

Vittorio Gregotti: Context and Architecture

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Università Iuav di Venezia

In the post-Second World War period, Italian architects opened up a debate on the role of history and time in architectural discourse that resulted in multiple interpretations of historical time in their work. Vittorio Gregotti, one of the main protagonists of the discussion, offered an interpretation of time based on an assemblage of intellectual tendencies, from phenomenology to structuralism. Gregotti makes an

original contribution to the problem of history in relationship to urban and natural environments.

It is the University of Palermo that he uses to illustrate his talk. It was the first application of his theory of design of the large-scale landscape and the relationship between architecture and its context. He defines context as everything that can be deduced about the formation of the site.

Content

Part 1: University of Palermo

Part 2: Theory

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Part 1

University of Palermo

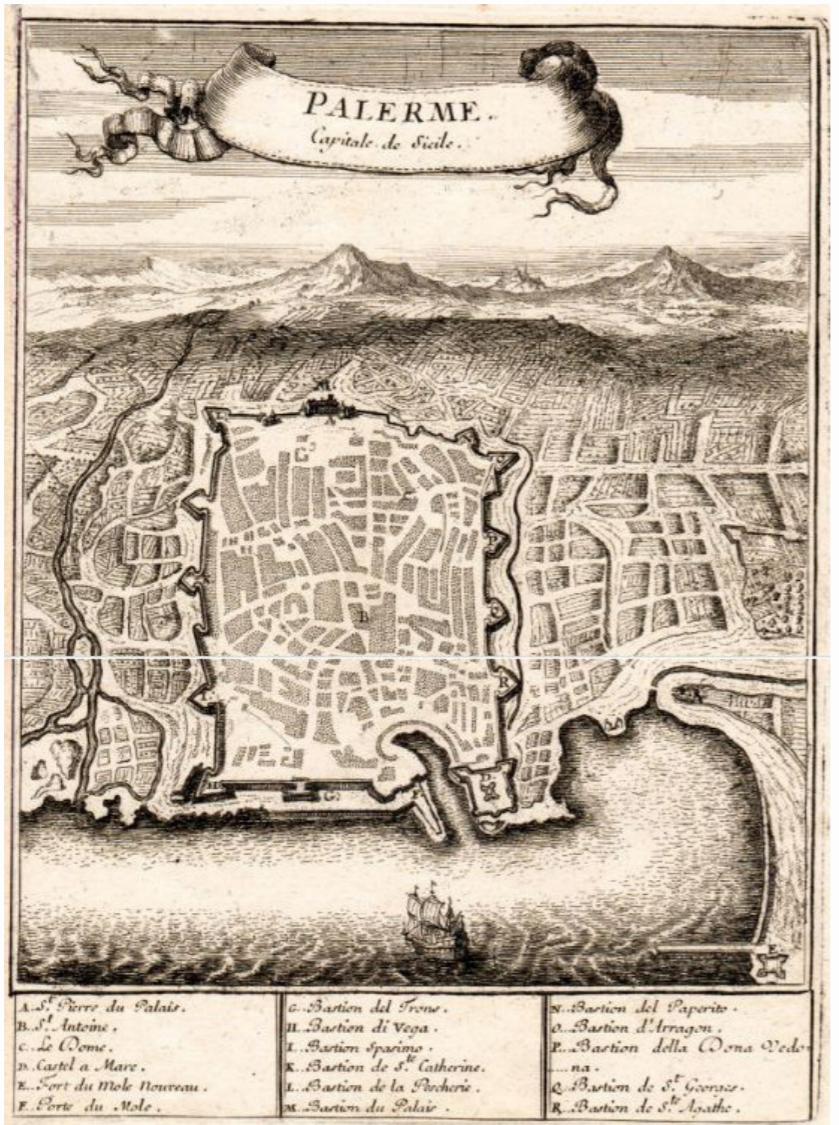
Engineer: Antonino Cangemi Leto
Architects: Gino Pollini & Gregotti Associati

Antique maps

Environment
Structure of City
Gates - Road system

the Cassaro street from the gate to the harbour

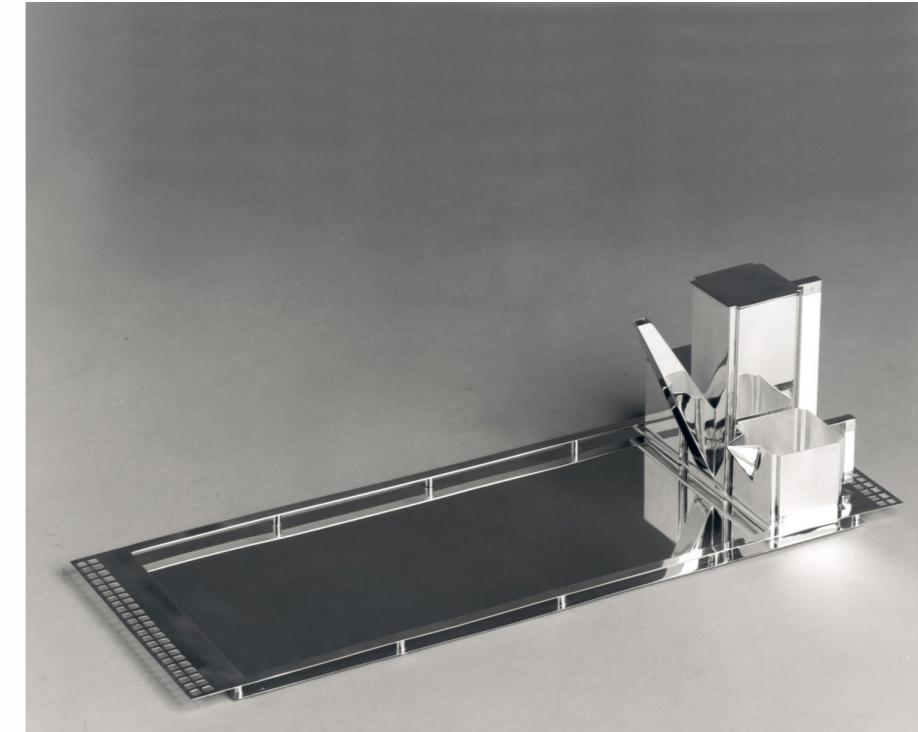
later in 19th century,
the transversal road
the change of the harbour
the urbanization is further developed



