CALL FOR PAPERS
San Rocco 11:
Happy Birthday, Bramante!

San Rocco is interested in gathering together the widest possible variety of contributions. *San Rocco* believes that architecture is a collective knowledge, and that collective knowledge is the product of a multitude. External contributions to *San Rocco* might take different forms. Essays, illustrations, designs, comic strips and even novels are all equally suitable for publication in *San Rocco*. In principle, there are no limits – either minimum or maximum – imposed on the length of contributions. Minor contributions (a few lines of text, a small drawing, a photo, a postcard) are by no means uninteresting to *San Rocco.* For each issue, *San Rocco* will put out a "call for papers" comprised of an editorial note and of a list of cases, each followed by a short comment. As such, the "call for papers" is a preview of the magazine. The "call for papers" defines the field of interest of a given issue and produces a context in which to situate contributions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

A External contributors can either accept the proposed interpretative point of view or react with new interpretations of the case studies. B Additional cases might be suggested by external contributors, following the approach defined in the "call for papers". New cases might be accepted, depending on their evaluation by the editorial board. C Proposed contributions will be evaluated on the basis of a 500-word abstract containing information about the proposed submission's content and length, as well as a list of the number and type of photographs, illustrations and/or drawings it includes. The abstract must be submitted as a PDF file that begins with the author's name and the title of the proposal and includes reproductions of all images intended for publication. The PDF should be named using this format: SURNAME_TITLE.PDF. The editorial team of San Rocco *will not review abstracts that fail to follow these guidelines. D Contributions to* San Rocco *must be written in English. San Rocco does not translate texts. E All texts (including footnotes, image credits, etc.) should be submitted digitally in .rtf format and edited according to the Oxford Style Manual. F All illustrations and drawings should be submitted digitally (in .tif or .eps format). Please include a numbered list of all illustrations and provide the following information for each: illustration source, name of photographer or artist, name of copyright holder, or "no copyright", and caption, if needed. G San Rocco does not buy intellectual property rights for the material appearing in the magazine.* San Rocco *suggests that external contributors publish their work under Creative Commons licences. H Contributors whose work is selected for publication in* San Rocco *will be informed and will then start collaborating with* San Rocco's *editorial board in order to complete the preparation of the issue.*

Proposals for contributions to San Rocco 11 *must be submitted electronically to mail@sanrocco.info by 15 November 2014.*

Bramante is the most important architect in the history of Western architecture.

This fact alone would be a sufficient reason for this issue, but the additional fact that Bramante died 500 years ago merits its own celebration. Most of all, now that globalization has come full circle and we live in an entirely unified market, we must address Bramante's work as the *foundation of universalism* (in the sense of Badiou's book on St Paul) in Western architecture.

Bramante imagined a single, universal architectural language that could deal with any potential architectural problem. Of course, universalism implies a sort of suspicious generosity, and Bramante's project is certainly a colonialist project. Still, universalism – at least in the form of the market – won, and now it can only be criticized from within by recognizing the violence it brings with it, but also by rediscovering the generosity that is equally implicit in a universal project.

Bramante was probably the most ruthless intellectual of the Renaissance, for he promoted his cultural project with the haste and cold-blooded brutality of a military campaign, seizing control over classical antiquity in the same manner in which a *conquistador* would lay claim to a luxuriant paradise. And yet Bramante – *der Zorn Gottes* – is also, together with Machiavelli, the most conscious intellectual of his time with respect to the double-sided nature of the Renaissance. Bramante never underestimated the *darker side* of his cultural project. Bramante conquered an empire on behalf of Western architecture that was as splendid as it was fragile and then bequeathed it, with all of its implicit burden of oppression, rage and fear, but also with its unlikely humanity and problematic innocence, to all Western and Westernized architects (including us). The violent generosity of Bramante's work remains the foundation of any contemporary attempt to imagine a universal architectural language for a globalized world.

