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Chapter 1

The Unconscious and Space: Venice and the work of Albrecht Dürer

Gordana Korolija Fontana-Giusti

This chapter focuses on the unconscious and space in the work of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). By unearthing the layers of history and mapping the dynamics of Dürer's spatial unconscious, it proposes a multifaceted argument of his work that considers Dürer not solely as a painter and engraver, but as a theorist of perspective, human proportions and architecture of fortifications, as evident in his treatises and commissions. The proposed analysis of Dürer's opus examines the nature of his understanding of space and spatiality in the context of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It considers relevant works by Dürer in relation to his place of birth and subsequent travels. The attention is directed to the nature of Dürer's stay in Venice and the ways in which the city had affected him on various levels including the unconscious. The argument concludes by discussing how Dürer's spatially innovative work was constituted in relation to *melancholia imaginativa*.

1. Introduction – Dürer and the unconscious

Dürer's spatial unconscious can be reconstructed through the analysis of his work and the events of his life. By focusing on the spatial experience of his travels, this chapter sheds light on what might be thought of as his unconscious libidinal economy in relation to spaces, places and cities.

Let us begin by asking: how was the "unconscious" defined in Dürer's time? The concept of the unconscious in the contemporary sense did not exist as such; at the same time, people must have been profoundly aware of the realm of the unknown within

themselves and how it can determine their lives in a compelling manner, allowing them to fight personal battles, suppress desires and test their anxieties, acts and morals.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the “unknown within oneself” was contemplated and controlled by different sets of practices that included education, reading and contemplation of the stories from the Bible and the New Testament. As the practice of reading gained momentum with printed books replacing manuscripts, the boundary between the realm of reading and that of contemplation about one’s life became blurry.[1] The dynamics concerning meditation and the realm of life/action were mutually dependent and triggered by recognizable signs. Such signs could be unusual celestial occurrences, rare animals, plants or any other striking phenomena. Signs were discussed, written about and painted. Significantly for our considerations, they appear in Dürer’s prints and paintings. Signs are often strategically placed in Dürer’s self-portraits giving them a particular meaning.

Other secular practices that arose in search of the unknown within oneself included apprenticeships and travels (*Wanderjahre*) often to other places, corresponding to what Foucault called – *heterotopia* – the places where individuals, in development or crisis, learn something about themselves that was not possible in their usual environment.[2] The aspects of the unconscious were thus dispersed over the spaces and events in one’s life. They were recognized, referred to and interpreted according to the understanding of the world-view at the time and a person’s role in this setting.

Various scholars largely agree that despite his fame and certain vanity about his looks, Dürer was a pious person, devoted to his family. He attended a religious school,

before joining his father's practice. Albrecht Dürer the Elder was trained in the Netherlands "with the great masters" and had thus served as an early intermediary between his son and "the very fathers of modern European painting."[3] According to the self-portrait now kept in Vienna, at the age of thirteen young Albrecht was already a skilled draftsman. Many other self-portraits followed, as Dürer became the first painter to represent his own likeness in a systematic manner on important occasions, most famously in the paintings of 1493, 1498 and 1500.[4]

In 1494 after four years of travel in search of painterly knowledge and experiences, Dürer headed back to Nuremberg to marry. He was probably disappointed that he had not visited Italy – the major destination for aspiring artists, as Italian cities were leading in the revival of the arts.

For my argument it is significant to recognize this moment in what I call "the libidinal economy" of Dürer's life. It is here understood as the distribution of the unconscious sexual energy (*libido*) on the level of the individual as they go through life and make different choices that are seen as libidinal investments. Freud argues:

> "Libido is an expression taken from the theory of the emotions. We call by that name the energy … of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word 'love'. The nucleus of what we mean by love naturally consists … in sexual love with sexual union as its aim."

Importantly for this paper Freud adds:

> "But we do not separate from this—what in any case has a share in the name 'love'—on the one hand, self-love, and on the other, love for parents and children, friendship and love for humanity in general, and also devotion to concrete objects and to abstract ideas." [5]

Although Dürer submitted to the will of his parents and married his bride, it is noticeable that his libidinal investments remained in his work and in the abstract idea of explorations. The family-imposed interruption to his unconscious libidinal desire to continue travelling and exploring life and arts, returned with force. It fueled Dürer's

subsequent travels to Italy and his interest in art, sublimating in the life-long dedication to the art that must be based on scientific knowledge.[6] This quest for "scientific explanations" became obsessive and, I argue, could be recognized as his symptom.

2. The art of sublimation – the first trip to Venice 1494–5

On his return to Nuremberg in 1494, and before setting out for Venice, Dürer married Agnes Frey in July of the same year. Dürer's 1493 self-portrait with the thistle makes a reference to his future marriage in the inscription "My affairs will go as ordained on high."[7] It supports the hypothesis about Dürer's compliant attitude to his marriage as it turned into a socially acceptable model that would allow him to explore the life of an artist as he desired it. This model that included a license to travel, accommodated for the healthy and vigorous drives of Dürer's curious and complex personality.

