# MACHIAVELLIANA

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# SOMMARIO

# TOPOGRAPHIES OF FREE LIVING: REFLECTIONS ON URBAN SPACE IN MACHIAVELLI'S *FLORENTINE HISTORIES*

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Riassunto · L'articolo si inserisce nel crescente dibattito sulla concettualizzazione dello spazio secondo Machiavelli che si può osservare in recenti contributi a carattere storiografico. In particolare, vengono analizzati tre aspetti fondamentali all'interno delle *Istorie fiorentine*: (1) lo scontro fra i nobili e il popolo, spazialmente determinato dalle fortezze e dai confini: (2) la parentesi tirannica di Gualtieri di Brienne, a proposito della quale Machiavelli pone in risalto sia l'abilità del tiranno ad 'abitare politicamente' vari spazi sia l'accorato appello di un anonimo membro della Signoria, che cerca di dissuadere Gualtieri dall'attuare il colpo di Stato sottolineando come la struttura urbana stessa ispiri costantemente ai cittadini l'amore per la perduta libertà; (3) il riconoscimento del valore politico dei palazzi nobiliari, i quali possono contribuire a introdurre una nuova fase nella storia politica della città. Secondo l'autore del saggio, Machiavelli non considera il tessuto urbano come la mera conseguenza materiale di forze sociali ma alla stregua di un fattore in grado di stimolare dinamiche politico-sociali nel contesto cittadino.

Parole chiave · *Istorie Fiorentine*, Firenze nel Rinascimento, spazio urbano, controllo politico dello spazio, libertà civile.

Abstract · This article contributes to the growing debate in recent historiographical works on the conceptualisation of space according to Machiavelli. In particular, it focuses on three key points in the *Florentine Histories*: (1) the struggles between the nobility and the people, shaped by the city's fortifications and boundaries; (2) Walter of Brienne's tyrannical interlude, in regard to which Machiavelli highlights the tyrant's ability to 'politically inhabit' different spaces and the heartfelt plea made by an anonymous member of the Signoria, who attempts to dissuade the French nobleman from the coup by pointing out how the urban structure itself constantly rekindles in the citizens their love of lost freedom; (3) the acknowledgement of the political significance of noble palaces, which can usher in a new era in city politics. According to the author of this article, Machiavelli sees the urban fabric not just as the by-product of societal forces but as the instigator of particular socio-political dynamics within the urban context.

Keywords · *Istorie Fiorentine* (*Florentine Histories*), Renaissance Florence, Urban Space, Political Spatiality, Civic Liberty.

## Introduction

THIS article contributes to the growing debate in recent historiographical works on the conceptualisation of space in Machiavelli. Despite recent scholarship emphasising the Florentine author's "spatial awareness", this aspect of Machiavelli's thought has remained relatively underexplored. His work has mostly been studied through the

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canonical categories of time, history, and occasion.[1] Nevertheless, Machiavelli offers a highly original reflection on space, spurred by the challenges of a world shaken by major geographical discoveries and whose traditional political spatiality was in the process of being deconstructed under the pressure of emerging centralised 'states', together with the political and spiritual fragmentation of the *respublica christiana*.[2]

Recent contributions have shown that the debates that animated the Florentine cultural milieu are vividly echoed in Machiavelli's writings. This is unsurprising, given that Amerigo Vespucci's *Mundus Novus* and the *Letter on the Islands Newly Discovered on Four of His Journeys*, among other texts of this nature, were certainly known in the chancellery where Machiavelli served as secretary. Machiavelli's reflections on the concept of *stato* have recently been read as evidence of the crisis of a juridical-territorial model that permeated Italian political thought in the sixteenth century.[3] The present article builds on this current strand of research and attempts to look at Machiavelli's thought in relation to a very specific type of space: the urban landscape. So far, «Machiavelli's urbanism has been largely overshadowed»;[4] likewise, his «vision of political life dependent upon the construction of shared, lived space and attentive to political asymmetries»[5] deserves more in-depth investigation. However, as Derek Denman states following John McCormick, Machiavelli is a thinker who is «spatially conscious, that is to say, attuned to the ways in which architecture, planning and design constrains (or enables) a democratically organised polity».[6] Precisely for this reason, perhaps more than other historians, Machiavelli succeeds in associating the multiple transformations that his city has undergone with the peculiar political vitality of the Florentine social body.

As Denman accurately notes, Machiavelli devotes particular attention to towers and fortresses, in which others seem to see only vestiges of a worldview that is about to be superseded once and for all.[7] Hence, the adoption of a spatial and, even more so, an

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[1] On this see P. Joanne, *The Use of* Kairos *in Renaissance Political Philosophy*, in «Renaissance Quarterly», XLVII, 2014, fasc. 1, pp. 43-78.

[2] On the crisis of pre-modern political spaces, see C. Galli, *Spazi politici: l'età moderna e l'età globale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2001, pp. 27-33.

[3] See P. Carta - R. Descendre, *Présentation*, in *Géographie et politique au début de l'âge moderne*, Lyon, ENS, 2008, pp. 5-13; R. Descendre, *L'arpenteur et le peintre: Métaphore, géographie et invention chez Machiavel*, in «Géographique et politique au début de l'âge moderne», VIII, 2008, pp. 63-98; Id., *L'État, le droit, le territoire: domination territoriale et crise du modèle juridique dans la pensée politique italienne du XVIe siècle*, in «Giornale critico della filosofia italiana», XCIII, 2014, fasc. 1, pp. 11-25; J. Larkins, *Machiavelli, Territoriality, and Lo Stato*, in Id., *From Hierarchy to Anarchy*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 123-44. Additionally, for an analysis of the symbolic function of space in Machiavelli, with particular attention to the diplomatic context, see J.-J. Marchand, *Teatralizzazione dell'incontro diplomatico in Machiavelli: messa in scena e linguaggio dei protagonisti nella prima legazione in Francia*, in Id., *Studi Machiavelliani*, Florence, Polistampa, 2018, pp. 197-216 and Id., *Teatralizzazione dell'incontro diplomatico V: spazio e tempo nella narrazione diplomatica di Machiavelli: l'incontro del 13 settembre 1511 con i cardinali scismatici, ibidem*, pp. 247-56.

[4] D.S. Denman, *Machiavelli and the Fortress City*, in «Political Theory», XLVII, 2019, fasc. 2, p. 224.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 204.  [6] *Ibidem*.

[7] On the political role of fortifications, and in particular on the «trace italienne», see G. Parker, *The "Military Revolution," 1560-1660 - A Myth?*, in «The Journal of Modern History», XLVIII, 1976, fasc. 2, pp. 195-214; Id., *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

urban perspective on Machiavelli's work is far from incongruous, since Machiavelli's interest in urban space was both situated in and marked by a specific intellectual context, which was in turn characterised by numerous and divergent perspectives on the city and its political spatiality.[1] In order to understand the main influences surrounding Machiavelli's view of the urban space (and thus to fully appreciate its original aspects), it is useful to give a brief account of some of these most influential perspectives before getting to the heart of the matter.

At the very end of 1494, in the aftermath of Lorenzo the Magnificent's death, Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) published both his *Sermons on Haggai* and his *Treatise on the Government and Rule of the City of Florence*.[2] On this occasion, he reclaimed the canonical Augustinian division between the 'earthly city' and the 'heavenly city', envisioning for Florence the need to model itself on the latter. According to the Prior of San Marco, the Tuscan capital (which had recently returned to a republican form of government) was bound to spearhead a renewal that would involve the whole Italian peninsula. However, this general redemption, symbolised by a city that was ideally considered the 'navel of Italy', would only be possible if Florence embarked on a diligent reform program aimed at imbuing the civic community with the virtues of primitive Christianity so ardently evoked in the friar's sermons.[3] «The city that is united is like a well-regulated convent of religious people, who have everything in common and live in peace and tranquillity».[4] In sum, in Savonarola's eyes, the civic space was to reflect the monastic one («a cloister», as he would call it in a later sermon) and to reproduce – in a social body marked by numerous divisions – the unity that prefigured the mystical body of the heavenly Jerusalem.

