

Though the Prato della Valle in Padua is one of the largest public squares in Europe, only a handful of articles regarding the piazza have been written in English.<sup>1</sup> Typically, authors have focused on the political manoeuvring to complete the work, the imaginative funding scheme devised by architect-politician Andrea Memmo, the physical nature of the site, or the nineteenth- and twentieth-century reception of the project. A continuous thread through existing scholarship is the belief that the work was influenced by the architectural theories of Carlo Lodoli relating to function, representation, and/or the truth of materials. I would agree that Lodoli’s thinking influenced the work but I do not believe that the significance of the project is based only on the issues noted above. This article will show that the Prato della Valle was also intended as a reconfigured Roman amphitheatre. Further, I will propose that the Prato della Valle operates in an emblematic way as a guide to understanding the role of history in design.

Evidence indicates that the *prato* has been occupied in various ways since Roman times. Vincenzo Radicchio, an eighteenth-century writer, asserted that the open field was used as a circus, for mock battles, and even as a theatre that later provided the stone for constructing the Rialto Bridge in Venice.<sup>2</sup> The *prato* remained an open space outside the city walls until the fifteenth century, and for the next few hundred years it was used as a marketplace, a parade ground, and even a place for manoeuvres by the cavalry. By the eighteenth century this marshy land was being used for fairs and for selling various wares. An etching by Canaletto shows opulent houses defining the irregular edge of the *prato*, connected by pathways worn into the field by use. [Fig. 1] The *prato* was the focus of a massive urban renewal project by Andrea

Memmo, the *Provveditore* (governor) of Padua, begun just after a major flood in 1772. The Prato della Valle, as the proposal became known, was one of a series of urban projects proposed by Memmo to make moral improvements to the city without straining the already tight economy. As a politician and architect, Memmo recognized its potential to boost tourism and the local economy, as well as improve the health and welfare of the citizens of Padua. To avoid the annual flood and the typically saturated soil condition, Memmo devised an elliptical canal to drain the land and divert the water into an existing canal. The project also proposed to transform the amorphous urban space into a site for large public gatherings such as annual fairs, firework displays, regattas, and horse races. Trees were to be planted to line the proposed elliptical island and a scheme was devised to install eighty-eight statues of famous Paduans along the canal. Andrea Memmo enlisted Francesco Piranesi to make etchings and a textual description to persuade citizens to finance the project by purchasing subscriptions for the statues lining the canal.

Andrea Memmo (1729–93) was no ordinary Venetian.<sup>3</sup> He was groomed from birth for an important life in politics. Named after his uncle, the family patriarch and a well-respected statesman, the young Andrea followed his elder namesake into political life.<sup>4</sup> After a series of duties related to his standing as a patrician in Venice, he went to Padua in 1771 to become its governor. In 1777 he was appointed as the *Balio* (ambassador) to Constantinople, a position he held for five years. During his tenure there he made plans for reconstructing the ambassador's house. He was then appointed ambassador to Rome and arrived there in the spring of 1783. For this recently widowed father of two girls, Rome was full of empty excitement. The lack of influence wielded by the Venetian Republic was painfully clear to him, and he found himself amused but bored. He was elected as the *Procuratore di S Marco* in 1787 and two years later

was narrowly defeated for the selection of Doge by Ludovico Manin, the last Doge of Venice. Memmo died in 1793 after a long bout of gangrene—one year before the Republic would do the same.

Eighteenth-century and current scholarship recognize Andrea Memmo as Carlo Lodoli's most faithful student. Memmo presented Lodoli's theory of architecture in at least two texts. The first, *Elementi dell'architettura Lodoliana* (1786), proposed new norms of architecture and critiqued almost everyone who had ever claimed to be an architect, especially Vitruvius.<sup>5</sup> The text also contains an outline for a treatise on architecture that Memmo claimed Lodoli gave him at the end of his life. An essential part of this outline is the metaphoric relation between function and representation. Thus, modern scholars often refer to Lodoli anticipating the modern dictum “form follows function.” The second text, *Apologhi immaginati* (1787), is a series of fifty-six fables that were presented during Lodoli's architectural lessons and written down after his death by Andrea Memmo.<sup>6</sup> Both texts by Memmo were written for students of architecture and explore the theme of *indole*, understood as “inherent nature.”<sup>7</sup> Lodoli used the word to describe both the individual nature of students and the specific nature of materials.