Bramante is both a complicated architect and a simple one. He is complicated because his work does not correspond to a precise style and reveals in a broad range of figures and masks. Thus, when Bramante leaves Milan for Rome, his architecture changes in such an extreme manner that, without documentary proof, we would never have been able to assign the works he designed in the two cities to the same hand. Bramante is also complicated because his work is never directly creative; rather, it has a more *editorial* tone, for it always combines the creative efforts of others. Indeed, he always works with pre-existing pieces, and the quality of his work lies not in content but rather in the process set in motion by his intelligence. Bramante is the ultimate abstract architect, and for precisely this reason, the ultimate pragmatic architect. He works with what is available and with the utmost speed. He is fully aware of the brief duration of the opportunities that come his way. As a result, Bramante's projects comprise a set of extremely simple gestures, ones that are simply combined, sometimes in unexpected manner. This results in an endlessly mutable but undestroyable architecture. Bramante is no purist, and he accepts – in fact, he actually likes – contamination. His architecture is impure from the beginning, for it is programmatically open to all sorts of opportunities, but at the same time it is incredibly clean, for no circumstance is capable of compromising the clear distinction of architectural *words* (which he basically leaves to circumstance) and architectural *language* (which is always perfectly controlled). Bramante seems to perceive this duality in Roman ruins: he sees the different temporality of the different figures and reads through them the different desires incorporated into the buildings. So, for Bramante there is no reason for any intolerance, provided the distinction among the different terms of the architectural problem is maintained. For this reason, Bramante does not need to entirely control the buildings he designs. Only San Satiro, the Cortile della Pace and the *tempietto* can be considered the result of a complete design by Bramante. As for the rest of his oeuvre, Bramante rarely designs more than 10% of what is attributed to him. None of Bramante's buildings is really Bramante's; his presence in their design is by definition elusive. His temporary residence makes any project he is associated with fundamentally unresolved. Bramante is somehow always in the air. He is always where the power is – or, perhaps, where he can somehow manage to come to participate in the intrigue of building. His architecture, if it does exist, is formulated in riddles that others have to resolve. In fact, Bramante's architecture is rather

like points of condensation in a landscape of possibilities. In a context where centres of power are endlessly shifting, Bramante operates as a skilled deployer of formal points of reference, apoliticised, without content. There is no content, for there never is a proper building, only corners, or suggestions – a whole virtual world of hypotheses. Somehow Bramante hovers about any relevant building of the time. This diffused presence is for the most part based on hearsay and indirect proof. Bramante's oeuvre is either gargantuan or almost non-existent. The intelligence of his quasi-invisible signature, of his authorial lack of authoriality, fits in perfectly with his *foundation of universalism*.

The incomplete architecture of Bramante is Roman not only in spirit, but also in action. Bramante goes to his construction sites only a couple of times and attempts to exert control over them by addressing just parts of the larger whole: a foundation, a layout, a corner . . . The case of St Peter's is amazing: Bramante left us a puzzle made of a few drawings, a model of the dome, four piers, a detail of a capital (which, by the way, he just let copy from the Pantheon) and a choir that was in the wrong location and was thus to be demolished. The promise of the building, as an urban artefact, creates a narrative and establishes a point of reference. To a certain extent, Bramante designs his buildings *as ruins*: structure and voids in between. In a universe where buildings are only started and never finished, the key to the game is not brilliance in a project's elaboration, but the blunt and uncompromising decision to begin it in the first place.

Bramante carries out his conquest of the *universal architectural language* with incredible speed. Once in Rome, he needs to define a formal language capable of responding to all of the challenges posed by contemporary cities and of being shared and used by all the subjects collaborating in the production of the city. Bramante masters this new (old) language in just a few years, from his execution of the Chiostro della Pace (ca. 1500–4) to the *tempietto* of San Pietro in Montorio (probably around 1502). In contrast to the clumsy, hyper-respectful, antiquarian efforts of his contemporary Giuliano da Sangallo, for Bramante, the refined architectural language of the past (*la bella maniera degli antichi*) is entirely available, perfectly ready to be used. No spiritual affinity is needed; no veneration is necessary. And no particular sympathy for the Romans is required. If for Mantegna or Alberti the revival of the architecture of the Roman past is the product of a choice rooted in a profound admiration for the civilization of ancient Rome, then the predilection of Bramante is entirely deprived of any moral judgement. Whatever the message, the repertoire that can be decoded in the Roman *campagna* simply provides a more efficient grammar. And it is precisely because of his complete indifference that Bramante is capable of looking at the architecture of the Romans with the detachment that allows one to gain complete control over it. Bramante just puts himself in the position of learning from the Romans; it is he who defines the presuppositions for the most realistic exploitation of these available assets. His approach to the past is strategically superior because of its unprejudiced pragmatism (in the end, conquering a land you do not love is somehow an easier exercise). When Bramante walks *solitario e cogitativo* among the ruins, he resembles a colonel in need of precise information in order to conquer a position on a hilltop much more than a lover inspired by some sort of romantic fascination with the past. In the end, this difference – the great one that distinguishes Bramante from Alberti and Mantegna, and even from Raphael and Palladio, and that defines him as a conscious non-revivalist – is a difference with regard to the category of phenomena Bramante is interested in looking at. Indeed, Bramante does not look *at* the architecture of the past; instead, he looks *through* the architecture of the past.