View of Palermo from "Atlas Curieux" published in Paris in 1705
Author: De Fer Nicolas



Braun Hogenberger 1581, cartolina pubblicamente diffusa, Palermo alla fine del '500



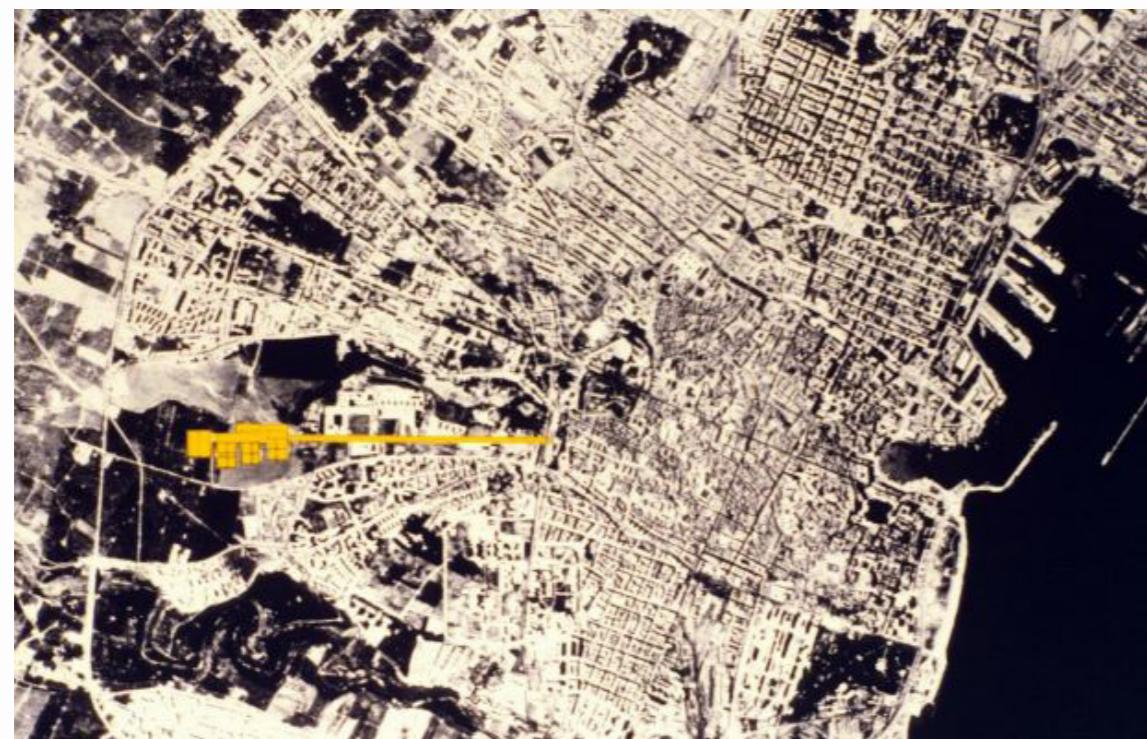
An old map of palermo, the main town in sicily. the map may approximately dated to the first half of 19th c. and bears 17 marks for places description

