello, the Palazzo Vecchio and the cathedral, Florentines witnessed the interaction of allied but separate regimes of acoustic meaning. This particular convergence of sounds, therefore, opened up both civic and sacred moments in which the populace was united both politically and spiritually. They were reminded of daily injunctions, legal proscriptions, working hours, functioning markets, common mealtimes, moments of ritual import (prayers, transubstantiation), their civic loyalties and obligations (the legitimate regime and their duty to defend it), as well as their spiritual friends and advocates (local saints). In this way the entire range of sounds made by bells transformed the diurnal, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual progression of time into sonic landscapes full of expectations that contained their own iconographic matrix. They were both medium and message, facilitating exchange and controlling information flows. They were a technique of representation and part of the urban soundscape that provided a certain way of understanding the specificity of one’s physical environment. They made

---

979 Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner," 162. Muir uses the example of the Feast of the Magi, where three of the city’s quarters chose a “king” to participate in the procession that took place in the fourth, distributing the contents of the sacred in much the same way the central government divided offices. For example, the banditori were chosen from each of the city’s four districts.
architecture speak in a specific and concrete way and they filled urban space with the
sound of its own identity. They guided civic action, regulated information, warned,
chastised, and comforted those that were listening.

It was this density of meaning, this complexity of urban sounds dominated by
bells that would gradually be supplanted by the abstract regularity of the sound of the
mechanical clock that foreshadowed a more universal regulation of time. This would
not happen overnight and there is no evidence of a general sense of anxiety over the
transition. The soundscape of a city like Florence contained enough flexibility in its
time systems to be governed by a range of temporal rhythms. As long as the bells
rang in their customary way, they supported the deep connections between past and
present, as well as expectations concerning the future that were necessary to maintain
a robust social fabric. In fact, Pucci himself, as prescient as ever, alluded to the way
the present not only maintained the past but reminded the present of its inexorable
passing, much as bells could hold onto that present, ultimately, only in a limited way.
The sound of the bell, by this very fact, allowed him to experience how each moment
of the present – the evening, the night, and the morning (all the primary moments
marked by the sound of bells) – tumbled relentlessly into the past, leaving the heritage
of all human capacities in ruins:

Alas, time, the hours, and bells, which every hour bring
to my mind with sound, remind me how often to human
capacities end in ruin; and I think upon it, alas, evening,
night, and morning as it [time] flees from each present
moment.980

980 "Lasso, che ’l tempo, e ’l’ora, e le campane / che ognor col suon mi danno nella mente / mi fanno
rimembrar quanto sovente / a morte vanno le potenze umane; / e penso lasso, sera, notte, e mane / come
si fugge ogni tempo presente…” Manni, "Notizie storiche," vii.
The inevitable wreckage of all things human by time was certainly a time-honored cliché for a minor poet such as Pucci, but he specifically links an emerging concept of a disappearing present to the sound of a bell. He gives expression to the modern notion of how time was something that could be lost even before it could be grasped, as it inexorably receded from the meridian of the present. Such sounds mediated understanding between oneself and the temporal dimensions within which one lived. As Corbin conceptualizes it, bell ringing constituted a now broken system of experiencing time and space. It bore witness to a different relation to the world in which reading the auditory environment involved the construction of identities,\textsuperscript{981} between neighbors, institutions, the living and the dead, as well as future generations.

3.8 “\textit{la quale si sente per tutta la città sonare: Constructing Space Through Sound}"

I have already situated architecture and urban space within the realm of perception, and I have used Schmarsow’s interpretation of architecture as enclosed space in order to emphasize, in art historical terms, that meaning is based in experience, and that the viewer brings architecture into being by moving through it, by perceiving it bodily through the extension of the body into space.\textsuperscript{982} It was at such moments that Florentines connected individually, socially, politically, and festively to the built environment around them. This spatial dynamic is even more complex with the addition of sound, since it adds a particularly temporal dimension to the meaning of certain spaces. Sounds reflecting off buildings defined a particular place so that it

\textsuperscript{981} Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}, xix.
had a particular sonic quality at the same time as it allowed one to imagine, without seeing, the dimensions and aspects of those spaces.\textsuperscript{983} Bells, therefore, were rung to allow sailors to avoid dangerous reefs near the shore and to alert travellers to the existence of hospitals.\textsuperscript{984} This orientation in space was a crucial aspect of a sound that was meant to be welcoming, a signal of safety to those of this world while it drove malignant supernatural forces away. Therefore, hearing familiar sounds allowed one to situate oneself in space, and to navigate to and through a city that did not have many long and straight vistas with visual landmarks to guide one’s path. One could hear the bell of the cathedral or the town hall from virtually anywhere in the city, but only see them from certain distinct, if consciously choreographed, points.

When bells sounded they both created temporary zones and reinforced already existing ones. In the latter case, one only need point to the intense, if sometimes ridiculous, attachment to local neighborhoods by residents who defined themselves by the sound and sight of the bell and \textit{campanile} that dominated their territory, which is embedded in the concept of \textit{campanilismo}.\textsuperscript{985} In times past however, the range of the parish bell also defined one’s social identity by creating the limits of one’s local world. Each time it rang one knew that one was at home, in a familiar civic territory made sacred by the sound of a church bell. Such limits were felt more strongly than the abstract borders between jurisdictions. Therefore, the division of the city into 16 \textit{gonfaloni} must have been a technique of reducing the attachment to parishes by splitting some and uniting others into larger units, while attempting to instil a more general loyalty to the commune itself.\textsuperscript{986}

\textsuperscript{983} Imagine the way the same sounds are modified by different environments; inside a cathedral, on the narrow \textit{calli} or canals of Venice, under arches and in large open squares.

\textsuperscript{984} Blavignac, \textit{La cloche}, 167.

\textsuperscript{985} See the definition of \textit{campanilismo} in \textit{Grande dizionario}, II, 599.

\textsuperscript{986} This is suggested by the fact that the division of the city into \textit{sestri}, as outlined by the 1325 statutes, was based on clusters of parishes, whose borders were common knowledge since those borders.
The structure of the dissemination of the official rhetoric of the state, therefore, sought to maintain – dramatize even – the hierarchy of spaces within the city. Around 1349, when he gave up his post of bell ringer and took up a position as one of the city’s four town criers, or banditori, Antonio Pucci simply changed his position within a hierarchical and complex system in which official information was disseminated in urban environments at a time before the technologies of modern mass media. He is also mentioned as approvatore (auditor or comptroller) in tandem with his duties as town-crier. This position gave him access to one of the things most valued by Florentines: information. He had access to both council meetings and was required to attend meetings of the priors themselves. Being inside both palaces (Bargello and Palazzo Vecchio), therefore, meant that he was at the intersection of the generation of official news and first wave of the circulation of rumors.

The piazza was the first circle within the expanding wave of sound as it traveled from the center to the periphery. The process by which the government informed its citizens about certain events starkly revealed how the emission of official happiness was carefully framed by particular sequences of sounds. Antonio Pucci was right at the centre of the city as a noise-making machine, a sonic non-verbal language that was, unlike written texts, universally understood. In his capacity as banditore, communal bell-ringer, versifier of Villani, author of sensual love lyrics as well as paraphrases of the gospels, and as an improvisatory storyteller and singer

---

were not defined. Precise borders of parishes may prove impossible to fix although a general pattern may produce useful information about the political redistricting of parish neighborhoods.
987 One of the approvatore’s duties was to account for the obligatory sureties put up by magnates.
988 "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," I, xliii.
989 Approvatori were required remain in the Bargello until the Podestà and his judges descended to render justice; i.e., at the third ring of the tochus iuris. Ibid. McKenzie quotes Morpurgo for the requirement that banditori be present at meetings of the Priori. Pucci, Le noie, xxv.
990 Pucci, Le noie, xxiv-xxv.
991 This is a critical point, since it constituted a universal literacy that bound all classes together even as it denied certain groups the right to respond in kind.
(cantimpana), Pucci was a prime example of how the civic and the secular were mediated through the urban soundscape. He would have been well aware of how the sound of bells created a spatial jurisdiction. The boundary markers laid by the city’s surveyors may have fixed precisely the thresholds between public and private property but persons certainly were not, as Benedetto Dei may have been, always capable of deriving any meaningful notion of where they were by the abstract and very complicated system of measured distances. Bells that rang to open markets only governed the extent of that economic space, and were therefore, relatively small. Church bells created a temporary sacred zone that amplified the sound of the mass. Alarm bells for fires functioned in relay, where the bell of the nearest parish church created a prohibited zone, while the bell of the commune alerted the whole city. The Leone, the commune’s largest bell, had to be loud enough to be heard by all Florentines because the space in which it was heard signified the legal threshold of the city’s authority. The city was not fully itself without the constant repetition of a sound that legally united a civic body.

This is clearly evident in the practical reasoning in a legal opinion arrived at by Albericus de Rosate, a fourteenth-century jurist, in a case involving Padua’s practice of doubling fines for crimes committed at night. Albericus noted that the sound that separated the day from the night, that is, the evening bell (campanae deputatae ad segregandum diem, a nocte), which was common to all cities (sicut communiter est in omnibus civitatibus), and therefore signaled the double penalty for crimes committed, was the moment after the third sounding of that bell (post tertium sonum campanae). From this, another legal problem emerged from a case in Bologna to which he refers. An argument was made that, even though the people in the fortress (castro) of S.

---

991 Wilson, Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence.
992 Albericus de Rosate ad D.2.12.8, Commentarii in primam digesti veteris partem, (Venice: 1585), 146v.
Pietro could not hear the evening bell, due to the distance from where it rang, they should still be punished by the double fine (Figures 3.25-3.25c). Albericus, however, argued the contrary position. Noting that the end of the day was determined in an arbitrary way by the sounding of the bell, he maintained that the law was only valid in the places where that bell was actually heard, and not beyond. This should be the case, he argued, because it was only day in the places where the sun reached the earth and not in any other. Therefore, even when it was night in one place, the sun was shining in other places.  

Albericus makes a remarkable argument about the way in which time and space were not absolute categories but relative, malleable entities. This was so because sound penetrated space, wantonly annihilating architectural thresholds and any pretence they had to concrete permanence. Space, on the other hand, constantly denied time its universal advance by slipping from its reaches across large distances. Albericus understood how sound was the mediator between the two. Time and space were local. Sound determined the spatial limits of legislation while it also set the temporal margins of those very same spaces.

The natural day was only a useful reference, not a universal marker of time. If you did not hear the bell, it was not night where you were, nor did you belong to the community it brought into being and you would not therefore, be subject to its laws. All manner of days and nights could happily exist side by side. For inhabitants in a city like Florence, Amphion’s lyre did not have to be understood metaphorically as a remote and fantastic origin myth because they experienced the sonic creation and maintenance of civic space literally, everyday, from morning to evening.

The implications of Albericus’ legal argument placed the sound of the communal bell as the mediator between government and governed. It was the

---

993 Ibid.
reminder and seal of a pact that linked them both within a series of rights and obligations. Such obligations were acoustically defined within a series of fluid spatial territories and itineraries. They marked the presence of transitional auditory zones that accompanied and guided urban dwellers. The link between bells and space has already been alluded to in the discussion of the evening bell, where people were accompanied by bells as they traversed the city and made their way home for the evening. The town of Chieri, mentioned above, was only the most explicit example, while in Pisa taverns had to be closed by the second ring of the evening bell in order for drinkers to be home by the third. In Bologna, the morning bell had to sound for as long as it took a person to exit the city gates and travel a distance of one mile.994

The legal dimensions that surrounded the way bells created spatial zones are latent within the conflicts over the right, not only ring to a bell, but to cast one in the first place. Battles over the size of both towers and bells were directly related to their ability to govern space. This was precisely the point. The right to have a bell, particularly a large one, meant that one had the capacity to bring people together. It was this particular power that had to be controlled. The bells of the mendicants, convents, and hospitals, as Trexler points out, had been drawing away parishioners from parish churches, which led, of course, to subsequent losses in revenue (Figure 3.26). As a result, new institutions within certain parishes were caught within an elaborate system of protecting parish rights.995

This was the case in the 1424, when the nuns of the convent of Le Murate, located within the parochial boundaries belonging to the nuns of Sant’Ambrogio, won the right to cast a small bell (campanetta) to place in their campanile, but only if it did

---

994 See the examples in Lattes, "La campana serale," 168-70.
995 Trexler, Synodal Law, 121. The Mendicants formed the focus of each district, rather than a parish church, so that their spatial jurisdictions were both religious and political simultaneously.
not exceed 100 pounds (Figures 3.27, 3.27a). The nuns of Sant’Ambrogio exhibited the same resolve to steadfastly maintain their prominence as the primary acoustic element of the area in a dispute with a certain Fra Giuliano. For an oratory he was constructing next to their properties between the Porta alla Croce and the Porta alla Giustizia, he was given permission only to build a small bell tower (campaniletto) with a bell that cost only 80 florins, which would have greatly limited its size and subsequent sonic range (Figure 3.27). In a contract drawn up by the notary Paolo d’Amerigo di Bartolo Grassi, this right to build a tower and cast a bell locked Giuliano into a series of restrictions and obligations to the nuns. He was not allowed to celebrate masses, observe the canonical hours, or administer sacraments without the express permission of the abbess of Sant’Ambrogio. In other words, any of the times that required him to ring that bell were only possible at the discretion of Sant’Ambrogio and its privileged position within the acoustic community of Florence. Breaching such an agreement gave Sant’Ambrogio the right to destroy both the oratory and the bell tower.

The right to destroy architectural property, as chapter 1 has shown, was part of a developing ethics of urban planning that carried latent within it an ideal of integrated networks of public and private, open and clear spaces. In just the same way, the soundscape of Florence had to be coordinated as a series of integrated frequencies. Such minute specifications of how the city’s bells were rung reflected the legislative care necessary to prevent the confusion produced by the unchecked profusion of

996 ASF, CRS, 79, 169 (unpaginated, entry 77).
997 Ibid. (entry 146) “16 July, 1477 Diciassì Moriti canonico fiorentino, e Bernardo Buongirolami danno un lodo tra il monastero di S. Ambrogio, e tra Fra Giuliano di Bartolomeo del terzo ordine di S. Francesco nel quale dichiarano, che e’ stato lecito a detto Fra Giuliano di erigere, e continuare a erigere un’oratorio dentro la parrocchia di S. Ambrogio, in onore del arcangelo Rafaello vicino, e fuori delle mura di Firenze tra la porta alla croce, e la porta della Giustizia, con un campaniletto, e una campana di fiorini 80 = circa, purché non vi si dica messa, ne’ si facciiano ufizi, né vi si sottervi(?), né vi si amministrino sacramenti senza licenza della badessa: e con obbligo di dare a titolo di censo(?) per la mattina di S. Ambrogio due falche di cera bianca di fiorini 1 =, e mancando a ciò le monache possano farlo distruggere.”
noises resulting from an unregulated soundscape. Left alone, the auditory landscape risked dissolving into complete aural chaos but the willingness to negotiate the torturous legal labyrinth of rights, privileges, and duties that were demanded by competing interests, as well as the enactment of strict legislation for transgressions, is a testament to how crucial a well-functioning soundscape was in the planning ethos of the pre-modern city. Clear sounds meant clear messages and they were as important an element of urban space as streets and squares. Or to put it another way, a meaningless, overloaded landscape of sounds was as unwelcome and frightening as streets and squares clogged with obstacles and violence.

This was the reason why winning the right to build a tower and ring a bell was so meticulously controlled, and why the policies of destruction were sometimes brutally enforced. Such was the case in 1307, when a beleaguered city under a papal interdict attempted to levy a tax on the Badia. In response, the monks closed their doors on the city’s officials sent to collect the funds. They also, significantly, sounded their bells, causing the neighborhood’s poor (gente minuta), along with other dubious and dishonorable types (malandrini) in the neighborhood to rise up in a fury (furore) with the support of their powerful neighbors, against the officials. As Villani recounts the episode, the commune took drastic action precisely because the monks had rung their bell.998 They ordered the destruction of their bell tower, and it was cut in half,

998 Villani, *Nuova cronica*, IX, 89. “del presente mese di luglio del detto anno feciono sopra i cherici una grande e grave imposta; e perché non voleano pagare, più ingiurie furono fatte a’ cherici, e a’ loro osti e fittaiuoli… E la Badia di Firenze, andandovi l’ufficiale isattore con sua famiglia, i monaci chiuso le porte, e sonarono le campane; per la qual cosa dal popolo minuto e da’ malandrini, con sospiignimento di loro possenti vicini grandi e popolani che non gli amavano, furono corsi a furore, e tutti rubati. E poi il Comune, perch’aveano sonato, volesa tagliare il campanile da piè, e disfeccionne di sopra presso che la metade; la quale furia fue molto biasimata per la bona gente di Firenze” (…in the present month of July of the said year they placed a large tax on the monks; and because they did not want to pay it, more injustices were made against them and their tenants… And when the tax official and his staff went there, the monks closed the doors and rang the bells; at the sound of which they chased with fury and robbed by the popolo minuto and other ruffians with the support of powerful neighbors, both grandi and popolani, who had no love for the officials. And then the commune, because the monks had sounded their bell, wanted to cut down the bell tower to the ground, and they
effectively silencing the Badia’s voice, its ability to call the faithful, or the hated underclass, or anyone else, for that matter. After the actual destruction of the bell tower of the Badia, Villani notes that the actual destruction of the bell tower – the one that was so much a part of the city’s daily civic life – was felt to be a blasphemy in and of itself – “fue molto biasimata per la buona gente di Firenze.”

In light the Badia’s importance to the daily sonic rhythms of the city, the loss of this campanile would have been a major auditory disruption. This may help to explain why the council of one hundred granted funds in 1310 to help the Badia rebuild its bell tower, which was completed in 1330. After so many years it may have been obvious that the monastery did not have the means to carry out such a large project itself and that this bell tower was considered part of a larger civic soundscape that belonged not only to the Badia but to the whole of Florence.

Across the river, in 1396, a neighbourhood dispute arose between the collegiate church of San Frediano and Santa Maria del Carmine (Figure 3.27b). In a legal procedure, the prior of San Frediano attempted, but ultimately failed, to prevent the Carmelites from building a campanile to ring their own bells just a short distance away.

What these cases reveal is what was at stake in the right to sound the bells for divine offices. It also points to how sacred territories were defined and mapped out across the city. The size of a territory corresponded to the size of a bell. The bell was the voice that turned urban space into sacred territory and creation of such territories

took it down to about half its height; an anger which was much disdained by the good people of Florence.


Villani mentions that it was erected at the request of the Cardinal Legate messer Giovanni degli Orsini of Rome, the Signore of the Badia. Villani, Nuova cronica, XI, 175.

had to be carefully negotiated. The importance of such temporary spatial zones is made clear in the concession made to Sant’Ambrogio in a decision reached by Urban V on October 26th, 1362. It allowed the nuns to celebrate mass while the city was under interdict, as long as they celebrated it beyond the walls of the city and provided that the doors of the church remained closed, the bells were not rung, and the offices were sung or celebrated in low voices (voce bassa). 1002 Within the confines of the church, therefore, the mass sanctified space. However, the closed doors and silent bells prevented the sound of the mass from leaking out of the church and sanctifying the proscribed streets and spaces of the city. Most importantly, however, the concession demonstrated how the sacred space of the city was indeed created by sound that emanated from the consecrated space of the church, filling the spaces of everyday life with the promise and mystery of faith and salvation. This exception makes it clear that for the nuns to worship they had to both remove themselves from the territory of the city and hold mass outside the walls, but it also displays a certain anxiety about the sound of the mass traveling beyond the closed doors and stipulates that the divine offices be done with low voices. Therefore, mass was understood as a specific type of sound that, just like a bell, had to be heard to be real. It had to exist in space in order to perform its function.

Such micro-management and intense confrontation over the right to make noise with a bell may seem like a trivial game of quibbling between self-interested actors. However, revenue was a real issue, and the ability to make one’s message heard was a matter of serious import. It was a matter of life and death for the

1002 ASF, CRS, 79, 169 (entry 32). “Il pontefice Urbano V concede alle monache di S. Ambrogio, possit(?) fuori delle mura di Firenze di poter celebrare li ufizi divini in tempo di interdetto a porte chiuse, senza suono di campane, e a voce bassa” (Pope Urban V conceded to the nuns of Sant’Ambrogio, that they may celebrate the divine offices outside the walls of Florence in times of interdict with closed doors, without ringing the bells, and in a low voice). I would like to thanks Saundra Weddle for bringing this particular set of disputes to my attention.
Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola, who, in 1498 was branded a heretic and was condemned to death by fire. When communal officials were coming to arrest him, his brothers rang the bell of San Marco, the now known as the piagnona, in alarm (a stormo) and a loyal community heard the call and rose up to defend the condemned (Figures 3.27c, 3.27d). Ringing the bell successfully followed a tumultuous time as partisans and enemies of Savonarola clashed in the streets and even in the cathedral. Landucci the diarist, sympathetic to the friars at San Marco, describes how their opponents would not even allow them to speak. With the whole city in uproar, none of the friars supporters dared to speak. Therefore, the sound of the bell was their only means left of defending their message. As punishment, the bell was ceremonially whipped in the Piazza della Signoria, paraded through the city in shame, and then exiled to the Observant Franciscans of San Salvatore (Figure 3.27e).

Imagine a modern corollary in the government’s licensing of the public airwaves. Essentially, such licenses give the right to certain institutions to fill a certain bandwidth with sound. Like all soundscapes, both radio frequencies and the audible environment had saturation points, at which point individual messages no longer can carry meaning effectively as they are subsumed into the inarticulateness of a garbled white noise.

The church customary that defined bell ringing for the cathedral in Florence was compiled by the bishop to make sure that an organized ecclesiastical hierarchy

---

1003 Landucci, 8 April, 1498.
1004 Landucci, 7 April, 1498. “…per modo che non era niuno di quelli del Frate che potessi parlare.”
1005 Landucci, 8 April, 1498.
1006 The bell was forged in 1435 at the expense of Cosimo de’ Medici and it had called the city to listen to the Friar’s sermons or participate in his bonfires of the vanities. It rang for the dying Lorenzo when the Dominican friar went to give him absolution. But for the call to arms the bell was the object of punishment by the Signoria. It was lowered from its bell tower to the sounds of the shouting mob while the executioner lashed it with the whip. Then, like a condemned prisoner, it was paraded through the city in a wagon and brought to the Franciscan church of San Salvatore al Monte. It later sounded for Florentine liberty during the siege of 1529. See Ubaldo Scotti, "'La Piagnona di S. Marco in Firenze' in L'Illustratore florentino. Calendario storico per l'anno 1908, ed. Guido Carocci, (Florence: Tipografia domenicana, 1907), 51-56.
honored not only the mother church, but also the territory over which it presided. The entire diocese, the city itself, was gathered into a spiritual unity defined by space. Each church that answered the cathedral bells on Holy Saturday acknowledged this over-arching territory by virtue of the fact that they were within audible range. When they rang their bells, they defined the space within which they submitted to the spatial authority of larger bells.

This was only part of the official rhetoric that linked the sound of bells to a spatial jurisdiction. As much as bells disciplined the body politic, they were also deployed as personal and social markers of space, zones that were profoundly temporal and therefore needed the soundscape to memorialize them in the past, sanctify them in the present, and project them into the future.

Evidence for this is found in Florentines’ deep attachment to their communal bells. Along with the Florentine army’s vermillion carroccio and military standard, Villani describes, with great pride, the bell called the Martinella (Figure 3.10c).\textsuperscript{1007} The Martinella was a communal bell that was in the care of the church of Santa Maria Sopra Porta and is mentioned as the “campana di guerra” (war bell) as early as 1123, when the city went to war against Fiesole.\textsuperscript{1008} During the month that Florentine forces were officially assembling for war, this bell was placed, along with a burning torch,\textsuperscript{1009} on the arch of the Porta Santa Maria, one of the city’s former gates that defined the ancient heart of the city and recalled the first medieval expansion of walls in the eleventh century (Figure 3.28). It would ring continuously, day and night, until the troops were scheduled to march out to battle, as they did in 1260, to Siena. This sound was also a declaration of war, since it was accompanied by the voices of the heralds.

\textsuperscript{1007} Villani, Nuova cronica, 7, 75. The bell was also known as the bell of the “bell of the asses” (campana degli asini). The church where it was kept, Santa Maria Sopra porta, was subsequently known as San Biagio, which today houses a branch of the communal library.
\textsuperscript{1008} Davidsohn, Storia, I, 1025-26.
\textsuperscript{1009} Ibid.
announcing the enemy against whom the military campaign was about to be waged.\textsuperscript{1010} The \textit{Martinella} was an extremely mobile bell. It accompanied the Florentine armies into battle so that its ring always represented the presence of Florentine territory out in the field. It was taken down from the gate and placed in a wooden tower (\textit{castello}) built expressly for this purpose and carried out of the city by those same troops in the \textit{carroccio} that they brought out into battle.\textsuperscript{1011} Out in the theater of war, it was used to coordinate the movement of troops along with the military standard. Locating the bell of the enemy was also the way in which the Florentine forces, in May 1260, were able to identify its positions.\textsuperscript{1012} For Villani, this bell, along with the red and white standard that flew from the \textit{carroccio} – a sound and an image – stood for noble pride of the old Florentine popolo at the same time that it organized its troops in the field.\textsuperscript{1013} It was both symbol and practical tool.

Villani’s digression, in the midst of his narrative, sets up the importance of the Martinella and the \textit{carroccio} for the identity of the Florentine Popolo and serves to heighten the tragic dimensions of the looming defeat at Montaperti that the text is about to describe. By September the \textit{carroccio} and the \textit{Martinella} were practically all that remained of the shattered Florentine forces. Abandoned on the battlefield they were both taken as trophies by the victorious Sienese. However, in a move that lends credence to the profound attachment Florentines had to the Martinella, Villani does not follow the bell to the place of shame.\textsuperscript{1014} Instead, the final image he leaves the reader with is of the bell and its chariot standing as a lone memorial to a broken

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{1010} Ibid., II, 573.
\footnotetext{1011} Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, 7, 75.
\footnotetext{1012} “...in su uno oggetto rilevato che si vedea dalla cittade, una torre, ove teneano la campana...” Ibid.
\footnotetext{1013} Ibid. “Di queste due pompe del carroccio e della campana si reggea la signorevole superbia del popolo vecchio e de' nostri antichi nell'osti.” That pride (superbia) of the old popolo referred to the regime that rule between 1250 and 1260.
\footnotetext{1014} Without citing any references, Artusi and Lasciarrea claim that the bell and the \textit{carroccio} were taken by the Sienese and, in contrast to conventional practice, not paraded into the city as symbols of victory, but were never seen by Florentines again. See Artusi and Lasciarrea, \textit{Campane, torri e campanili}, 40.
\end{footnotes}
Popolo and its now ruined pride, a monument to the thousands that lay dead on the silent battlefield and whose own analogous silence would now always mark the military loss it had witnessed. This may have been the metaphor to which Davidsohn was referring when he states that it was after this defeat that the Martinella fell silent, its sound only a painful memory of this Florentine catastrophe. The memory that remained embedded in the Martinella was one that was so profoundly tragic precisely because it no longer sounded and was forever attached to this momentous defeat.

In terms of the acoustic creation of space, what is also important is the way in which the Martinella defined a territory that was preparing for battle. Before it was lost, the bell was transferred to a gate that must have still remained from the first communal circuit of walls from the eleventh century. What was significant about the bell being placed on the arch of a gate rather than ringing from a bell tower, where it was more visible and closer to the community it rang for? As a range of different sources have made clear, this gate stood at the point of several conflicting communal identities, including magnate justice, marriage pacts, class conflict, vendetta, domestic life, horse races, and economic trade. This was the city’s main north-south axis, and, by ringing the bell here, the commune was also using a bell to sanctify the space of the street by clearing it, temporarily, of other more local and perhaps unwanted associations in order to focus the city’s collective consciousness on the need to face

---

1015 “Ma la grande mortalità e presura fue del popolo di Firenze di ciascuna casa, e di Lucca, e degli altri amici che furono a la detta battaglia. E così s’adonò la rabbia dell’ingrato e superbo popolo di Firenze, e ciò fu uno martedì, a di III di settembre, gli anni di Cristo MCCLX; e rimasevi il carroccio, e la campana detta Martinella, con innumerabile preda d'arnesi di Fiorentini e di loro amistate. E allora fu rotto e annullato il popolo vecchio di Firenze…” Villani, Nuova cronica, 7, 78.
1016 Davidsohn, Storia, IV, I, 313.
1017 Villani is not clear whether the bell was simply in the care of the church and was only brought out to ring in times of war, or whether it was used in times of peace by the church itself.
1018 On these see chapter 2, “Percorrere la città.” This was exactly the location where Buondelmonti snubbed his peers who had gathered there to make a wedding pact.
1019 See chapter 1.
the imminent threat of an external enemy. And since the army departed the city from the church of Santa Maria sopra Porta, which then faced the Mercato Nuovo, from the center of which the carroccio waited,\textsuperscript{1020} they would have passed through the gate’s now ritual threshold along a street that the government had turned into a symbolic military staging ground. It was another way in which this main thoroughfare was defined as communal space within the context of the anxiety of war.

Where, when, and how bells were rung were powerful markers of urban memory. Unlike permanent monuments, they did not become invisible to inhabitants who passed them everyday so that they retreated into the urban unconscious, necessarily displaced from the realm of urban stimuli. They resonated as sounds that evoked a whole range of associations, recreating specific spaces out of the chaos of one’s present. For example, in a passage from the Commedia already cited in the context of the daily soundscape, Dante lamented a Florence long past that still echoed in the sound of those bells that rang for Terce and Nones from the campanile of the Badia:

\begin{quote}
Florence, within her ancient ring of walls that ring from which she still draws tence and Nones sober and chaste, lived in tranquility.\textsuperscript{1021}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1020} Today this spot is marked on the pavement in the center of the market.

\textsuperscript{1021} “Fiorenza dentro da la cerchia antica / ond'ella toglie ancora e terza e nona / si stava in pace, sobria e pudica.”” \textit{Paradiso}, XV, 97-99. Most Trecento commentators of Dante locate these sounds as those made by the bells of the campanile of the Badia. “Sulle ditte mura vecchie si è una chiesa chiamata la Badia là quale chiesa suona terza e nona e l'altre ore, alle quali li lavoranti delle arti entrano ed esceno dal lavoro,” Jacopo della Lana (1324-28); “Firenze dentro dagli antichi muri della città, ond'ella toglie ancora i suoni dell'ore del die, che dà una Badia (detta la Badia di Firenze),” L'Ottimo Commento, 1333. This commentator has been tentatively identified as Andrea Lancia, the notary who translated the Florentine statutes of 1355. See Azzetta, \textit{Ordinamenti}, ?? “infra quos antiquos muros adhuc a cathedrali Ecclesia et ab Abbatia sua tollitur, idest pulsatur principaliter ad tertiam et nonam horam,” Pietro Alighieri, 1340-42; “ubi certius et ordinatus pulsabantur horae quam in aliqua alia ecclesia civitatis; quae tamen hodie est satis inordinata et neglecta, ut vidi, dum audirem venerabilem praeeptorem meum Boccaciu de Certaldo legentem istum nobilibet poetam in dicta ecclesia. Ideo dicit: ond'ella, idest, a quo circulo interiori praedicta ipsa Florentia, toglie ancora e terza e nona, et sic de aliis horis,” Benvenuto da Imola, 1375-80; “Sulle dette mura vecchie si è una ecclesia chiamata la Badia, la quale ecclesia suona terza e nona e altre ore, alle quali gli lavoranti dell'arti entrano et escono
The Porta Santa Maria, which held the Martinella, was likely one of the only concrete reminders of the ancient circuit of walls to which Dante refers (Figure 3.29). The city at peace – sober and chaste – that lay within those ancient walls of the city was long forgotten as it now spilled out from its original Roman grid into its medieval suburbs. However, it was brought back into vivid memory by the sound of a bell for Dante. That bell conjured up and overlaid the city’s past onto the present in a spatial way in the mind of the narrator. What is remarkable is the way in which Dante associated ancient Florentine virtue with a particular space that was dredged from the past by a certain sound. Not only did the bells of the Badia mark time throughout the day; the sonic rhythms that emanated from its campanile also excavated the memory of the privileged urban territory enclosed within the long-disappeared eleventh-century walls.

Dante’s city was a complex hierarchy in which bells defined limits and borders even when the actual structures, those city walls, were no longer there to guarantee them. They created space much more fluidly and convincingly than the complicated language needed to define the city’s political jurisdictions. They could overlay historically and socially constructed topographies onto legislatively defined ones. They played rituals of inclusion against borders of exclusion. It was precisely this space, the ancient urban core, that guaranteed, for Florentines such as Dante, a space which “was the proper setting for the enactment of honorable civic life,” against the morally debased spaces of outlying neighborhoods.\footnote{Eckstein, The Distric of the Green Dragon, 6.} It betrayed a certain anxiety about those who dwelt on the periphery by attempting to separate them off audibly from the ideal memory of the center. This was so even though Florentines of all
classes, rich and poor, lived throughout the areas enclosed by the final circuit of walls. Dante was calling on the purging power of the Badia’s bell to rid the center of any unwanted elements, even if it meant cleansing it through a type of sonic nostalgia.\textsuperscript{1023}

One such unwanted element may have been the consecrated existence of industrial wool production in the very area of the city in which Dante lived. Around the area of San Martino, which was right next to his beloved Badia and the ancestral home of the Alighieri, wool workers toiled to the sound of a very different bell that was located at San Martino.\textsuperscript{1024} A distinct sound would have linked this centrally located but economically isolated zone to the other peripheral zones of wool production that surrounded Dante’s chaste and sober centre. Therefore, the sound of a bell could dissociate a space from its own location and set its meaning as social space in relation to more marginal zones. These bells were part of an elaborate mechanism that attempted to circumscribe the urban experience of subjected workers. They represented an acoustic marginalization of one kind of labor located in spaces within the more general rhythm opening and closing workshops that sounded from the Badia. For Dante, the persistence of “Terce” and “Nones” was the power of the bell to evoke the memory of a wished-for past, while at the same time it excluded other spaces created by the sound of other bells or superseded and redefined the spaces created by those very same bells ringing for other reasons.\textsuperscript{1025}

In contrast, however, bells could perform in exactly the opposite way. They could also act to bind disparate communities into a larger fictive unity, breaking down the barriers, social and geographic, that separated them, as only sound could do. They

\textsuperscript{1023} Bell ringing reflected the divisions and hierarchies by which groups were structured. See Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}, 79.

\textsuperscript{1024} This bell is discussed above in “From Morning to Evening.”

\textsuperscript{1025} Jacopo della Lana, in his commentary on this passage, which is cited above, notes that Terce and Nones were rung from the Badia which also rang the hours of merchant labor. In this respect, Dante’s Badia was dissociated from even its own relation to the cycle of labor.
were capable of giving a unified voice to a collective sentiment and ensure a degree of symbolic equality.\textsuperscript{1026} We have already met the figure of Goro Dati, standing at the threshold of the Piazza della Signoria as he gazed at the monumental face of the commune. He readily internalized the politicized spatial poetry of his city’s most important monuments. In his description of the Palazzo Vecchio, he demonstrated a poetic method of describing architecture that incorporated the movement of the eye and the placement of the body in space. However, it was the crowning feature of the architectural ensemble – the one he saw from the newly finished piazza – that is the key to how architecture is linked to space through sound. This is the way his description of the palace ends:

...and up inside it are the bells of the commune, that is, the great bell that weighs 22,000 pounds, which has no equal in the world, and that of the council and that of the clock, which one hears throughout the city sounding the hours of the day and of the night.\textsuperscript{1027}

It ends with the three bells of the commune, the Leone, the bell of the Popolo, and that of the communal clock. It was the ringing of the latter that for Goro represented the sonic extension of the building’s authority over the entire city, as it marked the temporal range of the day and night (Figures 3.30, 3.30a). As a Florentine, Goro was obviously proud of both of these bells. The clock bell, which was a relatively recent invention, gave the city a veneer of technological prestige, while the Leone, at 22,000 pounds, had no equal in the world\textsuperscript{1028} and, by association, neither did

\textsuperscript{1026} Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}, 79.
\textsuperscript{1027} “...e in su esso sono le campane del Comune, cioè la campana grossa che pesa 22 migliaia di liber, che non ha pari al mondo, e quella del Consiglio e quella dell’ Oriolo, la quale si sente per tutta la città sonare l’ ore del di e della notte.” Dati, “Istoria,” 263.
\textsuperscript{1028} It was said that after its recasting in 1373 the Leone could be heard from more than thirteen miles around. Gotti, \textit{Storia del Palazzo Vecchio}, 31. If true, it would have ensured that no one within the
the Popolo it stood for. Large bells were expensive and they were jealously guarded as symbols defining the identity and authority of the community that their sound governed, making explicit the link between architecture and territory, just as Dante did.

Dante looked back in time through the sound of a religious bell, one that rang from the campanile of the Badia. It continued to echo a certain communal voice from the past, while it carved out and isolated a privileged space for that voice in the present through which it confronted the larger contemporary urban framework. The memory of a better time gone by was used to critique the chaos of the present. The link between sound and memory, bells and the past, was not only the product of the literary imagination. It manifested itself in concrete terms within the continuous conflict of the social order. When the last Florentine republic fell in 1530 and was succeeded by the principate, the sound of bells of the Palazzo Vecchio suddenly became incongruent with the sonic order of the new state. On October 1, 1532, Duke Alessandro de’ Medici decided to symbolically and collectively punish the city. He had the largest city, and many without, could claim not to hear the evening bell. Gotti’s source for this is Ammirato, who quotes duke Cosimo I, who also states that the bell weighed 27,000 pounds, which was an exaggeration. See below.

1029 Dohrn-van Rossum states that the “development or the invention of the mechanical clock... can be considered to have been more thoroughly researched than any other aspect of the history of technology prior to the industrial revolution. And yet no place, time, or circumstances have ever been pinpointed.” Dohrn-van Rossum, History of the Hour, 46. Most commentators date the development to the later thirteenth or early 14th century. Clock historian Giuseppe Brusa cites Bishop Guglielmus Durandus’ Rationale Divinorum Officiorum (1284) as the first documented description of a mechanical clock. Public clocks, which were rare before the end of the fifteenth century, visually or aurally (or both) marked the hours of the entire day, more often than not, for city-dwellers. The first recorded public clock is that found in Orvieto in 1307-08 and there are only 10 cities that record public clocks before Florence, two of which were not in Italy, where the technology was presumably invented. However, according to Dohrn-van Rossum, the first securely documented public mechanical clock that continuously struck the modern hours was the one commissioned by Azzo Visconti in Milan in 1336. On the earliest public clocks see Dohrn-van Rossum, History of the Hour, 128-34. Florence paid a local clock maker 300 florins to install its first public clock in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio in 1353. See Fondelli, Gli “oriioli meccanici”, 4-5. The document cited by Fondelli is ASF Provisoni, 40, 175r,v (80r,v) 20 November, 1353. “Niccolao Bernardi popoli Sancti Fridiani cittadino fiorentino per costruzione dell’ orologio da adattare sopra la torre del palazzo del popolo fiorentino per pulsare le ore di Dio, Trecento ovvero in Trecento fiorini di oro senza nessuna ritenzione di gabelle in quanto e’ contenuta in essa etc.”
bell of the communal tower (*Grossa, Leone*) torn down and ritually broken in the piazza.\footnote{1030} It was this sound that had called the people to arms – likely on more than one occasion – to chase the Medici from the city as enemies of liberty.\footnote{1031} In the words of one contemporary observer, the bell of the councils was taken away so that Florentines could no longer hear the “sweet sound of liberty.”\footnote{1032} Its sound was now rendered unnecessary and subversive. Taking away an enemy’s bell, therefore, was a way of rendering certain groups incapable of expressing their religious or political identity.\footnote{1033}

Duke Alessandro most likely knew that as long as the bell was heard, it would remind Florentines of that liberty, and its destruction was an attempt to enforce a collective forgetting. He may have had some success, since the echo of this bell lived on within the vagaries of a silent, unreliable, and wholly manipulable memory.

Cosimo I’s historian, Scipione Ammirato, remembers recounting the story to the subsequent duke of how the Sienese master made it possible, in 1322, for only two men, instead of twelve, to ring the “*grande campana del popolo.*”\footnote{1034} At this point, he

---

\footnote{1030} The sixteenth-century historians Benedetto Varchi and Scipione Ammirato, both of whom refer to the importance of this destructive act - the former as loss and the second as memory - use terms that have led subsequent commentators into complete confusion about which bell it was. Varchi was almost certainly referring to the “*grossa*” that Dati mentions, which began as the Leone. The confusion comes from the fact that Bernardo Davanzati refers to it as the “*campana del consiglio;*” see Isidoro del Lungo, *Dino Compagni e la sua cronica*, 3 vols., vol. II, (Florence: Le Monnier, 1879), 463. ?? Varchi states that it rang for the council and called the popolo to *parlamenti*; see Benedetto Varchi, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Lelio Arbib and Silvano Razzi, (Florence: Società ed. delle storie del Nardi e del Varchi, 1838), XIII (vol. III, p. 9). Ammirato calls it the “*grande campana del popolo;*” see Scipione Ammirato, *Istorie fiorentine di Scipione Ammirato*, ed. Cristoforo del Bianco and Francesco del Soldato, (Florence: L. Marchini and G. Becherini, 1824), VI (vol II, p. 87). It was the Campana del Popolo that called the council but it was the Grossa, or Leone, that called *parlamenti*. Clearly, therefore, all were talking about the larger bell. By the late 16th century, Ammirato probably no longer understood the fine distinction between a bell that rang to call the representatives of the popolo, as ruling class, and a bell that called the whole city and spoke in a much more universal voice.

\footnote{1031} It was Gotti who put it that way. See Gotti, *Storia del Palazzo Vecchio*, 31.

\footnote{1032} Gotti quotes Bernardo Davanzati but it is Del Lungo who gives the precise reference as *Opere*, ed. Bindi, I, xix. See Ibid. "A noi la campana del consiglio fu levata, acciò che non potessimo sentir più il dolce suono della liberta."

\footnote{1033} Dohrn-van Rossum, p. 200.

\footnote{1034} Ammirato, *Istorie Fiorentine*, VI (vol. II, p. 87).The Leone, or Grossa, originally weighed over 12,000 pounds although some refer to it as weighing 16,000 pounds. It weighed 20,000 pounds after its
fell silent as the duke himself related how the bell weighed 27,000 pounds and could be heard for miles around. There is no mention of how his predecessor broke the bell as he broke the republic, melting it down to look for silver.\textsuperscript{1035} The bell was now part of an official, depoliticized memory of the city’s past greatness.

On the other hand, the bell that so entranced Dati – the sound of the modern clock and its modern hours – looked toward the future, a future in which, on the contrary, the entire space of the city would be unified and ideally ordered around the centre of political power.\textsuperscript{1036} Standing in the piazza, Dati was wholly aware of the visual regime that was constructed for him, one that was supposed to exploit the distancing possibilities of sight in order to configure the individual’s relationship to the regime. This is what Trachtenberg was alluding to in his study of Trecento planning practice, which sought an ideal viewer to apprehend the Palazzo Vecchio and its tower from several key points in the piazza (Figures 3.30b-3.30d).\textsuperscript{1037} However, the experience of Trecento space did not stop there. It was not only about sight, but also about sound. Dati’s description transcends the distancing factor of vision by riding on the immersive qualities of sound. Although the towers stood as a representation of recasting in 1373. Dati claimed that it weighed 22,000 pounds in the early 15\textsuperscript{th} century and Varchi repeats this claim in the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Later in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, Ammirato records the claim by Cosimo I that it weighed 27,000 pounds.

\textsuperscript{1035} Varchi, \textit{Storia fiorentina}, XII (vol. III, p. 9). Varchi notes that the reason for destroying the bell – for money or to erase the memory of its power to rally the citizens – was a matter of debate amongst Florentines. Giuseppe Conti states that Alessandro put his own effigy on the coin and used this first minting to pay the German troops given to him by Charles V for the war against Florence. Notably, Conti sees this act, both practical and symbolic, as the beginning of Alessandro’s tyranny. Cosimo II cast a new bell in 1615 which is the current campanone. Giuseppe Conti, \textit{Firenze dopo i Medici: Francesco di Lorena, Pietro Leopoldo, inizio del regno di Ferdinando III}, (Florence: Bemporad, 1921), 122.

\textsuperscript{1036} That the sound of bells was intimately connected to a central authority is confirmed by the research of Corbin into nineteenth-century France, where he finds that disputes over bells reflected “a form of attachment – which has also disappeared – to symbolic objects. They laid bare an interplay of passions now incomprehensible to us. To control the voice of authority radiating from the center of a territory was a much coveted form of domination, although nowadays it seems a paltry thing. Numerous disputes in the locality hinged upon this privilege, which had so many ramifications.” Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}, xix.

\textsuperscript{1037} On Trachtenberg’s reading of space see chapter 2, “Goro Dati’s Vision of Beauty and Leonardo Bruni’s Harmonic Dream”.

396
authority, the sound of the bell beating regularly from its belfry also immersed everything, including Dati himself, within its sonic range. Perhaps more than visual markers, acoustic ones could be more intensely felt and intimately known. The boundary markers laid by the city’s surveyors may have precisely fixed the thresholds between public and private property, but persons could not derive any useful notion of where they were or how to navigate through them by that abstract and very complicated system of measured distances. The sound of bells, on the other hand, could tell them where, and if, they belonged.

However, what distinguished this mechanical clock, which was a new sound on the horizon, was the fact that it represented the dislodging of time-keeping from the day’s other integrated secular and sacred temporal rhythms. All the bells in the towers of the communal palaces spoke to the entire city but Dati singles out the one attached the mechanical clock. This clock was not part of any sonic dialogue insofar as it beat its own monotonous rhythm, marking each hour, instead of only a few. The diarist Ser Reccho di Domenico Spinelli puts it rather matter-of-factly:

On 25 March, the hours began to sound from the tower of the Palace of the Signoria.\textsuperscript{1038}

It cannot have been a coincidence that the clock began ringing on the Florentine New Year, on the feast of the Annunciation, in 1353. Nor does the brevity of the entry deny what was distinct about the new sound on the horizon; namely, that it was a public clock that sounded the hours. It was not part of an older technological

\textsuperscript{1038} “A di 25 Marzo cominciarono a sonare l’ hore nella torre del Palazzo de’ Sig.” Spinelli, "Diario," 38v. There is also a seventeenth century copy of the diary in \textit{ASF Manoscritti}, 238, f. 40. That Reccho was in fact referring to a mechanical clock is confirmed by the payment of 300 florins to Niccolò di Bernardo of the parish of San Frediano for installing the clock in the tower that year. See note 1032 and Fondelli, \textit{Gli "oriuoli meccanici"}, 4-5.
tradition of clocks with automata, carillons, or astronomical indications. These were striking tower clocks whose task was singular and that was their importance. Such instruments were more prestige objects – no expense was spared – than accurate time keepers, however, and required constant maintenance.\textsuperscript{1039} They represented, along with the communal tower and its bells, the “legal expression of communal autonomy and from the thirteenth century on were the center of the city’s system of signals.”\textsuperscript{1040} By the fifteenth century, an increasingly accurate mechanism was making the use of such clocks ever more practical. In addition, the installation and use of such clocks was a testament to a city’s openness to innovation, its wealth and the presence of a vigorous and active administration.\textsuperscript{1041} In fact, Goro may have had more reason to single out the clock bell since the city had commissioned a new clock in 1390 and cast a new bell specifically for it in 1397.\textsuperscript{1042} As such, the sound of the bell, cast at a time of taxing war with Milan, may have represented a certain defiance and perseverance as well as an expression of an unyielding confidence in the city’s future at a time of great anxiety.\textsuperscript{1043}

His response to the scene before him moves from the ground beneath him, up the massive block of the palace, slides up the tower then turns on its axis ninety degrees to follow the pealing of the bell that radiates out in expanding sonic rings to the entire city. Gilbert’s analysis of Goro’s description emphasized the upward movement of the text. However, he leaves the analysis incomplete. He was not

\textsuperscript{1039} Dohrn-van Rossum, History of the Hour, 143-52. There is evidence that bells had to be checked nightly.  
\textsuperscript{1040} Ibid., 139.  
\textsuperscript{1041} Ibid., 157.  
\textsuperscript{1042} Fondelli, Gli "orluoli meccanici", 5. On July 1, 1390, Jacopo di Biagio da Scopeto was commissioned to construct another clock for the Palazzo Vecchio. On July 1, 1397, the communal government commissioned a new bell for the clock from Simone di Lorenzo and his son Piero, “maestri di campane.”  
\textsuperscript{1043} Dati’s narrative, which spans the years between 1380 and 1406, places the forging of the bell in the middle of the war. Born in 1362, Dati would have been thirty-five years old when the new bell was installed.
interested in the bells or the sounds they made, but it was precisely these sounds that emanated from it that form the aesthetic climax. It is the sonic dimension of the tower that reconnects the palace as an isolated vertical monument back into the entire horizontal fabric of the city. It creates communal space by demarcating the aural borders of the commune’s authority. It was a constant reminder, when one could not see the palace, of the extent of the regime’s jurisdiction, the space in which all those rules and regulations remained in effect. Unlike the bells of the Badia, however, the communal clock bell of the Palazzo Vecchio, marking the modern, equal, secular hours, defined a more universal space, one that expanded beyond Florence’s traditional virtuous center, incorporating the spaces of the morally suspect periphery. This new bell attempted to subject urban space to a common set of temporal and spatial coordinates, within which dutiful citizens could establish their position in relation to the political and religious geography of the city (Figures 3.31, 3.31a).\textsuperscript{1044}

It was the sound he heard from the tower of the town hall, on the other hand, that allowed Goro to connect the city’s foundations to the future, by its bells ringing in the present. Why would a person like Goro be interested in such origins and in a civic peace of a well-designed, well-ordered city? And what would he be hoping for in the future? Dati’s description of Florence is broken up into a series of framed and isolated views: the duomo, Orsanmichele, the Ponte Vecchio, all of which conform to the fragmented and perspectival nature of vision alluded to at the beginning of this chapter. Each is the record of a visual experience with a duration defined by an allusion to movement, time, or space. At Orsanmichele and the Palazzo Vecchio, the narrator’s eyes move across the surface of the building; they move from baptistery to

\textsuperscript{1044} The jurisdiction of a communal bell was also a legal space created by its sonic range. In a legal opinion written by Albericus de Rosate (d. 1354) on the communal bell of Bologna, he argued that the statute that doubled fines at night, after the sound of the bell, only applied to those areas that were in audible range, since the establishment of night was artificially constructed by the bell’s sound.
duomo to campanile before he imagines the encircling ring of mendicant churches that act as spiritual walls surrounding the city. Our eyes are subject to an illusion when admiring the workshops on the Ponte Vecchio, a bridge that does not seem to be a bridge – “ve n’è uno… che non pare che e’ sia ponte” – and unaware that they flank a bridge until the “piazza” at its heart is discovered – “se non in sul mezzo d’esso, dove è una piazza.”

One can imagine him moving, turning and lifting his eyes but what ultimately united these urban showpieces was the sound of the bell. What united both these isolated views as well as the city itself, spreading the message of order and harmony throughout the city, promising to overlay this order onto those recalcitrant outlying areas, was nothing other than the commune’s bells, in particular, the one that sounded the hours of both the day and the night.

The rhythm of the clock bell plays in stark contrast to the careful and convoluted description of the ringing of the communal bells in the 1415 statutes, which were contemporary with Dati’s text. They make no mention of a bell whose sound needed no further explanation than Spinelli’s own: “… the hours sounded from the tower” (sonarono l’hora nella torre). As simple and straightforward as their function was, however, mechanical clocks were expensive, novel, and brought with them powerful associations with the most important and wealthy courts of Europe.

They united an architectural monument to the city that spread out around it, not in a temporary way but permanently, through its regular and incessant striking, both day and night. It made this tower the fulcrum around which all other sonic spaces revolved. It responded to no other ringing and participated in no dialogue; it expected

\[1045\] “there is one there that does not seem to be a bridge,” “if not in the middle of which, where it is a piazza.”

\[1046\] These framed views are discussed in chapter 2, “Goro Dati’s Vision of Beauty and Leonardo Bruni’s Harmonic Dream”.

\[1047\] It is significant that this bell rang in just the same way both during the day and at night, uniting what were, in the nature of the customary bell ringing described above, separate and distinct spatial and temporal territories.

\[1047\] Dohrn-van Rossum, History of the Hour, 133.
only to be greeted by its own monotonous echo. It made sounds but, for all intents and purposes, it was deaf to all others. It was this bell, in particular, that looked toward the future by virtue of its status as an early and quickly evolving technology of time. It was a relatively new sound on the auditory horizon and it added an increasingly regular and repetitive rhythm to the soundscape. This was the bell, therefore, that promised Goro a more homogeneous body public moving to a much simpler, regular, repeating rhythm. What it gained in accuracy, however, it lost in meaning, tending towards a temporal abstraction that Dati equated with social harmony.\textsuperscript{1048}

Although Dante and Dati were looking in opposite directions, they both were describing how sound opened up the temporal flow to incorporate the past and the future within the space of the present. This was the dynamic of collective memory in action, remembering the present and imagining the future as they were inflected within urban space. It made the city the ultimate memory palace and demonstrates how the past and the present were not foreign territories. They were bound to each in the present. The sounds that bells made were privileged markers of this collective memory. As they rang, they held these temporal territories in a certain dynamic tension and it was within this tension that Florentines were assembled into groups of overlapping communities in space and time and centered around a common set of ideas that they identified with or set themselves against. It is ironic that the sound that unified the city for Dati, the one that would represent modern abstract time, would ultimately, far into the future, form part of the techniques of modern life that have split the past and the future from a present that is incessantly shrinking towards its own temporal vanishing point, when bells no longer dominate the urban

\textsuperscript{1048} This is the effect his text has by isolating the sound of the mechanical clock bell. However, this sound was inserted into the customary complexity of other bells so that it could not immediately supersede older rhythms.
soundscape and the incomprehensible noise of modern cities drowns out the sounds of the past.  

The examples of Dante (poet, philosopher), Dati (merchant, historian), and Albericus (jurist) reveal that the sound bells made permeated the most important facets of urban life. They stimulated memory and brought the past into direct contact and even inspired critique of the present. They pointed the way to the future while they established and maintained a certain idea of communal authority over the city and its citizens and made present and real the force of the law in the regulation of time and space.

Bells were at the center, therefore, of a complex web of interrelated spatial and temporal networks. Both civic and religious bells chimed out multiple patterns of sound throughout the city each day. By their acoustic interaction with buildings and their temporal rhythms they allowed inhabitants to determine where they were, where they ought to go, and how much time they had to get there. At a time without maps, this system of familiar soundscapes meant that one lived more intimately within urban space and vision had less bearing on experience. It suffices to recall Paolo da Certaldo’s anxiety of secrets passing audibly through walls and listeners hiding around corners and behind curtains. Sound’s power of penetration, its ability to dematerialize architecture, was a matter of grave concern for an oral business culture. Instead, his remedy – and now it makes perfect sense – was to tell secrets in full view of others but outside their audible range. Paolo was not worried about being seen but was terrified about being heard. Vision was much easier to control.

---

1049 The importance of bells in maintaining such communities is made emphatically clear by Corbin’s study of the nineteenth-century countryside, where the acceleration of urban living had yet to drown them out. See Corbin, *Village Bells*.  

402
CHAPTER 4 THE SOUNDS OF EXPERIENCE: FROM VOICES TO STORIES

This chapter begins with stories and ends with voices. It moves from urban narrative to urban noise in order to further demonstrate how important it is to listen to the stories that communities tell themselves in order to understand how such collaboratively constructed identities were essential elements in the design and maintenance of urban space.

If the sound of bells constituted a common non-verbal language that marked the rhythms of urban life, the soundscape was also punctuated by a culture of oral exchange that centered on the lived space of the piazza. This was the place of the most vital, daily, face-to-face contacts through which one’s multiple, “sometimes incompatible, roles of kinsman, friend, political ally, tax assessor, business partner, client, parishioner” were played out.\textsuperscript{1050} The piazza, as architectural space and social phenomenon, therefore, was the fulcrum around which a verbal culture negotiated its relationships through the medium of words, spoken or sung, shouted or whispered, in the form of popular narratives or fractured rumors. It was the place where familial bonds were solidified, friendships maintained, loyalties tested, deals made, and stories told. The piazza was a multi-functional space where the sound of bells confronted the not always sonorous chorus of competing voices, where the elegance of Amphion’s lyre met the cacophony of Pucci’s mercato. This confrontation was implicit with each enactment of the official flow of information from government to governed (discussed in chapter three), where an oral culture was always threatening to inflect, mishandle, or even drown out such sounds.

This chapter deals with spatial transactions between stories and voices as vital aspects of the rich acoustic culture of the piazza. It attempts to set the official sounds

\textsuperscript{1050} Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner," 161.
of the commune as one narrative of spatial negotiation against the vibrant and more informal, but no less ritualistic verbal exchange that was part of a specific culture of public textuality. It seeks to trace the outlines of the kinds of narratives that circulated in the public square in order to then elucidate further how certain stories deployed the piazza in particular, but also urban space and architectural motifs in general, as a way of structuring narrative. It moves from words and texts into sounds and noise, always keeping in mind that written remains contain distant echoes of very vocal oral textual practices. It testifies to a close, if not always obvious, relationship between the circulation of stories, how they were read and heard, and the buildings and spaces they confronted. In this exchange, one can speak of “writing as architecture” and “architecture as narrative”. Therefore, this chapter begins with an extended discussion of the some of the ways that narrative writing depended on and explored the nature of architectural barriers, the lines between public and private, the link between urban space and identity; in short, the very themes with which this dissertation began and which were so important to Florentines of all stations, whether they were playing the role of writer, reader, legislator, husband, wife, lover, friend, or enemy. It ends with some of the voices and sounds that were heard in the city and the culture that helped to define them. By actively appropriating the acoustic dimensions of streets and squares, Florentines developed the means to map out lines of communication, discover limits and borders, and imagine spaces transformed. This was crucial since the possibility of speaking and hearing produces individual, organic, and animated feelings of community, while seeing tends to produce only abstract social relations, preserving the distance between subject and object. Hearing is intimacy and it was tied much closer to one’s power of remembering things.\footnote{Simmel, "Der Raum," 488; Simmel, "The Sociology of Space," 155.}
4.1 Storytelling in the piazza

Overhearing their conversation, we began to delight in his simplicity and in what the youths were saying to him. And after we had listened to them for a while, Ser Niccolò said to us: “I want to make you laugh.”

Stories need space. They need certain spaces in which to take place, to be reenacted, told and retold, remembered, written and rewritten, transformed, copied, picked apart, and perhaps forgotten. In what follows, the city will be explored as the performative space of storytelling in order show how this practice linked architecture, sound, voices, writing, and the memory of the past. It highlights the crucial role that stories played in linking communities to the spaces in which they lived by integrating both memories of the past and expectations of the future. Narrative themes were directly linked to the character of actual events, as Florentines explored how such themes could be reoriented, reused, and related to their own spatial experiences. Storytelling was a ritual part of many social activities. It took place at informal dinners, circulated in shared books, and could be heard in the piazza.

Florence’s vibrant vernacular culture was in part due to Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, along with the popular tradition of satirical narratives (burle e baie), civic celebrations, and devotional texts. These urban stories were intimately bound up in the creation, negotiation and transformation of social identities, infusing urban experience with a multitude of competing, malleable narrative strains through which Florentines recognized their neighbors, their government, their religion, and their assumptions about love, adventure, and their past. They also saw the mark of the

---

1053 Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 45.
supernatural in events that were beyond immediate comprehension. As an example, Villani interpreted the flood of 1333 within the moralized framework of Florentine sin and the need for redemption through the ferocious power of water. By the late fifteenth century, the act of interpreting events within a cosmological framework was a shared science. Self-declared prophets on the benches of the city addressed the city with the fantastic portents of monstrous births and flocks of butterflies.