After a few years in Rome, the classical repertoire ceases to be a problem for Bramante. Bramante is, with respect to the classic repertoire, in the same position Lenin is in after the October Revolution, and the same one as St Paul is in after Christ's resurrection. The fundamental event has *already* happened; the fundamental tool has already been discovered. For Bramante, the architectural language is *given*. The challenge is thus simply a question of using it to articulate space. And the fact that architectural language is *given* means, first of all, that *there is no need to invent,* and secondly, that *there is no merit in not inventing*. Classicism is not a

tradition (and, most importantly, it is not *our* tradition). For Bramante, classicism is simply the conscious idea of a universal architecture, one that cannot exclude anything and thus should remain as abstract as possible.

Bramante's work investigates the logical-political consequences of universal architecture.
Bramante thinks in terms of *law* and *exceptions*. Bramante's research is *logical,* for he occupies himself with matters of grammar – with rules, with cases, and *political,* for his work is occupied with multitudes, with agreement, with chance, with weakness, with violence, with arbitrariness. All of his research on this dialectic of *law* and *exceptions* – the topic none of his contemporary thinkers could avoid, from Erasmus and Machiavelli through Luther and Galileo – is carried out as *architectural* research, as a true *phenomenology of space* in which space is suspended and then explored in its infinite possible configurations.
It is with respect to this dialectic of law and exceptions, which implies the opposition but also the complementarity of the two terms it associates, that the specific abstraction of Bramante's architecture needs to be understood. Abstraction is both the method and the goal. Abstraction is the goal because Bramante's architecture aims to expose a universal manner of organizing space, but it is also the method, for it is the indifference to style, content and message that allows architectural "language" to address the multiplicity of reality. The given constraints in any specific situation (e.g., the decorative obsession of Lombard craftsmen, the limits of the plots, the hasty nature of a cultural project bound to the life of an ageing pope and an equally old architect) are neither ignored nor opposed. Instead, Bramante operates on another level, assuming all of the conditions of a given situation as equivalent aspects of an intellectual project that is simply aiming to combine all of the desires crowded around the architectural object into a single unified configuration. Bramante's logical-political construction is developed as a material one: the agreement is *built into space*. And the construction of this agreement is then exposed *as space* – indirectly, in a somehow distorted manner – as an empty cast produced by operating upon solid

substance. Thus, the *problem of Bramante* (to borrow Argan's beautiful expression and radicalize it) is indeed just one, but a quite ample one that is always investigated in a counter-intuitive manner: *the logical-political anticipation of possibilities enclosed into the void.*

The problem of Bramante is a *political* problem: the problem of the definition of a series of architectural decisions that could correspond to their specific *circumstances* without compromising the *universal language*. Bramante understands this task as political - and so obviously plural - both in its scope (the production of spaces that could be used and remembered by a multitude) and in its method (the construction of the agreement of all subjects involved into the construction process). Bramante's work is political also because it is not only addressed to a multitude, but also produced by a multitude of authors. Bramante is just the editor of a collective artistic effort. This is why, for Bramante, the rigorous universality and the absolute abstraction of the architectural language is systematically combined with a tolerance of outside interference. The laws are constantly defied by chance, while the universal language is constantly reacting to a multitude of dialects. In each specific set of circumstances, Bramante accepts the specificity of his task as a challenge to expand the realm of the universal language. No case can be ignored. And every time a new challenge presents itself, then the language needs to become more and more abstract, more and more detached and general. In each circumstance, Bramante sets himself the goal of showing that architecture can find a solution without starting over from scratch, without coming to conclusions that would declare somebody an enemy.
Bramante's architectural project presents itself as a series of *political* decisions, as a series of decisions about issues that are only partially known, as an elaboration of uncertainty, as labour, as a reflection on the unavoidable violence of choosing. In Bramante, the awareness of this fragility turns into the production of spaces that systematically display a lack of stability, a lack of reality, a lack of foundations. In the very moment that he impresses the viewer with his spectacle of spaces, Bramante also disappoints him by leaving him suspended