### ***Substitutions***

Though Lodoli is often described as an architect, his architectural production was not vast. It consisted of a series of renovations to his living quarters at the San Francesco della Vigna in Venice. The most well documented part of the renovations is a series of oddly shaped window frames. [Fig. 2] Throughout Venice, Lodoli saw cracks in the centre of stone window sills. He believed this was due to a poor understanding of materials and a lack of foresight with respect to the weathering of buildings. To remedy this condition, builders typically would leave out a

course of brick underneath the sill or would divide the sill into several pieces. Both solutions, as Lodoli observed, were still liable to fail under typical conditions. Lodoli believed that the downward force on the outer edges of the sill pushed the central portion of the sill upward and caused the stone to crack in the middle. To solve this problem, he reconstructed each window sill out of three pieces. The middle piece, wider in the centre and narrowed towards the outside edges, took the form of a catenary curve.<sup>8</sup> This middle piece was joined to the two side pieces with a mortise and tenon joint under the jamb (hidden under the plaster surface). Memmo claimed this was a completely new and totally Lodolian invention. Memmo called Lodoli's solution a *sostituzione* (substitution) and said that it could be used by others but should be adjusted to suit each different situation.<sup>9</sup> Memmo explained, "Other thresholds were made with circular segments, with catenaries, crushed stone, some with a menagerie of stone in the middle and sometimes without, depending on the various situations."<sup>10</sup> Following Lodoli's advice, Andrea Memmo designed very similar sills for his palazzo on the Grand Canal and for the Venetian Embassy in Constantinople.<sup>11</sup> According to Lodoli, each material has a specific nature (*indole*) and should be treated accordingly. Lodoli believed that the performance of stone must be understood in its particular situation and with common sense. In his sill it made sense for the stone to be thicker where the load is heaviest and where sills usually failed. Though none of Lodoli's writings on architecture have survived, Memmo described a *Libro delle sostituzioni* (Book of Substitutions) in which Lodoli documented various architectural details he had construed.<sup>12</sup> For Lodoli there was never one typical solution; each substitution should be appropriate to the place and the nature of the material.

The same approach guided Lodoli's teaching. Rather than setting lessons or exercises for students to imitate or execute, Lodoli taught through apologues: the fables that Memmo recorded

in the *Apologhi immaginati*. As with Lodoli's architectural substitutions, his teaching method depended on the nature of the student and the situation. The apologues were given orally, enabling Lodoli to adjust them each time. In the introduction of the *Apologhi*, Memmo noted that the apologues unfortunately had become fixed in written form and were unrelated to particular situations. Memmo explained Lodoli's intent:

With this new method, while remaining free in the manner in which to espouse his Apologues, he was able to adapt each of the phrases to the various abilities of his listeners and their various interests. It was for this reason that the same Apologue told in a different situation would seem to be another. This change of style would make suspect anyone trying to make a faithful recording in writing of the Apologues.<sup>13</sup>

It was difficult for Memmo to transcribe Lodoli's apologues because it had been over twenty-five years since Lodoli's death and because all of his apologues had been presented in different versions for particular situations.

Lodoli used typical characters from fables—mules, flies, eagles, frogs, geese, etc.—but also incorporated historical figures and various professions. Socrates might learn about patience from a snail, and an Athenian citizen might gain political insight from a more recent figure. The characters in Lodoli's apologues were often borrowed from fables, historical accounts, and Platonic dialogues. One example is “The Dangerous Citizen,” in which Lodoli describes the events surrounding the conspiracy involving the Roman politician Catiline, though in Lodoli's version a talking pomegranate provides the lesson about living peacefully within a society.<sup>14</sup> However, Lodoli did not simply tell stories. He was clearly aware of the tradition that preceded him. The introduction and first story in the *Apologhi* acknowledge previous introductions to

fables with an appropriately named “Story of the Story.”<sup>15</sup> Lodoli looked to historical precedent not simply to describe the past nor to imitate it. His attitude to historical precedent is shown in the story “The Young Nun and Her Mother.”<sup>16</sup> Lodoli describes a young nun who often made cakes for her family. Her mother was bored with having the same cakes all the time and asked her to make something else. The young nun made several attempts but eventually reverted to her old way of making cakes and had to turn to her mother for guidance. The mother then showed her daughter how to make new and more tasteful cakes. To break with her past, the nun relied on someone older, whom we might expect to be more traditional. Lodoli's lesson was to look to the past to find new meaning.

Memmo's first publication of his teacher's architectural theories, *Elementi dell'architettura*, is a rambling, point-by-point analysis of Vitruvius, the Greeks, the Romans, and finally the Moderns. Throughout its hundred and fifty pages, each of the Golden Ages prior to the eighteenth century is criticized for blindly following historical precedent rather than reason.<sup>17</sup> Vitruvius was criticized for being obscure and difficult and for giving impractical advice. This critique was based mainly on contradictions that Lodoli had found in the translation of Vitruvius's work. However, like the young nun who returned to her mother, Lodoli repeatedly returned to Vitruvius throughout the *Elementi*. The Galiani edition of Vitruvius, to which Memmo refers, is a bilingual Italian/Latin edition that was considered the definitive Italian edition in the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Lodoli did not simply cite Galiani's translation but made corrections to his Italian and used these more careful translations to develop his own theory. Memmo's architecture and political action were clearly influenced by Lodoli's thoughts on representation, materiality, and function but the results were sometimes dubious. I would assert,

however, that Memmo's historical awareness was developed from Lodoli's lessons and that his proposal for the Prato della Valle closely resembles Lodoli's tactics of substitution.