It is difficult to evoke how the spoken word flourished amid the rich sonic environment of Renaissance Florence but certain aspects of stories give us glimpses into a world where voice, narration, and dramatic gesture were as important, perhaps more so, as the content itself. Urban space was filled with words that emanated from the mouths of “storytellers, public reciters, gossips, circulating rhymes, and songs and abusive verses, telltale travelers and merchants, and even preachers.” As Lauro Martines states, these were the mass media of Florence. They represented the collective voice of government, laws, celebrations, the past, family memories, news, animosities, friendships, and a love of elaborate pranks. In the stories that circulated in the city, any of these voices, words, pronouncements, rhetorical conventions, secrets, or lies could be made the subject of shared laughter. In the fifteenth century they were accompanied by singing prophets, who had picked up the conventions of storytelling developed in the city and grafted them onto images of the

---

1054 Villani, Nuova cronica, XII, 1.
1055 Niccolò, "Profezie in Piazza," 669. This phenomenon, a part of the market square, disappeared after 1530.
1056 This would appear to be contradicted in the Decameron, where, almost monotonously, the members of the brigata make judgments upon the acts and characters narrated. However, the importance of performance and ritual interaction occurs at the end of each day, as songs are sung, innuendos made, and ambiguities dissolve into the night.
1057 Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 119.
1058 News reporting became a regular feature of the performance in the later 1400s, with traumatic events such as the massacre at Otranto in 1480 being sung in piazzas everywhere in Italy; see Niccolò, “Profeti e popolo,” 31.
future, rather than the past.1059 Florence became a major centre of the anonymous
diffusion of such prophecies which were linked to the influence of the Dominican friar
and “civic prophet,” Girolamo Savonarola.1060 With the advent of printing, many
would also sell pamphlets, a practice which made the copying and circulation of texts
by the audience superfluous.1061 These raggedly dressed prophets eventually came to
be seen as crazy misfits from an earlier age, becoming a buffoon-like parody of the
popular civic storyteller.1062

On any given day, one might have heard the “good and clear voice” of Antonio
Pucci, banditore of the commune, urban poet, friend of Sacchetti and Boccaccio,
calling out new and continuing legislation in the streets and squares of the city.1063 Or
one might have heard one of the many stories he compiled in his zibaldone.1064 As
texts and audible performances, the laws of the city were caught up in a lively textual
and narrative urban exchange. Chronicles such as Villani’s comprehensive account of
the city’s history, along with the urban novellas of Boccaccio, Sacchetti and Sercambi,
were copied and exchanged by an engaged class of merchant writers. Similarly, such
stories and tales were an important part of an urban culture of performative
storytelling in the piazza.

In terms of producers and consumers, the dialogic exchange between legal
statutes, literary culture, and urban space involved some of the very same people at
every level. This suggests, therefore, that between laws, texts, and spatial experiences,

Martines, Renaissance Sextet.
1061 Niccoli refers to a printer in Ripoli, just outside Florence, who printed material for a certain
“Bernardino che canta in panca.” The said Bernardino printed over 600 different pamphlets in just a
few years. See Niccoli, “Profeti e popolo,” 30-31.
1063 “...bannitores habeant claram vocem et bonam.” Caggese, Podestà (1325), I, xi, (p. 38);
"Statuti del Podestà (1355)," I, xiii.
1064 Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 48. Compilations were compiled by and for public storytellers and
singers in the piazza. It was a collaborative project in which stories were shared and transformed.
similar interests, preoccupations, desires, and anxieties were driving what was happening and what was being proclaimed, discussed, and listened to. In other words, the motivations that drove legislation can be found, as I have tried to show throughout, in urban literature and the recording of events. There were a cluster of urban concepts – limits, borders, and thresholds; networks, movement, and spaces; the creation of topographies, communities, and collective identities – that were interrogated from a number of rhetorical textual practices, all of which participated fully, in the construction, maintenance, and meaning of the city.

It was a multivalent urban dialogue that in its performance produced the defining structures of the public piazza as a privileged moment within a constellation of urban spatial networks; public space as a process, rather than a product. Therefore, if such evidence suggests that the public square was both caught within and made possible by an earnest and lively dialogue between citizens who were defining themselves as the body public in both official and informal terms, then such texts and practices need to be explored to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of urban space in terms of both its early modern expression and its particular role in the urban strategies of later medieval and early Renaissance urban culture.

The circulation of poetry in an urban oral culture created a much more complex and multifarious idea of the public because in face to face relations, those men who participated in an official public culture confronted and acknowledged their social inferiors, interacted with women, formed alliances with grandi, and listened to artisans and foreigners give public performances: in short, engaged with all those classes of persons who collectively embodied the larger “body public”, regardless of their official status with respect to the commune. This was the nature of the unofficial public domain. It was neither transparent nor homogeneous but opaque and

---

1065 On the popular nature of storytelling in Florence see Ibid., 43-46.
multivalent; a place where the stories and verses were altered at will. This was the
more fluid body of the city that served to both ritually support the network of abstract
ideas about what the city was as well as to ritually antagonize or praise authorities.

Professional storytellers or singers constituted a fundamental part of the vocal
culture of Renaissance Florence and they could be heard throughout the city. It was
in this context that the literary cultures of Boccaccio and Dante, Sercambi, Aesop,
classical stories, mythical histories, and medieval romances met with the Florentine
tradition of the satirical poems (burle e baie), practical jokes (beffe), civic
celebrations, and devotional texts. It was an eclectic mix of the literary, the
popular, the spiritual, and the vulgar. Such a mix of genres falling on the ears not only
of the elite, but also upon those who could barely read or write, made Dante “the poet
of wool-workers, bakers, and the like” and made Leonardo Bruni, the city’s humanist
chancellor, more than a little uneasy. The historian Dale Kent has traced the
contours of performances of these professional singers. They were regular and
popular events that produced a corpus of material that served as a source and
inspiration for those who copied and circulated versions of these stories.

The main, though certainly not the only, site for narrative performances in
Florence was the piazza in front of the church of San Martino, which was situated in

---

1066 Pucci complained that verse recitals were given everywhere in Florence, even in disreputable
places. See Corsi, ed., Rimatori del Trecento, 883; Martines, Strong Words, 236.
1067 On the repertoire of cantatori in Florence see Kent, Cosimo de' Medici, 44ff; Bianca Becherini, "Un
Novati, "Le poesie sulla natura delle frutta e i cantarini del comune," in Attraverso il medie evo: studi e
ricerche, (Bari: Laterza & figli, 1905), 329-65; Leonardo Olschki, "I 'cantari dell'India' di Giuliano
1068 Leonardo Bruni, "Dialogues to Pier Paolo Vergerio," in The Three Crowns of Florence: Humanist
assessments of Dante, Petrarcha and Boccaccio, ed. David Thompson and Alan F. Nagel, (New York:
Harper & Row, 1972), 36; quoted in Kent, Cosimo de' Medici, 44. Dante was read not only at the
Florentine studio but also in the cathedral and Orsanmichele, which reached a larger audience in a more
informal setting. Kent, Cosimo de' Medici, 44.
1069 Kent, Cosimo de' Medici.
1070 Antonio Pucci’s zibaldone exists in several versions and served as a storehouse of stock stories.
See, for example, BNCF II, III, 335, Biblioteca Laurenziana laurenziana-tempiano, 2.
one of the densest areas of wool manufacture in the city. Before the church was destroyed in 1478 and replaced with the current oratory that is oriented toward what was known as the “second small piazza of San Martino,” performances took place on benches (panche) of the current Piazza de’Cimatori (Figures 4.1- 4.2a). Part of the entrance portal and lunette above it that once held an image of the Virgin with two saints are still visible, and, according to Rastrelli, writing in the 18th century, the island of housing opposite was constructed only after the church was re-oriented (figs 4.1a, 4.2a).

Along the north side were the domestic properties of such prestigious families as the Donati while the area itself had one of the densest concentrations of workshops connected to the manufacture of woolen cloth. This guaranteed a mix of proprietors, manufacturers, and artisans, as well as unskilled workers in the trade. Such a mix of Florentine society was then reflected in the performances that took place on Sundays, feast days, and often over the course of several consecutive evenings.

---

1071 A bell owned by the church was rented annually by the wool guild to ring for the separate labor schedule of the wool workers. See “From Morning to Evening” in chapter three.
1072 “...seconda piazzuola di San Martino,” For an account of the earliest known documents concerning the church and the layout of the area, see Leonia Desideri Costa, La Chiesa di S. Martino del Vescovo, l’Oratorio dei Buonomini e gli affreschi sulle opere di misericordia in Firenze presso le case degli Alighieri, (Florence: Tipografia Classica, 1942), 7-32.
1073 For Rastrelli’s description see Ibid., 22. Desideri Costa provides evidence for the Badia wanting to build in the area in front of the entrance, leaving a street 3.5 braccia wide to allow access to the church. The decision required the destruction of illegally built construction in the square, leaving a five braccia radius around the well that had been sold by the Badia, and not building where the entrance of the church was, from the west (tramontana) up to the paved public street – presumably via Dante Alighieri – of a width of three and one quarter braccia. However, this would not have left room for a piazza. Therefore, the area in front of the church, included a well, had to have been left clear, although the entrance may have been partially obscured.
1074 On the properties see Ibid., 24-32. On the wool industry see Stella, La révolte des Ciompi; Hidetoshi Hoshino, L’arte della lana in Firenze nel basso Medioevo: il commercio della lana e il mercato dei panni fiorentini nei secoli XIII-XV, (Florence: Olschki, 1980); Hidetoshi Hoshino, Franco Franceschi, and Sergio Tognetti, Industria tessile e commercio internazionale nella Firenze del tardo Medioevo, (Florence: Olschki, 2001); Franceschi, Oltre il "Tumulto": i lavoratori fiorentini dell’Arte della lana fra Tre e Quattrocento.
1075 Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 44.
If one can derive the spatial dimensions of the piazza from what remains today, the site, in the heart of the old city, was large enough to contain a sizable crowd but closed enough to provide for an intimate, vibrant, and even raucous exchange between performer and audience, or even between members of the audience itself. This would be in contrast to the vast spaces of the mendicant preachers, notably Piazza Santa Croce and Piazza Santa Maria Novella, where such an exchange would have been virtually impossible (Figures 4.3, 4.3a).1076

Variously called cantatori, cantarini, cantimpanche, cantastorie, or cantafavelle, even their numerous names allude to the variety of their theatrical productions. They would continually reinterpret stories in the performance, always experimenting with new modes and additions, variations. They were careful to adapt to different publics while they would add to lapses in memory with improvised inventions, filling lacunae and clearing up irregularities in meter.1077 Such stories were often retold, updated and copied into personal compilations by listeners to suit current tastes and themes.1078 It was a constant collective development between the audience and storyteller, who was, of course, working the crowd for money, though not, it should be stated, always for his livelihood.1079

These canterini would often interrupt themselves at climactic moments of the narrative to build on the anticipation of the crowd, suspend its anxiety, and give the speaker a moment to catch his breath.1080 Sometimes lasting days, when the stories finally ended, the formulaic closing thanked the public, praised God and listeners.

---

1076 Obviously such spaces needed some form of vocal amplification or relay system. The acoustics of these large piazzas were not at all conducive to addressing large crowds and leads one to suspect that an entirely different dynamic was at play with popular preachers.
1078 Ibid.
1079 Although some, like Niccolò Cieco, were full-time singers, the majority of the storytellers in Florence came from the middling class of artisan guildsmen, being shoemakers, bakers and barbers. See Kent, Cosimo de' Medici, 44.
1080 Malato, Il Quattrocento, 860. For the description of the famous cantatore Antonio di Guido, see Michele Verino in Rossi, Il quattrocento, p. 642 (check page number).
Their verses were often self-reflexive, acknowledging the contemporary spaces in which they performed. Thus, these narratives lived in their urban environment, in their expression within a robust verbal culture. The singer acknowledged that what mattered at San Martino was the exchange between performer and audience and that such an experience transformed the physical space around it:

... that I am throwing away my verses at San Martino, I reply, ‘Oh timid one, behold, this street may be glorified by the worthy picaresque wisdom offered here.'

L’Altissimo, the singer of these lines and one of the most popular performers of the 1460s and 70s, understood how such social experience infused meaning into urban space itself. And the wisdom offered by his poetry was an ideal patriarchal Christian community of obligations and responsibility between classes. These were Florentines speaking to themselves, since many took part in the daily grind of work and artisanal manufacture.

Such stories would resonate, therefore, in particularly familiar ways, and it was Antonio Pucci’s zibaldone that provided one of the most important “user’s guides” to the standard material. His was a fourteenth-century text extending into the future to guide Florentine storytelling well into the fifteenth century. Such a repertoire

1081 “Dicemi alcun talhor e’ non mi aggrada / Che tu sparga i tuoi versi in San Martino 
/ Et io rispondo, o temario, bada: / A quello udito degno et pellegrino / Può per voi gloriarsi questa strada.” Rodolfò Renier, ed., Strambotti e sonetii dell’Altissimo, (Turin: Società Bibliofila, 1886), xii-xiii (n. 2). These lines are translated in Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 44. ”
1082 Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 45-47. See Cicco’s poem in Antonio Lanza, Lirici toscani del Quattrocento, (Rome: Bulzoni, 1973), 202-07. Cosimo de’ Medici certainly understood the powerful social consensus that could be built by the sonorous sounds of San Martino. Addressing social harmony and praising him as a patron of buildings in public performances – “conserver of temples and holy places” – meant that his name would echo throughout the streets of Florence like a powerful after-image.
1083 Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 48.
included popular sayings, moral *exempla*, observations on the disposition of women, the education of children, the character of priests, doctors, notaries, sacred songs of penance or instruction, biblical extracts, songs of love – fulfilled and unrequited – historical epics, the origins of Florence, as well as Latin poets and prose writers translated into popular verse.\footnote{Ibid.} The particular nature of the Florentine *cantastorie* can be deduced from this repertoire. It expresses the communal nature of Florentine urban culture, and cities like it. Performers did not simply play the role of Provençal *giullari* by reciting romances.\footnote{Arturo Graf, “Il zibaldone attribuito ad Antonio Pucci,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 1 (1883): 293.} In the Florentine piazza the dynamic between the storyteller and the audience was reciprocal. The repertoire suggests that this interaction was a means of creating, evoking, establishing, remembering, and fortifying a public culture in which each tried to lay claim to a voice in the civic dialogue.

Books, too, were copied at the great expense of one’s personal time, and, as a result, they became objects of great personal value. Compilations of texts were also works in the making, with additions over time and generations.\footnote{Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*, 74.} They represented a parallel commentary, recording a dialogue with urban events and entertainments. Books were lent out, returned, kept, and even stolen, as a letter sent by Francesco Buondelmonti to Giovanni Acciaiuoli, concerning his personal copy of the *Decameron*, implies.\footnote{Francesco was writing to request that his copy of the *Decameron* be brought to Naples, and he instructed his contact specifically and emphatically not to lend it or give it to anyone else, lest he lose possession of it entirely. For the text of this letter, see Branca, *Un secondo elenco*.} Francesco’s anxiety about losing possession of the book – “il quale libro è mio” (which is my book) – as well as the book’s popularity, is emphasized by his repeated instructions not to give the book to anyone else for fear that he would not ever get it back – “e che non desse n’ a messer né a nullo se non a
me” (and that he should not give it either to messer or to anyone except for me); “e guardate non venga a mano a messer Neri perché non l’avrei” (and mind that it does not fall into the hands of messer Neri, because then I shall never have it); “e guardate di non prestarlo a nullo perché molti saranno malcortesi” (and make sure not to lend it to anyone because most people will be most ungracious about it). Francesco’s fears were not unlike Paolo da Certaldo’s own, when considered in the light of words that circulated in the public domain, and the texts that memorialized them. Francesco betrays a distinct assumption that others would consider his book less as private property and more as a public resource. It was almost as if the book was straddling the line between a personal object and public stories so that it was never fully safe from the interventions of others in a culture where private libraries were in the process of formation. It was as difficult to draw the line between these territories as it was in urban space itself. The public and the private worlds of Florentine culture merged in such stories in terms of their narrative content, their social value and their spatial movement. Francesco was, whether he realized it or not, broaching an issue that was at the heart of the urban novella’s relationship to the spaces in which it was told, read, rewritten, and copied down. In the end, Francesco had only the trust that he placed firmly in the hands of the addressee, beseeching him to make every effort to make sure the book ended up in his hands.

The circulation of texts therefore, which were memories of stories told, of an urban dialogue, was itself a circulating dialogue within and beyond families. The flyleaf often served as a declaration of successive ownership, and pleas to potential

---

1088 Ibid., 163. Lending out books was considered a risk, and according to one source, was a matter of one’s word. Kent quotes a source that laments lending a book to a friend, who kept it for such a long time that he then swore he had returned it. The author goes on to make reference to financial lending, where such a swindle would not only lose him the thing loaned, but also the friendship that was supposed to guarantee it. See Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 74.
readers, who read these books not in libraries but amidst the clutter of everyday life.\textsuperscript{1089} Borrowers were encouraged to copy what they valued into their own collections, creating an interactive reading culture that dismembered and rebuilt texts as a communal monument to popular wisdom, moral desires, ideas, and memories. It mixed together diverse narratives and patriotic literature, so that the daily business of government was side by side with home remedies, recipes, as well as the graphic realism of ridiculous, amatory, cruel, and obscene stories.\textsuperscript{1090}

At the heart of this literary exchange were the monumental urban works of Giovanni Boccaccio (Decameron) and Giovanni Villani (Cronica nuova), the most influential civic narratives of the fourteenth century – and arguably the fifteenth – while the latter was the cornerstone of Florence’s origin and history. Villani’s chronicle also circulated constantly, and many Florentines owned a copy which they would lend out.\textsuperscript{1091} It formed the basis of a communal ideology and would later become the cornerstone of humanist history.\textsuperscript{1092}

The official counterpart to the stories sung at San Martino were the vernacular speeches made by the herald of the commune who celebrated military victories, sang to the priors at dinner and expounded on good government when the Signoria made its formal entrance into the palace every two months. Antonio di Meglio, the most renowned herald, also sang at San Martino, demonstrating how these two forms of social identity-building were interlocked. Often such patriotic speeches would be recounted also at San Martino and were copied into personal scrap books. The

\textsuperscript{1089} Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 74.
\textsuperscript{1090} Ibid., 81-93.
\textsuperscript{1091} Elio Conti, Alessandro Guidotti, and Roberto Lunardi, La civiltà fiorentina del Quattrocento, (Florence: Vallecchi, 1993), 236.citing ASF Carte strozziane, seconda serie, 13, 59v. Doffo di Nepo Spini records two instances in which he lent his copy of the Decameron: “E a di 25 di novembre 1427 gli prestai il libro dell Cento Novelle (...) riebbilo. Prestai a Giovanni di Scolaio degli Spini, Il 16 ottobre 1428, la mia cronica di Giovanni Villani in due volume.”
\textsuperscript{1092} Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 50.
question is: how did this practice reinforce or undermine the official voices of Florentine politics? Did the more popular context of San Martino allow for a certain amount of satire and self-reflexive criticism, or did it tend to instill a conformist ethic at the lower levels of society by encouraging loyalty and infusing the Florentine government with legitimacy? Doubtless it served an ambivalent process, though, with the specter of Cosimo de’ Medici hovering over it after his return from exile in 1434, the social function of the piazza may have increasingly been caught up not in the spatialized communal narrative but in the spatialization of Medici power.

The biography of Burchiello, however, might make a case for the former. According to his own poem, quoted below, he wrote down all the nasty actions of the city’s lower classes, and then turned them into sonnets. He was a barber, whose shop was located on via Calimala and then, as now, such professional space served as a hub for the exchange of information and stories. According to literary historian Domenico Guerri, he would take his lute to the piazza San Martino, where, in the image of one poem, it was locked in a poetic battle with the humanist poets. He would evoke the spontaneity and randomness of urban experience, building on fragments of daily life to create poems connected loosely by alliteration and not by semantic clarity. He created parodies of lofty poetry while he gave dignity and grace to poverty through language. More importantly, Burchiello was a vagabond. Roaming the streets without money he became a kind of ideal interpreter of the city as an internal outcast. He could be considered as a real-life prototype for the vagabond

---

1095 Domenico Guerri, *La corrente popolare nel Rinascimento: berte, burle, baie nella Firenze del Brunellesco e del Burchiello*, (Florence: Sansoni, 1931), 94. Historian Renée Watkins agrees with Guerri that the lute referred to in Burchiello’s poem is, in fact, a lute but does not believe that the sleeping clouds warning on his lute until they break his strings, are humanist poets, who would have been present in the gardens and homes where Il Burchiello performed. See Watkins, "Il Burchiello," 33.
that Alberti’s anti-hero Momus praises, ironically, as freer than anyone else in the city’s public spaces. His power derives precisely from his powerlessness, which gives him the ability to criticize with impunity. The city’s public places belonged to him: “the theaters belong to the beggars, the porticoes to beggars – in fact every public place belongs to beggars!” 1097 He is also able to speak freely in the “forum”, something no others would dare to do, afraid as they are of the raised eyebrows of their elders. 1098 He was not bound by the acoustic conventions of the piazza where secrets had to be whispered and criticism of the regime was prohibited.

Storytellers, both effective and clumsy, fill the pages of Florentine urban literature, addressing audiences from the pulpit, in piazze, in kitchens, bedrooms, and at the dinner table. To be a good storyteller was a shorthand means of praise and Giotto’s powers of narrative were praised even by Boccaccio himself – “And as he rode and listened to Giotto, who was a very fine storyteller…” 1099 Giotto is praised at length in the Decameron for his ability to paint the natural world, so much so that he fooled many into confusing the objects in his paintings for the real thing. For Boccaccio, who seems to be speaking of Giotto’s publica fama, he brought painting back to life for his contemporaries, appealing to the intellect rather than the viewer’s ignorant love of visual delights (Figure 4.4).

These two modes of praise for Giotto in the Decameron actually contradict each other, making Giotto’s art both a visual game in which the audience is delightfully fooled and an intellectual exercise that transcended the physical

1098 Ibid., 133.
1099 “E messer Forese, cavalcando e ascoltando Giotto, il quale bellissimo favellatore era.” Boccaccio, Decameron, VI, 5, 13. As a master storyteller, Giotto stands in direct contrast to the hapless knight in the previous story, who shows how good content is wasted if not wedded to competent style. It requires a practiced delivery to be effective. He stumbles over words, repeats himself, messes up names, and has to start over. See Boccaccio, Decameron, VI, 1.
experience. This contradiction, however, can be resolved by the way in which the narrative performance was experienced in its urban setting. One must consider that Giotto, like the storyteller, appealed to both the unlettered and the elite. This is foregrounded by a well-known but little-analyzed text by Poggio Bracciolini. It is a mini-story about a rather long story that went on and on for days and days in the piazza.\footnote{Poggio Bracciolini, Eugenio Garin, and Marcello Ciccufo, \textit{Facezie}, 1a ed., (Milan: Biblioteca universale Rizzoli, 1983), LXXXIII (p. 203?).} One night, one of Poggio’s neighbors (\textit{vicinus meus}), whom he describes as a simpleton (\textit{homo simplex}), was listening to this storyteller, and upon hearing the promise of the death of Hector, exhorted the performer with money and words not to kill such a great hero so soon. This continued, until he finally was forced to listen to the story of the death of Hector, which he did with great sadness, not to mention great poverty.\footnote{This attempt to prolong narrative by various means could also be a laudable act. Branca points to how Boccaccio’s copyists added stories, such as \textit{Il grasso legnaiuolo}, or a letter at the end, “to prolong the noble rhythms of the tenth day.” See Branca, Secondo Elenco, 198.}

The text gives evidence of the popularity and frequency of storytelling at San Martino, as commentators have noted, but its internal evidence also points to larger social issues of the urban experience of storytelling.\footnote{Kent, 44, Malato, 856.} Certain storytellers were highly praised for their ability to hold audiences and Kent has shown how their repertoire demanded a relatively broad range of learning.\footnote{See Kent’s discussion in \textit{Cosimo de’ Medici}, 44-48} Poggio’s naïve listener misrecognises narrative as conterminous with reality itself. The performance was so “real,” that it belonged precisely to the moment and space in which it was uttered. It came alive there before him on the urban stage, a product of agile storytelling technique and a voice that took complete command of the narrative content. This was Amphion in action.
The listener’s acoustic and visual worlds were so transformed that he feared that the act of storytelling itself would kill the hero who was so vividly portrayed before him; and only prolonging the narrative could save his fate. He is chastised for experiencing in a verbal form what Giotto seems to be praised for in the Decameron in a visual one; superseding nature, of being in control of the narrative to the extent that he had the power in his grasp to transform it into anything.\textsuperscript{1104} His lack of sophistication does not allow him to distinguish between drama and life, between the dynamics of style and the integrity of content. Therefore, the performance of narratives, which were embedded in dialogue, was subject to potential manipulative forces that images usually were not. The re-formulation of a painter’s style, compositional structures, and narrative innovations was, by and large, controlled by the system of studio apprenticeship. However, the much freer access to words by voices made the integrity of stories much more fluid and subject to degrees of dissolution by a whole range of verbal practices. This suggests that Poggio was using this story to express concern over, or even merely to point out, the way in which ancient literature was vulgarized and let loose to the forces within the public sphere. Attempts by the popular classes to make these stories their own may have been considered as potentially violent acts, inflicted on prized cultural monuments.\textsuperscript{1105} They were public insofar as their narrative and linguistic structures were respected, in the way that public space was filled with regulations to preserve the city as a public monument.

Unmediated by proper intellectual erudition, such stories could be completely misunderstood. This story also alludes to the distinct differences in the audience.

\textsuperscript{1104} There is also the indication that the listener simply wants this narrative not to end.
\textsuperscript{1105} It may have been considered to have a similar resonance to the vandalism perpetrated by Antonio Rinaldeschi on the image of the Virgin in 1501 when he threw horse dung at her face. On this episode see William J. Connell and Giles Constable, Sacrilege and Redemption in Renaissance Florence: the Case of Antonio Rinaldeschi, (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005).
Narrative performances at San Martino may have brought a wide range of Florentines together but it did not mean they were united by the experience, or that they reacted to them in similar ways. Poggio’s text actually points to the way Florentines might have differentiated themselves from each other, defining themselves in relation to stories in a variety of ways. At least his distaste for identifying with the lower classes through the enjoyment of the same civic performance had to be expressed in some way. Clearly, being a good listener was as important as being a good speaker for Florentines. Their responses, in their zibaldoni, attest to the urgency of listening and applying what one heard. The circulation of Pucci’s personal compilation would help to guarantee a certain commonality and agreement among performances, allowing audiences to compare and discuss differences of style.

The cantastorie therefore, was an ambivalent figure, representing the intersection of a multifaceted and vibrant literary culture that was in no way homogeneous. His power of storytelling, his rhetorical powers, possessed at least the illusion, perhaps some of the promise, along with the shadow of the threat, that one both listeners and the space of the piazza could be controlled through the careful manipulation of language.

In effect, the circulation of voices, stories, propaganda, books, and zibaldoni straddled the spaces between the verbal and the written, between the spoken and the read. It was a living collective memory, hovering between the active repetition in ritual exchange of a living social memory and the externalization of an official memory fixed in print as an unchangeable text.\textsuperscript{1106} Zibaldoni were a means of organizing, storing, and constructing memory. The constant repetitions and lists were meant as devices for memorization. The monotonous chants that suffuse Benedetto

\textsuperscript{1106} Bruni’s History was just such a text in terms of founding a more official Florentine memory.
Dei’s text link it to a memorized corpus of persons, places, and things.\textsuperscript{1107} Kent remarks that it is notable that Florentines chose the spatio-architectural model of memory palaces over the medieval model of memory treatises located in the written words of books and inscribed in the mind during sleep.\textsuperscript{1108}

The Decameron is full of characters with the ability to manipulate language, control its meaning and, therefore, the space around them. Consider the wife in the third novella of the third day – discussed above – who is able to control the space around her through the careful manipulation of a coded message sent through the medium of an unwitting friar. It gains her access to the streets of communication denied to her personally, and it is the desire she embeds in language that guarantees her success. However, there are also those storytellers, fabricators and tricksters, whose power to invent stories satisfy less erotic desires in the service of self-aggrandizement, deceit, and treachery. They range from the harmless to the fiendish, but both need to be undermined for their narrative transgressions.

Frate Cipolla, in novella VI, 10, is an example of the former. He is mockingly praised as such a skillful speaker that he could be confused with such figures as Cicero and Quintilian. Despite the obvious hyperbole, the friar’s skill gives him a wide sociability. His Achilles heel, however, is his servant, whose ineptness at storytelling brings on the insulting wrath of his master. Through such lies about who he is, this

\textsuperscript{1107} For a discussion of Dei’s lists see “Benedetto Dei’s lists: Counting and Measuring” in chapter two.  
servant tries to woo a servant girl, which allows the protagonists of the story to enter the friar’s room unnoticed and set up their joke against him. The exchange of a carefully guarded relic for a lump of coal was apparently merited because, despite Frate Cipolla’s rhetorical power, he actually had no education and therefore was not beyond public shame when he finally unveils his false relic. His own empty rhetoric is contrasted to the emptiness of the relic, which the coal exposes for the fake that it is. His whole act was a ruse, a fabricated façade on which such powers could be dangerous and which needed to be purged from the public arena of narrative.

Such danger is evident in the Franciscan impersonator of novella IV, 2 – discussed in chapter two – whose histrionics during the mass included him shedding dramatic tears, which were coupled with deceitful, pious preaching, all of which mimicked and mocked the performative techniques of cantastorie at San Martino.1109 Such aspects of performance, linguistic power, and deceit connected preachers and storytellers, sermons and tricksters within the same rhetoric of public persuasion. As a thief, pimp, and forger, this friar had to be unmasked, therefore. He stands in marked contrast to the publica fama of Coppo di Borghese Domenichi – discussed in chapter one – a historical figure praised in the Decameron as a consummate neighborhood storyteller who acted as a kind of memory storehouse for the city.1110 He was well-known for telling stories to friends and neighbors, several of which inspired narratives in both the Decameron and Il Trecentonovelle.1111 Such a figure was set against the fabulists. He was linked to the local community space of the neighborhood square, which is contrasted to the more unpredictable, central piazza, which was more accessible to itinerant storytellers. He stands for a certain ethics of storytelling that

\[1109\] This story was analyzed more fully in “Piaze, Streets, Networks” in chapter two.
\[1110\] He is also found in a list of “viri illustres” in Boccaccio’s own Zibaldone; see BNCF B.R. 50, f. 232.
\[1111\] See “The Gendered Street” in chapter one.
was more seriously concerned with the preservation of the past as it was told, responsibly, in a neighborhood setting away from the commercial temptations of San Martino.

What this varied collection of storytellers, fabricators, preachers and desirers shows is that on the threshold of the Renaissance there was also a complex, if informal, culture of storytelling that seems historically connected to the more formally ritualized and professional setting of San Martino. Stories about storytellers and their stories constituted an urban circulation system that could be manipulated for illicit ends. Thus, through careful listening, the urban world became a complex system of interpretation. The storyteller could gain power and prestige through performance, linking the control of words to the control of space. Giovanni Cavalcanti’s declaration, that “whoever holds the piazza, will always win the city,” could be applied to this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{1112}

The link between language and control of space is revealed in the government’s own ritual of reading of laws and diplomatic correspondences in prescribed places, but primarily in the Piazza della Signoria.\textsuperscript{1113} The government also hired an official \textit{cantatore}, the herald of the commune, who was an official narrator of the regime to the people in the city’s principal piazza and who also entertained the priors during their meals. Such a figure might also moonlight at San Martino and therefore straddled the line between public narratives as products of the piazza, and those that edified and entertained the regime. There would have been no clear line of

\textsuperscript{1112} Giovanni Cavalcanti, \textit{Istorie fiorentine}, ed. Filippo Luigi Polidori, (Florence: Tip. all'insegna di Dante, 1838), X, 13 (p. 311). “Colui che tiene la piazza sempre è vincente della città.”

\textsuperscript{1113} The banditori were required to make official government pronouncements through the city and the chancellor would read out laws on the ringhiera in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. See ASF Statuti, 19 XX, Meier, XX, Alle bocche, XX.
division between them.\textsuperscript{1114} San Martino marked a space of possible subversion.\textsuperscript{1115} Effective storytellers were lords of the square while they performed but it was up to the audience to praise or discipline them. Certainly, the techniques of rewriting popular stories ran up against certain notions of the integrity of texts, perhaps those that were also read in the more formal setting of the Florentine Studio.

The “Dante” who was read in that more academic atmosphere was a different textual experience, and its methodical rigor conflicted with the collective editing of the piazza. As a case in point, I would like to return to a novel by Sacchetti that begins with an encounter between a young Adimari knight and Dante himself.\textsuperscript{1116} Dante comes to a realization that the knight’s real crime – \textit{cavalcare largo} – was the usurpation of public space through an act of moving through the city. This was a crime endemic to his class. This symbolic act represented his class’s legacy of disrupting movement and turning space inward toward private control. The novel begins with a request – for Dante to advocate on his behalf – and ends with a condemnation of the knight’s arrogant spatial practices. However, something strange happens in the middle of this story, which at first appears to be a completely random urban encounter and utterly disconnected from the overall narrative. On the contrary, however, it is crucial for understanding Dante’s epiphany. In fact, it is this episode that is described in the story’s introductory rubric, making it the central focus of the narrative. The rubric is completely silent on the event that sends Dante walking through the city; listening to sounds and thinking about space.


\textsuperscript{1115} Cosimo de’ Medici’s patronage of events around San Martino is evidence of both his personal and social interest as well as his awareness that praise and damnation from the \textit{panche} had real effects. For a discussion of his patronage in this context see Kent, chapters V and VI.

\textsuperscript{1116} See “Percorrere la Città” in chapter two.
While Dante is making his way to the *executore’s* palace, he hears something he does not like. A blacksmith is singing his poetry just “as a public singer would sing it [in the public square], mixing up the verses and in general hacking it to pieces so that Dante felt a great injury had been done to him.”

Dante remains silent, and as a response he starts to throw the smith’s tools out onto the street, one by one: hammer, tongs, scales. When the stupefied artisan demands to know why he has broken his tools (*masserizie*) by throwing them into the street, Dante retorts: “If you don’t want me to break your things, don’t ruin mine.” The smith, still confused, wonders how ever he could have broken Dante’s tools, to which Dante replies: “You are singing the poem but you are not reciting it as I wrote it. I have no other art/trade/skill, and you are ruining it on me.”

Comparing his own *métier* to that of a metal worker, Dante reacts against the urban echoes of his works. This experience points to the way his poetry actually circulated within an informal and popular civic culture, where it suffered the mutilation of improvised and casual repetitions. It had become part of the city’s soundscape but it was not a sound that pleased the Sacchetti’s character of Dante at all, considering the way the bell of the Badia did when it rang at Terce and Nones.

The incident reminds readers that, although language may belong to everyone and that vernacular poetry in particular always had one foot in the public world of social exchange, it was also a public monument of sorts and demanded a certain amount of maintenance of its structural integrity for it not to disappear. What is more,

---

1118 Ibid., CXIV, 14-18: “Non dice altro, se non s’accosta alla bottega del fabbro, là dove avea di molti ferri, con che facea è’arte; piglia Dante il martello e gettalo per la via, piglia le tanaglie e getta per via, piglia le bilance e getta per la via, e così gittò molti ferramenti.”
1119 “Se tu non vuogli che io guasti le cose tue, non guastare le mie.” “Tu canti il libro e non lo di’ com’io lo feci; io non ho altr’arte, e tu me la guasti.” Ibid., 30-31.
1120 See the discussion in “per quale si sente per tutta la città sonare: Constructing Space through Sound” in chapter three.
the poetic work could also be conceived as the product of one’s labor and over which one was granted some formal control over cost and distribution. Hence, Dante the character claimed ownership of his poem, just in the way that the smith owned his things, his tools, through which he fashioned his products, no matter how complex that claim could be considering that Dante’s tools were, in fact, words.

The smith’s products, however, were for sale, and although there was a corporate mechanism to set prices, those products ended up in the world of economic exchange. Dante’s poem therefore, by Sacchetti’s inference, is not the product of his labor but his tool, the medium through which he mediates his understanding and experience of the public world as a producing individual. It is the means by which he maintained himself, and he had as much right to hold on to it in the way any property holder might, as a particular configuration of words, by virtue of an early idea of what is now known as intellectual property rights.\textsuperscript{1121} Anyone could sing it but there had to be some sort of standard of quality or fealty to the text and its author. Such restrictions would, theoretically at least, fall within the statutory purview of the regulation of labor and control of who could and could not perform their tasks in public spaces. We are left with the image of the smith, his chest inflated, probably searching for the bellowing force of a true Florentine \textit{motto} (witticism) but only able to silently pick up his things and return to work. He would no longer sing Dante, the narrator tells us, but made do instead with singing the story of Tristan and Lancelot and left Dante alone.\textsuperscript{1122}

This story can be traced back to an episode in the life of Arcesilaus, written by Diogenes Laertius. In it, Diogenes has the philosopher tell a story about Philoxenus

\textsuperscript{1121} It is worth noting that the character of Dante believed that the tools he and the smith wielded were comparable. 
\textsuperscript{1122} Il fabbro gonfiato, non sapendo rispondere, raccoglie le cose e tornò al suo lavoro; e se volle cantare, cantò di Tristan e di Lancelotto e lasciò stare il Dante…” Sacchetti, \textit{Il trecentonovelle}, CXIV, 32-34.
and the brick makers. The former heard the latter singing some of his melodies out of
tune. So he trampled on their bricks saying, “If you spoil my work, I’ll spoil
yours.”1123 Arcesilaus was chastising a dialectic philosopher for his inability to repeat
an argument properly. Sacchetti makes a subtle change to show how intellectual work
was relevant not only to philosophical arguments but also to everyday urban
experience. He also takes up the ethical question of the proper way to repeat poetic
stories.

Ironically, Sacchetti’s own story about the social rules of singing someone
else’s poems is not only a reformulation of an ancient Greek source but also a
rewriting of his own novella XC.1124 Sacchetti’s earlier story recounts how a
shoemaker (calzolaio) speaks badly about a certain messer Ridolfo da Camerino. Of
course, the stories reach Ridolfo’s ears and in response he takes away the slipper
maker’s forms, rendering him helpless to work his trade. Here, Sacchetti is playing on
social identity and how it is defined, as well as on the difference between direct and
indirect slander; whereas the former destroys through content, and the latter damages
through style. As such, Dante would suffer by the reduction in quality of his poems
through their diffusion and dissolution in the public realm. The question remains as to
whether the reader should take the example of Sacchetti himself, who rewrote ancient
stories, and then rewrote his own stories, mixing the past and the present, high culture
with low, classical learning with popular storytelling. What constituted the limits of
the variations? Did imaginative and well-crafted rewritings of the original story

1123 Laertius Diogenes, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, trans. Robert Drew Hicks, with new introductory
material. ed., 2 vols., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), I, IV, 36 (p. 413). For the
connection to the ancient story see Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, 255 (editor’s note).
1124 There existed a popular Latin compendium of the Lives that was most likely by an Italian author and
was written before 1326. This compendium was often confused with the actual work by Laertius and
was printed as such in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There was also a fourteenth-century
Italian translation of this Latin text. This makes it possible not only that Sacchetti could have read the
Latin version, but also that vernacular audience could have been familiar with the same narrative. On
the translations of Diogenes Laertius see James Hankins and Ada Palmer, The Recovery of Ancient
constitute a preservation of the integrity of the original by becoming something independent? Was the process of rewriting where the idea of originality lay? If one’s story was someone else’s, who owned it? Such questions arise from the seemingly easy identification of the blacksmith as a counterfeit narrator, but where did one draw the line?

As a socially valuable commodity stories embedded the collective memory of a civic society within the urban environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that bad storytellers are condemned, not just ridiculed. The hopelessness of the knight’s story in the Decameron (VI, 1) was not in its content; in fact, it was a very good story.

However, he forgot names, repeatedly restarted, forgot things, and in general messed up a delivery that was then detached from the contents of the story.\(^{1125}\) The reaction experienced by the woman is violent. The performance causes her to feel so ill she is at the point of death, and has to extricate herself and the knight from the abyss.\(^{1126}\) Such mangling of Florence’s cultural store of narratives literally grated on the ears of its citizens, causing a sonic dissonance that had to be silenced.

Immediately after Dante is confronted with the singing blacksmith the encounter obviously makes him begin to think about the nature of the urban space he is walking through; to whom it belonged, how it should be addressed, and the proper means of moving through it. It was, after all, the setting and repository of those stories

\(^{1125}\) “Messer lo cavaliere, al quale forse non stava meglio la spada allato che ’l novellar nella lingua, udito questo, cominciò una sua novella, la quale nel vero da sé era bellissima, ma egli or tre e quatro e sei volte replicando una medesima parola e ora indietro tornando e talvolta dicendo: ”Io non dissi bene” e spesso ne’ nomi errando, un per un altro ponendone, fieramente la guastava…” (This knight, whose sword by his side was probably no more effective than his tongue was in telling stories, upon hearing this remark, began his story, which was in truth in itself very good, but by repeating the same word three, four, or even six times, and then going back to the beginning to start the story all over again, and remarking from time to time. “I’m not telling this very well, am I?” and frequently getting the names of the characters wrong and even mixing them up with one another, the knight managed to make a dreadful mess of it all…). Decameron, VI, 1, 9.

\(^{1126}\) “Di che a madonna Oretta, udendolo, spesse volte veniva un sudore e uno sfinimento di cuore, come se inferma fosse stata per terminare…” (As she listened to him, Madonna Oretta began to perspire profusely and every so often she felt her heart sink as if she were ill and about to pass away…). Boccaccio, Decameron, VI, 1, 10-11.
and therefore, needed to be preserved, controlled, and maintained as much by laws as by social rituals and exchanges. So Dante reflects on the way that the cavaliere – the Adimari knight for whom he was going to see the esecutore – rode down the street on his horse and decides to do something about it. At issue in both cases are elements that concern the use of a developing concept of public space. The implication is that the smith was not reciting from the Commedia, but was singing corrupted songs he had heard in the piazza by cantatori who would continually reinterpret stories as they performed them, “experiment with additions and variations, improvise and insert digressions,” as they adapted to different audiences.\footnote{Malato, Il Quattrocento, 856 ff.}

Set together, the two “crimes” committed in the story revolve around control of communal space. The young knight, in the fashion of his class, was usurping the space of the commune by the way he rode through it on his horse, wrapping it around himself as if it were his own private mantle. The smith, on the other hand, was participating in the communicative experience of public space. This is the realm that always had the potential, for those who sought to control the message, to corrupt and degrade monologic communication. By placing Dante between two classes – one that appropriated space and one that appropriated texts – Sacchetti complicates Dante’s class identity and its relationship upwards to the disenfranchised elite and downwards towards the non-elite ranks of the lesser guildsmen. Both ends of this vertical axis give Dante profound consternation and force him to reflect on the nature of two kinds of “publics”. The space-cluttering knight encumbered and hindered public space as a network of movement that was supposed to facilitate trade and its control, while the ear-grating voice of the blacksmith corrupted a text that was part of a public culture of textuality to which, in Sacchetti’s narrative world, the blacksmith did not belong. What emerges is a contradiction that illustrates clearly the
rhetoric of Florentine republican statutes about public space and the constant desire to co-opt that space for private use by wealth Florentine citizens. The condemnation of the knight presupposed the uninhibited circulation of bodies in public space while the condemnation of the blacksmith demonstrated the necessity of obstructing the free flow of information through those very same spaces in order to protect a text that was, in practice, an aural public monument. In the perspective of the narrative, Dante’s work inhabited the public square but it was always in danger of being mangled and vandalized by the disorderly sonic forces at work there that threatened to turn it into something ugly, unsightly, or, more precisely, something acoustically repellent. In other words, Dante was condemning the privatizing use of space by one class while he sought to privatize the use of the public monument within the proper textual discourses. In both cases, what was at stake was the creation, control, interpretation, and enforcement of public space and the culture of textuality that it supported.\textsuperscript{1128}

The argument against the uncontrolled circulation of the monumental vernacular epic through Florence in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century stands as a metaphor, I believe, of the more secretive textual practices of elite guildsmen that are theorized by literary historian William Robins. Naming it \textit{mercantesca} textuality, he uses a term that refers specifically to a particular type of script that belonged to this class and was taught in merchant schools.\textsuperscript{1129} It was not

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{1128 In a real life analogy, a specific law forbade the public scrutiny of merchant’s account books as legal evidence even in cases of criminal convictions. Caggese, \textit{Podestà (1325)}, II, 29 (p. 101); "Statuti del Podestà (1355),” II, xxxiv. Exceptions were made for the petitions of creditors. This exception “nisi ad petitionem creditoris” is inexplicably missing from the 1355 edition of the statutes translated by Andrea Lancia under the rubric “Che mercatante non sia costretto di mostrare lo libro delle sue ragioni.” The law guards the right of all merchants and artisans to keep their account books private when they are condemned or exiled, including the quantity of his ragioni or his company, or even of the shop or the tavola. Foreign officials were to be fined for breaking this law. I am grateful to John Najemy for pointing out the difference in the two laws, and in whose judgment, the law makes no sense without the exception.}
\end{footnotesize}
only the style that distinguished this writing from other scripts, such as notarial, clerical, and humanist, but also the fact that the “one responsible for the contents of the book” and the “one who wrote it” were “one and the same.”

This was the world of the merchant account book, which has been ever-present throughout this study. These texts represented a genre not derived from religious, legal, diplomatic, or scholastic models but were the products of aspirations of what literary scholar Robin Williams calls the “third estate”, not aristocratic or religious, but secular and popular. They were the expression of an autonomous commercial sector that demanded a different documentary strategy designed to institutionalize the reduction of risk. Textual management became risk management through the careful recording of transactions. What necessitated this new technology of writing was the way that such an independent economic sector was less concerned with titles and deeds than it was with negotiability of debt, credit, and risk that were managed by continuous calculations. This transferability was analogous to an open and free network of streets, trade routes, and lines of communication between widely displaced buyers and sellers and. Risk was minimized by spreading the obstacles and dangers associated with international trade among larger numbers of traders.

However, the texts with which the merchant monitored such transactions constituted a secret book (libro segreto) that was only available to “a very small, almost conspiratorial circle of relatives and partners.” From account registers to ricordanze or libri di famiglia, the autonomy of these texts defined and managed the autonomy of commercial culture. These texts constituted the expression of a distinct textuality understood as:

1130 Ibid., 116.
1131 Ibid., 114-15.
1132 Ibid., 117.
1133 Ibid., 112. Williams bases this autonomy, which was particular to cities like Florence, in the independent authority of the merchants’ tribunal, or Mercanzia, which was “not a legal court so much
the formal factors and cognitive processes that make human beings, individually and in groups, intervene in their societies by defining themselves as makers, users, and possessors of texts, to examine how such formal concerns generate conflict rather than merely serve as a displacement for conflicts supposedly produced elsewhere, in material interests.\footnote{1134}

The format of the account book lent itself to the selection, transference, and recopying of texts, poetic, prosaic, devotional, or technical, where the “integrity of the written text was overruled by the flexibility of extracting and recombining any number of discreet items in order to meet new interests or obligations.\footnote{1135} Therefore, the freedom to take apart and recompose texts such as Dante’s belonged to a textual practice that was endemic to a specific portion of the merchant class. This was, outside the academic studio, the proper zone of experimentation with such texts, a zone of textuality that, as Robins has shown, was constructed to exclude precisely those lower guildsmen who debts were enforced by the Mercanzia. This was knowledge of limited public access and needed to be protected, lest it suffer the same fate of Dante’s poem in Sacchetti’s story. What was dramatized was Paolo da Certaldo’s fear of the threshold between the relative silence of a libro segreto and the audible sound of whispered secrets. For both records of economic transactions and poetry, prized by the merchant class, one had to construct textual barriers that functioned like thick walls.


\footnote{1135} Robins, ”Vernacular Textualities,” 115.
The regulation of public space could be a weapon against the magnate class, whose violence and arrogance cluttered it up, but it also needed protection from the uncontrolled voices and dissonant noises made by the lower classes. Inevitably, the circulation of Dante’s text in this field of popular improvisation would suffer the very hacking to pieces, additions, and bastardizations to which Sacchetti’s character himself so objects. The implications and serious consequences of such unauthorized mangling of texts so crucial to the civic identities of a certain class are re-emphasized in the very next novella of Il Trecentonovelle, where Dante, walking armed through the city, physically assaults a donkey herd. The unfortunate fellow was also singing Dante’s poem and after each line he would shout out a vulgar “arril” in time with spurring on the animal.\footnote{Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CXV.} The peasant is confused, stunned, and completely at a loss in the face of Dante’s protests that he had not put that “arri” into his text. So the donkey herd simply moves on, not recognizing the poet. A short distance away, however, he turns and makes a crude gesture to Dante – “sticking out his tongue, and making the sign of the cunt…”\footnote{Ibid. “cavandoli la lingua, e facendoli con la mano la fica...”} Dante is then praised by the narrator for the restraint he shows in the face of such a provocation. Instead of running after such a vile man – one even socially lower than a blacksmith – screaming and throwing stones as anyone else would do, he combats him with sage words: “I would not give you one of mine for a hundred of yours.”\footnote{Ibid. “lo non ti darei una delle mie per cento delle tue.”} In other words, Dante’s response highlights the fact that well-chosen words could replace the sounds and stones of factional violence, that texts, and the textual culture they represented, were a bulwark against the lower classes, as much as laws that were backed up with architectural violence were a weapon against the elite. This allowed a certain portion of the Popolo to claim a
distinct status within the enfranchised classes, and Sacchetti shows how the control of texts was a means through which that conflict was enacted.

Sacchetti dramatizes the double-bind of a public space that was in the process of emerging in the fourteenth century through two urban encounters by Dante. It had to be kept clear of physical obstacles (arrogant knights) but it also had to be filled with rules and regulations to prevent unwanted deterioration (the ignorance of the lower classes).

4.2 Reading and Writing: Notaries and Narrative

Volgarizate per me Andrea Lance notaio fiorentino; contiens qui alcuna cosa degna di memoria…
ASF, Statuti, 13, f. 1r

In my reading of Sacchetti’s novella about Dante and the performance of his texts in public space, I claimed that narrator’s principal objection was based on an idea of class. Although technically the lower orders of the guild system in Florence participated in the official administration of the city, that participation was less influential and their activities were far more circumscribed by statutory law than were the elite classes of bankers, manufacturers, and traders. I have pointed to numerous laws that regulated the slaughter of animals, the selling of food, footwear, scrap metal, as well as wool-spinning, brick-making, public proclamations, and fire fighting. The guild system itself was hierarchized between the seven maggiori and fourteen minori, but they were also separated psychologically, and part of that separation was based on their assumed relationship to texts. The culture of textuality defined in the previous section was reserved exclusively for merchants and was represented by the authority
of the *Mercanzia*, which defined this class as a vernacular community distinct from a religious or legal one.\textsuperscript{1139}

It was Florence’s army of notaries who provided the crucial links in the dissemination of both historical and literary knowledge within that class of non-Latin reading merchants whose enthusiasm for both classical and contemporary texts was nonetheless extremely fervent. These were the merchants who rearranged and juxtaposed texts in their *ricordanze*, creating a hybrid form of text whose strategies were protected by commercial law. Moreover, scrutiny of these texts was forbidden by any other civic authority than the merchant tribunal by law, even for criminal investigations.\textsuperscript{1140} A merchant’s account book was sacrosanct and it would be no surprise that literary fragments included in it would be cloaked in the same aura. Therefore, Dante was not only attacking the blacksmith and the donkey herd for messing up his poem; he was also rebuking them for attempting to participate in a literary and mercantile culture that reserved the right to dismember and recompose such texts.

Through the transmission of historiography and classical literature these Florentines were taking part in a collective endeavor to establish their relationship to both a local and a wider ancient past. Notaries were, according to Attilio Langeli, the public hands of the Italian medieval commune. They were a defense against collective forgetting and were very much aware that they were safeguarding communal memory.\textsuperscript{1141} The contracts they drew up were part of the narrative of the commune

\textsuperscript{1139} Lesser guildmen and the disenfranchised possessed their own relationship to texts, according to Williams. He defines it as a textuality of enfranchisement. In other words, the bureaucratic structure of a city like Florence was strong enough to persist despite radical changes in regime. Therefore, would-be revolutionaries like the Ciompi deployed the rhetoric of petitions and the guild-based regime.\textsuperscript{1140} Caggese, *Podestà (1325)*; "Statuti del Podestà (1355),” II, xxxiv. Only creditors could request to see account books, according to the statutes, an exception inexplicably missing from the 1355 statute. I have already referred to this law in a similar context; see “Percorrere la città” in chapter two.\textsuperscript{1141} Attilio Bartoli langeli, “Entre documents et monuments: la mémoire officielle de la cité communale italienne,” in *La mémoire de la cité : modèles antiques et réalisations renaissantes : actes du colloque*
that preserved the memory of citizens’ ritual acts of witness. Every private act, by way of the notary, entered the public domain and in so doing was guaranteed by the publica fides that the locally trained – most were trained in Bologna – but universally authoritative office of the notary symbolized. Towards notaries the inhabitants of the commune nourished an attitude of trust that was correctly public because it was recognized by everyone. As the Italian city-states were developing a sense of their political role, these experts in business, documentation, and collective relations became the trustees of memory and communal identity.\textsuperscript{1142}

Brunetto Latini, notary and Florentine chancellor, is a case in point. Sometime after the establishment of the primo popolo, the first popular government of Florence, in 1250, he assumed public duties for the regime. From 1259, when he was sent on an ambassadorial mission to Spain, until the defeat of the Ghibellines in 1266 he remained in exile but afterwards returned to public life in Florence. From at least 1273 was chancellor of the city until his death in 1294/5.\textsuperscript{1143} His Li Livres dou Trésor compiled a vast array of human knowledge into three subdivisions: the natural world, the virtues and vices, and the rhetoric of the civic government.\textsuperscript{1144} This work has been referred to as a manual for republican government and links his vast knowledge to an ethical interrogation of civic peace and justice.\textsuperscript{1145}

\textsuperscript{1142} Ibid., 26-27.
\textsuperscript{1143} For an intellectual biography of Brunetto see Bianca Ceva, \textit{Brunetto Latini, l'uomo e l'opera}, (Milan: Ricciardi, 1965).
\textsuperscript{1145} On Brunetto’s political ideas see Quentin Skinner, "The Vocabulary of Renaissance Republicanism: A Cultural longue-durée," in \textit{Language and Images of Renaissance Italy}, ed. Alison Brown, (Oxford;
As a voice of the commune, Latini has been identified as the author of an inscription still visible on Palazzo del Podestà in Florence, along the western façade (Figure 6). The text commemorates victory over Florence’s enemies, linking the city’s prosperity and peace to the building of “these walls” of the palace by the Capitano and then clearly defines the role of the city’s public walls: to preserve and transfer the city’s political and economic prosperity to future generations:

MENIA TVNC FECIT VIR CO(n)STA(n)S ISTA FVTVRIS.  

In other words, stones took part in the communicative interaction of a robust civic society by giving concrete form to institutions while those stones physically protected them. They transferred the rhetoric of the city, literally, by acting as the physical support for inscriptions like this one. This was part of an official dialogue in which the city consciously embedded its political memory into its architectural fabric.

The inscription begins by marking time according to the reign of Pope Alexander IV, the Holy Roman Emperor, the city’s Podestà, and the Capitano. In this


1147 MacCracken, *The Dedication Inscription*, 5-6. McCracken translates it as “a steadfast man… then built these walls for the future generations.”
way, the text links Florence’s new political structure within these larger more
universal jurisdictions. The text ends with another temporal reference, this time
setting the text and its referent, the new republic, within the Christian era with the
customary indication.\footnote{1148} Framed within these conventional temporal coordinates, the
text of the inscription reveals a clear partisanship for a certain idea of Florence and
even hints at the spatial interaction of such inscriptions by repeating a phrase from the
Baptistery floor that declares that “Florence is abounding in all riches.”\footnote{1149} Villani’s
declaration that Latini taught Florentines the art of speaking well takes on larger and
longer temporal dimensions when one considers that his example was carved into the
city’s architectural surface.\footnote{1150} It makes him the city’s story-teller par excellence, who
formed the link between rhetoric and the republic, words and buildings.

The notary was both a neutral arbiter of legal pronouncements and an engaged
citizen who spoke on behalf of the city, safeguarding its identity and interests. Placed
on the façade of a public building, the wall becomes the support for an official,
explicit public memory and its visibility participates in the discourse of making things
public (\textit{piuvichare}, \textit{publicare}). In addition, the wall allows the commune to speak
permanently to its own public, literally becoming the medium through which
republican propaganda could be transmitted.\footnote{1151} It also demonstrated how the republic
itself was a monument built on the twin pillars of concrete walls and mountains of
texts. Architecture was both the material support for this textuality and the metaphor
of how texts were the thick walls that protected the regime. The city itself could
function as an archive through which one walked. Each encounter, with communal
texts, arms, gates, and walls, was an encounter with this interactive edifice.

\footnote{1148}{Ibid., 9.}
\footnote{1149}{Ibid., xii.}
\footnote{1150}{Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, IX, 10.}
\footnote{1151}{For a cultural history of inscriptions see Armando Petrucci, \textit{Public Lettering: Script, Power, and Culture}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).}
In this text Latini embodies several of the characteristics of the public notary. His knowledge of Latin allowed him to conserve classical and medieval knowledge, and his legal training allowed him to speak authoritatively as the official voice of the commune, while his citizenship and ethical commitment to republican government made him a trusted ally to his fellow citizens. His authorship gave voice to the very architecture of the city, initiating an official dialogue in space that preserved an official memory in stone.

However, that memory was still in the *lingua franca* of Latin, a language of power and authority. For those who did not have access to Latin culture, such inscriptions may have acted as abstract general markers of memory only. They remained remote and unchallengeable in the way that one’s relationship to them was that of a dutiful citizen within an obedient collective.\(^{1152}\) Notaries, however, were also the central mediators of this Latin culture to the citizens of the Italian communes and Brunetto himself was crucial to the development of a vernacular literary culture.\(^{1153}\) Good rhetorical skills were central to his concept of a virtuous civil society and it is precisely this ethos, as I have shown, that pervades the narrative skills of the *Decameron*’s story-tellers. In the face of adversity, speech – political, ethical, or historical – maintained the integrity of a threatened urban culture.

Active in the middle of the next century, Andrea Lancia (before 1297-after 1357) is another notable example of the critical position notaries occupied in the Florence. On September 12, 1356 he was commissioned by the Florentine government to translate the city’s newly compiled statutes into the vernacular; the edition that has been fundamental to this study. Professionally, Lancia also served as

\(^{1152}\) On the play between the vernacular and Latin languages in terms of political propaganda see Starn, "Room of Peace." On Latin’s political ideas and the visual rhetoric of the republic in the frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in Siena’s Palazzo Pubblico see Campbell, "The City's New Clothes."

the official notary to several key urban magistracies, such as the Night officials
(Ufficiali di notte), the Fire Officials (Ufficio del fuoco), and the bread office (Gabella
del pane), as well as serving on the city’s legislative councils. As such, he
participated in a tradition of making the commune’s laws accessible to those not
versed in Latin by mediating between the lingua parlata and the lingua giuridica.
Such official projects as the vernacularization of communal statutes were also
intended to prevent excuses from those who might plead ignorance of the law and its
Latin textuality.1154 Along with the public reading of the laws by the city’s banditori
and the permanent exhibition of these very statutes for public scrutiny in the Palazzo
Vecchio’s chamber of the office of the gabelle,1155 the vernacular statutes could have
initiated a more lively debate about the rights and duties of citizens.

Such translations were part of an even larger role that notaries such as Lancia
played, however, in the dissemination of the city’s identity. All of this is to say that
Lancia stood at the intersection of several crucial urban trajectories that embedded the
piazza within a set of urban narrative discourses. They included ancient literary
culture, public service, legal opinions, contemporary urban literature, and the
historical memory of the city that was preserved in chronicles and transmitted in the
piazza. As a member of the legislative council, therefore, he was involved in the
creation and regulation of urban public space. As a translator of those laws he was
then involved in communicating these emerging ideas of the “public” to a certain
reading public. Lancia’s personal and professional milieu included crucial historical
figures such as Giovanni Boccaccio, Giovanni Villani, Coppo di Borghese Domenichi,
Sennucio del Bene,1156 Antonio Pucci, and, perhaps, even Dante himself.1157 He refers

1154 For a discussion of the tradition of vernacular statutes see Azzetta, Ordinamenti, 40ff.
1155 Marzi, Cancelleria, 419.
1156 Del Bene was a friend and patron of Petrarch. See Azzetta, Ordinamenti, 23.
1157 Lancia is considered to have been the author of the Ottimo Commento, one of the earliest glosses on
the Commedia, the first version of which was written in 1329. See Deborah Parker, "Interpreting the
to the power of Dante’s voice, how the poet was able to make words mean other than what they did for other speakers (*dicitori*). 1158

As early as 1322 he was involved in the translation of the Florentine Franciscan Anastasio’s Latin prose edition of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. 1159 Disentangled from its Latin poetic edifice, the work had a rapid and very successful diffusion within merchant culture. The text was, in turn, an important source for Villani. It included many references to the *Commedia* and points to the sharing of books between the two men. 1160 Lancia’s life-long promotion of Dante also included his own commentary on the exile’s epic poem – a commentary much admired by Boccaccio – in which he cited Villani often and explicitly. 1161 This circulation shows the intimate literary bonds that formulated, disseminated, and interpreted elements of merchant literature in Florence. It brought together the revival of Roman law, official public memory, classical culture, and local history. Lancia helped to bring this confluence of traditions to a vernacular audience. As an example of this textual interaction, the *Aeneid* became a source for Villani’s civic chronicle in which he was able to restructure the origin myth of Florence. Similarly, Lancia then cites Villani’s chronicle several times in his commentary on Dante. 1162 All of this aided in the creation of a cycle of interlocked narratives that bound the city, its past, its inhabitants, and its spaces together.