in an extremely uncomfortable position. Space is produced and then immediately dissolved. Reality and illusion are constantly played off against each other, somehow proving each other wrong.

And of course, Bramante's project fails. As much as he rediscovers an entirely new scale for contemporary architecture, and as much as he may succeed in imposing his agenda upon all of the architects of the following hundred years, the *universal language* never really materializes and remains merely a promise. The land that is conquered never becomes firmly held territory. The coach turns back into a pumpkin. And yet Bramante also speaks – and to a certain extent, more clearly – through his failure. Conquerors are, indeed, always eventually vanquished, their empires doomed to vanish. And the humanity of Bramante's work lies in his constant confrontation with failure, in his explicit investigation of failure – what could almost be seen as his recasting of failure as the supreme human achievement. Bramante conquers the empire simply in order to burn all its provinces in a colossal cultural potlatch. The tenderness of his ruthless military campaign is the tenderness of failure, the fragility of his unbelievable ambition, the desperation of his colossal(ly) bad jokes, the humour and the stubbornness with which the unavoidable and nonsensical project of a universal architecture is pushed to the extreme.
So, happy birthday, Bramante – and fuck you.

Werner Herzog, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God,* 1972

▪ *Per vedere il Duomo* ▪
In his fantastically well written *Life of Bramante,* Vasari ignores Bramante's Milanese period.
The author simply says: "Per il che, deliberatosi di vedere almeno qualcosa notabile, si trasferì a Milano per vedere il Duomo", [For this reason he determined at least to see some noteworthy work, and betook himself to Milan, in order to see the Duomo.] and then a few lines later: "...considerata che egli ebbe questa fabbrica e conosciuti questi ingegeneri, si inanimì di sorte, che egli risolvè del tutto darsi all'architettura. Laonde, partitosi da Milano, se ne venne a Roma... ", [...having studied that building, and having come to know those engineers, he so took courage, that he resolved to devote himself wholly to architecture]
In its surreal version of the facts – twenty-something years to see a building? – Vasari's story exposes Bramante's tendency toward boredom, his desire for a metropolitan life, his curiosity, his open-minded confrontation with the past, his analytical precision, his obvious fascination with scale (and thus also with courage or bravery).

▪ Milan / Rome ▪
Bruno Zevi famously criticized the Milanese and Roman periods of Bramante's career. Zevi metaphorically spoke of *luci milanesi* [Milanese lights] and of *ombre romane* [Roman shadows], opposing a classical (and for Zevi, therefore bad) period and an anti-classical (and for Zevi, therefore good) period in Bramante's oeuvre. Such clear-cut separation is in this case curious because Bramante precisely opposed it in its entire work. And indeed, there cannot be lights without shadows at the same time.

▪ San Satiro ▪
The false choir is not a substitute for a missing space: rather, it is a tool for acting upon the existing one. Such a choir not only suggests a possible movement into an unreal space, but also operates as a wall or obstacle – and the true flatness of the fictive choir is clearly exposed as such by positioning the real volume of the

altar directly against the choir's fake perspectival view. The flat choir works as a mirror that redirects the progression down the nave laterally into the perpendicular transept. Bramante does not want to let you believe in any illusions: the fake is exposed as such. The false choir is first and foremost a wall. San Satiro is a real T-plan church, not a fake central plan one.

▪ Non-modern Precision ▪

The decoration of the domes of Santa Maria delle Grazie follows an incredibly articulated astrological (?) geometry. Nobody knows if Bramante was involved in the project of the church's decoration. In any case the execution is rather clumsy. None of its lines manages to be straight. And then, precisely because of this incertitude, the precision of the intention is made even clearer. The clumsiness of the hands testifies to the clarity of the idea. Ideal geometry is proved right by its capacity to accept the fallacious gestures of the everyday. A real cosmos is made of all the traces of the unknown workers.