While the Savonarolan model looked to the Scriptures and made the new philological criticism an essential tool for rediscovering the authentic meaning of texts (thus moving closer to the early Christian model), a humanist like Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) had a rather different focus. A pupil of Chrysoloras (ca. 1355-1415), Bruni was among the first in early- fifteenth-century Italy to master Greek and to contribute to the spread of Plato's and Aristotle's thought throughout Europe, upholding these two philosophers as points of reference for the tradition of Florentine civic humanism. Unsurprisingly, the Chancellor of Florence – author, as is well known, of the *Historiae Florentini populi* (1415-1444 ca.) and other historiographical works that served as sources for Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* – directed his gaze to Rome and Athens as represented by classical texts, which he read in light of the reflections of those medieval jurists (such as Bartolo) who had associated the *regimen civitatis* with an independent power (*sibi princeps imperium*) endowed with an autonomous legal system (*iurisdictio*).[5]

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[1] For an overview of the debate on the political character of the urban space in modern times, see S. Mastellone, *La città europea come spazio politico dal Quattrocento al Settecento*, in *Le ideologie della città europea dall'umanesimo al rinascimento*, ed. V. Conti, Florence, Olschki, 1993, pp. 3-16.

[2] See G. Savonarola, *'Prediche sopra Aggeo' con il 'Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze'*, ed. L. Firpo, Rome, Belardetti, 1965.

[3] For an overview of the political character of Savonarola's prophecy, see R. Fubini, *Profezia e riforma nel pensiero di Girolamo Savonarola*, in «Studi Slavistici», vii, 2011, fasc. 1, pp. 299-311.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 265. My English translation.

[5] See esp. A.M. Cabrini, *Un'idea di Firenze. Da Villani a Guicciardini*, Rome, Bulzoni, 2001; R.

Equally distant from Savonarola's notion of the urban community regulated like a monastery was the city open to trade (*mercatura*) theorised by Giovanni Antonio da Uzzano (1420-1445). This author, known primarily for his *Pratica della mercatura* (whose full title in English translation reads *Book of Taxes and Weights and Measures of Many Different Places and How Such Weights and Measures Compare to One Another*, 1440), clarifies the complex economic-financial system of mid-fifteenth-century Florence.[1] Listing the knowledge, skills, and virtues of both merchants and bankers, Uzzano upholds trade, the estimation of 'profit and loss', and production as genuine civic virtues. He describes markets, workshops, and places of production and finance are the central hubs of the urban network. Despite scholars' highly divergent views on Uzzano's work, it is interesting here to cite his *Pratica* to show how no single urban model prevailed in Machiavelli's time. On the contrary, Machiavelli's contemporaries present us with a complex network of contrasting, converging, or alternative models.

In the following sections, I will focus on three key moments of the *Florentine Histories* (1526) to see how attention to the urban fabric – understood as the architectural framework of a city (with its buildings, monuments, and peculiar spatiality), always related to the citizens who inform it and are at the same time informed by it – constitutes a peculiar feature of Machiavelli's analysis. The latter uses the city's architectural structure as a privileged interpretive grid to grasp the social and political dynamics at work in Florence. For Machiavelli, the city is not a neutral field of action, nor a 'geometric' plane useful only to visualise the movements of forces that can be subsumed within geometric logics. Machiavelli perceives the city's perimeter as a living and plastic fabric, marked by the development of the *umori* (humours) that lie at the heart of Florentine politics. In other words, the space of the city (with its buildings, voids, points of convergence and encounter, but also its barriers) guides the vectors and humours of the forces at work in Florence, while at the same time being shaped by them. To explore this interesting perspective on urban space, in the first section of my essay I will discuss the role that Machiavelli assigns to the city's fortresses as places of civic fragmentation and polarization of partisan humours. I will also look at Machiavelli's argument about the momentous nature of the spatial choice made by the city's opposing factions to ensconce themselves in «towers and arms» as the clash between them grows fiercer. As we will notice, the Secretary sees this choice as a threat to free life in Florence, in light of its previous outcome in local history: the expulsion of the opposing party from the city itself. In the second section, I will

FUBINI, *Osservazioni sugli "Historiarum florentini populi libri XII" di Leonardo Bruni*, in *Studi di storia medievale e moderna per Ernesto Sestan*, eds. M.S. Mazzi - S. Raveggi, Florence, Olschki, 1980, pp. 403-48; ID., *La "Laudatio Florentinae urbis" di Leonardo Bruni: immagine ideale o programma politico?*, in ⋆*Imago Urbis. L'immagine della città nella storia d'Italia*, ed. F. Bocchi, Rome, Viella, 2003, pp. 285-96; ID., *Storiografia dell'umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003; G. IANZITI, *Leonardo Bruni, the Medici, and the Florentine Histories*, in «Journal of the History of Ideas», LXIX, 2008, fasc. 1. pp. 1-22; ID., *Writing History in Renaissance Italy: Leonardo Bruni and the Uses of the Past*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2012.

[1] See F. GUIDI BRUSCOLI, *Uzzano, Giovanni da*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, XCLII, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2020 (online version).

analyse the figure of the Duke of Athens (1304/5-1356), emphasising how Machiavelli praises him for his ability to adapt his actions to the most diverse spaces. In doing so, I will spend a few words on another passage that reveals the Secretary's attention to space: the fictitious speech he ascribes to an anonymous member of the Signoria who evokes the visible traces of the city's urban fabric as the last bastion of freedom, even when tyranny marks the end of free institutions. Finally, I will assess Machiavelli's view of noble palaces, specifically that of Cosimo 'the Elder' and the Pitti Palace. This overview will allow us to see how the urban landscape provides Machiavelli with a privileged vantage point from which to observe, understand, and even explain the forces and balances at work in his city.

### FROM THE URBAN FORTRESS TO THE PEOPLE AS THE BULWARK OF FREEDOM: THE LIVING BODY OF THE CITY

In the preface to the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli, somewhat belittling the work of the local historians who had preceded him, claims that «in the descriptions of the wars waged by the Florentines against foreign princes and peoples [Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini] had been very diligent, but as regards civil discords and internal enmities, and the effects arising from them, they were altogether silent about the one and so brief about the other as to be of no use to readers or pleasure to anyone».[1] By contrast, the version of history proposed by the Secretary emphasises more than ever the role of dissension and internal strife, as well as the role played by factions.[2] Unlike most other polities, which were torn apart by a single internal division within their social body (such as that between patricians and plebeians in ancient Rome or Athens), «in Florence», Machiavelli writes, «the nobles were, first, divided among themselves; then the nobles and the people; and in the end the people and the plebs: and it happened many times that the winning party was divided in two».[3] While the riots in Rome had been sparked by the plebs' ardent desire not to be oppressed, in contrast to the patricians' innate ambition to oppress, the divisions in Florence – Machiavelli points out –often coincided with the aspiration of one party to annihilate the other, and always led to further fragmentation of the socio-political body. In this regard, Machiavelli maintains that «no other instance appears to me to show so well the pow-

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[1] N. MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, Engl. trans. by L.F. Banfield - H.C. Mansfield Jr., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 6. The originals reads: «Ho trovato come nella descrizione delle guerre fatte dai Fiorentini con i principi e popoli forestieri sono stati diligentissimi, ma delle civili discordie e delle intrinseche inimicizie, e degli effetti che da quelle sono nati, averne una parte al tutto taciuta e quell'altra in modo brevemente descritta che ai leggenti non puote arrecare utile o piacere alcuno». N. MACHIAVELLI, *Istorie fiorentine*, proem, in ID., *Tutte le opere. Secondo l'edizione curata da Mario Martelli (1971)*, Milan, Bompiani, 2018, p. 1681. All my quotations in the original language from Machiavelli's texts will be from this edition.

[2] For a comparison between this idea of 'exception' in Machiavelli and in the most influential contemporary and later authors, see R. ESPOSITO, *Ordine e conflitto. Machiavelli e la letteratura politica del Rinascimento italiano*, Naples, Liguori, 1984.

[3] MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 7. The original reads: «Ma di Firenze in prima si divisono intra loro i nobili, di poi i nobili e il popolo, e in ultimo il popolo e la plebe; e molte volte occorse che una di queste parti, rimasa superiore, si divise in due». *Istorie fiorentine*, prologue, p. 1682.

er of our city as the one derived from these divisions, which would have had the force to annihilate any great and very powerful city. Nonetheless ours, it appeared, became ever greater from them».[1] In other words, he identifies this incessant fragmentation of the social body as the defining characteristic of Florentine politics and the most unique manifestation of the vitality of his city, thus distancing himself from the tradition of civic humanism, which was captivated by the theme of harmony, as encapsulated in the Livian expression *concordia civium murus urbium*.[2]

The traces left on the urban fabric by such a peculiar feature of the city's political life are clearly grasped by Machiavelli, who had already reflected on various aspects of urban planning (especially from a military perspective) in several pages of the *Art of War* (1520) and the *Report on a Visit Made to Fortify Florence* (1526). As we will see, in several passages the author associates the progressive fragmentation of the Florentine political body and the emergence of rival factions with the proliferation of fortifications and defensive structures (such as towers and strongholds) in the urban centre. In his eyes, these simultaneously residential and military structures have twisted the urban fabric, fragmenting it and circumscribing certain areas according to the polarization of the warring factions and their partisans. This progressive militarization of the city made the divisions inherent in the political body tangible, transforming Florence into a battleground for the factions entrenched in the fortresses and geographical zones of influence. In other words, the partisan nature of the rival 'humours' was transferred to and reinforced by the urban perimeter.