### ***Memmo's Prato***

Memmo was more even-tempered than the acerbic Lodoli, and this advanced his political agenda. Whereas Lodoli's efforts were focused on the education of young patricians, Memmo used his position as a politician to seek social reform through architectural production. He believed that public works could enrich the lives of the citizens, boost the local economy, and increase tourism. He detailed his intentions in a small book: *Viste politiche sopra varie parti del Governo di Padova la maggior parte delle quail bisognose di lume, e di ben maturi esami*.<sup>19</sup> It outlines Memmo's vision for civic improvements such as installing street lighting, restoring facades, formalizing agricultural festivals, replacing wooden bridges with stone, paving busier streets and squares, and organizing a fire brigade. He thought these improvements would make the city more attractive to foreigners. Memmo, the ever-conscious politician, kept a checklist to record work that had been completed. The Prato della Valle was clearly his most lasting project and it included many of his ideas for improving the city.

We know of Memmo's thoughts for the *prato* from a strange book published in 1786. In the frontispiece of *Descrizione della general idea, ed in gran parte effettuata dall' Eccellentissimo Signore Andrea Memmo* (1786), Vincenzo Radicchio is named as Memmo's secretary.<sup>20</sup> There is no evidence that Vincenzo actually existed. It is more likely that this Signore Radicchio was a playful *nom de plume* for Andrea Memmo, as well as a reference to the *prato*. "Vincenzo Radicchio" translates to "*radicchio* from the city of Vicenza." Radicchio is a bitter, leafy vegetable that is usually grown in late fall, when the ground is saturated and very

moist, like the previous marshy condition of the *prato*. Domenico Cerato, the builder who carried out the work, was originally from Vicenza. Memmo, though clearly the author of the project, shied away from claiming this role, as is evident from correspondence between Memmo and Cerato.<sup>21</sup> Much of the text describes procedures for funding the project, difficulties in draining and grading the land, and thoughts about how pleasant the Prato della Valle would be for the citizens of Padua.

It is impressive that Memmo was able to fund and build one of the largest public spaces in Europe at a time when the Republic of Venice was almost bankrupt after many years of costly warfare.<sup>22</sup> Funding was obtained initially through a tax on goods and services sold at the annual fairs. This paid for canals to be dug and bridges and stairs to be constructed during the first four years.<sup>23</sup> When this funding proved insufficient to complete the project, Memmo changed tactics and began selling subscriptions for the individual statues that would line the canal. This ingenious plan enabled individuals to choose the subject for each statue they had funded. The cost of the statue depended on the wealth of the purchaser.

Memmo commissioned Giuseppe Subleyras to represent the project in a painting, from which Francesco Piranesi then made an etching. The top border on Subleyras's painting indicates the immense size of the proposal: 974,012 sq. ft. [Fig. 3] Further, he explains that the proposed Prato della Valle will include a public garden on the newly formed island, an area for the annual agricultural fair, an amphitheatre, houses, permanent shops, a museum of statues, canals, paths for walking, a grove of trees, a lake, and fountains.<sup>24</sup> The painting shows details of each structure, including tiered seating beyond the outermost row of statues. Piranesi's etching is taken from roughly the same viewpoint. [Fig. 4] The images are revealing in a number of ways. They clearly show a central axis leading to Memmo's residence at the Palazzo Angeli. The plan



is not aligned to the cardinal points; instead, it follows previous paths that cut through the once-open space and led to the centre of the city. Both images also show a third ring of statues that was never built but would have lined the track for the *palio* (horse race) that Memmo proposed. There are a few differences between the two images. Piranesi's version is more detailed and shows the city beyond, but omits the details that frame Sibleyras's version and removes the tiered seating, central pavilion, and differentiation between the second and third exterior rings.

Piranesi was originally asked to make a catalogue showing all of the statues, but at that time there were not enough subscribers to make it worthwhile. Therefore he represented another view from above, showing the entire proposal. The first statue to be placed was that of Cicero, though this was only a mock-up for others to imitate. This statue was destroyed and a likeness of Cicero is not to be found in the Prato della Valle today. Memmo intended that the statues would represent illustrious men from any nation who had brought glory in some way to the city of Padua.<sup>25</sup> Though the subjects were to be noble, the statues remained somewhat ordinary. At least fifteen different sculptors carved the statues but all appear to be by the same hand because they include similar features: All are made from similar stone, have the same scale, and are numbered and inscribed with the Latinized name of the subject.<sup>26</sup> Further, Memmo mandated that none of the subjects could be living.<sup>27</sup> Memmo funded the first statue: Antenor, the mythical founder of Padua, who occupies position number two. Four popes, five Memmos, and Paduans such as Galileo and Giovanni Poleni are represented.<sup>28</sup> The numbering begins on the right side of the path on the main axis leading from Memmo's house. The statue placed at position number one was originally Marc Antonio Memmo but was replaced by a statue of Antonio Diedo after the French destroyed the statue of Memmo. The numbering continues counterclockwise along the

outside of the canal until it reaches the left side of the path. It then continues, again counterclockwise, on the inside of the canal.