Interpreters have agonized about the question of Dürer's wife as they agreed that the wedlock was not a particularly happy one. Yet, Dürer remained attached to Agnes, and defended her from his friends' criticism. It is important to think of Agnes's role as a wife of a blossoming artist who had numerous responsibilities in supporting her husband's career. Apart from being responsible for the household and providing food for family members, the apprentices, maids and various guests, Agnes was involved in selling and promoting her husband's work. Dürer's letters express confidence in Agnes and her professionalism.[8] She was responsible for Dürer's legacy, and posthumously initiated the translation of his *Art of Measurement* into Latin (1538).

This kind of complementary in marriage is consistent with Dürer's acceptance of the "orders from above" and the related process that we can call the sublimation of libidinal energies towards an agreeable purpose. Sublimation is here understood in Freudian sense of being a defense mechanism where socially-unacceptable impulses

are transformed into socially-acceptable actions or behavior. As such sublimation has always been recognized as "an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development that makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play an important part in civilised life."[9] We can recognize this process in Dürer's case. I emphasise this condition by naming it a libidinal transformation. By this I mean a transfer of personal energies where the individual assumes a different attitude to life and where this dynamism can be traced to his/her primary libidinal energy.

This libidinal condition that sublimates the drives and consoles Dürer's desires into continuous studies of art in far-away places, was in the heart of his marriage. Before the end of 1494 Dürer was on his way to Venice via Augsburg, Tyrol and Trento. The trip was a fulfillment of his desire to experience the Mediterranean world and the arts of classical antiquity. Given that Durer's libidinal energies have been sublimated into total dedication to his art, we can see how this trip took priority to any other duties.

Other factors that played a part in Dürer's choice of Venice could be mentioned as he must have known about the city from various artists such as the Housebook Master and/or Erhard Reuwich. Dürer was familiar with the related woodcuts of the city views that were available in Martin Wolgemut's studio where he worked; the five-foot-wide representation of Venice by Reuwich was impressive and technically advanced enough that it alone could have been the reason why Dürer hurried to Italy.[10]

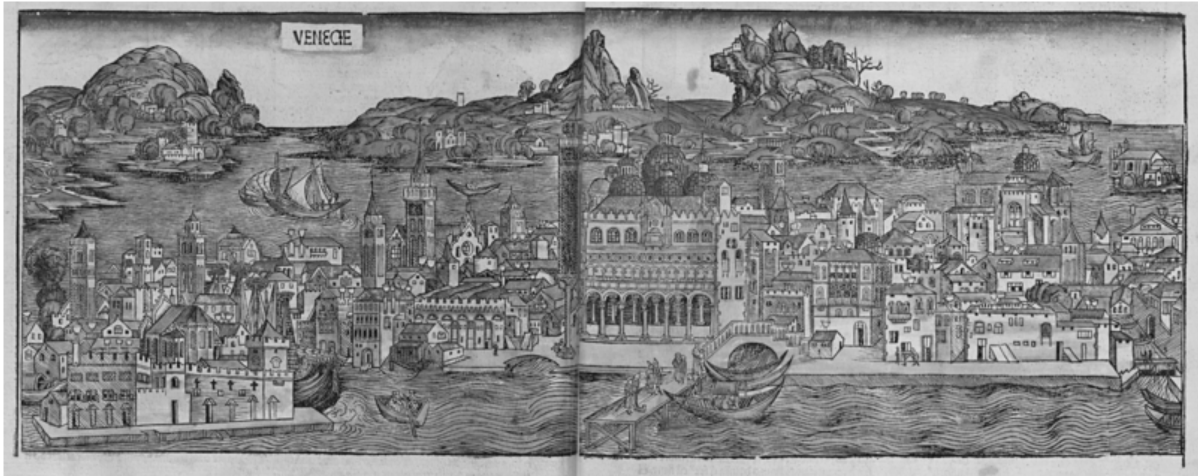

Figure 1.1. View od Venice, woodcut by Martin Wolgemut, for Schedel's 'Nuremberg Chronicle' 1493

Within the scholarship, there is some controversy about Dürer's travels to Venice and whether there were one or two trips, as there is no firm textual documentation of the trip other than two brief references.[11]

Given the profound transformation of Dürer's opus since 1495, I tend to agree with Panofsky et al. who believe that there were two trips. The fact that the first trip is poorly documented supports my thesis about the unconscious nature of the city's impact. It indicates that Dürer's relationship with Venice was compelling and decisive as it fuelled the obsessive life-long quest for scientific explanations about arts, which meant conceptualization of the Northern practice of art previously based mostly on intuition and craftsmanship.

From the point of view of the scholarship, there is evidence that Dürer made copies of Mantegna's engraved "Bacchanal" and "Battle of the Sea Gods" dated 1494, and that he was received by Giovanni Bellini,[12] who had welcomed Dürer into his circle of friends. They were reportedly close enough to share models as Bellini let Dürer paint the "Three Orientals" that also appear on Bellini's "Procession."[13] Dürer learned from Bellini about light and shadows, most evident in his paintings for

altarpieces.[14] He probably met Jacopo de' Barbari, from whom he learned about the mathematical studies of Luca Pacioli and their importance for the theory of beauty and harmony in art.