In the *Istorie fiorentine* (ɪɪ 8-9) Machiavelli also notes that a further remodelling of the urban landscape had taken place after the definitive expulsion of the *grandi*. Either expelled from the city or relegated to the rank of commoners, the representatives of noble families sought refuge in the castles they traditionally held in the Mugello and the surrounding countryside. In doing so, they reshaped the political geography of Florence once again. The militarization of the countryside displaced the line of conflict that had previously run within the city walls. Also, it redrew the city-countryside relationship, eventually forcing the Signoria to prohibit the possession of castles and fortresses near Florence (*Istorie fiorentine*, ɪɪ 32). In short, the urban landscape of the city evolved and extended even beyond the walls that had traditionally defined its perimeter. This eventually brought about a relationship of mutual influence, with the evolution of the Florentine political landscape resulting from the clashes and encounters between factions.

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[1] Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 7. The original reads: «E veramente, secondo il giudicio mio, mi pare che niuno altro esemplo tanto la potenza della nostra città dimostri, quanto quello che da queste divisioni depende, le quali arieno avuto forza di annullare ogni grande e potentissima città. Nondimeno la nostra pareva che sempre ne diventasse maggiore». *Istorie fiorentine*, prologo, p. 1682.

[2] See esp. F. Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza: Tumult and Indignation*, New York, Bloomsbury Academics, 2009; G. Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018; Id., *Against Peacemakers: Machiavelli on the End of Tumults*, in ⋆*The Art and Language of Power in Renaissance Florence: Essays for Alison Brown*, eds. A.R. Bloch, C. James, C. Russell, Toronto, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2019, pp. 273-92; F. Raimondi, *Constituting Freedom. Machiavelli and Florence*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

### FLORENCE: A CITY FORTIFIED FROM WITHIN

After completing his short overview of Italian history following the fall of the Roman Empire, in Book II of the *Istorie* Machiavelli focuses on Florence. Having introduced the effects of the enduring division of the city into Guelphs and Ghibellines, the opening sections of the second book recount how the city's political arena was polarised by the conflict between the arrogance and lust for domination of the *grandi* on one hand and the thirst for liberty of an increasingly enterprising and determined mercantile bourgeoisie, eager to play a leading role in governance, on the other. In an attempt to curb the overreach of the aristocrats, especially when war did not require them to play the role traditionally reserved for warrior elites, Giano della Bella (Standard-bearer of Justice from 1293 to 1295) was tasked with promulgating the Ordinances of Justice, a series of measures aimed at excluding nobles from public office. However, with his dismissal – Machiavelli writes – «the nobility rose up in hope of regaining its dignity; and judging the ills to have arisen from its divisions, the nobles united together»[1] in an attempt to regain the power from which they had been ousted. «And so, between the desire of the nobles and the suspicion of the people, they came to arms».[2] The fourteenth chapter of Book II, which is devoted to the clash between the opposing humours of the popular and the magnate factions, contains one of the most vivid descriptions of the climax that threatened to plunge Florence into the abyss of civil war. In a particularly dramatic passage, Machiavelli illustrates the opposing humours that are tearing the social body apart by situating them spatially:

The nobles made their stand in three places – at San Giovanni, in the Mercato Nuovo, and at the Piazza de' Mozzi – under three chiefs: Messer Forese Adimari, Messer Vanni de' Mozzi, and Messer Geri Spini. The men of the people assembled in very great numbers under their ensigns at the palace of the Signori, who lived then near San Brocolo.[3]

Introducing a pattern that is repeated several times throughout the narrative, the author establishes an indissoluble connection between the expression of a particular *umore* and the physical convergence of the faction in one location. This can be seen in *Discourses* I.44, where the Secretary describes the secession of the Roman plebs on the Aventine, and repeatedly in the *Histories*, for example when the rebellious Ciompi gather in the *piazza* (hitherto invisible and atomised in the workshops of the 'arte della lana', that is, the wool guild). The confluence of several individualities in a physical space is presented as an inescapable condition for a party's humour to coalesce and express itself: it is by converging in a physical space together with other

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[1] MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 66. The Italian original reads: «Dopo la costui partita la nobiltà salse in speranza di ricuperare la sua dignità, e giudicando il male suo essere dalle sue divisioni nato». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.14, p. 1757.

[2] *Ibidem*. The Italian original reads: «[...] e così, tra il desiderio de' nobili e il sospetto del popolo, si venne alle armi». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.14, p. 1757.

[3] *Ibidem*. The Italian original reads: «I nobili feciono testa in tre luoghi: a San Giovanni, in Mercato Nuovo e alla piazza de' Mozzi, e sotto tre capi: messer Forese Adimari, messer Vanni de' Mozzi e messer Geri Spini; i popolani in grandissimo numero sotto le loro insegne al palagio de' Signori convennono, i quali allora propinqui a San Brocolo abitavono». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.14, p. 1757.

similar individuals that one becomes aware of belonging to a *parte*. This phenomenon produces that 'discharge' (to borrow an expression used by Elias Canetti, who refers to the transcendence of individuality in the mass as «thunderous unselfishness») [1] that unites people and gives rise to a collective sense of belonging. Convergence in a space semantically turns it into the face of an *umore* already present within the social body, while at the same time giving substance to the 'other', that is, the enemy.

This is precisely what occurred in the circumstances described in the above-quoted excerpt from the *Histories*, when the city first split, then recomposed itself in places that polarised factionalism before directing it against the opposing bloc: San Giovanni, Mercato Nuovo, and Piazza de' Mozzi on one side, the open space adjacent to the palace of the Signori on the other. By subverting the apparent harmony (and uniformity) of civic space, the polarization described here endowed those places with an unprecedented political significance; as such, they first exerted a powerful centripetal force of assembly before exerting a centrifugal impulse that threatened the very life of the city. Each faction wanted to take over, and the space occupied by each *umore* was launched towards the conquest of the city's perimeter. Only by considering the spatial context in which they occurred one can grasp the radical nature of the riots described by Machiavelli, who uses a vocabulary not dissimilar to that employed for wars fought against external enemies. While in Rome the riots had produced those 'orders' that allowed the city to expand and to increasingly extend the perimeter of the *pomerium* (i.e., the boundary upon which its very essence as a city depended), the Florentine riots seemed to fragment the very essence of the *civitas* as a community of people coexisting in one place. The city was annihilated by the desire of one party to take over, to occupy and nullify the other faction and its space by expelling their local enemies, burning their houses, and razing their towers to the ground. [2]

Reaching a dramatic climax in II.15, where he describes nobles and commoners about to engage in a clash (*zuffa*), Machiavelli recounts how the intervention of «certain men of religion of good repute» as mediators succeeded in leading lawmakers to soften the severity of the edicts against the nobility, thus avoiding open warfare. However, the persistence of a latent conflict made it impossible to recompose the unity of the city, which continued to be torn apart by walls and fortifications that constantly re-territorialised factional positions: «When their arms had been put down, both parties remained full of suspicion, and each *fortified itself* with towers and arms». [3] Machiavelli identified two reasons for the radical difference in the outcomes of the riots and conflicts in Florence and ancient Rome : 1) the Roman plebs had been driven by a desire to share honours with the nobility rather than to annihilate them entirely by imposing themselves as the only faction; 2) in Rome the unrest was brought to an end by a renewal of the city's institutional architecture. In Florence, on the other

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[1] On this point, I refer to the chapter titled *The Discharge* in E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Engl. trans. C. Stewart, New York, Continuum, 1981, pp. 17-19.

[2] See Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, cit. See also M. Viroli, *Neither Medicean nor Populist: A Defense of Machiavelli's Republicanism*, in «Machiavelliana», 1, 2022, pp. 131-81.

[3] Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 67. The Italian original reads: «Posate l'armi, rimase l'una e l'altra parte piena di sospetto, e ciascuna con torri e con armi si fortificava». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.15, p. 1759.

hand, the lack of an institutional outcome to the turmoil had left room for a 'war of position' that incessantly reconfigured the urban landscape.

