

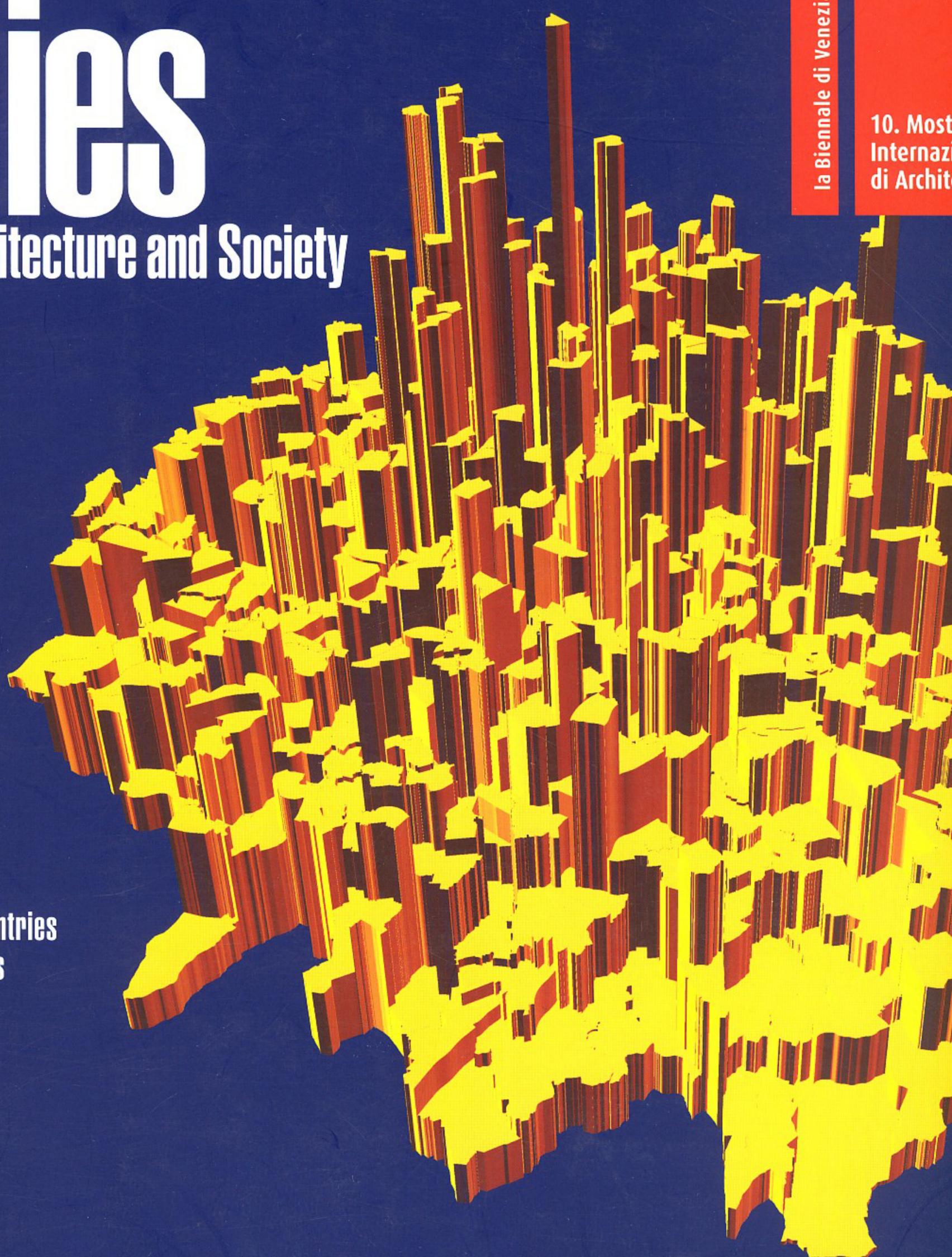
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The Dispersed Urbanity of the Aegean Archipelago