Site

Context - Geography

Axis: Orleans Park - Cassaro street - sea

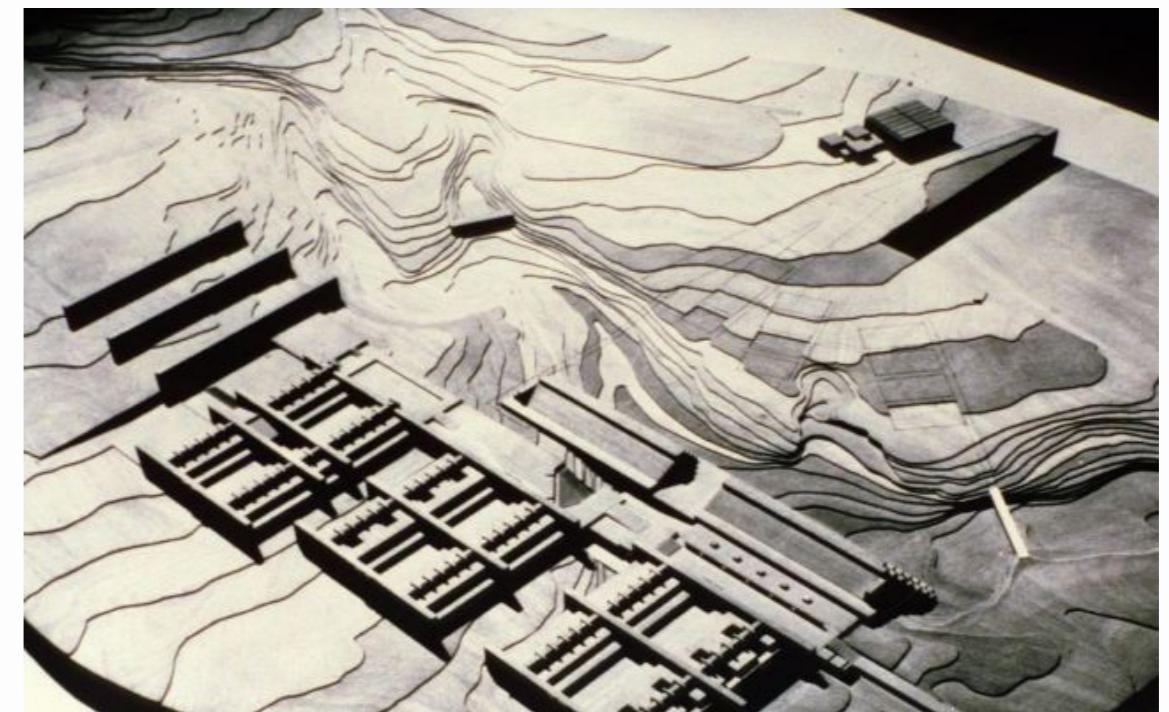
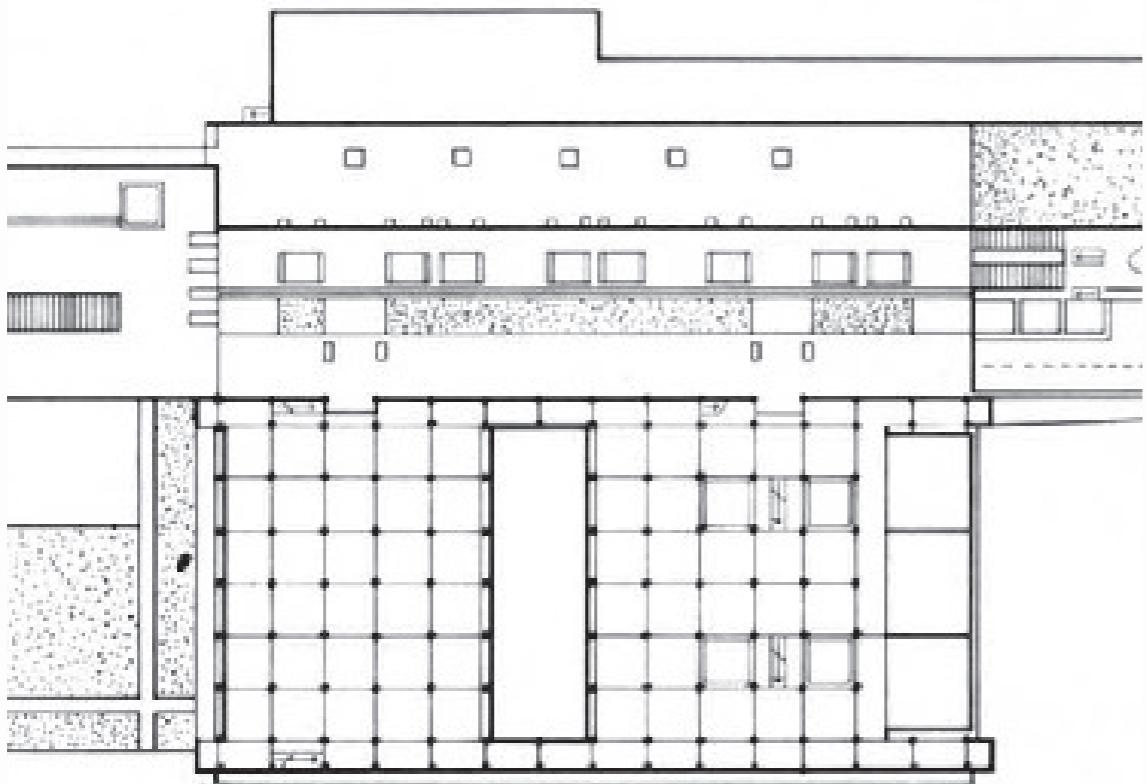
Reacting to the historical and geographical context, Gregotti chose to play with the axis, starting from Orleans Park to the old city.



Nell'intento di **Gregotti**, pesantemente criticato per la progettazione delle **case popolari allo Zen** negli stessi anni in cui progettò i Dipartimenti, si voleva costituire un'architettura in continuità con la natura agreste del **Parco d'Orleans** e del **Fiume Oreto**, sfruttando anche la spazialità e i giochi prospettici dell'asse del Cassaro, che parte alla fine del Parco e arriva al mare. Il sistema d'irrigazione pensato per i Dipartimenti è dunque al centro dell'idea, e protagonista di questo sospeso paesaggio urbano è la grande vasca.

