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URBAN DIALOGUES

The Venice Architecture Biennale, with its plethora of national pavilions dotted around the Giardini and the city of Venice, is often claimed to function as a global showcase that brings together advances in the design of the built environment and critical debate. This claim can be substantiated with reference to numerous examples from past biennales, from the first exhibitions curated by Vittorio Gregotti in the 1970s to the more recent engagements with what Aaron Betsky in 2008 termed ›building-free architecture‹ as a way of dealing with important societal issues. The very setting of the Venice Architecture Biennale, with its changing themes, individual curatorial interpretations and delightful scattering of shows in lush gardens and a city steeped in history, seems to evoke a sort of walk-in dialogue between the city of Venice, the directors, the curators and the global audience. But what kind of dialogue can be achieved by staging or provoking responses to a finished object?

Or are there other ways to engage in dialogical situations in the urban realm, to extend—in Deleuzian terms—the co-existence of polyphonic, multi-vocal compounds (Deleuze/Guattari 1991: 178)? In Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *dialogism* words constitute subjectivity by generating a social space that is fundamentally interpersonal and thus facilitates a constant appropriation and transformation of the voice of the other (Bakhtin 1984). What emerges in such dialogues is not merely a reproduction of self-contained worlds but a complex map of intensities whose distribution, rather than according with a predetermined logic, develops out of reciprocal points of contact: singular encounters, movements, gestures and spontaneously coordinated actions. None of the links appearing between the encounters is required to be part of an overarching plan, part of the grammar of a common project. Dialogues evolve in the acts of speaking and hearing, in processes of interruption and sedimentation and not in the planning of a common outcome.