Further on in the narrative, after describing the armed truce in which the city fortified itself before hostilities would resume, Machiavelli focuses on a government reform that, far from appeasing the nobles by somehow satisfying their requests, aimed instead to secure the institutions by reducing participation in political life:

The people, moved by the fact that those Signori had been favorable to the nobles, reordered the government by restricting it in number [. . .]. The state having been strengthened, for the greater magnificence and security of the Signori they laid the foundation of a palace for them in the year 1298 and made a piazza for it where the houses of the Uberti had once been. The public prisons were also begun at the same time; these buildings were completed at the end of a few years.[1]

Machiavelli immediately links this institutional reform to a restyling of the palaces of power. On the one hand, the great aristocratic families entrenched themselves in veritable urban castles – a fact that Machiavelli expounds on, openly contradicting one of his sources, i.e., Villani's *Nuova Cronica*. On the other hand, the *popolo grasso* embarked on the construction of the Palazzo Vecchio – the symbol of the new bourgeois power – on the ruins of the ancient palace of the Ghibelline family of the Uberti, one of the most prominent representatives of the great Florentine aristocracy. Just as the urban castles were intended to reproduce the traditional expression of rulership over the territory, so the bulk of the Palazzo Vecchio, with its tower rising above all other bastions or bell towers, foreshadowed the hegemony of a new ruling class.[2] Both factions demarcated the field of their power with walls and battlements, demolishing the vestiges of the opposing party and erecting structures that symbolically projected their shadow over the entire urban geography. In addition to its undeniable symbolic significance, the erection of fortified structures in the city imposed a significant twist on the urban grid by circumscribing spaces, redefining urban geographies, and affecting the flow of people across public space. The clash of opposing humours (in this case, *grandi* vs. *popolo*) and its institutionally sterile (not to say partisan) outcome had turned

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[1] ID., *Florentine Histories*, cit., pp. 67-68. The Italian original reads: «E il popolo riordinò il governo ristringendo quello in minore numero, mosso dallo essere stati quegli Signori favorevoli a' nobili [...]. Fermato lo stato, per maggiore magnificenza e più securtà de' Signori, l'anno 1298 fondorono il palagio loro, e feciongli piazza delle case che furono già degli Uberti. Comincioronsi ancora in quel medesimo tempo le publiche prigioni, i quali edifici in termine di pochi anni si fornirono». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.15, p. 1759.

[2] It is interesting to compare Machiavelli's observations with the descriptions that one of his sources, Leonardo Bruni, gave of the Palazzo Vecchio. For example, in the *Laudatio Florentinae urbis*: Bruni writes as follows: «Among the most magnificent buildings rises a palace of extraordinary beauty and marvellous structure, which by its very appearance easily indicates the purpose for which it was built. Just as the flagship of a great fleet is usually such that one can easily infer that it carries the commander, who is the guide and leader of all the others, so the appearance of this palace is such that anyone can deduce that it houses the rulers of the State. Wonderfully constructed, it rises so high that it dominates the surrounding buildings over a wide area, and its height seems much greater than that of a private building – so much so that I do not know whether this palace should simply be called a 'fortress,' or rather a 'fortress of the fortress'» (my English translation). For the original Latin text see L. BRUNI, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. P. VITI, Turin, UTET, 1996, p. 581.

Florence into a 'fortress city', fortified from within. In Machiavelli's eyes, the outcome was probably less paradoxical than we might think, since at various points in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, he describes fortresses as designed to protect rulers from possible internal uprisings. However, the Florentine example, caught up in a kind of internal siege, shows peculiar consequences:

The resulting political terrain impedes democratic assembly and public gathering, leaving a patchwork of political connections. It is the paradoxical quality of the fortress city, that is, the way the concept captures an enigmatic organization of space, time, power, and political detachment, which makes it a powerful descriptor of urban life. [1]

The erection of walls and towers enacted a form of parcelling of public space, thereby limiting «public gathering» and impeding «political connections». It «accelerate[d] the privatization and militarization of urban life», [2] thus foreshadowing the contraction of the political body and the future loss of free living. The erection of walls obstructed the flow and permeability that had previously characterised urban space. When the troubles that had postponed the conflict – including the interlude of the dictatorship of the Duke of Athens and several wars with neighbouring cities – disappeared, the spectre of *stasis* again loomed over Florence: «Since things outside where settled, they turned to those inside». [3] The fragile palliatives proposed to halt the escalation – including an administrative reform of the city's geography, transforming the *sesti* into *quartieri*, so as «to give a part to the great» – did not yield any results. On the one hand, as Machiavelli writes:

The city would have settled down if the great had been content to live with that modesty which is required by civil life; but they acted in a contrary way, for as private individuals they did not want companions, and in the magistracies they wanted to be lords. Every day produced some example of their insolence and arrogance. This displeased the people, and they lamented that from one tyrant [the Duke of Athens] who had been eliminated a thousand had been born. [4]

On the other hand, the popular faction was exasperated since «the great were indecent and not good companions to the people»; as a consequence, «instances of insolence grew on one side and indignation on the other». [5] The outbreak of a severe famine (exploited by Andrea Strozzi in a clumsy attempt at authoritarian rule) favoured an unexpected convergence between the interests of the aristocracy and those of the plebs. Once again, Machiavelli describes this dynamic in spatial terms:

The great had taken up positions on this side of the Arno in three places: at the houses of the Cavicciulli near San Giovanni, at the houses of the Pazzi and the Donati at San Piero Mag-

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[1] DENMAN, *Machiavelli and the Fortress City*, cit., p. 204.      [2] *Ibidem*, p. 203.
[3] MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 100. The Italian original reads: «Posate le cose di fuora, si volsono a quelle di dentro». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.39, p. 1800.
[4] *Ibidem*. The Italian original reads: «Si sarebbe la città posata, se i grandi fussero stati contenti a vivere con quella modestia che nella vita civile si richiede; ma eglino il contrario operavono: perché, privati, non volevono compagni, e ne' magistrati volevono essere signori; e ogni giorno nasceva qualche esempio della loro insolenzia e superbia. La qual cosa al popolo dispiaceva, e si doleva che per uno tiranno che era spento n'erano nati mille». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.39, p. 1800.
[5] MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 100.

giore, and at those of the Cavalcanti in the Mercato Nuovo. Those on the other side of the Arno had fortified themselves at the bridges and in the streets of their houses: the Nerli were defending the bridge at Carraia, the Frescobaldi and Mannegli at Santa Trinita, the Rossi and Bardi at the Ponte Vecchio and Rubaconte. The popular side, for their part, were gathering under the Standard of Justice and under the ensigns of the companies of the people.[1]

Lying dormant and deferred for over twenty-five chapters of the *Florentine Histories*, civil war eventually erupted under the banner of «towers and arms». Once again, the urban perimeter shaped and structured the temperaments of the factions. Civilian dwellings became military outposts, while squares and urban spaces were withdrawn from communal life to acquire a partisan connotation. Bridges no longer united the two banks of the same river; instead, they separated two enemy armies. This new phase of tumult was aggravated by the arrival of external forces that sacrificed the city's freedom to factional interests. With the various factions having lost all aspirations to safeguard freedom and achieve an inclusive outcome, the new *tumulti* no longer sought to fluidify political frameworks that had become inadequate and out of sync with the new times. Rather, they aimed to rigidify the institutions by depriving them of any form of political dialectic. Even the gonfalon, once the symbol of the Comune, was now brandished as the banner of the popular faction, which launched an assault on the *grandi* and the plebeians. In sum, the city was reduced to a mere battlefield: «While standing in this manner, it did not appear to the people that they should hold off the engagement (*zuffa*) any longer».[2]

The following pages describe some of the bloodiest moments in Florentine history, giving the city's riots an unprecedented connotation: deprived of any nomopoietic significance, they became a mere struggle for domination or survival. In describing them, the narrator displays an almost obsessive attention to urban geography: «Here the engagement was great because they were struck by stones *from the towers* and wounded by crossbows from below. The battle lasted for three hours»; «The Ponte Vecchio was the first to be attacked; it was hardily defended because the *towers were armed*, the *streets barricaded*, and the barricades guarded by very fierce men»; «And although the Nerli defended themselves manfully, they were unable to withstand the fury of the people, because the bridge (*having no towers* to defend it) was weaker».[3]

In the eyes of the Secretary, the city's fortresses are more than simple defensive devices. They become 'masses' capable of diverting and compressing urban space, transforming the open spatiality of free assemblies (certainly not exempt from the

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 102. The Italian original reads: «Avevano fatto i grandi di qua d'Arno testa in tre parti: alle case de' Cavicciuli propinque a San Giovanni, alle case de' Pazzi e de' Donati a San Piero Maggiore, a quelle de' Cavalcanti in Mercato Nuovo. Quegli di là d'Arno si erano fatti forti ai ponti e nelle strade delle case loro: i Nerli il ponte alla Carraia, i Frescobaldi e Mannegli Santa Trinità, i Rossi e Bardi il Ponte Vecchio e Rubaconte difendevano. I popolani dall'altra parte sotto il gonfalone della giustizia e le insegne delle compagnie del popolo si ragunorono». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.40, p. 1803.

