



Gerhard Ullmann
Venezia oscura

With an introduction by Lucius Burckhardt. 96 pp. with 87 ill.
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We could find a great deal to say about masks and concealment when leafing through Gerhard Ullmann's photographs. Half of Venice is masked, stuck over with posters or covered with paintings, so convincingly that with some of the pictures by Ullmann you don't know whether you are seeing the reality or just the pictures overlapping it. But in fact it is just like the old Venetian half-masks, where the face shows through at some point – and above all it is keeping a sharp and watchful eye on us, the strangers. These pasted images are like the old masks, they are evil or sad, the last thing they are is amusing. We are aware of the decay that is being hidden here, the flaking decorations that would reappear if the area under the paper were cleaned.

Is Venice decaying? No other city flaunts its decline as much as Venice, and perhaps the papering has something to be said for it because it makes us wonder whether there might be something beautiful under there, a carved slab or an inscription. John Ruskin responded to the signals of decay by writing his book about Venice, which was supposed to ensure that there was at least a record of the city after it disappeared. A postcard written by his young wife to her parents has survived; she writes: »John has gone into a church to draw it, at least while it is still standing.« So for the author of *The Stones of Venice* the masking was simply grounds for mourning. He did not understand what else it had to offer. – Here we have to add a sentence by Leon Battista Alberti: »Io scrissi queste cose ridendo, voi ancora ridete.«

Ullmann has explored Venice photographically for more than twenty years. This book shows the famous city from a very individual point of view, not emphasizing the touristic highlights, but investigating the »essence« of Venice in a number of impressive photographs.

Gerhard Ullmann was born in Teplitz in 1935, and has lived in Berlin since 1956, where he studied architecture and painting at the Hochschule der Künste, then worked as an architecture and art critic, and also as a photographer. His work includes books on Sanssouci and derelict industrial sites. He has also acquired a reputation abroad with his photographic exhibitions on Berlin and Venice, on masks and carnivals. Lucius Burckhardt, a young don at HfG Ulm and ETH Zurich, later editor-in-chief of the magazine *werk*, professor at the Gesamthochschule Kassel from 1973 to 1997, in the meantime chairman of the Deutscher Werkbund, is undoubtedly one of the most unusual »lateral« thinkers of our day.

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Menges

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Blättern wir durch Gerhard Ullmanns Photographien, so wäre vieles über Masken und Verhüllung zu sagen. Halb Venedig ist maskiert, mit Plakaten verklebt oder von Malereien überzogen, so täuschend, daß man bei einigen Photographien nicht weiß, ob man die Realität sieht oder nur die sie überlagernden Bilder. Aber es ist ja wie bei den alten venezianischen Halbmasken, bei denen doch das Gesicht durchkommt – und vor allem der scharfe, beobachtende Blick auf uns, die Fremden. Wie die alten Masken, so haben auch diese Verklebungen nichts Heiteres, sondern sind böse oder traurig. Wir denken an den Verfall, der hier verborgen wird, an die abgesplitterten Dekorationen, die bei einer Reinigung unter dem Papier hervortreten würden.

Verfällt Venedig? Keine andere Stadt erzählt uns so viel von ihrem Verfall, und vielleicht hat die Verklebung insofern etwas für sich, als wir gespannt sein dürfen, ob nicht darunter etwas Schönes hervorkommt, eine skulptierte Platte oder eine Inschrift. Es war John Ruskin, der auf die Botschaften des Verfalls reagierte und dessen Venedig-Buch ja dazu dienen sollte, die Stadt nach ihrem Verfall wenigstens dokumentarisch zu erhalten. Eine Postkarte seiner jungen Frau an ihre Eltern ist erhalten geblieben, sie schreibt: »John ist in eine Kirche gegangen, um sie zu zeichnen, wenigstens solange sie noch steht.« Für den Autor der *Stones of Venice* war der Verfall nur Anlaß zur Trauer. Ruskin hatte kein Verständnis für dessen andere Seite. – Hier kommt einem ein Satz von Leon Battista Alberti in den Sinn: »Io scrissi queste cose ridendo, voi ancora ridete.«

Gerhard Ullmann, geboren 1935 in Teplitz, lebt seit 1956 in Berlin, wo er an der Hochschule der Künste Architektur und Malerei studierte und seitdem als Architektur- und Kunstkritiker sowie als Photograph arbeitet. Er veröffentlichte u. a. Bücher über Sanssouci und Industriebrachen. Photoausstellungen zu Berlin und Venedig, zu Masken und Carneval machten ihn auch im Ausland bekannt. Lucius Burckhardt, in jungen Jahren Dozent an der HfG Ulm und der ETH Zürich, später Chefredakteur der Zeitschrift *werk*, 1973–97 Professor an der Gesamthochschule Kassel, zwischendurch Vorsitzender des Deutschen Werkbunds, ist zweifellos einer der originellsten »Quer«-Denker unserer Zeit.