The scholarship is unanimous in stating that the Italian stimulus is most evident in Dürer's representation of human figures.[15] The bodies became less static and more expressive of movement in space. Panofsky argued that the studies of the nudes that were developed in Venice have served to render a series of female bodies back in Nuremberg for years. This is evident in "Ladies in Venetian Costumes", "Nude Woman Seen from the Back," "Young Woman in Oriental Dress," "The Rape of Europa", "Apollo", "Alchemist", "Three Lion's Heads," and "Rape of the Sabine Women," all dated 1495. Because the drawings appear more intense and vivid in comparison to Dürer's previous drawings, we can speculate that these studies embody the effects of the encounters with Venetian men and women.

3. Return to Nuremberg – a period of great productivity 1495–1505

Dürer returned to Nuremberg in 1495. The years that followed were productive with works of both secular and religious nature.

The typical works from this post-Venetian period are the prints of secular subjects with nudes such as "Women Bathing," "Bathhouse," "Four Witches," the "Fall of Man," the "Dream of the Doctor" and the "Sea Monster." They show the impact of studies elicited in Venice as noted by Panofsky et al. Featuring either water or voluptuous female bodies or both, the series stands out in the way in which human figures emerge in space, in their postures and proportions, containing subjects of sexual temptation and mysticism. Similarly enticing are Venetian dresses that appear in the

representations of female bodies in “Martyrdom of St. Catherine” and the “Babylonian Whore”. Dürer’s skills of *contrapposto* and other classical positions that emphasized liveliness, sexuality, physical energy and movement evidently came from his encounters in Venice.

Dürer made several compositions based on classical narratives copying from Pollaiuolo’s “The Ten Nudes”, Mantegna’s “Battle of the Sea Gods” and the “Death of Orpheus” among others.[16] “Hercules” (1488–9) completes this series of secular prints summing up the Italian experiences. By employing one of the maenads from “Death of Orpheus” for Virtue and the voluptuous woman from “Battle of the Sea Gods” for Pleasure, Dürer crystallizes the idea of moral choice. He deployed “Mantegna’s pagan pathos” for the revitalization of “Psychomachia” illustrations where Vices and Virtues are shown in combat.[17] Although these themes are classically inspired, Dürer adds his own layer of interpretation, conveying the idea of the undisciplined, raw libido, what Panofsky calls “unregenerated sensuality.”[18]

In 1498 Dürer published a book entitled *Book of Revelation*, known as *The Apocalypse* by John the Apostle, with a cycle of fifteen woodcuts that provided him with fame and income that were able to sustain him in doing the things which he craved for, such as the investigation into classical studies of proportions. When addressing various themes from the scriptures, Dürer always marks a slight departure from the canonic representations and moves into the world of the human psyche, studying the turmoil of the soul, moods and their bodily expressions, demonstrating a profound interest in the essences of men and women. This art inspired by humans led Dürer to what he called the “inner imagination”.

Having heard about the prominence Leonardo da Vinci gave to mathematics meant that Dürer intensified his studies on proportions. His art from 1500 onwards exhibited the influence of these studies as evident in his 1500 self-portrait taken frontally and implying the presence of Christ. Dürer's figures become more constructed according to the rules of measurements.[19] He read about the works on proportions following the advice of Jacopo de' Barbari.[20]

Figure 1.2 Jacopo de' Barbari, "View of Venice," Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

It is significant to highlight that Dürer probably met Jacopo (de' Barbari) in Venice and later in Nuremberg, where the author of the masterly "View of Venice" (1500-1) was a portrait painter and illuminator in the service of Emperor Maximilian 1500–03. The two artists met and exchanged experiences and certain similarity can be observed between their two engravings of *Apollo and Diana*. That the Italian artist remained a constant reference for Dürer who must have admired his innovative view of Venice is evident in his writing:

> If I cannot find someone else who has described how to make human proportions, then there is always Jacopo (de' Barbari), a lovely painter, born in Venice. He showed me

> (figures of) man and woman which he had made from measurements; and at that time I would have preferred to have had his judgment than a new kingdom, and if I had it, I would have put it into print in his honour for the general good. But at that time I was still young, and had not heard of such things…. I realized that Jacopo would not clearly explain his principles. So I set to work on my own and read Vitruvius, who writes a little about a man's limbs. Thus I took my start from or out of (the work of) these two men, and since then have continued my search from day to day according to my own notions.[21]

Constant improvement in respect to the proportional representation of the human figure is evident in Dürer's powerful engraving "Nemesis" (1502). Set above the Alps, the goddess of retribution holds in one hand the goblet of rewards and in the other the bridle of restraint. She stands precariously on the sphere hovering over the Alpine landscape and the town Dürer had visited on his way to Venice in 1494. This dramatic figure has the features of Durer's wife suggesting that the work had an intricate meaning for the artist concerning his wife and the libidinal nature of his transalpine travels.[22]

Figure 1.3 Albrecht Dürer, "Nemesis," Minneapolis institute of Arts.