[2] *Ibidem*. The Italian original reads: «E stando in questa maniera, non parve al popolo di differire più la zuffa». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.41, p. 1803.

[3] *Ibidem*, pp. 102-03. The Italian original reads: «E benché i Nerli virilmente si difendessero, non potettono il furore del popolo sostenere [...] per essere il ponte (non avendo torri che lo difendessero) più debole». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.41, p. 1804.

dialectical conflict inherent in free living) into the circumscribed field of factions. In the fortress-city, it becomes impossible to translate partisan struggles into institutional outcomes heralding freedom and expansion. On the contrary, a new kind of antagonism emerges – more akin to war between declared enemies – where some «would rather fight and either die or see their houses burned and sacked than voluntarily submit themselves to the will of their enemies».[1] By fortifying themselves, the factional humours ultimately destroy the very possibility of the city.

This outcome is illustrated in the chapter's conclusion when the popular faction, under six gonfalons, launches an assault on the Bardi fortress, the *grandi*'s last bastion. From the struggle to share public offices with the nobles to the expropriation of their assets, the people have finally moved on to purge the city of their rival *umore*. In their quest for totality, the people have become the architects of a profound resemantization that upends the civic and political space. The new type of tumult that characterised Florence, in contrast to ancient Rome, deprived the victorious faction's counterpart of citizenship rights (relegating them to the status of enemies) and thus homogenised the urban fabric by destroying everything that reminded them of the opposing faction: «Meanwhile, the people, and of these the most ignoble part, thirsting for booty, looted and sacked all their houses, pulled down and burned their palaces and towers with such rage that the crudest enemy to the Florentine name would have been ashamed of such ruin».[2]

### The vestiges of freedom:
#### architecture as a stratification of the various social orders

*The new prince: conquering space and the places of his power*

Chapters 33-37 of the second book of the *Florentine Histories* contain some of the most emotionally charged passages in the entire work; also, they place great emphasis on urban structure. These chapters recount the brief despotic interlude (lasting a mere ten months) of Walter vi, Count of Brienne, which culminated in his expulsion on July 26, 1343. The French aristocrat, better known by his title as 'Duke of Athens', had been summoned by the Florentines to raise a city weakened by the catastrophic outcome of the war with Lucca, stuck in a precarious financial situation, and torn by internal strife between Guelphs and Ghibellines. Machiavelli highlights the crucial moments of Walter of Brienne's seizure of power by situating them in two specific and diametrically opposed spaces.[3] The contrast between closed/open, private/public spaces establishes the dichotomy between the intrigues aimed at the achievement of

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 103. The Italian original reads: «E vollono più tosto, combattendo, o morire o vedere le loro case ardere e saccheggiare, che volontariamente allo arbitrio de' loro nimici sottomettersi». *Istorie fiorentine*, ii.41, p. 1804.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 104. The Italian original reads: «Il popolo intanto, e di quello la parte più ignobile, assetato di preda, spogliò e saccheggiò tutte le loro case, e i loro palagi e torri disfece e arse con tanta rabbia, che qualunque più al nome fiorentino crudele nimico si sarebbe di tanta rovina vergognato». *Istorie fiorentine*, ii.41, p. 1805.

[3] On the open/closed and public/private oppositions in *The Prince*, see S. VISENTIN, *La topografía política de Maquiavelo*, in «Anacronismo e Irrupción» vi, 2016, fasc. 10, p. 172-201.

absolute power – conferred upon the Duke initially with the aim of benefiting one party over the whole – and the blatantly demagogic attitude subsequently adopted by the tyrant to consolidate his regime, who chastised the most eminent individuals in order to win the sympathy of the multitude. The impossibility of finding an institutional solution to the Florentine political crisis had been the initial trigger for plots and secret conspiracies in private and closed quarters, far from the city's squares and other places of public life.[1] The Duke's regime had been characterised at the outset as a 'reactionary' attempt by the elites to «tame that people» who had ousted them from their traditional privileges.[2] Subsequently, however, Brienne had turned to the masses, demonstrating his ability to conquer them in the open and public space of the city. In Machiavelli's view, power in the public square must know how to exhibit itself. Knowing how to do this is a key asset for tyrants. In the ninth chapter of *The Prince*, for instance, he suggests that a prince who wishes to maintain power should cultivate the support of the people, rather than relying solely on the support of the elite. Similarly, in the sixteenth section of the first book of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli posits that even if the tyrant's rise to power was due to an aristocratic party's intention to oppress the people, the tyrant should not hesitate to secure the backing of the people (cf. *Discourses*, 1.16).

In conclusion, Machiavelli's account presents Brienne as possessing an indispensable skill for a good prince, namely the ability to preserve his state, precisely because he is capable of exploiting a dual spatiality to bolster his authority: the private, clandestine realm of palace machinations, and the public, ostentatious, and theatrical domain of displays designed to 'intimidate' and harness people's thirst for revenge. In his dealings with the nobility, the Duke astutely capitalised on the opportunities afforded by the «secret places» (alluded to in *The Prince* with regard to Oliverotto) to his advantage:

In this case, the prince flees from the visibility of public space and hides in secret, in the invisible. However, it is not so much a matter of concealing an act contrary to common morality, as of *finding the space* appropriate to the political specificity of each action, especially when the prince is confronted not with the people, but with the nobility, with whom he must behave differently. For, in this case, he must know how to *resort to other places* and other strategies.[3]

On the contrary, when engaging with the people, a prince (or tyrant, as the case may be) must be adept at exploiting the opportunities presented by an entirely different 'civic space': the square, the *agorà*.

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[1] See MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 90.
[2] For an overview of the issue of tyranny in Machiavelli, see esp. H. BARON, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966; M. TURCHETTI, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2013; G. GIORGINI, *The Place of the Tyrant in Machiavelli's Political Thought and the Literary Genre of «The Prince»*, in «History of Political Thought», XXIX, 2008, fasc. 2, pp. 230-56; M. GEUNA, *Extraordinary Accidents in the Life of Republics: Machiavelli and Dictatorial Authority*, in *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, eds. D. Johnston, N. Urbinati, C. Vergara, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2017, pp. 280-306; G. PEDULLÀ, *Machiavelli's Prince and the Concept of Tyranny*, in *Evil Lords: Theories and Representations of Tyranny from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, eds. N. Panou - H. Schadee, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 191-210.
[3] VISENTIN, *La topografía política de Maquiavelo*, cit., p. 885 (my English translation).

The Secretary demonstrates a heightened awareness of the spectacular and theatrical nature of political action in numerous instances. One of the most significant examples is his description of the execution of lieutenant Remirro de Orco (Ramiro de Lorca) at the hands of Cesare Borgia. To assuage the indignation of the citizens of Cesena, who were appalled by the brutalities perpetrated by de Lorca «to reduce the territory to a peaceful and united state»,[1] Borgia recognised the need to exhibit equal ferocity; he thus acted «in order to purge the minds of the people and to win them completely over to his side».[2] Consequently, seizing the opportunity to rid himself of a potential rival and at the same time to consolidate his new principality, «*in the middle of the territory* he established a civil tribunal with a highly distinguished president, in which each city had its own advocate».[3] Borgia, who had not hesitated to authorise de Lorca to use any means necessary to quell insurrections in Romagna, then set up a popular tribunal to judge his crimes and installed it in the heart of the conquered but soon-to-be loyal province. To complete the ruse, the Duke of Valentinois made one last use of the man who had aided him in subduing the region, resorting to his mutilated body to stage a show that would both satisfy and terrify his subjects: «[...] he had Messer Remirro's body laid out in two pieces on the piazza, with a block of wood and a bloody sword beside it. The ferocity of such a spectacle left that population satisfied and stupefied at the same time».[4]

According to Machiavelli, Borgia's strength lay not only in his capacity to control space militarily (i.e., knowing how to deploy his forces with remarkable speed and surprise), but also in his ability to employ it scenically:

Here, the space of princely action coincides with the space in which the city's population moves: it is a public space, open, visible to all, because every action must be observed, must remain imprinted in the imagination of the citizens, must produce effects on their souls, and modify their passions.[5]

Once again, passages such as this show how, in Machiavelli's perspective, a prince's *virtù* encompasses not only the capacity to act in harmony with time, alternating between prudence and abrupt action, but also the ability to situate oneself in space and govern it. By analogy with his observations on the qualitative character of temporality (the true measure of the 'morality' of all actions, which cannot be judged on the basis of a predetermined ethical code), the Florentine secretary seems to extend similar reflections to space. While, as critics have underscored, Machiavellian time lays the

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[1] N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Engl. trans. P. Bondanella, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 27. The Italian original reads: «la ridusse pacifica e unita». *Il Principe*, vii, p. 827.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 27. The Italian original reads: «Per purgare li animi di quelli populi e guadagnarseli in tutto». *Il Principe*, vii, p. 828.