### ***An Amphitheatre, Reconsidered***

Memmo intended that the public Prato della Valle would function in many ways: as a fairground, as an open theatre, and as a track for horse races. The canal was the setting for a regatta and the interior quadrants could be used as a stage for hunting games and as a place to launch and view fireworks.<sup>29</sup> It was intended to accommodate a wide range of spectacles and indeed Memmo referred to them as *spettacoli*.<sup>30</sup> In a recent article in *Chora*, George L. Hersey describes the connection between the spectacle and the amphitheatre: "*Spectaculum* and *spectator* connote the act of seeing. Another name for the Coliseum does the same: amphitheatre. θεατρον can mean 'the spectators', 'those who are looking!'"<sup>31</sup> This clearly matches Memmo's intention for the project. Memmo/Radicchio is even more deliberate in the description of the form:

He began to sketch designs, and in the somewhat triangular plan of the Prato he inscribed the most regular and pleasant form that he was able: the oval. And amongst all of the ovals, he chose the one that was most beloved by both the ancients and moderns alike, the Amphitheatre Flavius, also known as the Coliseum, a figure that had been altered only slightly since it was executed.<sup>32</sup>

The excavation for the canal revealed that the site was originally used by the Romans as a theatre. This serendipity notwithstanding, it is clear that Memmo looked back to the Romans for guidance in his proposal for the Prato della Valle. The elliptical plan is taken directly from a Roman amphitheatre. He knew and praised the Coliseum in Rome, as well as the one in Verona,

just a short journey from Padua. Originally Memmo thought that an amphitheatre would be the ideal built form to house all of the public functions he was proposing. As the design developed, however, he decided that it was flawed in several ways. This partially explains the differences in the representations by Subleyras and Piranesi. The first problem was that the seating for an amphitheatre would block all of the houses around the *prato*. If he lowered the seating, this would give free views to those who live in the houses. Another problem was that the population of Padua was not large enough to fill all of the seats in an amphitheatre, so events would not be profitable. Although an exact replica of an ancient amphitheatre might not be appropriate, the public functioning of such an amphitheatre—as *spectaculum*—might be. I suspect it was at this point that Memmo substituted the Roman amphitheatre with the more appropriate public park that still functions today: the Prato della Valle. To develop this further requires speculation on Memmo’s understanding of an ancient amphitheatre. For this, we need to look at the work of Scipione Maffei (1675–1755), the erudite author of theatrical and educational reform, as well as an antiquarian, Arcadian, and one of Lodoli’s most important influences.

Memmo was not a particularly good scholar, but he knew where to look. His knowledge of amphitheatres was most likely derived from Scipione Maffei’s massive study of the history of Verona, the *Verona illustrata* (1731).<sup>33</sup> Maffei even notes that Lodoli showed him a manuscript, now lost to history, describing the amphitheatres on the island of Candia. Giovanni Poleni, the doctor to the ailing dome of St. Peter’s, was also researching the form of the amphitheatre.<sup>34</sup> Alexander Gordon quickly translated the fourth volume of Maffei’s study, on amphitheatres, into English.<sup>35</sup> In his introduction, Gordon states that Maffei’s contribution was to distinguish between the theatre and the amphitheatre according to their respective events. Simply put, the theatre, a Greek invention, had no gladiators and was only for musical performances. Both

Maffei and Poleni regarded the amphitheatre as a Roman invention that is not tied to the landscape, whereas a Greek theatre is situated on a hillside. Maffei further distinguished between them according to the height of the exterior wall and whether numbers were engraved on the arches of the openings. Maffei decided that the arena at Nîmes was not really an amphitheatre because it was only two stories tall, had no numbers engraved on the arches, and had no windows in the upper part of the building.<sup>36</sup> Another factor that distinguished the amphitheatre from the theatre was safety. Maffei explained that it was important to keep the animals in place and not to let them attack the spectators—surely a prudent decision that would encourage spectators to return. Though these two building forms are distinct, Maffei claimed that the form of the amphitheatre came from placing two circular theatres together, forming an ellipse.<sup>37</sup>

Much modern scholarship has attempted to determine whether the amphitheatre was indeed an ellipse or simply an oval. The confusion typically comes from inaccuracies that arise when replicating a drawing at a much larger scale on the ground. It is also difficult to make concentric curves truly parallel when constructing the seating and the exterior wall. Add to this the potential for a cosmic reading of the geometry and one can imagine the disputes over how amphitheatres were laid out. Mark Wilson Jones has shown that the plan of the Coliseum was not simply a geometric or arithmetic construction, but was actually both.<sup>38</sup> The multiple reading is due to the differences between its ideal geometry and its material construction. A geometric trace was inscribed first and corrected later, when the exterior wall was built. Wilson Jones presents two very similar geometric constructions for the initial layout of the Coliseum. [Fig. 5] They follow the same geometric steps but their initial triangles have different proportions.