- 33. Plastik am Eingang der Giardini Pubblici.
- 34. Gondel im Wartestand.
- 35. Annäherungsversuche.

- 33. Sculpture at the entrance to the Giardini Pubblici.
- 34. Waiting Gondola.
- 35. Advances.





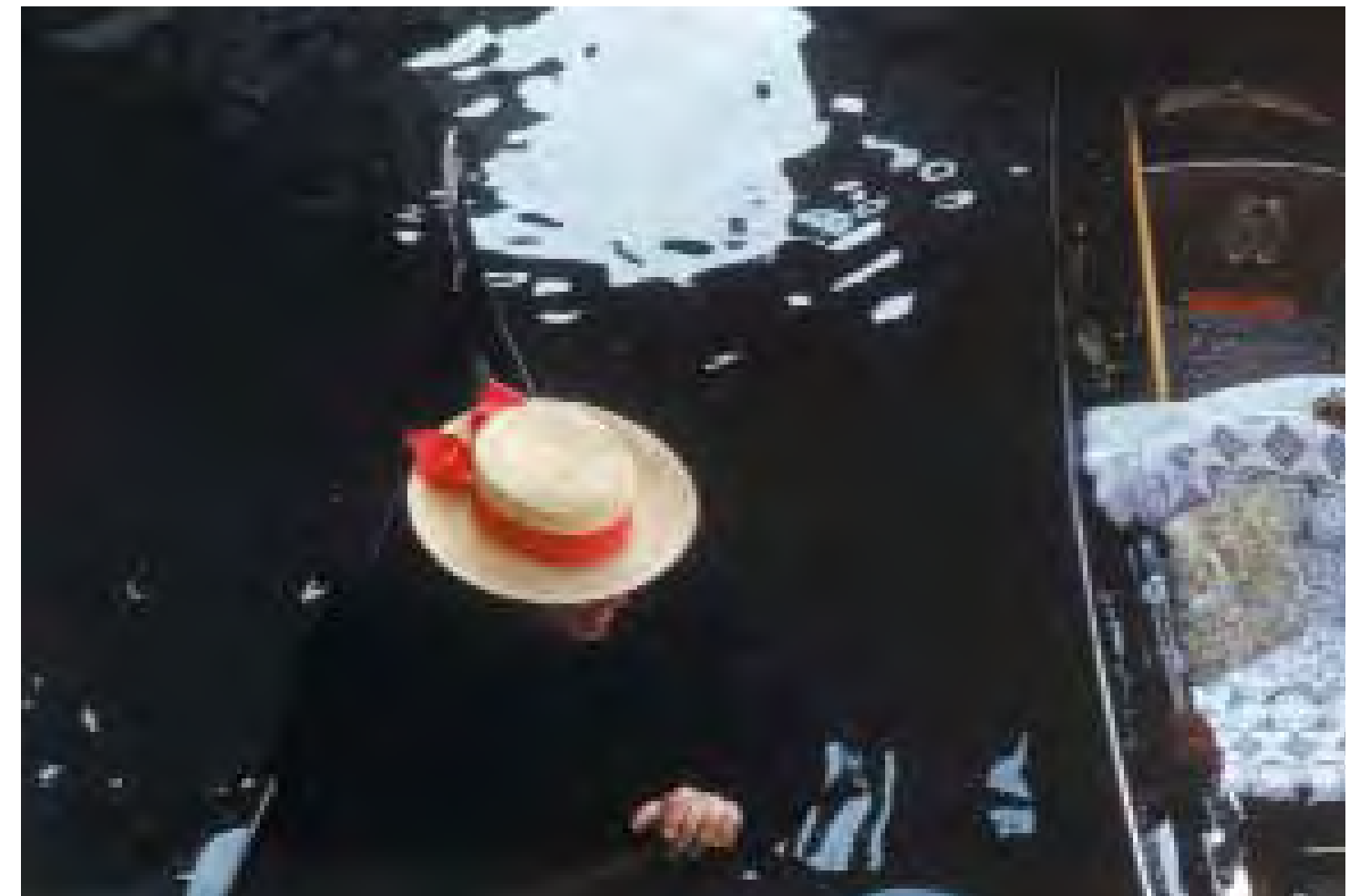
36. Ablegen eines Vaporettos.
37. Nächtliche Gondelfahrt.

36. A vaporetto setting off.
37. Nocturnal gondola ride.



38. Der Hut des Gondoliers.
39. Durchfahrt unter einer Brücke.

38. The hat of the gondolier.
39. Passing under a bridge.



40. Ein Segel vor dem Friedhof.
41, 42. Die Farben des Wassers.

40. A sail in front of the cemetery.
41, 42. The colours of the water.