[3] *Ibidem* (my italics). The Italian original reads: «[...] preposevi uno iudizio civile nel mezzo della provincia, con uno presidente eccellentissimo, dove ogni città vi aveva lo avvocato suo». *Il Principe*, vii, pp. 827-28.

[4] *Ibidem*. The Italian original reads: «[....] lo fece a Cesena una mattina mettere in dua pezzi in su la piazza, con uno pezzo di legno e uno coltello sanguinoso accanto: la ferocità del quale spettaculo fece quegli populi in uno tempo rimanere satisfatti e stupidi». *Il Principe*, vii, p. 828.

[5] Visentin, *La topografía política de Maquiavelo*, cit., p. 184 (my English translation).

groundwork for the *occasione* that offers princely virtue the opportunity to overcome fortune (and 'take the measure of the world'),[1] geographical and spatial elements are also crucial assets in the prince's toolkit. For example, both Borgia and the Duke of Athens excel at spatially conscious actions that capture the collective imagination. A crucial means of maintaining and fortifying the state, the public display of his actions enables the prince to establish an emotional bond with his subjects. By meticulously positioning his presence (both physical and symbolic) in public space, the prince can appeal to the imagination and passions of his citizens, evoking emotions whose political potential Machiavelli clearly recognises. It is precisely by 'territorialising' itself through buildings and expressing itself in public spaces that power affects the collective imagination. Much as in Borgia's case, the ostentatious executions and public appearances of Walter VI mark a turning point in his authoritarian interlude. After all, Machiavelli himself seems to emphasise the stage-like quality of the Duke's performances and his ability to adapt his actions to urban space.[2] Through a deliberately staged and performative use of power, the Duke enables the plebs to identify themselves with him, laying the groundwork for the transition from his role as an exceptional magistrate tasked with resolving an emergency to his position as a tyrant. This transition affects the city's architectural configuration, which bows to his – now uncontested – power: «The reputation of the duke had become great and fear of him very great, so that everyone was having his coat of arms painted on their houses to show him they were his friends; nor did he lack anything as prince but the title».[3] Much like other figures depicted by Machiavelli, the Duke of Athens proves capable of 'territorialising' government practices, showing that «the 'novelty' of the Machiavellian prince depends on the fact that he inherits nothing, and therefore does not place himself in a predefined space (the court, the palace), but must literally conquer his space and the places of his power».[4]

From this juncture onwards, for several ensuing paragraphs, references to the urban fabric become insistent, enabling Machiavelli to portray the struggle between the Duke and his partisans, on the one hand, and those who oppose them in the name of the *Florentina libertas* on the other. On the eve of his seizure of power, Walter VI persists in his unscrupulous quest for further leeway by moving into yet another kind of space: that dedicated to sacred rituals. As Machiavelli writes:

The duke, so as to give himself a greater mark of religion and humanity, had chosen the convent of Fra Minori di Santa Croce for his dwelling. Desiring to give effect to his evil thought, he had it publicly proclaimed that on the following morning all the people should appear in the piazza of Santa Croce before him.[5]

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[1] For an interesting perspective on this issue, already much discussed in Machiavellian scholarship, I refer to the section titled *Le laboratoire florentin*, where Fournel and Zancarini offer an interesting view of the 'measure of the world'/'measure of time' nexus. Cfr. N. MACHIAVELLI, *De principatibus/Le Prince*, eds. J.-L. FOURNEL, J.-C. ZANCARINI, G. INGLESE, Paris, PUF, 2014, pp. 20-40.

[2] Cfr. MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 90.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 91. The Italian original reads: «Era [...] la reputazione del duca grande e il timore grandissimo, tale che ciascuno per mostrarsegli amico la sua insegna sopra la sua casa faceva dipignere, né gli mancava ad essere principe altro che il titolo». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.34, p. 1787.

[4] VISENTIN, *La topografía política de Maquiavelo*, cit., p. 182 (my English translation).

[5] MACHIAVELLI, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 91. The Italian original reads: «Aveva il duca, per

The Duke thus manages to dismay the *Signori* and those who still remain «amatori della libertà» (i.e., those who oppose him in the name of freedom) by summoning the people to a physical location: the square in front of the church of Santa Croce.

At this point, the Duke's opponents find themselves powerless in the face of his supporters and partisans: «Nor, since they recognised the duke's forces, were they able to think of any other remedy than to pray to him and to see, since their forces were insufficient, if their prayers were enough either to deter him from his enterprise or to make his lordship less harsh».[1] Through the device – recurrent in Machiavelli's work – of a fictitious speech delivered by an anonymous member of the *Signoria* in the presence of Walter VI, the Secretary revisits the *topos* of the tyrant's unhappiness and then moves on to the theme of memory as a bastion of free living. Machiavelli thus gives a unique spatial twist to this theme, already dear to civic humanism:[2]

That there is not enough time to consume the desires for freedom is most certain, for freedom, one knows, is often restored in a city by those who have never tasted it but who loved it only through the memories of it left to them by their fathers; and thus, once recovered, they preserve it with all obstinacy and at any peril. And even if their fathers had not recalled it to them, the public palaces, the places of the magistrates, the ensigns of the free orders recall it. These things must be recognised with the greatest desire by citizens. Which deeds of yours do you want to be a counterweight to the sweetness of free life or to make men lose their desire for present conditions?[3]

In this passage, the citizens' desire for freedom is reinforced by two distinctive forms of resistance. On the one hand, the memory of free living, passed on by fathers and those who, having experienced it, transmit it to their children, instilling in them the zeal to fight to recover their lost virtue. On the other hand, even if no witnesses of the now-extinct orders were to endure, the city itself – with its stones, remains, and monuments – would preserve an indelible trace of *vivere libero* (free living). Even when removed, demolished, and obliterated, the ruins of public buildings and monuments to

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dare di sé maggior segno di religione e di umanità, eletto per sua abitazione il convento de' Fra' Minori di Santa Croce; e desideroso di dare effetto al maligno suo pensiero, fece per bando publicare che tutto il popolo la mattina seguente fusse alla piazza di Santa Croce davanti a lui». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.34, p. 1788.

[1] *Ibidem*. The Italian original reads: Né pensorono, cognosciute le forze del duca, di potervi fare altro rimedio che pregarlo e vedere, dove le forze non erano sufficienti, se i preghi o a rimuoverlo dalla impresa o a fare la sua signoria meno acerba bastavano». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.34, p. 1788.

[2] For an examination of the miserable condition of tyrants and an apology of tyrannicide, see R.S. Miola, *Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate*, in «Renaissance Quarterly», XXXVIII, 1985, fasc. 2, pp. 271-89 and S.K. Brincat, *'Death to Tyrants': The Political Philosophy of Tyrannicide – Part 1*, in «Journal of International Political Theory», IV, 2008, fasc. 2, pp. 212-40.

[3] Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 92. The Italian original reads: «Che il tempo a consumare i desideri della libertà non basti, è certissimo: perché s'intende spesso quella essere in una città da coloro riassunta che mai la gustarono, ma solo per la memoria che ne avevano lasciata i padri loro la amavano, e perciò, quella ricuperata, con ogni ostinazione e pericolo conservono; e quando mai i padri non la avessero ricordata, i palagi publici, i luoghi de magistrati, le insegne de' liberi ordini la ricordono: le quali cose conviene che sieno con massimo desiderio dai cittadini cognosciute. Quali opere volete voi che sieno le vostre che contrapposino alla dolcezza del vivere libero o che faccino mancare gli uomini del desiderio delle presenti condizioni?». *Istorie fiorentine*, II.34, pp. 1789-90.

republican values remain as scars inscribed in the urban fabric, an everlasting memory of a wound that cannot be healed, impressed on the city's geography. Machiavelli had already considered iconoclastic practices in various passages of his *Discorsi*, reflecting on the fervour with which religions, particularly in their early stages, sought to efface vestiges of previous beliefs.[1] Here, however, the focus shifts to the cityscape, which is presented as the most enduring stronghold of a political community's collective ethos. Far from being neutral, the urban layout, its meeting places, and the political spatiality it reveals are presented in this passage as intrinsically suffused with the community's foundational values.[2]

### City-destroying palaces

In the second section of this paper, our focus was on Machiavelli's distinct perspective on fortresses, which he deemed ineffective in ensuring the security of a prince who lacks the support of his subjects or, worse still, is scorned by them. Moreover, the Secretary argued that fortresses contributed to the disintegration and polarization of the urban environment, thereby jeopardising citizens' liberties. This section will instead be devoted to Machiavelli's view of other types of architecture that played a significant role in the urban tapestry of sixteenth-century Florence: palaces and noble abodes.