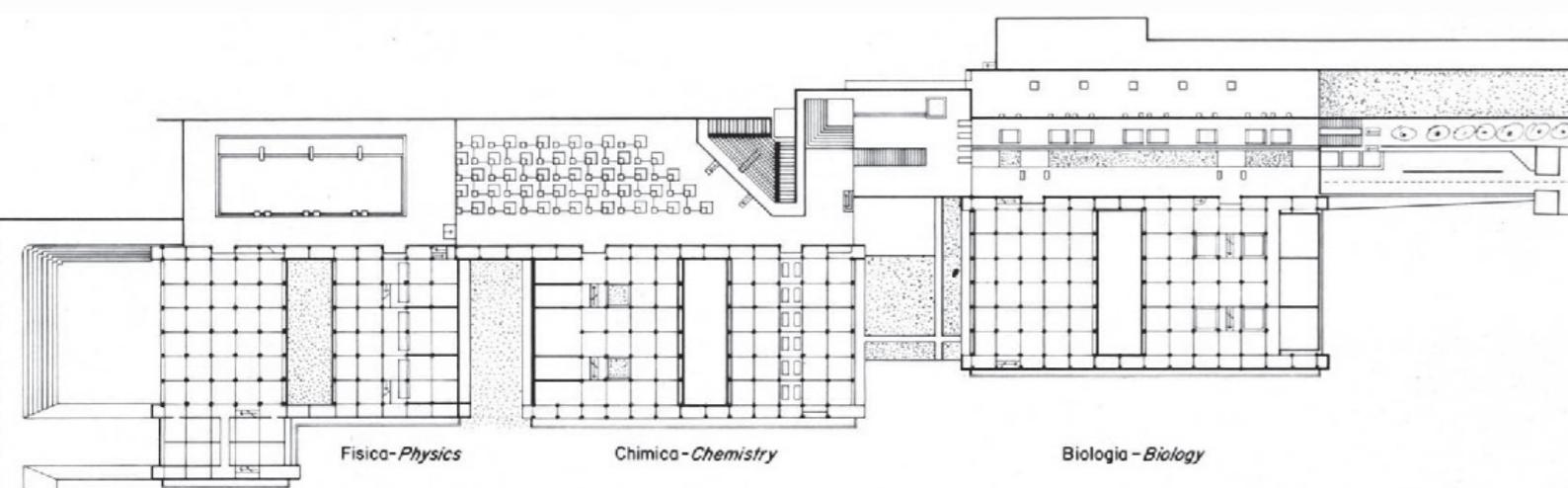
Unit of 100m * 50m
Module of 7.20m * 7.20m

Reserch and teaching

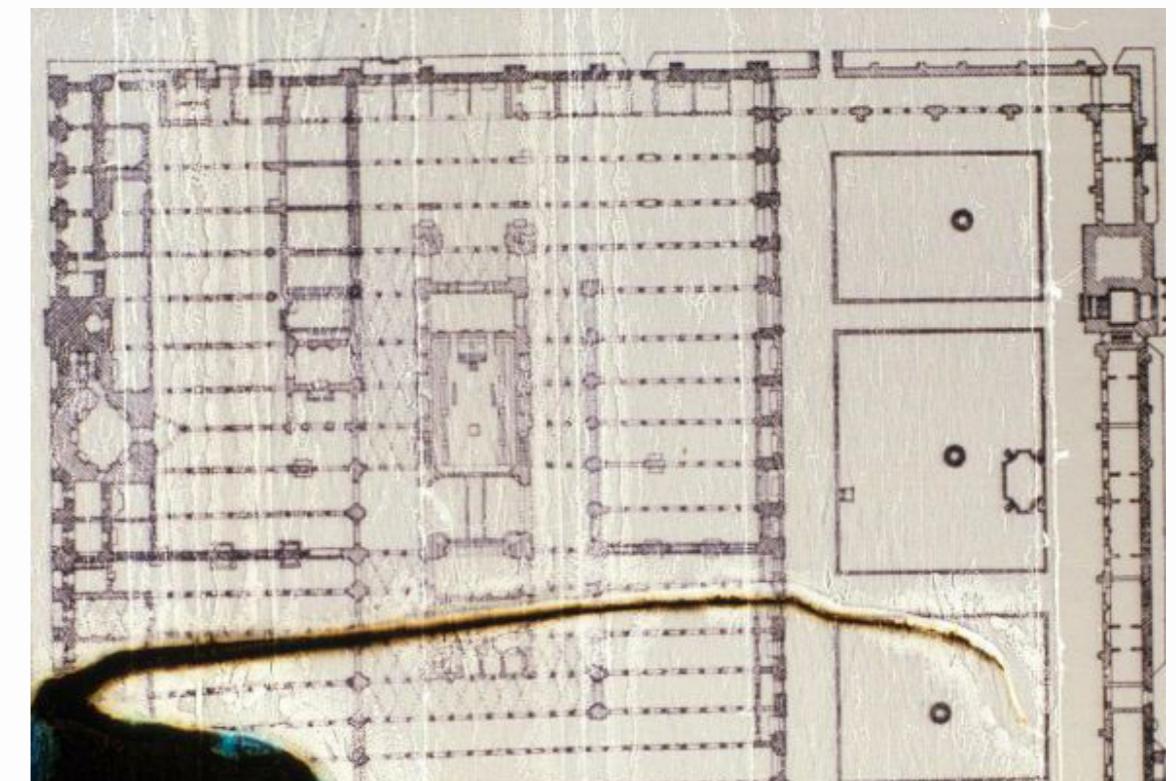


The project is divided into two parts by the axis. Each unit consists of the teaching area and research area. Everything is managed by the module of 7.20m.

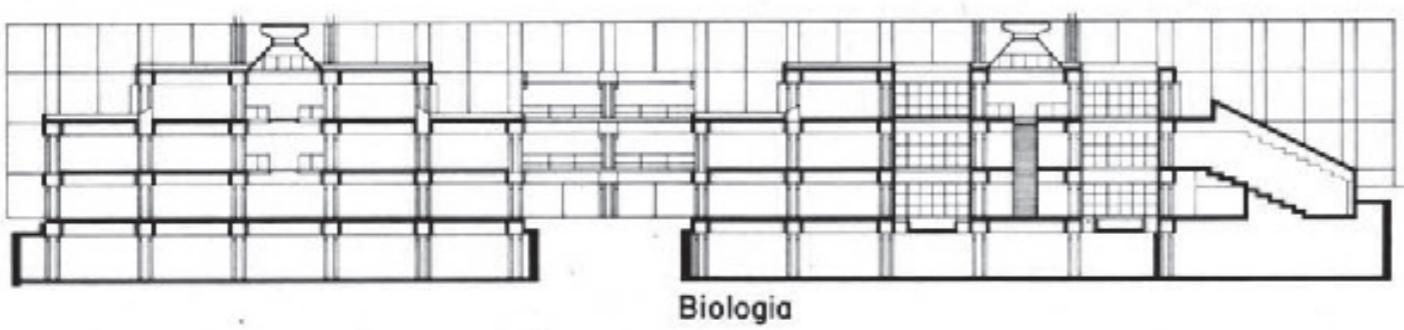
**Greek culture of Sicily
geometry - principal**