▪ Emptiness ▪

Bramante's architecture is made up of walls and voids. As such, it is Roman: a science of separating the interior from the exterior, an articulation of voids by means of solid obstacles. Bramante derives this understanding of architecture from his exploration of Roman ruins. He understands the processional nature of the large vaults, the pauses made of large, plain walls and the forced rhythm imposed by slopes. His work always has a character of duality (following architecture's fundamental pairing of solid and void, substance and absence) and always displays a preference for emptiness, for the absence that remains within elements of matter. For Bramante, the non-existent is always ontologically superior to the existent, presence is always subordinated to absence, substance is always ancillary to emptiness. And, of course, Bramante is no magical realist or surrealist. He simply discovers the real nothing within the purported substance. The piers of St Peter's in drawings UA1, UA8 and UA20 show that Bramante can discover the void within any substance.

▪ Vaults, Apses ▪

Bramante is not particularly interested in domes. What interests him more are barrel vaults and apses, which he uses as channels and receptacles of space. Indeed, vaults imply a movement through space, and thus a rhythm. Apses imply a distance and hence a longing, or a narrative. In the *School of Athens,* Bramante (if he is really the author of the architectural scene as Vasari proposes) imagines the philosophers coming from unearthly distance, walking beneath barrel vaults and passing through an articulated series of triumphal arches framing a spatial channel. Also, there is apparently no roof bridging the sequence of vaults. Architecture is not there to shelter; it simply frames human movement.

▪ Pedestals ▪

In Bramante's buildings, pilasters normally rest on pedestals (Baroni asserts that pedestals were probably also present in the nave of San Satiro, and they were present in the project for St Peter's before Antonio da Sangallo and Raphael decided to get rid of them by raising the level of the pavement). Thus, the vertical elements do not touch the ground. The visitor of Bramante's spaces is left somehow below the horizon, as if sunken down into the ground (or better, the spaces are sort of lifted up to the viewer's shoulder level by introducing pedestals that separate the actual pavement from a higher "ideal" pavement). The space through which the visitors move does not coincide with the space that is visually defined by the architecture. A disconnection is introduced. Visitors walk on a pavement and are immersed in an entirely separated space floating on top of them. This ideal pavement thus slices through the bodies of the viewers, leaving them halfway between two worlds.

▪ Centralized / Not Central ▪

Bramante is not particularly interested in geometry. Of course, this does not mean that proportions are not perfectly thought through, but geometry has no absolute value for Bramante (at least not in the sense of Wittkower's *Principles*). What is more, Bramante is relatively indifferent to the notion of the central plan, as Christof

Thoenes's studies of St Peter's show. What really matters for Bramante is the possibility of bringing together into a single configuration all the data comprising the architectural problem in each given case. As a result, all of Bramante's buildings are centralized and not central. To put it another way, they are all somehow governed by the gravitational pull of a centre, but this centre is never precisely defined and does not manage to entirely erase the original configuration of the elements. Bramante's buildings are always strangely hybrid spaces. Although there is absolutely no tolerance for the picturesque in his work, the figures are nonetheless never unilateral or iconic – well, except the *tempietto,* that is.

▪(Speaking of) *the Tempietto* ▪

The *tempietto* of San Pietro in Montorio is the icon that the Renaissance was waiting for.
Bramante produces it with complete cynicism: Doric columns, round plan and dome. The *tempietto* is all-you-can-eat classicism. The *tempietto* is quite kitschy (and a remarkable plunge into vulgarity for somebody who has just completed the exquisite Chiostro della Pace), yet the vulgarity of the *tempietto* makes sense within the architect's media campaign (one that was, of course, for an elite) for the new St Peter's.

▪ Putting the Pantheon on Top of the Basilica of Maxentius ▪

A tradition reported in Bruschi (1969) claims that for the new St Peter's, Bramante simply proposed screwing the dome of the Pantheon to the top of the Basilica of Maxentius. It is an amazingly brutal – and yet also amazingly humble – idea. Bramante reduces the problem to its strictest architectural terms (even if it is the most incredibly symbolic-ideological of all possible architectural problems). Bramante also refuses to invent, instead proposing the combination of the two most impressive buildings he knows (and also the two most obvious, the two best known by his contemporaries). The design is once again understood in analytical terms. In his *Opinio* on the Milanese cathedral, Bramante precisely dismantled the building into pieces – somehow producing a textual version of a Stirling axonometric drawing – while in the case of St Peter's, he assembles gigantic, ready-made Roman pieces.