The results of Dürer's continued and symptomatic studies of the art of classical models feature prominently in the "Fall of Man" engraving of 1504, where the ideal forms of the ancient "Apollo Belvedere" and "Venus Pudica" can be observed in the figures of Adam and Eve elaborately constructed by compass and ruler.[23] Mastery of perspectival space and knowledge of geometry are stated prominently in Dürer's

celebrated woodcuts such as the “Life of the Virgin” series of 1502–5, where the “Annunciation” for example features a perfectly constructed central perspective of the internal space of the house as a background for the Virgin and the angel.[24]

In all these examples (1495–1505) we can observe how Dürer deployed the heightened perception of human figures and lived-through experiences of art that he gained in Venice. They are also indicative of how the work bears the traces of Dürer’s quest for the inclusion of the scientific approach to figures and space. His quest is a research into space and spatiality, as figures are captured moving through space. In analytic terms we may identify that these works contain at least three layers of narratives: personal, literary and scientific. Indeed Dürer’s symptom opens up and suggests these layers of interpretation as his libido gathers momentum and regroups to each of them. These layers also seem to correspond to the layers of interpretation identified by Panofsky in his studies of iconology.[25]

4. Second trip to Venice 1505–07 – the effects of the city

In addition to seeing different artists and styles of painting, the libidinal pleasure of the visit to Venice was in the overall experience. Its climate, its air, its rich scenery, the lavished decorum, voluptuous textures, variety of exotic spices, scents, foods and wines were all felt consciously and unconsciously. Geographically, from the point of view of a traveller from Nuremberg, Venice appears as the place where Europe’s sublime mountains slope into the floodplain, giving way to the Adriatic. Winding roads take the voyager down the Alps meditating about the descent during which the climate becomes milder, light more luminous, vegetation diverse, odors more fragrant, sounds of nature more sonorous.

City appears in the nexus of the continent meeting the sea. For the late-fifteenth

and early-sixteenth century traveller the arrival to this place must have been unforgettable. The immensity of the sea and its promises of distant shores must have mesmerised the travellers from landlocked places. This port has always been an open city: on the one hand, to other cultures with which the city used to trade, and on the other, it was open towards the inner exploration, soul-searching and humanist knowledge. Venice teased Dürer's curiosity nurturing his imagination. He is comforted by Venetian appreciation of the arts and enchanted by its novelties: from people of diverse cultures, via colourful costumes, to the previously unseen sea creatures.

During Dürer's lifetime, the city experienced a boom in the publishing business, despite the German invention of the printing press in the 1450s, more than half of all printed books in Europe at the time were published in Venice.[26] As the mercantile and cultural capital of the world, Venice was the centre for the first printers, publishing houses and bookstores mostly due to its freedom, wealth and high literacy level of its cosmopolitan population, many of whom were coming from the East following the advances of the Ottoman Turks across the countries such as Greece, Serbia and Croatia among others. The St Mark's library *Bibliotheca Marciana* acquired its nucleus stock from Cardinal Bessarion of Constantinople, who donated his library containing 482 Greek and 264 Latin manuscripts to the Senate of Venice in 1468.

These conditions provided for the revival of classical knowledge that underpinned the arts and excited Dürer, his friend Pirckheimer and other humanists. Ancient treatises previously known as manuscripts and circulated for limited audiences became available in print. Dürer acquired some including a copy of Vitruvius. He bought artifacts, painterly materials, rare pigments, textiles, etc. Above all he appropriated the experiences of the new world in its making (*theatrum mundi*).[27]

Cosmopolitan make-up of the 'world stage' unleashed creativity that came from the exchange with the communities of the numerous diaspora residing in Venice. Conscious of his growing reputation Dürer became more involved in promoting his work[28] and constructing his own place. Many art historians have traced the Venetian influences in Dürer's work, agreeing that Venice gave him pleasure and a well-disposed attitude.

Dürer felt unencumbered as he relaxed in the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, known for its clientele of German-speaking businessmen who offered him commissions such as the altar-painting of the local San Bartolomeo church. This commission resulted in the colourful and versatile masterpiece, the "Feast of the Rose Garland" now kept in Prague. While these effects of Venice have been acknowledged, how are we to account for them within the context of the questions raised about Dürer's unconscious spatiality and his libidinal economy? What was the nature of the overall impact of this city space? How did the city's unusual configuration affect this artist?

The hypothesis is that there is an impact of the city on the level of the spatial unconscious – something that traditional scholarship does not account for. This impact of Venice seems to have affected Dürer as he was reportedly "full of images." The city and the artist interacted in the ways that were dynamic, groundbreaking and soul-searching. Given that the urban fabric is formed of many layers that cannot be simply inventoried, this experience needs to be carefully reconstructed. For that purpose an operative statement will now follow with the aim to facilitate the analysis of the unconscious effects of the city.

5. On the unconscious effects of the city: overall level, legibility, *loci*, mental mapping, deep images and watercourses

Overall level

Each city produces its own discourse; by means of its position, general configuration, streets, watercourses and landmarks, it communicates to its inhabitants and the inhabitants respond by living in it, watching it, traversing it, by gathering in specific places, orienting gardens or directing water in particular ways. We speak to the city through our behaviour and through the manner in which we relate to each other. We also unconsciously adjust our behaviour as we move from one city to another.