1159 He translated letters of Seneca, responding in particular to the one on drunkenness. See Azzetta, *Ordinamenti*, 9-49. He also translated Ovid’s *Ars amandi and remedie amoris*. For these and other notarial translations of classical texts see Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 47.


1161 Torri, ed., *L’ottimo commento della Divina Commedia [Andrea Lancia]. Testo inedito d’un contemporaneo di Dante..* Paradiso XVI, 88. For the relationships between these readers and writers see Azzetta, *Ordinamenti*, 14ff. On the Commentry tradition see Parker, "Interpreting the Commentary."

1162 Azzetta, *Ordinamenti*, 16.
Classical culture, civic memory, urban legislation, and contemporary literature defined a common discourse between these merchant readers and writers.\textsuperscript{1163}

This circulation of texts is further complicated by the fact that the wealthy merchant and noted Florentine storyteller, Coppo di Borghese Migliorato Domenichi, commissioned Lancia’s translation of Virgil. He was also a close friend of Giovanni Boccaccio, who lauded him as possessing the consummate mercantile and civic skill of \textit{ragionare}, which allowed him to order and ornament the city’s collective memory.\textsuperscript{1164} He was part of an intricate culture of the piazza, where readers, writers, spectators and storytellers were also notaries, public officials, patrons, and legislators. They would fill such spaces as the Piazza San Martino, the Mercato Nuovo, and the Piazza della Signoria with a wide variety of narratives, many of which were copied down as they circulated. They formed part of the textual practices of the Florentine merchant who often used the hybrid form of account book combined with the diary to create personal topographies that confronted the dense matrix of laws and customs of public space in order to situate his own position \textit{vis-à-vis} the built environment. Therefore, within these texts and practices – statutes, diaries, and storytelling – are the traces of a larger urban dialogue in which the city’s spaces and their cultural significance were endlessly negotiated, inflected, and transformed through laws, contracts, violence, buildings, precise measurements, social rituals and personal reflections, spoken narratives and written texts.

\textsuperscript{1163} This circulation was based on access to the works in question and, therefore, copies were objects of great value. As an example, Lancia made a sworn oath on behalf of his friend Villani in front of the Mercanzia, when he petitioned for the return of a book that was stolen from him and which was found in the bottega of the bookseller, Andrea Orselli. \textit{Ibid.}, 18.

\textsuperscript{1164} Boccaccio, \textit{Decameron}, V, 9, 4. For a discussion of Coppo as civic storyteller see “The Gendered Street” in chapter one. By using the term “ragionare”, the \textit{Decameron} links Coppo’s skill at ordering stories to his ability to order the world through the accounting practices of Florentine merchants. See “Ragionare: Taking Account of the City” in chapter two.
In the Decameron Domenichi is identified first as a man of the city of Florence, who may have still been living there.\textsuperscript{1165} He appears in both Sacchetti’s and Boccaccio’s novelle and, according to the story in the Decameron, he delighted in discussing Florence’s past with his neighbors. He was an elegant speaker, had an expansive memory, and a logical mind. He is described like this:

you should know, then, that Coppo di Borghese Domenichi, who once lived in our city and perhaps still does, a man of great and respected authority in our times, one most illustrious and worthy of eternal fame both for his way of life and his ability much more than for the nobility of his blood, often took delight, when he was an old man, in discussing things from the past with his neighbors and with others. He knew how to do this well, for he was more logical and had a better memory and a more eloquent style of speaking than any other man.\textsuperscript{1166}

Within the endless circles of narrative of the Decameron, Coppo is, first and foremost, a master storyteller. It is his story, which he used to tell, that is retold by Fiammetta, within the frame of the stories told among members of the brigata. It is a conscious retelling. Being praised more for his ability and his manner of living than he is for his noble blood puts him squarely within the culture of the merchant republic. He is also linked to an urban discourse, conversing with neighbors in the neighborhood piazza where he put to use his great skill and formidable memory of the city’s past for the benefit of neighbors and others. In this discourse Coppo is the guardian of an oral tradition of memory, and the stories he told in Florence, to

\textsuperscript{1165} Ibid. The doubt about his whereabouts is doubtless an indirect reference to the plague that is always threatening to invade the space of the narrative.

\textsuperscript{1166} Ibid. “...grande e di reverenda autorità ne’ di nostri, e per costumi e per virtù molto più che per nobiltà di sangue chiarissimo e degno d'eterna fama, essendo già d'anni pieno, spesse volte delle cose passate co' suoi vicini e con altri si dilettava di ragionare: la quali cosa egli meglio e con più ordine e con maggior memoria e ornato parlare che altro uomo seppe fare.” Boccaccio, The Decameron, 426.
Florentines about themselves, were a source for Boccaccio who used Coppo’s knowledge to trace out just who was who in the Florentine civic family tree in his own commentary on Dante.\textsuperscript{1167}

Coppo is a rather different and irascible (bizarro) character in Sacchetti’s stories. In novella CXVI, which was discussed in terms of gender in chapter 1, he is a figure from the past, having died some time between 1348 and 1353.\textsuperscript{1168} The narrative situates him in the area where the lions of the commune were kept, while he is in the midst of building his houses (Figure 7).\textsuperscript{1169} Instead of a storyteller, however, in this novella he is a reader. In Livy’s history, one day just after None, he discovers an account of the passing of sumptuary laws against the clothing fashions (ornamenti) of Roman women. Livy then recounts how the women then marched to the Capitoline Hill, the sacred heart of the Roman state, to demand that the law be revoked.\textsuperscript{1170} Rage

\textsuperscript{1167} Bruni, "Between Oral Memory and Written Tradition," 120.
\textsuperscript{1168} Sacchetti, II trecentonovelle, CXVI.II Coppo may have died in the plague, considering Fiammetta’s uncertainty about whether he was still alive at the time of her own storytelling.
\textsuperscript{1169} At the time, the lions were kept across from the church of San Piero Scheraggio, on the site of the future mint and Loggia dei Lanzi, the latter of which is covered with carved lions. See Adrian Randolph, "Il Marzocco: Lionizing the Florentine State," in Coming About--a Festschrift for John Shearman, ed. Lars R. Jones, et al., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 12-13. Randolph traces the movement of the lions from the Piazza San Giovanni in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries to the emerging civic space of the Piazza della Signoria by 1331. It was only in 1353, around the time of Domenichi’s death, that they were transferred to the area around the present day via dei Leoni, which was behind the palaces of the Capitano and Gonfaloniere and is now behind the expanded Palazzo Vecchio. Villani records the theft, in 1258, of the gate that most likely guarded the lions (chiesa del Leone). This seems confirmed when soon afterwards a lion escaped from its captivity and almost mauled a boy after running into Orsanmichele. See Villani, Nuova cronica, 7, 65 & 69. For the lions at the Piazza della Signoria see Villani, Nuova cronica, 11, 184. “Come in Firenze nacquono due leonecigli. Nel detto anno [1331], a di XXV di luglio, il di di santo Iacopo, nacquono in Firenze II leoncini del leone e leonessa del Comune, che stavano in istia incontro a San Pietro Scheraggio; e vivettono, e fecionci grandi poi: e nacquono vivi e non morti, come dicono gli autori ne’ libri della natura delle bestie, e noi ne rendiamo testimonianza, che con più altri cittadini gli vidi nascere, e incontenentè andare e poppare la leonessa; e fu tenuta grande maraviglia che di qua da mare nascessono leoni che vivessono, e non si ricorda a’ nostri tempi. Bene ne nacquono a Vinegia due, ma di presente morirono. Dissesti per molti ch’era segno di buona fortuna e prospera per lo Comune di Firenze.” See also Villani, Nuova cronica, VII, 65 & 69; Frey, Die Loggia dei Lanzi, 28; Giulio Cesare Lensi Orlandi Cardini, Il Palazzo Vecchio di Firenze, (Florence: A. Martello-Giunti, 1977), 52; Davidsohn, Storia, I, 113.
\textsuperscript{1170} It seems odd that the women would assault the temples on the Capitoline hill. Perhaps Sacchetti is conflating the site of Roman government in his own day to make a contemporary point.
begins to well up inside Coppo until he slams down the book, bangs his hands on the table saying: “Good Grief, Roman men, you suffer this, you, who have never suffered either king or emperor to be greater than you?”

As he rages about, the stone masons and construction workers (maestri e manovali) working on his houses have arrived from the work site to ask for their wages. Wishing ruin on his own houses, he sends the workers away unpaid and confused as he continues to rant about the brazen Roman women and the campidoglio (Capitoline).

This is the figure of Coppo di Borghese that emerges in a literary dialogue. He is passionately connected to the past. He reads history, ancient history, as part of his role as mediator of the city’s past and its imperial origins. It is important that the workers leave mystified by their encounter with the Coppo’s incoherent rants about the ancients. The workers mistake roman for a measure of weight used in sliding scales, and “campidoglio” (Capitoline) for “capo mi doglio” (my head hurts), and they wonder whether or not Coppo’s head is not quite right itself. Therefore, they do not participate in the cultural exchange that merchants engaged in. They can barely recognize its people and places either because of Coppo’s mad, unintelligible rendition or because their social status renders them incapable so that they can only hear a disorienting and garbled message. It is impossible to declare with total certainty whether Sacchetti is poking fun at a merchant class that was popularizing classical texts, dumbing them down, so to speak, or dramatizing the intellectual gulf between merchants and the class of manual workers, or both.

Coppo was the patron of Andrea Lancia’s prose translation of Virgil’s Aeneid from the abridged Latin prose version by the Florentine Franciscan Anastasio. He functioned as a narrator whose stories helped to preserve the identification of

---

1171 “Oimè, Romani, sofferrete voi questo, che non avete sofferto che re o imperadore sia maggior di voi?” Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, LXVI.
Florentines with their past and Florence’s status as daughter of Rome.\textsuperscript{1172} He was a hinge around which circled both civic and literary memory, facilitating knowledge, narrating the past, making public the laws of the present, and serving as the object of literary interventions into contemporary sexual politics. Along with Boccaccio, Lancia, Villani, and Sacchetti, he participated in the exchange of stories that circulated in the “piazza” of merchant culture.

In Sacchetti’s story, Domenichi’s houses were located where the city’s lions were kept, while the houses of the historical family were indeed located in Santa Croce, near the 
\textit{zecca nuova}, or new mint. Therefore, Sacchetti’s story recalls a moment in Florentine history when the lions were still across from San Piero Scheraggio and associates these important republican symbols with this family.\textsuperscript{1173} With such an association, Coppo’s stories would have been linked to the way in which the lions, their health and fertility, were connected to the health of the republic.\textsuperscript{1174} In the \textit{Decameron}, retelling Coppo’s story takes on a new urgency since the \textit{brigata} is uncertain of his status in the city. There is a need to keep alive the stories he took pleasure in telling to his neighbors, who were those living around the civic centre of Florence, the Piazza della Signoria.

The proximity of Coppo to the lions and the piazza emphasizes the importance of his status as guardian of civic memory. Similarly, his righteous indignation at the threat to Florentine virtue by the opulence of female dress may have, in some way, stood as a narrative bulwark against what Villani also saw as a slide into collective shame. In his chronicle he recalls a time, during the first popular government (1250-1260), when Florentines were more sober, modest, and the women dressed in a chaster

\textsuperscript{1172} Bruni, "Between Oral Memory and Written Tradition," 116.
\textsuperscript{1173} On the importance of these Lions as Florentine republican symbols see Randolph, "Il Marzocco."
\textsuperscript{1174} Randolph recounts how in 1530, the besieged republic still authorized the payment of 2,518 lire, 3 soldi and 10 piccoli for 13, 548 pounds of meat, constituting two months food for the lions, while the rest of the city went hungry. See Ibid., 12.
manner.\textsuperscript{1175} It is significant that this nostalgia for a more chaste and moral past follows immediately upon Villani’s account of how a lion of the commune escaped but did not, on the pleas of the mother, maul the child it had taken between its paws.\textsuperscript{1176} Either the gentility of the lion, the presumed chastity of the mother, or Fortune were all possible reasons for the minor miracle. Therefore, the women who protested the laws that governed their accoutrements were attempting to destroy the virtue that was directly linked to their charity, the lions’ protection, and Coppo’s conservation of these values. For contemporary Florentine readers, these associations would have been spatially located in the profusion of leonine imagery around the Piazza della Signoria, the closest square to the neighborhood in which Coppo recounted his stories.\textsuperscript{1177} The area becomes, therefore, through the intersection of narrative and visual imagery, an archive of Florentine historical memory.\textsuperscript{1178}

\textsuperscript{1175} Villani, Nuova cronica, VII, 69.
\textsuperscript{1176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1177} On lions in the piazza see Randolph, Lionizing, 14
\textsuperscript{1178} The reference to the “Leoni” by Sacchetti may also have referred to the lions that decorate the piazza on the Palazzo Vecchio and the numerous ones on the Loggia dei Lanzi. By the time that Sacchetti was writing, the real lions had been transferred to a place behind the palace, according to Orlandi. See Lensi Orlandi Cardini, Il Palazzo Vecchio, 52. According to Geraldine Johnson, the sculptural program of the lions in the piazza was the product of the regime of the oligarchy that defeated and replaced the alliance of laborers and rank-and-file lower guildsmen which had been a product of the Ciompi rebellion of 1378. Therefore, the association of Domenichi in the latter part of the fourteenth century with the lions may also have linked him to Sacchetti’s own particular ideological allegiance to this “regime of the lion.” See Geraldine Johnson, “The Lion in the Piazza.” In Secular Sculpture, pp. 54-73. Lions sculpted in the public sphere before this time include Andrea Pisano’s Baptistery doors, which contain 48 heads, and those, roughly contemporary, on the campanile of the duomo. The transfer of the lions and their representation south to the civic space of the Signoria later in the fourteenth century may have been part of a program to safeguard the new civic spaces coming into being, as Michelagelo’s David would later. Could the enemies also have been the lower classes?
4.3 Textual Architecture

Lord reverend, Monte Belandi writes to his wife who will give you the book of novellas by messer Giovanni Boccaccio, a book which is mine, so I beseech you as much as it is possible that you have it sent. And if the archbishop of Naples has not left, I ask you to send it with him, that is, with his staff, and that he give it neither to messer nor to anyone but me. And if the archbishop has left, have it sent to me with Cenni Bardella: he may send it to me in L’Aquila or in Semona or you can send it to me with whomever it seems to you that it will come into my hands: and be careful that it does not fall into the hands of messer Neri, because then I would not get it. I am having it given to you because I trust you more than anyone else and I hold it very dear, and mind not to lend it to anyone because many would treat it badly.\textsuperscript{1179}

Francesco’s letter, introduced above, betrays how intimately attached to and jealously possessive of Boccaccio’s merchant epic that merchant readers could be. On the reverse of the letter, in an apparent afterthought, he repeats a similar plea that Giovanni not give it to Nicolò since he will certainly want it. More than two thirds of known copies of the Decameron, according to Bec, belonged to merchants; Florentines, Aretines, Sienese and Venetians.\textsuperscript{1180} Some even made their own copies, adding to it stories from Il Trecentonovelle or Giovanni Sercambi’s Pecorone.\textsuperscript{1181} They changed the stories in terms of their own reason of commerce (raison de

\textsuperscript{1179} “Domine Reverende, echo che Monte Belandi scrive a la moglie che vi dia il libro de le novelle di messer Giovanni Boccacci, il quale libro è mio, sì che vi peggio quantum possum che ve lo faciate donare. E se l'arcivescovo di Napoli non è partito vi peggio il mandate per lui, cioè per li suoi camerieri, e che non desse n’ a messer né a nullo se non a me. E se lo arcivescovo è partito fatelomi dare a Cenni Bardella: lo mi mandi a L’Aquila o a Sermona o voi me lo mandate per chi pare a voi che venga in mia mano: e guardate non venga a mano a messer Neri perché non l'avrei. Io il fo dare a voi perché mi fido più che di nullo altro è olo troppo caro, e guardate di non prestarlo a nullo perché molti ne sarono malcortesi.” Letter from Francesco Buondelmonti to Giovanni Acciauoli, 13 July, 1360. Quoted in Branca, Un secondo elenco, 163.

\textsuperscript{1180} Bec calls it their favorite book. See Bec, Les marchands écrivains, 397ff.

\textsuperscript{1181} Sercambi himself rewrote 20 of Boccaccio’s novellas. See Branca, Un secondo elenco, 193. In his own proem, Sacchetti invokes a time of crisis as a common inspiration for writing his own pleasurable stories, in keeping with the structure of the Decameron’s description of the plague and the brigata’s attempt to tell “pleasing” stories. See Il Trecentonovelle, proemio.
commerce). They wrote accounts in the margins, noted borrowings and lending of the text itself. In short, it was their favorite book, copied with personal devotion by those who loved the book rather than by professional scribes. A comparison of the narrative structures of the literary works that constitute a fundamental part of this thesis provides a useful way of demonstrating the link between architecture, bodies, and spaces of the city.

Numerous compilations testify to the circulation of Boccaccio’s – and others’ – stories within the merchant classes in both readable and audible forms. One such manuscript isolates the fundamental architecture of the work by eliminating the stories completely, leaving only the armature of the frame, the introductions and conclusions to each of the ten days. By emptying it of its content, this critic performed a radical intervention into the text that exposed its formal armature. It betrays, perhaps, that this architecture, into which the stories were fitted, was one of the most fascinating aspects to the work, according to some critics. Many of the stories in it, of course, were conscious retellings, and often the places in which they occurred, as well as the people that populated them, were certainly familiar. What was new was the monumental text as edifice. Formal structure determined to a large extent how the stories would circulate and be interpreted. Similarly, it was the spaces in which they were ritually retold, the real architectural space, that surrounded stories sung in the piazza, that linked those stories to a shared collective memory by embedding them into the physical dimensions of the city itself. This re-writer of the textual frame is explicit about the fact that he heard these stories. Therefore, they were part of the public reenactment of the Decameron as civic narrative. He also offers criticism that

---

1182 Ibid., 194-95. Branca is at pains to find the names of important copyists and copies in the inventories of literary libraries. Aside from what appear to be some exceptions, the Decameron was copied exclusively by amateurs. Not until 1467 is there a manuscript by a professional hand. Ibid., 198.
1183 Ibid., 180.
led Branca to determine that the author knew Boccaccio personally, and that the text is evidence of a dialogue between the two.  

Another manuscript shows the editorial range that was possible. In a copy now in the Biblioteca Riccardiana a copyist rewrites his own version of Boccaccio’s stories next to the originals, showing how such narratives functioned in a self-reproducing mechanism.

The Decameron, as Vittore Branca has shown, found its immediate audience in the merchant classes. He claims that it inspired in them a happy confidence and familiarity that permitted re-workings, suppressions, and insertions. In other words, it was read and copied within the mercantesca culture of textuality described above. They were engaged readers, to whom this book belonged both as an object and as an urban dialogue. Readers of the Decameron did not always display the kind of respect for the work that Sacchetti demanded for Dante in his story. These textual practices suggest that readers did not treat it as a literary monument. They browsed it, managed it, rearranged it, and manipulated it with a happy confidence and familiarity that permitted such reworkings, suppression and deletions. For as much as Branca delights in the construction of a literary culture through exchanges of stories let loose in the public domain, Sacchetti cautions us that such a domain is a tendentious medium filled with disparate voices and conflicting desires which exert uncontrollable influence over the stories circulating there. In fact, it was the context of telling stories in the piazza that guaranteed the liberty with which the Decameron and similar texts were treated. Dante evidently circulated as well but Sacchetti reminds us that such texts perhaps should be beyond the reach of a type of

1184 Branca, citing Quagli, posits that the style of the criticism is linked to both Pucci and Sacchetti, two other writers passionately engaged with the urban milieu. See Ibid., 177-80.
1185 On the practices of reading and copying the Decameron, see Ibid., 152ff.
1186 Ibid., 198.
1187 On this pleasure of re-writing, see “Textual Architecture” below.
play that were transformed into destructive acts that “hacked to pieces” certain texts that did not have such a robust architecture. Performances in the piazza tended to dissociate texts with iconic authors and promote a lively exchange, something that would not occur as easily with silent academic forms of reading.

However, although the Decameron may have been subject to this fragmentation, its architectonic structure was an attempt to fortify it against just such social dissolution. As Lucia Battaglia Ricci has pointed out, the Decameron is explicit in where it starts and where it ends. It begins, in red, like this: “Comincia il libro chiamato Decameron…” And it finishes like this: *Qui finisce la decima e ultima giornata del Libro chiamato Decameron…”* (Figure 4.8). Although many of Boccaccio’s stories derived from a circulating tradition of freely rewritten narrative compilations, the Decameron’s incessant structural frame set this work apart from that tradition. The precise delineation of beginning and end was something rather different. It stopped that literary tradition in its tracks, or at least attempted to contain it within its own internal spaces. The Decameron gathered together a dispersed cultural memory that the plague threatened to obliterate and built a monument whose structure sealed off its own doors in order to withstand such an assault. Within, it maintained and promoted experiments in storytelling as a defense against disappearance. This architectonic edifice was built to contain memories of a past and to provide a space apart that allowed the process of rebuilding to take form. The text as urban structure suggests that contemporaries understood their cities in similar ways, as vast archives of possibilities.

However, the Decameron, along with the Trecentonovelle, also participated in a vibrant social sphere. Their authors themselves had rewritten, sometimes more than

---

once, popular stories, repositioning them into the architectural frame of their own urban consciousness. Their stories were born of re-elaborations of narrative elements developed in popular preaching, such as proverbs, exempla, hagiographies and fables.¹¹⁸⁹

So, inevitably, the brigata will return to Florence, and Boccaccio’s and Sacchetti’s stories will be copied, taken apart, reassembled and retold in the very urban milieu that they so vividly represented. The resulting ensemble was an opaque series of reflections and distortions, somewhere inside of which were ethically motivated questions about the nature of streets and squares, the function of walls and doors. All this was a product of engaged urban subjects who never ceased from recreating, reinterpreting, and rejuvenating all those recalcitrant and intractable walls that surrounded them. Therefore, part of the prescribed ethical response to one’s environment was contained within the outer textual framework of the Decameron. Those recalcitrant and intractable walls, a combination of social and physical barriers, demanded that readers work on them, in ways that the Decameron allowed because it’s the solidity of its overall narrative structural frame could withstand such interventions. In contrast to the violent urbanism of fires and floods, linked to magnate factionalism and divine retribution, the city could be worked on piecemeal, which did not negate radical interventions necessarily, however much of a gradualist Boccaccio himself may have been. He threw the Decameron into the middle of an eclectic civic society whose violent impulses could be redirected onto it. Ultimately, learning to read and rewrite the Decameron transformed its readers, listeners, and reciters of stories into the final all-encompassing frame for all these stories, the actual urban environment itself. The text reached out and transgressed the border that

separated civic life from narrated tales. It produced an oral culture that did not
consume the text. It was a gift given back to the oral culture that had laid the ground
for its coming into being but one that would stand, nevertheless, as a monument to that
culture’s creativity, a bulwark against the violent attack on a society’s frameworks by
the plague.\textsuperscript{1190}

The point relevant here, however, is making the urban environment speak.
Sacchetti produced his own sermons, rhymes, as well as texts for the Palazzo
Vecchio’s decorative program and for the Marzocco that graced the principal exterior
corner of the government palace (Figure 8a).\textsuperscript{1191} Within this more official context,
similar dynamics were at work. His stained glass program at Orsanmichele was based
on a long oral and written tradition of Marian legends and miracles,\textsuperscript{1192} transforming
walls into condensed popular narratives not dissimilar to those sung at San Martino.
Beyond the novella and the beffa, Boccaccio and Sacchetti, there were the various
moralistic and popular tracts sung at San Martino that commented directly on social
mores.\textsuperscript{1193} It is highly likely that extra-biblical narratives found their way into the
piazza as well. Sacchetti’s program for Orsanmichele was thus connected to urban
storytelling.

Twelve narrative windows occupy the two eastern bays of Orsanmichele and
constitute the only known cycle based on the miracles of the Virgin in the west at the
time (Figures 4.9-4.9b).\textsuperscript{1194} They pictorialized what were stories in popular manuscript
compilations of the Trecento, which were in large circulation in Italy, which suggests
they could have been heard in the square. They also respond to contemporary

\textsuperscript{1190} A comparison with techniques of reading and interpreting biblical stories may shed more light on
these practices.
\textsuperscript{1191} On these inscriptions see Ricci, Rubinstein.
\textsuperscript{1192} See Gripkey, “Mary Legends.”
\textsuperscript{1193} For generic repertoire, see Kent, 48.
\textsuperscript{1194} Zervas, 167.
anxieties over fires and floods, which plagued Florence through these decades.\textsuperscript{1195} They were employed by preachers in the narrative section of their sermon. The \textit{exemplum} and such episodes would have been included in Marian sermons at Orsanmichele. They were the precursors, in form, content, and circulation, of the Tuscan novella and they were well known by both Boccaccio and Sacchetti.\textsuperscript{1196}

In two of these pictures, Sacchetti performed precisely the rewriting that he employed in some of his own novellas (Figures 4.9a-4.9b). A conventional story is made to conform to local places and settings, which transforms it from a general \textit{exemplum} into a \textit{storia vera}.\textsuperscript{1197} The two miracles occupy the outer windows of the eastern-most south bay of Orsanmichele and are dated to c. 1386-1400. On the left is depicted “The Renunciation of Worldly Goods with the Virgin of Orsanmichele” while on the right is “The Miracle of the Ordeal by Fire at the Grain Market of Orsanmichele.” The former has been identified by Zervas as a variation of a Marian miracle found both in the Golden Legend and in a manuscript of the Biblioteca Nazionale.\textsuperscript{1198} She also suggests that the addition of a miraculous cure to the story may have originated in the nature of miracles traditionally attributed to the Madonna of Orsanmichele, described by Villani in 1292.\textsuperscript{1199} In the latter image, an accused man appears before officials of the grain magistracy, evidently being punished by having to hold a horseshoe in a fire. Such a punishment, as Zervas points out, was usually reserved for crimes of adultery and sorcery but here it is obviously associated with a

\textsuperscript{1195} Sacchetti chose three main themes for his sermons and for the windows: those concerning general assistance, fire and drowning. See Zervas, 167 and Sacchetti, \textit{Sposizioni dei Vangeli}, XXVII in Opere, 1958, 883-884, 887-888. See also the discussion below of fires and floods.

\textsuperscript{1196} Sacchetti used them in his own sermons. See Zervas, 167.

\textsuperscript{1197} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1198} Zervas, Saggi, 532. The Florentine codex is BNCF, Magl. XXXVIII, 110. The conventional story concerns a courtesan who gives up her worldly possessions, enters a convent, and is granted forgiveness.

\textsuperscript{1199} Ibid, 534. “Nel detto anno, a di III del mese di luglio, si cominciarono a mostrare grandi e aperti miracoli nella città di Firenze per una figura dipinta di santa Maria in uno pilastro della loggia d'Orto Sammichele, ove si vende il grano, sanando infermi, e rizzando attratti, e isgombrare imperversati visibilemente in grande quantità.” Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VIII, 155.
crime concerning the distribution of grain, perhaps hoarding to drive up prices during a famine.\footnote{Zervas, 535.} He is then shown kneeling, holding the horseshoe, unharmed, in front of the image of the Madonna while awestruck spectators from the confraternity look on. The scenography is correct, locating the tabernacle between the magistracy and the confraternity headquarters to the south, identified with the initials “O.S.M.” Therefore, Sacchetti located two popular Marian miracles precisely within the loggia occupied by the image, transforming the general theme so that it conformed to local topographical events and spaces. This practice of localizing stories with the details of familiar spaces was the foundation of the realism that both the Decameron and Il Trecentonovelle flaunted so vigorously. To the viewer, the scene reflected back his own space of experience, sanctifying it with the presence the Virgin and the memory of a miracle that was located just where that spectator stood. What was evoked by such images was an oral tradition of popular stories that Florentines could have heard in sermons, along with the historical “truth” of miracles performed at Orsanmichele by an image confirmed by Villani’s chronicle, one of the most widely read texts that stored the city’s collective memory.

\section*{4.4 Thresholds}

Stories need space but they also create spaces, defining territories in analogous ways to the civic legislation discussed in chapter one. It is one of the governing hypotheses of this study that the city was created by both buildings and texts, that legislation was concerned with many of the same issues that urban literature was, and that those who governed, legislated, profited, recorded, and wrote about the city were often the same people, at least had very similar desires and anxieties. Therefore, the
topographies created by laws, human movement, the urban soundscape, and civic narratives all participated in the construction, experience, and interpretation of urban space. This is not the same as claiming that certain stories were history, or that the “realism” of the novella gives it a priori documentary status. Instead, most documentary sources are the product of similar, if less overt and elegant, designs and desires as any textual narratives concerning the city were. With the mixing of real figures and historical events, such stories interrogate the ways in which buildings and spaces were springboards for ideas and strategies. They reveal the cognitive processes and structures that were invested in such spatial experiences and help the historian of architecture to reconstruct the city and its monuments as a discursive space that is constructed by all manner of texts, “documentary” and “literary”. It keeps the crucial fact before one’s eyes that there is not a true and proper city behind the documents that refer to it but that important aspects of the historical city lie within those very documents and that this helps to distantiate and denature, make strange, a city that is so overwhelmingly “present” in a physical sense. It is not simply a matter of unpacking successive physical interventions into the structure of buildings and squares but of making ephemeral interventions more central to historical investigation. Stories, therefore, dramatize such active interventions as a means of defining urban space and they return, over and over, to the problem of creating, locating, and managing thresholds in a variety of imaginative and critical ways.

According to Georg Simmel, a frame or border that surrounds a social group has an analogous function to the frame of a work of art. It closes the group/work off from the surrounding world while at the same time it holds that group/work together, protecting its integrity.

---

The frame proclaims that the world is located inside of it, which is subject only to its own laws, not drawn into the determination and changes of the surrounding world. In so far as it symbolizes the self-contained unity of the work of art, the frame at the same time strengthens its reality and its impression. 1202

A city’s walls performed a similar function, although, like any structure, or social group, there needed to be a mechanism that controlled what and how things crossed this threshold, all the while maintaining such a distinct identity and border. Within them, laws and regulations created internal thresholds between fluid groups and individuals. As chapter one has shown, the city’s surveyors had to contend with drawing up many frames within the city that divided the space into multiple zones that citizens had to navigate between. Such an obsession with thresholds drives the logic of the Decameron’s insistent narrative frames, a work of art that requires a whole system of internal frames and borders in order to play out its drama. It interrogates the divisions between city and country, piazzas and public buildings, streets and private homes, the very things that were on the minds of the city’s republican planners. Therefore, such narratives open up the potential issues that borders and thresholds contained and show how they were not simply neutral markers between territories but points of social contact, communication, and conflict.

In the Decameron they increase the work’s reality effect by posing as the borders between self-contained worlds which, nevertheless, are linked and interpenetrated by each other precisely because they share spatial borders. However,

1202 Simmel, "The Sociology of Space," 141. “…der Rahmen verkündet, dass sich innerhalb seiner eine nur eigenen Normen untertänige Welt befindet, die in die Bestimmtheiten und Bewegungen der umgebenden nicht hineingezogen ist; indem er die selbstgenugsame Einheit des Kunstwerkes symbolisiert, verstärkt er zugleich von sich aus deren Wirklichkeit und Eindruck.” Simmel, "Der Raum," 465.
the only links that extend out to touch our world, the space in which the reader is placed, are the beginning and the end, before we know any better and then when it is already too late to do anything about unpacking this world. The *Decameron*’s borders are carefully regulated, in contrast to the plague-ridden city described in the introduction, and this contrast between rigid order and structural and social dissolution is crucial for understanding the spatial construction of the work. The text’s tightly bound up frames create an ambience of monumentality when viewed in terms of their diagrammatic structure, but this allows the contents to seep safely into other jurisdictions through cracks that may be found in the narrative boundaries, just as the characters do.

One of the recurrent themes that pervade the *Decameron* examines the wreckage left in the trail of the plague to see just how arbitrary, useful, or dispensable certain social structures, and the architecture that sustained them, were. It posed such questions about what needed to saved from the past, what could be happily jettisoned, and what would be irrevocably missed. The world, therefore, the one disappearing in the face of the plague, required incremental and careful adjustments after such horrendous rupture within a solid framework. The structure of the *Decameron* itself, beyond the obvious architectural metaphor, stages the spatio-social fluidities that characterize the interaction of social groups. It acts as a self-contained city itself; one that might protect Florence’s legacy in the face of the environmental onslaught of the plague.

Sacchetti, however, provides a useful foil against which to measure the architecture of the *Decameron*. In the *Trecentonovelle*, he acknowledges his debt to Boccaccio but develops a different structural approach. He allows his narratives to transgress narrative borders with much more freedom. The beginning and the end do not fold back neatly and tightly upon themselves to demarcate a separate world. This
is a different kind of literary art where the frame, rather than containing and
separating, interweaves within and beyond the stories. It is oriented as much to the
characters within as to the social world of the readers without. Even though it suffers
from actual historical fragmentation – there are missing stories, fragments, and it
contains only 258 novellas – such narratives could, like an urban conglomeration –
expand in all directions at once as one story refers to another, stories are rewritten, the
narrator slides between authorial voice, the first person “I”, and a character within the
story. In contrast, the Decameron would continue to increase in proportional relation
to the closed series of repeating boxes in which it wraps itself. Each day needed a new
narrator, ten stories, and an over-arching theme. It projected an endless potential of
ordered spatial extension, not unlike the inherent potential of lateral expansion of the
repeating arches in Brunelleschi’s façade for the Ospedale degli Innocenti – all
programmed as self-contained, repeating units.

Inside the architecture of the Decameron, one first encounters the confined
spaces that are evoked as the pretense for writing the work in the first place.
Boccaccio offered it as a kind of gift to women readers who were enclosed within the
monotonous spaces of barren bedrooms; an architectural space that evoked the reverse
side of Simmel’s conception of the frame. Instead of linking internal elements, it shut
off the individual from any contact with larger social groups, reducing its occupant to
a lonely desiring subject. One of the tasks, therefore, which the author set for the
Decameron, was to interrogate the nature of just such an architecturally barren space
and subject it to careful analysis. What were its origins, its use, and its value for the
social institutions that were in the process of falling apart?

The work itself offers many images of women finding ways to transgress those
architectural barriers, to speak effectively, to hear surreptitiously, and attend to their
desires satisfactorily. However, the overall structure of the work itself, the rigid
division into one hundred stories, each framed by an introduction and conclusion, told by an anxiously chaste brigata of youths enclosed within ideal gardens, confined squarely within the narrator’s opening and closing words, and all contained neatly within the author’s initial address and conclusion, ultimately reproduces, reflects, and offers back a tightly locked world that only permits bodies to transgress thresholds and architectural enclosures to be breached within the overall concentric architectonic structure of the work itself. Both the Decameron and Il Trecentonovelle respond explicitly to urban crises by proposing to tell stories. However, in order to confront loss and social anxiety, they deploy different narrative strategies.

In the wake of the 1348 plague, Boccaccio sets up a rigid narrative structure in which both the time and space of storytelling are tightly contained. He constructs an elaborate system of frames, which demarcate a chain of narratives enclosed within each other and told in a space apart. In Il Trecentonovelle, however, Sacchetti’s novellas immerse themselves more freely in the ebb and flow of daily urban life. Just as Boccaccio claimed to offer his stories as solace to love-struck women, Sacchetti confronts the profound social insecurities of war, pestilence and family ruin\textsuperscript{1203} with comforting and pleasing stories.\textsuperscript{1204} They both set the therapeutic power of storytelling against an edifice of sickness and death. Through a conventional literary trope,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1203} “Considerando al presente tempo e alla condizione dell’umana vita, la quale con pestilenziose infirmità e con oscure morti è spesso vicitata; e veggendo quante rovine con quante guerre civili e campestre in essa dimorano; e pensando quanti popoli e famiglie per questo son venute in povero e infelice stato e con quanto amaro sudore conviene che comportino la miseria…” (Considering the present times and the condition of human life, which is often visited by pestilential sickness and death; and seeing how much ruin and civil and rural strife inhabit it; and thinking of how many people and families came to ruin and an unhappy state by this and with how much bitter sweat required for them to bear this misery…). Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, proemio, 1-6. Sacchetti’s project was, in all likelihood, conceived around 1385 when Sacchetti was elected to the priorate. This followed a decade of profound and varied crises both for the city and the author. Valerio Marucci points out that the preceding decade had seen the War of the Eight Saints (1375-78), the revolt of the Ciompi (1378), the war with Milan, the death of Sacchetti’s wife and execution of his brother (1379). On March 23, 1379, Florentine mercenaries in the contado south of the city burned his villa at Marignolle. To this was added a grave illness which Marucci believes stimulated him to search for new values or frames of reference. See Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, xiii-xiv.
\textsuperscript{1204} Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, proem, 6-11.
\end{footnotesize}
therefore, both authors transform the pleasure of the stories into ironic, ambiguous, but ultimately ethical responses to social anxiety.

In what follows, I would like to trace certain narrative threads within these two texts that engage directly with the experience of thresholds in urban space and architecture. Boccaccio’s stories focus on how architecture defined and reinforced the closed parameters of domestic space, while those of Sacchetti continually return to the problem of the open, unruly spaces of the city. In the Decameron, for example, the narrative drive of certain stories hinges upon the ability of characters to open and close doors, to transgress the integrity of walls, and rearrange their surroundings to suit personal desires. In the Trecentonovelle, the city emerges as a dominant character, confronting its inhabitants with a volatile, cacophonous and implacable field that constantly impedes and undermines social communication. The city, however, is not simply a backdrop upon which scenes play themselves out. It is, instead, a series of overlapping topographies, full of noise and confusion, its spaces buzzing with frenetic energy. It is brought to life by the diverse human activities that surround and invade it. Stories spill down its streets and into its squares. The city itself swells and resists, barging noisily into the chaos of daily life. In both works, the architectural matrix is not simply a backdrop upon which scenes play themselves out. It is, instead, an opaque physical medium that has to be worked on, taken apart, and then reordered. Sacchetti often focuses on the opacity of urban space as a dramatic mechanism, while for Boccaccio, conversely, the spatial issue is often the relative porosity of walls. Sacchetti makes plain to us that urban space did not exist outside the body, as a void that was filled with commerce or ritual. On the contrary, it was something more opaque that was always somehow attached to things, and from which it was impossible to free oneself. As such, this space had to be negotiated by the urban subject, and Sacchetti’s stories explore the possibilities of constructing such
topographies. Both authors explore aspects of the contemporary spatial imagination in which architecture and urban space are linked to desire and social interaction.

4.5 Frame/structure

In the Decameron, desire always has the potential to reconstruct architectural borders in the face of a looming plague that threatens to destroy those borders completely. Against an incomprehensible tragedy, the text assembles an architectonic structure out of the narrative frame in an attempt to give space to desire while containing the force of the disease. For Boccaccio, an elaborate and rigid narrative structure subsumes the devastating effects of the plague, as well as the social and urban chaos that ensued. This configuration is best understood graphically in a schematic drawing based on the one outlined by Franco Fido and adapted to my own interpretive needs (Figure 4.10). This diagram functions as a kind of ground plan for the text, demonstrating the internal relations of its constituent parts. It begins with the author, who places the structure of the work between him and the readers. Within this solid frame, the narrator addresses and dedicates the work to a specific female audience: those women locked in their bedrooms with no outlet for their desire. This narrator will then recount the story of the brigata, who then each narrate ten stories which make up the interior dialogic spaces of the work. Within these are other stories, lies, and games that the characters themselves invoke within the individual novellas.

This construction, which recalls the medieval garden within a garden, encourages a certain type of non-linear reading and conceives of the text more as a place to explore rather than a story that successively unfolds. Inside, as each interior


\footnote{1206 Fido, "Architettura."}
space becomes more and more porous, the contents of these spaces, the stories themselves, can be shuffled about, taken apart and rearranged, which is exactly what readers did. In the Decameron, it is precisely this link between the narrative and the architectonic that is continually reinforced.

Sacchetti was also inspired by and engaged with the urban sphere. He paid homage to Boccaccio as the acknowledged master of the genre of novella-writing in his poem, from which he derives the authority to write his own series of urban stories. Sacchetti also refers to the great popularity of Boccaccio’s work, which he claims has spread out to northern Europe and has been translated into their vernacular tongues:

…and looking then at the illustrious Florentine poet Giovanni Boccaccio, who described his Cento Novelle (=Decameron) as a base thing, with respect to his noble intellect... that [book] is widely known... for even in France and England they have translated it into their language.

As an example of the kind of experimentation and manipulation that the structural logic of the Decameron’s frame encouraged, I turn to a series of remarkable images that ornament a fourteenth-century manuscript copy of the work (Figure 4.11). It is one of the many early versions of the Decameron copied by a non-

---

1207 Vittore Branca has commented on the particular type of readers and reading the Decameron inspired; an environment of confidence in making the stories conform to one’s own desires. See Branca, Un secondo elenco. However, my reading of this aspect of the Decameron diverges slightly from Branca. I believe that the very structure of the Decameron provides a stable edifice within which the stories can be manipulated and that Boccaccio was attempting to maintain the integrity of his text. See below.

1208 Sacchetti, Il trecentonovele, Proemio, 11-15. "...e riguardando in fine allo eccellente poeta fiorentino messer Giovanni Boccaccio, il quale descrivendo il libro delle Cento Novelle per una materiale cosa, quanto al nobile suo ingegno[...] quello è divulgato[...] che infino in Fracia e in Inghilterra l'hanno ridotto alla loro lingua." I would like to thank Marilyn Migiel for her help with Sacchetti’s rather particular syntax.

1209 Giovanni Boccaccio, "Decameron," in BNF Ms. It. 482 - P (Paris), 5r. The text was copied by Giovanni d’Agnolo Capponi, a member of an important merchant family who had ties to Boccaccio. He was born between 1343 and 1346, was elected prior in 1378 as a member of the Arte della Lana. On
professional but highly engaged class of merchants, not professional scribes or artists, but passionate amateurs.\textsuperscript{1210} Regardless of whether or not these particular images are in Boccaccio’s own hand, as some scholars have suggested, they manifest an intimate familiarity with and acute understanding of the text they illuminate.\textsuperscript{1211} Within the illustrated initial here that begins this “\textit{humana cosa}” is a portrait of the author in the act of storytelling, seated at a lectern, addressing a gathering of attentive women (Figure 4.11a). Above, the figure of Cupid makes ready to release an arrow.\textsuperscript{1212} This image alludes to the outermost frame of the work, the proem in which the narrator addresses the tales to those women whose families have enclosed them within a similar series of architectural barriers.

However, something significant has happened here. The architectural barriers described in the \textit{text} have trapped idle women in their bedrooms:

Moreover, restrained by the will, the caprice, the commandment of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, confined most part of their time within the narrow compass of their chambers…\textsuperscript{1213}

\begin{itemize}
  \item this attribution see Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré dal Poggetto, "L’iconografia nei codici miniati boccacciani dell’Italia centrale e meridionale," in \textit{Boccaccio visualizzato: narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento}, ed. Vittore Branca, (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), 72.
  \item \textsuperscript{1210} Branca, \textit{Un secondo elenco}, 152ff; Bec, \textit{Les marchands écrivains}, 397.
  \item \textsuperscript{1211} Based on stylistic comparisons to drawings in Boccaccio’s own \textit{Zibaldone} and their narrative relationship to the texts they illustrate, these ink and watercolor pictures have been attributed to Boccaccio himself. According to Dupré, these images constitute the most sophisticated visual responses to the text in terms of their narrative content. Vittore Branca himself broached the issue early on when he speculated on Boccaccio’s involvement with these images. See Ciardi Dupré dal Poggetto, "L’iconografia," 8-11.
  \item \textsuperscript{1212} This complicates the issue of female desire as it is set up in the proem. Boccaccio had written that he embarked on the work as a response to and possible salve for the unrequited love that burned within the women he addresses. Boccaccio has introduced desire as a prime motivating force in the \textit{Decameron}. However, with the figure of Cupid introduced in the image, it becomes unclear whether the women had already been stung by love or were about to as the storyteller/lover recounts his tales.
  \item \textsuperscript{1213} “…ristretta da’ voleri, da’ piaceri, da’ comandamenti de’ padri, delle madri, de’ fratelli e de’ mariti, il più del tempo nel piccolo circuito delle loro camere racchiuse dimorano…” Boccaccio, \textit{Decameron}, Proemio, 13-16. The text makes explicit how women were enclosed by the desires, wants and commands of family members.
\end{itemize}
However, in the image of the initial, those barriers have disappeared completely. Here one finds the author reading from a lectern to an eager group of female listeners. It is as if the act of storytelling itself, the desire to narrate to a specific audience, has transported the author from his writing desk, gained him access to those closed spaces, and brought that audience into being. Immediately, the text-image relationship foreshadows the Decameron’s trope of how architectural barriers are set up to mediate, foreclose, maintain, and pre-empt desire, while at the same time it points to the possibility of dissolving those very barriers through narrative, memory, and history.

Boccaccio’s celebrated description of the 1348 plague begins the next interior level of the frame, the introduction to the first day (Figure 4.11b). In it the author claims that there is but a single narrative path that he can lead the reader through to the enchanted plain of abundant happiness in which the stories will be told. As much as he would have desired to do so, however, he cannot find an alternative path to moving through the wreckage of the plague in order to transport the reader across the threshold of the cornice, or frame, and into the storytelling world on the other side. Only after working through this urban social trauma – writing through the plague – will the narrator be able to explain the underlying reasons for what the audience – and the reader – are about to encounter.124 The accompanying image follows the main lines of

---

124 “Ma non voglio per ciò che questo di più avanti leggere vi spaventi, quasi sempre tra' sospiri e tralle lagrime leggendo dobbiate trapassare. Questo orrido comincianento vi fia non altramenti che a' camminanti una montagna aspra e erita, presso alla quale un bellissimo piano e dilettevole sia reposto, il quale tanto più viene lor piacevole quanto maggiore è stata del salire e dello smontare la gravezza. E si come la estremità della allegrezza il dolore occupa, così le miserie da sopravvenute letizia sono terminate… E nel vero, se io potuto avessi onestamente per altra parte menarvi a quello che io desidero che per così aspro sentiero come fia questo, io l'avrei volentier fatto: ma per ciò che, qual fosse la cagione per che le cose che appresso si leggeranno avvenissero, non si poteva senza questa ramemorazion dimostrare, quasi da necessità constretto a scriverle mi condoce,” (But I do not wish to frighten you away from reading any further, by giving you the impression that all you are going to do is spend your time sighing and weeping while you read. This horrible beginning will be like the ascent of a steep and rough mountainside beyond which there lies a most beautiful and delightful plain, and the degree of pleasure derived from the climbers will be in proportion to the difficulty of the climb and the descent. And just as pain is the extreme limit of pleasure, misery ends with unanticipated happiness…"

465
the text (Figure 4.11c). Indiscriminate death on the streets is depicted by the figure of death hovering over randomly piled up corpses:

…and not having any servants or attendants, they almost always died. Many ended their lives in the public streets, during the day or at night, while many others who died in their homes were discovered dead by their neighbors only by the smell of their decomposing bodies. The city was full of corpses.\textsuperscript{1215}

The gesture of Death’s right arm visually connects the text’s description of bodies on the street and those rotting inside. It points towards an interior scene and the personal moments of the sick and dying in contrast to the anonymous death in the public sphere. On the right, a corpse is taken away with a reluctant clergy lagging behind:

…they would pick up the bier and hurry it off, not to the church that the dead man had chosen before his death but, in most cases, to the church closest by, accompanied by four or six churchmen with just a few candles, and often none at all. With the help of these beccheni, the churchmen would place the body as fast as they could into whatever unoccupied grave they could find without going to the trouble of saying long or solemn burial services.\textsuperscript{1216}

\footnotesize
To tell the truth, If could have conveniently led you by any other way than this, which I know is a bitter one, I would have gladly done so, but since it is otherwise impossible to demonstrate how the stories you are about to read came to be told, I am obliged, as it were, by necessity to write about it in this way). Ibid., Introduction, 3-7.

\textsuperscript{1215} “…quasi senza alcuna redenzione, tutti morivano. E assai n'erano che nella strada pubblica o di di o di notte finivano, e molti, ancora che nelle case finissero, prima col puzo de lor corpi corrotti che altramenti facevano a' vicini sentire se esser morti; e di questi e degli altri che per tutto morivano, tutto pieno. Ibid., I, Introduction, 36-37. ”

\textsuperscript{1216} “…e quella con frettolosi passi, non a quella chiesa che esso aveva anzi la morte disposto ma alla più vicina le più volte il portavano, dietro a quattro o a sei cherici con poco lume e tal fiata senza alcuno; li quali con l'aiuto de' detti becchini, senza faticarsi in troppo lungo uficio o solenne, in qualunque sepoltura disoccupata trovavano più tosto il mettevano.” Ibid., I, Introduction, 35.
Inside, the sick, abandoned by their kin, expired under the cold glare of indolent domestics, whose ignorance of care was matched only by the exorbitant salaries they charged. In the image, the servant on the left holds the arms of the sick woman, but her sincerity is questioned by the way in which the arms of the servant on the right, who does nothing, has folded her arms impatiently.

In the illustration, the barriers separating the outside from the inside have been all but obliterated. On the left, the disease-ridden leg of a corpse intrudes on the space of the bedroom while the trio of clergy, who appear set to follow, however reluctantly, the corpse’s lonely procession, are also turning their backs on the scene of imminent death in the bedroom. The walls of women’s bedrooms have indeed been breached; not by stories, this time, but by death itself. The text describes how, in the wake of the plague, even the thresholds between bodies was irrevocably broken. Women were no longer concerned about exposing their bodies in a space that no longer covered their shame nor suppressed their desire. This breach of the architectural barriers of female bedrooms is a central theme of the Decameron and it rests on a tripartite construction. It begins with stories, visually represented as the voice of the narrator himself, whose tales transport him into this domestic interior. It continues with the tragedy of those very same walls torn asunder by the havoc of the plague, and it will be turned into comic farce and sexual satisfaction in many of the stories that follow. This is how the Decameron invites a range of responses by deploying the architectural metaphor, which allows the readers to think about their own physical, moral, social,

---

1217 Ibid., I, Introduction, 28. “…niuno altro subsidio rimase che o la carità degli amici (e di questi fur pochi) o l’avarizia de’ serventi, li quali da grossi salari e sconvenevoli tratti servivano, quantunque per tutto ciò molti non fossero divenuti: e quelli cotanti erano uomini o femine di grosso ingegno, e i più di tali servigi non usati, li qual niuna altra cosa servivano che di porgere alcune cose dagl’infermi addomandate o di riguardare quando morivano; e, servendo in tal servigio, sé molte volte col guadagno perdeano.”

1218 Ibid., I, Introduction, 29.
and political relationships to the walls that enclose them, the barriers that protect them, and the thresholds that separate them. As an ethical move, the Decameron questions various aspects of walls in order to determine what might be worth saving of such arbitrary borders set up by law and social custom.

Boccaccio extends this architectural trope of dissolving walls to the contrasting ways in which Florentines responded to the crisis. Both revolve around the notion of the relative opacity and porosity of the fundamental architectural frame – the wall – and its threshold – the door. In the first instance, people locked themselves up within houses that were plague-free and lived a moderate but elegant lifestyle.\textsuperscript{1219} They shut themselves off from the world of terror around them so that not even stories of the horrible events outside were allowed to seep through the walls and contaminate the space of their self-imposed quarantine as they attempted to drown out such noise with their own pleasurable sounds.\textsuperscript{1220} They denied any links to the rest of the city as they reduced their world to a tiny interior space, even more inaccessible, it was hoped, than any woman’s bedroom.

The other response was quite the opposite. It involved a conscious attitude of abandon, drinking in excess, and satisfying one’s appetites. These people caroused in the abandoned houses whose doors now lay wide open for anyone to come and go.\textsuperscript{1221} In these spaces, the walls of the house had been permanently transgressed. Their doors could no longer fulfill their proper function in the absence of the families that gave them meaning. In a properly functioning urban environment, entrances and exits

\textsuperscript{1219} “...e in quelle case ricogliendosi e racchiudendosi, dove niuno infermo fosse e da viver meglio, dilicatissimi cibi e ottimi vini temperatissimamente usando e ogni lussuria fuggendo...” Ibid., I, Introduction, 20.

\textsuperscript{1220} “...senza lasciarsi parlare a alcuno o voler di fuori, di morte o d’infermi, alcuna novella sentire, con suoni e con quegli piaceri che aver poteano si dimoravano.” Ibid., I, Introduction, 20-21.

\textsuperscript{1221} Such abandoned properties had become a form of common property. “...ciascun, quasi non più viver dovesse, aveva, si come se, le sue cose messe in abbandono: di che le più delle case erano divenute comuni...” Ibid., I, Introduction, 22.
through doors were carefully controlled, property lines were clearly demarcated, and goods were bought and sold in their proper places. All the meticulous desires of the city’s regime and the studious measuring of the city’s surveyors were unraveling into chaos and oblivion. It is important that Boccaccio described the breakdown as one that clearly decimated the physical framework that structured social life. Through this description he is able to show how such social relations depended on the physical characteristics of the city, its borders and thresholds, and pointed to how rebuilding that society from the ruins of the plague required the interrogation of the organization of such borders and the creation of urban spaces. What did they hinder and what did they promote? Who benefited and how could they be transformed by those who needed to establish an identity of their own in space, in order to recreate new forms of social relations?122 Between these two reactions to the plague we encounter the two extremes of the wall as a boundary. In neither case was the door properly regulating the interaction of private domestic and public urban space.

This description of the plague – the suffering, the desperate responses, and the physical effect the disaster had on the city of Florence – leads to the formation of the brigata of seven women and three men, who have come to the church of Santa Maria Novella for different reasons, for both safety and desire. It is here that they decide to leave the city for the clean air of the countryside (Figure 4.11d). They make their way to empty villas, whose gardens they transform into their own locus amoenus (Figure 4.11e).123 The gardens stand in contrast to the first specific interior space that we encounter in the Decameron; the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella. By the

---

122 The careful control of doors was also connected to control the openings of the female body. See Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed." Therefore, it is natural, inevitable even, that the fate of architecture was so closely tied to the desire of women in the Decameron, who stood to gain or suffer the most from the breach of the bedroom wall.

time of the plague the church had recently been incorporated within the final circuit of walls (1284 –1333). Yet it was still on the periphery of the central urban core, standing amid its own suburban agglomeration (Figure 4.12). It is from here that the brigata will go off into the countryside and attempt to recreate a moralized environment. At Santa Maria Novella, unlike the rest of the city, the narrator notes that masses were still being sung.\textsuperscript{1224} The time of the church was still being marked by the celebration of the canonical hours, as if the practice of maintaining the sacred and civic temporal rhythms could prevent the destruction of the social and spatial ones. Consequently, there was no sign that the plague had entered there.\textsuperscript{1225} This architectural image stands between the two extremes of total enclosure and absolute openness, which represented the poles between which the proper access to the various forms of built space lay.

It is in the garden that the brigata carves out an artificial space to separate themselves from the horror of the urban world they leave behind. In deciding to retreat to their villas in the surrounding contado, in the clean air and pleasant natural surroundings within which stand the estates with their verdant gardens, spacious courtyards, loggias, and exquisitely decorated public halls and bedrooms, the brigata will attempt to make merry and live virtuously while they tell their stories, navigating the path between complete social withdrawal, austerity, and licentiousness.

But there is something strange about the villa where they first arrive. While they were deliberating inside Santa Maria Novella, Pampinea had exhorted the others to visit their estates in the countryside, of which they had a great number (\textit{gran copia}). Once there, all the members of the brigata marvel at the beauty, the comforts, and the wine. The servants, sent ahead, have made all the preparations, but the question

\textsuperscript{1224} Boccaccio, Decameron, Introduction, 49

\textsuperscript{1225} The practice of ringing bells and paying criers to announce individual deaths was suspended during times of plague, presumably in order to not fill the air with the sound of the dying.
remains: *whose villa is this*? No one remarks on ever having seen it before. No one claims ownership or nostalgia for times visited in the past. There is no memory in this villa. For all its precious objects, it is empty. It has no conventional meaning because there is no one there to give it one. This passage brings home an important point. Architecture is not an abstract field and not simply the practice of constructing buildings. It is a way of thinking about and acting upon our civic experience within such buildings and spaces. Earlier in his description, the author exhorts the reader to reflect upon the extent of the tragedy by invoking another architectural image:

Empty architecture in the city stands as a testament to loss, describing the horror as an emptying out of homes. Empty architecture in the countryside, however, where the acknowledgement of that loss is deferred, allows stories to be told that pose the problem of the city and its design, its buildings and its spaces. It allows us to analyze how these spaces determine, limit, encourage, and define urban social relations within the realm of desire. And, on the other hand, it poses questions about the limits, opportunities, and possibilities on the part of the city’s inhabitants to rework, transform, in effect, redesign their physical environment to make it respond to those desires.

The importance of beginning the stories with a narrativization of the plague is the way it presents the city in ruins, both socially and architectonically. Laws had fallen into disrespect because of the lack of magistrates to enforce them, while

______________________________

Oh, how many great palaces, beautiful homes and noble dwellings, once filled with families, gentlemen and ladies, were now emptied, down to the last servant! How many noble families, vast domains, and famous fortunes remained without legitimate heir!1226
neighbors and families abandoned each other. All manner of social bonds were horribly broken.\textsuperscript{1227} In short, those who survived were compelled to abandon practices that constituted the basis of an urban ethics of living. Houses were either fortified or abandoned. This provides the impetus for the \textit{brigata} to leave the city, though not at all to abandon it.

In contrast, the narrator has reminded us that there were ruthless people who abandoned their family, their houses and their city \textit{as if} they could escape the wrath of God and the plague in the countryside. They are the ones who have actually abandoned the city, believing that the boundaries of the disease were the walls of their city, linking its destructive power to what could only have been a failed urban experiment. They have given up on it in the belief that Florence’s final hour had arrived.\textsuperscript{1228}

In contrast, the \textit{brigata} does not leave in an escapist despair, although Pampinea acknowledges that they might perish on their journey. Her exhortation to leave is directed toward reestablishing a virtuous life no longer possible in the city but which is still connected to urban living. They take a part of the city with them, constructing an equitable, if rigidly hierarchical, microcosm of the just society. In

\textsuperscript{1226} “...quasi caduta e dissolta tutta per li ministri e esecutori di quelle, li quali, si come gli altri uomini, erano tutti o morti o infermi o sì di famiglie rimasi stremi, che ufficio alcuno non potean fare; per la qual cosa era a ciascun liceo quanto a grado gli era d'adoperare.” Boccaccio, \textit{Decameron}, I, Introduction, 23.

\textsuperscript{1227} “E lasciamo stare che l'uno cittadino l'altro schifasse e quasi niuno vicino avesse dell'altro cura e i parenti insieme rade volte o non mai si visitassero e di lontano: era con sì fatto spavento questa tribulazione entrata ne' petti degli uomini e delle donne, che l'un fratello l'altro abbandonava e il zio il nepote e la sorella il fratello e spesse volte la donna il suo marito; e, che maggior cosa è e quasi non credibile, li padri e lemadri i figliuoli, quasi loro non fossero, di visitare e di servire schifavano.” Ibid., I, Introduction, 27.