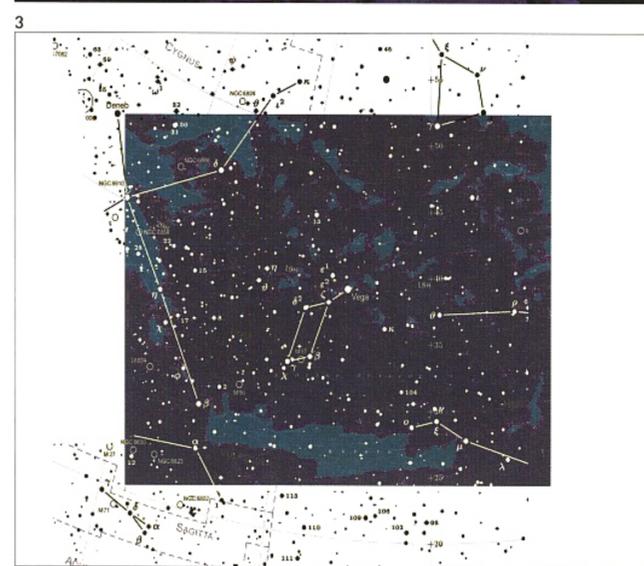
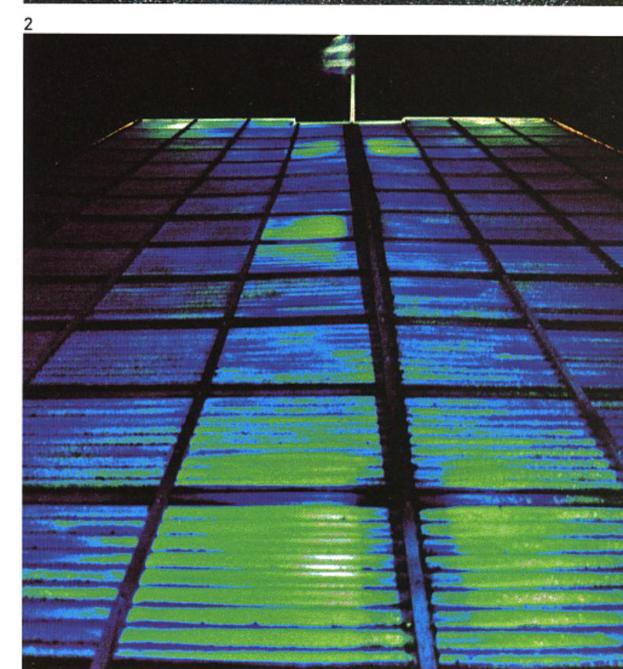
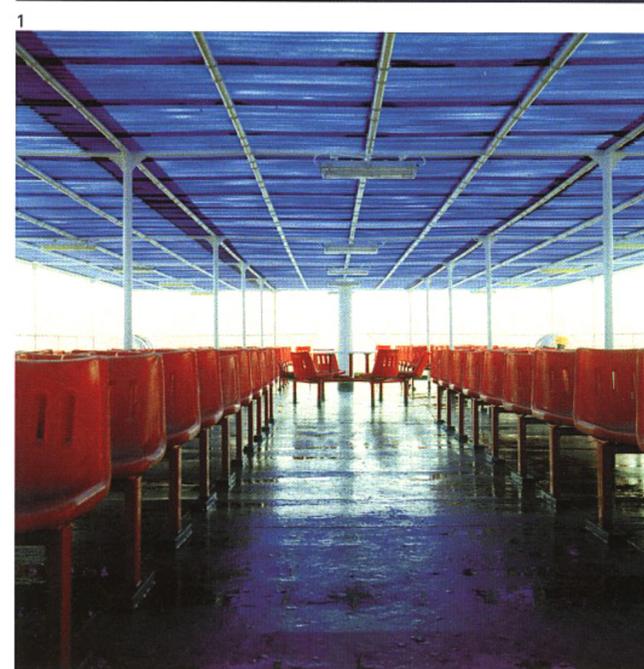
1. The Aegean Archipelago is a scattered city. The Aegean sea is not a void but a field which integrates the clusters of its 65 major islands into a *system of differences*: a complex network of social relations, economies, exchanges, symbolisms, infrastructures and the natural characteristics that constitute a city. The historians Romano and Asdrachas have argued that the Archipelago is not a theme park or a privileged resort, but a real community whose population of 1,300,000 inhabitants is tripled in the course of the year. Successive forced migrations and return journeys, tourist congestion and a multitude of economic migrants are exerting pressure on the human geography of this city and are shaping the islands' distinctive identities.

The peculiar physical geography and loose institutional protection of the urban fabric has prevented the settlements from gigantism, and the dispersion of the islands has discouraged their homogenization leading to the development of a *decentralized centrality*. The diversification in the relationship between built/unbuilt, in their models of habitation and in their rapidly changing architecture, generates island 'constellations' on the Archipelago map: they are the island utopias, the islands of prehistory, of hospitality, of rare products, of maritime shipping, of family tourism, of vanity, of liberality and tolerance, of anarchy, of exile and confinement, of shelter and of pilgrimage.

2. The endurance of the Archipelago – the fact that the Aegean city has not suffered any semantic impoverishment, that it has not been relegated to a state of alienation or to the non-space of alienated consumption – cannot be attributed to the diversified architectural physiognomy of the islands, nor to some transcendental resistance to change on the part of their historically shaped fabric. This endurance is rather due to the special way in which the Archipelago subscribes to the conditions of the metacity or to the features of its physical geography. Despite the predominance of aggressive models of tourism and local resource consumption, the pace in the Aegean is not set by mass tourism: visitors are absorbed into the residential folds of the existing villages, which retain the balance and rationale of their fabric. Also, the fact that the islands are surrounded by sea and exposed to light, sun and mighty winds, describes the unconditional relationship of the Archipelagic city with its nature, proposing not an anachronism but an alternative, *generic* and vibrant urbanity.

3. Aquatic networks lie at the core of the Archipelago's perception as a city. The literary metaphor of the *journey* and the *sea routes* give the Aegean its shape. In the exhibition the Archipelago becomes a map of meanings, the Aegean experience of travelling from one place to another and the *ships* in the Aegean floating city squares, the public spaces of the city.

4. Alongside the condition of freedom established by its physical geography and its architecture, the Archipelago, in the words of Cacciari, becomes the vital allegory of mutual social understanding, while according to Agamben it is identified with the world of outcasts, with the land of *exception*. In the context of contemporary urban discourse, the Archipelago introduces the example of an aquatic city as the land of desire. The allure of the Archipelago does not stem from nostalgia but from the endurance of a structure of habitation that contains the promise of a city that calls for freedom.



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The Aegean Islands
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Greece

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