In order to conduct this analysis of the urban unconscious, it is important to extract the language we need to use from any metaphorical usage. This needs to be done in the manner in which Freud had managed to extract the expression "language of dreams" from its metaphorical meaning in order to give it its actual meaning in psychoanalysis. The same process of extraction is required in relation to the unconscious and the city. We ought to excerpt and undo the metaphors in order to be able to fully participate in creating and using the language of urban effects. It is important to differentiate various effects, as certain elements of the city are strong while others are not even marked. The effects of the city space are often the outcome of the relationship between the two: marks and voids, presences and absences, solids and liquids as they always read in relation to each other.

Legibility, loci and mental mapping

The legibility of the city is of great importance to any person experiencing it. More precisely, I am referring to a kind of reading that is concerned with the setups of memory and the importance of what Frances Yates called the "backgrounds" (*loci*). According to this argument, the subject is able to recall the object by its background, as the subject unconsciously (and involuntarily) remembers the set-ups (*loci*) that become

instrumental for the recollection of objects.[29] Hereby I extend her argument in relation to the city, and in doing so I am bringing it closer to the idea of mental mapping as argued in cognitive psychology and as expressed in Kevin Lynch's image of the city.[30] The legibility of the city (*imago urbis*) is thus a similar process of the unconscious recognition of the form (and its background) in the minds of its citizens (and its visitors). It is not about making the city plan completely transparent as this undermines the (involuntary) memory and imagination that are part of an enjoyable urban experience that needs to be reconstructed based on fragments. The variety of layers and balance between various fragments is what is required.

The awareness and knowledge of the space are determined by our primary perception, but also by our dreams, our unconscious desires and passions.[31] The space within which we grew up determines and holds within itself many intrinsic qualities: it could be light, ethereal, transparent, or dark, uneven and cluttered. There is space of peaks, heights, lights and towers as well as of depths, mud, wells and dungeons. This space is an inner space, a configuration of our unconscious. Wherever we travel, it is with us and in a corresponding relation to the outside space that keeps on adjusting. Roland Barthes argues that in the same way as phenomenology and semiology do not posit the existence of the definite signified, in relation to the city we find ourselves confronted with the infinite chain of metaphors whose signified is always essentially recessive - the structure that was explored in Lacan's psychoanalysis and in Derrida's study on writing, the structure that has an erotic dimension.[32] Eroticisms is here understood in a general sense whereby the city is comprehended as the site of our encounter with the other in which certain subversive forces appear and we may

encounter rupture and various ludic powers. We can see how this description echoes aspects of Dürer's experience of Venice.

Deep Images – watercourses and the phenomenon of disorientation

Amongst the myriad of urban elements that we experience there are some that stand out. Barthes identifies these as "deep images" and thinks of them in psychoanalytic terms.[33] It is at this point that he argues about the relevance of the imaginary function of the watercourses, stating that rivers, canals and waterways generally impress deep marks in the minds of the people.[34] Barthes argues that there is a relation between the road and the watercourse, as they both excite strong (memorable) impressions, stating that all cities that lack watercourses have difficulties with their legibility. The cities with good watercourses offer clear legibility of their space, and as a consequence they have a strong sense of identity.[35] This legibility and related sense of identity are therefore primarily unconscious.

Because it has an unusual balance between land and water, Venice is a specific case. The abundance of watercourses and fewer roads give visitors a saturation of deep images. The predominance of water subverts our usual mental map by turning it into its negative. The process of orientation, which now depends on the negative of the customary mental mapping, cannot work as previously. We cannot orientate ourselves as usual in relation to a (single) river as the main watercourse and the chief reference for orientation. Venice simply has too many of them and solid roads can't be clearly mapped on this unstable ground saturated by the unconscious aquatic images. This phenomenon explains the disorientation visitors often experience in this city that constantly mirrors itself in more ways than one.

Evidence suggests that this condition of disorientation and mirroring, including the general effects of city's morphology, the disposition of its roads, watercourses and landmarks, could have affected Dürer. Coupled with carnival dresses and masques, the phenomenon is an urban device for amplifying the city's erotic dimension, and for creating dis-ordination of various kinds. These urban effects subvert the usual power relations, by means of licensing freedom and encouraging pleasures. They appealed to many visitors including Dürer. That he was carried away by unusual treats such as attending the costly local dancing lessons appears in his letters.[36] Further effects of Venetian adventures could be found in Dürer's confession about his fears concerning his sexual health, which could be interpreted as a consequence of unusual sexual behaviour.[37]

Overall Dürer enjoyed Venice but strangely did not paint it. He produced only the plans and elevations of one Venetian house. The lack of cityscape drawings or views such as those by Erhard Reuwich or Jacopo de'Barbari is unusual, and further supports the argument about the effects of water impressing and perplexing him.