\textsuperscript{1228} “Alcuni erano di più crudel sentimento, come che per avventura più fosse sicuro, dicendo niuna altra medicina essere contro alle pistilene migliore né così buona come il fuggir loro davanti: e da questo argomento mossi, non curando d'alcuna cosa se non di sé, assai e uomini e donne abbandonarono la propria città, le proprie case, i lor luoghi e i lor parenti e le lor cose, e cercarono l'altrui o almeno il lor contado, quasi l'ira di Dio a punire le iniquità degli uomini con quella pistilenza non dove fossero procedesse, ma solamente a coloro opprimere li quali dentro alle mura della lor città si trovassero, commossa intendesse, o quasi avvisando niuna persona in quella dover rimanere e la sua ultima ora esser venuta.” Ibid., I, Introduction, 25.
light of Brunetto Latini’s understanding of the city this was possible because the city came into being wherever people gathered together to live in communities.\textsuperscript{1229} It was not a fixed topography but one that was transportable and could be preserved in times of such drastic spatial dislocation. However, this could only be a temporary measure. Although the physical city was not coterminous with the social dimensions of the city as a collective enterprise, that collective enterprise would eventually require solid concrete foundations. The \textit{brigata} could preserve its memory through storytelling but eventually all its members would have to return to Florence to reinstall such memory back into city after the plague as a part of its reconstruction. It is a narrative of exile and return.

Some of the stories told evoke different kinds of spatial experiences. The narratives explore the ways these spaces affect human relationships and, in turn, can be affected by determined actions. I believe Boccaccio is attempting to take the wreckage of his city as an opportunity to analyze and speculate on its physical features in relation to social experience. In the face of what is characterized as a complete urban breakdown, social norms in relation to urban spaces and structures are laid bare. In the stories they are interrogated in the knowledge that the \textit{brigata} will return and that the city’s social and architectural fabric will be rebuilt. The question now is: \textit{Could it be rebuilt differently?}

However, the plague still haunts the space of the garden to which the brigata had retreated, indirectly, in the form of the half-open doorway to the villa in the background of the image (Figure 4.11e). This open door alerts us to the compromised architectural frame which was the result of the probable death of its inhabitants.\textsuperscript{1230}

\textsuperscript{1229} See “The Legislated city: Establishing Public Space” in chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{1230} It is from this doorway that the class conflict of the introduction of the sixth day will effect a turn in the themes and tenor of storytelling from that point on, dramatizing the social strain and tensions that erupted with the loss of carefully controlled spatial zones.
Against this threat, however, the *brigata* has organized a rigid program. Their days revolve around a cyclical schedule in which they wake, play, eat, tell stories, sing, and dance in regular succession for each of the ten days of storytelling.\(^{1231}\) Like the author, not to mention Florence’s statutes, they too have deployed a rigorous, repetitive control over space, time, and behavior, but in this case it is in order to protect their stories, which will move in and out of the unruly spaces of the city and out into the larger Mediterranean world.

In the face of an urban nightmare, the narrators seem to be asking how a city – understood as buildings *and* people – functions, how, through the most quotidian human desires, the city is constantly redesigned in a piecemeal, but coherent fashion. There is no appeal for legislative action, for those structures have disappeared. What remains, on the one hand, is the singular act that confronts the wall, and on the other, the collective action, or civic dialogue, which confronts, and makes both intelligible and livable, the complexity of urban space.

This is in direct contrast to the way Dante, in Sacchetti’s incarnation, sees the collective action of urban dialogue in the novella with the blacksmith. Instead of preserving the city’s social memory, such thoughtless, popular repetitions of a poem that was also a profound urban critique carried more destructive force within them than constructive potential. What Dante realized was that the smith was participating in the communicative experience of public space. This is the realm that corrupts and degrades attempts to communicate.

Dante the character was making a claim for the text as the author’s personal creation. He could not suffer the real-life pleasure of misuse and reconstructing that were the hallmarks of merchant’s textual practices, especially when it suffered such

\(^{1231}\) The days in which they decide not to tell stories, due to the religious cycle, are barely described and are set apart from the rest.
“hacking to pieces” in the hands of popular poets and their semi-literate audience. This was his creation and he demanded full authorial control over its dissemination in the spaces of the popolo. Sacchetti the narrator, however, reminds us that no such claims can hold in the opaque and chaotic spaces of work, entertainment, and mix of social classes. The dark side of public space was the way it accommodated legions of users, so that anything in its domain was subject to its constant reformulations. Sacchetti seems to be posing the question of intellectual integrity, property, and privacy against the cacophony of the piazza – private writing versus public orality.

4.6 The Desiring Body

The frame also contains all the desiring bodies within the stories told by the brigata. These were expansive women, and also men, who learned to manipulate the built environment – by voices, words, actions, deceptions, games, stories, and lies – so that it conformed not to an ideal but a workable compromise. They took as much as possible from the closed strictures of Florentine moral life and confronted the authorities with all the means at their disposal.

The contrast between the impervious container that is the structure of the Decameron and the oozing bodies within it addresses the ways in which the moral code of the street, expounded and interrogated by merchants, preachers and intellectuals, made liminal spaces and thresholds important symbolic places. In a sermon delivered in Siena’s central square, the Piazza del Campo, the observant Franciscan preacher, San Bernardino of Siena, railed against the appearance of women at windows.

Let’s talk of where the Angel found the [the Virgin]. Where do you think she was? At the windows or
engaging in some other sort of vanity? Oh, no! She was enclosed in a room, reading, to give an example to you, girls, so that you will never be tempted to stay either at the doorway or the window, but that you will remain inside the house, reciting Ave Marias and Our Fathers.\textsuperscript{1232}

Apparently, San Bernardino did not have the \textit{Decameron} in mind when he evoked the image of the Virgin in her bedroom reading as a model for the proper place and activity of women, even though the text contains many images of Franciscans and other religious whose mechanical recitations of \textit{Pater Nosters} are often undermined by their less than chaste actions.\textsuperscript{1233}

However, the anxiety of women framed by architectural thresholds is clearly expressed, acting as an index to bodily thresholds. The problem was the conjunction of space, sex, and visibility. As architectural historian Saundra Weddle has pointed out, it “was not enough for a woman to behave virtuously, she had to be believed to have behaved virtuously, and this required her and her family to control carefully when, where, and by whom she was seen.”\textsuperscript{1234} They were to participate in processions against external threats, and not watch from windows. Separated in the procession, coming behind laymen, they appealed to the Virgin and flagellated themselves,

\textsuperscript{1232} “Ma diciamo da [sic] la trovò é’Angiolo. Dove credi ch’ella fusse? A le finestre o a fare qualche altro esercizio di vanità? Eh no! Ella stava inserrata in camara, e leggeva, per dare esempio a te fanciulla, che mai tu non abbi dileito di stare né a finestra, ma che tu stia dentro in casa, dicendo delle Ave Marie e de’ Pater Nostri.” Quoted in Weddle, “Women’s Place,” 65 and n. 11. The irony may not have been lost on San Bernardino’s early fifteenth-century audience that such women might have been found reading the \textit{Decameron} itself, the source of numerous images of women and men passing through doors and windows to commit all the acts that so horrified the preacher. The relationship between a woman’s chastity and the enclosed bedroom, however, was obviously a conventional theme ripe for manipulation and satire long before San Bernardino. Note too, how both this Franciscan friar and the merchant Paolo da Certaldo evoke the image of the Virgin as the ideal woman who despite her sexual inaccessibility could still somehow produce male children and be the perfect mother.

\textsuperscript{1233} For example, Dominican friars at Santa Maria Novella hand out the \textit{Pater Noster} in the vernacular, along with other nonsense (\textit{ciancioni}), to Gianni Lotteringhi, a man with more money than brains, simply in order to extract meals and clothing from him (VII, 1). In II, 4, a Franciscan tertiary at San Pancrazio is duped by Dom Felice, a Franciscan conventual brother, with a bizarre form of penance so that Felice can sleep with Gianni’s wife.

\textsuperscript{1234} Weddle, “Women’s Place,” 64.
dramatizing the “spiritual zeal of the whole citizenry.”

Clamoring to the heavens for salvation, their ritual cries, ironically, gave voice to their husbands’ work and charity.

To the eyes of men, women in doorways, however, gave women the power to look. They were spectators to a public world that had to remain beyond their gaze, and women in such places always alluded to the honorable woman’s fallen alter ego, the prostitute. In her analysis of prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara, Diane Ghirardo demonstrates how it was not so much the prostitute’s actions that were condemned – after all, she was licensed and taxed – as her visibility and movement through urban space. Her presence and spatial range were severely restricted. However, in the spirit of Sacchetti’s sumptuary law-defying women, prostitutes in Ferrara robustly asserted their rights in the face of legislation that forced them to endure the shame, suffering, and guilt of a society that needed them.

These spatial restrictions forced prostitutes to carry out their activities in liminal spaces. Their status was always linked to where they could and could not go, but they were, paradoxically, able to breach that most sacred architectural barrier, the door that separated domestic from public space. “One of the distinguishing features of prostitutes and other women of ill repute in Renaissance Italy was that they apparently breached this zone with impunity, leaning out of windows and loitering in open doorways.”

This helped them to avoid the ban on movement in public streets and

---

1235 Trewler, Public Life, 360.
1237 Ghirardo, 409-410. They could be paraded through the city while pelted with sticks and rotten fruit. Their punishment was therefore public and collective. Similarly, Florentine prostitutes could be publicly shamed through the very streets which their presence was supposed to defile. See “Statuti del Podestá (1355),” clxi.
1238 Ghirardo, “Topography of Prostitution,” 411. The threshold of the family home was a relatively porous barrier. As Weddle has shown for convents, certain parts of interior architecture in Florence could function as spaces for public ceremonial encounters, turning ostensibly private zones into public ones. As well, for women, private spaces had to be accessible to patriarchal bodies. See Weddle, “Women’s Place.”
do business without breaking the law. Prostitutes had an uncanny power that was
normally reserved for men, crossing borders between the spaces where they were
supposed to ply their trade and those in which they had to be prohibited from being
seen. However, in doing so they created a new, eroticized space from which
“honorable” women had to be kept away. These thresholds were critical for their
ability to properly define adjacent but separate spaces. They had to function properly
by controlling who could pass through and when, making them an interstitial
jurisdiction in their own right.

These spaces were also crucial to the tradition of night music that was
banned everywhere in communal statutes in Italy. These included the mattinata,
which comprised a ritual cacophonous noise created by homemade instruments and
popular songs dedicated to widows or widowers who were getting remarried. The
disturbance of night time silence assaulted the house and penetrated the walls of the
lovers’ bedrooms in a more or less aggressive manner. Often, one had to pay off
revelers to celebrate on one’s behalf elsewhere or hire more sober musicians to
perform. Such activities were explicitly banned in the statutes of 1284, 1322-25,
1355, and 1415, where only the names of the instruments listed changed. They
prohibited dishonorable night time songs and the offending instruments were to be
confiscated and sold, the money going into communal coffers. The time of prohibition
was, predictably, defined by the sound of the evening bell and was lifted only by the
morning bell that rang towards dawn. Included in such prohibitions were also the
serenades by lovers, who would sing at night to their beloved.

1239 “Enduring evidence of the symbolic potency of the doorway is that one of the typical insult gestures
in 16th century Rome among prostitutes involved setting fire to another prostitute’s door.” Ghirardo,
"Topography of Prostitution," 411. It was a threshold whose proper functioning symbolized the proper
separation of activities.
1240 On the mattinate in Italy see Klapisch-Zuber, "Mattinata."
1241 1284, Frammenti, Rondoni, 52. Caggese, Podestà (1325), I, cxxi. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III,
c. Statuta populi (1415), III, cxcii (I, 403).
After counseling his family how to make one’s intentions known to an honest young woman, Giovanni Morelli suggests that one “sonare” once a year without too much expense or ostentation. No more than two florins should be spent. Three or four youths would suffice to go in secret with pipes and horns but, he repeats, only once a year in order that one not appear ridiculous.\textsuperscript{1242} Therefore, even though it was outlawed, Morelli thought it important enough as a social ritual to maintain.

The figure of the woman at the window was therefore caught between social ritual and the economic exchange of sex represented by the prostitute. The issue was visibility, and underlying Morelli’s paid pipers and Paolo da Certaldo’s desire to hide young virgins was the fact that the music itself could penetrate the wall in the way that sight could not. The architectural barrier was not compromised but only inflected by a different form of communication. Women at windows had to be tolerated in some circumstances, which was perhaps the case in Savonarola’s bonfire of the vanities in 1497, described by Piero Parenti, where women at windows surrounded the square.

However, the image of the woman in the window also belonged to festive culture and alluded to the ritual of knights jousting to announce their love to a certain woman.\textsuperscript{1243} One case, from 1464, involved Bartolomeo Benci, who rode out in grand procession from his family compound in Piazza de’ Peruzzi to the Strozzi residence in what is now known as the Strozzino (Figure 4.13). Along with eight other suitors the procession included a giant “triumph of love,” which seems to have been an elaborate float festooned with family arms, bells, sprites, and on the summit a burning, bleeding heart. No other mounted riders were allowed in the streets that night as carnival raged,

\textsuperscript{1242} Morelli, "Ricordi," 194-95. As Klapisch-Zuber notes, fines for musical noise at night were higher than simple nocturnal vagrancy, and lost instruments followed the logic of lost arms. See Klapisch-Zuber, "Mattinata," 268.
\textsuperscript{1243} This episode is repeated in many primary sources, transcribed and commented on in Pietro Gori, Le feste fiorentine attraverso i secoli, (Florence: R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1926), 40-44. For Boccaccio’s description of a similar event see Giovanni Boccaccio, Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta, ed. Vittore Branca, vol. V, (Milan: Mondadori, 1976), 1018-21.
and anyone injured by the jousting could not bring suit against this *brigata* in any way. When they reached the house where the daughter of the Strozzi lived, they ritually charged and broke their lances at the foot of the woman’s window. Then the triumphal chariot was burned amid shouts and sounds that rose to the stars. Flaming arrows were sent into the air by the window of the beloved. One apparently entered because the author hoped that it would enter her heart out of the compassion of this lover. The metaphor of entering and claiming the female body was played out through the threshold of the window that led to the woman’s heart. The same was then repeated by the rest of the suitors at the houses of each of their beloveds before the young men finally returned to the houses of the Benci from where they had started.

Clearly, the general laws restricting relations between the sexes were aimed not at such grand displays but at more clandestine encounters not authorized by families, including the possibility of both extra-marital ones. Architectural thresholds had to be protected because they were both symbolic of and led to the female thresholds at the center of a family’s honor. Despite the general ban on female visibility evident in Paolo da Certaldo, certain proscribed acts of courting were condoned and contained by laws, customs, and ritual processions. Boccaccio exploits these possibilities extensively in the *Decameron*, playing on the myriad ways in which architecture could be breached by the burning heart of love, or lust.

Sacchetti, on the other hand, rewrites the story of the sumptuary laws, twice. He remembers Coppo’s anxiety and allows one to compare the different strategies deployed by women to confront and change the laws that govern their bodies in the streets – in the first story the Roman women march into the piazza, while in the second Florentine women confound the law through its own attempts to control language.

---

1244 It is not clear that the woman was actually able to watch but such a spectacle certainly demanded to be seen.
1245 Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, LXVI, CXXXVIII.
The stories end differently – in the first rendition Coppo calms down and pays the workers, realizing he was moved to madness by reading about the actions of these women, while in the second the women are also victorious. The officials are rendered helpless to punish them for contravening the dress code and it ends with a Friulano quote: what women want, men also want, and that which men want goes up in smoke.

What is the significance of gender here? This story also follows immediately after one in which women are considered such great painters because they can paint angels in the place of devils through making up their faces. This story includes the manipulation of civic laws as well as marching on the piazza - by women – who were denied such a privilege in Florence.

4.7 The Art of Opening and Closing Doors

However, in the face of an urban catastrophe, where social and physical structures are laid bare, by what acts and through what kinds of desires or passions can city spaces be remade? In the novellas that follow the horrific description of the plague in Florence in 1348, the brigata begins to explore ways of rebuilding the architectural frames destroyed by the plague and interrogating the arbitrariness of dividing up lived space. Success and resolution for characters in the Decameron often require that they manipulate a physical medium that normally stands as a barrier. Much of the narrative drive is the result of barriers placed between characters and the thing they want to possess. These barriers can be related to class, marital status and gender separation but are often interlaced with architectural and spatial divides that have to be overcome as well. Both space and architecture, in both public and narrative space, were opaque physical and social media that had to be worked on, manipulated, “redesigned” as the characters move through them.
Characters have to figure out the linguistic key to open the door to a potential lover’s heart, but they also have to demonstrate the mental and physical agility to traverse urban spaces and pass through walls in unconventional ways. They have to understand the way language operates in urban space; that it travels through physical media (servants and streets) within networks of other language and information users who occupy similar frequencies. In short, they have to redesign the urban environment by making holes in its walls, turning windows into doors, balconies into bedrooms, bedrooms into spaces of fulfillment. Boccaccio has taken the medieval tradition of the Art of Love, where desire is motion through space and past barriers to the inner space of the woman’s body, and recast it as an interrogation of those barriers themselves.\(^{1246}\)

The same careful prodding and readjusting of the architectural structures that determine one’s spatial limits allows characters in the Decameron to undermine structures that were designed to control their movements in specific ways. Florentine authorities were under no illusions about the threat posed by breached architectural borders. Entering and exiting houses secretly was a preoccupation of the magistrates. The Night Watch was charged with assessing damages done to private homes during the hours of curfew. They had to take stock, throughout the city, of entrances broken into, attempts to access domestic interiors by digging tunnels under walls, or placing bases under windows upon which to put ladders. The resulting theft had to be declared by the victims, who could be compensated for up to one hundred soldi in a kind of home insurance plan.\(^{1247}\) Only fire officials were expressly exempt from the restriction on people entering buildings through windows.\(^{1248}\)

\(^{1246}\) Hallissy, "The Good, the Bad, and the Wavering: Women and Architectural Space."

\(^{1247}\) "Statuti del Podestà (1355)." I, li. “Et di mendare li danni che di notte per furto si commettessero o facessero ne’ popoli, contrade che guardare dovranno dove apparirae [sic] rompitura d’uscio o cavamento fatti sotto il soglare o sotto la finestra o porgiamento di scala per entrare in casa le quali cose se adverraae [sic] che sieno fatte sia mendato a colui che avra’ ricevuta la ingiuria pur chè il die
This anxiety over the transgression of architectural barriers was not simply linked to criminal activity but was also, unsurprisingly, part of a deeper anxiety about the threat of and to women. Each month a government notary was to visit each brothel to take any prostitute who voluntarily wanted to leave the building and that way of life it housed. In light of this, the notaries also had to routinely check that no exits were blocked or locked in order to prevent those women from leaving. They were also charged with breaking open such portals if they suspected that prostitutes were being held against their will. It was just such fears about privacy, property, and sexuality which the Decameron exploits and transforms into narratives of desire.

In the first story of the fourth day, Ghismonda succeeds in getting her lover into the private space of her bedroom. In the illustration (Figure 14), we see her catching his gaze in the first scene on the left. Then, in the center, we see him entering into her bed chamber through the grotto where the two lovers embrace. On the right, Ghismonda is delivered the heart of her dead lover from Tancredi, her father, who had caught them in the act of love. Finally, the pictorial narrative ends depicting her drinking poison mixed with her tears from the goblet holding the heart. In this story, wishing ardently for her would-be lover, Ghismonda had appealed to the spirit of “Love,” and it was precisely love’s desire, the narrator tells us, that enabled her to remember a lost stairway that led from her room to a grotto. For David Wallace, the nature of this bedroom is determined by who enters from what door. One door leads to the formal, public space of the court, the other out to the wild, subterranean

---

1248 Ibid., I, lxx.
1249 Ibid., III, clxi.
1250 Boccaccio, Decameron, IV, 1, 10-11. “Amore, agli occhi del quale niuna cosa è si segreta che non pervenga, l’aveva nella memoria tornata alla inamorata donna.” “Love, to whose eyes nothing is so secret that it does not penetrate, had recalled it to the memory of the enamored woman…” (my translation).

483
world of illicit desire.\textsuperscript{1251} Ghismonda provides her lover access to the room from the grotto but cannot prevent her father from entering her bedroom from the zone of the court over which he has total access. Entering one day, and having fallen asleep waiting for her to return, her father secretly and accidentally witnesses the terrifying act of love. Full of wrath, he decides to remain silent. Afterwards, the lovers leave by their respective exits – Ghismonda by the door, Guiscardo by the secret staircase. The father, on the other hand, opens up a third threshold as he takes his secret with him out the window.\textsuperscript{1252}

This story dramatizes how modes of entering and exiting transformed architectural space. Memory plays a key role in allowing a woman’s desire to open up a secret entrance that leads directly to her heart and to her room. That memory revealed the walls of her bedroom to be a palimpsest of past interventions. By analogy, historical memory of how Florentine society and Florentine space were adjusted and reorganized by temporal superimpositions allowed one to salvage what was useful from the past and was in danger of being effaced. It showed how important it was to maintain such figures as Coppo Domenichi who could transmit that past to a present that was itself in danger of being annihilated. By highlighting the concerns that Florentines had about the control of bodies and space, the Decameron, through the trope of desire, reminds its readers that both architectural and legal barriers were constructed, reconfigured, and in no way were eternally fixed within a dynamic social body. They were subject to manipulation as well as to the overbearing techniques of dominant political power.

\textsuperscript{1251} Wallace, Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron, 55.
\textsuperscript{1252} Boccaccio, Decameron, IV, 1, 21. “…da una finestra di quella si calò nel giardino, e senza essere da alcuno veduto, dolente a morte, alla sua camera si tornò.” “…from a window of the room he descended into the garden, and without being seen by anyone, pained to death, returned to his room.” (my translation).
However, the forbidden love that the entrance to the grotto facilitates is destroyed by the authority of the father, whose conventional anxiety over the chastity of his daughter threatens to destroy her (Figure 4.14a). He leaves by the window after having played the role of secret witness to the love-making which seems to have rendered him part of an illicit triangle. He decides to remain hidden before taking action and is, therefore, obliged to climb out the window rather than open the door into the public space of the court.

Separating women from the hazards of daily contact in the social world provides the basis for a radical architecture of anxiety in the fifth story of the seventh day, where a rabidly jealous husband sequesters his wife within her room. His irrational state, however, sets the stage for the very thing he is trying to prevent from happening (Figures 4.14b, 4.14c).1253 This unnamed woman is unable to unlock her bedroom door and she is forbidden even to look out from her bedroom window to the street below. She is the victim of an extreme anxiety and jealousy on the part of her husband who sought to keep any element of the city from entering into her bedroom. It is a darker example of the attempt by Florentines, described in the introduction, to keep out the contagion of the plague by shutting themselves up in their homes and alludes to the futility and barbarity that such an act contained. Shutting out the city and urban culture was tantamount to an abdication of one’s identity. The question was; could architecture serve such a functional disorder by becoming an ultimate barrier.

The answer, unsurprisingly, turns out to be negative. The desire for contact always finds a way to transgress. Being a Boccaccian woman – alone, neglected and

---

1253 Ibid., VII, 5, 10. “Per chè, veggendosi a torto fare ingiuria al marito, s’avvisò, a consolazion di se medesima, di trovar modo, se alcuno ne potesse trovare, di far si che a ragione le fosse fatto.” “Seeing that she had been wrongfully made to suffer by her husband, she decided, in consolation to herself, to find a way, if anyone could find one, to make it reasonable to accuse her thus.”
imprisoned – the wife’s thoughts naturally turn toward love and sex. She remembers that there was a handsome man next door and imagines that if only there were a hole in the wall she would be able to contact him and send her love. So she carefully searches the wall that separates them, detecting the slightest chink in its blank surface, which she transforms into a hole. By doing so she transforms architecture into a porous membrane that is susceptible to her desire. Not unlike language, it too contains gaps and slips that allow users to become producers and make certain modifications in its structure.

Holding hands through this hole with her lover, however, fails to satisfy her, so she resolves to play a game of storytelling that will turn the enclosing domestic architecture against itself. She asks permission from her husband to go to confession, but his jealousy drives him to dress up as a priest to hear directly from her own mouth just exactly what her sins could have been. Seeing through his less than convincing disguise, she tells him a story in which he is the protagonist. She tells him that she has fallen in love with a priest who enters her room every night and sleeps with her. However, since her husband hears the story disguised as the woman’s confessor, he misinterprets it, believing that this figure who has the power to open all the doors of

1254 Ibid., VII, 5, 11. “…sappiando che nella casa la quale era allato alla sua aveva alcun giovane e bello e piacevole, si pensò, se pertugio alcun fosse nel muro che la sua casa divideva da quella, di dovere per quello tante volte guatare, che ella vedrebbe il giovane in atto da potergli parlare, e di donargli il suo amore, se egli il volessi ricevere…” “But since she knew that in the house next to hers there lived a handsome and pleasant young man, she thought that if she could find an opening of some sort in the wall which separated her house from the next one, she might be able to look through it from time to time, just enough to see the young man, and to be able to speak to him and to offer him her love, if he were willing to accept it…”

1255 Ibid., VII, 5, 13. “e venendo ora in una parte e ora in una altra, quando il marito non v’era, il muro della casa guardando, vide per avventura in una parte assai segreta di quella il muro alquanto da una fessura essere aperto.” “…and going now in one part and now in another, when her husband was not there, looking at the wall of the house, she saw by chance in a relatively obscure part, the wall was somewhat opened by a crack.” (my translation)

1256 Ibid., VII, 5, 24. “Or venendo alla confessione, tra l’altr’ cose che la donna gli disse, avendogli prima detto come maritata era, si fu che ella era innamorata d’un prete, il quale ogni notte con lei s’andava a giacere.” “Now coming to the confession, among the other things that the woman told him, first having said that she was married, that she was in love with a priest, who every night came to enjoy himself with her.”
her house, simply by touching them, must be her lover; missing the ironic description of his own transparent folly.\textsuperscript{1257} This magical door-opening ability of the priest/husband is in stark contrast to the slow, arduous task of the wife who must manage with the tiniest hole in the wall. However, Boccaccio shows how the power to tell effective stories relies on anticipating the presuppositions of one’s audience. Meaning is context specific and the ability to interpret properly is a crucial skill. The husband believes in the “truth” of the story, but his interpretation, flawed by his jealousy, leads precisely to the very conditions in which his worst fears will come true.

That night, he constrains his wife behind a series of three locked doors; her bedroom, the landing and the front door of the house.\textsuperscript{1258} He does this in order to lie in wait for his enemy, who turns out to be his own fear. As he will soon discover, he has only succeeded in locking himself out of his own domestic space and allowing his wife to turn the prison-like series of doors into a sanctuary of desire.\textsuperscript{1259} Her lover, naturally, climbs over the roof and enters the bedroom window into her waiting arms (Figure 4.14d). Such thresholds, along with the nefarious activities that could go along with them, were actually forbidden by law along house walls that bordered

\textsuperscript{1257} Ibid., VII, 5, 28. “...il prete con che arte egli il si faccia non so: ma egli non è in casa uscio si serrato, che, come egli il tocca, non s’apra; e dicemi egli che, quando egli è’ venuto a quello della camera mia, anzi che egli l’apra, egli dice certe parole per le quali il mio marito incontanente s’addormenta, e come addormento il sente, così apre l’uscio e viensene dentro e stassi con meco.” “...with what art the priest does it I do not know: but there is not a door in the house so tightly locked that it does not open as he touches it, he says certain words by which my husband suddenly falls asleep, and when he hears him sleeping, he opens the door and comes inside and stays with me” (my translation).
\textsuperscript{1258} Ibid., VII, 5, 38. “...serrrai ben l’uscio da via e quello da mezza scala e quello della camera.” “...you will lock well the front door and that of the landing and that of the bedroom.” (my translation)
\textsuperscript{1259} Ibid., VII, 5, 42. “...e la donna avendo fatti serrar tutti gli usci, e massimamente quello da mezza scala, acciò che il geloso su non potesse venire.” “And the woman having locked all the entrances, and especially the one on the landing, so that the jealous husband could not come up” (my translation).
another’s property. Windows were only permitted at these thresholds for night illumination and they had to be locked to prevent any unwanted entrances.1260

Even though the art of opening and closing of doors is a gendered act in which the power of the male has a magical effect, architecture can also be rendered porous to a woman who desires. In this case, the woman finds sexual satisfaction within a functioning matrimonial bond and within a spatial framework that defines the limits of that bond. After confronting her husband with the meaning of the story she had told him, he realizes his blindness was caused by jealously and resolves to give more spatial freedom to his wife. He finally understood what the story was about when his wife explains it through the metaphor of the entrance/exit:

I told you that no door of my house could be held closed to him when he wanted to enjoy me: and which door in your house was ever held closed to you, when by it you wanted to come and see me?” The husband therefore, actually makes certain to happen what he had feared all along, though from now on, the lover was able to enter through the front door under his trusting gaze, and no longer had to climb in through the window.1261

The wife, by both her physical and linguistic manipulation of the structures that bound her was able to carve out a zone of erotic liberty. The holes she has made in the wall, however, lead only to other interior, erotic spaces, and they end at the

1260 “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” II, lxxix “Chiunque nella cittade o ne’ borghi o ne’ soborghi di Firenze che avrà corte o terreno al lato o dopo la casa d’alcuno et colui di cui sia la casa non avrà alcuno terreno proprio dala r____ ala(?) ne_o d’uno braccio di dietro et al lato alla sua casa cotale persona di cui sia la casa, in nullo modo possa fare o fare fare o avere o tenere uscio o finestre da quella parte presso a terra per x braccia se non fosse finestra per tendere lume et allora quella finestra debba essere serrata si che per quella non si(?) possa entrare nè uscire. Et quello medesimo s’intenda della finestra fatta o che si farà nel muro o nel portico sopra lo tetto del vicino.”

1261 Boccaccio, Decameron, VII, 5, 55. “Dissiti che niuno uscio della mia casa gli si poteva tener serrato quando meco giaeer volex: e quale uscio ti fu mai in casa tua tenuto, quando tu cola’ dove io fossi se’ voluto venire…” (my translation)
masculine figure of the lover. There is as yet no space beyond that could lead her out into the streets themselves.

Out on the streets, things were much more difficult for women, but, as the investigation in Chapter one into laws, diaries, and stories makes clear, it was necessary for Florentines, through a variety of ways and media, to establish their own borders and limits within the confines of their urban world. Such borders were always shifting and had to contain and maintain certain notions about social order, social exchanges, and economic transactions.

4.8 The literary spaces of the everyday

The grotesque body’s favored space is the marketplace where it enjoys “a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology.”

Chi vuol udir bugie e novellaccie, venga ascoltar costoro che stanno tutto il di su le pancaccie.

A similar textual architecture to that of the Decameron forms the framework for the early fifteenth novella Bianco Alfani, attributed to Piero Veneziano, a Florentine wool merchant. The plague had returned in 1430 and so it was necessary to tell stories in order to stave off its deadly force. The plague is again the demon at the edges of the narrative, hovering over the attempt of the characters to counter

---

1262 Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed."
misery with delightful stories (à la Sacchetti) in a garden with cool wine, the smell of Jasmine, and a small fountain gushing water (à la Boccaccio).\textsuperscript{1265}

The narrator introduces what appears to be the outermost frame with the plague. The characters, discussing (ragionando) the pestilence, were avoiding the heat in the loggia of the Buondelmonti.\textsuperscript{1266} A certain Lioncino, along with unnamed others, interrupts their discussion (ragionamenti) and exhorts them to leave the dead to the dead and the dying to the doctors. So they cross the Ponte Vecchio and go to the garden of the Pitti family in the Oltrarno (Figure 4.15). However, when the narrator, who speaks in the first person, introduces the afternoon of storytelling, the first person to tell a story is Piero Veneziano, a stand-in for the author of the novella itself: “Piero Veneziano called us all to attention with a pleasant preamble and began to tell the tale of mistress Lisetta…”\textsuperscript{1267} However, the reader is denied the story told by Piero because his narrator suddenly addresses the implied reader, declaring that he has already heard that story, reminding him or her that he has already recounted it: “…since I had heard him tell it before, I have already recounted it to you.”\textsuperscript{1268} Suddenly, with the introduction of the second person pronoun, the reader is forced to straddle the threshold between the world of experience and the world of the text. We already know this story, or we ought to, as participants in a set of shared civic narratives since the story self-consciously situates itself within the textual exchange of readers and

\textsuperscript{1265} “…sotto una pergoletta di gelsomini, in mezzo della quale surget un zampilietto d’acqua viva, una tavola fu ordinata, piena di tutte quelle frutte che ‘l tempo richiedeva, con due rinfrescati pieni d’ottimi vini bianchi e veremig…” Veneziano, “Bianco Alfani,” 633-34.

\textsuperscript{1266} The Buondelmonti had houses and towers in via delle Terme ad Borgo SS. Apostoli. Their Loggia, according to Macci and Orgera, was next to their tower, facing the via delle Terme and across from their principal residence at no. 5. Therefore, it was on the north side of the street, next to their tower and between the first and second chiasso; see Macci and Orgera, \textit{Architettura e civiltà}, 119. It was large, elegant, and grandiose according to Carocci; see Guido carocci, “Vecchia strada.” Rivista fiorentina 1 (1909), 11. Curiously, no Buondelmonti are mentioned in present in the story, suggesting that family loggias in Florence were treated as a type of public property.


storytellers outlined above. The story seems to reach beyond its own frame to forge links with the world outside. As a trope, it heightens the realism on which the novella turns. The reader is put into an ambivalent position in terms of where he or she is placed by the narrative; inside or out, in Florence or elsewhere, in the conversation or outside it, listening in.

This proem, however, was most likely added later. Consequently, the reader is plunged directly into the complex web of storytelling, retelling, listening, remembering, editing, and adding to which stories in Florence were constantly subjected.

The art of storytelling is also a crucial part of the tale. The narrator admits that although he has told this story already to the reader, Piero tells it much better because “But it was so much more delightful when he told it, in that he imitated all the actions and gestures of the woman and the peasant, laughing and crying at the appropriate times, so that we seemed to see and hear each of them.” In other words, the narrator describes another storyteller who had more talent but the reader is denied such a performance because it goes untold and the aural dimension is denied by the limits of the text as a silent document. Then a second order narrator, Lioncino, takes over the story itself by challenging Piero to a storytelling dual, believing that he is even better at the art. This is the story told to the reader but the reader will never be able to judge the narrator comprehensively, since he is distanced by over-arching narrative frame that mediates such a performance.

---

1270 Veneziano, "Bianco Alfani," 634, n. 7.
1271 Ibid., 634. “fu tanto più piacevole quanto facendo lui tutti gli atti e gli gesti della donna e del lavoratore con ridere e piangere agli tempi, e l’uno e l’altro, e vedere, e udire ci parea.” Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 96. Note how the realism is a product of both seeing and hearing.
Ironically, this tale told to Piero in a contest, is the one that the historical author, Piero Veneziano, wrote. In this novella it is not only the structure of signification that escapes a final reading as the story circulates within the urban milieu, but the narrative voices themselves also slide between readers, writers, and, storytellers, staging the social frameworks within which such stories moved. This situation points to how even texts with definite authors imply a certain collective formation that is present in every retelling. Such a situation demonstrates clearly just how complex layers of storytelling could become and the direct interventions made within a culture of retelling stories.

The setting of this story, the Pitti garden, is thus different from the one constructed by Piero. Perhaps the secondary narrator felt a certain context was needed to make the story function in a particular way: in this case, as a weapon to combat the plague. But what is evident is the textual evidence of the circulation of stories. The Boccaccian setting was realized as an act of will, the reader is identified as a participant, and the performance of storytelling is the point of the story. The challenge by Lioncino rests on his ability to outdo Piero in telling a story. The narrator had noted how Piero had imitated the gestures of the characters, thereby making them seem present. In short, he was the epitome of a talented cantastorie but did not stand on benches for money. He was part of a more leisured class linked to the social class of Boccaccio’s brigata. However, either Lioncino is trying to narrate Piero’s own story in a way more amusing than his other one about Lisetta, or as a character invented by Piero to recount a story – Lioncino tells his own tale in the first person – he confronts his own creator on this issue of the power of narration:

Lioncino turned laughingly to him and said: ‘Piero, I mean for our dispute, which has gone on for so long, to be settled and for you to see that I am a better storyteller
than you. These worthy young men ho have heard your tale will be patient enough to listen to me tell another. And if they judge it to be more amusing than yours, from then on you shall call me your master; and if it should be the opposite – which it won’t – I shall call you mine.”

Tellingly, he begins his story just as the proem did, by evoking the concrete space of male sociability. He recounts how the main character, Bianco Alfani, often used go to the Mercato Nuovo after dinner to tell stories. In all probability, such storytelling centered on the moveable benches in the Mercato Nuovo, whose presence dated to the fourteenth century and whose installation and removal Landucci carefully recorded in the later part of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

However, Bianco’s value as a storyteller – separated from the reader by two narrative frames – is undermined by the description of his audience. They were young men who followed him around like birds after a decoy, listening to his stories and boastings. Among Lioncino’s friends who were “unofficially” listening in on Bianco’s ravings, was Messer Antonio di Guido, who was among the most famous

---

1272 Veneziano, “Bianco Alfani,” 634. “…Lioncino tutto ridente a lui voltosi, disse:’Piero, io intendo che la nostra questione, durata tanto lungamente, si determini, e che tu sia chiaro ch’io so meglio novellare che tu non sai; e questi valenti giovani, che hanno udita la tua novella, saranno pazienti udirne un’altra da me; la quale se giudicheranno che più sia da piacere che la tua, da quinci innanzi chiamera mi maestro; e dove il contrario fosse, che non sarà, io cosi chiamerò te.” Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 96. Either that, or the narrator is remembering the historical Lioncino tell a story that was originally written by Piero. In any case, there is a play between writer and storyteller, audience and reader, narrators and those narrated. The whole exchange seems to threaten the very idea of an original author, making the collective act of telling the fulcrum of possessing and making meaning of the story.

1273 Sacchetti also uses the Mercato Nuovo as the sight for shaming shabby storytellers. Matteo di Cantino, old, fat, and badly dressed, but a knight, is telling stories there among the merchants when a band of youths lets loose a mouse that they chase with a broom right into Matteo’s britches. See Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, LXXVI.


1275 “Nell’anno passato egli usava molto di venire in Mercato nuovo. E sempre la sera dopo cena aveva un cerchio di giovani, che traevano a lui, come gli uccelli alla coccoveggià, per udire delle sue millanterie e novelle…” Ferrero, Bianco Alfani, 635. “Last year Bianco used to come often to the New Market and in the evening after supper he was always surrounded by a circle of young men, drawn to him like ducks to a decoy to hear him boast and tell stories.” Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 97.
heralds of the Florentine Republic, and therefore, a professional singer and storyteller himself in the employ of the government. After setting up Bianco’s vanity, Lioncino hatches his plan to humiliate him.

Here we have the convergence of several relevant themes. The Mercato Nuovo was obviously also a site, as Piazza San Martino was, for the performance of ritual storytelling. This market, in contrast to the Mercato Vecchio, was the site of more elite guild activity and exchange. Around it were the *banche* of prominent bankers, as well as the headquarters of some of the city’s major guilds: such as the Cambio (bankers), Calimala (cloth merchants), Por Santa Maria (silk), and Lana (wool) (Figure 4.16). In this story it served also as a place of evening leisure before nighttime. Antonio di Guido was the official storyteller of the republic, hired by the city to entertain the priors at meal times, and to sing patriotic songs in the Piazza della Signoria. He also may have moonlighted by singing in the Piazza San Martino. Therefore, the story continually emphasizes the culture of storytelling in Florence, from the private setting of friends, to the informal setting of the piazza (Mercato Nuovo, Tetto dei Pisani) and the formalized spaces of the government (Palazzo Vecchio). Actors, audiences, and spaces were intertwined with one another so that the lines between the official and informal public were blurred and infiltrated the gardens of the private. In this animated oral culture of close but suspicious neighborhoods, stories circulated freely and belonged as much to the urban environment as they did to an individual raconteur. It was therefore perfectly natural for the “I”s of stories,

---

1276 On this figure see Becherini, "Un canta in panca."
1277 On the office of the herald see Trexler, *Libro cerimoniale*; Branciforte, "Ars poetica".
1278 Martines mentions the site of the Tetto dei’ Pisani, on the fringes of the Signoria and the university, as sites of ideas, literature and public life. See Martines, *Renaissance Sextet*, 118.
1279 Public performances were so popular that they had to be regulated in time and place. See Pucci, *Le noie*, xlvii.
their authors, creators, revisionists and interpreters, to slide between groups and names in a very fluid fashion.\textsuperscript{1280}

The impossible relations between the “I”, Piero, the reader, and Lioncino in this novella threaten to dissolve any attempt to organize them into an interpretive nightmare but they point to a lively exchange, a ritual game of repeating and rewriting through the performance. A community of speakers told the tale through him – Lioncino mentions near the end that his listeners would have already heard the story circulating in the streets and squares of the city. Lioncino had simply lifted it from the urban continuum in which it lived.\textsuperscript{1281} Even the well-known cantastorie, Il Burchiello referred to this novella in one of his poems, and the story must have enjoyed considerable fame since the character of Bianco Alfani became the model for the gullible fool.\textsuperscript{1282} But even more than that, stories moving in this continuum contained multiple viewpoints in their constant transformations, and never fully cohere into a single unified perspective. There are multiple narrators, digressions, adaptations, references to the real, the historical, and the fantastic. Time is distorted and morals, themes, messages and motivations are contingent.\textsuperscript{1283} In a story that destroys a person’s reputation; namely Bianco’s for his inept storytelling, there are no clear protagonists nor is there necessarily an appeal for completely social resolution. In the end, the unresolved question remains about whether, under the current circumstances of death and destruction, delight and laughter or melancholy content performs more effectively.

Vanity, foolishness, and gullibility were an affront to the community because it meant a kind of misunderstanding. The beffa or burla, the practical joke, reinforced

\textsuperscript{1280} Martines, \textit{Renaissance Sextet}, 123.
\textsuperscript{1281} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{1282} Rossi, "Sulla novella del Bianco Alfani," 383-84.
\textsuperscript{1283} Martines notes the two temporal continuums present in the story. See Martines, \textit{Renaissance Sextet}, 125.
certain loyalties, friendships and social bonds just as it was a locus of sustained and focused animosity toward the person whose obtuseness was taken as a threat. By the early Quattrocento Bianco Alfani’s name had already become a synonym for naïve vanity, testifying the longevity of the story and the widespread participation of Florentines in this type of oral storytelling. Part of Bianco’s social indiscretion, which helped to justify the cruel joke played on him, was the way he would boast and blab about himself in the piazza: “If we send him a letter that seems to come from this Giovanni di Santi, in which he all but confirms Bianco’s appointment, he’ll go crazy over it and we’ll hear a thousand stories from him here every evening.”1284 The delight derived by the pranksters would, of course, be the production of more vain stories whose spoken words acted as urban corrective mechanisms, enforcing a conformist ethic.1285 So Bianco had pay where he sinned, in the end, in public.1286

---

1284 Ibid. “Se noi mandiamo a costui una lettera che appaia venire da questo Giovanni di Santi,… noi ce lo faremo su impazzare, e udiermo mille sue novella qui la sera.” Ferrero, Bianco Alfani, 637.
1285 Ibid., 137.
1286 Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 136.
4.9 The Body Public

Or come mi cognoscerò tra costoro? Per certo io mi 
smarririe coi costoro se non mi segno di qualche 
segno.

Giovanni Sercambi, Il Novelliere, II.

Martines remarks how “[c]ity society in Renaissance Italy put its mark on you, 
so that you then “read” its streets and squares accordingly and with much less leeway 
or choice than is available to us.” The public sphere was much more invasive of all 
 aspects of one’s life and weighed down on one’s possible personas. Rather than an 
open place of access guaranteed in Roman law so that it was the antithesis of a modern 
notion of privacy, public space was an opaque and constraining force that followed 
every social move. This would help to account for the intense analyses of public life, 
 events, and spaces in the ricordanze of Florentines in the fourteenth and fifteenth 
 centuries. They explored many ways of creating semi-private topographies within this 
amorphous public edifice and responded with varying degrees of conformity and 
resistance.

The Florentine piazza and other public spaces were just such identity-defining 
loci, caught as they were between the flow of commerce and conversation; it was both 
open and closed, affording public sociability as well as secret surveillance, private 
moments among friends, as well as collective expressions of civic identity. However, 
the precarious nature of one’s public identity is illustrated by the following stories.

Giovanni Sercambi (1348-1424), spice merchant (speziale), novella writer, and 
chronicler of his native city of Lucca, borrowed heavily from the Decameron for his 
compilation of novellas and is a perfect example of the merchant copyist combined

---

1287 Martines, Strong Words, 176.
with the urban writer. He copied liberally from Boccaccio, rewriting some stories word for word, changing details in others, while using still others as models on which he could elaborate. He combined motifs and tropes from stories that he must have heard in the piazza, for which he had no written sources, combining elements of near eastern tales and western courtly romances. He also used the plague as a point of departure for a brigata that tours the entire peninsula instead of retiring to a garden. His second novella (exemplo) is entitled “De simplicitate,” (simplicity) and follows the first, which had dealt with wisdom (“De Sapiens”). In it, Ganfo, a Lucchese furrier and simpleton (grosso di pasta), is forced to confront the loss of his personal identity when he arrives at the public bath he is sent to for reasons of bodily health. His anxiety arises at the thought of sharing a thermal bath with so many (centonaia) naked men, though not from any shame about a shared nudity but from the total loss of identity such nudity was sure to bring: “Oh dear, how will recognize myself amongst these people,” he thinks to himself. “Surely I will lose myself in them if I don’t mark myself with some sign.” In danger of disappearing completely he places some straw in the shape of a cross on his shoulder and declares that as long as he bears it he will remain himself (serò desso).

As Michael Camille has argued, the display of public signs, in the streets and on the body, was a form of collective identity formation and urban communication. It was popular, ironic, sensually allusive, and resistant to official communicative signs. It offered an alternative system to conventional signs of civic identity. However, Ganfo’s sign was rather uninspired and bore no special relationship to him as an

---

1291 “Or come mi cognoscerò tra costoro? Per certo io smarrirerei con costoro se io non mi segno di qualche segno.” Ibid., II (vol. I, p. 27).
1292 Camille, “Signs of the City.”
individual. This sign belonged to a more conventional urban semiotic world and it did not, so to speak, fit him particularly well.

Looking at the straw cross on his shoulder just before entering, Ganfo recognizes himself (Ben sono esso). One’s identity therefore, was caught within the movement of these signs; dress, address, neighborhood. Sometimes, however, it was difficult to hold on to such apparel, as Ganfo finds out when he helplessly watches his homemade name tag float away when he lowers his shoulders into the warm water. In horror, he watches it float across the water and stick onto a Florentine next to him. Looking at himself and not seeing the sign, he turns to the other and suddenly declares, despairingly: “‘You are me and I am you.’” (Tu sei io e io son tu). The Florentine, having no clue what Ganfo is talking about, tells him to go away (va’ via). But Ganfo can only repeat his horror at the transference of identities, leading the Florentine to declare that Ganfo was dead – (tu sei morto). After grabbing his clothing he flees back to Lucca, where he does not respond to anyone who recognizes and greets him along the way. He was dead, declared thus by the Florentine, who had literally sucked out his self.

The implication, on the surface, is the simplicity of Ganfo’s understanding of the world. He was unable to maintain his identity in it, an identity he derived entirely from things that marked his body. However, the Florentine’s response could be read in two ways; as a condemnation and curse, or as a perfectly logical response to Ganfo’s loss of identity. Without it, Ganfo was, indeed dead when he was recognized as so in public, and not before. Significantly, Ganfo refuses to return the curse. Reaching his home, screams to his wife that he is dead and throws himself onto the bed and lies motionless with his eyes closed. The neighbors (vicini) arrive immediately to provide comfort and advice to the “widow”. Ganfo is placed on a bier and while being led to his burial, the funeral party encounters a woman named
Vettessa who curses him because now she would never have her fur undergarment
(*pelliccione*) that she had consigned to him repaired and returned to her. It is precisely
this repeated lament – one that appealed to Ganfo’s trade and one of the strongest
social identifiers for urban dwellers – that symbolically brings him back from his ritual
death. If he were alive, he declares, he would certainly respond to her. It restitutes his
self by reminding him of his social responsibilities while his bodily self is dropped and
crushed under the bier by the understandably stupefied funeral cortège.

This story plays on the trope of the feigned death, but in this case, there is a
significant twist that derives from the discursive movement of social identities. Ganfo
is terrified and does not feign death to fulfill an amorous desire or play a trick on
someone. He has actually lost control of who he is and is, therefore, as good as dead.
Notably, the accusation of Vettessa seems to have cured his original malady and
“having been comforted, he regained his health and continued to ply his trade.”

The simpleton is mocked for his inability to forge an individual psychological
identity that can counter the social markers that control who he is. He sees no one
underneath his clothing. This suggests that one’s public identity at the threshold of the
Renaissance was formed directly in the streets and squares of one’s community and
depended on its visibility to others through social interaction in space. It is further
evidence that the idea of individual self-fashioning at the threshold of the Renaissance,
where the individual arose as a work of art along with the state in a complicated
situation of liberation and tyranny, is a wholly anachronistic concept that denies its
necessary dialectical relationship with the collaborative construction of identities. The
great Renaissance “individuals” – Brunelleschi and Donatello – played relentlessly on
the way one’s identity was a public construction in a novella that appeared as

historical memory in Manetti’s biography of the Renaissance architect and
engineer.1294 So the question remains, did anyone have control over who they were?

The line that separated narrative fiction from narrative space was decidedly
thin. The intense realism of Renaissance novellas created a public discourse that
blurred the separation of telling and listening, reading and experiencing. Consider the
shifting narrative frameworks of *Il grasso legnaiuolo* (The Fat Woodcarver), where
the narrator recalls the story as his memory of actual events in Florence in 1409. This
story had circulated widely in the fifteenth century and it also hinges on a similar
internal diffusion of the story that it tells to put its form of civic justice into play. It
stages the anxiety over one’s “self”, which can literally be taken away through the
careful manipulation of space and social contacts.

Manetto, or Grasso, the woodcarver, is the victim of a ritual destruction of
identity. He was invited to dine with a group of social elites (*di reggimento*), along
with “masters of the more intellectual and imaginative of the crafts, such as painters,
goldsmiths, sculptors, woodcarvers, and the like.”1295 His refusal to come, conceived
as a snub, inspired the idea amongst the group to play a trick on him. It is Filippo
Brunelleschi, characterized as an intellectual genius (“maraviglioso ingegno ed
intelletto”), who comes up with what seems to be an impossible plan: to make Grasso
believe he was someone else. In other words, they were going to gradually strip his
identity from him in a series of orchestrated encounters in public spaces. At first, the

De Robertis and Giuliano Tanturli, (Milan: Il polifilo, 1976); published in English as Antonio Manetti,
The Life of Brunelleschi, ed. Howard Saalman, trans. Catherine Enggrass, (University Park:
Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970). The English version does not include the novella of “The
Fat Woodcarver,” which has been translated by Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 171-212. Manetti, Vita,
De Robertis. The original manuscript version of the Vita and the novella is found in BNCF II, II, 325.
1295 “maestri d’alcune d’arti miste e d’ingegno, quali sono dipintori, orfici, scultori e legnaiuoli e simili
guests are not convinced such a thing is possible, but with many convincing arguments Filippo is able to win them over.

The plan involves getting various people to consciously misrecognize Grasso in the spaces – public and private – that Grasso inhabited on a daily basis: his workshop, his home, and the area in which they were located, around the Baptistry and cathedral. A progressive alienation of Grasso to other unfamiliar spaces – to court, prison, someone else’s neighborhood and domestic interior – serves to strip him of his sense of self.

Filippo then takes over his apartment and his voice, locking out Grasso, who then runs into Donatello, who greets him as “Matteo.” Grasso is so confused that he needs to go immediately to the place where social identities are maintained and confirmed, his “neighborhood” square, only to have that identity unceremoniously stripped from him. While waiting near the baptistery to be recognized by someone, anyone, he is arrested by several of the plotters. Thus begins his confusing odyssey into an urban world turned upside down, as the signifiers that fixed him within the city disappear and are transformed into others. He becomes Matteo, debtor, gambler, and ne’er-do-well, who is jailed, scolded, and lectured to. In a series of spatial moves and verbal assaults, he loses his identity in stages (Figures 4.17, 4.17a). The first stage is legal, in the court of the Mercanzia, where he is jailed. Upon his release his acting brothers take him into the alien familial territory of Santa Felicità. He finds out there that his name was circulating in the Florentine rumor mill of the Mercato Nuovo. As in Bianco Alfani, crossing the river elicited a psychological change, from death and dying to lush gardens for Alfani, into terra incognita for Grasso.

On the second night he is drugged and brought back to his own room, which begins the second phase of the joke. Grasso is finally awakened by the sound of the morning office of the Virgin, the Ave Maria, ringing from the campanile of the duomo
as it did every morning. It was this familiar urban sound that transforms the unstable places of his own neighborhood into a place of recognition (Figure 4.17). This was the sound that began the acoustic exchanges between church and commune for Florentines and begins the slow process of self-recognition for Grasso. The sound of bells, as chapter three has established, could make even strange spaces familiar, or make familiar again those that had been made strange. They could bring back an alienated self through the memory they extracted from and preserved in urban spaces. This was the first sign that signaled to Grasso that he had returned to his own neighborhood. This familiar, regular sound of the public world initiated the gradual repossessing of his identity and memory, which was intimately tied to one’s location in space and was therefore unstable in the dynamic social world of Florence. Such stories attest to this anxiety.

However, he finds himself lying with his head at the foot of the bed, having had his world, quite literally, turned upside down. He rushes to his shop, only to find that his tools have all been rearranged into a completely different order.1296 As Ganfo does without his clothes, so Grasso barely recognizes himself in a familiar space made strange by its re-organization. After having just been convinced he was someone else, both identities dissolve before his eyes.

Grasso needs a place to think. His sense of self is almost completely shattered before the conspirators confuse him further by treating him as Grasso again in his workshop. As a consequence, he literally has trouble moving through his own neighborhood, which has now become a strange place. Trying to confirm who he is, he decides to go to the cathedral to think and meet people, but he can barely control his own movement in space. Unable to sustain his thought, he takes four steps

1296 Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi*, 26-27. One cannot underestimate the importance of one’s tools and control over them, a fact that was clearly demonstrated by Sacchetti in his novellas concerning Dante. See above.
forward and three steps back. Inside, he overhears the pranksters telling more stories, as the division between lived experience and narrative play recedes into oblivion (Figure 4.17a). In fact, Grasso has to hear the story about himself as narrative first, before he begins to realize the truth of what has happened. The cathedral is just such a place for the revelation of hidden truths as he follows the conspirators who discuss the event that had happen first out in the open of the nave and then in a more private and sacred setting in the stalls of the choir. Grasso also needed to affirm that he had indeed returned to himself, and to do that required the public affirmation of others. Only under their gazes could he be sure of who he was. Grasso’s journey – his banishment to “strange streets” where he could not assert himself – the Oltrarno, the parish of Santa Felicità – underlines how urban space was connected directly to one’s sense of self, how it was socially constructed, and how it could be taken away. It counters the idea of the individual “self-fashioning.”

The cathedral itself served as an extension of public space, offering the possibility of both visual contact and some sort of verbal privacy. Filippo and Donatello were there talking (ragionando), as was their habit. So Grasso was confronted with the story of his own shame. He hears a narrative of his own

---

1297 “...ed andando verso la chiesa, come del mantello, quando andava verso quella quattro passi, e quando ne tornava adietro tre.” Ibid., 29. “...he made for the church, as he had for his cloak, taking four steps forward and three back,” Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 196. Compare this inability to move coherently through urban space with that of the French King, Charles VIII in 1494, when his troops were stationed in the city. On this movement, see “Percorrere la Città” in chapter 2.

1298 “...fè pensare di lasciare per un poco la bottega ed andarsene insino in Santa Maria del Fiore, per avere agio a pensar a’ fatti sua, e per certificarsi meglio s’egli era el Grasso o Matteo ne’ riscontri degli uomini...” Manetti, Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi, 29. “...so he decided to get away from his shop for a while and go to Santa Maria del Fiore to think at his leisure, and to verify whether he was Grasso or Matteo by meeting other men,” Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 196. Notable too is the fact that Manetti, in introducing his biography, is looking back to a building that Filippo will soon transform into one of the city’s most important monuments.


1300 Manetti, 30. Although this time the two had come to look for Grasso, the subtle allusion to Filippo and Donatello spending time chatting in the duomo may allude to how informal discussions between friends provided the seeds for some of most important ideas that would transform the visual landscape of the city.
experience before he realizes that the story no longer belongs to him but now forms part of the narrative world of the *beffa*. Instead of confirmation, however, Grasso is confronted with the story of his lost identity which confuses him even more, a confusing tale that is reminiscent of a Christian parable in that it has a moral point to make. The story is already, according to Filippo, circulating madly throughout the city — ironically, though, the story is still in the process of happening, since Filippo has kept up the dissimulation by having the original Matteo tell of his own supposed transformation into Grasso.

Filippo was well aware of the play of looks and gazes as he brings the *beffa* to completion just as a magician wields his illusions in full view of an audience who cannot see the strings. Of course, the joke is that Grasso is the only one not in on the show. When various others begin to take notice, Filippo has to change location so that only the group itself can take advantage of seeing each other. After a crowd of curious onlookers threatens to undo the carefully staged story, Filippo leads his small group to the choir stalls where they can all see each other. The choir, as the narrator points out, was in those days between the pilasters of the nave just in front of the tribune. So the scene sets up the unfinished narrative in the unfinished church, the space that will occupy a central position in the biography that follows the story. This is a critical moment for Grasso who is becoming aware but is still dumbfounded and cannot speak. He is not able to counter the narrative with his own self-expression and loses the opportunity to stop the ritual of public shaming in its tracks.

1301 “ch’è odo che se ne tenne cento cerchi per Firenze.” Manetti, 31. “Because I heard that a hundred different groups were talking about it throughout Florence,” (my translation).
1302 “E pusonsi tutti a sedere in uno di que’ canti del coro, che si potevano largamente vedere l’uno con l’altro” il quale coro in que’ tempi era tra’ due polastroni che sono innanzi che s’entri nella tribuna...” Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi*, 35. “They all sat down in a corner of the choir stalls where they could easily see one another. (At that time the choir of the cathedral was between two large pilasters that stand just before the entry to the tribune.)” Martines, *Renaissance Sextet*, 203.
At one extreme is the absolute cunning to defeat, control, and subordinate public space to one’s own desires (Filippo) and at the other is the recognition of one’s abject powerlessness to hold on to one’s self in the face of so many encounters and possible conflicts (Grasso). That is why Filippo was more than just an architect to Florentines. He was a master of the manipulation of space. Here was an expert who could defy the power of gravity in building the cupola of the cathedral and who therefore represented the power to create space at his will.

Grasso, however, is caught within the topography of the beffa that Filippo has overlaid onto his world; showing how he is able to manipulate space, a master planner who understands that such spaces were created by the social interactions that went on in them. He is prevented from turning a corner to escape from this invented spatial itinerary that follows him around like an unwanted storm cloud. The novella points to how unstable spatial regimes are, and how one has to constantly be aware of the structures that govern one’s experience of space and therefore of one’s social world.

The conspirators were perhaps, giving Grasso a chance to call their bluff. That such a response was possible, and even admirable and desired, plays itself out in a beffa recounted by Sacchetti in the Trecentonovelle. Antonio Pucci himself, is the object of a practical joke that focuses on his city garden, a small piece of land he held in the via Ghibellina.¹³⁰⁴ There, he grew many kinds of fruit, especially figs, a great quantity of jasmine, and in a corner he had planted young oak saplings and called it the forest (la selva). Antonio had transformed his garden into a poem, in the terza rima style of Dante and in it dealt with all the fruit and the condition of the garden as if it were a place of utter abundance, like the piazza of the Mercato Vecchio, which he had also turned into a poem, elevating it above all the piaze of Italy.¹³⁰⁵ Just such

¹³⁰⁴ Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, CLXXV.
¹³⁰⁵ On Pucci’s Mercato Vecchio poem, see “The Urban Soundscape” in chapter 3.
vanity perhaps – of comparing one’s tiny personal garden to the great lively space of the city’s commerce – was the impetus for the joke. One night, two asses and mule are introduced to the garden, completely destroying it. Antonio is only momentarily dumbfounded, which was the intention of those playing the joke. Quickly regaining his composure, he plans to unmask his adversaries, greeting everyone he met that day on the street with the expression “ben t’ho” (“I have caught you,” or perhaps more ironically, “I am obliged to you, you have done me a good deed.”).\textsuperscript{1306} Tacchello, one of those involved, falls into the trap, claiming not to have been part of the joke. Having thus found out the guilty, Antonio wins from each the promise of a dinner and turns the whole event into his own narrative by rewriting the episode in verse.