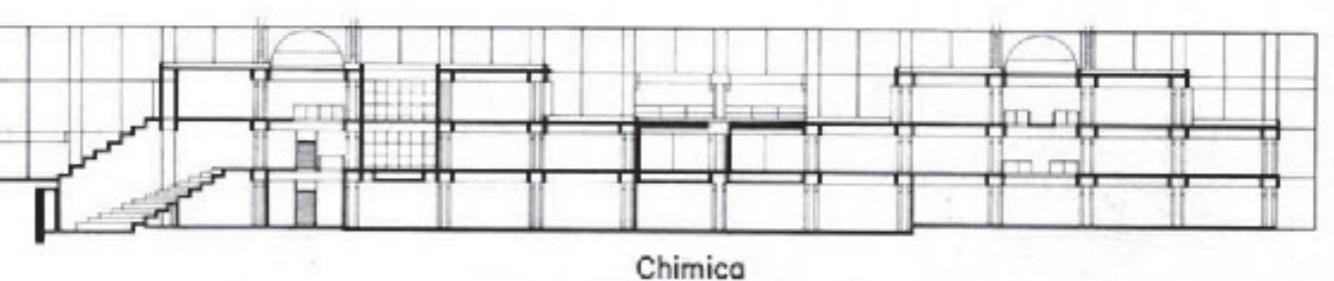
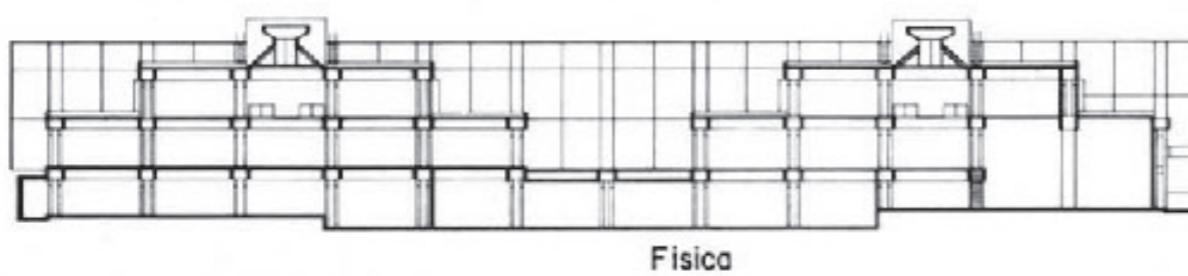
In the University, the Greek culture of Sicily is reflected in its geometry.



**Reduced height
undulating terrain**



The reduced height of the building is used to measure or define the undulating terrain.

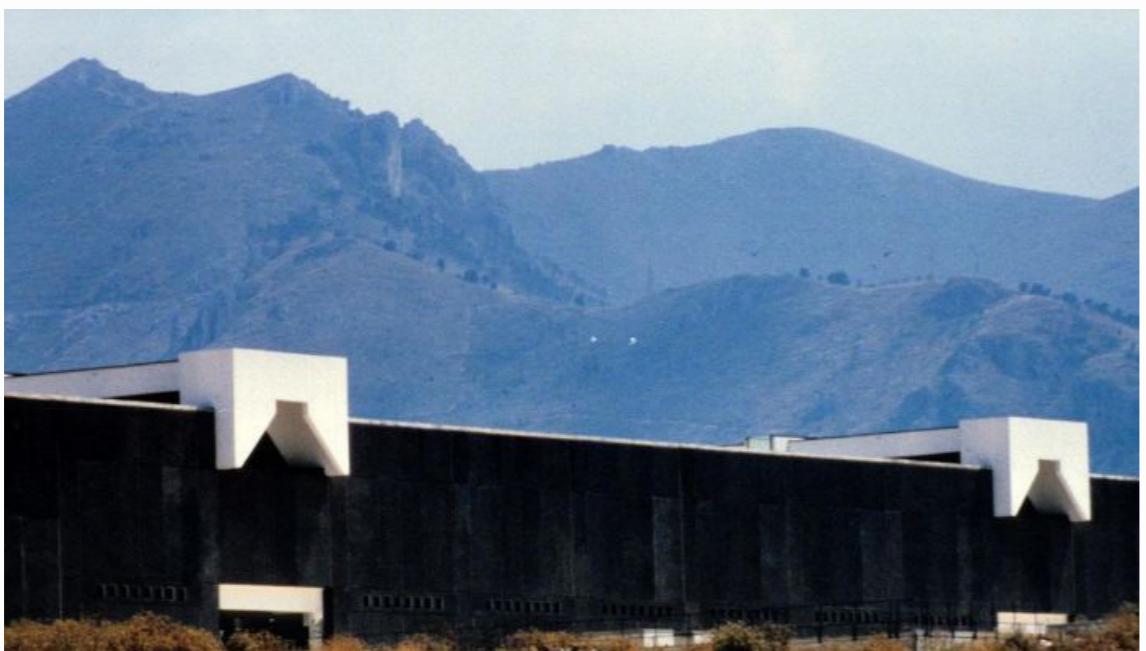


Landscape - Public



the Arabic architecture of Sicily

**simple exterior enclosure
complicated interior
filtered daylight**



the Arabic architecture of Sicily is echoed in the simple exterior enclosure of a complicated interior with filtered daylight;



Function - Form
Service room - Composition Wall - Simplicity



The simplicity is also combined with the function of service room.