As previously observed, after the expulsion of the aristocracy and the razing of their main fortresses within the city confines, it became essential to prohibit the ownership of castles close to the city. These bastions not only posed an undeniable military threat (intensified by their unyielding support of foreign powers in the ever-changing landscape of alliances), but also epitomised the dominance of one faction over a territory. Nevertheless, fortresses were not the only dangerous centralising force, capable of distorting the city's landscape by consolidating affluence and influence. In this process, they both delineated and delimited urban space (both tangibly and symbolically). The emergence of a novel economic system, characterised by the power of the mercantile and financial elite, found its architectural expression in sumptuous palaces.

Among the many sections of the *Istorie* that scrutinise the function of palaces in the political chronicle of the city, the most salient passages are found in Book VII (§4-5), devoted to the architectural ventures of Cosimo the Elder (1389-1464) and Luca Pitti (1398-1472). In both cases, Machiavelli associates the magnificence of their dwellings (or the public works initiated by them) with the attainment of a status far surpassing

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[1] M. GEUNA, *Machiavelli, la «variazione delle sette» e la critica al Cristianesimo*, in ⋆*Al di là del Repubblicanesimo. Modernità politica e origini dello Stato*, ed. G. Cappelli, Napoli, Unior Press, 2020, pp. 189-244; M. GEUNA, *'The Modes Taken by Saint Gregory': Machiavelli and the Violence of Religious Sects*, in ⋆*Machiavelli's «Discourses on Livy»: New Readings*, eds. D. Pires Aurélio - A. Santos Campos (ed.), Leiden, Brill, 2021, pp. 117-42; M. GEUNA, *Religione e politica in Machiavelli: l'analisi del Cristianesimo nelle pagine dei Discorsi*, in ⋆*Religione e politica: paradigmi, alleanze, conflitti*, ed. G. Bissiato, Pisa, ETS, 2022, pp. 65-122.

[2] On this specific feature, within a general examination of Machiavellian thought, see Q. SKINNER, *Visions of Politics*, II, *Renaissance Virtues*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002 and ID., *Machiavelli*, New York, Sterling, 2010. On the importance of the «foundational moment» in republican ethics, see also J.G.A. POCOCK, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016.

that of mere citizens, emblematically underscored by the Latinate expression «tanto cittadino» (i.e., a citizen of such greatness). This connection between the erection of a princely residence and the ensuing menace to a republic's unencumbered existence is not an impromptu observation by the author. The connection is already emphasised in a noteworthy passage of his previous work: *Discourses* i.28 (*For What Cause the Romans Were Less Ungrateful Toward Their Citizens than the Athenians*). Here Machiavelli recounts how the Romans, driven by the apprehension of relinquishing the freedom acquired after expelling the kings, unjustly banished two citizens: «Collatinus and Publius Valerius [ . . . ]. The first of them was sent into exile for no cause other than that he bore the name of the Tarquins, even though he had been found to have freed Rome; the other was also on the point of being made an exile only for having given suspicion of himself by building a house on the Caelian Hill».[1]

Here Machiavelli is referring to Publius Valerius Publicola ('friend of the people'), a member of a time-honoured and distinguished *gens* who, having built his abode on the Velian Hill, the former site of King Tullius Hostilius' *domus*, was obliged to demolish it overnight because of speculation that he aimed to proclaim himself king. In alluding to the exile of a citizen for an ill-judged choice of domicile, Machiavelli departs from his source, Livy, and presents an array of *exempla* from the ancient historian's work to illustrate how the Romans effectively preserved their liberty and built a magnificent city, in contrast to the practices prevalent in his native Florence.

In *Istorie* viii.5, Machiavelli provides a brief assessment of the founder of the Medici 'Signoria'. He observes:

His magnificence appeared in the abundance of buildings built by him; for in Florence, the cloisters and churches of San Marco and San Lorenzo and the monastery of Santa Verdiana, and on the hills of Fiesole, San Girolamo, and the Badia, and in the Mugello, a church of the Minor Friars – he not only initiated but built anew from the foundations. Besides all this, in Santa Croce, in the Servi, in the Angioli, and in San Miniato he had very splendid altars and chapels built. Besides building these churches and chapels, he filled them with raiments and everything necessary to the adornment of divine service. In addition to these sacred buildings were his private houses, which are: one in the city of a sort befitting so great a citizen; four outside, in Careggi, Fiesole, Cafaggiuolo, and Trebbio – all palaces not of private citizens but of kings. And because it was not enough for him to be known for the magnificence of his buildings in Italy, he also built in Jerusalem a hospital for poor and sick pilgrims. In these buildings he spent a very great amount of money. And although these dwellings and all his other works and actions were kingly, and he alone in Florence was prince, nonetheless, so tempered was he by his prudence that he never overstepped civil modesty.[2]

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[1] N. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, ed. and trans. by H.C. Mansfield - N. Tarcov, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 125-26. The Italian original reads: «a Collatino ed a Publio Valerio: de' quali il primo, ancora che si trovasse a liberare Roma, fu mandato in esilio non per altra cagione che per tenere il nome de' Tarquinii; l'altro, avendo solo dato di sé sospetto per edificare una casa in sul monte Celio, fu ancora per esser fatto esule». *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, i.28, p. 383.

[2] Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, cit., p. 281. The Itaian original reads: «Apparve la sua magnificenzia nella copia degli edifizi da lui edificati, perché in Firenze i conventi e i templi di San Marco e di San Lorenzo e il munistero di Santa Verdiana, e ne' monti di Fiesole San Girolamo e la Badia, e nel Mugello un tempio de' frati minori non solamente instaurò, ma da e' fondamenti di

The entire passage is built on the increasingly nuanced juxtaposition between the modesty and the type of residence befitting a *privato cittadino*, on the one hand, and the magnificence and the dwellings worthy of kings (*regii*), on the other. In scrutinising this idiosyncratic figure, Machiavelli examines a highly peculiar mode of subjugating a political community by ascending to princely power. An "unarmed man" (in contrast to what had hitherto been the norm in Florentine history and, more broadly, in the Italian political landscape), Cosimo based his authority on an astute and unscrupulous exploitation of his financial resources and the web of influence he was able to weave within and beyond his city. He also acted as the initiator of wide-ranging urban projects on an unprecedented scale, both inside and outside his city, and involving both private buildings and religious works (whose purposes, at the time, went far beyond mere places of worship). As Machiavelli perceptively notes, such a reimagining of the urban fabric was bound to have tangible consequences for the institutional architecture of the city. The extensive urban development and renewal of Florence – in the Renaissance style so closely associated with the shift to Medici rule – symbolically led the city out of the communal era of republican assemblies housed in austere Gothic palaces. The novel guise in which the city adorned itself was the stage on which a new political regime, the princely one, was bound to be enacted (albeit with the artful modesty feigned by Cosimo).

The figure of Cosimo de' Medici emerges as a paradigmatic example of the potential consequences of a private citizen's rise to power and prestige, as manifested through an ambitious building policy: ultimately, the freedom of the city is lost and its institutional and geographical spaces are transformed, from those of a republic to those of a principality. The erection of magnificent palaces and the completion of grandiose public works not only elevated Cosimo's status far above that of an ordinary citizen, but also, as Machiavelli contends, distorted the city's living space by concentrating wealth and influence, thereby undermining the very principles of *vivere libero* that a republic should ideally embody.

In stark contrast to the *exemplum* set by Publicola in ancient Rome, who was compelled to dismantle his residence to quell suspicions of monarchical aspirations, Florence allows private citizens to erect princely abodes. This permissive attitude progressively erodes the very tenets of free living. The juxtaposition between the houses of private citizens and regal palaces, as outlined in the text, reveals the detrimental impact of the latter on the urban environment and on the liberties and self-determi-

nuovo edificò. Oltre a di questo, in Santa Croce, ne' Servi, negli Angioli, in San Miniato, fece fare altari e cappelle splendidissime; i quali templi e cappelle, oltre allo edificare, riempié di paramenti e di ogni cosa necessaria allo ornamento del divino culto. A questi sacri edifizi si aggiunsono le private sue case, le quali sono: una nella città, di quello essere che a tanto cittadino si conveniva; quattro di fuora, a Careggi, a Fiesole, a Cafaggiuolo e al Trebbio: tutti palagi non da privati cittadini, ma regii. E perché nella magnificenzia degli edifizi non gli bastava essere cognosciuto in Italia, edificò ancora in Ierusalem un recettaculo per i poveri e infermi peregrini; nelle quali edificazioni uno numero grandissimo di danari consumò. E benché queste abitazioni e tutte le altre opere e azioni sue fussero regie e che solo, in Firenze, fusse principe, nondimeno tanto fu temperato dalla prudenza sua che mai la civile modestia non trapassò». *Istorie fiorentine*, VII.5, p. 2038.

nation of its inhabitants. By creating imposing physical networks and fostering social divisions, princely palaces precipitate the gradual decline of civic institutions and communal spaces essential for nurturing a spirit of civic unity and shared identity among the citizenry.