▪ UA8v ▪

Drawing UA8r is one by Giuliano da Sangallo for St Peter's that is now in the collection of the Uffizi. The drawing is probably Giuliano's reaction to drawing UA1 by Bramante. Giuliano enlarges the piers imagined by Bramante to make the building a bit more realistic and produces an incredibly stiff and rather idiotic project. He simply does not get the point: he does not understand that the substance of Bramante's project is the void. On the back of the same sheet bearing drawing UA8r, Bramante corrects Giuliano (possibly the most humiliating moment in the history of architecture). With a few strokes, Bramante rediscovers the void within Giuliano's sturdy pillars. Space is freed again. Poor Giuliano.

▪ Creative Destruction ▪

Shortly after the Sack of Rome, sometime between 1532 and 1536, Maarten van Heemskerk made a few incredible drawings of the construction site of St Peter's. In the drawings, the church looks like a ruin. Around the new pillars lazily growing, there is all of the debris of the preceding church, which Bramante had razed to the ground with incredible determination. To our knowledge, this is the only case of a religious sanctuary that was destroyed not by invaders but simply for the sake of beauty. Is St Peter's the terrible masterpiece of the Renaissance? A demolition project?
(Martin Luther visited Rome only once – in 1510–11, during the papacy of Julius II, when things still looked a bit more promising, and he was certainly not convinced of the idea.)

▪ Pieces ▪

Bramante does not complete the building of St Peter's, and he also fails to complete his project. He leaves behind only pieces: a dome that looks like a stupa, four pillars and a choir that upon closer inspection should be

destroyed because it does non correspond at all to the pillars and served only to give an idea of how the thing should look.

▪ Durand's St Peter's ▪

Apparently, employing Durand's version, the project would have been cheaper – much cheaper.

▪ *Difficoltà grandissima* ▪

"Bramante, non solo imitandogli [i Romani] con invenzion nuova ci insegnò, ma ancora bellezza e difficultà accrebbe grandissima all'arte."

[Bramante not only imitated what he saw, with new invention, and taught it to us, but also added very great beauty and elaboration to the art.]

Vasari is – perhaps unconsciously – quite honest: *ci insegnò,* or "he taught us".

Vasari also notices that Bramante somehow raised the level of the game, forcing all of his followers to continue to play the one that he had defined. In a pretty material sense, all of his followers will have to deal with his legacy by working on the unfinished St Peter's. The game is deliberately difficult, something Vasari knows from personal experience. Somehow we are reminded of Henry James's *The Figure in the Carpet*: "Literature was a game of skill, and skill meant courage, and courage meant honour, and honour meant passion, meant life."

▪ Bramante vs. Michelangelo ▪

In Carol Reed's *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), starring Charlton Heston as Michelangelo, Harry Andrews as Bramante and Rex Harrison as Julius II, Bramante seems like a complete asshole.

In contrast to the pure, tormented, uncompromising genius portrayed by Heston (which is, in the end, identical to Gary Cooper's Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead* of 1949), the character of Bramante is a manipulative, worldly son of a bitch.

In its absurd naïvety, the film is probably not wrong – at least, Bramante was proudly not a genius, not a romantic hero, not a simple heart.

▪ Bramante vs. Raphael ▪

Raphael seems to perceive the fragile empire of Bramante as a solid foundation.

Raising the pavement and removing the pedestals from St Peter's meant removing the problematic elements of the composition, removing what protested that the very same church that was being built was actually impossible to build. It was too much of a bad joke for Raphael. For him, the classic revival was *for real*. His letter to Leo X is damn serious. And in the end, he believed that the classical revival could be achieved simply by *spending more money*.

▪ Bramante vs. Palladio ▪

Bramante does not name *his* sons after Roman heroes.

▪ Bramante's Tomb ▪

No one seems to know where Bramante is buried.
Could you design a tomb for him?