The consequence of this phenomenon is that in the process the multitude of deep images exaggerates and augments one's own inner spatiality. Dürer experienced these exaggerations: he reports about great pleasure with some of his Venetian friends, and exaggerated fear with others. The positive result of amplified pleasure slips into his inspired drawings of Venetian women and in the magnificently colored painting the "Feast of the Rose Garlands" (1506) where we find the unrestrained depth of Dürer's expression affected by heightened sensuality and libido.[38]

In addition, Dürer's libidinal drive to learn about the science of art had led him to Bologna, where he had learned about the science of perspective as formulated by

Leon Battista Alberti and Piero della Francesca. His unknown teacher in Bologna was probably Luca Pacioli, who was believed to be in possession of the mathematical secrets of art and of editions of Marsilio Ficino's work that became of interest to Dürer. When he returned to Nuremberg he was determined to pour his libidinal energies into writing his own treatise on mathematics and its application for the visual arts.

Water as screen

The final effect of water as screen needs to be addressed. It comes into play as a result of the city's detachment from the continent that provides Venice with a horizon of almost 360 degrees. Uninterrupted brightness, enhanced by the reflection of the sea, allows the viewer to clearly perceive the city and the outline of its profile against the blue of the sky and the water. The surrounding water makes the citizens and visitors aware of its enormous horizontal surface upon which they are enticed to project their gaze, and through the gaze, the unconscious. This long and deep projection of one's sightlines relaxes and, importantly, lures the unconscious, allowing the phenomenon of anamorphosis to play itself out by constructing the imaginary figures on the surface of the marine screen. On a different scale, the projections of this kind also occur on the surfaces of the canals allowing for the similar occurrence.[39]

The phenomenon of anamorphosis that enables us to construct and see the images works with libido and contributes to explaining Dürer's experiences of Venice that are "full of images," making him both outgoing and introspective: he interacted with people and contemplated about the city in the context of life and the world around him.

On a general level, we could conclude that this is the reason why the urban sites of Venice have marked such a significant exteriorized field of the unconscious. It is also why the city has for centuries continued to attract visitors and tourists, and why in

this city individuals were able to construct the vision of their own worldly solitude. Most famous examples include Thomas Mann's book "Death in Venice" (1912) and the related film by Luchino Visconti (1971). As argued by another Dürer admirer, Friedrich Nietzsche: "A hundred deep solitudes taken together form the city of Venice – that is her charm. An image for the men of the future."[40]

6. Inner spatiality and the landscape of the soul: "Melencolia I"

In Venice the image of *theatrum mundi* stood out more glaringly than in other cities and Dürer felt part of it. The participation of city's *imago urbis* within *theatrum mundi* fascinated him. Propelled by the unconscious libidinal force, Dürer's desire to experience and learn is also rational. It seeks for and is determined by the laws of the sciences and arts, as these laws were shaping and coming to new prominence. The first decade of the sixteenth century was increasingly showing signs of emerging new practices and attitudes and Dürer's search for mathematical knowledge grew steadily and continually. Indeed his book on proportions would never be finished, suggesting that in the heart of it was a constant lack that always needed to be filled-in.

Significantly for our argument (and symptomatically) overall, Dürer's drawings addressing his perpetual quest for mathematical knowledge date from the same period (1510–15) as his most celebrated "Melencolia I" (1514). This magnificent engraving which embodies his technical achievement, spatial knowledge and higher learning at their best, is Dürer's masterpiece of outstanding beauty and of highest esteem. It is also a representation, not of the disease but of a problem that was part of the artist's experience. It presents Dürer's symptom and his complex state of mind.

Figure 1.4 Albrecht Dürer, "Melencolia I," Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

"Melencolia I" depicts a moment when Dürer's personal quest for mathematical knowledge becomes a cause of melancholy. The engraving shows a winged angel looking like a young woman, who sits in apparent sadness, surrounded by unused objects of mathematics, science, craft and art, holding a pair of dividers. Her face is masked by darkness, while her eyes glare with intensity, revealing the sharp mind in distinction to her tired bodily pose.

Interpreters are divided as to whether "Melencolia I" was intended to be the first in a series, or whether the "I" in "Melencolia I" stands for *melancholia imaginativa.* This notion is derived from Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535), a German alchemist, theologian, a contemporary of Dürer, who describes "*melancholia imaginativa*" as a state in which the person is subject to "imagination," that predominates over "mind" or "reason."[41] We can see how this description could have appealed to Dürer.

The condition of *melancholia* is rooted in medieval medicine: according to the theory of the "humours," melancholy was caused by an increase of black bile that shows in the darkened face of the muse-like angel. However, Dürer also portrays something new: a sense of a soul burdened by its own intellect. The fact that this is Dürer's only engraving with a title inscribed within the plate, testifies to its conceptual importance as a diagnosis of a condition that Dürer deliberately wished to publicize and disperse to a broad audience.