What Antonio was able to do that Grasso was not, was to confront the city’s inhabitants in public space. Rather than remaining silent, he accused everyone equally and countered the attempt to symbolically attack his versifying by actually destroying its modest and pitiable source of inspiration. The narrator is explicit that another victim would have been crying out bloody vengeance on every street corner while Antonio – wisely, calmly, acutely – is able to discover the culprits. In the end, he is able to claim the ‘novella’ that emerged from the joke as his own, to appropriate the story. He confronted an urban narrative that was developing around himself and turned himself into the protagonist, and could therefore freely tell the story himself, which he did, to many, accompanied by great laughter. Being in control of the narrative and appropriating the right to tell one’s own stories was crucial to negotiating unstable spaces and identities in the city.

Naturally, when Filippo’s joke is finally over, Grasso’s shame traveled quickly through the city’s oral networks. He shows himself as little as possible in public. However, in order to, yet again, confirm his status, he must move through the streets

\textsuperscript{1306}Sacchetti, \textit{Il trecentonovelle}, (1946) p. 434, n. 76.
so that he can hear first-hand the city collectively laughing and retelling the story he
had suffered. He literally goes out to hear the “truth” of a narrative that publicly
confirmed his identity as the victim of a prank that had appropriated and exploited that
very power of the public. He becomes a listener to the repetition and confirmation of
his own social narrative. He is literally dis-placed from himself.

His public persona, his public fama, temporarily destabilized by the beffa, was
not entirely, in the end, restored to him, since it now also belonged to this cruel public
discourse. The participants in the event let the story loose and Grasso realized that he
was in fact no longer able to live as he had known himself. His fears about the joke’s
authors are confirmed and now his former self, once a member and friend within a
community located in certain spaces – the Piazza del Duomo, the cathedral, his
workshop, and friends’ houses – has been entirely re-narrativized into an object of
collective derision. At the end of the story, Grasso’s tenuous hold on his self is
contrasted ironically by Filippo’s assertion that Manetto’s fame (read: shame) will
endure through this story for a hundred years. In any event, he buys a horse, and
leaves for Hungary.

What is dramatized in this novella is the way the story slides between historical
memory, fictional narrative, and urban experience. The story told to us recounts how
certain events in the city were transformed into a circulation of the narratives telling
the very same story to Grasso who slid from unknowing actor to shamed audience:
stories within stories generating stories. It ends, with the sound of the whole city in
laughter.

But even if these events occurred, the narrative undermines its own claim to
historical truth by informing us that little detail of the story was written down in the
immediate years after it took place and that even those fragments were full of defects
Filippo had told the story many times to many people, but those who heard it were explicit about how they could not properly retell it themselves to our author. The end of the text consciously confronts the reality of merchant textuality in Florence, where the degradation of narratives was a natural occurrence and, therefore, required the collaboration of master storytellers and those who preserved it in writing as best they could. Collective memory was preserved in urban space, but it by no means guaranteed its original integrity. It was always threatening to disappear without the active intervention of collective narrative practices.

The narrator had gleaned the story from these shards and from those who had heard and collected the story from Filippo’s oral repetitions: the architect as master prankster, storyteller, and creator of social being. Manetti names those who helped him remember the story, and they are all architects, painters, writers, and sculptors; those who made images, formed narratives, constructed buildings, and shaped space, all the environments in which such narratives could, admittedly precariously, endure. In the fifteenth century, beyond the amateur culture of merchants, artists were now represented as a more professional kind of cultural conservator.

* * * * *

1307 Manetti, Vita di Filippo Brulleschi, 44.
1308 Ibid., 43.
1309 Martines, Renaissance Sextet, 212. All the names are identified in Manetti, Vita di Filippo Brulleschi, 43. The list includes Antonio di Matteo dalle Porte (Antonio Gamberelli – Rossellino, sculptor, 1427-1479), Michelozzo (1396-1472), Andreino da San Gimignano (Andrea di Lazzaro Cavalcanti da Buggiano), Lo Scheggia (borther of Masaccio 1407-1480), Feo Belcari (poet, 1410-1484), Luca della Robbia (1400-1482), Antonio di Migliore Guidotti (architect), Domenico Michelino (painter, 1417-1491), and “many others.”
From Grasso’s standpoint, the story is about humiliation and the being the butt of one of Florence’s favorite pastimes. But what does this story say about Brunelleschi? As the architect of the *burla* Filippo demonstrated his mastery over social space in a way that mirrored his mastery of physical forces in the building of the dome. The two dramas, one architectural and the other social, play out in parallel form. Filippo thinks and then declares his intentions to his audience. In the case of the novella, he wanted, for their mutual enjoyment, to make Grasso believe that he had become someone else and that, in fact, *he would no longer be the fat woodcarver.*

Although his friends knew him to be of great talent (*grande ingegno*), what Filippo was proposing seemed impossible to them. Filippo, as the narrator, confronted them with a mischievous smile (*ghigno*), which he possessed by nature (*per natura*) and by his faith in his own ability (*la fidanza di sé*). Confident in his own self, Filippo used clever and subtle arguments to convince his comrades how such a feat could be accomplished. The resulting drama is a sustained manipulation of bodies, language, and space.

In this light, the novella, which claims to be a recounting of an actual story, appears to perform a dry run or novelistic parallel to Manetti’s account in the biography that follows of how Brunelleschi finally convinced the *operei* of the wool guild that he could build the cathedral’s dome without centering. Such a reading makes the case for the narrative importance of the novella for the *Vita*, though it does not help further the issue concerning the historical truth of the story.

---

1310 “modo ho pensato che noi gli faremo credere che fusse diventato un altro, e che non fussi più el Grasso legnaiolo.” Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi*, 5.
1311 This image of the grinning, malicious Brunelleschi is inexplicably omitted in the English translation. See Martines, *Strong Words*, 173.
1312 Manetto is documented in Hungary after the events were to have taken place and died there in 1450. See Manetti, *Life of Brunelleschi*, 129, n. 2. For the text of the biography itself, I refer to Saalman’s bilingual edition, which does not include the novella. Martines is convinced of the story’s veracity. See Martines, *Renaissance Sextet*, 254.
Manetti’s account of Brunelleschi’s encounter with the authorities of the cathedral replays a similar drama.

Having been asked to consider the problem of vaulting the cathedral’s octagon, Filippo was the only master on the scene who did not assume that centering would be needed. His advice to the operai of the cathedral was based on his conclusion that centering could not be used, and that if it were to be built, one would have to figure out how to do without this conventional building practice; which he did by inventing machines (Figures 4.18, 4.18a). The result was public humiliation for Brunelleschi, ridiculed as he was by the operai, other master builders, both Florentine and foreign, as well as even ordinary citizens.1313 The operai concluded, therefore, that it could not be done at all and that it had been naïve to have thought otherwise. To this Filippo protested, claiming that he had been misunderstood, and over the course of the next few days he maintained that the dome could in fact be built without support. This time he was forcibly removed from the council chambers by the authorities, “as if he were reasoning foolishly and his words were laughable,” and he was ashamed to go through the city, not unlike the way Grasso was made to feel in the city.1314

Filippo, it seems, was not yet entirely proficient at the critical art of ragionare. In the context of his most dramatic contribution to the building arts, he also makes a claim that his audience can’t believe is possible. However, unlike his mastery of the practical joke in the novella, his reputation as a builder among his peers, both professionally and politically, had not yet been established, denying him the chance to make such claims in public with his own authority.1315 His mistake was not unlike that of Bianco Alfani, whose boasting in the public square was considered incompatible

1313 Manetti, Life of Brunelleschi, 67.
1314 “come se ragionassij stoltamente e parole da ridersene.” Ibid., 69. In a way the novella functions, in Manetti’s account, as a kind of displacement of Filippo’s shame avant la lettre. The ability to speak convincingly is held out as a necessary component of architectural innovation.
1315 Ibid., 67.
with his social position, and who was consequently punished. However, in the
narrative of his life, Filippo stuck to his guns, and the combination of the communal
magistracy’s helplessness in the face of an architectural mystery with the prudent,
patient, and persistent fairness Filippo demonstrated in his judgment of others began to
change his fortune. Therefore, it was his realization that, even if he was right, he had
to defer to others in order to win their trust in the public arena. According to Manetti,
Filippo admitted that “he was ashamed to go about Florence” in those days and that he
always felt that people were saying behind his back: “look at the madman who utters
such nonsense.”1316 One’s reputation, honor, and standing were always negotiated
within the strict confines of pre-established norms. One did not create one’s identity
freely but had to find a position within which one was sanctioned to be.

In the end, Filippo’s persistence wins out and he carefully explains how he is
going to vault the dome:

Filippo reasoned orally with great conscientiousness and
precision, and finally he was requested to put down in
writing the method of keeping it steady and firm so that
it would not slip.1317

Filippo had learned the correct rhetorical mode and was now better at
convincing arguments (ragionamenti). He had learned, if we take the novella at face
value, from his own command over the circulation of stories in space. One could, in
fact, derive one’s identity from the public realm by manipulating it with the
merchant’s power of ragionare. The negotiation of identity was always a strategic

1316 “si vergognava andare per Firenze,” “Gguarda quel matto che dici le taj cose.” Ibid., 69.
1317 Ibid., 71. “E ragionando Filippo acutamento e con gran diligenza e apparole del come, ne fu
richiesto ultimamente per iscrittura per tenerlo in sul caso sodo, e perché non potessi smucare [the
cupola].”
game so that those without convincing arguments lost control over who they were in public space.

For that reason Filippo’s transgression did not provoke the revenge of the burla that was cast on Bianco Alfani for his outrageous claims. Filippo already understood how his words entered the confusion of public discourse and sought to make amends. Bianco, in ignorance, did not realize the shame he should have felt when laughed at by others, hence the need for the corrective and cruel joke.

Of consequence as well, between the novella and the biography, is the subtle interplay between practicing the beffa and the practical capacity at ragionare. Vasari, in his biography of Brunelleschi, recounts how the counselors, operai, and all the citizens present thought that Filippo’s proposal sounded like foolishness (schiocchi) and they mocked and laughed at him (“se ne faciono beffe, ridendosi di lui”). Such

---

1318 Giorgio Vasari, Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), II, 345. That one of the most salient moments in the popular imagination of the story of the cupola was the shock produced by Filippo’s audacious proposal is evident in Altissimo’s (Cristofano Fiorentino) poem recounting the event that he sang in the piazza San Martino to his Florentine compatriots:

Et Pippo detto di ser Brunelesco
venne di Roma et con suo modo acuto
la vol edificar che’n l’arte è fresco,
e’l modo degli antichi havea veduto
et dicea: facilmente del caso esco;
ma volea il ciel che non gli era creduto,
et perchè di color prende solazzo
da quei maestri fu tenuto pazzo.

Perché suoi modi a lor trovò contrari
essendo in patria favor non havea
et cittadini havea per avversari
et nessuno al suo modo non credea,
c’h’aveb modelli e ingegni tanto vari
ch’apena contemplarli si potea,
et ardorò di dire che Dio di sopra
sol lo creasse per fornir quell’opra.
E se Cosmo de’ Medici famoso,
pien di virtute, d’escellenza e ingegno,
comè discreto, savio et glorioso
non fusse stato suo perno et sostegno,
si faceva la cupola a ritroso,
beffe mocked Filippo’s power of reason but also pointed to how the ability to play tricks was at the core of the Florentine’s triumph over space and gravity. In this narrative the city’s leaders betray a fear that they might have been the subject of the joke itself. This is important, in relation to the story of Grasso, where the *beffa* is in fact so successful. Filippo had been able to conquer the quotidian forces of oral and visual exchange of urban life by creating a new insular world within it that was impervious to it. He had constructed a kind of bubble, a solid edifice built on air around the woodcarver that was transparent from without but opaque from within. This may be a kind of metaphor of the cupola’s singularity, that it was either somehow built in another spatial dimension or that Filippo’s power in enacting the *beffa* was so great it could bend reality to his desires. Similarly, in metaphorical terms, the cupola was built within a carefully orchestrated side world, or seemed to have been. Literally, it was fooled into supporting itself in the air. In other words, an acute ability to *ragionare*, combined with the creative freedom of experimentation gained from mastering the *beffa*, created the conditions for Brunelleschi to imagine the impossible. It now took his powers of persuasion to convince everyone else. If he could manipulate space to change Grasso’s identity against his will, then he certainly had the power over inanimate objects in that same space. It is ironic but telling that Filippo enjoys the fruits of his joke over Grasso in the duomo; where his mastery of space would later solidify his hold on the visual imagination of his entire generation.

perché cacciarmo Pippo con isdegno  
perché un porco parlò fuor di maniera  
et volean darla e gente forestiera.

E Cosimo lo fece ritornare  
Et fegli i patti che Pippo gli chiese  
E vide ch’altri non l’era per fare.  
Tanto si è, quel che fece è palese’  
Color facevan pel mondo cecare  
Quel che gli havieno in casa in tali imprese.  C. XVI.  
Renier, ed., *Strambotti e sonetti*, xxiii.
What one can derive from this is that, in Brunelleschi’s Florence at least, one could forge a singular identity (after all, that is what inspired the biography and made it worth telling) but that such a construction had to negotiate the strict codes of behavior and language imposed from without, from the spaces that arbitrated such identities. In other lands, in the conclusion to his landmark study of Renaissance drama, Stephen Greenblatt came to similar conclusion about the Renaissance in England, after beginning with the opposite assumption:

But as my work progressed, I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions – family, religion, state – were inseparably intertwined… there were… no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society.\textsuperscript{1319}

One could participate in making one’s own identity with careful \textit{ragionamenti}, but not simply as one pleased. It never would fully belong to the individual it overlaid. It was a social system that demanded conformity to a body of rules that pre-existed each Florentine inhabitant just as language precedes its users. The trick, of course, was manipulating the environment itself, not the individual, because one’s image was also a reflection of urban spaces, not purely a projection onto them. Thus, in the novella, Filippo has already learned how architecture, space, and social communication were linked; that to transform oneself or one’s community one had to control and choreograph the space that surrounded one. The metaphor introduces Brunelleschi’s profound alteration of the city’s architectural profile. Of course, that is exactly what he was attempting to do when he set up his perspective experiment in the cathedral.

\textsuperscript{1319} Greenblatt, \textit{Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare}, 256.
For Grasso, the unfortunate woodworker, sight was the medium of recognition of others and the affirmation of one’s own sense of self. Therefore, public space was a conveyor or producer of meaning. One has to give oneself over to it even while it is the sight of deception and anxiety, a place with the potential for misrecognition. Shame, as Grasso learns, is linked to the intimate way in which people shared public spaces, interacted and spoke in them, and looked at others.

Life was lived in the public arena for men in Florence in the Renaissance and discretion in public behavior was the key to success. One was constantly confronted with the potential that one’s community might enact a swift and potentially devastating communal punishment. Street life was intense, and in order to navigate through it successfully, one had to be intensely practical, alert, and suspicious.

I want to stress, through examples such as those analyzed above, that the urban novella was a vital mode of exploring the possibilities of creating communities, deriving identities, and constructing an ethics of city living. The circulation of these stories in the city, the professional storytellers, re-readings and re-writings of certain narratives, practical jokes, rumors, gossip, and songs, were all ways to take account of the physical structures that determined one’s relationships to others, and a means by which they could be disassembled, re-ordered, and put back together in fragmentary ways.

---

4.10 Listening in the City: Secrets, Rumors, Songs and Stories

...even when a private statement, such as a prayer or a vow of love, was shunted into verse form, it was thereupon converted into something public, into a gesture of public intention.1322

At the end of the fourteenth century, a paranoid government asked itself what to do about stopping the circulation of a defamatory sonnet about their ally the king of France. Advisors recommended using the city’s internal police, the Otto della Guardia (Eight of the Watch), to locate the author and punish him. Similarly, in 1420, a Florentine ambassador had to be sent out to mollify an offended pope concerning a couplet making the rounds via the mouths of children. Such were the stakes involved with the fragile apparatus of public honor, shame, and ridicule.1323 According to historian Lauro Martines, the circulating rhyme was a kind of memory capsule, containing within it a condensed image of the past and whose purpose was to inflect thinking about the present. It cast the past into a memorable, usable form.1324

The “word spoken in public was likely to have a certifying value: it entered a zone” that constituted being as a social fact. In this zone identities were “confirmed daily in their streets and marketplaces, or in government squares” through the semiotics of dress, visible signs, and audible words.1325 Such words heard on the streets were the audible, if unofficial, accompaniment to the city’s notorious pitture infamanti (pictures of infamy) that were painted on the facades of public buildings. Enemies of the state were depicted with the symbols of shame, their visual images wedded to shameful words. Therefore, the circulation of public shame was play out in

1322 Martines, Strong Words, 84.
1324 Ibid., 233-34.
1325 Martines, Words, 235.
a dialogue between streets and architectural facades, between voices, words, and pictures.

Such information that wended its way through the streets was transmitted by both audible and visible signs. It was carried by the gestures and voices of moving bodies. It spread out through the city from churches and government palaces by the sound of bells. From the sounds of trumpets and public proclamations it coursed through the streets to reach active listeners in neighborhoods across the city who received, stored, repeated, revised, and critiqued it as it circulated throughout the city. As much as the movement of goods and people had to be regulated, facilitated, and surveilled in an emerging public domain, so too the sounds of the city – rumors, secrets, laws, music, bells – were subject to the same kind of intense legislation, scrutiny, and general control. Not surprisingly therefore, such official categories of urban sound were countered by fluid sonic networks of popular sounds by those who negotiated the city at the level of the street. The result was rich matrix of sounds that was overlaid upon and bound intimately to the physical dimensions of the city. Just as the visible cityscape was characterized by a certain structural organization, the urban soundscape of the late medieval and Renaissance city was also the product of an organized, interlocked system of audible constructions.

The acoustic texture of the city that formed a crucial part of the daily experience of Florentines was a web of interconnected sounds. Naturally, this sonic experience of Florence is lost to contemporary historical consciousness in a far more profound way than the visual and concrete legacy of the city. The urban past is still often embedded in the concrete fabric of the city; in names of streets, squares, and neighborhoods, in churches, stones and coats of arms, in palaces, spaces, and images from the past. The character of, rumors, festivals, and civic processions are almost entirely lost.
But sounds – music, voices, and noise – of the city were irreducibly integrated with the architectural and spatial dimensions of the city, and if the venerable adage is true that stones speak, what kind of a sounds did they make and what did the city’s inhabitants think they were saying? If stones still speak to us from the past, moreover, then is it still possible to know what they were saying, sometimes literally, to their contemporaries? When the official soundscape of Florence functioned without hindrance, bells rang from their towers, marking the spiritual and secular rhythms of daily life, trumpets sounded from the government’s palace, and chancellors read out official proclamations in the Piazza della Signoria. These messages were then repeated throughout the city by the cries of the banditori.\textsuperscript{1326} These sounds encountered those at a more localized level. One heard confraternities singing lauds to the virgin,\textsuperscript{1327} the repeated chants of scrap metal dealers moving through the city\textsuperscript{1328} and the sound of metal dumped in piles around the city.\textsuperscript{1329} Heralds of death (bannitori de’ morti) announced the passing of the living.\textsuperscript{1330} Lovers serenaded the object of their desire at night,\textsuperscript{1331} while others sang obscene verses in the streets by day.\textsuperscript{1332} In rituals of social confrontation stones echoed off walls and pavements, windows were banged on, while rivals clashed with sticks and clubs.

\textsuperscript{1326} On bells see Chapter 3; on the chancellor and the banditori see “Piazze, Streets, Networks” in chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{1327} \textit{Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici}, 55.
\textsuperscript{1328} ASF, Statuti, 13. Statuto del Capitano. I, CLXIII, f. 32r. Those engaged in selling scrap iron and copper could not perform their ritual chant as they walked through the city unless they had put up a surety of fifty denari to guarantee against fraud. “De le malleverie di ferrovechi: Niuno di chiunche condizione si sia possa, ardisca o vero presuma andare per la citta’ di Firenze o vero contato dessa gridando o vero chiamando ferro vechio o rame vechio a vendere e simiglianti cose se imprima e innanzi a ogni cosa mallevaranno dinanzi a detti quattro officiali dela balia o vero il notaio loro di livre cinquanta di denari fiorentini piccoli di no commettere frodi inganno o vero malitia o vero ruberia sotto pena di livre cento di denari fiorentine piccoli per ciascuno che contrada.”
\textsuperscript{1329} The occurrence of these noises is gleaned from their prohibition in law. See “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, xxvii, xxviii, xxviii, xxx, xxx.
\textsuperscript{1330} Davidsohn, \textit{Storia}, VII, 707. They were paid a fixed amount by the family, could only announce one name at a time and could not make such announcements either at night or during outbreaks of plagues, to minimize anxiety.
\textsuperscript{1331} “ASF Statuti, 19,” (Podestà 1355), III, c
\textsuperscript{1332} “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” III, lxxxi.
In any private vocal exchange the government feared defamatory speech and idle chatter. Magnates could not criticize the city’s leaders; no one could yell injurious insults while the Popolo was assembling to the sound of the alarm bell and jesters were forbidden to have a conversation in any of the communal palaces. At the more local level neighbors chatted, gossiped, and laughed, tradesmen bartered, insults were hurled, rumors were repeated, and stories were sung in the piazza. All of these were bound up in the spatial experience of the city. All of these sounds are referred to indirectly and they remain as barely audible echoes. Even though we constantly refer to the orality of this culture, we are hard pressed – outside the bounds of purely musical history – to get a sense of the aural nature of that orality. It expands beyond the music, incorporating the official, popular and random sounds that the city necessarily made.

Nevertheless, as chapter 3 has made clear, listening to the city was crucial for contemporary Florentines in allowing them to comprehend the spaces of their city in a more fundamental and profound way. If the sound of bells performed a major role in the creation and maintenance of temporal spaces and borders as a means of augmenting or refining concrete ones, then the sounds and words dealt with in this chapter were, by and large, bent on dismantling and transgressing such concrete barriers and thresholds.

Of course the intimacy of hearing was precisely what made it suspect in terms of accuracy, objectivity and truth. Words could be repeated, which meant they could be mistaken. The problem was always the circulation of messages, which were always being corrupted. Dino Compagni (c.1255-1324), a civic chronicler, who served as only the third Standard-bearer of Justice of the Florentine republic (the city’s highest

---

office), acknowledged this problem right at the beginning of his analysis of the political strife plaguing the city around the turn of the fourteenth century. Writing years after the sequence of events, he declares his intention to write the “truth,” which was, significantly, the product of what he saw and what he heard. However, those things that he himself did not witness personally were subject to the distorting powers of desires, interests, and opinions, not all of which would have been honorable and trustworthy. Therefore, he states, he will appeal to the best possible report on such occasions.

He labels such reports with the term “maggior fama,” a species of the publica fama that was the gossip and rumors of the street and the piazza. The term fama incorporated the various ways in which communities constructed themselves socially by talking. Fama could be distinguished into two related but distinct forms of public knowledge. On the one hand, it referred to personal status and public trust, the common reputations that clung to individuals and groups. On the other, it referred to a common knowledge that coalesced into a more or less reliable form of truth, and both could be used in legal proceedings. Both kinds of fama were formed and expressed in the streets but when the social fama of the streets was subsumed into the juridical practices of the commune it was reconstructed into something different. “The amorphous, fluid, and supposedly non-hierarchical talk of the streets and piazze becomes the stilted, arcane, and hierarchical (not to mention Latinized) talk of the

---

1334 Najemy, A History of Florence, 84.
1335 Compagni, Cronica, I, 1. “Quando io incominciai, propuosi di scrivere il vero delle cose certe che io vidi e udii.”
1336 Ibid. “e quelle che chiaramente non vidi, proposi di scrivere secondo udienza; e perché molti secondo le loro volontà corrotte trascorrono nel dire, e corrompono il vero, proposi di scrivere secondo la maggior fama.”
courtroom or other legal arena or office.\footnote{Fama as knowledge and facts, therefore, had a double resonance and was twice constructed, once in urban public spaces and once in the courts.} As a legislator Compagni would have been familiar with way information was always generated rhetorically, and that extracting facts required that public talk be properly disciplined.\footnote{It provided a workable approximation of the truth for Compagni because it represented a social practice – public speech – in which competing versions of events could filter out the most extremely erroneous, fraudulent, and misremembered stories among those that tended to reiterate and confirm each other in the piazza and ultimately coalesced into an acceptably accurate version. It was a product of the social exchanges heard and seen. Compagni knew that such information was a product of the urban spaces in which it circulated. Such spaces navigated the middle zone between the city as a zone of perfect informational transparency and the city as a completely opaque zone of misrecognition and anxious confusion.} Compagni believed, just as Antonio Pucci did, that the Piazza had a mediating effect on the extremes of misapprehension and that it could be relied on to produce a certain informational consensus.\footnote{Compagni believed, just as Antonio Pucci did, that the Piazza had a mediating effect on the extremes of misapprehension and that it could be relied on to produce a certain informational consensus.}

Figuring out exactly what the “maggior fama” was, therefore, constituted an important tool in one’s arsenal. It required access to multiple sources and the ability to discern the relative status of some rumors and assumptions over others. Chapter
two followed the way in which information flowed through space. In the present case, however, my interest lies in the sonic qualities of information and voices that carried, or miscarried, as the case may be, such information.

The late fourteenth-century diary of an anonymous Florentine, already cited, provides a useful guide to navigating between the different kinds of narratives of public *fama* that flowed through the city’s streets and hovered tantalizingly in its squares. This diary is a compendium of sights and sounds. This anonymous author takes account of all the changes and noises that surrounded him, trying to tease meaning out of urban space itself, between the rumors whispered in the streets and the elaborate spectacle of political theatre in the square. Bells constantly intrude upon the narrative. They alternately sound for conspiracies, real or imagined, and for feasts, games and jousts. When bells did not ring, however, the urban terrain was dramatically changed.

The author was witness to the spectacle of political theater in the city’s monumental square but also had his ear tuned to the daily pulse of the public culture of the piazza, tapping into the vast reservoir of circulating murmurs, rumors and whispers. Through phrases such as: “essi detto per Firenze” (it is said throughout Florence), or “by the common people it is said” – the author evokes the lively dialogic, face-to-face exchanges that brought social space into being and breathed life into streets, squares, and workshops. In the words of his editors, he reveals a certain “tonality” of the city, with the piazza as the point of reference, which he evokes with words such as “bisbigli,” “dicerie,” “favelari,” and “boci” (murmurs, sayings, stories, voices) in order to navigate between various orders of information flows. He has a particular sensibility for this flow of information – the way Benedetto Dei did\textsuperscript{1343} – a

\textsuperscript{1342} See “Piazze, Streets, Networks” in chapter two.
\textsuperscript{1343} On Dei’s description of information flows see “Piazze, Streets, Networks” in chapter two.
certain ear for the subtleties of anticipations and expectations.\textsuperscript{1344} Despite its collective character, public speech was a system of anonymous voices fraught within discourses of power relations and defined by its own hierarchy of sounds; from barely audible whispers and murmurs of subversive speech, through the rumors and stories that contained the true and proper outlines of comments and reactions to events, to the increasingly fearful noise made by insurrections in the making (\textit{romori}).\textsuperscript{1345} This is contrasted with the meaningful silences imposed by a fearful government to avoid such uprisings from achieving a critical sonic mass.\textsuperscript{1346}

The informal soundscape of the city was, unlike the soundscape of bells, characterized less by periodic punctuations and formal exchanges than by a low level hum that could crescendo into the outbreak of unrest and violence. In describing the politically tumultuous events in 1382, the author sums up these sounds as a \textit{grande favelio},\textsuperscript{1347} a babbling buzz of competing voices, a confusing mass of whispers, mumblings, and murmurs.\textsuperscript{1348} Related to \textit{favella} – the art speaking well, of being able to express oneself, of conversing, of telling stories – \textit{favelio}, on the contrary, signified just the opposite. Instead of clarity of expression and exchange, it denoted confusion; instead of a single clear articulate voice, it was characterized by collective chatter.\textsuperscript{1349} The term articulated the dense web of information that chroniclers and diarists, such as Compagni, were constantly trying to unravel and evoked the sonic tenor that confronted and attempted to penetrate the thick walls of the city’s communal offices for information beyond official rhetoric.

\textsuperscript{1344} Alle bocche, XXXV-XXXVI.
\textsuperscript{1345} Ibid., xxxvi.
\textsuperscript{1346} On the silencing of the hours in 1382 see “Civic Soundscapes” in chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{1347} Alle bocche, 17.
\textsuperscript{1348} On the meaning of the term \textit{favelio} see Grande dizionario, V, 744.
\textsuperscript{1349} For the term \textit{favella} see Ibid., V, 743.
In this anonymous narrative, the sounds of the piazza are often juxtaposed to the official sounds of order and authority, underlining the unpredictability of the former and the instability of the latter. The favelio arises after armed members of the two recently created minor guilds moved en masse to release a condemned prisoner, while the Capitano threatened to resign.\textsuperscript{1350} This triggered a panic in the government that led directly to the agitated grumbling that the author hears in the city and then finally to emergency measures in which the staff of governorship (bacchetta) is given back to the Capitano amid the celebratory sounds of the commune’s trumpets.\textsuperscript{1351} In this case, the public talk of the square was confronted and silenced by the sounds of order and authority.

It was at such times that one heard the political slogans shouted out by armed citizens, whom the author describes as running through the city in order to prevent the favelio from escalating into a romore as the government continued to execute its enemies.\textsuperscript{1352} It was the same mechanism enacted by bells, the sounds radiating out from the center to the periphery, eliciting obedient citizens to then fill the central piazza for news and demonstrations of strength. That afternoon, as a pendant to the morning executions, the city created new knights of the commune in the piazza before reading out new government reforms on the ringhiera. The ritual enactment of urban pacification was then completed that evening by a ritual reclamation of the streets and squares by a procession, as the standard of the Guelf party was followed by the Popolo through the city, with great rejoicing and no burning.\textsuperscript{1353}

\textsuperscript{1350} *Alle bocche*, 17.
\textsuperscript{1351} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{1352} Ibid., 19. In this case the slogans were “Viva Parte Ghelfa” and “Muoiano e’ Ghibelini”, which demonstrates the shorthand way Florentines had of designating the good and the bad, the legitimate and the treasonous elements of the city. However, they were as easily used by either side of the factional divide, see *Alle bocche*, 33.
\textsuperscript{1353} *Alle bocche*, 20.
The official sounds of the commune, therefore, were used as weapons in trying to drown out or counter threatening voices in the piazza. After yet another execution in 1382, the murmur of insults was countered by trumpets signaling the completion of a scrutiny (a new pool of potential office holders) but the bells at None did not ring in order to keep the city in peace. Apart from the daily rhythms of the soundscape, the exchange between voices, instruments, and bells was an anxious game of moves and counter-moves. Each tried to control, stop, or augment the flow of information through the city, while each play was interpreted by an audience attentive to the sounds the city was making. Rumors were constantly sparking fear in the authorities’ – “it was said… they wanted to start an insurrection and kill…”1354 – who responded with their own modes of verbal expression: prayers and processions, laws read out to close shops,1355 alarms and trumpets sounded, and bells silenced. However, the clear expression of dissident demands of certain groups could also be articulated through the proper auditory channels. Disenfranchised citizens sent their demands to the palace and they were read out by the chancellor on the ringhiera to the assembled citizens.1356 At times like these no news, was good news. When the author hears nothing on the street, there are no threats.1357 Silent voices, especially at night, were comforting, but silent bells could turn the space of the city into an unknowable, alien territory. The connection between neighborhoods and individuals within them was denied by the absence of certain conventional sounds.

1354 Ibid., 33. “si disse che… voleano levare romore ed ucidere…”
1355 Ibid., 33, 34.
1356 Ibid., 34.
1357 Ibid., 33.
4.11 Information Networks

In chapter 2, I traced the ways in which people and things moved, more and less successfully, through the city on foot, on horses, with goods, as well as in collective memory and urban narrative. In every case, there was much to learn from such movement. Following the flow of information through the same streets, carried on the medium of bodies and words, was equally important in understanding the nature of the built environment. The difficulty encountered by Compagni or the anonymous diarist considered above in teasing out the multitude of messages coursing through the streets at times of collective anxiety helps to explain why the government was so meticulous in its legislation concerning the dissemination of information. The government could only speak with one voice, and this was the sound of a bell and the voice of the chancellor. Up to that point, the message remained clear. It was when such messages began to circulate through the voices of others that the message was liable to distortion.

From the ringhiera in the central square, the government sent out four banditori – one for each quarter of the city – to relay that message to the city at large. It was a testament to the regime’s anxiety over controlling the diffusion of public information in pure form that the Podestà was required, each month, to send out spies (spie segrete) to make sure that banditori were following regulations for the correct mediation of public information (Figure 19).1358

An example of this official hierarchy of noises is found in an anonymous diary already cited, which is a key document in understanding the importance of the sonic experience of Florence as a jumble of jostling sound competing for attention and truth. What the following account, in particular, calls into play is the way in which both the commune and the church had established two monumental and interlocked aural

1358 “Statuti del Podestà (1355),” I, xliii. No specific locations are mentioned in this law.
armatures, not only in the daily acoustic rhythms but also for official announcements that interrupted that schedule. Through various offices and laws, rules and regulations, they sought to bring sonic order to the chaos of the noisy street.

When news of Florence’s victory over Arezzo, in the form of letters and an olive branch, reached the city in the early hours of the morning on 18 November, 1384, it was greeted with bonfires and street parties throughout the city. This military campaign was situated at the initial stages of a major realignment of the city’s political use of space. Between the 1380s and the 1430s, “[w]ar and the myths needed to sustain it assumed unprecedented importance and generated a patriotic ideology combining a celebration of Florence’s domination of Tuscany with its self-assigned duty to defend republican liberty.” Such a victory, therefore, especially since it was claimed to have been accompanied by a complete lack of plunder (ruberia) and abuse (vilanegiare) was cause for a major civic celebration. Accordingly, such a celebration erupted informally that evening. In the morning, halfway to the end of Terce (meça terça) the bells sounded to assemble all the Popolo of Florence (tutto il popolo). A proclamation, carried by the city’s banditori went out to order all shops to be closed. The priors and their advisory colleges came out onto the stage that was the ringhiera, all wearing the olive branch of victory. These executives, however, the city’s highest office holders, presented themselves as mute visual symbols as Coluccio Salutati, the city’s chancellor, read out the letters of victory to the assembled crowd from the political stage. This was the beginning of the way in which information radiated out from the piazza to the outlying areas of the city. Immediately after the letters were read, the verbal message became an instrumental one, as the commune’s

---

1359 This episode is recounted in Alle bocche, 54-55.
1360 Najemy, A History of Florence, 188.
1361 Pucci’s job, as banditore, in carrying the verbal message of the central piazza to all corners of the city was considered so critical that the government hired permanent spies to make sure the banditori were faithfully carrying out their duties. "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," I, xliii.
trumpets sound. It was then that the bells of the palace rang, followed by the bells of the cathedral, the Badia, and then the mass of other churches leading all the way out to the farthest reaches of the city. Almost immediately the piazza was filled with horsemen jousting in celebration, their horses bedecked with tiny bells whose ringing would have continued as an echo of the city’s celebratory voices. This relay appears to have been the customary interchange between civic and religious bells at times of official celebration. One is immediately aware of the emission of official happiness from the centre to the periphery. The process involved the back and forth movement of sounds and bodies, as sounds and messengers went out from the centre and bodies moved into it. A succession of different sounds gathered people together, approved a holiday, announced a victory, and then sent the information out in the city. In the exchange, the bells of the city’s most important religious institutions, the Cathedral and the Badia, responded to the news so that church and state were united, sonically at least, in the rightness of Florence’s pursuit of territorial domination.

Those who missed, ignored or resisted the visual spectacle in the square were reminded acoustically of where authority was located and where its jurisdiction lay. Only sound had the capacity to make present, real, and universal this idea of power as series of omni-directional waves radiating out from the center in all directions. Rather than a one way monologue, it was an attempt to unify the disparate localities of the city into a common and connected space while countering, or attempting to counter, the always uncontrollable localized communication frequencies that traversed the city and always threatened the universalizing message. In this way, the audible

---

1362 All’bocche, 54. “E lette le dette lettere, sonaron molti stormenti e lle canpane de’ Signori e delle chiese, Santa Maria del Fiore, la badia di Firenze e molte altre chiese infino a Sancto Piero Ghattolino.”
1363 Ibid., 55. E subito giunsono i sulla piazza brigbate d’armegiatori… cho molti chavagli adestrati, tutti choverti di drappo e i sonagli…”
1364 Immediately thereafter the square was then filled with mounted contestants for games and jousts. Ibid.
environment was a way to know how well the state was functioning, so that mutations in its rhythm were indices to significant developments or certain truths behind official events. This larger auditory mechanism involved bells, trumpets, and the voices of its chancellor and banditori, all in precise succession; from communal tower, cathedral, and Badia to outlying churches, and from central piazza out to neighborhood streets, intersections, and squares.

The dynamics of this system highlights how the government relied on a series of proxies to send a message that individual members of that government never uttered in public. This intrinsic silence of the regime was noted by historian Ulrich Meier, who attributed it to a gap between the authority of the office and the persons who held that office. In other words, the individual voices of the elected signoria, which could undermine the authority of the collective and unified voice that was heard from the chancellor and the communal bells, had to be silenced. This practice was an attempt to extract the government’s rhetoric of authority from any contamination by the dynamics of publica fama. Its formation had to occur behind closed doors and emerge only when it was fully formed. Meier delineates the ritual shroud of secrecy and silence that covered the office of the priors.1365 As the most symbolically important political body, the priors, or Signoria, were, officially at least, rarely seen and practically never heard. They ritually came out of the palace onto the ringhiera for parlamenti and other important events but they remained silent as the chancellor of the republic, the city’s official letter writer and therefore a key element in the collective voice of the city, read out loud the decisions of the government or new from abroad. In the case of a parlamento, where the assembled citizens were formally required to shout approval of pending legislation, their shouts of “SI, SI, SI!” were dutifully noted down by the notary as the willing approval of the Popolo, which then acquired the

1365 Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit," 252 ff.
force of law. Even though the parliament metamorphosed into a political tool manipulated by elite regimes, citizens gathered in the square might have responded not with shouts of affirmation but with stones and other forms of resistance. In some cases, the best resistance was in fact just the sound of their voices, as we shall see.

At official receptions the Capitano or the chancellor gave speeches and orations but the Signoria remained silent. Even the advisory colleges, who faced the priors in the palace during deliberations, did not hear their responses. They deliberated in private even within the palace itself, with notaries communicating their decisions. It was through various media that the regime expressed itself and found an official voice.

As Meier also points out, the office of the priorate was larger and more symbolic, more authoritative than those whose bodies and personalities passed through it. Priors were not seen close up in the streets of Florence for a reason. At a distance they remained a collective body in ritual dress. Similarly, anything they wanted to say had to be translated into a recognized official language that carried the authority of the state. Therefore, proclamations were read out after they had been rendered into a polished text by the chancellor, decisions were communicated by notaries who understood the legal niceties of political exchange, and the appearance and disappearance of the priors from and into the palace was marked by the bells. All this was, in part, to maintain the solemnity of an office whose participants were not necessarily gifted writers or speakers. Not everyone was as eloquent as Amphion, but the sonic apparatus of state – its bells, trumpets, and bureaucratic voices – was. If the

---

1366 Ibid., 254.
1367 Ibid.
1368 Unfortunately Meier is missing the precise documentation for these formal relations. See Ibid., 255, n. 56.
1369 Ibid., 256-61. This was due to Meier’s conception of charisma, which was bound to the office rather than the men in it. The concept is derived from the sociology of Max Weber.
enclosure of space around the subject’s desire for order was the origin of architecture for Schmarsow, then the story of Amphion building Thebes situates that origin between the sound of music and the power of speech. The city was as much the product of sounds, therefore, as it was of stones. Antonio Pucci knew full well, along with his contemporaries, that its spaces were continually formed by a sonic regime that pervaded all aspects of urban life. Without its bells, the city lost a great deal of its rhetorical beauty and its political authority.

In effect, the people who governed Florence were, in theory at least, citizens like any other. Thus, it was the architecture of the palace and the sounds that it made that had to invest them with the authority they would not have been able to maintain alone. When Florentines heard the bells ringing for the priors, they had to be convinced of the possibility that all members of the Popolo could occupy such an office and that it was legitimate to do so. The square, the palace, and the bells that rang from the communal tower were key elements in voicing that message.

It was this ritual silence that the bells filled with sound. They echoed throughout the city, inscribing the acts of government into spaces and memories throughout the city. It was a way of aurally circumscribing the boundaries within which such legislative acts had jurisdiction. Symbolically, it extended the contents of the regime’s authority by marking the time of its activities. Within this official soundscape, however, other sounds participated in creating the meaning of space through sound. For example, when the names were drawn from bags to elect the new priors every two months in the sala dei Dugento, the doors to the hall were opened wide to those who could enter the palace to witness the event. In addition, for those that could not, the windows that looked out onto the Piazza della Signoria from the Udienza were also opened so that what they could not see, they could hear (Figure 20-20b). The names drawn were spoken out loud, so that it might be known if the person
was alive, had paid his taxes, held magnate or Ghibelline status and whether or not a near relative had sat in a high office at the same time. Together with the bells that defined Florence’s civic authority, the voices of notaries, rectors, and chancellors, electors, and the citizens in the piazza created an even more complex ritual dialogue in which both government and governed had specific roles to play in the urban soundscape.

But what if this ideal model broke down, or failed to effectively control the message of the city’s aural landscape? As a case study, events around the Ciompi revolt of 1378 will be discussed in chapter five. In the present context, the example of an urban novella helps to illustrate the awareness of readers and writers of the chaotic potentialities of the urban soundscape. It demonstrates the close proximity between literature and the analysis of aural spatial networks.

In the context of the war with the papacy of Gregory XI (1375-78), Sacchetti describes a story in which the city of Macerata, in the Marche, was attacked by mercenary armies. The city was then set upon by a great flood that washed up sewage and poured into houses. A woman on her way down to get wine accidently submerges herself up to her thighs, whereupon she cries out for help:

“Accurr’uomo!”

Her husband runs toward the sound and finds himself submerged in the water too, the light having gone out. He too, makes the same emergency call for help.

Neighbors rush toward the sound and get trapped inside as well by the water coursing

---

1370 Ibid., 245. It is likely that these were the windows that were opened to call the militias in November 1494, when the signori could be heard to cry; “popolo e libertà!” See chapter 2, “Percorrere la città.
1371 Sacchetti, Il trecentonovelle, 132.
1372 This expression is a conventional call for help.
through the streets. Now all of them begin to cry out. A nearby guard hears and calls the Watch, who call the chancellor and the priors. By the time the message reaches these government officials, however, it had become garbled into a call to arms:

“All’arme, all’arme!”

When they ask what they are saying exactly, the guards tell them that they are crying “la gente è dentro.” Mistaking this call for help from its citizens on the periphery, however, the alarm bell is sounded in the belief that the city has in fact been invaded by enemies, who have again breached the walls. The guards in the piazza take up arms and pull chains across the entrances to the piazza, “gridando ‘All’arme!’” Everyone, upon hearing the alarm, exits their houses armed, thinking they were being assaulted yet again. Running to the piazza they see it chained and defended by the guards. They call out and are answered by the crowd: “Who’s there?” “Long live messer Ridolfo!” “Friends!” (Chi è la!, Viva messer Ridolfo! Amici!)

And the noise grew so loud no one could hear anyone else while they waited nervously in the piazza for the enemy. Many said that the enemy was within and had reached the church of San Giorgio, halfway from the gate to the piazza. In the end a call for help was transformed into a call to arms. A message originating in the periphery had made its way from the edge of the city, through the proper channels – from victims, to guards, to bureaucracy, to the executive government – but this only highlights the possible distortions that a damaged city could bring to bear on an unwitting populace already predisposed to the fear of attack. It was the farcical return of the tragedy of war, which sent the city into a mad frenzy against a chimera.
Seeing that no one was coming, the priors attempt to send a message back from the center to the periphery. Needless to say, this message too, suffers a similar fate as it moves in fits and starts through unreliable means. The government sends messengers to the gate to find out news and many went there and – like the bird of Noah – did not return. Among those sent was comic figure of Frate Antonio, who armed himself with a large shield and a bell-clapper that he placed around his neck. While returning to the piazza he fell on his shield and, being a very large man, was not able to withdraw his arm from the shield or lift himself from the ground. Someone in the nearby piazza, who heard the clamor, immediately mistook it for the sound of the enemy and began to yell, “To me, brigata, here is the enemy!” (a me brigata, che ecco la gente). Some jumped over the chains and went into the street, ready to fight. There was much yelling and confusion as the friar called for help and it was only with a great effort that they raised him up – injured as he was by the bell-clapper. The priors then finally regained their nerve and let everyone return to their homes as the city and those in the region all had much to laugh about over the city’s acoustic breakdown where friars and bell clappers were mistaken for soldiers and weapons. At the end the narrator mocks the paranoia of a community where, even in normal circumstances, they show such ignorance and in times of war even more. A cat knocks a basin, he writes, and they rush to the noise thinking it is the enemy. Like drunken geese they entangle themselves in confusion while losing all semblance of reason.¹³⁷³

In the real world, the flow of official information required a constant repetition of official sounds. In a face to face economy, information was transmitted from the mouths, gestures, and visible signs of moving bodies. Through the *banditori*, a large amount of the information that the government addressed to the city was carried in this

¹³⁷³ Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, CXXXII. “… e rompendo una gatta uno catino, si moveranno a romore credendo che siano inimici: e su questo come tordi ebbri s’anderanno avviluppando perdendo ogni loro intelletto.”
audible, face-to-face form. In effect, the heralds “made public” (piuvichare) the will of the government in the network of spaces that they helped to constitute as public space. In fact, the degree to which the flow of information was open, facilitated and accessible, or closed, obstructed, and limited, depended on the same street networks that facilitated trade and movement. The same bodies were moving through them. Therefore, regulations that attempted to keep streets clear for economic reasons had to remain audibly clear for the dissemination of official voices, and regulated, contained, and controlled to suppress the circulation of other unsanctioned ones.

If the evidence of novellas is any historical guide, then news traveled quickly through the Renaissance city, mixing with daily verbal exchanges of business, law, government, and neighborhood chat. In Anton Francesco Grazzini’s recasting of the Decameron’s narrative frame, ten diners tell stories to delight the others over a series of Thursday dinners. In one story, a violent beffa, or practical joke, involves shaming a would-be lover by dressing a straw effigy of him, hanging a sign around his neck linking him to sodomy and sticking it in the pillory at the Mercato Vecchio. Of course, the next morning the whole town was talking about the stunt. The conspirators even join the crowd to circulate more infamy about the teacher who was caught expressing, in writing only, his love to their sister. Public shame was an important component of social discipline and it showed how public speech could confront and discipline private writing. The city’s public spaces provided a stage to enact such “correctives” and make public the issue of sodomy, class divisions, female and familial honor, all of which were bound up in a virgin daughter and were the source of intense anxiety among Florentines.

This was an age-old trope, seen in many narratives in the *Decameron* itself. Stripped away from this narrative, however, are the successful sexual relations, the practical solutions, and any kind of restitution that the fourteenth century allowed. In this sixteenth-century context, the perpetuation of families and their honor was paramount and punishment of the infiltrator was the stuff of comedy. However, this story needs to be read allegorically. The way in which an event so quickly becomes public knowledge (*fama*) is common in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century stories. Such knowledge made public was a kind of social judgment, witness, and collective jury brought to bear on perceived aberrations of the shared system of identity formation. This could prove to be coercive and liberating, cruel and just.\footnote{\textsuperscript{1376} The lightning-quick pace of dissemination of public knowledge is dramatized in the stories of Frate Alberto in Venice (*Decameron*, IV, 2, discussed in “Piazzé, Streets, Networks”, in chapter 2), the *Fat Woodworker* and *Bianco Alfani* (both discussed above), and in novella CXX of *Il Trecentonovelle*, where the entire city (tutta Firenze) comes the next day to see the place where a *banditore* was spooked by a grave-robber exiting a tomb.} The image of the gathered crowd, piqued by a delicious gossip, riding a wave of increasing social rage, or telling certain stories as a way of circulating shame, alludes to a general paranoia about secrets and the desire to know at least as much those around you did.

\textbf{4.12 Voices in the Square}

Constructed through performative acts of daily life, these fluid, overlapping information networks demonstrate how the meaning of architecture and urban space was internalized and transformed through the experience of those who confronted it on a daily basis. At stake was the control and meaning of urban space through a sonic world that was bounded by a series of conventions, laws, and regulations that emanated from both civic and religious authorities. Such legislation, consequently, was confronted by the interpretive strategies of the Florentines who have left traces of
the ways in which they responded to their city, how they understood its exceptional character, how they linked it to their ordinary lives and interests, and how they treated its effects as tools for various purposes. However, as much as these conventions were an instrument of control over urban space, they were also immersed in a popular hierarchy of competing interests and traditions. By navigating through urban spaces, Florentines used the sounds of the city to construct an auditory dialogue through which they interpreted and laid claim to the spaces of their city.

The city’s streets and piazzas served as conduits for the flow of information throughout the city. Accessing the most up to date, accurate and useful information was a constant source of anxiety for Florentines. The novellas of both Sacchetti and Boccaccio, for example, are full of embarrassing, deceitful, corrective, and humorous narratives that spread like wildfire through city. Such networks make up a crucial narrative element of the novella and take part in the performative dynamics of the city’s soundscape. In one comic exchange, a wealthy but miserly man and his wife discuss the inevitability of the diffusion of the husband’s shame after having been caught trying to smuggle in thirty fresh eggs in his britches, in order to avoid taxes, which were now all crushed inside his pants. Even if his wife were to keep quiet, she states, others won’t and even the little esteem in which he was held to that point will be lost and his reputation, his *publica fama*, would sink even lower – “I tell you, husband of mine, you were held in little esteem before, and now you will be considered for what you will be,” (Io ti dico marito mio, tu eri tenuto prima dappoco, e or serai tenuto quello che tu serai). Here, the circulation of gossip through the city has an ameliorative effect and shows how one’s reputation was subject to the judgment of the street. It was a façade whose construction was the result of a negotiation between

---

1378 Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, CXLVII.
an individual and society. The vilification that could result, however, was part of a mechanism that allowed him to realize how he had misrecognized himself in the gap between one’s self-perception – which was often a form of self-delusion, or blindness – and the perception of the public sphere – which could be very unforgiving. In the end he understands his wife’s misery brought on by his stinginess. If voices in urban space generated such pressures upon the institution of marriage, could they also have larger effects on other forces? If so, what was the nature of the exchange between the official sounds and voices of the city and the collective construction of the *publica fama*? To begin, we have to return to the piazza.

Piazza and monument: the Piazza della Signoria and the Palazzo Vecchio constituted an ensemble through which public and private knowledge were negotiated (Figure 4.21). Such negotiations were caught up in the relationships between silence and audibility, things hidden and visible, secrets and communication. The piazza and the monument it framed enacted just such a reciprocal relationship, its bell tower acting as the official signal of the exchange that went on there. The palazzo was generally a silent building where secrets were jealously kept and the government carefully controlled its official voice through surrogates. In ideal terms, these official voices instilled a normative body of messages and knowledge into the city’s public networks, opposing and exploiting the circulation of private gossip, secrets, and lies. This authoritative voice was visually constructed within the spatial arrangement of palace and square, where voices, trumpets ad bells communicated to the crowd in the square below, which, according to its choices, could aurally respond.

That the information networks of the city were unstable, sometimes unreliable, and never fully controllable is demonstrated by how anxiety over the acoustic transmission of information in urban space reached even to the micro-level of exchange in the piazza. We have already encountered Paolo da Certaldo, who was
greatly concerned about how information traveled in space. He was well-aware that concrete visual barriers, walls and corners, were never guaranteed to contain the sound of information within well-defined spaces. The immersive qualities of sound were a double-edged sword for someone who was in the business of transferring secrets. Sound always threatened to dissolve the carefully laid boundaries between public and private space, between outside and inside, between official and popular versions of urban narratives. The obvious remedy was to speak very softly, in a low voice, but Paolo also realized that one could take advantage of the very nature of the piazza’s status as the most important architectural expression of public space. It was the site of verbal exchange and its open design complemented the closed secretiveness that the thick walls of the Palazzo Vecchio protected. The information circulating here was public knowledge, in both senses of the term, accessible, in theory, to all. However, Paolo knew that one could also “redesign” the square’s openness to create a zone of acoustic privacy by using the optimal visibility provided by open urban space: “go and speak of your secret things in a piazza,” he advises, “or in a meadow, or along the river, or in an open field, so that you see that someone is not so near that they hear you.”

In other words, no one could hide in a piazza; everyone was equally exposed. That equalizing visual effect of architectural space, the corollary of the social equalizing power of Pucci’s piazza, was a product of clear sightlines. The piazza allowed one to exploit the distancing nature of vision in order to control the omnidirectional radiation of the sound of one’s voice. One could “see” what the effects of

---

1379 See “Morelli’s distrust and Certaldo’s Paranoia” in chapter two.
1380 “...va a parlare i tuoi sacreti fatti in una piazza, o in uno prato o renaio o campo scoperto, si che tu vegga che persona non vi sia presso che v’oda.” Branca, Mercanti scrittori: ricordi nella Firenze tra Medioevo e Rinascimento, 74. The term “renaio” refers to the sandy banks along a river, but was considered to be a specific place in Florence. The “renaio” was along the Arno in the vicinity of the Ponte Rubicone (alle Grazie). See Grande dizionario, XV, 797; Villani, Nuova cronica, II, 1; Villani, Cronica, 7, 57.
one’s words uttered in that space could be because one knew who was within audible range.

Paolo was grappling with the ambivalent nature of the piazza and how the jumble of sounds – rumors, insults, lies, and truths – circulated so frenetically through Pucci’s beloved market square. He seems to be verging on the edge of total spatial paranoia, but if the sound of an intimate conversation gave rise to so much anxiety, then one can imagine the collective anxiety caused by the sonic threat of a whole chorus of voices assembled in the piazza during the political crises of 1378.\textsuperscript{1381} On July 22, an angry crowd of textile workers, artisans, and guildsmen, all armed, filled the Piazza della Signoria while the government deliberated on their demands. The cries of the crowd were so loud – “Making such a great noise with shouts that reached the skies,”\textsuperscript{1382} – that the nervous priors inside the palace accepted their petitions, out of fear. The next day, while the council was deliberating those same petitions the noise of the crowd in the piazza was so loud that no one inside could actually hear what those demands were – “One could not hear a thing in the hall, when the petitions were read to the councilors.”\textsuperscript{1383} – so naturally they were immediately accepted. When a terrified prior was seen slipping out of the palace unnoticed in order to flee home, the angry crowd once again let loose a colossal cry, demanding that all the priors come out, as the shrieks again reached the heavens.\textsuperscript{1384} Those inside, stunned, wrung their hands, wailed, beat their faces, and completely lost their nerve\textsuperscript{1385} but the noise only grew louder – “The noise outside was incredible”\textsuperscript{1386} – provoking the terrifying image

\textsuperscript{1381} The architectural and spatial aspects of this revolt will be dealt with in more detail in the chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{1383} “non si udiva nulla nella sala, quando le petizioni si leggevano alli consiglieri.” Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{1384} Ibid. “Di che il popolo e le arti, quando viddono Guerriante andarsene a casa, ad alta voce cominciaro a gridare: ‘Scendano tutti… Le gridà eran grandi, che insino al cielo si sarebbono sentite.”
\textsuperscript{1385} Ibid., 31. “I collegi piangevano, chi torceva le mani, chi cone esse si batteva il viso; e tutti sralorditi…” (the colleges cried, rubbed their hands, some beat their faces; and everyone astounded).
\textsuperscript{1386} “el romore fuera era grandissimo,” Ibid.

541
of the entire city going up in flames. The priors, abandoned, and not having a clue what to do, frantically ran here and there, until finally, the keys were handed over to a representative in the square. The remaining two priors then went home themselves, along with all the Gonfalonieri and the Twelve Good Men, and, just like that, they lost control of the city.

Two days of sustained screaming continued to drown out the ability of the councils to conduct their business. The noise provoked a combination of physical barrier and a psychological threat. By filling the piazza with both bodies and voices, the victorious revolutionaries succeeded in giving credence to Giovanni Cavalcanti’s later observation that “he who controls the piazza, will always win the city.” It was precisely the verbal disorder, the loss of control over the acoustic dimensions of the piazza that led directly to the government’s defeat. As historian Stephen Milner has remarked, control of the spoken word was paramount in maintaining social order and the piazza, as the privileged site of the spoken word, was at the heart of the relationship between sound and architecture. It was here, at moments of extreme crisis, that sound revealed its power over walls by penetrating spatial barriers, wantonly annihilating any pretences toward concrete permanence. The thick walls of the Palazzo Vecchio, constructed to contain and protect the government while it muted the sounds of voices within, succumbed to the furious sound made in the piazza. It demonstrated how not only the bells of the church could appropriate the power of

---

1387 Ibid. “El romore di fuera era grandissimo, dicendo che al postutto vogliono che i priori vadino alle loro case, e voglion che li otto rimanghino in palazzo; altrimenti questa città andrà a fuoco e fiamma…” (The noise outside was terrible, [those outside] saying that they wanted the priors to return to their houses, and they wanted the Eight to remain in the palace; otherwise this city would go up in flames).
1388 Ibid. “I priori, in quella, chi andava in qua, e chi in là, chi giù, chi su, e non sapevano che si fare,” (the priors, in their room, went here and there, some went up, some went down, and they did not know what to do).
1389 Ibid. “E così si può dire essere perduto el felice e quieto e buono stato della città,” (And like this one could say that the happy and peaceful and good state of the city was lost).
1390 Cavalcanti, Istorie fiorentine, X, 13 (p. 311).
1391 Milner, "Citing the Ringhiera," 71.
Joshua’s trumpets and knock down walls. Looking back, the anxiety that Paolo expressed in his diary about the forces unleashed by voices in the square reaching unwanted ears hidden around corners, along walls, and bushes, now seems completely justified in a culture where every sound could matter. However, the events just described above would have shattered even his measured faith in the silencing power of thick walls.

Even more importantly, this episode of 1378 stands out as the real life rejoinder to Amphion’s dream of Thebes that initiated the discussion of the audible city in chapter three. If, as that myth memorializes, a single eloquent voice could stir stones and men to build a city of reason and laws, then a thousand angry ones screaming in unison in the piazza could just as easily tear that city down in order to refashion it into something else. The battle between the impassioned eloquence of rhetoric and the raging anger of the crowd represented the two extremes of how sound harnessed the power of the piazza and radically reorganized space. A functioning sonic regime of voices, therefore, was one in which speeches from the ringhiera had to negotiate with the cacophony of the piazza in order to construct a workable space for those who found themselves caught within it.

As one who lived to witness these events, Antonio Pucci would have seen before him the vindication of his literary interpretive skills, which further emphasizes the direct relationship between texts and urban space, reading and spatial planning. In both cases, interpretation was the critical tool that forged the link between users and producers. Just as Pucci had suspected in his critique of Amphion, not a single stone was moved in the Piazza della Signoria but the noise did induce recalcitrant men inside the palace, however haphazardly and temporarily, to follow new laws and remake the city. It dissolved those palace walls and it toppled a regime’s confidence,

---

1392 See “Morelli’s Distrust and Certaldo’s Paranoia” in chapter two.
all the while leaving the concrete architecture of the piazza and its monument completely untouched. This episode stands out for the way it dramatizes the magical abilities of sound in the piazza. As a counterweight to Paolo da Certaldo’s paranoia, it played out Pucci’s faith, however briefly, in the potentially ferocious but civilizing power located in mobilizing the architecture of the city square. That power was the result not only of the space and its architecture but of the transactions between it and the community that had the temerity to clutter it up with its unsightly presence. When the piazza was not the site of the beautifully orchestrated ritual of state, it could, noisily, annoyingly perhaps, fulfill Amphion’s promise.