Domenico Cerato (1715–92), the professor of *Practica architettura civile*, and his assistant Daniel Danieletti demonstrated the same geometry in a series of drawings from which

the Prato della Valle was constructed.<sup>39</sup> [Fig. 6] Cerato's plan is drawn to scale, the statues are numbered (though differently than as-built), a few statues—*Dose* (Doge), Antenor, and Azzo d'Este—are labeled, and the shops are outlined. As the exterior “wall” was a series of statues, the curves of the ellipses did not need to be parallel, and the difficult ellipse-versus-oval discussion is moot. The plan shows a geometric construction very similar to Maffei's drawing of the “subterranean” plan of an amphitheatre. [Fig. 7] Both plans include light construction lines that help explain how they would be laid out. Both are constructed from a triangle whose base locates the two focal points; a circle is then inscribed around each focal point to help form the initial arc. There is a slight difference that can be explained by looking at Sebastiano Serlio's description of ovals, found in his *Tutte l'opera d'architettura* (1537–75). [Fig. 8] In the text, Serlio offers different methods of constructing ovals. The first begins with a pair of equilateral triangles, then extends four of the sides and uses radii to inscribe four arcs that form the shape. Ovals with different proportions can be constructed by varying the radii. The second method (*ovalo tondo*) also relies on a pair of equilateral triangles, though it begins with two circles and uses the two points of intersection to generate the arcs. These two ovals described by Serlio are the same as those described by Wilson Jones. Though he begins the second method with two arcs and not two circles, the result is the same: a Vesica Piscis. [Fig. 9] Allow me to demonstrate: A point is made. A line is extended from that point. A circle is inscribed using the point as the centre and the line as the radius. Using the opposite end of the line as a centre point, a second circle is drawn. Connecting the endpoints of the line to one of the points where the circles intersect generates an equilateral triangle. This geometric proof is the basis of Euclidean geometry.

### *Prato della Valle, Reconsidered*

Andrea Memmo imaginatively substituted the public function of a Roman amphitheatre—as *spectaculum*—into an appropriate response for eighteenth-century Padua. The *prato* did not become an amphitheatre proper, but I would argue that it performed the same role in the public realm. Similar to Lodoli substituting the characters and morals of ancient fables into specific responses for individual students, Memmo substituted the history of Padua into eighty-eight numbered statues. The references between old and new are obvious, though Memmo did not seem concerned that the urban form should be novel. Indeed, most references—the geometry, the numbering of openings and statues, the spectacles to be witnessed, and even the separation of animals into the four quarters of the plan—are quite direct. Memmo’s references, however, are always adjusted to the new situation using common sense.

I would propose to read the geometry of the plan in a more emblematic way. The Vesica Piscis at the centre of Cerato’s plan might also demonstrate an approach to history that, like the young nun returning to her mother, is productive rather than repetitive. I will very briefly explain how I understand this within the realm of architectural making. One forms a question within a given situation (a point is made and a circle is drawn). One then looks to others in history who have asked similar questions (a second circle is drawn). It is essential that the other work be viewed within its own world and not retrospectively. Through historical and philosophical dialogue the question is fleshed out and becomes specific. It is pursued through making and action, not through abstract thought (an equilateral triangle is constructed). Its fusion of horizons refigures new meaning and a work is created through historical dialogue. This is not historical kitsch, as the work generates meaning in this world and not solely by referring to another. This is not simply historical inquiry nor technical production alone. Its relation to history is metaphoric

and it synthesizes heterogeneous elements into practical action. Judgement then may be based on the depth and rigour of research and not only on the manipulation of form, technical certainty, or ironic historical reference.

### ***Postscript***

In the 1770s Andrea Memmo discovered the ruins of a theatre on the site of the *prato*, a serendipity that foreshadowed the role of the project as a substituted amphitheatre. In researching this article I found my own happy coincidence. In his proposal for the 1985 Biennale di Venezia, Aldo Rossi used the Prato della Valle as one of six sites for exploration. It is interesting that Rossi's own fascination with the form of ancient amphitheatres and his critique of naïve functionalism were based on the transcendence of form over use. In a perverse way, Memmo inverted Rossi's argument by referring back to the form of a ruin that was never there and by substituting its old use with a new use. It may not be coincidence, then, that another theatre appeared before Rossi discovered the Prato della Valle: In 1981 Rossi's *Teatro del mondo a Venezia* floated past the Grand Canal, into the lagoon, and then out to sea, where it became a ruin.

## Captions

Figure 1: Antonio Canaletto, *Il Prato della Valle* (1770s?). From *Prato della Valle: Due millenni di storia di un'avventura urbana*, ed. Lionello Puppi (Padua: Signum 1986).

Figure 2: Carlo Lodoli, Sill at S. Francesco della Vigna, Venice, Italy (1740s?). Photo by author.

Figure 3: Giuseppe Subleyras, *Generale idea per la definitive sistemazione del Prato* [Proposal for the final organization of the Prato] (1784–85). Biblioteca Civica, Padua.

Figure 4: Francesco Piranesi, *Generale idea per la definitive sistemazione del Prato* [Proposal for the final organization of the Prato] (1784–85). Biblioteca Civica, Padua.

Figure 5: Method for laying out monumental civic amphitheatres. From Mark Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2000).

Figure 6: Domenico Cerato, *Pianta della fiera di Padova nuovamente eretta nel Prato della Valle* [Plan of the recently built fairgrounds in the Prato della Valle] (1776). Biblioteca Civica, Padua.

Figure 7: Scipione Maffei, “Condotti sotterranei con indicazioni mecanica dell’elisso” [Underground conduits with description of the elliptical construction], *Verona illustrata*, vol. 4 (Verona: Per Jacopo Vallarsi, e Pierantonio Berno, 1731–32).

