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Architectural Knowledge: Transmission, Exchange and Translation

Title: *"L'apologo dell'apologo."*

Author: Marc J Neveu, PhD
Executive Editor, *Journal of Architectural Education*
Associate Professor, Architecture Department
Wentworth Institute of Technology
Boston, MA 01215
neveum1@wit.edu

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Through the Italian *settecento*, the vast majority of architectural treatises differed from publications of the previous centuries in that very few purported to offer original knowledge. The topic of publication, rather, was pedagogic in nature, tended to be blatantly more syncretic and was intended for a new audience, the youth. The texts, by authors as varied as Bibiena, Masi, and Vittone, contained summations of previous treatises, practical guidance concerning issues of building, estimating, and law, as well as observations, demonstrations, as well as exercises and instructions to work through and complete. Further, each offered a more “practical” guide to developing one’s taste (*gusto*)—the defining characteristic of the worth of an architect.

Architectural education in the Veneto began in the seventeenth century when Galileo taught the theory of civil and military architecture; it was studied in Padua, albeit sporadically, for the next hundred years. By the mid-eighteenth century, various means of architectural instruction had developed as an education that was seen variously as an attempt at recognition for artists separate from the guilds; a political means of reform; or a continuation of the Venetian tradition with respect to craft. Between the poles of Venice and Padua, several individuals emerged who focused on teaching architecture within the university, the academy, and the city of Venice itself: Giovanni Poleni’s demonstrations of various *machinae* in his theater of physics in Padua, Domenico Cerato’s professional practices at La Specola, and Antonio Visentini’s visual corrections of Venice each offered a competing vision and, as importantly, a publication, that proposed a mode of architectural education. It was in this context that Carlo Lodoli began teaching architectural rhetoric to young Venetians.

Unique in architectural publication is the *Apologhi Immaginati*, posthumously published by Lodoli’s most faithful student, Andrea Memmo. The text contains fifty-six architectural fables used by Lodoli in his *scuola di conversazione* in Venice. Memmo begins the introduction by expressing their importance, but did not feel that he needed to prove how important they were. Memmo asserted: “Non perderò ora tempo a mostrar quail utilità possano derivar dalle immagini [the apologues], che fondata sopra una ben intesta analogia, e con industria dirette all’uso pratico della vita per la stessa via del diletto agevolano l’intelligenza, o purificano il cuore.” He continued to explain that Lodoli was not interested in simply proposing moral tales, as other fable-tellers may have done. Rather, Lodoli “crearne per l’uso di tutte le professioni, come s’è potuto vedere, dove trattatti dell Civile Architettura [*Elementi dell’Architettura Lodoliana*], e come meglio vedrassi nella seconda parte d’esso mio libro già compiuta, e che non tarderà molto ad uscire.” The stories were clearly pedagogical in design, intended to spur action and not simply for amusement or contemplation.

This codification of education-specific texts in lieu of traditional treatises in Venice and Italy lays the foundation for the establishment, in the 19th c., of the profession as defined by Carr-Saunders. This short essay will situate Lodoli’s fables within the context of the epistemological foundations of architectural education in Venice and demonstrate that just prior to the codification of knowledge essential to establishment of a “professional” architect, another voice was part of the conversation.