Amidst all the violence, fires, treachery, and betrayal that rocked Florence that summer, for one moment, while the piazza sounded, the chronicler makes no mention of actual violence: not a shot was fired, not a house was burned, and not single person was attacked. People in the crowd itself might even have been aware of this when, after frightening the government enough with their sonic anger to speedily pass their petitions, they promised that if their petitions were passed by the councils of the commune the next day, they would simply disarm themselves, and go quietly off into the silence of the night.¹³⁹³

¹³⁹³ Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 30. “Di che l’arti e il popolo rimasano contenti, promettendo a’ priori, che domattina, vinte le dette petitioni nel consiglio del comune, di certo il rumore s’atuterebbe e ciascuno s’andrebbe a disarmare,” (about which the guilds and the Popolo were satisfied, promising to the priors that the next day, the petitions having been passed in the councils of the commune, for certain the insurrection (noise?) would subside and everyone would disarm).
CHAPTER 5  THE SPACE OF EXPERIENCE II: COMMUNITIES AND
THE SIGNS THAT BIND THEM

In his groundbreaking study of how Quattrocento culture understood and
looked at pictures art historian Michael Baxandall reminds us that “peasants and the
urban poor play a very small part in the Renaissance culture that most interests us
now, which may be deplorable but is a fact that must be accepted.”  Baxandall’s
study is concerned with painting, of course, and the particular set of categories that
were constructed to look at it and appreciate it. His remark, however, elides “culture”
with what was a tiny, in terms of numbers, “elite culture.” Baxandall refers to the
“patronizing classes,” but, as Charles Hope has reminded us, there is evidence that
even Renaissance patrons were not at all concerned with the dense and complex
iconographic interpretations with which modern researchers have overlaid them. The
question he was asking was: what did people in the Renaissance thinks altarpieces
were, and what interpretations, therefore, were possible?  

Certainly, altarpieces were a specialized genre, but they participated in highly
conventional and densely interpreted liturgical practices, so that they, if any picture
was, ought to be reverberating with symbolism. In the fifteenth century, patrons may
have been increasingly engaged in intellectual practices that their fourteenth-century
forbears might not have, but the number of aesthetic objects upon which they brought
this erudition to bear must have been similarly small, in terms of the visual arts, if
Hope is in fact correct. If one looks at Christian Bec’s study of the inventories of elite
Florentines who died intestate in the Quattrocento, then the habits of reading point to a

1394 Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: a Primer in the Social
1395 Charles Hope, "Altarpieces and the Requirements of Patrons," in Christianity and the Renaissance:
Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson,
(Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 536.
profound change in Florentine culture by the later 1400s. At the beginning of the century, the Decameron was their favorite book, and there was still evidence of the engaged manipulation of that text that was characteristic of its circulation in the city. By the later fifteenth century, however, the Decameron all but disappeared, its popularity increasingly eclipsed by both Dante and Petrarch, as well as classical texts. For Bec, these profound changes in taste were both cultural and ideological; the result of humanist education but also the political stratification of the later Medicean world. This world left much less space for a work that proposed a model of society harmoniously regulated and animated by responsible citizens who were actively engaged, cultivated, and civilized. The Decameron was shut out from the triumphant regime that was modeling itself into a court along with the requisite courtier’s spirit, and renouncing the civic doctrine as a thing of the past. This earlier elite culture addressed the poor and the peasant, ridiculed them, laughed at them, scorned them, and clashed violently with them, but they also were aware enough to understand their plight and assume their inclusion and place within civic culture. They interacted in the same spaces. However, the culture that Baxandall describes, as well as the art history he assumes, has effectively erased their presence or, more probably, no longer understood them and their desires.

For example, in his Detti piacevoli, Agnolo Poliziano imagines an Albizzi knight confronting one of his lower class clients (clientulo) during the Ciompi revolt in 1378, who is also identified as a Ciompo. He asks him how they planned on keeping control of the regime now that they conquered it, since they had no experience, and because even those who were used to governing were not able to hold

---

1397 Ibid.: 252.
1398 Ibid.: 254-55.
onto power. To this the Ciompo replies: “we will do exactly the opposite of what you have done.”\(^{1399}\) Despite the humor aimed at both classes, this passage reveals how clearly divided these two groups were in the later fifteenth century, how each only understood itself as the annihilation of the other. The two classes had no common set of beliefs, desires, or memories, since what one thought or did was anathema to the other. Regardless of Poliziano’s own historical memory, these two individuals represented a profound misunderstanding of the conflicts over the meaning of what Florence was as a communal society.

In this narrative they inhabited opposite universes, where the regime of one was the world turned upside down for the other. However, back in 1378, the dividing lines between classes were not so clear and the forces that swept out the sitting government were in no way interested in turning the world upside down. In fact, according to Robins, the culture of textuality to which the lower guildsmen, and even the mostly illiterate Ciompi, produced was one of “enfranchisement”.\(^ {1400}\) They wanted the whole maintenance, control, promotion, and development of the public culture constructed by the “Popolo” to also include them. And they had a remarkably coherent plan for bringing this about, which demonstrated how well they understood how images, signs, symbols, sounds, spaces, and buildings formed a series of overlapping meaning-generating systems of which they were not merely passive consumers but also active users. This chapter seeks to show that Florentines of all

\(^{1399}\) Angelo Poliziano, *Detti piacevoli*, ed. Tiziano Zanato, (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1983), 199. “Quando e Ciompi tolsero lo stato a’ grandi, un cavaliere de gli Albizi ragionava con suo clientulo che era de’ Ciompi, dicendo: Come credeste voi potere mantenere lo stato, i quali non siete usi, conciosia cosa che noi, usi sempre al governo, non l’ habbiamo potuto mantenere. Rispose il clientulo: Noi faremo a punto il contrario di quello che havete fatto voi, e così lo verremo a mantene,” (When the Ciompi had taken power away from the grandi, a knight of the Albizi family was conversing with his servant who was a Ciompo, saying: “How do you people think you can maintain the state, which you are not used to doing, , which it is with us, who are used to always governing, and we have not been able to maintain it?” The servant replied: “We will do exactly the opposite of what you have done, and like this we will come to hold on to it”).

\(^ {1400}\) Robins, “Vernacular Textualities,” 120 ff. Robins uses Antonio Pucci as representative of this non-elite culture.
classes were as sophisticated in interpreting the visual environment (cityscape) as they were the aural one (soundscape).

Therefore, the images that are the subject of the following are the non-material aspects of the material environment, those images that played across its surfaces. By focusing on the *popolo minuto* in their struggles with the Popolo in the fourteenth century, this chapter also acts as a case study in which many of the arguments made in previous chapters find direct historical expression. Throughout, I have argued that Florentines dissected and probed their city in order to understand symbolically. They developed an acute skill in reading, interpreting, and intervening in this symbolic realm which was embedded in the physical structures of their city. By looking at buildings, spaces, images, and events in this way, one is struck by the way all such things, seen and heard, formed part of larger interconnected complex systems of meaning. Being sensitive to how Florentines looked at their visual world and how they interpreted it will provide much needed information about how they reacted as a viewing culture in general.\(^{1401}\) In addition, it is my hope that such viewing and interpreting practices of the visible world will shed new light on how they looked at images more traditionally defined as objects of art history. I must emphasize that close readings of individual pictures that reveal complex iconographic structures are crucial to understanding more intimate relationships between artists, pictures, and intellectual culture. Similarly, my own interests are not simply a call for the contextualization of art and architecture within historical milieus, religious movements, or social relations. Art historians of the Renaissance have been doing this, and doing it well, for generations. However, by looking at such buildings, images, and objects from the point of reception and not within the arbitrary borders

defined by an academic discipline, one begins to see the connections between facades, statues, images, collective memory, individuals, communities, laws, social rituals, and political struggles. It is not so much about situating the work in its context as trying to see how the “work” – a façade, a space, a picture – actively participates in the game of meaning and as such, it is never quite fixed.

Having made such claims, however, my research relies heavily on the work of others, with which I hope to initiate a dialogue by shifting my interpretation from what the “work” might be saying to what Florentines thought the elements in their urban world were saying to them at different times and in different circumstances. Wrong or right, just what was it that they thought their urban experiences meant? From this perspective, an altarpiece in a chapel in a church enters into symbolic relationships within multi-dimensional spatial systems with other objects and urban communities in ways that would normally be scarcely imaginable. The physical evidence of such connections has often vanished long ago and remains now only as traces, recorded in texts, events alluded to by contemporaries and that – to show how remote the past can be – were barely perceptible, even in the fifteenth century, as a distant urban collective memory.

5.1 Precedents

What follows is an attempt to initiate a discussion about the possibility of looking at architecture and images as outlined above and ultimately to make some claims about the relationship between urban space and urban communities. In other words, how does my overriding assumption – that the interaction of architecture and urban space enacts communities and cannot be separated from them – if at all – actually play itself out? Therefore, this study concentrates on the Ciompi and their
political struggles to show how even those groups so marginalized from history as to have been almost unmentionable, possessed remarkable interpretive skills and a keen sense of the nuances inherent in what one saw and heard. The question with which I would like to begin, however, is what precedents did the Ciompi have for reading and interpreting their built environment? I do this in order to establish how there was a historically grounded set of principles and motifs available to an urban community, a symbolic ‘language’ that they shared and put to use as a matter of defining who they were. I have already discussed how Dino Compagni, the early fourteenth-century chronicler, was an expert reader of events occurring in the spaces around him. He interpreted the growing animosity between the Cerchi and Donati families, which led to the factional divide between the White and Black Guelf factions, through the transfer of property and the construction of domestic architecture:

It came about that some of the Cerchi family (men of low estate, but good merchants and very rich; they dressed well, kept many servants and horses, and made a brave show) bought the palace of the Counts [Guidi], near the houses of the Pazzi and Donati, who were of more ancient lineage but not as rich. The Donati, seeing the Cerchi rising – they had walled the palace and increased its height, and lived in high style – began to nurse a great hatred of them.1402

Compagni links architecture and power directly by describing how the Cerchi were literally rising up to take a more prominent place in the city’s skyline through the purchase and enlargement of their architectural presence. Later, he moves from

1402 Compagni, Cronica, I, 20. “Intervenne che una famiglia che si chiamavano i Cerchi (uomini di basso stato, ma buoni mercanti e gran ricchi, e vestivano bene, e teneano molti famigli e cavalli, e aveano bella apparenza), alcuni di loro comperaron il palagio de' conti, che era presso alle case de' Pazzi e de' Donati, i quali erano più antichi di sangue, ma non si ricchi: onde, veggendò i Cerchi salire in altezza (avendo murato e cresciuto il palazzo, e tenendo gran vita), comincieron avere i Donati grande odio contra loro.” Translated in Compagni, Chronicle, 22.
viewer to user, as he attempts to deploy the power of architecture to douse the flames of internecine violence. He gathers leaders of both sides together into the baptistery in 1301, neutral ground that belonged to everyone as part of the commune, but to no one in terms of private use (Figure 5.1). It is specifically this building that he makes stand for the “most noble city in the world.” Compagni’s argument was based on the fact that they were all, as Florentines, baptized in that place and this bound them together in a common spirit of brotherhood. This was a place in which they were used to congregating to deliberate on political matters and come to agreements. Compagni records how it came to him as a holy and honorable thought in his capacity as a high communal office holder, to gather together representatives of the city’s competing factions in order to get them to swear to peace between them, which they did. He was exploiting the unifying and civilizing power of architecture and linking it to their sense of civic campanilismo. In doing so, Compagni was making a profound assumption about how the initiation into the Christian community was also the entrance into a civic one. In this place, factionalism was supposed to disappear and subsequently he was able to convince them all to swear an oath of concord.

This theme of communal reconciliation may have been on the minds of the programmers of the cycle of mosaics that decorates the enormous octagonal vault of the baptistery itself. Scenes from the Old Testament life of Joseph occupy the fourth

---

1403 On the policy of ridding the space around the baptistery of the presence of private families and their arms see Peter Seiler, "Kommunale Heraldik und die Visibilität politischer Ordnung," in La bellezza della città: Stadtrecht und Stadtgestaltung im Italien des Mittelalters und der Renaissance, ed. Michael und Ruth Wolff Stolleis, (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004), 217 ff.
1404 “Cari e valenti cittadini, I quali comunemente tutti prendesti il sacro baptesmo di questo fonte, la ragione vi sforza e stringe ad amarvi come cari frategli, e ancora perché possedeste la più nobile città del mondo.” Compagni, Cronica, III, 8.
1405 See Compagni’s description of a meeting held there in the late 1200s. Ibid., I, 9.
1406 “a me Dino venne un santo e onesto pensiero… Pensoi, per lo ufficio ch’io tenea e per la buona volontà che io sentia e’ miei compagni, di raunare molti buoni cittadini nella chiesa di San Giovanni; e così feci.” Ibid., III, 8.
1407 Ibid., II, 8. “Cari e valenti cittadini, i quali comunemente tutti prendesti il sacro baptesmo di questo fonte, la ragione vi sforza e stringe ad amarvi come cari frategli.”
tier from the top in a decorative program that includes the celestial spheres, the
hierarchy of angels, God the father, Genesis, the lives of John the Baptist, Christ, and
the Last Judgment (Figure 5.1a). In such a cosmologically coherent and universal
scheme the inclusion of the Old Testament narrative was a significant and conscious
choice for the decoration of the largest medieval baptistery in Europe and the first one
in Italy to be adorned with mosaics since the fifth-century baptistery in Ravenna.\footnote{1408}

According to Irene Hueck, the mosaicists demonstrated a remarkable amount
of freedom in choosing the scenes of Joseph’s life to depict. Based mainly on the
apostolic basilicas in Rome, they omitted at least one scene usually included in the
cycle and added another that was completely new.\footnote{1409} The conventional scene of
Joseph and Potiphar’s wife was replaced by the invention of the scene of Potiphar’s
wife convincing him to buy Joseph upon the latter’s arrival in Egypt (Figure 5.1b).
This meant that the temptation scene was taken away from the narrative, diminishing
significantly this aspect of the patriarch’s life as a prototype of Christ. It also meant
that – if the mosaic program contained deliberate civic messages, which I believe it
does – as Hueck claims,\footnote{1410} then this scene eliminates a scene in which a woman
attempts to use her sexual allure. Such a scene might have been compatible with a
civic ethic that laid the blame for civic discord, symbolically as well as historically, on
the misplaced interventions of women.\footnote{1411} Such an ethic was bound up in the Popolo’s
claims against the Magnates and the role women played in their family relationships.
For the Popolo, whose attitude toward women and their place in a purely political

\footnote{1410} Ibid., 229-30. Hueck refers to the inscription in the chancel concerning the city’s allegiance to
Frederick II and what looks like an imperial crown below, resembling the one now held in Vienna.
There is also the prominence of the Dominican figure in the realm of the saved (Figure 5.1f), which
suggests that contemporary themes were being addressed.
\footnote{1411} See the discussion of the Buondelmonti Murder in “Percorrere la città” in chapter 2.
culture was one of all possible exclusion, the replacement of the scene shifts the emphasis from social critique to social administration. Joseph, with his dreams, was an ideal counselor to the Pharaoh. His powers of interpretation were placed in the service of the state, which was reminder to Florentines of how visual and narrative interpretation, symbolized by the dream, was an ethical imperative.

The central dream and interpretation revolves around the Pharaoh’s vision of seven blighted ears of corn devouring seven ripe ones, along with seven starving cows eating seven fat one. Joseph’s advice about the stockpiling of grain for those seven years of drought and famine would have made the scenes of grain storage prominent in the minds of contemporaries (Figure 5.1c). It would have resonated with Florentines wary of the fluctuation of grain prices and the importance of keeping reserves for bad harvests to prevent violent food riots. Such a riot found both textual and pictorial expression in a near contemporary work, which was the product of a grain merchant. The so-called Specchio umano contains detailed chronological lists of fluctuating grain prices in the early fourteenth century, a carefully compiled succession of entries that is literally interrupted by the eruption of food riots in the spring of 1329. The author, Domenico Lenzi, describes the events, where authorities try to control prices, sales, and hoarding of grain while sellers lament, and the popolo minuto accuse grain merchants of corruption and cruelty. Violence periodically breaks out and force is needed to close off the piazza and restore order. In an image depicting the unrest in the piazza of Orsanmichele in a copy of the Specchio umano in the Laurentian Library, the confusion and violence caused by failed harvests are palpable (Figure 5.1d). In the foreground figures sit in despair, while people leave with what bags of grain they can buy on the left. In the middle ground, people stare

1413 The manuscript is Bibl. Laur., Tempi 3, fol. 70r.
into empty grain barrels. In the background, just to the left of the tabernacle of the miraculous image of the Virgin, one can see the shield with a red cross that represented the Popolo and the justice they sought to maintain in the city through the presence of such signs. It is accompanied by shields bearing the arms of the district (gonfalone) of the Red Lion (Leone rosso), which represented the neighborhood militia that was called to bring order.1414

Such an event, commemorated both textually and visually, finds its sacred resolution in the scene of reconciliation in the baptistery vault. Compagni’s attempt to bring reconciliation to warring brothers thus echoed precisely the theme of this narrative mosaic cycle (Figure 5.1e). The Old Testament story of Joseph, who is thrown into a well by his brothers and then sold into servitude in Egypt, ends with a scene of family reconciliation and unity, which would most concern Compagni’s attempt to bring peace to the city. It depicts Joseph’s meeting with his father and brothers, when the latter came in desperation to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph forgave his brothers (Gen. 45) and wept when he saw his aged father (Gen. 46). Such a narrative, which includes a conspiracy against one brother and his subsequent forgiveness, would have been directly relevant to Compagni’s argument about Florentine brotherhood. Despite past injuries, those wronged were obligated to reconcile in the interests of the larger common good of the city.

The mosaics of the vault depicting these scenes have been dated to 1290-95, in the decade preceding Compagni’s attempt at architectural persuasion.1415 They would, therefore, have emerged along with the most ambitious projects of urban development

1414 A more detailed discussion of communal arms will be taken up below. It is not clear at this point what the shields with the towers designate (Tower officials?) and there are abandoned arms in the foreground that bear the rastrello (rake) of the Angevin kings, identifying these arms also as Florentine militia flags.
Florence had seen to that date: the new cathedral, Santa Croce, Palazzo Vecchio, the new communal walls, as the new communal prison, and Orsanmichele itself.\textsuperscript{1416} They coincided with the promulgation of the Ordinances of Justice that established the formal federation of guilds and barred from office seventy-two urban families.\textsuperscript{1417} It was a time when the Popolo was asserting itself spatially in a profound way. By choosing this particular narrative, sanctioned by Early Christian precedents (San Paolo fuori le mura and San Pietro), the story could also function as propaganda for social unity forged under a regime that was developing deep divisions at a time when such messages were still fresh within communal memory.

The oath made to Compagni, of course, remained valid only while those leaders were actually inside the baptistery, since Compagni laments that after this oath there were those who then went on to cause the destruction of the city – “furono i principali alla destruzione della città.”\textsuperscript{1418}

\section*{5.2 Representational Invisibility}

Dealing with historical groups that effectively had no representational voice presents a difficulty for the architectural historian. It means that one has to look for those voices in oblique ways. One has to attempt to derive from other images and texts the hidden voices and actions that may lie beneath; what events they may be covering up, avoiding, erasing, or interpreting for their own ends. In the events with which I am concerned, those voices momentarily erupted onto the surface of the city and onto the pages of contemporary diaries. This allows one a glimpse of the

\textsuperscript{1416} For the construction dates of these projects see Seiler, "Kommunale Heraldik," 212.
\textsuperscript{1417} Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 82-83.
\textsuperscript{1418} Compagni, \textit{Cronica}, III, 8. Given that this story was rare in Tuscan art at the time, once can only speculate on the reason such a theme was chosen. On the Mosaics see Hueck, "Il programma dei mosaici - The Mosaic Programme."; Giusti, "I mosaici."
mechanisms by which people, on a daily basis, engaged with their physical world, how they imagined it, confronted it, understood it as an ensemble of circulating signs and symbols. This is the story about how the Ciompi, the large mass of workers toiling in the Florentine wool industry, founded, against considerable odds, a community of their own. For them, this meant that they had to construct a corporate identity in order to foster their social and economic well-being. And to do so, in Florence, in the late fourteenth century meant that they had to make that identity visible through its representation in the urban environment.

In the summer of 1378 the political situation in Florence came to a head. Tensions within the guilds erupted into insurrection in June between elite members and those who favored a more popular form of guild representation. The Ciompi took part in these events, which included the massive looting and burning of private palaces. However, it was the revolt that followed in July, planned and executed by the Ciompi themselves, that made the link between the establishment of a corporate identity and the representation of that identity in urban space. On July 1 of that year, the priors elected at the regular bimonthly change of the executive government entered the palace to take up residence, but observers noted, with intense forebodings, that there was no customary ringing of the communal bells to honor and sanction the event. The public swearing-in, normally held on the ringhiera with much pomp and ceremony, was performed in secret behind the fortified walls of the palace.¹⁴¹⁹ The symbolic representation of civic power, therefore, was breaking down. What was missing was the proper visual representation of republican power relations through traditional social rituals. In the public square there was only silence and invisibility, and it was precisely at this moment, when gaps began to appear in the representational order of symbolic space, that the Ciompi decided to act.

My interest lies specifically in how this marginalized group was able to take
hold of the architectural semiotics of the city of Florence and establish their claims to
corporate legitimacy. Although these ephemeral events, which were so dependent on
the visual environment, have left virtually no trace, this is one moment where the
events were shocking enough, and the popolo minuto terrifying enough, that the
historian has a chance to peer through the documentary traces of those who were eye-
witnesses to catch a glimpse of a group that barely ever made any historical noise of
its own. However, despite draconian legislation, urban spaces still provided sites of
possible resistance in the field of representational “signs”. Even though the Ciompi
were officially excluded from urban representation, they were still subjected by power
relations. And since these power relations were contained within urban space, in the
arrangement of buildings and monuments, the Ciompi belonged to the networks of
meaning circulating through these spaces because of their very subjection. They
belonged to urban space, therefore, indirectly and negatively. They lacked a visible
urban identity, for they were neither so poor as to be represented in the mechanisms of
charity, nor affluent enough to become patrons in their own right. They were bound to
collective memory of social practices, which were, nevertheless, susceptible to tactics
of irony and subversion. This was especially true at moments of crisis and social
anxiety, when the representational order of the city became highly unstable. The link
between traditional forms of power and space became more difficult to maintain as the
representational armature supporting those power relations began to buckle under
pressure. It was here that the Ciompi were able to open up historical time and urban
space to other modes of representation.

On July 20, 1378, this mass of organizing wool workers, the Ciompi, rose up
(“si levò il romore”) against those corporate structures that determined the limits of
their urban world. Their motivations were clear. They wanted the right to form their
own corporate guild, which would allow them access to the wealth their labor
produced and to participate in the guild-based government of Florence. This was a
formidable task. Workers directly employed by the wool guild could not gather in
groups of more than 10 persons, nor could they gather for funerals or other religious
gatherings.\footnote{1420} By constitutional law, they could not form a new corporation. In fact,
they were bound, by forced oath, to be subject to guild laws.\footnote{1421} Lists of their names
were recorded and they had to promise to perform their work well.\footnote{1422} This textual
anxiety over disorder and rebellion led to a concrete reliance on both the church and
the government to help in the maintenance of discipline and control. They listened to
preachers that excoriated them and even threatened them with excommunication for
shoddy work, while secret informants (exploratores secreti) were hired to maintain
surveillance of their workshops.\footnote{1423} In short, the wool guild exercised extensive
control even over the social world of its workers.

Without the right to form their own corporation, they could not march in
processions under their own banner. They could not patronize churches or chapels,
display their arms on buildings, or participate in civic building projects. In short, they
were excluded from the means of representation, of being able to use visible signs to
form collective identities. They were not legally recognized as a civic corporation and
so they were officially rendered voiceless, speechless, and invisible within the bounds
of the ritual expression of urban identity. The Ciompi understood, however, that they
were in a double bind. In order to gain corporate legitimacy, they had to gain access

\footnote{1420} Rodolico, \textit{Il popolo minuto}, 67.
\footnote{1421} Acciaioli, "Cronaca,; "Cronica seconda d' anonimo (1378)," in \textit{Il Tumulto dei Ciompi - cronache e
\footnote{1422} Rodolico, \textit{Il popolo minuto}, 13-14. Rodolico describes a period between 1343 and 1373 in which
the statutes of the Lana, Calimala, and Silk guilds are extremely unstable. Often emended, they contain
numerous additions and corrections in the margins.
\footnote{1423} On attempts to counter and enforce control over the Ciompi through laws and tactics that penetrated
deep into their daily experiences, see Ibid., 55-77. On the "exploratores secreti" see Agnoletti, \textit{Statuto
dell'Arte della lana di Firenze (1317-1319)}, 27.
to the urban exchange of images that made the city a network of circulating signs and symbols. This participation however, was precisely what was denied them. So the question was how to make themselves seen and heard, how to make architecture and the urban environment speak for them. And that they were, however briefly, successful in legally establishing their corporate identity, allows the architectural historian an exemplary moment in which to look carefully at the strategies of representation that were possible, meaningful, and terrifying enough to play a role in that success.

However, without the conventional means of representation, of articulating themselves through social ritual or artistic patronage, the Ciompi had to find other ways of making the urban environment speak. What remained for them was the urban landscape itself, the signs and symbols, rituals and traditions already contained within it. These they could appropriate, subvert, manipulate, and refashion. In order to understand this appropriation, one has to consider their tactics of silence and noise (romore), how they moved from secret gatherings to open revolt (romore) and in doing so how they transformed the architectural terrain of the city. They did this by constructing secret routes of communication, ringing bells, setting fires, parading through the city with flags, gathering in the city’s squares, and using architecture as political critique. All of these actions already had long-established meaning in the Florentine urban context. All of them had a history, a past that was continually unearthed with each successive repetition. In their subjection to the authority of the wool guild the Ciompi were familiar with the mechanisms by which symbolic meaning was constructed. They understood how power relations were inscribed in the arrangements of the city’s buildings and spaces because they lived on the wrong end of them on a daily basis. They knew that in a highly ritualized and contested social context, Florentines constantly took stock of the visible world, to interpret
transformations in the physical environment in order to account for changes in the social and political one.

In order to demonstrate how the Ciompi inscribed, clandestinely, their corporate identity into the spaces of their city, it is necessary to describe how they appropriated and subverted contemporary representational practices. As I stated above, the Ciompi were legally excluded from the means of representing themselves, but neither were they the object of visual representation per se. They did not represent and they were not represented so they lacked an “official” visible urban identity. A sixteenth-century image of wool workers by Giorgio Vasari that forms one panel of the studiolo of Francesco I is an exception that proves the rule (Figure 5.2). In such a complex iconographical and allegorical setting, the classically robust male bodies at work take part in a game of forgetting, in which the larger memory of Florence’s long-lost dominance in the production of fine woolen cloth for the international market is subsumed into nostalgia for an entirely fictitious noble labor. It speaks nothing about the wool workers at all and everything about a romanticized image of the past transformed into mythological dimensions, surrounded as it is with highly refined allegories and myths of the arts of man and nature. It overlaid the ugly social antagonisms connected to wages, profit, and the control of labor with a veneer of classicizing beauty.

However, the Ciompi were caught within the discourse of representation; negatively, indexically, as those who were excluded, subjugated, negated, and completely unworthy of even being named. This, paradoxically, had the effect of strengthening the basis of their association and their collective identity. And this relationship to official images, however tenuous and subordinate it was, was the point of entry for them into the symbolic dimensions of the urban world.
The corporate identity of the wool manufacturers, on the other hand, was invested in an image, officially rendered to them by the commune in 1282,\textsuperscript{1424} along with the six other major and five middle guilds (Figure 5.3).\textsuperscript{1425} More than just an image of identification, the gonfalonii given to the guilds reinforced the commune’s political relations forming at the time. It was also under these banners that the guild members were expected to rally to the defense of the Popolo. At this point, before continuing with the Ciompi narrative, I would like to broach the issue of urban signs as a complex matrix in order to make more evident the kind of visual networks into which the Ciompi were projecting themselves.

\textbf{5.3 Excursus 1: The Silent Language of Urban Signs}

I have already made clear the large debt my understanding of Florentine urban space has to the work of Marvin Trachtenberg, which has enabled me to open up and explore many avenues of the urban and architectural realm in Florence. He has demonstrated how Trecento urban planning principles were grounded in contemporary pictorial conventions; conventions that themselves looked to architecture in order to create pictorial space, provide a schema for mimetic representation, and function iconically, or symbolically, to inject a desired \textit{placeness}.\textsuperscript{1426} Since most types of painting were conceived for architectural space, there was a fluid interpenetration between the two, so much so that the cognitive practices brought to bear upon the two were intertwined. In short, the urban landscape was conceived pictorially, at least by

\textsuperscript{1424} The Wool guild may have been using this image as far back as 1267, but it was reissued in 1282 by the popular government.
\textsuperscript{1425} Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VIII, 13. The five other guilds were formalized in 1282, see Seiler, "Kommunale Heraldik," 211. However, there were twenty-one official guilds in the 1293 federation, see Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 43.
\textsuperscript{1426} Trachtenberg, \textit{Dominion of the Eye}, 165-84.
those who were designing it, as analogous to looking a pictures of architecture painted directly on architecture.

In this conception of urban planning, one of the principal images, or architectural pictures, was the tower and palace ensemble of the city’s second town hall, the Palace of the Priors, later known as the Palazzo della Signoria and now as the Palazzo Vecchio, which was completed around 1315. It was this building, or more precisely its tower, that determined the shape of the square that wrapped itself around it, which, in turn, concentrated the visual power of the edifice on major focal points around the piazza in an attempt to fix the viewer, conceived primarily as a floating eye rather than a body, whose “period gaze” would subsume the “glory, beauty, and perfection of the city,” a phrase that was entirely conventional but which still contained within it a historically specific idea of what constituted good or beautiful public space (Figure 5.4).1427 This was brought about by the viewer’s ability to intuit the harmonic geometries of the piazza and its tower. Such harmonics were supposed to guarantee the presence of a highly ordered good government, whose spectacular beauty was brought to completion by the viewer, who produced the representation of a certain political theory, perhaps aspects of a larger ideology.

Trachtenberg’s thesis clearly focuses the dynamics of a would-be universal jurisdiction of the state squarely on the tower that dominated the city’s skyline. And by showing how the urban configuration of tower and square extended the geometric order of state power out into clear, orderly, and straight streets, he rescues the structure from listing in the doldrums of a topographical sea of isolated monuments. My engagement with this thesis was to show how, in particular cases, this representational drama could play itself out in actual experience. My understanding of Goro Dati’s

1427 “ad honorem et pulchritudinem et actationem dicte civitatis.” Braunfels, Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst, 113, n. 411. The document cited by Braunfels refers to the street the commune wanted to open up between Orsanmichele and the Bargello in the later thirteenth century.
description of the ensemble demonstrates how Trachtenberg’s reading of space and the
pictorial positioning of the viewer worked effortlessly with someone who was already
inclined to identify with a regime in which he wanted to participate. However, its
pictorial power may not have been sufficient to coerce everyone. Architecture as an
image alone could not bear the onerous burden of guaranteeing the authority of a
regime whose identity had changed a great deal between in the time between those
who built the tower and those who finished the square. But even if one refused to
recognize the tower visually – by looking away or lowering one’s gaze – it constantly
reminded one of its presence acoustically, everyday, from morning to evening, as it
organized the city and its duties through the repeating sonic patterns of its great
communal bells. In my view, Trecento urban planning principles reached out to a
viewer who was also a listener, to an eye that had a body whose own sensorial matrix
conditioned and defined the way architecture and space were experienced and
absorbed into the contemplation and desire of the individual.

However, conceiving architecture as a pictorial image may have been even
more surreptitiously astute than Trachtenberg had imagined. While the viewer stood
transfixed by the awesome power of the regime, would such a viewer have been aware
that not only did this image speak back, it also looked back – a function may have
been more immediately relevant to authorities at the time? Buried in the 1415 statutes
of the Florence in language that is detailed, often repetitive, at times convoluted, and
now and then wholly obscure is the following passage.1428 Inserted in the rules
concerning the ringing of the communal bells, bell ringers were also charged with
manning the tower, day and night,

---
1428 I would like to express my thanks to the architectural historian Margaret Haines, of the Opera del
Duomo, for her expert help in understanding this passage.
with the intention of seeing signals, which may occur in any part of the land, contado, or district of Florence, and to respond to them. And making signs once, or several times, or whenever, as agreed upon by government deliberation, and they should be prepared up on the palace with visible signs, just as may seem appropriate to them.”

The tower of the Palazzo Vecchio was obviously also a central node of a silent visual communication system of signs that broadcast alongside, simultaneously to, but under the radar of, the sonic regime of official public information transmission by bells (Figure 5.4a). Far from an isolated, aesthetic monument, the tower, the palace, and the square were functionally integrated with the urban matrix, embedded in multiple overlapping communicative systems where the boundaries between architecture, urban space, visual images, human movement, social relations, political propaganda, and urban communities no longer makes sense. The palace was a beautiful, even transfixing monument, but it was also an active agent sending and receiving messages, relaying secrets, sounding the commune’s schedule, and orienting streets and neighbourhoods. It was both an object of vision and a subjective voice. It was seen and heard but it also looked and listened. Florentines were caught within these systems that provided the raw material from which they would position

\[1429\] Statuta populi (1415), V, xlii (vol. II, p. 547). “intentus ad videndum signa quae fieren in aliqua, seu aliquist terris comitatus, seu districtus Florentiae, & ipsis respondendum. Et signa etiam faciendum prout deliberabitur semel, seu plures, & quotiescumque per offitium dominorum priorum artium, & vexilliferi teneantur, & debeant super dicto palatio miras fieri facere prout viderint convenire.” The obscurity of this passage derives from the uncertainty of translating the term “mira.”. According to DuCange, MIRA=SPECULA ("Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, volume 5, Niort: Favre; p.405) from Italian sources. A "specula" was a watchtower or lookout. However, I take “mira” to refer to signs or signals responding from the tower to other signals that formed part of an official communication network of visible signs. According to Grande dizionario, X, 503., the Italian term “mira” (target) also contained the sense of being a “segno di riferimento”. Both Leonardo and Machiavelli used the term, in the 15th and 16th centuries respectively, to mean a visible point of reference, something with which one could locate relations in space. Therefore, I understand mira to mean visible signs that communicated with others, in a pre-established way, and provided the means of a certain type of spatial orientation. More detailed knowledge of this communication network will require further research.
themselves as individuals, members of various communities, and astute interpreters of the world that surrounded them.

Naturally, the statutes are completely mute about the details of what must have been a secret, flexible, and changing system of visual interaction, but such evidence suggests that visual signs, markers, and reference points were part of a larger complex representational field. Florence was overlaid with several orders of visible signs that appeared and disappeared within the nexus of the sacred and the secular, the official and popular, the elite and the disenfranchised. When they appeared and where they appeared were often critical, since they both fostered solidarity, inspired rebellion, instilled the awe of the civic and the sacred, and helped to located Florentines in time and space.

A critical component of the circulation of images in any commune of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance was the constellation of flags and coats of arms through which collective identity was continually reinforced and renegotiated. It is by looking at where they came from, how they were formed, what they represented and what people did with them that one can begin to understand how architecture, space, and images functioned together to determine, support, undermine, and complicate the formation of such urban identities. Unfortunately, this history has largely been ignored by art historians. This is perhaps due, as art historian Frank Fehrenbach suggests, to the remarkable continuity of flags in time and space and their lack of typological development.\footnote{Frank Fehrenbach, "Much Ado about Nothing: Leonardo's Fight for the Standard," in Bild/Geschichte: Festschrift für Horst Bredekamp, ed. Philine Helas, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), 404.} However, “[p]ublic life in the Middle Ages [and the Renaissance] was decisively marked by the ceremonial use of flags.”\footnote{Ibid., 405.} I would add that urban life in general was a saturated field of visible signs in which flags and coats
of arms were an essential component. Since arms do not fall solidly within the bounds of representation – being so conventional and rarely used to index things beyond themselves or the properties and objects they mark – they are not, in and of themselves, the object of study to an art historian.

In Florence, the proliferation of official flags and standards was intimately connected with the successive regimes of popular governments. In a similar fashion to their strategy of casting bells, they assigned and distributed signs to officials, magistracies, guilds, districts, and the city itself as a way to establish a firm visual presence in a city that demanded certain forms of visibility. \(^{1432}\) Typological developments aside, the interpretation of flags and urban signs was crucial to Florentines. Their meanings were context specific, so that where they were, who held them, who gathered under them, and where they were etched into the architectural surface of the city, were central elements in grasping their meaning. The messages and dialogues they made about space, ownership, rights, and group identity do often invade the frame of the art historical realm but not simply as signs of identification.

### 5.4 The Ciompi: the Emergence of a Visual Identity.

In previous chapters I have sought to show how the medium of architecture and the spaces it created were the site of the negotiation of cultural memory, identity, and representation. For the ranks of merchants who were constructing a republic to function in their name and to speak with a universal voice, the mass of visual signs, spectacles, and laws that surrounded them was the arena in which were enacted the various interpretations of how that voice was to sound and what it was to say. For the

---

\(^{1432}\) For documentation of this phenomenon, see Seiler, "Kommunale Heraldik," 209-13. Carol Lansing argues that the government wanted to create, through the unified designs, strong visual connections between neighbourhood identities and the authority of commune. See Lansing, *Florentine Magnates*, 199.
Ciompi, what were the possibilities of speaking back to this symbolic environment that addressed them indirectly? They understood that a subversive critique of representational practices was possible. Despite their official exclusion from representational dialogue the Ciompi still lived in the spaces in which that dialogue was played out. They understood that signs and symbols were always linked, dependent even, on the architectural medium through which they became meaningful. Therefore, in the architectural terrain of the city, the Ciompi appropriated the very structures and images that subjected them; redirecting their messages, inflecting their meanings, and interrogating their design.

Out of their particular relationship to Walter of Brienne, the Duke of Athens, the Ciompi constructed that corporate identity. In the midst of economic crises in the financial sector, wealthy Florentine merchants turned in desperation to this nobleman, giving him vast powers to carry out drastic measures to save the Florentine financial empire.\(^{1433}\) In the face of unpopular decisions, however, the Duke allied himself with the lower classes when it became clear that he was losing support among the wealthy popolo with his strict fiscal reforms aimed directly at their economic self interest.

In organizing elements of the *popolo minuto* into six festive brigades,\(^{1434}\) he bestowed upon them an image. To the wool carders (*scardassieri*)\(^{1435}\) of the parish of San Frediano, who would form the most radical wing of the revolt in 1378, he gave a banner depicting an angel (Figure 5.5).\(^{1436}\) That angel would reappear in the 1378 revolt, carrying a sword as well as the arms of the Popolo (Figure 5.5a), a remarkable


\(^{1434}\) Trexler, *Public Life*, 220.

\(^{1435}\) Wool carders were responsible for preparing the wool for spinning, which required combing out impurities and straightening the fibers with a card, an instrument with iron teeth that resembled a crude brush.

\(^{1436}\) Stefani, * Cronica fiorentina*, r. 566 (pp. 199-200). “ed agli scardassieri concesse che ciascuno potesse avere un pavese, nel quale dipignesse un agnolo, e cosi feciono.” It is significant that when discussing the lower class class groups courted by the duke, the only non-guild ones Stefani mentions by name are the carders.
image that made reference to the Archangel Michael, bringer of divine justice.\textsuperscript{1437} No mention of the sword is made in 1343, suggesting that the Ciompi themselves re-issued their own flag as a sign that would identify it with the militant figure of Michael, whose divine role was to chase heretics with that sword. Significantly, the image of the Archangel Michael had also decorated one of the most famous military standards of the Middle Ages, which was known simply as the \textit{Angelus} and was used by the Holy Roman emperors.\textsuperscript{1438}

Under this banner these carders, who became known as the Ciompi;\textsuperscript{1439} were permitted to march in brigades of their own, “with banners and uniforms that established their status, for the first time, as collective participants in the commune’s ritual life.”\textsuperscript{1440} It was under this banner that they were then able to process in the feast of San Giovanni, in which Brienne ordered that offerings made to the Baptist be carried out under the flags of the guilds, not the \textit{gonfalonii}, which had been the case since 1306.\textsuperscript{1441} Among other ritual acts of celebration – wax offerings, horse races (called \textit{palli} because the prizes awarded to the victors were, naturally, more flags), banquets, jousts, games, and masses that took place on the feast of John the Baptist –

\textsuperscript{1437} "Cronica prima d' anonimo (1378 - 1387)," in \textit{Il Tumulto dei Ciompi - cronache e memorie}, ed. Gino Scaramella, (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1917), 77. Along with the armed archangel, the new guild of more skilled textile artisans was given a white arm on a red field carrying a sword with “giustizia” written on it. The third new guild received the robed arm of Christ coming out of the sky holding an olive branch. The angel is also referred to as Gabriel in a poem found in one contemporary source. See "Cronaca seconda," 121.

\textsuperscript{1438} Fehrenbach, \textit{Leonardo's Fight for the Standard}, 404.

\textsuperscript{1439} Stefani locates the origins of the term “Cionpo” in the French term “compar”, which Trexler translates as “co-father” or “ally”. Stefani’s reference to the French and their association with the laboring classes drips with contempt. He describes how the French would say “Compar, alois a boier,” to which the uncouth worker would respond, mis-pronouncing the French word: “Cionpo, andiamo a bere,” Stefani, \textit{Cronica fiorentina}, r. 575 (p. 203).

\textsuperscript{1440} Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 137. The duke was trying explicitly to counter the power of the geographically based \textit{gonfalonii} with a class based military strategy. He also released the dyers from their subordination to the wool guild and gave them permission to form their own guild along with other artisans in related fields. See Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 220-21. This short lived corporate experience, according to Najemy, awakened the “political aspirations of the laboring classes.” See Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 136.

\textsuperscript{1441} Trexler, \textit{Public Life}, 221. The change from guild-based processions to neighborhoods was a policy of the regime in which the elites came to dominate. See Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 137.
all the city’s *gonfalonì*, identified simply by their flags – had to process under their standards. In doing so, they were expressing a certain type of civic brotherhood that Compagni sought to conjure in the baptistery itself, but which contrasted with the more class-based procession of guild flags that the duke had re-awakened. Processing by district represented the military duties of the citizen-soldier and stressed a brotherhood that defined itself against the “audience of the non-represented.” After 1343, this non-representation again included the ranks of the *popolo minuto*, whose processional brigades were dissolved in the wake of the expulsion of the Duke of Athens from the city.

After expelling the duke, offerings to the Baptist reverted to the city’s districts, or *gonfalonì*, whose units would now be the front line between the *gente minuta* (little people) and their attempts to enfranchise themselves within the discourse of the guilds. Such an episode occurred in October 1394, when the *gonfalonì* blocked the piazza to prevent any of the *popolo minuto* from entering to join their comrades who were still shouting in favor of a guild-based government: “‘viva il popolo e l’arti.’” To help keep those laboring classes at bay visually and symbolically, communal festivals were specifically inaugurated to celebrate military victories over the lower classes. The feast of St. Anne is a case in point, dedicated to the day when the Popolo liberated itself from the Duke of Athens, while it simultaneously functioned as a “backhanded condemnation of the bad lower classes whom Brienne had courted.”

In such festivals, therefore, images played a fundamental role. On the feast of the Baptist, banners made from the city’s finest cloth - namely, silk – were offered to the patron saint in the baptistery (Figure 5.6). In Florence, the manufacture,
distribution, sale, and export of finished cloth employed a massive workforce spread out across the city and beyond. In this industry, wool was treated in large factories where it was washed, carded and combed. It was spun – often by women in the surrounding countryside – then returned to the city to be woven, dyed, fulled, and stretched in various more-or-less independent workshops.\(^{1445}\) However, the *lanaiolo*, or wool merchant, maintained full control over the wool throughout this process, while the guild that represented him maintained full control over the labor that produced it. This is not surprising considering the complicated nature of the system and its distribution in space. Consequently, all wool workers were subordinated (*sottoposto*) to the guild and its statutes but in no way were they members of that corporation, a fact re-emphasized in the city’s own statutes.\(^{1446}\) In the decades leading up to the Ciompi revolt, the guild statutes constantly updated lists of these *sottoposti*, reaffirmed rules and rewrote provisions to counter what must have been the constant threat of rebellion. Not only were the Ciompi required to accept all work, they had to promise to do it well. One Ciompo was even executed by the government for committing the capital crime of attempting to form an independent association.\(^{1447}\) The issue of a corporate identity was thus a matter of life and death for the Ciompi. What was at stake was economic and political independence. Florentine politics was based on a corporate idea of representation. Membership in guilds was a prerequisite to political offices, which were divided up according to the relative status of the major and minor guilds: a system that had oscillated between the dominance of more and less wealthy


\(^{1446}\) "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," II, lxxxii.

members of the major guilds. Therefore, the independent incorporation of the Ciompi would allow them to represent their interests in government and negotiate with the wool guild directly. They would also be able to control the price of their labor and have the legal right to be paid for it. Naturally, the wool guild had everything to lose by conceding to such demands.

Therefore, the constellation of identifying images, arms, and city emblems on the feast day of the city’s patron saint were all represented in the proper geographical configuration. This harmonious rhythm, this choreography of textiles – from mounted banners to overhead canopy, and the ritual dress of the procession – decorated with the arms of the enfranchised classes pointed obliquely to the mass of workers as well as the social tensions in the industry that constituted the backbone of the Florentine economy. It was a constant reminder of the Ciompi’s exclusion from the symbolic dimensions of the very cloth they produced (Figures 5.6a, 5.6b).

This event was subsequently celebrated allegorically by a fourteenth-century fresco found originally in the Stinche, the city’s communal prison, originally built in 1303 (Figure 5.7). It is a large round fresco that decorated the entrance hall of the prison and is now housed in the Palazzo Vecchio. Dated as early as 1343 and attributed to Orcagna (Andrea di Cione), it came right on the heels of the actual expulsion. It is directly related to the Florentine tradition of the *pittura infamante*, a connection pointed out by art historian Samuel Edgerton, in which effigies of enemies of the state were painted on the outside walls of the Bargello.\(^{1448}\) It is obvious that the

Popolo wanted to erase any lingering memory about the role they played in inviting the duke into Florence in the first place by a representation that emphatically depicts them ousting him. On the left side of the image the victorious popolo, dressed in military garb, raises three communal standards. The red cross of the Popolo, which was carried by the Gonfaloniere della Giustizia, is the nearest and most prominent. In the middle is the red and white military standard that followed the carroccio into battle, which was entrusted to the Capitano, followed by the red Guelf lily of the commune.\footnote{The lily of the commune changed colors in 1251, the Ghibellines taking the white lily on a red ground as their sign, the Guelfs keeping the red lily on a white ground as their standard of the commune. The older red and white standard that symbolized the union of Fiesole and Florence, however, dating to the 11th century, was also a standard of the commune, and Villani states that it would never be changed. See the discussion below and Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VII, 43. Earlier he had called it the principal standard of the Popolo even though it predated that class signifier. See Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VII, 39. The confusion arises from having three flags variously associated with the commune (red and white, red lily) and the Popolo (red and white, red cross).} St. Anne, on whose feast day the expulsion took place (July 26), is placed on what appears to be an obliquely angled dais, and although she is sitting, there is no clear evidence of a throne, except for the patterned drapery that the two angels hold behind her. She grasps the military standard of the commune while her left hand is poised above the Palace of the Priors, today’s Palazzo Vecchio. It is not clear if she is bestowing the standard upon the Popolo itself, or whether they are offering it to her as an allegory of their military might. In any case, the act of giving and receiving flags in Florence cannot be overstated. Such transfers were direct translations of the power invested in the image, under which authoritative action could take place.

The duke himself is chased away from the palace and the city on the right by a figure variously identified as the virtue Constancy or Fortitude.\footnote{Belting identifies it as Constancy, while Crum cites Offner identifying it as Fortitude. See Hans Belting, \textit{The New Role of Narrative in Public Painting of the Trecento: Historia and Allegory}, \textit{Studies in the History of Art} 16 (1985): 157; Roger J. Crum and David G. Wilkins, "In Defense of Florentine Republicanism: Saint Anne and Florentine Art, 1343-1575," in \textit{Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society}, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley and Pamela Shingorn, (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 161 (n. 25).} With a column in
his left hand, he may also have carried a spear in his right.\textsuperscript{1451} Looking back over his shoulder as Adam might in his own expulsion from Paradise, the duke may also have been represented as one of the damned to Hell in the Last Judgment. In the former interpretation, the winged figure would be acting as the avenging angel.\textsuperscript{1452} In the latter, St. Anne becomes the central focus, her right hand blessing the Popolo by restoring their arms and her left dismissing the tyrant, who carries the beast Gerione, with a deceptively benign head, serpentine body, and a scorpion’s tail.\textsuperscript{1453} In Dante’s Inferno 17, this creature was an allegory of fraud. “With a mild face, with sweet words, using every politeness, he used to attract strangers to him; and then, having lulled them with his benignity, he would slay them.”\textsuperscript{1454} In the Inferno he was supposed to sting unsuspecting sinners between the seventh and eighth circle of Hell.

Roger Crum shows how Villani was emblematic of the Popolo’s ambivalence to the Duke. He had earlier lauded the Duke’s service to the commune in the 1320s. Now, however, as a wealthy \textit{popolano} he felt betrayed in a way similar to that of Gerione’s deceptive fraudulence.\textsuperscript{1455} Therefore, it is fitting that Brienne carries the image of fraud, which helped to transfer the guilt of the Popolo onto a figure that would become the generic receptacle for any threats to the regime. Such guilt was alleviated by associating him with the Gerione, since he had won them with “sweet words” and kept the truth of his self hidden, acting as a kind of alter ego to Amphion and his power of speech.

On October 15, 1342 Brienne installed new priors in the palace, most of them minor artisans, along with some old Ghibellines. He also gave them a new standard of

\textsuperscript{1451} Crum and Wilkins, "In Defense of Florentine Republicanism," 138. Could it have been a sword?
\textsuperscript{1452} In which case it would recall the Archangel Michael with sword.
\textsuperscript{1453} Identified by Crum and Wilkins, "In Defense of Florentine Republicanism," 138.
\textsuperscript{1455} Crum and Wilkins, "In Defense of Florentine Republicanism," 138.
justice, which Villani describes as a combination of three separate arms (Figure 5.8). On the left, closest to the pole, were the arms of the commune, the red lily. In the middle he placed his own arms, a blue field studded with small rectangular shapes (biliottato) with a golden lion on whose neck was a shield with the arms of the popolo. Next to the lion were the arms of the Popolo, a white field with the red cross, while above was the rectangular bolt of cloth with tooth-like pendants (rastrello)\footnote{See “rastrello” in Grande dizionario. It was similar to a lambello, but with long teeth instead of hanging drops (gocce). This device was taken off the banners of the militia companies in 1303 by the Cardinal of Prato along with other measures meant to bring peace to the city. See Villani, Nuova cronica, IX, 69.} that linked Brienne to the royal house of Anjou.\footnote{Villani, Nuova cronica, XIII, 8.} Not only that, but the duke had also inaugurated his appropriation of the regime by tearing up both the Ordinances of justice and the standard of justice, placing his own banners (bandiere) on the tower of the palace and sounding the bells to the glory of God (“a Dio laudiamo”).\footnote{Ibid., XIII, 3.}

As historian Richard Trexler has shown, paying close attention to the movement of flags at the level of the street was crucial in determining both subtle and profound transformations in civic power relations across the urban terrain. Similarly, one can see how the game of flags was replayed in pictures, where banners and arms inform the visual logic of frescoes such as this one. Here, the popolo reestablish their authority by assembling under their flags, which literally mediate their relationship to the saint, and they cast down those of the duke, which now lie at the feet of St. Anne in disgrace, while the symbols of law and justice – the sword, book, and the scales – lie broken at his own (Figure 5.7). As the central axis, Anne’s hands appropriate the gestures of Christ in Judgment; her right declaring victory for Popolo while her left condemns the fleeing duke.\footnote{On the Last Judgment imagery see Edgerton, Pictures and Punishment, 40-41.} She is the mediator between the Popolo and the seat of
urban power that had been “fraudulently” taken from them.\textsuperscript{1460} Her left hand also hovers over the Palace, as if Anne is about to reunite the standard with palace it symbolically protected. Such an act was not only symbolic but was part of events that took place in the streets, since Brienne had dissolved the citizen militias and their standard bearers, an act that would have been seen as a direct attack on Florentine sovereign identity.\textsuperscript{1461}

5.5 Recouping the Popolo’s Image

To counter this, the leaders of the Adimari, Donati, and Medici clans announced the plan of attack on the duke from the Mercato Vecchio and the Porta San Piero, when the merchants had left their shops for the day. Since the gonfalonieri were dissolved, the plan was to have the citizens emerge armed from their neighborhoods each under a banner of the Popolo, a sign that represented their unity – they cried out “viva il popolo e ‘l comune di Firenze e libertà” – as well as their concept of justice as a community that refused to be disbanded (Figure 5.9).\textsuperscript{1462}

In a similar move, the spatio-political configuration of the city was reformed. Sestieri became quartieri, and as such, they required new arms, which were subsequently painted under the arches of bell tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, along with the city’s official communal arms (Figure 5.10).\textsuperscript{1463} In doing so, the popolo sought to reestablish their authority through the re-appropriation of the building by

\textsuperscript{1460} Belting refers to it as the seat of Justice, see Belting, ”The New Role of Narrative,” 157.
\textsuperscript{1461} Crum and Wilkins, ”In Defense of Florentine Republicanism,” 139.
\textsuperscript{1462} Villani, Nuova cronica, XIII, 17.
\textsuperscript{1463} Modesto Rastrelli, Illustrazione istorica del Palazzo della Signoria, (Bologna: A. Forni, 1976), 75-90. Rastrelli describes nine of these arms in the 17th century. They include those of the commune (red lily), Popolo (red cross), the military standard (dimezzata), those of Robert and Charles of Anjou (gold lilies), the Pope (keys), the Parte Guelfa (black eagle with green dragon), the priors (libertas), and the old communal standard (ghibelline white lily). At least one of those arms would not have been painted before 1458, when the priors adopted the blue flag inscribed with “Libertas”. See Rastrelli, Palazzo della Signoria, 80.
marking it with images, the protective signs that guaranteed the integrity of the
regime. St. Anne herself was raised to the level of a communal saint after the duke’s
expulsion, and her feast day was marked as an official holiday, equal in solemnity to
Easter.1464 On this day all the guilds would process with their arms to Orsanmichele,
where an altar dedicated to St. Anne was set up (Figure 5.11).

The site of the Florence’s grain market, Orsanmichele and its piazza were
located in the heart of the city, between the cathedral and the town hall (Figures 5.11a,
5.11b). By 1240 it had long been the site of the city’s grain market, but its central
position between the city’s other markets and the cathedral made it an important hub
of judicial and legislative activity before the formal construction of any public
government buildings.1465 By the time of the duke’s regime it already carried with it
deep political and spiritual connotations, linked as they were to a Guelf collective
memory by several auspicious events.1466 Subsequently, the original loggia over the
market was built in 1284 as part of the ambitious urban building program of the
secondo popolo and a church dedicated to Saint Barnabas – on whose feast day the
Guelfs defeated the Ghibellines at Campaldino in 1289 – was planned to be built
directly on top of this loggia.1467 Damaged heavily in the fire of 1304, the loggia over
the market was in a state of extreme deterioration by the 1330s, despite several
interventions and repairs, when the commune made a formal decision to rebuild it.1468
However, the spatial and structural needs of the site required that designers also

1464 Villani, Nuova cronica, XIII, 17. “per la qual grazia s'ordinò per lo Comune che lla festa di santa
Anna si guardasse come pasqua sempre in Firenze, e si celebrasse solenne uficio e grande oferta per lo
Comune e per tutte l'arti di Firenze.” (in order to show thanks the Commune declared that the fest of the
Saint Anne always be held just as Easter in Florence, and that is be celebrated with solemn office and
generous offerings by the Commune and by all the guilds of Florence.)
1466 Ibid., 13-14. A Guelf girl being tortured in 1248 was rescued by the Beata Umiliana de’ Cerchi,
who had died two years earlier. In 1259 a young girl was saved by her mother from an escaped
coomunal lion. See also Villani, Nuova cronica, VI, 69.
1467 Zervas, Orsanmichele, 19; Caggese, Podestà (1325), V, cxii (pp. 397-98.
1468 Zervas, Orsanmichele, 43.
facilitate the worship of a miraculous image of the Virgin. Painted in fresco on one of
the piers of the original loggia was a picture of the Madonna, and on August 10, 1291,
a confraternity of laudesi had been established specifically to sing vernacular lauds to
this image.\textsuperscript{1469} It was on July 3, 1292, that this image responded to those lauds, curing
the sick and the lame, while transforming the loggia into a major pilgrimage site,
much to the chagrin of the city’s mendicant orders.\textsuperscript{1470} Damaged or destroyed in the
fire of 1304, this image was most likely replaced by another in 1307 or 1308.\textsuperscript{1471}

Therefore, the new building was a nexus of converging spatial associations that
included political, social, and spiritual dimensions that were not fully distinct from
each other, but blended into one another. It contained the Virgin who cured the sick
but who also guaranteed the harvest. She was a miraculous Virgin but it was also a
miraculous site that even tamed lions, animals so closely identified with the Florentine
state.\textsuperscript{1472} It was the site of the sale of grain, a dietary staple, as well as a space of
justice, and politics.

In 1339, Orsanmichele would become a civic shrine dedicated to the guild-
based conception of the republic when the government granted the will of the consuls
and operai of the silk guild to have thirteen tabernacles constructed on the exterior
piers of the new loggia for the representation of the patron saints of the city’s twelve
major guilds along with that of the Guelf party (Figures 11c, 11d). This extended and
made obligatory a practice that the wool guild had initiated in the 1320s: processing
on their feast day to Orsanmichele to offer donations used to help the city’s poor.\textsuperscript{1473}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1469]{\textsuperscript{1469} Ibid., 21; Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VII, 155.}
\footnotetext[1470]{\textsuperscript{1470} Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VII, 155.}
\footnotetext[1471]{\textsuperscript{1471} Zervas, \textit{Orsanmichele}, 30.}
\footnotetext[1472]{\textsuperscript{1472} On the symbolism of the lions see Randolph, "Il Marzocco."}
\footnotetext[1473]{\textsuperscript{1473} Zervas, \textit{Orsanmichele}, 52.}
\end{footnotes}
distribution of offices and the curtailment of political corruption” only eight months after the 1339 provision concerning the tabernacles.1474 Orsanmichele became part of a running urban dialogue between guild-based and neighborhood-based configurations of civic authority. It was beginning to represent the intricate web of associations between lay piety, mercantile charity, political spectacle, and the corporatist ideal of government, ensnaring architecture, by means of an image and a procession, to embody this palimpsest of practices.

Therefore, the elevation of St. Anne to a communal saint in late 1343 by the regime that was established in the wake of Brienne’s expulsion later in 13431475 placed her within a growing pantheon of saintly presences within the market area. Her feast, made perpetual in 1345,1476 commemorated the restitution of civic liberty as the product of the newly resurgent guilds, which all processed under their banners to the image of the liberator saint. As a non-ecclesiastical shrine to the Virgin, a market, and as an expression of guild solidarity, Orsanmichele represented the converging vectors of politics, economics, and communal piety. It fixed into urban space the memory of victory over the tyrant and the legitimacy of the Popolo’s power over those unwanted non-guild elements – magnates and the popolo minuto. Processing as guilds was also a way to erase the memory of the military units set up by Brienne, whose ranks came directly from the popolo minuto, mostly workers in the wool industry, which countered the tradition of guild protection of the republic.1477

In addition to the fresco and the grain market, which celebrated the new patron saint and her feast, the duke was also demonized, as mentioned above, by the state.

1474 Ibid., 55.
1475 Ibid., 58. For this legislation Zervas cites Richa and Zocchi, Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine, divise ne’ suoi quartieri, I, 27-28. However, she notes that the statute he quotes actually comes from an unrelated one found in the 1415 statutes. See Statuta populi (1415), III, V, xviii (p. 316).
1476 Zervas, Orsanmichele, 61.
His image was painted in the exterior tower of the Podestà’s palace (Bargello, Figures 5.12, 5.12a). It depicted the duke surrounded by six of his counselors, all identified by coats of arms and insignias and all of whom also wore the miter of justice on their heads. In the spirit of the Lorenzetti’s Bad Government frescoes, each had an accompanying inscription, in which the six counselors speak accusingly in the first person. The duke is described as:

Avaricious, treacherous, and then cruel
Lustful, unjust, and false,
Never did he hold his state secure.