"Melencolia I" contains the first magic square to be seen in Europe, including the date 1514 as two entries in the middle of the bottom row. Of spatial interest is Dürer's inclusion of the polyhedron, whose faces appear to consist of two equilateral triangles and six pentagons. This could be a reference to Luca Pacioli and the painting usually attributed to Jacopo de' Barbari showing Pacioli with the same geometrical body. The engraving contains several references to time symbolizing Saturn; it also shows a blazing comet that appears on the sky. In contrast to the main figure of the angel-muse we have a small busy-looking putto taking notes and a skinny dog sleeping uncomfortably.

It is impossible not to recognize this aggravated figure sitting amidst the disorderly scientific instruments as embodiment of Dürer's spirit of intellectual research. The quality of detail presented is so refined that it must be based on the knowledge of the work of philosophers such as Ficino[42], whose work was incorporated by Pacioli in *De divina proportione*.[43] Writing about melancholy, the fifteenth-century Florentine philosopher claimed that intellectuals, humanists and artists, talented and introspective souls, were predisposed to melancholy. Dürer therefore translated Ficino's ideas into a mysterious heroic figure.

From all this we can conclude that the artist was personally affected by melancholy. Furthermore he could have heard from Pacioli that this was the condition of another great artist whom he admired: Leonardo da Vinci, who notoriously suffered from a strange affliction that stopped him finishing his paintings. Dürer recognized the infliction of *melencolia* and through relentless introspection he was able to represent it. By means of this introspection Dürer's interest in science was not only the one of a painter/engraver, but of a person who by means of observation, detection and painting aimed at reaching the explanations in scientific knowledge including medicine. This aspect of Dürer's work (which resembles the work of Leonardo) was the reason why the humanists such as Pirckheimer, Erasmus, Philip Melanchthon and Celtes Conrad spoke highly of Dürer and why they wanted to interact with him.

After returning to Nuremberg in 1425 from his final trip to the Netherlands, where amongst other things Dürer hoped to find Jacopo de' Barbari's book on proportions, Dürer's health deteriorated. His major effort went unabatedly into his treatise on proportions, and although it was not completed in 1523, Dürer realised that it implied a high-level of mathematical knowledge, so he decided to write a more

approachable text. He published this more elementary treatise *Unterweisung der Messung mit dem Zirkel und Richtscheit* in 1525. It is the first book on mathematics published in German, making Dürer one of the key Renaissance mathematicians. Dürer's sources for this work are threefold: the practical recipes of craftsmen; classical mathematics from printed works and manuscripts such as Vitruvius's; and the manuals of Italian artists.[44] And yet this contribution to mathematics is mainly due to Dürer's personal strife driven by his symptom that was sublimating his libido and making him obsessive about both art and mathematics.

7. Conclusion – Dürer' libidinal contribution to the science of space

Dürer's last masterpiece, his treatise on proportion, was at the final stage at the time of his death. In this treatise Dürer set the foundations of Descriptive Geometry as he developed one of the methods of overcoming the problems of projection and describing the movement of bodies in space.[45] Dürer's remarkable achievement was that by applying mathematics to art, he developed a fundamentally new and important knowledge within mathematics itself.

Dürer's opus therefore emerges in the interplay between, on the one hand, the conscious exploration of the arts by applying mathematics, and, on the other, the pursuit of unconscious passions in search for these mathematical postulates. This interplay has produced qualitatively new results for spatial studies taking knowledge about space and geometry into novel directions and paving the way for René Descartes and Gaspard Monges.

This paper has therefore demonstrated how Dürer's opus developed in relation to his unconscious and his libidinal drives. It was argued how the dynamics of his

personality drove him to explorations. In particular it was my aim to show how the effects of Venice on Dürer were complex and multiple due to city's specific disposition, its urban morphology and the presence of the surrounding water that resulted in the intensification of perception, deep mental images, and the increased quantity of these images.

Crucially, owing to his symptom, Dürer brought together the discourses that were previously separate. He did not give up on his 'inner images', but sought how to make them communicable with a belief that they can disseminate novel ideas and knowledge. Propelled by his symptom and its libidinal force, Dürer explored Venice learning about the arts of representing that have both excited and troubled him. By being dedicated to present these internal struggles in full, Dürer produced a significant elaboration on these inner contentions, their constant questioning, mirroring and self-examination. By putting his own life in the line of interrogation and erosion, this cycle of experiences made Dürer the artist as we know him.

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an archaeology of human sciences* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 17–42.

[2] Michel Foucault, "Of the Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in Joan Ockman (ed.), *Architecture Culture 1943–1968* (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), pp. 421–2.

[3] Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971 [1943]), p. 4.

[4] These are: the self-portrait with the thistle on the occasion of his engagement (1493), Louvre, the self-portrait in new clothes with black and white hat (1498), Prado, and the frontal self-portrait for the occasion of the jubilee of 1500 (1499–1500), Munich.

[5] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, translation by James Strachey, (London & Vienna: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922), p. 33.

[6] Max Steck, "Dürer," in Charles Coulston Gillispie (ed.), *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1970–1990).

[7] "Myn sach dy gat als es oben schtat" (Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, p. 6). The plant on this self-portrait, identified as the thistle, was considered to be the sign of marital fidelity.

[8] Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *Dürer* (London: Phaidon, 2012), pp. 52–5.