Figure 8: Two methods for constructing an oval. From Sebastiano Serlio, *The Book of Architecture* (1611), translation of *Tutte l’opera d’architettura* (1537–75).

Figure 9: Vesica Piscis. Drawing by author.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Joseph Rykwert, *The First Moderns* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1980), 317–23, and Rebecca Williamson, “Andrea Memmo’s Prato della Valle,” *Urban Design Studies* 6 (2000): 93–104. Manlio Brusatin, “Il Prato della Valle: Progetti, trasformazioni, personaggi e spettacolo di un luogo urbano di Padova,” *Lotus* 30 (1981): 47–56, was translated into English in the same issue. The standard reference in Italian is *Prato della Valle: Due millenni di storia di un’avventura urbana*, ed. Lionello Puppi (Padua: Signum 1986).

<sup>2</sup> See Vincenzo Radicchio, *Descrizione della general idea concepita in gran parte effettuata d’al eccellentissimo signore Andrea Memmo* (Rome: Antonio Fulgoni 1786), 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> See GianFranco Torcellan, *Una figura della Venezia settecentesca: Andrea Memmo* (Venice and Rome: Istituto per la collaborazione cultural 1963) for the most informative biography of Memmo. His family, which included two Doges, was considered to be one of the original twelve families whose offspring formed the patrician class in Venice. The Memmo family line ended with Andrea’s death in 1793.

<sup>4</sup> The elder Andrea held many positions in the Venetian government, including Ambassador (*Balio*) to Constantinople, where he was famously imprisoned and tortured. He ended his career as the *Procuratore di San Marco*, the highest position in Venice after the Doge.

<sup>5</sup> Andrea Memmo, *Elementi dell’architettura Lodoliana ossia, L’arte di fabbricare con solidità scientifica e con eleganza non capricciosa*, 2 vols. (Zara: Fratelli Battari 1834) was first published in Rome in 1786. Memmo’s daughter, Lucia Mocenigo, funded the publication of the second edition.

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<sup>6</sup> There are two editions of Andrea Memmo, *Apologhi immaginati, e sol estemporaneamente in voce esposti agli amici suoi / dal fu fra Carlo de' conti Lodoli* (Bassano: 1787). The first was published on the occasion of Memmo being elected *Procuratore di S Marco*. Gio Claudio Molini published another edition (Paris: 1800) with minor grammatical corrections and a smaller format.

<sup>7</sup> See Marc J. Neveu, "Architectural Lessons of Carlo Lodoli (1690–1761): *Indole* of Material and of Self" (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2006), in which both understandings of *indole* are developed more fully.

<sup>8</sup> Memmo does not refer to Giovanni Poleni specifically, though he does describe the curve of the sill as a catenary—the same curve proposed by Poleni to cure the ailing dome at St. Peter's in Rome. See Augusto Cavallari-Murat, "Giovanni Poleni e la costruzione architettonica," in *Giovanni Poleni (1683–1761) nel bicentario della morte* (Padua: Accademia patavina di scienze lettere ed arti 1963), 55–94.

<sup>9</sup> Lodoli proposed another such substitution for a door frame. It is not known if Lodoli did construct such a frame but an example can be seen in the frontispiece of the Giovanni Ziborghi edition of Vignola. See Memmo, *Elementi dell'architettura Lodoliana*, 2:159. Memmo referred to Giovanni Ziborghi, *L'architettura di Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola : ridotta a facile metodo per mezzo di osservazioni a profitto de' studenti* (Bassano: Remmondi 1748). Domenico Cerato, the professor of architecture, constructed a very similar frame in his renovation at La Specola.

<sup>10</sup> "Altre soglie fece con segmenti di circolo, con catenaries, di pietre cotte, con la serraglia di pietra viva nel mezzo ed anche senza, secondo le varie situazione." Memmo, *Elementi dell'architettura Lodoliana*, 2:159. Translation by author; emphasis added.

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<sup>11</sup> See Tommaso Bertele, *Il palazzo degli ambasciatori di Venezia a Constantinopole le sue antiche memorie* (Bologna: Apollo 1931). Though I have not seen the building, drawings can be found in the Bertele text and also in Manilo Brusatin, *Venezia nel settecento : stato, architettura, territorio* (Turin: Einaudi 1980), images 107, 108. Both are reproductions of originals in the Archivio di Stato in Venice. Memmo's proposal was not completed. The Bertele text shows photos of the palazzo in 1931, without the "Lodolian" sills. I have no evidence of its current condition.

<sup>12</sup> See Memmo, *Elementi dell'architettura Lodoliana*, 2:149. Memmo briefly describes the book.

<sup>13</sup> "Con questo nuovo metodo, mentre tentavasi libero nella maniera di esporre i suoi Apologhi, onde meglio adattarne il frasario ancora alla diversa capacità degli ascoltatori, od alle varie loro inclinazioni, nasceva, che lo stessissimo Apologo, a chi in separata società l'aveva un'altra volta udito, paresse un altro. Un sì fatto cambiamento di stile potrebbe ancora far prendere in sospetto chi scrive per quanto fosse esatto, di non esserne fedel espositore." Memmo, *Apologhi immaginati*, 7. Translation by author.