Structural truth



Complicated interior



In contrast to the exterior wall, the interior is complex but clear. The force is clearly demonstrated by the connection of material.

Lihgt - Roof - Structure



Phenomenology

Abstract Shadow

There is an article about the phenomenology in the university of palermo, providing an interesting view of experience to the project, even though different from the phenomenology Gregotti talks about.

Da essa parte un fitto reticolato di canali irrigui che abbevera alberi di agrumi e melograni.
Siamo nel cuore del Giardino di Pietra e non possiamo non pensare a "Enigma di un pomeriggio di autunno" (anche se siamo in primavera), il quadro di **Giorgio De Chirico** che ha dato vita al concetto di Metafisica.

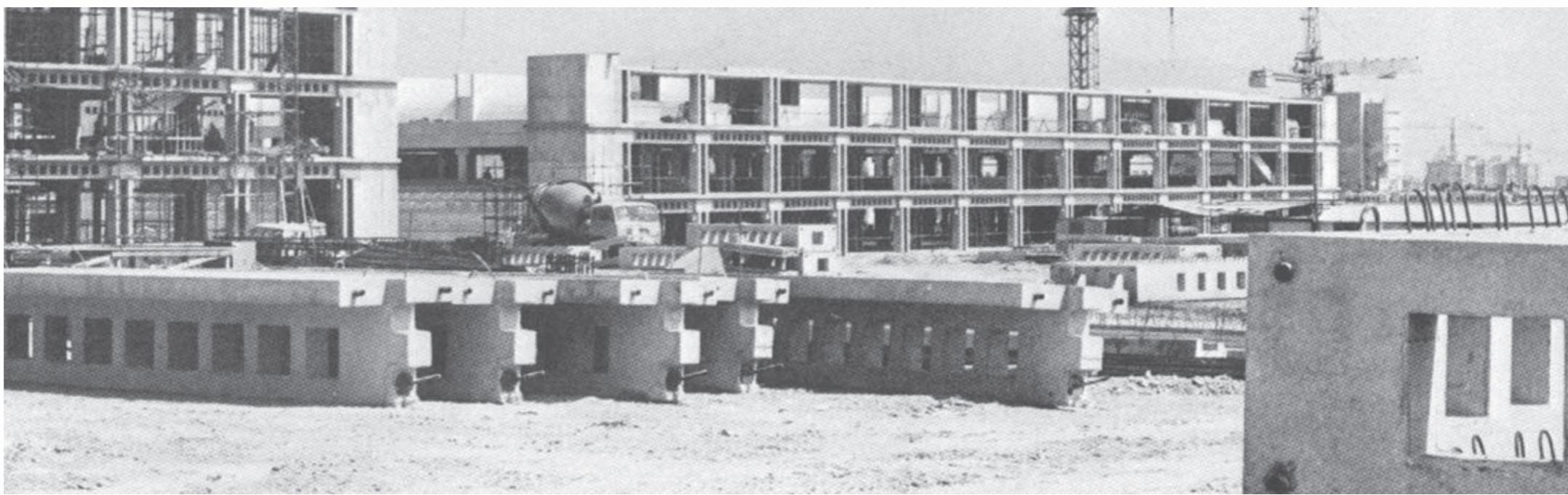
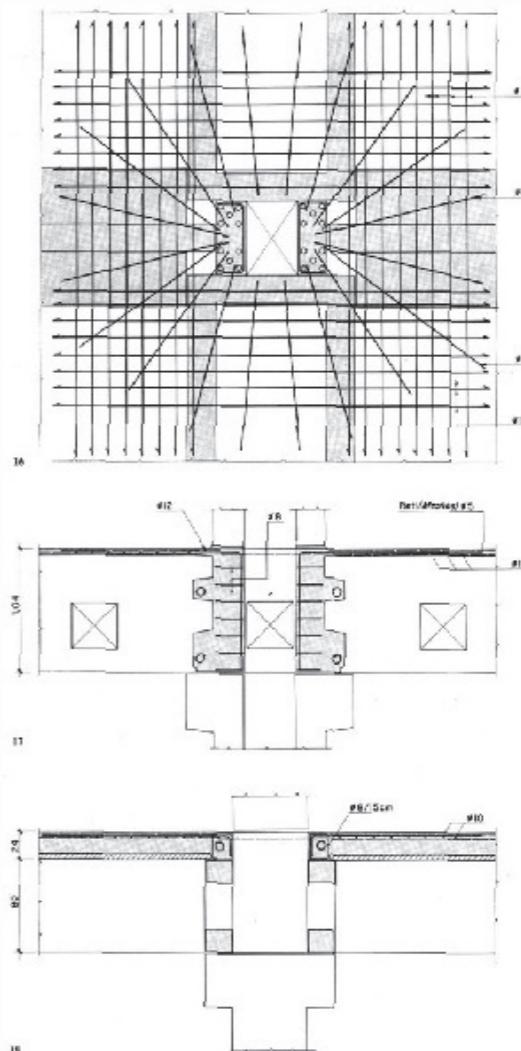
Palermo Metafisica vol. II, Il Giardino di Pietra,
Andrea Anastasi, Stefano Lo Voi, June 21, 2016