In brief, the Machiavellian examination of Cosimo's *liberalità* reveals that the reshaping of the urban environment functions as a mechanism of power, subtly influencing the political landscape.

Machiavelli's opinion on another contemporary figure, on whom he dwells in §4, appears even more categorical. As Cosimo grew older and his health deteriorated, the predatory attitude of «a few citizens» who were gradually assuming the role of de facto rulers of the state became increasingly brazen. One of the most influential of these was Luca Pitti, an exceedingly wealthy banker who assisted Cosimo in his final years. In recognition of his services, and with the approval of the Signoria and the Medici, Pitti received the honorific title of knight, as well as substantial rewards, ascending to the most important magistracy of the Republic (by now, in name only): the 'Gonfaloniere di Giustizia'.

In order to underscore the ambition and hunger for power of this enigmatic figure, Machiavelli recounts a much-debated episode in Florence at the time: the construction of a palace designed to rival those of the Medici.

Thus he rose to such reputation that not Cosimo but Messer Luca governed the city. He gained such confidence from this that he began two buildings, one in Florence, the other in Rusciano, a place nearly one mile from the city – both splendid and royal, but the one in the city was altogether greater than any other that had been built by a private citizen until that day. To bring these buildings to completion, he did not spare any extraordinary mode, for not only did citizens and individual men make him presents and help him with the things necessary for the building, but the communes and whole peoples provided assistance. Besides this, all the banished and anyone else who had committed murder or theft or any other thing for which he might fear public punishment, provided he was a person useful to the building, took refuge safely within those buildings. The other citizens, if they did not build as he did, were not less violent or less rapacious than he: thus if Florence did not have war from outside to destroy it, the city was destroyed by its own citizens. [1]

From the earliest stages of its construction, Pitti's building in the city sparked gossip – such as the rumour, also reported by Vasari, that the windows alone were intended to surpass the dimensions of the doorway of the Medici Palace. Unsurprisingly,

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 280. The Italian original reads: «Donde egli salì in tanta reputazione che non Cosimo, ma messer Luca la città governava. Da che lui venne in tanta confidenza ch'egli cominciò duoi edifici, l'uno in Firenze, l'altro a Ruciano, luogo propinquo uno miglio alla città, tutti superbi e regii; ma quello della città al tutto maggiore che alcuno altro che da privato cittadino infino a quel giorno fusse stato edificato. I quali per condurre a fine non perdonava ad alcuno estraordinario modo, perché non solamente i cittadini e gli uomini particulari lo presentavano e delle cose necessarie allo edifizio lo suvvenivano, ma i comuni e popoli interi gli sumministravano aiuti. Oltre a di questo, tutti gli sbanditi e qualunque altro avesse commesso omicidio o furto o altra cosa per che egli temesse publica penitenzia, purché e' fusse persona a quella edificazione utile, dentro a quelli edifizi sicuro si rifuggiva. Gli altri cittadini, se non edificavano come quello, non erono meno violenti né meno rapaci di lui: in modo che se Firenze non aveva guerra di fuori che la distruggesse, dai suoi cittadini era distrutta». *Istorie fiorentine*, VII. 4, p. 2036.

Machiavelli describes this episode so as to directly link Pitti's efforts to the construction of a princely residence that could rival those of the city's *de facto* ruler. He describes the new building as "splendid and royal," underlining its ostentatious superiority to the rest of the urban fabric as an embodiment of Pitti's attempt to transcend his status as private citizens. To describe the construction of Palazzo Pitti, Machiavelli employs precisely the expression "extraordinary mode", typically used to denote political initiatives that deviate from the boundaries of existing institutions to the point of threatening their stability. More generally, the Secretary categorises the regal palaces that arose at the beginning of the Medici dynasty under the banner of exceptionality. Exceptional was their structure, which distinguished them from the homes of private citizens and embedded the sovereign/subjects distinction in civic space. Exceptional was their monumental character, emblematic of a style devoted to celebrating values other than equality, civic harmony, and Florentine *libertas*. Exceptional, finally, was the mass they represented in the city's political spatiality, deviating from the communal space and aspiring to become a place for the gathering of partisans and supporters. In sum, according to Machiavelli, buildings such as Palazzo Pitti were genuine spaces of exception, capable of bending the city's political spatiality (with its rules, institutions, allotted moments, and relations between citizens) towards entirely novel outcomes. Far from the wonder typically reserved for the proliferation of sumptuous buildings that dotted Florence at the threshold of the sixteenth century, these pages of the *Istorie* link the feverish construction of an unprecedented urban profile to the destruction of republican institutions and *vivere libero* tout-court. More than any other building erected in the city until then, the sumptuous palaces that were being built demarcated an exceptional space that withdrew from public jurisdiction and would inevitably succeed in expropriating it. Resuming the leitmotif of the entire narrative, the author thus highlights that while the city had proven solid enough to withstand external enemies, it had ultimately succumbed to an unregulated internal conflict that was not institutionalised.

Although prudence, which Cosimo mastered, had forced him until then to behave as a simple *primus inter pares*, the advent of the principality was already evident to those who, like Machiavelli, knew how to read the urban landscape of their city as a political compass.

## Conclusions

In analysing the three episodes of the *Florentine Histories* under consideration – the struggles between the nobility and the people, punctuated by the city's fortification and delimitation; the tyrannical interlude of Brienne, with his ability to 'politically inhabit' different spaces on one hand and the contrasting appeal to the city as a bastion of free living on the other; and, finally, the acknowledgement of the political significance of noble palaces, capable of ushering in a new era of city politics – we witness Machiavelli's ability to read the evolution of the urban fabric in tandem with the dialectics inherent in the city's socio-political fabric. In an age marked by the transformation of political spatiality following major geographical discoveries and the dissolution of traditional political entities, particularly in light of Europe's political and

spiritual fragmentation, the Secretary offered an original perspective on the emerging scenarios. As some authors have observed, particularly with regard to *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, many of his pages propose a «politicization of space», leading to a «spatialization of politics». [1] From the standpoint of an Italy increasingly marginalised on the European political chessboard and torn apart by a long series of wars (1494-1559), Machiavelli's perspective confronted a space progressively dislocated in its traditional attributes, which did not correspond either to «the formless uniformity of a scientifiable space» [2] or to the attempt to reconnect with tradition proposed by Florentine Neoplatonism. [3] Machiavelli, for his part, creatively developed the Lucretian *lectio*, exploring the new political geography of his time as a site of convergence and clash of forces and dynamics that needed to be understood in relation to the variables conditioning their potential and flows. These included not only time (and *occasione*, conjuncture), but also space.

In these pages, I have endeavoured to show that, far from being a neutral and homogeneous plane, the city that the author configures as the site of action in the *Histories* conditions the forces at work within it and evolves with or against them. Observing a living and changing urban fabric, Machiavelli casts an original and penetrating gaze on the unique outcome that the *umori* of the factions had in Florence, contrasting them with other political contexts. By fortifying and occluding spaces of encounter and convergence with towers and walls, or instead opening them up through squares and assemblies that offer institutional and physical relief to converging humours, the city alternates between demonstrating its capacity for expansion (institutional and territorial) and tending towards its own implosion and collapse. Faced with a city unable to institutionally sublimate conflict and preserve its freedom, the ability to read the urban perimeter becomes a tool for foreseeing and preventing tyranny. This seems to be the hope that the anonymous member of the Signoria offers his fellow citizens at the beginning of the Duke's tyranny: when free institutions are exhausted and dissenting voices are silenced by the end of *vivere libero*, the city – with its vestiges, space, and living traces – never ceases to awaken in its citizens a deep-rooted and forward-looking thirst for freedom.

[1] Cfr. DESCENDRE, *L'État, le droit, le territoire*, cit.
[2] GALLI, *Spazi politici*, cit., p. 34.        [3] See *ibidem*, pp. 33-37.

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