<sup>14</sup> Memmo, *Apologhi immaginati*, 69–73. Another example is Lodoli's retelling of the Platonic dialogue *Laches*, called "The Graceful Hunter" by Lodoli. In both, the main character possesses an unwieldy gun that is analogous to knowledge. The moral of the story is that knowledge without judgment is useless or, at best, misguided.

<sup>15</sup> Giambattista Basile, Leon Battista Alberti, and Marsilio Ficino all introduce their collections with a "story of the story." See David Marsh's introduction to *Renaissance Fables: Aesopic Prose by Leon Battista Alberti, Bartolomeo Scala, Leonardo da Vinci, Bernardino Baldi* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2004).

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<sup>16</sup> Memmo, *Apologhi immaginati*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Memmo praises the Greeks for creating a Golden Age of architecture but criticizes them for blindly accepted the authority of those who came before them, as shown by their poor reasoning when they translated an architecture of wood into an architecture of stone. He praised the Romans more highly than the Greeks, though they made mistakes based on blind imitation and not clear reason. The same critique applies to the Moderns.

<sup>18</sup> Berardo Galiani, *L'Architettura di M. Vitruvio Pollione colla traduzione Italiana e commento del Marchese Berardo Galiani* (Naples: Stamperia Simoniana 1758). Memmo claimed that Lodoli had written on architecture and specifically on Vitruvius, though he did not refer to a particular source. Lodoli's corrections are very specific and seem to have come from a textual source. It is difficult to imagine Memmo remembering corrections word-for-word after twenty years.

<sup>19</sup> See Andrea Memmo, "*Viste politiche*," ms. BP 2230/XL (1775?) in the Biblioteca Civica di Padova. See Williamson, "Andrea Memmo's Prato della Valle," 93–104, for a more complete description of the text.

<sup>20</sup> The full title is *Descrizione della general idea concepita, ed in gran parte effettuata dall'eccellentissimo Signore Andrea Memmo Cavaliere, e Procurator di S Marco, quando fu per la Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia nel MDCCLXXV, e Vi. Proveditor Straordinario della Città di Padova, sul materiale del Prato, che denominavasi della Valle. Onde renderlo utile anche per la potentissima via del diletto a quell popolo, ed a maggior decoro della stessa città, a maggior intelligenza delle due grandi incisioni, che stanno per uscire dalla calcografia Piranesi.*

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*Estesa da D. Vincenzo Radicchio Veneziano* (Rome: Antonio Fulgoni 1786). Giuseppe Subleyras also made two etchings for marketing the Prato della Valle.

<sup>21</sup> See Williamson, “Andrea Memmo’s Prato della Valle,” 100.

<sup>22</sup> See James Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility as a Ruling Class* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press 1962).

<sup>23</sup> See Radicchio, *Descrizione della general idea concepita*, 15–25, for a discussion of how the funding of the initial stages of the *prato* was handled and praised.

<sup>24</sup> *Nuova piazza di Padova nel sito prima detto il Prato della Valle comprendente la riflessibile soma di piedi geometrici quadrati 974012 rialzato e livellato colla formazione dell’isola o pubblico giardino, e colla indicazione delle introdotesi mercantile fiere spettacoli, anfiteatro, case, e botteghe stabili, pinacoteca di statue, canale, passeggi, bosco, lago, tempio fontane, e dietro l’idea già concepita dal S.E. [sic] Andrea Memmo quando nel 1775 teneva il governo di quella città or nel 1784 in gran parte eseguitasi senza aggravio dell’ e (eccellentissimo) senato della casa del pub. Padovano e senza alcuna imposizione sul popolo straordinaria.*

<sup>25</sup> It was only men. The sole female representation is that of the icon of Padua and at the side of Andrea Memmo’s likeness.

<sup>26</sup> Pietro Danieletti of Padua made twelve (no. 7, 10, 35, 36, 38, 39, 46, 47, 48, 51, 85, 86); Luigi Verona, also from Padua, made fourteen (no. 8, 11, 13, 15, 24, 25, 27, 31, 43, 58, 62, 79, 81, 82); Giovanni Ferrari made nineteen (no. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 30, 59, 60, 64, 65, 66, 67, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76); and Canova, the most prominent sculptor of the day, made only two: his own and Giovanni Poleni’s (no. 52).

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<sup>27</sup> The only exception was Antonio Canova (1757–1822) (no. 68). He is represented sculpting the bust of Antonio Capello, *Procuratore di S Marco* (1523). In the sculpture, Canova is dressed in eighteenth-century costume, though covered by an ancient smock. A sculpture of Andrea Memmo was funded by Angelo Diedo and added in 1794, a year after his death.