Module - Construction

Vierendeel truss
Prefabricated
Precompressed



rationality in tectonics

single/double beam - primary/secondary beam



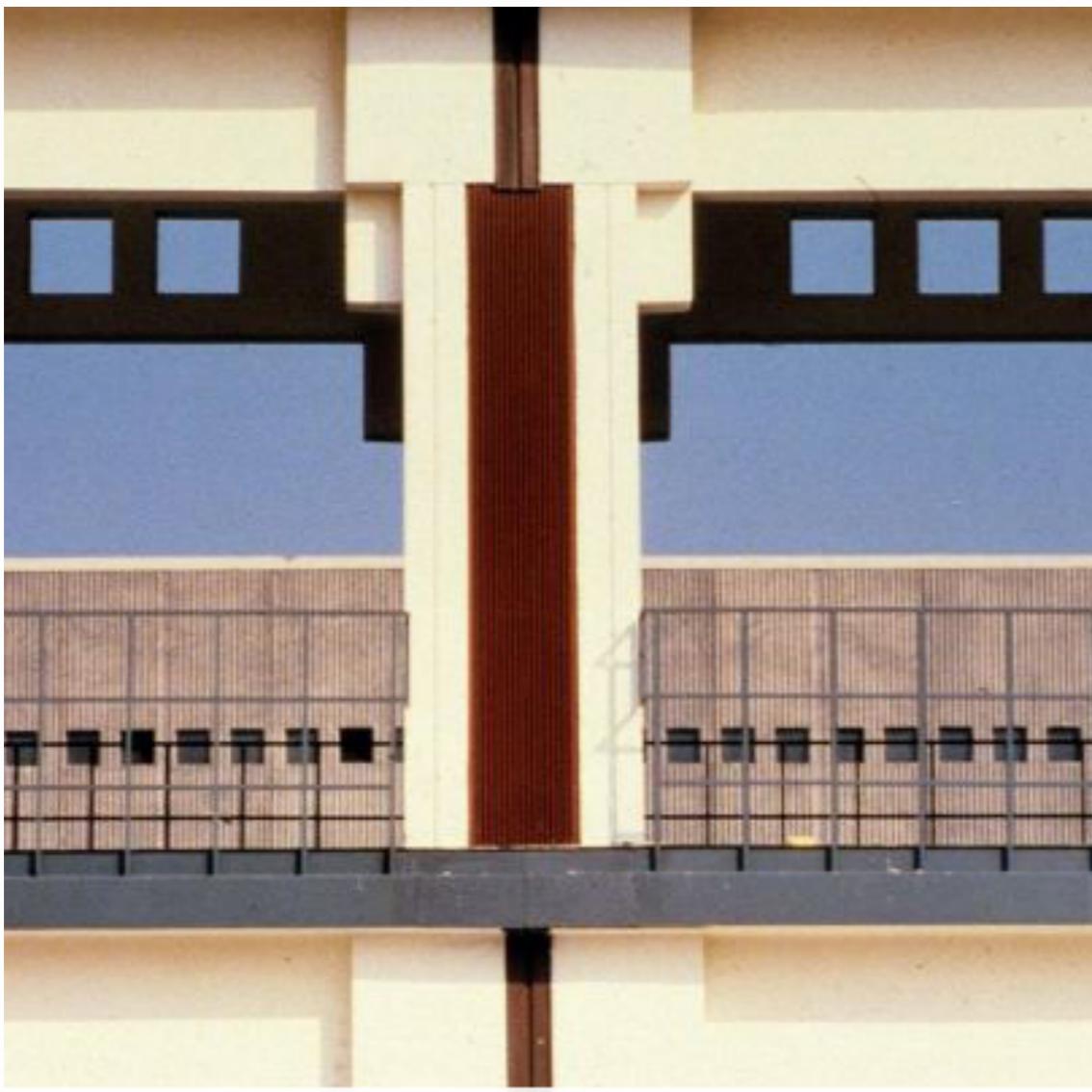
construction and device

double pilarsters - prefabricated

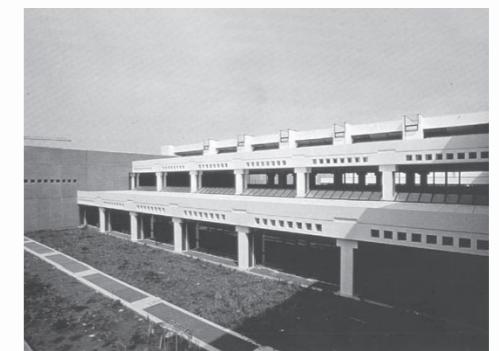
vertical passage of tubes and lines



Construction - Tectonics - Aesthetics - Prefabricated



Rhythm of module



Part 2

Theory

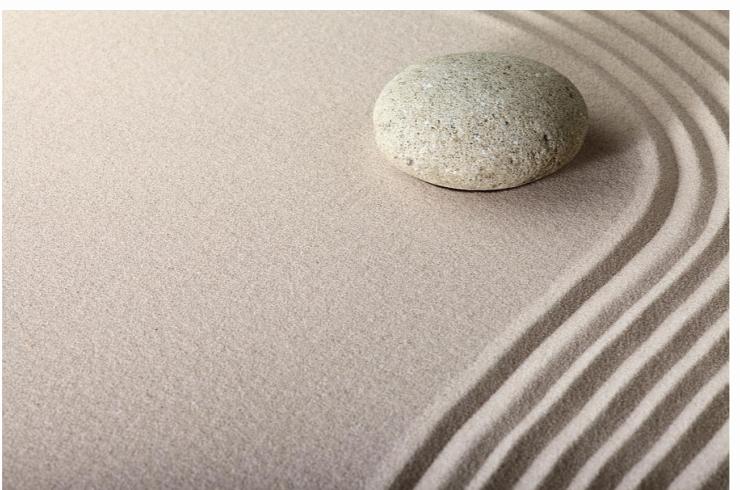
Phenomenology

Enzo Paci

New & Old
Modernism & Tradition

post-war background

retreat to modern architecture



Man put stone on the ground in order to recognise place in the midst of the unknown universe and thereby measure and modify it.