This fresco initiated a civic dialogue across urban space with Orcagna’s fresco because it portrayed one of the duke’s counselors in an act of civic betrayal, handing over an image of the Palazzo Vecchio to the duke; an act of treachery that St. Anne had to undo by giving it back. Obviously, this gesture was meant to lay the blame for the transfer of power to the duke squarely on those few treacherous Florentine counselors of the duke. However, such an image functioned ambiguously and could cause a considerable amount of anxiety on the part of those to whom it was addressed. Villani appreciated the image but he noted that the wisest among the city complained about it because it conserved the memory of the failure and shame of the commune for

---
1479 Edgerton suggests the likely similarity in composition between the two images. See Edgerton, Pictures and Punishment, 41 ff.
1480 “Avaro, traditore, e poi crudele / Lussurioso, ingiusto, e spregiuro / Giamai non tenne suo stato sicuro.” Filippo Baldinucci, Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua, per le quali si dimostra come, e per chi le bell'arti di pittura, scultura, e architettura lasciata la rozzezza delle maniere greca, e gottica, si siano in questi secoli ridotte all’ antica loro perfezione, (Florence: Per Santi Franchi, 1681), I, 236; translated in Crum and Wilkins, "In Defense of Florentine Republicanism," 140. Baldinucci includes a transcription of all inscriptions.
having made him lord. Stefani himself complained that the city was paying once
again for the duke who had brought the city disgrace but on account of its own
failings. Later, in 1394, an embarrased commune had to temporarily cover up the
image of the duke on the occasion of a state visit from one of his noble kinsmen.

The cult of St. Anne in Florence began by investing her presence in at least
three major buildings that represented three moments of renewed popular government:
1250, 1282, and 1343. The Bargello was the monument built by the first popular
government, while the Stinche prison (begun 1303) was part of the large urban
transformations of the second. Orsanmichele itself was long connected with Guelf
identity and its ritual reconfiguration was part of the emerging third popular
government established in the wake the duke’s demise.

By the latter half of the fourteenth century, such spatial and pictorial practices
transformed the specter of Brienne into a shorthand stick to beat back any support for
unrest among the laboring classes. Anne, by contrast, had become one of the most
important political symbols of the liberty of the Florentine Popolo, as she was
transformed from a divine liberator in a specific event into a general protector of the
city (Figure 5.13). She had saved them from both aristocratic tyranny and plebeian
anarchy.

The duke’s arms were subsequently banned from the city and all those on
display and in private homes were ordered destroyed. Obviously, the only
acceptable visual representation of these arms was in state-sanctioned images of

---

1481 Villani, Nuova cronica, XIII, 34.
1482 Stefani, Cronica fiorentina, r. 608 (pp. 220-21). Edgerton translates this passage in Edgerton,
Pictures and Punishment, 80.
1483 Edgerton, Pictures and Punishment, 85; Alle bocche, 171.
1484 Seiler, "Kommunale Heraldik," 212.
1485 On the third popular government see Najemy, A History of Florence, 132-44.
1486 Becker, Florence in Transition, 1, 165.
1487 Crum and Wilkins, "In Defense of Florentine Republicanism," 140.
1488 Ibid., 141. See Paoli, della Signoria, 47-48.
disgrace, such as the Stinche and Bargello frescoes. The Ciompi’s angel, meanwhile, was taken into hiding, marking the loss of their brief but spirited pretense to corporate identity.¹⁴⁸⁹ An annual mass procession of guild flags to venerate St. Anne would also celebrate that loss of that collective image.

These were the most explicit visual indices of the Popolo’s hatred of the Ciompi, whose defeat was celebrated but whose existence was too repugnant, in representational discourse, to explicitly name. But as we shall see, the Ciompi were able to appropriate these images and rituals; confront them and subvert them, redirect them and turn them back on themselves. But first they had to prepare the city, secretly, for their arrival.

5.6 The Return of the Angel: Communication Networks in Action

Beginning with the anxieties of Paolo da Certaldo, in chapters three and four I attempted to show how verbal messages traveled through the city in ways that defied the wishes of those who uttered them, those who heard them, and those sought to control them. Therefore, the terrain on which the Ciompi began to work was both a resistant and porous surface. They understood that one’s location in space and one’s architectural surroundings were critical to determining the effects of one’s words and deeds; that something happening here, was different than if it happened there.

In both images of the duke discussed above, architecture, in the shape of the public palace, functioned as a metaphor of to whom and where the proper functioning of the city belonged. The image of the palace was a privileged sign of possession of the state. It was the handing out of flags from the palace, as well as the return of those

¹⁴⁸⁹ Becker, Florence in Transition, I, 169. Six uniformed brigades of the Popolo Minuto paraded festively and, for the Popolo, scandalously, at Easter and on the feast San Giovanni Battista during his reign.
flags to that palace and square at certain times of crisis that extended the spatial
presence of the regime. In other words, architecture and signs functioned in tandem so
that one could read complex political transformations by watching the movement of
flags in conjunction with the architectural itineraries they made.¹⁴⁹⁰ Architecture as
metaphor, therefore, provided a way of interpreting moments of social crises, when
visual symbols and messages became unstuck from familiar patterns and associations.
As a medium however, architecture provided the ground upon which the Ciompi were
able to manipulate existing signs and to project their voice through the manipulation of
visual signs. This made them producers of newly inflected images, through which
they forced themselves into participating in a visual culture of signs.

In a detail of Ghirlandaio’s fifteenth-century image, Confirmation of the
Franciscan Rule, one can see the well-functioning piazza and its ringhiera, the
rostrum upon which the visual rituals of Florentine government were enacted for the
people in the square (Figures 5.14-5.15a). It was on this liminal stage, mediating
between the fortified walls of the palace and the open space of the piazza, where the
first signs of trouble were noted. On July 1, 1378 the new priors, as they did every
two months, entered the Palazzo Vecchio. But on this occasion, as observers noted
with intense forebodings, the communal bells did not ring, as they customarily did
(“sanza sonare campane seconda l’usanza”), and no elaborate ceremonial ritual took
place on the ringhiera.¹⁴⁹¹ Instead of sights and sounds, there was silence and
invisibility, as the swearing-in of the new government took place not in public view
but shielded behind the thick walls of the palace. The proper symbolic representation

¹⁴⁹⁰ Trexler’s influential essay on the movement of flags does not make this link explicit, but it is
crucial. See Trexler, "Follow the Flag."
¹⁴⁹¹ Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 17. "ché è mai più s’udi dire, che quando i priori entrassino non si sonasse a
martello, e in sulla ringhiera del palazzo dare i malleadori e pigliare el giuramento, altro che questa
volta."
of civic authority was beginning to break down and walls were beginning to
dematerialize.

The Ciompi broke this silence on July 20, 1378, when the clock maker,
Niccolò degli Oriuoli, heard the tortured wails of a certain Simoncino’s confession.
The latter had been picked up by authorities based on reports of a brewing
insurrection.\textsuperscript{1492} Realizing that the game was up and that the uprising planned for the
next morning had been exposed, he rushed across the river to his home in San
Frediano and armed himself.\textsuperscript{1493} He then came out into the streets of his neighborhood
and started shouting to his comrades to do the same: “to arms, to arms; the priors are
committing murder… arm yourselves, you enraged people, if not you will all be
dead!”\textsuperscript{1494} It was at this point, according the chronicle, that Nardo di Camaldoli
entered the church of Santa Maria del Carmine and began to ring its bells (Figure
5.16).\textsuperscript{1495} Immediately afterwards, the bells of San Frediano were heard ringing
(Figure 5.16a), followed closely by those of San Piero Gattolino (Figure 5.16b), then

\textsuperscript{1492} Several first-hand accounts of the Ciompi uprising have been collected in Gino Scaramella, ed.,
*Croniche e memorie sul tumulto dei Ciompi*, vol. XVIII part III, (Città di Castello: Nicola Zanichelli, 1917). See also the diary of Pagolo di Ser Guido Cimatore in ASF Carte strozziane, seconda serie LIX, which has been transcribed in Stella, *La révolte des Ciompi*, Appendix. The classic studies on the
Ciompi and the revolt of 1378 can be found in Niccolò Rodolico, *I Ciompi*, (Florence: Sansoni, 1945);
Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto*; Niccolò Rodolico, *La Democrazia fiorentina nel suo tramonto (1378 -
1382)*, (Rome: Multigráfica Editrice, 1970; reprint, 1970); see also the collection of essays in Istituto
(Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993). Recently there has been renewed
interest in the subject; Franceschi, *Oltre il “Tumulto”: i lavoratori fiorentini dell’Arte della lana fra Tre
e Quattrocento*; Ernesto Screpanti, "La politica dei Ciompi: petitioni, riforme e progetti dei
rivoluzionari fiorentini del 1378," CLXV, no. 1 (2007); Ernesto Screpanti, *L’angelo della liberazione

\textsuperscript{1493} According to the 1378 tax records, Niccolaus Bernardi magr. lived in Borgo San Friano (Frediano)
and was taxed at a rate of one florin, one lira, and six soldi, which was paid by Simone Ribellati de
Spinis, ASF Prestanze 332, f. 159r.

\textsuperscript{1494} Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 22. “‘A l’arme, a l’arme; i priori fanno carne e gl’hanno mandato e fatto
venire ser Nuto bargello in Palagio; armatevi cattiva gente, se non che tutti sarete morti.’”

\textsuperscript{1495} Ibid. “E andossene nella chiesa del Carmine, e uno Nardo di Camaldoli sonava la campana a
martello. E così di campana in campana, tutta Firenze sonava a martello” (And arriving at the church of
the Carmine, Nardo di Camaldoli rang the bell in alarm. And so from bell to bell. All of Florence was
ringing in alarm).
San Niccolò (Figure 5.16c). Across the Arno, the bells of Ognissanti joined in the alarm (Figure 5.16d), followed by those of Santo Stefano a Ponte (Figure 5.16e), San Piero Maggiore (Figure 5.16f), and finally, San Lorenzo (Figure 5.16g).1496 From tower to tower, from bell to bell (di campana in campana), all of Florence was sounding the alarm and the insurrection was underway. In light of the complex rules, regulations, and customs that surrounded the ringing of bells outlined in chapter three, this relay of acoustic signals must have caused a powerful invasion into the city’s soundscape, and it broke the axial coordinates of the city that were emphatically focused on the central markets with a circle of sound. If three institutions of the city – church, judiciary, government – had bells large enough to envelope the entire city, then the Ciompi had constructed a means by which they could relay messages from one outlying neighborhood to another,1497 bypassing entirely the acoustic transmitters at the center. The sounds that erupted that morning directly confronted the bells at the heart of the regime’s power to communicate. They expressly overturned the proper one-way direction of messages played out in public announcements, from center to periphery.

Plotted visually on a map, as the historian Alessandro Stella has done, the topography of revolt is rendered more explicit (Figure 5.16g). As the message was relayed from one campanile to another, a wall of sound was constructed that physically encircled the city and surrounded the centre of power. The first planned act of the insurrection had overturned the sonic order of the city.

1496 Ibid. “E li primi che si leveranno, saranno quelli di Camaldoli e di San Frediano, e soneranno le campane del Carminio e di San Frediano a martello; e poi quelle di San Piero Gattolino e quelle di San Nicolò, e poi quelle d’ Ognissanti, di poi quelle da Santo Stefano a Ponte e da San Piero Maggiore e da Santo Lorenz.” (and the first to rise up were those of Camaldoli and of San Frediano, and the bells of the Carmine and San Frediano rang in alarm; and then those of San Piero Gattolino and those of San Niccolò, and then those of Ognissanti, then those of Santo Stefano a Ponte and from San Piero Maggiore, and from San Lorenz). The authorities had “coaxed” this information out of Simoncino, just before the insurrection started.

1497 Stella, La révolte des Ciompi, 70.
The importance and meaning of ringing bells to start a revolt cannot be overestimated in a culture in which those bells and towers were an integral part of the urban experience. Bells, for their part, were rung to mark a wide range of events and Florentines had to attune themselves to subtle changes in tone and rhythm. As chapter three has made explicit, bells marked the time of the church, its offices, and its calendar. They called the religious to prayer, councils to gather, government to order, and citizens to arms. They marked the beginning of the day, the time of labor, its cessation and the beginning of night. They announced foreign events, welcomed dignitaries and mourned death and excommunication. They accompanied the troops out to war, on the carroccio itself, along with the “dimezzata”, the commune’s oldest communal flag (Figure 5.17). The scene portrayed involves the Florentine troops in their battle against the Sienese.

Visually, the image of the medieval city was often a conglomeration of bell towers, family towers, and the towers of city gates. Such structures had always played a fundamental role in all kinds of spatial conflicts, whether they were used as refuge or for battle, destroyed in a new ethic of urban planning, or built to protect the city. Now the sound that they made had been turned upon the regime that had placed so much importance on controlling those sounds. This is made clear in an image taken from the only illustrated fourteenth-century manuscript of Giovanni Villani’s chronicle of Florence, which depicts a battle between family and communal towers (Figure 5.18). It demonstrates how the image of the city could be reduced to a configuration of such structures, an image much more readily presented by pictorial conventions, as opposed to the horizontal topographies plotted by the textual practices analyzed in chapter two.

A late fourteenth-century fresco in the ceiling of Orsanmichele depicting St. Anne holding a model of the city, therefore, could visibly demonstrate how the hierarchical relationships between the civic church and the commune, on the one hand,
and the outlying periphery, on the other, was subsumed into a dialogue only between those architectural elements – towers and walls – that stood in for those authorities (Figure 5.13). In the chronicle image, the emphasis was on the unruly factional conflicts that attacked from the periphery, while the Orsanmichele image denies that periphery in a context in which the recapturing of control of the city’s center was celebrated. Reducing the city to the profile of its most important monuments was, of course, a pictorial convention but it was also a conscious choice among several available options. More complex and complete versions of the fourteenth-century commune exist in manuscript – Lucca – (Figure 5.19) and San Gimignano (Figure 5.19a). The former shows the chaos of towers that marked the city’s skyline, while the latter presents a vertical hierarchy in which all elements of the city take part. In the Florentine image of St. Anne, the city has been reduced to its ideal minimalist political order, which effaced the unwanted elements of the periphery, which was exactly the kind of city that St. Anne was supposed to guarantee as protector of the city against the tyranny of the both foreign princes and lower class workers. It differs from the Bigallo fresco of the Madonna della Misericordia (Figure 5.19b), where the dense topography of towers and buildings is barely contained within the walls. Therefore, subtle differences in the way the city was represented reflected a range of ideal visions of the city.

The proper functioning of bells had to respect the visual hierarchy of the city’s configuration of towers. The proper lines of communication were from center to periphery and from cathedral and town hall to parish bells. This organization defined the spatial limits and daily practices of localized communities, which were subordinate and organized around parish bell towers, such as that of Sant’ Ambrogio (Figure 5.20). Such local bells, in contrast, defined the spatial limits of a neighborhood, a familiar territory set in relation to others. They gathered around them a community of souls
who were connected to each other by this aural experience. In other words, Florentines understood their connection to a community through both their aural and their visual experience.

Bells had been an important instrument of the Popolo in their campaign against nobility from the thirteenth century, and it is my contention that this had taught the Ciompi how to effectively use the bells in the service of political struggle. The sense of acoustic threat brought on by the encircling bells that morning is suggested in another eye-witness account. The writer of an anonymous letter describes how he was there in the piazza as a scuffle broke out with the armed guards around the hour of Terce. He cannot say neither what nor how, but all of a sudden he hears cries of “siege, siege!” and at that very moment, he also hears the alarm bells begin to ring: from Camaldoli (Santa Maria del Carmine?), San Piero Gattolino, San Giorgio, several churches in via San Gallo, Sant’ Ambrogio, and “in many other places.”

This was the sound of the revolt heard from the center of the city. It was, in fact, literally, a siege. This writer’s ear was attuned enough to his own sonic environment that he was able to trace, acoustically, the way in which the successive ringing of bells was beginning to envelop the city, and he understood immediately that the periphery was making an assault on the center by the way in which the city’s audible rhythms had been completely overturned. Even before he saw the flag of the Ciompi, he heard them coming.

---

1498 “Lettera d’anonimo sul tumulto dei ciompi (23 July, 1378),” in Il Tumulto dei Ciompi - cronache e memorie, ed. Gino Scaramella, (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1917), 141. The term the author uses is “serra”, which can be meaning either siege, barricades, or a general state of military threat. See Grande dizionario, XVIII, 745.
1499 “Lettera d’anonimo,” 141. Although the letter is dated three days after the events and, therefore, the writer would most likely have discussed the various churches whose bells were rung, there is no reason why he would not have been fully aware of the encircling movement of the alarm, which he foregrounds in his experience.
It was in these outer localized soundscapes, connected through and made universal by their collective ringing, that the Ciompi found access to a corporate voice and countered the official sounds of the city. Parish bells, and those who managed them, must have had a more intimate and responsive relationship to the communities they served. It was here, at the level of local communities, that a history of resistance lay open to the Ciompi. In 1307, for example, the monks of the Badia rang their bell to protest the imposition of taxes on their properties.\textsuperscript{1500} It was their intent to call the *popolo minuto* to arms in order to protect themselves from the communal tax collectors (Figure 5.21) The commune, so incensed by this act, responded by ordering the partial demolition of their bell tower (Figure 5.21a). In 1344, four inhabitants of Lastra, just outside Florence, were fined for insulting the bishop of Florence verbally as he was returning from Rome. They were also punished for ringing their bell, not, as would have been customary, to welcome him on his way through the parish (*a distesa*), but in alarm to raise bands of armed men to assault him (*ad stornum*) for all the suffering he had caused them.\textsuperscript{1501} Therefore, the Florentine soundscape offered sites of resistance for the Ciompi, who were able to draw on a familiar idiom in order to confront the city precisely where the relations between community and architecture were most intimate, namely, the neighborhood church. They were intimately connected through daily experience to the sound of their parish bells. This gave them a collective voice, which allowed them to communicate across neighborhoods and to bypass conventional hierarchies. This was, in fact, their crime. The subversive nature of such actions is made clear by the legal proceedings that condemned the Ciompi precisely for ringing the bells of several churches *independently* of those of the Popolo.

\textsuperscript{1500} On this event see “la quale si sente per tutta la città sonare” in chapter three.\textsuperscript{1501} Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto*, 48 and document 22 on pp. 111-12. The clergy was in tense conflict with minor guildsmen and the popolo minuto because of their ties to wealthy merchants and after the passage of a law stripping them of the privileges.
and the commune of Florence.\textsuperscript{1502} In other words, they had transgressed the proper representational order and in doing so, they had begun to inscribe their collective identity, however terrifying it was, into the soundscape of the city.

So on that day, as the bells called the Ciompi to action, it was not only the sheer numbers gathering in four major piazzas around the city that horrified observers – four hundred at Santo Stefano a Ponte, eight hundred at San Piero Maggiore, one thousand at Santo Spirito, “innumerable” men at San Lorenzo;\textsuperscript{1503} this transgression also opened the way for the reappearance of a certain image, hidden but not forgotten. In Florence, relationships of power determined the communities that belonged to communal visual signs at different times, bestowing the political power and magisterial honor upon those that successfully united under them. This helps to explain the horror at the re-emergence of the Ciompi’s angel in 1378 (Figure 5.5a).\textsuperscript{1504} The insurrection was given shape and form by that image that Florentines saw coming across the river from San Frediano. At the sound of the bells that banner reappeared at the head of as many as a thousand men as they marched across the river. It was the angel with a sword and the cross of the Popolo\textsuperscript{1505} that the chronicler Stefani saw coming that morning and he knew it was “one of their signs,” remembering that the Duke of Athens had given it to them. He knew that “they were called the Ciompi.”\textsuperscript{1506}

Having been banned following the expulsion of the Duke of Athens, the Ciompi had hidden and protected their standard, and consequently their identity, for over thirty years. They understood that at the proper moment and in the proper place

\textsuperscript{1502} Rodolico, \textit{La democrazia fiorentina}. In a sentence against Piero el Ciri dated December thirteenth 1379, reference is made to him having been condemned during the political upheaval of the previous year: “Cuperunt se coadunare in aliqua multitudine gentium armatarum et fercerunt pulsari campanas quampluriam ecclesiarum ad martelium divisim et per se a campanis populi et Communis Florentie…”

\textsuperscript{1503} Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 22.

\textsuperscript{1504} The significance of this act cannot be underestimated, since communal statutes expressly forbade anyone, but especially the workers of the wool guild, to gather under a flag. See "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, chxxxv.

\textsuperscript{1505} Screpanti, \textit{L'angelo della liberazione}, 217.

\textsuperscript{1506} Stefani, \textit{Cronica fiorentina}, r. 795 (p. 322).
this banner would crystallize their identity into an intelligible image and therefore allow them to claim a corporate status by assembling under it. As Trexler has demonstrated, it was only when the established guilds figured out how to deprive the Ciompi of that image that the Ciompi were dispersed and defeated.\footnote{1507}

When the angel appeared, the Ciompi had succeeded in taking their identity from its negative existence of exclusion – as that which could not be named – and had turned it into a positive force that allowed them to communicate within the urban visual symbolic order. And it was from the power of this image that the Ciompi were able to represent their vision of communal relations. Under this banner, the Ciompi solidified their bonds of fealty. With it they could then participate in the circulation of arms, banners, and flags that were crucial to the multiple identities of late medieval urban culture in Italy.

Proceeding to the Piazza della Signoria, the Ciompi were then joined by disaffected guildsmen as well as other \textit{popolo minuto}. From there they went to the house of the Gonfaloniere della Giustizia (Standard-bearer of Justice) and burned it but did not loot anything from it.\footnote{1508} Returning to the piazza they demanded the release of those being held by the city’s officials, but when all of their demands were not met they marched to the house of the Executor of Justice and demanded the Standard of Justice (Figure 5.22), which was not given to them willingly. So they took by force. It is not surprising that one of the first acts of the insurrection was to universalize the revolt by taking the standard of justice from the window of the Executor’s palace. Parading under this sign was crucial to the Ciompi’s early success as they processed throughout the city with it. Under this sign, all Florentines could assemble, allowing the Ciompi to merge with other corporate groups even though that

\footnote{1507}{Trexler, "Follow the Flag," 386-87.}
\footnote{1508}{"Lettera d’anonimo," 141.}
may have meant the possible compromise of their project. And it was under this sign that they burned the houses of their enemies.\textsuperscript{1509} Under this sign they processed that evening throughout the city, sacralizing its spaces, gathering in numbers and strength, and inscribing their identity into the urban fabric itself.

Observers watched as great numbers of Florentines joined in behind their standard because that was what they were supposed to do when they saw it. They understood the power of the sign even without the standard-bearer, whose job it was to guard and protect it and the city it embodied. But as the Ciompi coursed through the city, bodies and images swelled into a new kind of community through the interaction of collective strength, political intimidation, and social anxiety.

\textit{5.7 Excursus II: An Empire of Signs/An Urban Semiotics}

The Standard of Justice was part of a constellation of communal flags whose appearance accompanied the foundation and re-assertion of successive popular regimes. These flags formed part of a whole range of visual signs that was overlaid onto the architectural armature of the city. These signs, which were made up primarily of flags and coats of arms, functioned within their own relatively coherent syntactic and representational system. They were a concrete semiotic system in which individual elements played metonymic and synecdochic roles in marking, defining, and orienting various groups and communities in space. Such communal flags were derived from ancient Roman military standards and, more than simply representing communities on the battlefield, they embodied them, as art historian Frank Fehrenbach has pointed out, like talismans, into which a community invested and derived its identity.\textsuperscript{1510} They also carried with them the ancient sacrality of ancient standards,

\textsuperscript{1509} Ibid., 141-42.
\textsuperscript{1510} Fehrenbach, "Leonardo's Fight for the Standard," 404.
which is most starkly shown in the labarum, the ancient standard created by
Constantine and described by Eusebius of Caesarea (Figure 23). It included the chi-ro
monogram of Christ along with profile portraits of the emperor and his two sons and
referred to the flaming cross in Constantine’s famous dream. Such a standard,
along with its name, was, therefore, also a holy object in and of itself. It did not have
to refer to something else, and its loss was, therefore, considered a disastrous event
whose unique status made its recovery tantamount to regaining a community’s
integrity.

However, as much as communal flags and arms in Florence participated in a
discourse of holy things in themselves, they were, at the same time, also
representations, signs that referred to things, to the fluid communities that came into
being alongside them. These signs could, under strict regulations, be copied,
elaborated upon, varied, and carved into walls. Caught between such strict aesthetic
legislation as well as containing the magical power of the relic, such arms did not
undergo much typological, or stylistic, development – there is a more or less fixed set
of symbols and colours and geometric shapes – and this may explain, according to
Fehrenbach, the lack of interest such images have had for art historians. However,
the art historical canon is littered with still-venerated miraculous images and
modernist geometrical configurations, both of which are deeply implicated in the
mystical. The iconography of flags and coats of arms, moreover, does not reside, for
the most part, in the images themselves but in their evolving relationships with others,
in their movement within the whole constellation of communal images that circulated
in the city.

---

1511 Ibid. See also Helmut Nickel, "Flags and Standards," in The Dictionary of Art, ed. Jane Turner,
1513 Ibid.
The bulk of these signs, of course, belong within the confines of heraldry, whose relationship to urban aesthetics has been seldom explored, especially in relation to communal arms and the Italian city-state, according to art historian Peter Seiler.\footnote{Seiler, "Kommunale Heraldik," 206.} This is so despite the ubiquity of urban signs, with or without arms, on architecture, in paintings, above altars, at corners, or under one’s feet, between neighbourhoods displayed on bridges, churches, city gates, private homes, coins, and books (Figure ). And these were only the fixed signs, which did not include those that moved through the city at the head of processions, on the backs of horses, on the clothing of people, with advancing armies, those given as gifts, or not so subtle mnemonic devices of just who was in charge of whom.

In an analysis of Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s fourteenth-century frescoes in the public palace of Siena, Randolph Starn noted the medieval republic’s mania for words and its propensity to generate texts. Monarchs had their secrets, but republics had their statutes.\footnote{Starn, "Room of Peace," 4.} Anyone who has ventured near a Florentine archive knows that the city was a republic of words. It was also, however, a vast empire of signs. As it produced laws, statutes, regulations, and prohibitions it was constantly re-creating, re-organizing, and reinforcing a range of officially sanctioned communities through the production of images, in the form of arms, emblazoned on flags.

Looking at such images is more, much more, than figuring out which arms decorate which images, and as Seiler is quick to point out, there is a lack of preliminary groundwork to construct a systematic and comprehensive overview of the significance of heraldic representation within the visual culture of the Italian communes. However, Seiler has begun to lay that groundwork, and it is his work that I want to follow in order to incorporate an even wider field of urban signs that bear
directly upon how communities, geographical as well as those based on class, occupation, or gender, were marked and maintained, and sometimes lost, by the circulation of visual signs.

The oldest, and in ways most sacred, sign of the city was linked to the union of two communities and was half-buried in civic myth. According the Villani, the dimezzata (Figure 5.25), dating to 1010, was the red and white standard that commemorated not the destruction of neighbouring Fiesole but the “trust and love” that its citizens bestowed upon the conquering Florentines. It combined the standards of the two cities, removing the sky blue moon from the white flag of Fiesole, and the white lily from the vermilion flag of Florence (Figure 5.25a). It was this flag that was carried by the Capitano del Popolo and also placed in the carroccio, the cart from which Florentine forces coordinated the theater of war visually, and, with the bell that accompanied the standard, acoustically as well (Figure 5.17).

Earlier in his chronicle, Villani located the origins of the Florentine communal flag in ancient Rome. He described how the shield appeared in sky in the time of Numa Pompilius (753-673 BC; king of Rome). According to legend, the shield was a gift from Mars and contained sacred letters concerning the fate of Rome from which eleven copies were made to form the ancilia, the bronze processional shields that determined the invincibility of Rome. For Villani, however, the shield was red and was taken as the flag of the city, to which the letters S.P.Q.R. were later added (Figure 5.26). In turn, this flag was then offered to Rome’s progeny, the cities that she built, such as Perugia, which added a white griffon (Figure 5.26a), Orvieto, which added a white eagle (Figure 5.26b), and Viterbo, which couldn’t seem to come up with anything and kept it as a red flag (Figure 5.26c).

---

1516 Villani, Nuova cronica, V, 7.
1517 Ibid., II, 3.
1518 Ibid. Notably, except for Florence, none of these cities were founded by Rome.
Florence, on the other hand, in honor of its legendary founder, the Roman general Fiorino, added a white lily (Figure 5.26d). With or without the lily, a version of this red flag led Florentines to victory in the Holy Land in 1188, and was then kept in the baptistery of San Giovanni. One of the most striking things about Florence and its flags is the deep attachment to vermilion, a red that predominated in fourteenth-century workshop practice in the production of cloth.\(^{1519}\) It was the dominant color in communal and military arms, as well as the dress of state and maintained, in myth at least, the city’s link visually to ancient Rome (Figures 5.27, 5.27a).

It was, according to Seiler, only in the thirteenth century that the visibility and number of communal arms dramatically increased in Florence, invading public, private and sacred spaces.\(^{1520}\) They detached themselves from their original medium of support and floated across the surface of the city, diversifying, differentiating, and reconfiguring new meanings. Before 1250, communal arms were relatively scarce but with the institution of the first popular government in that year, that scarcity was brought to a sudden end.\(^{1521}\) Immediately after its leaders drew up new laws and statutes, the flag frenzy began. They distributed twenty flags (gonfaloni) to twenty neighborhood militias (Figure 5.28).\(^{1522}\) Ninety-six more were given to the reorganized countryside, and six more to the combined cavalry of the six sestieri (Figure 5.28a). These did not include the flags bestowed upon the guardians of the carroccio (Figure 5.28b), the field mercato, the crossbowmen (Figure 5.28c), the pavesari (Figure 5.28d), archers (Figure 5.28e), supply units (Figure 5.28f), and sappers (Figure 5.28g). Immediately afterwards – in the very next sentence of Villani’s chronicle, they cast a bell and it was not long before they planned to build

---


\(^{1520}\) The following is based on Villani’s description of these arms in Villani, *Nuova cronica*, VII, 39, 40.

\(^{1522}\) Caggese, *Capitano (1322-25)*, V, lxxiii (pp. 262-64).
themselves a palace (Bargello), ordered the lowering of all private defensive towers to a uniform height, and used the resulting stones to reinforce the city across the river. Laws, flags, bells, and buildings or, to put it differently, words, images, sounds, and architecture, these were the primary building blocks of a political community.

Although the victorious Guelphs officially changed the arms of the commune to the red lily on a white background in 1251, they had already been assembling under it in the 1240s, while the Ghibellines decided to retain the older white lily on a red ground,\textsuperscript{1523} in use since at least since 1216.\textsuperscript{1524} In 1332, the new official flag is described with the \textit{rastrrello} (rake) of the arms of the Angevin King Robert (Figures 5.29-5.29b).\textsuperscript{1525} The \textit{dimezza}, on the other hand, which Villani had called the “principal flag of the Popolo”\textsuperscript{1526} was too sacred to change\textsuperscript{1527} and was brought out from its privileged place in the Baptistery by two white bulls when it was needed for military campaigns and fixed to the \textit{carroccio}, itself painted totally red, and was then known as the “great standard of the arms of the commune.”\textsuperscript{1528}

Significantly, this flag-producing regime was defeated precisely when the hand of its standard-bearer was cut off on the battle field, the flag fell, and the cavalry collapsed at Montaperti in 1260.\textsuperscript{1529} In exile, however, the defeated Guelf party received a major boost when Pope Clement IV, a subject of Charles of Anjou, bestowed upon them his own arms out of his deep love for them and hatred for the Holy Roman Emperor (Figures 5.30, 5.30a). This act transformed the battle between papacy and empire into a visual one, in which the dragons of the two coats of arms confronted each other whenever Florentine Guelphs assembled to defend their

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1523} Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VII, 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{1524} Ibid., VI, 40.
  \item \textsuperscript{1525} Ibid., XI, 214.
  \item \textsuperscript{1526} Ibid., VII, 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{1527} Ibid., VII, 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{1528} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{1529} Ibid., VII, 78.
\end{itemize}
community. The Florentines added a red lily above the head of the eagle who grasps a green serpent.\footnote{1530}

After the defeat of the Ghibellines and the rise of the guild-based republic in 1282, there were new laws – and new flags – to be designed and handed out. The first of these were the gonfalon of the seven major guilds, under which they would assemble to defend the new regime (Figure 5.31). Villani, of course, describes each one.\footnote{1531} The commune, therefore was reconceiving itself as a constellation of communities now based, not on the geography of neighborhoods but on the hierarchy of trades, imposing a more class-consciously based collective identity that set the stage for a long-running conflict between these two urban topographies. Nevertheless, the arms of the wool guild were exemplary for the way they interwove the manufacture of wool with divine protection and sought to link themselves to Christ, the city, and the Popolo (Figure 5.3).

The Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) was a fortuitous symbol. As a visual sign it functioned as a symbol of the risen Christ who had triumphed over death. In a Florentine context it is worth pointing out that it was John the Baptist, the city’s patron saint, who called Christ the Lamb of God (John 1:29). As a result, the lamb was often a symbol of the Baptist himself.\footnote{1532} As an image it also alluded to the animal whose fur was the source of the wool guild’s wealth. It is significant that Villani refers to the animal not as a lamb, but as a ram \textit{(montone)}, which links it to the animal that replaced the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham (Gen. 22:9).\footnote{1533} This lamb also carries a flag, a red cross on a white ground. The cross could refer to the one that the Baptist usually carries but it was also a standard associated with the risen Christ in visual

\begin{flushleft}
\footnote{1530}{Ibid., VIII, 2.}
\footnote{1531}{Ibid., VIII, 13.}
\footnote{1533}{Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, VIII, 13. Notably, Villani’s standard is on a red ground, which would make it more emphatically Florentine, although most representations of it are on blue.}
\end{flushleft}
representation since at least the twelfth century. His spirit was also believed to have been present in the banner itself, which drew upon and intensified the already sacred associations and status that flags always carried.\textsuperscript{1534} It is important to keep in mind that such signs, unlike other images, were not representations but the things themselves. It did not so much depict the Lamb of God as incorporate the lamb of god, embody its power, just as it incorporated, literally, the wool guild itself.\textsuperscript{1535} The image of a flag was always already a flag, so to speak.

In this case a coat of arms initiates a series of reflections, testing the limits of objecthood by representing arms within arms. The flag of the Popolo, which was also Christ’s military standard, is set within the arms of the guild whose duty it was to protect that community as representative of the commune of Florence, within which the guild’s legal status was bound. All of these associations would have been at play in the various ways and places these arms were found throughout the city, sanctifying the process and the product of the guild, as well as its civic and sacred relationships to power.

Members of this guild included members of the elite classes as well as non-elite members of the politically dominant and enfranchised class of the Popolo; both of whom were eligible to join guild corporations. Both of these groups were contrasted to the popolo \textit{minuto} (little people), who had no right to guild status and of which the Ciompi formed a significant part. If elected consuls and written statutes were the “two features that denoted a professional corporation’s legal status,”\textsuperscript{1536} then the feature that gave guilds a palpable urban presence – that which organized their collective form and distinguished them within a hierarchy and community of corporations – was their arms; in short, an image. This visual sign, marking the

\textsuperscript{1534} Fehrenbach, "Leonardo's Fight for the Standard," 405.
\textsuperscript{1535} Ibid., 404.
\textsuperscript{1536} Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 41.
territory of the wool guild’s charity, patrimony, and influence throughout the city would always symbolize to the Ciompi the impossibility of their own corporate identity. It was through their arms, therefore, that the rest of the city recognized the wool guild and this fact made such images so much more meaningful, relevant, and contentious wherever and however they appeared in the urban context.

Since 1288, this new Florentine regime had exercised its right to carry the arms of the Neapolitan King Charles of Anjou, which had become a major ensign of Florentine forces\(^{1537}\) and was grafted onto the new flag of the commune to form the ensign of the cavalry (*feditori*, Figures 5.32, 5.32a).\(^{1538}\)

The five middle guilds (*arti medie*) received flags in 1292 (Figure 5.33), while the Ordinances of justice, which were drawn up in 1293, enshrined the community of guilds as distinct from the disenfranchised magnates,\(^{1539}\) whose arms marked their deep associations to a family-based organization of feuding clans (Figure 5.33a). In opposition to these private arms, communal ones were attempts to mark out a continuous territory free of such particularist images by outlawing their presence in public spaces. It was at this point, notably, in the extended formation of the second popular government that the political community of the guilds cast for themselves another bigger, louder bell, and built themselves another, bigger, palace, today’s Palazzo Vecchio (Figure 5.34).\(^{1540}\)

The community of guilds was further complicated by the introduction of the red cross of the Popolo, which stood for, and with, a less clearly defined and

\(^{1537}\) Villani, *Nuova cronica*, VIII, 124.
\(^{1538}\) Ibid., VIII, 140.
\(^{1540}\) Along with the casting of bells, the production of visual signs was a constituent part of political community-building so that whenever a government changed or needed to consolidate its position, it almost always re-issued or remade the geography of the city, added new elements to the soundscape, and (re-)distributing more flags. On the phenomenon of casting bells and reforming the state see the discussion in chapter three.
sometimes violently contested community of the politically enfranchised that excluded both magnate guild members as well as a flagless, guild-less, popolo minuto, the bulk of the city’s unskilled or unincorporated workers. ¹⁵₄¹ This flag was first ceremonially given to the Florentine who held the office of Standard-Bearer of Justice (Gonfaloniere della Giustizia), the city’s highest civic official, in the church of San Piero Scheraggio in 1293. ¹⁵₄² This ritual act of giving literally transformed the flag from that of the Popolo (Gonfalone del Popolo) into the Standard of Justice (Gonfalone della Giustizia), a symbol that pointed to that community’s continual preoccupation with its claims to a universal justice as a way of extending its jurisdiction, though not necessarily its membership, to every corner of the city (Figure 5.22).

At the time, banners were also attached to the city’s neighborhoods with fifty foot soldiers attached to each one who were to be armed and carry a shield with the same red cross. It was specifically this flag that was brought out by this militia, which grew to 4,000 men, to confront the grandi, the magnates against whom the Popolo was building its republic. And the first such use of the Popolo’s arms as the Standard of Justice was to dismantle the properties of the Galli clan, for murder. ¹⁵₄₃

In 1303, among the ways in which the Cardinal of Prato attempted to forge a peace between the city’s factions was his renewal of nineteen of the original twenty standards of the militia companies of 1250 by re-issuing their flags. This time however, they were deprived of their rake (rastrrello), which had linked them to the sign of the Angevin kings. ¹⁵₄₄ By 1306, this government felt the need to fortify itself

---

¹⁵₄¹ On the complicated collective identity of the Popolo see Najemy, A History of Florence, 35-62. See also Salvemini, Magnati e popolani.
¹⁵₄² Villani, Nuova cronica, IX, 1.
¹⁵₄₃ Ibid.
¹⁵₄₄ Ibid., IX, 69. It is not exactly clear why the twentieth gonfalone was dropped. Villani notes that when they were re-issued with the rastrrello, one of them, the “balzano” (horizontal white and black stripes), was left out, though he gives no explanation as to why. Considering its iconography, however,
and ordered Florentines to follow these reinstated geographically-based flags, instead of those of the twenty-one guilds, on the feast of St. John the Baptist, the most important Florentine civic holiday.\footnote{Villani, \textit{Nuova cronica}, IX, 87.} Significantly, the \textit{rastrello} was re-assigned to them in a move which, for Villani, recalled with nostalgia, the \textit{``popolo vecchio''} of 1250 (Figure 5.35). This subtle change in the flags’ design looked back to a time in the Popolo’s past that was, in collective memory, not yet plagued by its current factional strife; when the enemy was clearly the now long-defeated Ghibellines. It was a time before civil protection was demanded of the guild corporations by the much more class-conscious second popular government, which was now, by the changed regime of signs, indirectly implicated for sowing the seeds of communal discord, of being anti-community. And then they cast themselves another, even bigger bell, the \textit{campana magna}, the largest bell the city had ever seen, or heard.

In attempts to fortify its position in the midst of threatening events involving the upper classes, the Popolo issued fifty-six more flags in 1323, three or four per district.\footnote{Ibid., X, 219.} Notably, this coincided with the important compilation, or re-issuing, of communal laws and statutes, and it followed right on the heals of the successful instalment of a mechanism that reduced the number of men required to ring the commune’s newest and biggest bell from twelve to two.\footnote{The relevant statutes were compiled between 1322 and 1325. The mechanism for the large bell, the \textit{campana magna}, is discussed in chapter three.} What is also significant is that it testifies to how Florentines imagined that they were the draped in multiple and overlapping fluid identities that could quite happily coexist depending on where one was at a particular time.
Reading political conflict through the appearance, proliferation, movement, and disappearance of visual signs in the urban environment was a critical skill for Florentines, who were able to detect subtle changes in the landscape through them. Amidst political strife in 1342, the Popolo suspended its regime of signs during the brief and unfortunate rule of Walter of Brienne, the Duke of Athens. He replaced the arms of the commune in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio with his own, which were also painted throughout the city on almost every street corner.\footnote{Villani, Nuova cronica, XIII, 3.} As noted above, the Duke was also given to consorting with the popolo minuto, organizing them into military processional units and giving them flags. However, such communities would live and die by the existence of those images unless they could invest that visual sign with a distinct sense of their own identity. So they would all, except for the Ciompi, disappear along with the Duke in 1343, when the city was ritually cleansed of his insulting arms (Figure 5.35a).

In the fresco that celebrated the Duke’s expulsion – introduced above – his arms can be seen lying in disgrace at the feet of St. Anne, who is returning, or receiving, the dimezzata, the two-colored ensign that contained the most universal idea of what Florence was as a single, united community against all foreign enemies (Figure 5.7). It is flanked by two flags – the standards of the commune and the Popolo (Justice) – which derived from it and with which they tried to both distinguish and associate themselves at the same time. This created a united visual ensemble of the Popolo’s ideal of community and justice that was universalist in its rhetoric but often particularist in its application.

Urban dwellers knew that the relationship between images and the communities they identified and bound together had to be continually reinforced by flags, wherein they were re-designed, re-issued, re-distributed, or re-captured. For
example, in Giovanni Sercambi’s fourteenth-century chronicle of his native Lucca, art historians Max Seidel and Romano Silva have pointed out how he is able to represent “the rapid succession of foreign powers that dominated Lucca from 1314 to 1370” (figs 5.36-5.36e).\textsuperscript{1549} Amidst the dense vertical cityscape formed by the city’s many towers are flags bearing the arms of the della Scala family of Verona, the Holy Roman Emperor, the Visconti of Milan, and commune of Pisa, among others. They crowd out the arms of Lucca itself, which are almost lost in the confusion.\textsuperscript{1550} Below, suspended from the walls, are those very same flags hanging upside down in disgrace. Sercambi castigates every type of foreign domination, one by one, and shows them, in a series of images, as one flag toppling from the tower and another rising in its place; culminating in the liberty of communal autonomy which is represented by a flag itself (Figures 5.37-5.37b). The fluidity of tyrannical rulership is set against the unassuming solidity of the Lucca as an urban community, whose arms and the architectural edifice they mark remain unchanged in each visual sequence. As long as this flag remained, the urban community it represented held ranks, remained intact, and persevered.

The flag was symbolic of communal identity but it was also, at the same time, the agent of a community’s survival, a relationship evident in the shameful defeat of Florentine forces at the battle of Altopascio in 1325. According to Villani, everything had been going rather well for the multi-national army the Florentines had assembled, A unit of cavalry, the feditori, even broke through enemy lines but the remaining mounted troops did not follow in support because the mercenary captain bungled the flag (Figure 5.32a) by turning it the wrong way. This caused the supporting mounted troops to turn and flee in dismay just when Villani believe that the battle could have been won. Instead, the Florentine forces were routed in a matter of hours and the

\textsuperscript{1549} Max Seidel and Romano Silva, \textit{The Power of Images, the Images of Power: Lucca as an Imperial City: Political Iconography}, (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007), 24.

\textsuperscript{1550} These arms were adopted after the city won autonomy from Emperor Charles IV in 1369.
captured royal ensigns of Florence were hung upside down in shame in the captured 
*carroccio*, behind which were paraded the Florentine prisoners of war.\footnote{1551} A flag, a 
coat of arms, some form of visible sign was indeed necessary for the community’s 
survival, but it could not guarantee it. Its position and direction of movement were 
indices of just where such a community was located, and where it might be heading.

In an analogous way to the manner in which Sercambi portrayed Lucca’s 
steadfastness in the face of successive waves of foreign domination, Florence 
reconfigured itself under its newly restored communal arms with the popular reforms 
in the wake of the duke’s expulsion. The sexpartite topography of the city was re- 
organized into quarters, which necessitated, of course, the introduction of new district 
flags centered on the great mendicant shrines, along with the baptistery, each of which 
were divided into four districts (*gonfalonii*) (Figures 5.38-5.38a).\footnote{1552} Most of the 
parish-based flags were integrated into the new system, but, besides the mysterious 
disappearance of the *balzana* in 1306, gone were two lions, the black eagle, and the 
horse and rider (*cavaluccio*), while the unicorn was added to make a total of sixteen. 
At the same time (1344), the bell of the Popolo was transferred from its position in the 
roof of the palace to the tower, so that it could be better heard in the Oltrarno, home to 
the most despised elements of the *popolo minuto*.\footnote{1553} This high concentration of 
official signs was only the beginning, however. Florentines lived within a dense field 
of signs that confronted them, organized them, located them, protected them, excluded 
them, welcomed them, taxed them, and decorated them.

The government also attempted to fix its presence in certain places more 
permanently, with immobile arms on public buildings, city gates, churches, civic

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{1551} Villani, *Nuova cronica*, X, 306.
\item \footnote{1552} “Statuti del Capitano (1355),” II, iii.
\item \footnote{1553} Villani, *Nuova cronica*, XIII, 36.
\end{itemize}
sculpture, and even taverns (Figures 5.39-5.39b). 1554 The statutes reveal that there was a clear of sense of what constituted acceptable subject matter for public walls. Private arms were generally banned from public spaces and no city officials or foreign rector were permitted to display their arms on their palaces or homes, or the city’s gates. 1555 The building and the office belonged to him only in his capacity as a temporary official and, therefore, laws suspended his right to mark them with private arms, since the commune surrounded and dressed him in its own. 1556 No official was allowed to encroach upon this emerging circulation of public signs, whose distribution was controlled by the government and only under these officially recognized arms could citizens gather *en masse.* 1557

For the commune, the built surfaces of the city were, in fact, a vast canvas for the mediation of images whose subject matter they sought to strictly to control. No one could substitute someone else’s arms for their own, and painters were prohibited from painting any arms other than those for whom they were employed. 1558 It was not only arms, however, that were regulated in the public sphere but any image at all. A general ban on graffiti ordered the removal, at the expense of the commune, of any offending images already painted or carved into public buildings unless, of course, they were images of Christ, his mother, her mother (St. Anne), any other saint of the Roman church, the pope, King Charles, or any of his Angevin descendents. Images that commemorated military victories, such as the taking of a city or fortress by Florence, were also considered acceptable. Coats of arms had to be communal or of the Angevin kings but the mixing of media, combining individual arms with those of

---

1554 "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, lxxxviii. “Et che ciascuno taverniere o che vendi vino a minuto debba avere et tenere una insegna col campo bianco et col giglio vermiglio acciò che si possano conoscere li vendenti vino a minuto e possa di cercare più lievemente de’ giuochi vietati.”

1555 Ibid., III, cc.

1556 Communal arms had to always be returned to the commune after one’s tenure. See Ibid., IV, viii.

1557 "Statuti del Capitanò (1355)," II, xxvii.

the royal house, was not permitted.\textsuperscript{1559} Ironically, the iconography of exterior public spaces allowed by law in Florence would not have been radically different, in terms of subject matter, from the images one would have seen inside many churches or public buildings.

The commune treated public images with regard to public morality, banning base or undignified images on walls at the same time they banned such speech, especially during solemn processions. Defamatory public images were instead a monopoly of the state.\textsuperscript{1560} Evidence dating back to the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries attests to the popularity of such images, which were closely connected to the office of the Podestà, who took on the role of communal patron, commissioning images representing the commune’s fugitive enemies of state painted on the exterior of his palace.\textsuperscript{1561} Here, the private arms of Duke of Athens and his traitorous counselors could be freely displayed in a context of shame.

Such polemical images could also provoke pictorial responses, however. In the late fourteenth century, the commune ordered the image of Ridolfo da Camerino, a traitorous mercenary, to be painted on the palace, upside down on the gallows and giving the finger to signs representing the church and the city of Florence. A contemporary chronicler described Ridolfo’s response by painting Florence’s Eight of War in a toilet. Ridolfo plays the role of the devil and the inscription reads: “I am Ridolfo da Camerino, and I shit in the throat of the Eight of War.” Such images were, perhaps, precisely what the commune of Florence feared the most on the public buildings of their own city, degrading the ideal and sacred communities they were trying to assemble. Communal signs, emblems, banners, and arms, therefore, were

\textsuperscript{1559} Caggesi, Capitano (1322-25), V, cviii.
\textsuperscript{1560} This is evideent in legislation against image production during the Ciompi revolt. See "cronaca prima," 85.
\textsuperscript{1561} Edgerton, Pictures and Punishment, 74.
part of the arsenal of the commune in its efforts to impose a strong and decorous visual presence of the commune on buildings and in spaces throughout the city by banning the personal expression of petty rivalries along with the display of private arms in certain places.\footnote{Seiler, "Kommunale Heraldik," 217 ff.}

The adoption of private arms, however, was not a communal concession. According to the fourteenth century jurist, Bartolus of Sassoferrato, anyone could adopt a coat of arms, since they functioned like names, which people had every right to choose.

Some assume coats of arms and insignia on their own initiative, and we should consider whether they are permitted to do it. I think that they are permitted. Just as names are created to identify persons, so insignia and coats of arms are devised for this purpose. Anyone is permitted to use such names for himself and thus anyone can bear these insignia and depict them on his own belongings, but not on another’s.\footnote{Bartolo da Sassoferrato, \textit{A Grammar of Signs: Bartolo da Sassoferrato’s Tract on Insignia and Coats of Arms}, ed. Osvaldo Cavallar, Susanne Degener, and Julius Kirshner, (Berkeley: Robbins Collection, University of California at Berkeley, 1994), 145-46. “Quidam tamen arma seu insignia sua propria auctoritate assumunt sibi, et istis an liceat videndum est. Et puto quod liceat. Sicut enim nomina inventa sunt ad recognoscendum homines ut C. de ingenuis manumissis, I. ad recognoscendos (Cod. 7. 14. 10), ita et ista insignia inventa sunt, ff. de rerum dicisione, I. sanctum (Dig. I. 8. 8). Sed talia nomina licet cuilibet sibi imponere ad placitum, ut dicta I. ad recognoscendos (Dig. I. 8. 8), et ff. de [lege Cornelia de] falsis, I. falsi (Dig. 48. I. 13), in principio. Ista ista insignia cuilibet licet portare et depingere in suo tantum non in alieno, ut C. ut nemini liceat sine iudicis auctoritate, I. ii (Cod. 2. 16/17). 2), et ibi notatur per glossam, facit extra, de excessibus prelatorum, c. dilecta (X. 5. 31. 14), et quod ibi notatur per glossam.”}

Bartolus goes on to argue that, just as many persons can choose the same name, anyone can assume the arms of another because “the sign someone bears is not really identical to the same sign borne by another; rather, they are different, although they might appear to be alike.”\footnote{Ibid., 146.} Therefore, arms denoted one’s ownership of things,
but the arms in turn did not belong to those they denoted. This was the case even though the same arms were inflected in different ways by those who bore them, just as names were. Bartolus displays a very subtle and sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of arms as “signs” in a wider image-based system of references in which identities were constantly being negotiated. Arms acted like signs in the way that their meaning, the things to which they referred, were dependent on the context in which they were found. They were never identical because they were modified by the character, behavior, and reputation of those who chose them.

However, in practice, as Bartolus was aware, the behavior and reputations of others who took the same arms would necessarily have repercussions on those whose arms were, on the surface, the same.\textsuperscript{1565} This problem was reflected in Florentine law, which prohibited one from painting the arms of another person on one’s things, of marking oneself with them in a way that injured others.\textsuperscript{1566} In other words, what was prohibited was the misuse of the images that designated others, which disrupted the tenuous connection between images and one’s identity. One was not complete without the other. Such regulations about one’s visual identity in the city shows how that identity was contingent upon, belonged even, to the signs that one wore; just as a man could not go through the city dressed as a woman, nor a woman as a man.\textsuperscript{1567} The problem was not so much the concept of self-fashioning, but of mis-fashioning one’s self with signs that belonged to other individuals or larger collectives. One was completely free to choose one’s personal symbols but heavily restricted in their display. Communal signs, on the other hand, proliferated everywhere, interweaving an urban community together in space, while hovering independently above it, designating everyone and belonging to no one.

\textsuperscript{1565} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1566} Caggese, \textit{Podestà (1325)}, III, lxx; "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, cxx.
\textsuperscript{1567} "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," IV, cv.
Communal arms had to generate the authority of the commune when its representatives were not present. They articulated the constant negotiations between a particular idea of public space against a more general notion of individual rights to self-promotion. In other words the state was in the business of controlling the means to self-fashioning through a constant regulation of the visual environment. If one imagines the urban architectural armature as a vast material support, then communal arms overlaid a vast topography of signs onto it, transforming the city itself into an image on the horizontal plain that contrasted with the vertical image of the commune as a configuration of palaces and towers.

Flags and their design, therefore, had to remain independent of individuals, while remaining attached to the mechanisms of state. As Ulrich Meier has pointed out, it was the political office itself, and not the person, that possessed authority and dignity in Florence.\textsuperscript{1568} It was not the clothing of state – its images, robes, and objects – that were changed, but the bodies within them. This is dramatized in the stunning silence of the city’s priors, which was outlined in chapter 3 (Figures 5.27a, 5.40). They had to be visible but were not heard in rituals of state and they were the focus of a spectacle in which citizens watched them enter into the palace where they were sequestered for the duration of their term.\textsuperscript{1569} Inside, they also sat in silence while counseled, then deliberated, behind closed doors. They even voted secretly, handing a white (against) or a black (for) bean to the friars, their trusted secretaries, who placed them in the ballot box (bossole).\textsuperscript{1570} They did not speak when they sat in public while news and proclamations were read out.\textsuperscript{1571} In effect, individuals in positions of power were absorbed by the visual apparatus of the state; into the choreography of signs that

\textsuperscript{1568} Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit," 260.
\textsuperscript{1569} Dati, "Istoria," IX, 5-6 (p. 278).
\textsuperscript{1570} Ibid., 279.
\textsuperscript{1571} Meier, "Die Sicht- und Hörbarkeit," 255.
followed them everywhere and gave shape and tone to urban space. It was not the
world transformed into a picture, but pictures transformed into a world, an ideal world
caselessly in negotiation with irksome urban realities.

Such an ideal image of the city, protected by its arms and the institutions they
embodied, found expression in a fourteenth-century image in the palace of the Guild
of Judges and Notaries (Figures 5.41, 5.41a). This fragment of a larger cycle of
images, which might be said to represent Florence’s version of “Good Government”
frescoes, contrasts significantly with that of Siena in that (Figure 5.42) there are no
people, no female allegories, no human activity. The city is represented as a series of
radiating communities condensed into their visual signs. In the center are the four
aspects of a single united city: Florence, the commune, the Popolo, and the Parte
Guelfa (Figure 5.43). They are flanked by the symbols of the four quarters and ringed
by the sixteen gonfaloni, which are, in turn, surrounded by a two rings of twenty-one
images representing the city’s guilds (Figures 5.43a-5.43c). With extensive
deterioration of the painted surface, only several of the guild arms are visible and they
are surrounded by niches that once contained images of their respective patron saints.
All of these images are then enclosed within circular, idealized fortified walls, whose
towers point inwards (Figure 5.43d). In Florence, in contrast to Siena, it was not
abstract concepts such as the seven virtues, the “common good” (ben comune), peace,
or even the various types of justice that guaranteed a well-governed city, but ideal
communities; precisely as they were combined and ordered by communal symbols,
divided into geographic neighborhoods, and recombined into a protective ring of
guilds. This circular configuration resists, of course, the hierarchy built into the guild
system, where the seven major guilds received the most political representation and
represented a numerical minority. However, the order, in a counter clockwise
movement, of the few guild arms that are visible, reintroduces the conventional hierarchy of the seven major, five middle, and nine minor guilds.\footnote{1572}

A comparison of the representation of justice between Siena and Florence helps to mark the differences between the two pictorial cycles. Justice is represented as an image three separate times in Siena’s Sala della Pace (Figure 5.42). On the far right of the north wall, the so-called Allegory of Good Government, Justice is represented among a pantheon of virtues, arranged as counsellors might be to a powerful sovereign, the \textit{ben comune}, or as a heavenly court of apostles in judgement around a benevolent, if mute and remote, Christ-like figure. She holds a crown in her left hand and a sword in her right, its pommel resting on a decapitated head. In contrast to Justice, who stares off into space over the left shoulder of the viewer, the head’s eyes are closed. On the left Justice is rendered in action (Figure 5.44). She gazes upwards, not seeing directly the justice her hands are meting out – retributive on the left, commutative on the right.\footnote{1573} The scales are balanced from the apex of her head, while her hands intervene with what seems to be a stabilizing gesture. Instead of evidence or figures of the accused, the scales contain angels representing concepts of equal weight. The words that bind these two forms of justice together visually, though

\footnote{1572} This ordering of the guilds is repeated in the vault of the Sala dei Consoli in the palace of the silk guild. Although it may have once provided a useful comparison of guild hall decoration, only traces of this fourteenth-century vault decoration remained when it was radically repainted in the nineteenth century. Reading from the star of the Judges and Notaries, counter clockwise, the seven major guilds appear, followed by the five middle guilds, and then the nine minor ones. This appears to be the conventional ordering, since Dati names the major guilds in the exact same order. He combines the rest into minor guilds although he names four of the five middle guilds first. See Dati, "Istoria," IX, 1 (p. 277).

\footnote{1573} Commutative justice is often paired with distributive justice since the former consigns what is due to individuals and the latter gives what is due to the collective, or defines what is just in general. The term \textit{iustitia commutativa} was widely used by Aquinas (e.g., \textit{Summa} 2a2ae, q. 61, a.1) and other medieval philosophers, who derived it from the thirteenth-century translation of the Greek term \textit{synallagma} in Aristotle’s famous definition \textit{t\ en to\ is synallagmasi diorhōtikon dikaion}, that is, corrective justice in private transactions (\textit{Nicomachean Ethics} 1131a1).}
not grammatically – “love justice you who judge the earth”— was a medieval commonplace taken from the opening verse of the Book of Wisdom.\textsuperscript{1574}

The third image of Justice is bound at the feet of the allegory of Tyranny and looks down in despair at what appears to be one of her scales that lies broken on the ground to her right where a standing figure holds one of the torn cords of the scale in her left hand and a cord that may have been used to whip the conquered allegorical figure (Figure 5.44a). Ironically, none of the figures is blindfolded.

In addition, Justice is mentioned or referred to at least six times throughout the room’s inscriptions. Such repetitions demonstrate a marked, if conventional, anxiety about the role of justice in the ideal republic as well as its status in urban experience; its relationship to governance, its power both to give rise to and maintain the integrity of the state, as well as its inherent weakness in the face of urban corruption. The corresponding scenes of urban life subsequently illustrate how justice has a direct causal relationship to the experience and maintenance of urban space and architecture – expansion and development on the one hand, abandonment and deterioration on the other (Figures 5.45, 5.45a). Such a relationship between social conditions and architectural order recalls, visually, the textual architectural metaphor Boccaccio deploys in the Decameron to make the response to the plague more comprehensible; neither abandoned and empty buildings, nor those that were completely sealed up, functioned as viable architecture. As such, architecture was the structural base of any urban society. It bore the burden of materializing the destructive aspects of social

breakdown and political corruption precisely because such physical deterioration was far from merely being metaphorical. The built environment could never be separated from the social relations formed within and across it.