<sup>28</sup> The popes are: Pope Paul II (1418–71) (no. 22), paid for by Pope Pius VI in 1786; Pope Eugenio IV (1383–1447) (no. 23), donated by the Benedictine monks in 1782; Pope Alessandro VIII (Pietro Ottoboni) (1610–91) (no. 66), donated by the Duchess Ottoboni-Serbelloni in 1787; and Pope Clemente XIII (Carlo Rezzonico) (1693–1769) (no. 67), donated by two of the Rezzonico brothers in 1787. The Memmos are: Doge Marc Antonio Memmo, now destroyed (no. 1); Giovanni Maria Memmo (1509–79) (no. 30), paid for by Duke Peter of Curland in 1787; Maffeo Memmo (fourteenth century) (no. 42), paid for by Andrea Memmo in 1776; and Andrea Memmo (1729–93) (no. 44), paid for by Angelo Diedo in 1794. This last statue replaced Domenico Contarini and put Andrea’s likeness at the entry to the main axis of the Prato della Valle. Prior to the move, Andrea Memmo occupied position number 33. For a description of each of the statues, see *Prato della Valle*, ed. Puppi, 160–73.

<sup>29</sup> See Radicchio, *Descrizione della general idea concepita*, 14–15. Radicchio/Memmo even discusses how the design for starting races around the oval would compensate for the length of the interior ring being shorter than the outer ring.

<sup>30</sup> See Radicchio, *Descrizione della general idea concepita*, 54–61.

<sup>31</sup> George L. Hersey, “The Colosseum: The Cosmic Geometry of a Spectaculum,” in *Chora: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture*, vol. 4, ed. Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Stephen Parcell

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(Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2004), 122. I will not attempt to argue that the geometry of the Prato della Valle holds any cosmic implications.

<sup>32</sup> “Cominciò a scarabocchiar disegni, e nella quasi triangular figura del Prato inscrisse la più regolata, e gradita che potè, qual’er l’ovale, e tra le ovali scelta quella, che tanto piacque all’universale antico, e moderno dell’Anfiteatro Flavio, o sia del Colosseo, figura che fu un poco alterata da chi poi ne ordino l’eccezione, e che quando S. E. trovavasi fuor[i] di Città per veder gli esercizi dei Miliziotti, credendosi di fargli un piacere, fu collocata dirimpetto al suo Palazzo, ch’è ben contermine alla principale strada, che dale piazze porta nel Prato, ma che non lasciava più che le Quattro strade ad angolo retti, che dovevano giustamente incontrar questa, e le altre tre strade venienti in Prato avess più luogo, come Egli disegnato.” Radicchio, *Descrizione della general idea concepita*, 8–9. Translation by author.

<sup>33</sup> See Scipione Maffei, *Verona illustrata* (Verona: Per Jacopo Vallarsi, e Pierantonio Berno 1731–32), 4:35, and its translation by Alexander Gordon, *A compleat history of the ancient amphitheatres. More peculiarly regarding the architecture of those buildings, and in particular that of Verona by the Marquis Scipio Maffei; made English from the Italian original* (London: W. Sare 1735), 80.

<sup>34</sup> See Giovanni Poleni, *Degli antichi teatri, e anfiteatri : lettere due critiche / l'una del signor marchese Giovanni Poleni ... l'altra del signor conte Giovanni Montenari* (1735) and Poleni’s critical edition of Vitruvius, completed by his student Simon Stratico, *Architectura : textu ex recensione codicum emendato / cum exercitationibus notisque novissimis Joannis Poleni et commentariis variorum, additis nunc primum studiis Simonis Stratico* (1825–30). Though the

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work was completed later than Memmo's *Prato della Valle*, various pieces were available from Poleni as early as 1741.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon, *A compleat history of the ancient amphitheatres*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Based on these criteria, Maffei claimed that only three amphitheatres existed in the time of ancient Rome: the Coliseum in Rome, a second in Verona called the Arena, and a third in Capua. Maffei claimed that others at Nîmes in Languedoc, Pola in Istria, Syracuse in Sicily, and Puzzola near Naples were merely theatres and not amphitheatres. Maffei suspects the same of the arena in Pola, though he decides to reserve judgment until he has seen it. (It was only a theatre.)

<sup>37</sup> Here, Maffei cites Pliny and Alberti. See Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1988), 278.

<sup>38</sup> See Mark Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2000), 87–88.

<sup>39</sup> Cerato, born in Mason, just outside Vicenza, began a school there but was forced to shut it down due to his “unnatural inclinations.” These “inclinations” and other issues are discussed in Giambattista Fogaroli, *Notizie sulla vita dell'architetto abate Domenico Cerato, vicentino* (Padua: Prosperina 1863). Ettore Motterle attributed his career path to his connections to wealthy Vicentines. See Ettore Motterle, “L'Abate D. Domenico Cerato, architetto e professore” (PhD dissertation, Università di Padova, 1959). See also Giambattista Zanazzo, “L'Abate Architetto Domenico Cerato,” *Odeo Olimpico* 4 (1943–63): 83–92. He traveled to Padua and began working with his friend Giuseppe Toaldo. His first project was La Specola, an observatory. Renovations to the building also included space for his new school of architecture. He assisted



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Memmo on other projects. For the curriculum of his school, see Domenico Cerato, *Nuovo metodo per disegnare li cinque ordini d'architettura civile conforme le regole di Palladio, e di Scamozzi, ed alcune regole di geometria pratica* (Padua: Penada 1784).