[9] Sigmund Freud, "Civilisation and Its Discontents," in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, The Standard Edition*, vol. XXI, trans. James Strachey (Hogarth Press: London, 1961), pp. 79–80.

[10] Although Panofsky refers extensively to the Housebook Master, he does not mention this woodcut or Reuwich himself. See Ibid., p. 8.

[11] Katherine Crawford Luber, *Albrecht Dürer and the Venetian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 40–77.

[12] Mark Evans, "Dürer in Italy Revisited: the German Connections," p. 3.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Katherine Crawford Luber, *Albrecht Dürer and the Venetian Renaissance*, pp. 77–126.

[15] Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, pp. 39–80.

[16] Mark Evans, "Dürer in Italy Revisited: the German Connections," p. 3.; and Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, p. 74.

[17] Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, p. 74.

[18] Ibid., p. 73.

[19] Ibid., pp. 80–107.

[20] Ibid., p. 80.

[21] Mark Evans, "Dürer in Italy Revisited: the German Connections," p. 3 (n. 55).

[22] In his 18th Aug 1506 letter from Venice Dürer expresses his worry about his sexual health in regards to large number of men being infected with the French sickness (syphilis). Albrecht Dürer, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, p.54.

[23] The process of their construction, which is displayed in many sketches and different stages of prints, is well documented by the scholarship. See Mark Evans, "Dürer in Italy Revisited: the German Connections," p. 3; and Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, pp. 291–3.

[24] There are other painterly aspects that are mentioned by both Aby Warburg and Panofsky which concern the question of pathos and affect and how they came to be construed in Dürer's work, best shown in the "Death of Orpheus," "Bacchanal with Silenus," and "Venetian Women," showing different ways of portraying the female nude. The scope of this chapter does not allow for this expansion.

[25] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of Renaissance* (Oxford: Icon Editions, Perseus, 1972 [1939]).

[26] Alessandro Marzo Magno, *Bound in Venice: The Serene Republic and the Dawn of the Book*, trans. G. Conti (Rome: Europa Editions, 2013), pp. 1–5.

[27] Here I reflect on Dürer's contribution to the establishment of concept of *theatrum mundi* – the world stage where all beings play a part, consciously or unconsciously. See more in M. Foucault *The Order of Things,* pp xv-xxiv

[28] Albrecht Dürer, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. and ed. W.M. Conway (London: Peter Owen, 1958), p. 51.

[29] Yates talked about memorising places in the house and how certain well-acknowledged backgrounds work for memory. See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: ARK Paperbacks, 1984 [1966]), pp. 12–13.

[30] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1960).

[31] Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

[32] Roland Barthes, *Semiology and Urbanism*, Colloquium Op. 10. (Naples: University of Naples Institute of Architectural History, 1967) quoted from J. Ockman, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968*, New York: Columbia Books of Architecture, Rizzoli, p.417.

[33] *Ibid.* p.418.

[34] *Ibid.* p.418.

[35] Gordana Korolija Fontana-Giusti, "Water, Cities and Signification," in *Book of proceedings, 1st symposium on waterfronts in the Danube Region* (Novi Sad: University of Novi Sad, 2006).

[36] Albrecht Dürer, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer,* trans. and ed. W.M. Conway (London: Peter Owen, 1958), pp58-59

[37] See note 22 above.

[38] Katherine Crawford Luber, *Albrecht Dürer and the Venetian Renaissance*, pp. 77–126.

[39] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), pp. 9, 79–119. I here refer to several concepts of Lacan addressed in this book such as the gaze, the screen and anamorphosis.

[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Aurora e scelta di frammenti postumi* (1879–81), fragment form spring 1880, in *Opere*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, trans. F. Masini and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 5, tome 1 (Milan: Adelphi, 1964), p. 296. Quoted in Manfredo Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance,* trans. Jessica Levine (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1989), p. xi.

[41] Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, ed. Perrone Campagni (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

[42] Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Durer's "Melencolia I": Eine quellen-und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1923); Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy:*

Studies in the history of natural philosophy, religion and art (London: Nelson, 1964). See also on this subject Lurinda S. Dixon, *The Dark Side of Genius: the melancholic persona in art, c. 1500–1700* (University Park, Philadelphia, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

[43] Luca Pacioli, *De divina proportione* (Venice: Paganini, 1509).

[44] Albrecht Dürer, *Underweysung der Messung mit dem Zirckel und Richtscheyt* (*Instructions for Measuring with Compass and Ruler*) (Nuremberg: Albrecht Dürer, 1525).

[45] The first book was mainly completed in 1523, showing five differently constructed types of both male and female figures. Dürer based these constructions on both Vitruvius and empirical observations of two to three hundred persons as he estimated. The second book includes eight further types, loosely based on Alberti, probably learned from Francesco di Giorgio's "*De harmonica mundi totius*" of 1525. In the third book, Dürer shows how the proportions of the figures can be modified addressing also human physiognomy. The fourth book is devoted to the theory of movement. Albrecht Dürer, *Vier Bücher von Menschlicher Proportion* (*Four Books on Human Proportion*) (Nuremberg: Hieronymus Formschneyder, 1528).