In the Florentine fresco – and I am aware that a comprehensive reading of the whole program may never be possible, given its ruinous state – the concept of Justice would have only been alluded to. It was bound up in the flag of the Popolo, which became the Standard of Justice only when Justice was in the act of being carried out in the streets. In other words, Justice was literally attached to a community of Florentines, whether it was official governmental authorities or the Ciompi in revolt – linking it to a class of men and a community of guilds.\textsuperscript{1575} Rather than residing in a relatively sightless, abstract female allegory, it was embedded within an ideal community that gives rise to an ideal city. As a cross it sanctified that community as a privileged Christian one, and it formed part of a circular hierarchy of different and interconnected communities that, by its location in a central vault, secularized the hierarchy of heavenly angels in the mosaics of the Florentine baptistery.\textsuperscript{1576} The circular order of the walls, moreover, recalls both Villani’s idealized topography of a symmetrically arranged and measured city – discussed in chapter two – as well as the schematic images one often finds in medieval maps of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem (Figure 46). The configuration of guild arms and patron saint, moreover,

\textsuperscript{1575} The rest of the fresco decoration appears to, in fact, represent heavenly figures such as saints, along with iconic-like images of aspects of justice. Nothing particularly narrative appears to emerge but the schematic rendering of the city contains within it a coherent urban structure, whatever its ultimate thematic relations to the rest of the decoration may have been.
\textsuperscript{1576} This theme of the sanctified city may have been augmented by the image, now lost, that was contained in the central roundel of the vault. The vault of the palace of the silk guild contains an identical visual format and places the papal keys in the center. If that was the original design of both of these images, it would have strengthened the Parte Guelfa’s role, as the party favoring ties to the pope, in the construction of urban order. It would also have replaced the heavenly apex of the vault with its earthly mediator, which stands over the city’s communities as the one to which all, as Christians, belonged. The virtually identical schema of these programs also suggests that the concept of justice was not necessarily only the purview of the guild that was dedicated to it as a matter of professional practice but also resided in urban politics, and by extension, at least symbolically, in the community at large.
recalls the same configuration that forms the exterior facades of Orsanmichele, incorporating that building into a more complex system of urban monuments that embodied the idea of the city in directly visual ways, reminding Florentines of just who they were as an urban community (Figures 5.11c, 5.11d). Justice in the Florentine context was bound up in an image but it was an image that would actually have been carried through the city and whose movement was a way of linking architecture, space, and political communities together. Buildings without functioning social communities were empty shells, as Boccaccio had already understood.

Such an ideal representation also erased the conflict between Florence’s political communities and their role in forming and protecting the state, absorbing them into a fortified tripartite structure: government, topography, labor. But just as armies might fall at the loss of their flags, such signs were empty without the communities they marked. This is made clear in a novella by Franco Sacchetti, where the mercenary captain of Lucca, Castruccio Castracane, chastises one of his attendants after the latter had proudly demonstrated his fighting prowess by detaching a Florentine lily from the wall of a conquered fortress.1577 Castruccio punishes him by ordering him to confront and fight against a lily that actually had a fighting body behind it. The unfortunate attendant was immediately impaled by that lily and fell down dead. Castruccio wasted this unfortunate life because he wanted to make an example to his troops. He turned to them and declared that he wanted them to fight against the living and not the dead. In other words, arms without the communities that breathed life into them were only so much archaeological refuse. The sign without its referent was a dead image.

1577 Sacchetti, Il trecentonovele.
5.8 La Città rifatta “per le mani del popolo minuto”

After having diverged into an analysis of what those very arms and flags meant in historical context, I would like to continue where I left the Ciompi: holding the Standard of Justice and processing through the city. As the revolutionaries paraded through the city for the next two days, they broadened their support, attracting to their ranks other elements of the disenfranchised popolo minuto, minor guildsmen, disaffected elements of the major guilds and even members of the most elite social groups. As they did, one could not miss the symbolic importance of first burning the house of the Standard-Bearer of Justice, the supreme executive magistrate whose office represented the Popolo’s claim to the terms of justice embodied in that standard under which the citizen militia assembled. Fire and the destruction of architectural patrimony had been established by the Popolo as fundamental elements in their multi-pronged approach to justice, grounded in class terms when they redacted the Ordinances of Justice in 1293.\footnote{1578} They had long been an effective means by which both the Florentine government and rival factions had sought to undermine the power of their enemies.

Chroniclers made it clear that Florentines learned to interpret the meaning of fires in terms of socio-spatial struggle (Figure 5.47). For example, in 1177, the Uberti clan was generally blamed for fires that broke out in the places where their enemies were most powerful.\footnote{1579} In 1304, both Villani and Compagni watched as 1900 buildings burned in the center of Florence, clearly aware how it was framed and would affect the current political crisis.\footnote{1580} Similarly, the destruction of property also became an official form of urbanism, one in which the city could be redesigned in order to

\footnote{1578} The first person to hold the Standard of Justice, Baldo de’ Ruffoli, destroyed the properties of the Galli clan for murder, in 1293. On the policies against the magnate class entrenched in the Ordinances, see Najemy, A History of Florence, 81-87.\footnote{1579} Davidsohn, Storia, I, 825.\footnote{1580} Compagni, Cronica, III, 8; Villani, Nuova cronica, IX, 71.
accommodate an emerging political ethos. The destroyed property of the Uberti, an unruly magnate family, was a lesson in civic ideology. Left in ruins as a monument of shame to the violence that ensued after their failed attempt to take the city in 1258,\textsuperscript{1581} this desecrated urban space was eventually re-sanctified when it was transformed into the city’s main square, the Piazza della Signoria, of which it still forms part, one of the primary sites of the spectacle of republican politics. The Ciompi, therefore, were continuing a tradition with deep urban roots.

However, what the chroniclers notice, without exception, is that the disciplined Ciompi almost never permitted any looting.\textsuperscript{1582} Their targets were so well-defined that they could be translated by observers into familiar lists of names and locations. They even tore down some structures to avoid burning others in the vicinity\textsuperscript{1583} and they were ready to discipline anyone who might try to save things from the fire and make off with private goods,\textsuperscript{1584} having erected a scaffold in the piazza for that purpose.\textsuperscript{1585} Therefore, these acts claimed the authority of historical precedents but tempered and refined the politics and topography of politically motivated arson.

\textsuperscript{1581} Davidson, Storia, II, I, 651-53.
\textsuperscript{1582} "Lettera d’anonimo," 141-42, and 43; Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 24; "Cronica terza d’anonimo (1378 - 1382)," in \emph{Il Tumulto dei Ciompi - cronache e memorie}, ed. Gino Scaramella, (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1917), 130. Contents were even left inside burning houses specifically so that no one could loot them. Even money and precious objects were burned, showing how the uprising was political and had obviously been planned in advance; see "Cronaca seconda," 108. Compare these accounts to that of the fires set the previous June, where looting occurred everywhere; see "Cronaca seconda," 107-08; "Cronaca terza," 129; Simone Peruzzi, "Ricordanza di Simone Peruzzi dell’Ufficio degli Otto della guerra (June 1378)," in \emph{Il Tumulto dei Ciompi - cronache e memorie}, ed. Gino Scaramella, (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1917), 49; Ser Nofri di Ser Piero delle Riformagioni, "Cronaca (1378 - 1380)," in \emph{Il Tumulto dei Ciompi - cronache e memorie}, ed. Gino Scaramella, (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1917), 55; Stefani, \emph{Cronica fiorentina}, r. 792, p. 319. The popolo minuto even knew who was renting which houses and who were the owners, which affected their acts of destruction; see Stefani, \emph{Cronica fiorentina}, r. 792, p. 319. Ser Nofri is the only one to claim that houses were looted on July 20; see Riformagioni, "Cronaca," 57. The only real exception was public property, such as the Palace of the Podesta and the headquarters of the wool guild, where the rioters burned documents but were not accused of theft, despite the fact that even this may have been an exaggeration. See "cronaca prima," 75; "Cronaca terza," 130.
\textsuperscript{1583} Guido Monaldi, Istorie pistolesi, ed. Antonio Maria Biscioni, (Florence: Stamperia di Sua Altezze Reale per G. G. Tartini e S. Franchi, 1733), 453.
\textsuperscript{1584} Stefani, \emph{Cronica fiorentina}, r. 795, p. 322.
\textsuperscript{1585} Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 26.
Having begun to transform the urban fabric of Florence through sound and fire, the Ciompi were then able to forge the constituent elements of a corporate identity out of the built environment itself by moving through the city with the Standard of Justice, which was a necessary aspect of rulership, as Trexler has demonstrated.\textsuperscript{1586} The flag belonged less to those who managed to get hold of it than to those who held it and thus had access to the authority over space that it embodied, not as a representation, but as the thing itself.

The next day, the decision was made by a part of the uprising to take the Palace of the Podestà (Figure 5.48). This was the place of the both civil and criminal courts and the residence of the city’s foreign judicial magistrate, the Podestà. With them they brought all the gonfalonii along with the Standard of Justice,\textsuperscript{1587} and the flags of the seven major guilds; all those images that constituted the composite image of the ideal commune.\textsuperscript{1588} However, the Podestà’s men put up stiff resistance, raining down rocks and shooting the crowd below with crossbows. Once again, the popolo minuto quickly adapted their use of the bell tower as the central staging element in their struggle. They were able to gain access to the campanile of the neighboring Badia and send up their own crossbowmen to attack the palace from the nearby tower (Figure 48a). However, even battling between towers – a venerable Florentine tradition – they could still not advance on the palace due to the volleys of stones so they resorted to fire; taking tables of the albergatori (innkeepers), they set them on fire against the palace doors. The Podestà was finally convinced to surrender and was allowed to leave with his staff.\textsuperscript{1589}

\textsuperscript{1586} Trexler, "Follow the Flag."
\textsuperscript{1587} Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 27.
\textsuperscript{1588} "Cronaca seconda," 112.
\textsuperscript{1589} "cronaca prima," 75.
Gaining access to the bell tower of one of the city’s most important and prestigious religious institutions in the middle of a battle, along with the fact that the Ciompi had been able to coordinate their movements through the calculated use of several other towers, suggests that they had both deep neighborhood and spiritual ties to such institutions and had formed bonds of trust. I can only speculate here, but even though the popolo minuto were excluded from political life, they were still parishioners and neighbors, friends and family members, concentrated in neighborhoods throughout the city. They existed both within and without urban hierarchies. They moved through a topography that both excluded and accepted them at various levels so that their topographies overlapped with their zones of exclusion. They confronted the arrangement of buildings and spaces in the city and witnessed the ritual acts that made those spaces symbolically meaningful. It was their ties as members of a Christian collective that they were able to exploit against the civic structures and communities that excluded them.

What the popolo minuto did then demonstrated their acute sense of how transforming the visual order of the cityscape was integral to transforming their place in it. From the windows of the palace they draped the Standard of Justice along with all the flags of the major and minor guilds, with one exception; namely, the flag of the hated wool manufacturers guild.\textsuperscript{1590} In doing so, the Ciompi and their allies reversed the process of exclusion and demonstrated how the regime could be reordered to include their corporate identity through the appropriation and redesign of the palace façade. It was a gesture of immense loyalty to the ideal of the Florentine republic, and a damning indictment of the obstacle impeding their political franchise. The fact that the wool guild’s absence was noticed was a sign of the efficacy of the message.

\textsuperscript{1590} Ibid. The flag of the blacksmiths was placed at the top of the tower, suggesting that they played a major role in this episode of the revolt.
The new design also communicated their idea of the new political order, which was given concrete form by the petitions they would soon send to the Palace of the Priors (Palazzo Vecchio). It was not, however, a world simply turned upside down as imagined in the facezia of the fifteenth-century humanist Poliziano referred to above. Instead, it was a political world in which a large swath of textile workers was liberated from the laws that bound them to the oppressive control of the wool guild. Rather than annihilating the city, the Ciompi were recasting its image, taking part in urbanistic practices in which the city was constantly redesigned. They were demanding and imagining, through the art of façade decoration that the promise of corporate political recognition be extended to a larger body of the city’s laborers. They embraced the universal idea of corporate representation and its architectural design, while they rejected the particularist tendencies that limited those goals for many.\textsuperscript{1591} However, if this goal of enfranchisement was not revolutionary in the modern sense of the word – which is the projection of a historical anachronism onto groups that would never have participated in post-industrial ideology – then what was revolutionary was their concept of proportional representation; that numbers mattered and that, therefore, the minor guilds with the largest membership ought to have more equitable political representation.\textsuperscript{1592} And precisely because they excluded the wool guild from the new symbolic order on the palace, the Ciompi could make conspicuous the corporation that was the obstacle to their own independent corporate and political claims.

However, one must keep in mind the larger pictorial program that contemporaries would have seen represented across the surface of the palace’s façade.

\textsuperscript{1591} The petitions called for the creation of a single new guild of textile workers. See Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 28. Ultimately, within days, these trades would be organized into three new minor guilds of skilled industrial workers, other artisans in the clothing trade, and the largest, which comprised basically those that the Florentines recognized as Ciompi; see Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 165.\textsuperscript{1592} "Cronaca seconda," 110.
It is all too easy to forget not only that hanging banners from windows already part of the visual tradition of civic festivals, but also that the Bargello itself was more permanently decorated with images on its exterior walls. Therefore, these banners would have also been juxtaposed to certain effigies of shame, which are now lost. As mentioned above, these *piture infamanti* were a standing reminder of the city’s enemies, especially the Duke of Athens, whose image, along with six counselors, was visible on the tower and whose re-emergent supporters were now among those trying to change the regime. Therefore, the decoration of the façade with the flags of the guild corporations could have visually reinforced the united Popolo as the class who finally chased the duke from the city, while the absence of the wool guild would have turned the tables on the one guild that had everything to gain from the suppression of the Ciompi. If the Ciompi had been traditionally only negatively represented by absence and exclusion, now the wool guild was symbolically jettisoned from the visible ranks of the political community.

However, representation was a double-edged sword, and this could only be further emphasized by the juxtaposition of so many discordant images on the façade of the Bargello. Latent within the image of the Duke was not only the anxiety of the Popolo but also the terrifying image of the Ciompi who were always the invisible specter behind the memory of the duke. It justified with acute irony the anxiety of the elites who, according to historian Marvin Becker, always conjured up the menacing image of the duke “whenever the outraged working class pressed its demands upon a tottering signory.”

The political critique of the revolt through architectural imagery did not stop there, however. Guild flags on the Bargello inevitably made a visual allusion to another public monumental building, one that the government had tried to connect to

---

the Bargello by a new public thoroughfare in the late thirteenth century. The profile of
the Badia campanile stood as a defiant testament to the failure of that project (Figure
5.49).\footnote{See “Communication Breakdown” in chapter two.} Across the center of the city stood Orsanmichele, where, as I have discussed in more detail above, the seven major guilds and the five middle guilds had been charged, since 1339, with decorating the façade niches with statues of their patron saints, the maggiori in bronze, the others in marble.\footnote{Note that the presence of the Corazzai, (makers of armor) guild was the thirteenth, and therefore among the ranks of the minor guilds even though they were represented on the exterior façade. The fourteenth niche was originally given to the Parte Guelfa but was subsequently taken over by the Mercanzia, the merchants’ tribunal. Ironically, the statue of St. George carved for the armor makers by Donatello, is the most famous among a pantheon of Florentine masterpieces.} As Zervas points out, whereas on certain major feast days – St. John the Baptist, St, Phillip, S. Peter – all twenty-one guilds took part in a ritual of offering and veneration as representative of the larger communal corporate body, at Orsanmichele only the twelve major guilds were singled out specifically as allied directly to the Parte Guelfa.\footnote{Zervas, Orsanmichele, 53.} The latter represented the most elite and conservative elements of the Florentine political class and they were particularly hated by the popolo minuto. Therefore, that façade represented a more starkly visual rendition of the hierarchical divisions between the guilds which was down-played in the vault fresco of the Judges and Notaries guild palace.

Orsanmichele clearly made visible an elite corporatist consensus of government in which the most powerful corporations sought to minimize the presence of the minor guilds, while they attempted to erase the memory of the Ciompi entirely. This made the display of the Standard of Justice (a symbol that was more global than that of the Parte Guelfa), along with the arms of all the guilds but one at the Bargello, a direct visual critique of the configuration of corporate identities that were inscribed on the façade of Orsanmichele.\footnote{Although the oldest sculpted saint currently occupying a guild niche at Orsanmichele is that of the Virgin and Child, executed by Niccolò di Piero Lamberti some time before 1399 for the doctors and apothecaries guild (Medici e speziali), many of the tabernacles and guild arms, works of art in and of}

621
important shrines; quoting it, subverting it, and redesigning the formal and
representational structure on which it was based. They understood images, sculpture,
and architecture as part of a tactical aesthetic game. This is why I believe that even
“non-elite culture”, which Baxandall will exclude from the Quattrocento regime of
visuality, was already participating in creating and deciphering sophisticated
iconographies in the Trecento. Ignoring how contemporary Florentines of all classes
saw, consumed, and re-constituted urban monuments and images extracts them from
the urban environment and the urban culture for and against whom they were made
and privileges only one elite viewing constituency as the arbiter of value and meaning.

However, the presumed absence of the flag of the angel on the façade of the
Bargello represented a visual transformation in the meaning of the revolt. Now it was
the established guilds that were opening up space for the disenfranchised Ciompi who
supported them. The revolt was being contained, visually, by more moderate
forces.\footnote{Tremler, “Follow the Flag,” 372-73.} It contrasted to the more radical tactics put into play in the Piazza della
Signoria. There, the forces under the angel were still engaged in the visual
transformation of the city.

I have already described the second sonic attack by the Ciompi, which allowed
them to win the Palazzo Vecchio by dematerializing the architecture with the sound of
their voices, rather than the force of their arms.\footnote{See “Voices in the Square” in chapter 4.} During this uproar, the Ciompi
issued a decree from the piazza that also bore directly on the visual signs and imagery
of the piazza; this time, in the realm of dress. It threatened to punish anyone caught
wearing a bourgeois cloak – made of course, from wool – and they could be killed
without retribution. The government watched from the palace as the citizens obeyed,
“thereby transforming the dress of the city: ‘the people in the piazza and throughout Florence, all of them, stripped their cloaks off their backs for fear of being killed.’”

When Michele di Lando, erstwhile leader of the Ciompi, stood in front of the palace and demanded that the priors leave, he was only declaring officially – he had the flag, after all – what had already been accomplished by the sound of the crowd.

When they finally entered the palace they also hung their flags from the windows, from the tower, and from the battlements. Then they climbed up with the Standard of Justice and rang the bell – the sound of justice – to assemble the people in the square. The revolt had begun with the sound of a bell, and it had ended with one. In the common tripartite Florentine political tradition, regimes were born with the simultaneous sound of bells, the proclamation of laws, and the presentation of flags, all of which belonged to this specific architectural ensemble of piazza and monument. Since the Oltrarno Ciompi themselves were in the square that morning, it is most likely that this time, on the façade of the town hall, the angel was displayed next to the flags of the other guilds. At the Palazzo Vecchio, the revolution was visually complete as well.

In contrast to the battle to enter the Bargello and the subsequent redesign of its architectural decoration, the Ciompi were able, without the use of arms, to use sound to breach the fortified walls of the government palace and cause it to simply dematerialize. Three times, their cries “reached up into the heavens.” The noise they made was so loud that no one inside could hear the reading of the Ciompi

---

1600 Anonimo fiorentino, "Diario anonimo fiorentino dall'anno 1358 al 1389," in Cronache dei secoli XIII e XIV, ed. A. Gherardi, (Florence: 1876), 367. It is tempting to see this cloak connected to the official vermilion color of the state.
1601 Stefani, Cronica fiorentina, r. 796 (pp.325-26).
1602 See “From Morning to Evening” in chapter three.
1603 Trewler notes that, according to an unpublished text by a wool shearer, his comrades had brought a suspected executioner to the gallows in the square that morning and had done so under their flag. Since shearers were an important element of the twenty-fourth guild of Ciompi, this flag would most likely have been the angel; see Trewler, "Follow the Flag," 375-76.
petitions. The councils simply passed them and gave up the palace, frightened into
defeat by the noise of the “people of the angel” in the square. The two remaining
priors, finding themselves abandoned in the palace, descended the stairs, and handed
to the keys of the city (le porti) to a certain Calcagnino, a minor guildsman, and then
they too, simply went home. And “so one can say,” wrote one of those priors, “that
the happy, peaceful and good state of the city was lost.”

The Ciompi had successfully intervened in the visual symbolic order of
Florence. They had turned architecture into a medium through which they could
establish the fact of their corporate identity. It is no surprise then that contemporary
witnesses interpreted these events in architectural terms, using it as the metaphor
through which they described and comprehended the meaning of what was playing out
before their very eyes. In the civic imagination, the Palace of the Priors had to act as
the final repository of the city’s larger identity and coalition of corporate interests. Its
image could always stand for the city, formalizing and idealizing the link between
space and the communities that participated in it at any given time. However, the
palace was also a real structure, whose corporeal presence, its tactility, always held out
the possibility of a universal promise; that if the palace could represent the whole city,
then what that whole city was, could be continually redefined. It depended on what
the symbolic structure of the urban environment could be made to represent. In 1378,
the Ciompi were determined to confront the city and its constellation of signs with
their own imagined corporate identity. The fact that contemporaries understood the
Ciompi’s acts in visual terms is attested to by an anonymous addition to Alamanno
Acciaiuoli’s chronicle, where the author, who witnessed the events, described the
building in late July, very soon after the revolt was complete (Figure 5.50). The
struggle was, in large part, about what and how one saw. It was the façade of the

\[160{5}\]
Ibid., 32.
palace that had to bear the symbolic weight, once again, as the image of a transformed city:

It was an amazing thing to see how the palace of our lord priors, which previously had been so untainted, so adorned, so honorable, and so well ordered, had now been made foul and ugly with every vice, disgraced with every dishonor, disordered and lacking all good mores. Seen from on high, it stank with a dishonorable smell, that it was an abominable and offensive thing to see what had become of it.\textsuperscript{1606}

This text heaps all the “barbarous” acts of the Ciompi onto the image of the palace. The author is struck by the afterimage of the Ciompi’s reconfiguration of the façade with the commune’s flags. It proves that the Ciompi were fully aware of how the visual imprint of their tactics could penetrate the visual psyche of the city. If Goro Dati would later willingly internalize the regime’s power and authority through the beauty of the palace, this writer lamented the transformation of that beauty into something so vile he could not throw enough negative words at it. Even from a distance (\textit{dalla sommità}), from the safety of a long-range perspective, the ugliness of the palace was still visible.\textsuperscript{1607} It radiated out from the palace just as the sound of bells did, invading the entire city. The Ciompi had managed, not with recourse to traditional techniques of representation, but with an acute historical awareness of symbolic mechanisms, to redesign the symbolic and literal façade of the city. In the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{1606} Ibid., 36. “Maravigliosa cosa era vedere la casa de’ priori nostri signori, che per lo tempo adietro tanto netta e così ornata, tanto onesta e così bene ordinata, ora era fatta brutta d’ogni cattività, e puzzolenta, e vituperosa d’ogni disonestà, disordinata e mancante d’ogni buon costume; che a vederla dalla sommità puzzava di disonesto puzzo, che era cosa abominievole e dispiacevole, vedendo a quale usanza andava.”
\item\textsuperscript{1607} Leonardo Bruni would pick up this theme of sight and distance in his Panegyric, where he declared that the city did not lose its beauty when one moved in the opposition direction, from far to near, from a wide vista to close scrutiny. See “Goro Dati’s Vision of Beauty and Leonardo Bruni’s Harmonic Dream” in chapter 2.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
social conflicts by which the city of Florence was shaped in the late Trecento, despite the best and worst intentions, the meaning of architecture could neither be finally fixed nor recreated at will. Daily practices as well as social struggles determined a malleable and ambivalent symbolic environment. The Ciompi had succeeded in creating an image that represented them but, in turn, had to be interpreted, described, and accounted for in the imagination of those who found that image so horrifying.

By August 31st of that year, however, after six weeks in the political spotlight, the time of the Ciompi would be over. Stripped of their angel with its sword, they were routed, dispersed, hunted down, and exiled. The defeat of the Ciompi, as Trexler has shown, came when the new government turned on them and betrayed them by exploiting the conflict embedded in two competing visions of the city. Through the complex relationships between flags (signs) and communities (things), they pitted the geographic order of the city against the guild-based one that the Ciompi had helped to re-create. The Ciompi’s primary demand had been the creation of their own guild, one among three new guilds established in 1378 (Figures 5.51-5.51b). On August 31st, however, all the guilds were ordered to hand over their flags to the palace and, instead, assemble under the flags of their neighborhoods, a move that was meant to, and did, break the very ties that bound the Ciompi across neighborhoods by literally breaking them up in space. Forced to choose between two signs, the core of the Ciompi community that remained with the Angel was then isolated, broken, and driven from the piazza.

On that night, however, while the Ciompi went down in bloody defeat, the bells of Sant’Ambrogio, a Ciompi stronghold, were heard ringing in alarm (Figure 5.20). The government trembled in fear and in desperation rang all of the bells of the commune to combat the call to arms.\footnote{\textit{“cronaca prima,”} 82-83.} It was a sonic war that raised the specter of
July 20th when the periphery acoustically besieged the center.\textsuperscript{1609} One observer, a participant in the events, wrote that many citizens feared the awesome strength of the Ciompi, which led to the desperate attempt to drown out their voice by ringing the communal bells. In fear, the standard-bearers brought their flags into the piazza while the so-called “Herald of the Ciompi” declared that with only one hundred men the Ciompi could have won the piazza that night, and thus the city. But they were a broken people, he writes, without a leader, and betrayed by those they trusted. They had simply lost all heart.\textsuperscript{1610} Nevertheless, this episode demonstrated the extent to which the Ciompi had destabilized both the audible and visible environments of Florence through their intimate knowledge and experience of it.

On September 25, a still nervous government decreed that all standards and flags with the arms of the Popolo and the Parte Guelf were to be removed from all buildings and churches. Moreover, no painter was allowed to depict such images for any person, of whatever condition, on pain of death.\textsuperscript{1611} Under such conditions even communal arms were in danger of losing their symbolic connection to those that were frantically trying to hold on to them as identifying images. Such acts reveal the true desperation of the regime in its increasing anxiety over representation, its power, and the impossibility of ever controlling the interpretation and the circulation of images that gave meaning to urban space. Unable to effectively control the status of images, in desperation they tried to hide them, to deny their presence in the symbolic landscape of the city. Both of these moments – aftershocks of the revolt – attest to

\textsuperscript{1609} Another witness hears all the bells of the city begin ringing at midnight, in which case, the Ciompi ended their desperate bid for corporate representation just as they ended it, the first time with spirited hope, the second time in defiant despair. See "Cronaca seconda," 120.

\textsuperscript{1610} "Cronaca prima," 83. “Costoro se n’andarono sì come gente rota, e senza capo, e senza sentimento; però ch’è l’avien perduto, sì come gente che si fidavano, e furono traditi da’ loro medesimi. Se pur costoro fossero istati c, arebbono auto la Piazza. Non ebbono cuore.”

\textsuperscript{1611} Ibid., 85.
how the memory of the Ciompi would echo, long and deep, within the sounds and spaces of the city of Florence.

5.9 Afterimages

Fear and anxiety over flags, sounds, uprisings, and conspiracies continued to plague Florentine urban space in the later fourteenth century. I have already mentioned the restive popolo minuto being chased from the square in 1394. The remaining two new guilds created by the Ciompi government in 1378 remained, at least until January, 1382, when reactionaries challenged the regime by running through the streets with three flags of the Parte Guelfa, along with a trumpet banner, a piece of cloth used to cover the city’s outdoor benches, and a large tapestry used for civic funerals because these were, literally, the only images they could get their hands on (Figure 5.52).1612 In response to these ad hoc flags the official flag of the Parte Guelfa, representing the most conservative wing of the Popolo, was brought out of the palace that evening for a procession.1613 This was a prelude only the violence unleashed the next morning. Members of the city’s dominant wool guild gathered under arms across the city (Figure 5.3).1614 With the intent to destroy the guild headquarters of these reviled lower classes, most of whom were workers in the wool industry, it was no coincidence that these merchants convened first in the Mercato Nuovo (Figure 5.53). This was the central space of elite guild activity, and was located close to their official headquarters (Figure 5.53a). At such moments of social crisis it was precisely this link between space and authority that had to be constantly reaffirmed in the visual

1612 Alle bocche, 19.
1613 Ibid., 20.
1614 Ibid.
terrain of the city.\textsuperscript{1615} They knew, and the anonymous author understood, that authority was constructed and maintained through the symbolic dimensions of the built environment as much as it was backed up with the threat of violence. From the mercato nuovo the assembled elite went to the headquarters of the two remaining lowest guilds and destroyed their palaces, smashed their tools, and confiscated their legal documents. They then entered the Piazza della Signoria and similarly removed those guilds’ coats of arms from the Mercanzia, the merchant’s tribunal (Figures 5.53b, 5.53c).\textsuperscript{1616} In other words, they sought to destroy all those things that signified their status as a public corporation, a political community. Such symbols would have visually legitimized the participation and authority of the groups they represented and they did so at the borders of the city’s most “sacred” civic space. Such arms may have been located on the façade, next to those of the city’s traditional twenty-one guilds that can be seen today on the Mercanzia.\textsuperscript{1617} Such an act was a ritual way of cleansing the political space of the city’s central core of an invasive polluting element. It testified to the way in which the built environment was overlaid with a veneer of symbolic purity that had to be continually surveilled. Buildings, statutes, and arms – the pattern of destroying a community was the same as building one out of architecture, texts, and images.

The Standard of Justice made a brief appearance two days later on January 22
\textsuperscript{nd} and 23\textsuperscript{rd}, along with the flag of the Parte Guelfa, but it was clear that the latter image

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{1615} Elite (grassi) supporters of the Parte Guelfa gathered in the Mercato Nuovo when they were holding a kind of parallel government, reading out their petitions here before going en masse to close off the Piazza della Signoria and demand their reforms. See Ibid., 27-28.
\textsuperscript{1616} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{1617} Friedman does not provide any documentation that would allow the dating of the current arms. David Friedman and Antonella Astorri, "The Florentine Mercanzia and its Palace," \textit{I Tatti studies: Essays in the Renaissance} 10 (2005): 11-68. However, these guilds had won the right to participate in the election of the court’s foreign official in 1378 in the wake of the Ciompi revolt and lost it just as these events were transpiring in 1382. Such a privilege would have likely been codified by a visual sign. See Friedman and Astorri, "Mercanzia," 20-21. I am indebted to Luca Boschetto for bringing this reference to my attention.

\end{footnotesize}
was becoming more visually dominant; marking a re-emerging community with a narrower vision of republican rulership based on its own elite membership. This group forced the remaining guilds to swear an oath of loyalty and to seal the politics of the new regime they made a new flag, with the arms of the Parte Guelfa, the Popolo, and now only the arms of the twenty-one original guilds (Figure 5.54). It replayed the Ciompi’s own tactic of visual exclusion by attempting to ground the image of the guilds permanently into the visual order of the commune.

What Ghirlandaio’s fifteenth-century fresco in the Sassetti Chapel at Santa Trinita makes clear is that the city’s main square, the Piazza della Signoria, was simultaneously a monumental site from which emanated the monologue of power and a less hierarchical background space of rumor and gossip (Figures 5.14-5.15a). Interpreting it depended upon when these practices occurred. Between urban space as propaganda and social discourse, therefore, this diarist tried to penetrate that disjunction between official proclamations and the circulation of fragmented stories wherein lay a vital urban knowledge. In describing political clashes in the streets of Florence, the author reveals just how deeply embedded certain symbolic associations with space were in the psyche of urban elites.

For example, in March of that year, when the hated gente minuta gathered in Sant’Ambrogio, calling for the revival of their lost guild,\footnote{Alle bocche, 35. “Viva le XXIII arti”} the popolo grasso assembled in the nearby piazza of Santa Croce, that quarter’s main square.\footnote{Ibid., 36.} Meanwhile, in the Piazza della Signoria, the flags of the commune were given to two citizen leaders, who then led the Popolo under these official symbols of authority from Santa Croce to Sant’Ambrogio, in order to hunt down those restless workers (Figures 5.55-5.55b).\footnote{Ibid.}
What is notable is the way in which the hierarchy of space was preserved by the *popolo grasso*. The flags were ceremonially passed from the central piazza, the political centre of the city, to the politically subordinate main square of the quarter of the Santa Croce and only then, under these visual signs, did the *popolo* venture into the “dark”, fearful corners of the neighborhood of Sant’Ambrogio. The spatial and symbolic breakdown of 1378 had, therefore, been largely restored.

The anxiety produced by these two groups colliding into one another across the surfaces of the city emerges in the text by the way the author juxtaposes the central monumental core, linked to the image of an assembling popolo, with the impoverished outlying zones of the poor, that needed to be kept at bay and from which they needed to be clearly demarcated. What becomes clear in such an analysis is that both kinds of texts – legal statutes and personal diaries – were responding to concrete situations while attempting to construct ideal and workable itineraries, topographies, territories of influence, and zones of knowledge through meticulous attention to both subtle and dramatic changes in the public domain. They also allude to the presence of a lively debate going on at the margins of the piazza, to other voices and texts engaged in different ways with coming to terms with what kind of space the piazza was and might be.

Such information was just what the anonymous diarist was so ardently seeking, as he lay waiting for the secrets of state to seep from the thick walls of the palace, or as he tried to pick up rumors, opinions, and judgments in the neighborhood square. Paolo da Certaldo, therefore, may not have been seeing enemies hidden around every corner. He learned from experience that news travels quickly in urban spaces, and that prudence was necessary for not getting caught up in the maelstrom of rumor and innuendo that could lead one into dangerous territory.
In 1378, the Ciompi themselves were able to set up a parallel communication network through which they were successfully able to transmit secrets. Richard Trewler has pointed to evidence of coded forms of address that the Ciompi used to recognize each other on the street. They also had to create ways of gathering unnoticed by the authorities since they were expressly forbidden to do so.\textsuperscript{1621} They had to invent ways to represent themselves to each other and to communicate within and between neighborhoods. In addition, the government itself relied on informants to foil suspected conspiracies. Even the Ciompi were finally betrayed on the eve of their planned uprising, which is the reason we know about their secret meetings in the first place. Such denunciations were even part of an official network of informants, the “\textit{exploratores secreti}”, who were employed by the wool guild to monitor the Ciompi in the widely dispersed system of wool production in Florence.

Near San Piero Gattolino, for example, with great sacraments, rites, and alliances (\textit{leghe}), they banded together and kissed each other on the mouth (\textit{bacioronsi in bocca}) to unite themselves in both in death and in life. They vowed to defend each other against those who would oppose them. Then, from such illegal gatherings the Ciompi returned to their neighborhoods to relay information and to secure promises of support by the ritual repetition of these sacred rites.\textsuperscript{1622} It was in such rituals of community that individual Ciompi began to form a community that was not simply one formed by their exclusion. They were already, from the beginning, appropriating communal forms of association which would give them the ability to invest themselves as a community into the image of the angel and subsequently that of the commune itself. They elected representatives, established ritual forms of

\textsuperscript{1621} "Statuti del Podestà (1355)," III, clxxxv.
\textsuperscript{1622} Acciaioli, "Cronaca," 19.
communication and membership, sacralized a place, and attached it to the collective memory of the city.

The visual reordering of the city, primarily the piazza, was a long and contested process from here on in when the oligarchic regime began to consolidate its position. It was countered by successive attempts to re-engage with a more popular republic and this permeated the experience of the Piazza della Signoria throughout the fifteenth and into the sixteenth centuries. It is not my intention to begin to describe this complex process that incorporates the full scope of the Florentine Renaissance but I would like to make some tentative comments. In addition to the framed view of the palace and its tower, as well as its sonic and silent message systems, there was also a more general class of visible “signs” that linked the square to the city. Developing relations of power and authority participated in the maintenance and contestation of a public propaganda machine that was framed in three dimensions by the square, the sculpture, and formal rituals of the Piazza della Signoria, where they took on carefully calibrated meaning. One need only to think of the ceremonial entrances of the French King Charles VIII and Piero de’ Medici in 1494, and discussed in chapter 2.

In the Quattrocento, the square was part of a more comprehensive reorganization of the city’s ritual spaces that were increasingly made to conform to the manipulated rhetorical forms of civic humanism in order to bolster the “patriciate’s strategies for asserting and centralising power.”1623 However, the loggia and the ringhiera had always been conceived as sites for the formal display of the lord priors, who would then participate in the economy of public sculpture, initially the Marzocco (the Florentine lion) as a communal symbol and subsequently such various figures as Judith, David, Hercules, and Perseus, in a constant game of sculptural interaction.1624

1623 Johnson, 63.
1624 Ibid. For an analysis of the visualization and spatialization of politics through sculpture in the Piazza della Signoria see John K. G. Shearman, “Art or Politics in the Piazza,” in Benvenuto Cellini:
This was part of an attempt to infuse an “integrated urban network that incorporated sculpture, facades, streets, and squares”\textsuperscript{1625} that fixed the political image of the Piazza della Signoria within a certain civic ideology. This process was both helped and hindered by the fact that Florentines had a long tradition of being very sensitive to the politicization of public space through the placement of sculpture.\textsuperscript{1626} The placement of Donatello’s \textit{Judith and Holofernes} in front of the Palace upon the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, the placement of Michelangelo’s \textit{David} next to the door through which the priors ritually entered and exited from the palace to “protect” them from the Medici in 1504, and the installation of \textit{Hercules and Cacus} to confront \textit{David} across the entranceway after they had returned to power in 1535, all offer clear evidence that Florentines looked at objects in their urban world as part of a larger urban dialogue in constant flux.\textsuperscript{1627}

What was most important visually in the Trecento was the placement of the Marzocco at the corner of the Palazzo Vecchio, serving as a dominating hinge embraced by the piazza. It also marked the threshold of the piazza and the ringhiera, the public stage built for the ceremonial viewing the lord priors.\textsuperscript{1628} Over the next few decades it appeared in different guises all over the square. The rhetorical gesture exploited the lion’s association with guelfism, the Angevin dynasty, and the power of the Florentine government led by an oligarchic regime that needed to cleanse the visible and spatial memories of the horrific political transformation initiated by the Ciompi revolt of 1378.

\textsuperscript{1625} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{1627} On the concept of the “more engaged spectator” see Shearman, \textit{Only connect...} 10-58.
\textsuperscript{1628} The provision to build the ringhiera was promulgated in 1349, a year after the plague. See Lucia Battaglia Ricci, \textit{Palazzo Vecchio e dintorni: studio su Franco Sacchetti e le fabbriche di Firenze}, (Rome: Salerno, 1990), 34.
Sacchetti played a prominent role in this rhetoric, composing texts for public inscriptions in the Palazzo Vecchio. The latter was part of the ritual actions of the Florentine military forces as they prepared for battle.\textsuperscript{1629} Sacchetti composed the text inscribed on its crown that was placed on the Marzocco on special occasions. “I wear the crown for the worthy state, so that each may keep their liberty.”\textsuperscript{1630} The ensemble of text, crown, lion, and the commune’s ensigns that would be brought out onto the battlefield were all part of that propagandistic mechanism that turned spaces into a visual communal rhetoric. It shows how the location of text was important for both composition and reception, for a more controlled writing and reading of site-specific texts. As well, it shows how visible symbolic signs worked together to create an ever-expanding narrative of power.

However, not all the visible signs of the city were overtly political. Edward Muir traces the way in which urban space was also sanctified by the image of the virgin in public spaces, how holiness adhered to certain places by her presence.\textsuperscript{1631} Even holy objects that moved through the city allowed for a collective experience of the sacred through the way relics and images had intensely meaningful relationships to urban spaces.\textsuperscript{1632}

Seen from this perspective, the events surrounding the Ciompi revolt and its aftermath illustrate how there was no fixed relationship between “signs” and the communities they embodied; there was only contested space. They were more than just passive indicators of political shifts. Despite its keen insight, Trexler’s analysis did not recognize that signs were active agents in a dynamic exchange of mutual reinforcement and exclusion that separated participants, users, and spectators. Such an

\textsuperscript{1629} For the function of the lion in the piazza see Randolph, "Il Marzocco."
\textsuperscript{1630} “Corona porto per la patria degna/A ciò che libertà ciascun mantenga.” Battaglia Ricci, \textit{Palazzo Vecchio e dintorni}, 39.
\textsuperscript{1631} Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner," 153.
\textsuperscript{1632} Ibid.
exchange presupposed a certain flexibility between signs and the communities they wore as a form of dress; they wore some while they discarded others as competing interests sought to fix such signs permanently to themselves through ever stricter regulations and spatial tactics, moves that were an attack on the nature of the sign itself and, therefore, bound to fail.

The problem was always – for the Popolo, the Ciompi, and any urban community – getting the sign to stick, but signs were, and always are, slippery things. They were public in the fullest sense of the term because they were never fully fixed and could be appropriated, manipulated, and refashioned by a range of users whose access was based on a shared culture of signs, meanings and memories. This was what Ganfo, the hapless furrier from Lucca in Sercambi’s novella – discussed in chapter 4 – found out when he descended into the public bath. He could not get the little cross he had fashioned as a desperate sign of his fragile personal identity to adhere to himself because even though he belonged to the Christian community it represented, it did not belong exclusively to him. It could float onto anyone it pleased. Inevitably that is exactly what it did, just as the Standard of Justice could legitimately attach itself to a community emerging onto the urban scene that brought with it a clear sense of just what that concept of justice ought to mean. Ganfo was attempting to mark himself as an individual with a sign that designated a community but a cross – a straw one or a red one – belonged to no single person at the threshold of the Renaissance. Moreover, there was no individual without a community that allowed one to be so. For Ganfo, one could not simply construct a self in the midst of a hundred naked men before one forged a community, which was always, as I have been a pains to point out, a constellation of sounds, images, texts, and concrete structures from which the self could emerge (Figure 5.56). Individuals, like signs, lived only with the communities in which they defined themselves and those signs
might coalesce around someone else, some other community that, even in the wildest nightmares of well-entrenched regime like the Florentine Popolo, would never have included the likes of the *popolo minuto*.

The Ciompi knew, at least in that brief moment in 1378, that one followed signs, not individuals, because it was the latter that would betray them even if the former refused to adhere to them. Neither the self nor any single community could ever fully determine what signs would do or where they would go, which meant that communities were defined by the struggle to maintain themselves through images and sounds that were never securely fixed. When Florentines interpreted and acted upon the buildings, spaces, sounds, and images that they encountered in their urban world, they were performing, as a matter of civic pride and social community, what I have been trying to do, with more and less success, in the last several hundred pages that have led me to this point.
CONCLUSION

I am fully aware that the preceding investigations into urban space rely very little, or hardly at all, on a direct engagement with historical visual material. This is true in spite of the fact that, within the period covered, some of the most profound developments in pictorial representation in the history of western art occurred in Florence. I made passing reference to Brunelleschi’s famous perspective experiment in relation to modes of vision constructed by Goro Dati and Leonardo Bruni in their early fifteenth-century texts. However, there is a striking lack of the “visual” in the way I have plotted out the socio-architectural spaces described by Florentines who wrote rather than painted.

In addition, there has been much written about the logic and symbolic nature of pictorial space across the perspectival divide, experiments that led, among other things, to what has been characterized as a “representational language” for the visual description of cities and urban environments. In terms of architectural spaces of the past, this has led, in my opinion, to a conflation of the “visual” and the “representational.” Art historians are, necessarily, concerned with both, and as slightly uncomfortable cousins (partners?) to their art historical colleagues, architectural historians have been squarely planted within the disciplinary “visual” regime. As far as design goes, this is clearly the case, with drawings and plans

---

dominating our understanding of architecture as a visual art since the Renaissance. However, when the messy business of architectural production gives way to use and consumption, things are no longer so clear. Florentines looked carefully at their city and its spaces. They watched and recorded the things they saw go on there. But they also listened, as I have argued at length, and most likely raised their fingers to test the changing winds, located themselves by familiar, strange, and acrid odors, felt the contours of their streets, as well as tasted the fruits of their neighborhood sociability.

Architecture, for those who lived in it, moved through it, and clashed with it, was part of a total environment whose sensorial matrix was defined by the configuration of buildings and spaces in it, as recent scholarship has suggested. In this understanding, architecture is a much richer field of historical inquiry, in which the “visual” plays a major but integrated role. Research into developments of pictorial space, on the other hand, have tended to isolate the “eye” of the beholder and graft it onto the “I” of the subject, which, in English, is a very alluring homophonic slip. No such “period eye” can be claimed for architecture and urban space, despite the tendency towards perspectivalism of later developments in urban planning.

Although Trachtenberg’s excellent analysis and adaptation of Trecento spatial theory onto the design and execution of urban space by Florentine planners is extremely convincing within the disciplinary discourse of the “visual,” Goro Dati’s complicity in the visual architectonic regime configured in the Piazza della Signoria—an argument I make in chapter 2—demonstrates how Dati’s willing internalization of this dominating visual perspective was wholly embodied and linked to his particular

---


way of establishing relationships with Florentine monuments. He was not only a disembodied floating eye. He was a fully conscious and feeling “I.” Even the increasing sophistication of the visual representation of architecture in this period rarely gives a ‘sense” of the total environment that architecture is. The privileging of the “visual” as concomitant with the proper understanding architecture leads, I believe, to a misunderstanding of architecture as purely a visual art located at the point of production. Even the experience of pictures would likely have belonged to a larger sensorial experience in space, in much the same way that the Byzantine icon has recently been reconceived as part of a larger complex spatially enacted environment. ¹⁶³⁶ From the perspective of experience and consumption, therefore, we have much to learn about how people actually saw the artifacts we claim to see now and what they believed meant when they confronted them.

On could argue that I have neglected to attend to visual material as the proper object – the buildings, for example – of study for architectural history. However, I am more interested, in this context, in how Florentines understood their city, its buildings, and its spaces. They were an intensely visual culture but in order to see that visual sophistication, one cannot turn to images only. Florentines represented the visual through non-visual means and that does not disqualify such visions from the disciplinary field of inquiry. Just as a wealth of information lies in documents relating to a building’s construction history, so too does a profound analysis of the visual, aural, and general sensorial environment lie buried in the legislation, diaries, and literature that Florentines used to construct and understand their world.

The “visual” in my project lies in the eyes of long dead Florentines and I have tried to excavate that vision from the traces it has left in language. Even though we

¹⁶³⁶ I am referring the work of Bissera Pentcheva, who recently laid out this claim in a lecture delivered at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz on June 16th, 2009, entitled “Icons of Sound: Hagia Sophia and the Descent of Grace.”
can touch, taste, and smell buildings today, we have no record, except language, that
gives us an idea of how it was experienced in the past. The easy equation of vision
with truth in pictures of cities makes us easily forget that the world they represented
was only a tangential component of the experience of that world. The “period eye”
was likely a “period frame of reference,” a Weltanschauung of the senses. Florentines
integrated the visual within an embodied social world in which architecture and space
were vital means of identity formation that we are at our peril, as architectural
historians, to ignore.

This is not at all to say that my project seeks to undermine any of the more
“traditional” approaches to the visual culture of the past. On the contrary, it is built on
them. I believe that it can and should be integrated with them for two reasons. Such
integration allows the discipline the means to extend beyond its own boundaries and
engage constructively with other disciplines, while it’s grounding in the “visual”
allows it to construct its autonomy. However, it is a mistake to confuse such
autonomy with a distinct separation of fields. The formation of architectural history as
a discipline cannot exist without art history, while both are continually reconfigured
within the larger interactions of the humanities themselves. I learned this from the
way Florentines derived their personal identity within a larger collective one so that
the one buttressed, rather than threatened, the other. In the spirit of Marx’s famous
dictum, one constructs one’s own discipline but not as one chooses, since its limits are
determined by the collective. However, a discipline must also have a robust sense of
itself and its objects of study – and I emphasize a robust sense, not necessarily a clear
and fixed one – so that it is not at the mercy of the expansive and invasive movements
of other disciplines.

This, I believe, is profoundly summed up in the relationship between the vita
of Brunelleschi and the novella of the Grasso Legnaiolo that preceded it. The vita is a
work that has been at the foundation of our conception of the architect as solitary genius, of the Renaissance man who battles the forces of doubt, ridicule, and the status quo. However, the story of the fat woodworker (Grasso Legniaolo), which was sometimes — mistakenly, I believe — omitted from it, acts as a corrective to the absolute autonomy of the individual derived from the \textit{vita}. The architect as a social being is still a man of ideas but he is very much a collaborator in this novella. In fact, he can only bring his ideas to fruition with the help of others. Others have to be willing to believe him, to act with him, and respond to him. He must win them with persuasive arguments (Amphion?) and it is the constant dialogues and narratives throughout the story that show the reader how one’s sense of self is contingent upon others. In other words, once might lose that self if one refuses to participate in the society that recognizes and legitimates it. Grasso refused to come to dinner and he did not communicate his intentions with the others so that his real crime was not simply opting out of an invitation but of refusing to take part in the collective dialogue that a city is. Consequently, he gave up his right to the identity that society had helped him build. Is it significant that Brunelleschi himself rarely worked on private commissions and was largely committed to dealing with the city’s extensive bureaucracy in building Renaissance Florence? As Howard Saalman remarked, Brunelleschi’s ideal conception of society, politics, economic organization, and architecture came out of Florence’s long and vigorous corporate and collective institutional traditions and not out of the new personal decorative desires of private patrons such as Cosimo de’ Medici.\textsuperscript{1637}

Brunelleschi was more involved in a collaborative city-building ethic. His architectural projects were more the product of the co-operation with other elements within a larger society than they were a means of creating personal monumental

legacies. For him, perspective was a means, a tool, and not a frame for disciplining vision and the world it saw. It was a tool understood in the same way that Sacchetti’s Dante conceived it.\textsuperscript{1638} He was horrified by how his own tools had fallen into the hands of a blacksmith whose repetition of his beloved poem turned into – politely speaking – a horrendously grating work song. Grasso also lost his tools, or control of them, along with his entire workshop, to someone claiming to be him. In both these cases, what was at stake was the understanding of one’s personal relationship to one’s tools or skills (Grasso) and respecting the collective use of the tools of others (Sacchetti’s Dante).

In my own training in literature, history, and art and architectural history, I was taught the importance of understanding one’s disciplinary tools, its theories, assumptions, and its methodologies. I was also taught the importance of being sensitive the voices and objects from the past that we claim to interpret and explain, rather than attempting to graft a unified and fixed theoretical framework onto them. The trick is to mediate understanding between a flexible set of theoretical models and an open disposition to what documents and artifacts could possibly be saying and representing. I have learned a great deal from Florentines of the past and they have shown to me my own discipline in an expanded field. When I looked at their city they brought me a long way from my traditional assumptions about the visual culture they were engaged with. And if what I have presented does not appear firmly anchored within the discipline of Renaissance art or architectural history, then perhaps that discipline should dislodge that anchor in order to look again to see what Florentines thought they were seeing when they were looking at is buildings and spaces. They were making borders all the time and then undermining them, which is what we should be doing as well.

\textsuperscript{1638} See “Storytelling in the Piazz in chapter 4.
On the one hand, misusing the tools of other disciplines turns our historical work into and series of bland and derivative repetitions, while, on the other hand, not fully grasping the nature and limits of our own modes of inquiry sets the stage for their appropriation by others who could, just as Brunelleschi did, make us irrelevant by deftly showing us how little we understand them. They are our means of constructing a useful and wider academic dialogue. The former situation exposes our self-contented intellectual delusions about the worth of what we are doing, while the latter warns of the danger of carving an empty shell out the substance of academia. Most of us misidentify ourselves with a figure like Dante or Brunelleschi when most of us are closer to Sacchetti’s blacksmith or the fat woodworker to whom the former had to teach an ethical lesson. The question is, therefore: Have we learned from them how to use our tools? Otherwise, the consequences for our collective project lie between irrelevance and oblivion.
APPENDIX: Reconstruction of the Daily Ringing Schedule in Florence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Bell configuration</th>
<th>1325 statutes/cathedral customary</th>
<th>Stat. 1355</th>
<th>Stat. 1415</th>
<th>Other sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two bell ringers hired for the Bargello, and for the PV (stat. 1415, II, V, xiii)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Four bell ringers employed at the PV (Dati)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PV – Leone, Popolo (campana del dì)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daybreak</td>
<td>Badia – Leone Lauds? Prime?</td>
<td>Leone rings six times after the mass at dawn (sotto voce)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Little bell of the Badia rang, and was followed by 3 hits of the Podestà followed by the Popolo Davidssohn IV, I, 311 Commencement of daily labor (before Leone was cast and PV built)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Podestà – popolo</td>
<td>Triple ring of the Podestà answered by Popolo on the third hit (Capitano’s palace before Palazzo Vecchio built)</td>
<td>Same configuration Signals the beginning of the day – cap.</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>After the sequence – work day began Davidssohn IV, I, 311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lana bells 4 churches</td>
<td>Rings some time after the day bell Until it rings, no entry permitted to enter the communal courts, rectors palaces Signals that courts are in session – pod. III, lxxi</td>
<td>Leone (grossam) – At half Terce, each day, it rings a triple succession of two strikes with an equal space of time between each (Tocchus iuris) Montanina rings at the hours of justice – single sequence, before the first and last sound of the tocchus iuris To “rendere ragione” – courts open at least until the end of Terce</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Montanina rang for “messì” Villani 9, 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leone - Montanina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Bell configuration</td>
<td>1325 statutes/cathedral customary</td>
<td>Stat. 1355</td>
<td>Stat. 1415</td>
<td>Other sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daybreak</td>
<td>Badia – Leone Lauds? Prime?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two bell ringers hired for the Bargello, and for the PV (stat. 1415, II, V, xii). Four bell ringers employed at the PV (Dali) PV – Leone, Popolo (campana del di)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leone rings six times after the mass at dawn (acutus) This may be the campana del di</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leone rung six times after the mass at dawn (submissa voce)</td>
<td>Little bell of the Badia rang, and was followed by 3 hits of the Podestà followed by the Popolo Davidsohn IV, I, 311 Commencement of daily labor (before Leone was cast and PV built)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Podestà – popolo</td>
<td>Triple ring of the Podestà answered by Popolo on the third hit (Capitano palace before PV built)</td>
<td>Same configuration Signals the beginning of the day – cap.</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>After the sequence – work day began Davidsohn IV, I, 311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lana bells 4 churches</td>
<td>Rings some time after the day bell Until it rings, no entry permitted to enter the communal courts, rectors palaces Signals that courts are in session – pod. III, loxi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The four convents of the lana guild commenced labor separately to the sound of four different church bells were begun by four designated churches Davidsohn IV, I 312; lana statutes, 1317-19, pp. 31, 198; ASF CSR, 78 (Badia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leone - Montanina</td>
<td>Leone (grossam) – At half Terce, each day, it rings a triple succession of two strikes with an equal space of time between each (Toccus iuris) Montanina rings at the hours of justice – single sequence, before the first and last sound of the toccus iuris To “rendere ragione” – courts open at least until the end of Terce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Montanina rang for ‘messi’ Villani 9, 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Bell configuration</td>
<td>1325 statutes/cathedral customary</td>
<td>Stat. 1355</td>
<td>Stat. 1415</td>
<td>Other sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Terce</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leone - Montanina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rings some time after the day bell. Until it rings, no entry permitted to enter the communal courts, rector's palaces. Signals that courts are in session – pod. III, Ixii</td>
<td>Leone (grossam) – At half Terce, each day, it rings a triple succession of two strikes with an equal space of time between each (Tocchi iuris). Montanina rings at the hours of justice – single sequence, before the first and last sound of the tocchi iuris. To “rendere ragione”</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Montanina rang for “messi” Villani 9, 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badia – Cathedral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duomo – Terce</td>
<td>Badia - Terce Davidsohn IV, I, 312; I, 1069 (rang for half an hour Dante)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toiano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Toiano rung from PV for one hour after Terce was rung in the cathedral</td>
<td>Rang to sound the “ora del mangiare” for merchants from ballatoio – M. Villani, 11, 20 Sound together a distesa with the bells of the cathedral – Salemi After the duomo sounds Terce, Toiano sounds for 1 hour, a distesa, from PV – 1369 law – Gargani 34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sext</strong></td>
<td>Sonatores – trombatori, pifferi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Must sound for lunch of the priors every day both before and after II, V, xi</td>
<td>Badia sounded Sext Davidsohn IV, I, 312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>None</strong></td>
<td>Badia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Davidsohn IV, I, 312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leone – Montanina After None, before Vespers</td>
<td></td>
<td>From the closing of the tribunes at Terce until this bell, communal courts are closed. Podestà opens the palaces for public audiences after Nones pod. III, Ixii</td>
<td>“to rendere ragione” cap. I, cixi Pulsetur ad iura reddenda quando curiae reinitur II, V, xiii Montanina must ring a single sequence after Nones when the tocchi iure are rung (3 sequences of 2 rings = 6 strokes) III, V, xiii Courts open for at least 2 hours or more if necessary all officials of the commune are to be at their offices by the third ring</td>
<td>After lunch Leone rings six times for officials to be in their offices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1518 - Ave maria also sounded at Nones in light of the new crusade that was supposed to occur – Gargani 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leone</td>
<td>In these statues no one could go to weddings – cap. I, cixi</td>
<td>People gathered for weddings Coadunari debeant gentes pro sponsalis factendis</td>
<td>And to celebrates marriages Salemi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Bell configuration</td>
<td>1325 statutes/cathedral customary</td>
<td>Stat. 1355</td>
<td>Stat. 1415</td>
<td>Other sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vespers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>From vespers or the closing of the courts until the following day when the Montanina rings again – courts closed – pod. 1325 Ill, lxxx</td>
<td></td>
<td>Montanina - From Vespers to 22nd hour – courts open – bell to ring just before opening I, II, xvi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All bells of the duomo (feast days)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sonatones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Must sound for dinner of the priors every evening both before and after. They are also to go through the city sounding together, as it is the custom II, V, xi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leone</td>
<td>Leone rings in the evening for the Ave Maria Cap. I, cixxii</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rings the evening ave maria II, V, xli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Night</strong></td>
<td>Bell configuration</td>
<td>1325 statutes/cathedral customary</td>
<td>Stat. 1355</td>
<td>Stat. 1415</td>
<td>Other sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Podestà – Leone</td>
<td>Double fine bell Markets, communal palaces, bridges, cathedral complex, preaching, weddings, funerals all always double fine zones All crimes committed after this bell are in double fine zones Podestà rung every evening except days of the Lord and Good Friday (?) II, xi</td>
<td>Marks the double nature of night as judicial space (pod. Bell) and communal space (Leone)</td>
<td>Bridges, markets, piazze, gatherings for preaching, marriages, funerals all doubled Crimes committed at night are double-fined Officially this was the sound of the Podestà bell</td>
<td>Campanella – work bell Mentioned in reference to workers at both Santa Reparata and Loggia dei Lanzi – were not to leave until the 24th hour, and when this bell rung, which was specifically dedicated to ending their work day - 1381, Carta strozz. II, 78, 40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

648
| Officially the Podesta' bell, followed by the bell of the Capitano – I, xiv | Rung every evening after vespers, i.e. Between the 23rd and the 24th hour, and not before The exception is diebus iovis & good Friday where fines may be doubled after the hour that the bell usually rings. This may be why the two bell ring works – but all bells are silent on good Friday even though this is a civic bell I, III, xxxii | Council bell (oppolo) now ordered to ring for the ave maria in 1425, after the ringing of the 24th hour (clock bell?) Thus, the evening bell was not a bell but a whole series No reason why this replaces the Leone, which had rung the ave maria before – gave rise to confusion that ave maria started in 1415 40 days for 3 palomestes, and 3 ave marias Petruboni priorista – p. 182 |
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Agnoletti, Anna Maria E. Statuto dell' Arte della lana di Firenze (1317-1319). Florence: Le Monnier, 1940.


Baldinucci, Filippo. Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua, per le quali si dimostra come, e per chi le bell'arti di pittura, scultura, e architettura lasciata la rozzezza delle maniere greca, e gottica, si siano in questi secoli ridotte all' antica loro perfezione. Florence: Per Santi Franchi, 1681.


Bruni, Francesco. "Between Oral Memory and Written Tradition in Florence at the Beginning of the XIVth Century: Coppel di Borghese Domenichi, Andrea


*Commento alla Divina Commedia d'anonimo fiorentino del secolo XIV, ora per la prima volta stampato a cura di Pietro Fantani.* Bologna: G. Romagnoli, 1866-74.


Godefroy, Denis, Franôois Modius, and Simon van Leeuwen. *Corpus juris civilis romani*. Editio nova ... á quaemplurimis, in notis praecipuâe, mendis falsisque allegationibus repurgata & correcta ... ed. Coloniae Munatianae,: sumptibus fratrum Cramer, 1756.


Santini, Pietro *Quesiti e ricerche di storiografia fiorentina*. Florence: Seeber, 1903.


Spinelli, Ser Reccho di Domenico. "Diario di Ser Reccho di Domenico Spinelli." In *BNCF Codice Magliabechiano, XXV*, 422, 19-.


*Statuta populi e communis Florentiae*. Freiburg: Michael Kluch, 1783.


——. "The Workers of Renaissance Florence."


Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1994.