From this interview, we can see the influence of phenomenology and Enzo Paci on Gregotti, helping him to think about basic and essential questions of architecture, like the new and old, modernism and tradition, which I guess might be an explanation of the retreat of modern architecture in his projects, considering the postwar background.

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The role of phenomenology in the formation of the Italian Neo-Avant Garde
(Interview: Milan, June 30, 2000)

Interview with Vittorio Gregotti

Jorge Otero-Pailos



Vittorio Gregotti, left, with Jorge Otero-Pailos.

Vittorio Gregotti (b. 1927), one of the principal figures of the Italian Neo-Avant Garde, is best known for his defense of historical interpretations and contextual references in design. His writings and buildings were instrumental both in the revision of some of Modernism's foundational myths and in the spectacular rise of Postmodernism during the late 1960s and 1970s. Because the focus of attention has been on the heated debates of his generation with the older masters such as Le Corbusier (1887-1965), Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe (1886-1969), and Ernesto N. Rogers (1909-1969), historians have often overlooked some of the intellectual threads linking the two sides. In this interview, Gregotti discusses their shared commitment to interdisciplinary work, and their common interest in history. In addition, in recounting this little known chapter of architecture's intellectual history, Gregotti identifies the importance of phenomenology as an intellectual framework that helped articulate exchanges between disciplines and generations.

Jorge Otero-Pailos (JO): Would you say that the journal Casabella was a vehicle for disseminating phenomenology within the post-war Italian architectural discourse?

Vittorio Gregotti (VG): Certainly, because [Enzo] Paci was present on the editorial staff. Besides, Ernesto Rogers, director of Casabella between 1953 and 1963, was a great friend of Enzo Paci.

JO: How was this relationship between phenomenology and architecture established? Who were the protagonists?

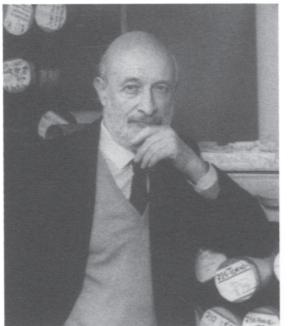
VG: The reasons [for this relationship] are many. But, in any case, there is another figure that I think you should take into account: Giulio Carlo Argan. The book that he had written in those years on the Bauhaus explained [Walter] Gropius's position from a Husserlian point of view, even if Gropius himself was not conscious of it—at least I don't think so. In any case, I think it is valuable to observe Argan's interpretation of this subject carefully. His analysis is especially sharp in the introduction of the book, [but] the historical part is more conventional. In the introduction he tries to explain the question of the Bauhaus from a phenomenological point of view; why it was constituted and what relationships it had.

JO: Can one say that phenomenology is dead?

VG: Can one say that Aristotle is dead? I don't know. It is part of our Western culture, and in particular of the European tradition of critical reason; and I hope it is not altogether dead. Husserl writes about

Léa-Catherine Szacka

A Conversation with Vittorio Gregotti



VITTORIO GREGOTTI IN HIS STUDIO.
PHOTO: LEONARDO CENDAMO.
COURTESY GREGOTTI ASSOCIATI
INTERNATIONAL.

In the more than 100-year history of the Venice Biennale, the quadrennial 1975 to 1978 was particularly crucial for the institution's development. During those years, under the leadership of Biennale President Carlo Ripa di Meana, the Biennale entered a new phase of its exhibitions. In 1979, architecture became an independent section, and in 1980 the First International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale was held under the directorship of Paolo Portoghesi. Still, for many people, the real point of departure for the Venice Architecture Biennale had occurred four years earlier, in 1976, which leaves the exact inception of what we now call the Architecture Biennale blurred and controversial.

In a 2008 interview, Vittorio Gregotti, the Italian architect, professor, and former editor of Casabella, discussed the Venice Architecture Biennale's complex history and origins. From this conversation (translated and edited from the Italian), it is clear that the introduction of the Venice Architecture Biennale was a response to an institutional crisis that arose circa 1968, followed by a period of instability in the 1970s.

LÉA CATHERINE SZACKA: *From the end of the 1970s on, a number of institutions, landmark exhibitions, and events related to architecture started to appear around the globe. Within this context, what is generally considered to be the first Venice Architecture Biennale was organized in 1980. However, you organized some architecture exhibitions at the Venice Biennale prior to this date. Could you tell us how and why an institution that had displayed only paintings and sculptures since its inception in 1895 suddenly decided, in 1980, to organize its first architecture biennale?*

VITTORIO GREGOTTI: The first architecture biennale was not in 1980. I organized the first architecture biennale in 1976. The 1980 Architecture Biennale was only the first one with an independent section dedicated to architecture. In 1979, the head of the Venice Biennale decided to separate art and architecture because there was no director equally competent in both fields. I was a bit of an exception, and that is why, in 1974, when I took on the role of director of the visual arts section of the Venice Biennale, I transformed it into the visual arts and architecture sections. Yet the architecture biennale

Expression in Media and Exhibition

Biennale
Casabella

but this was never the case for the whole Biennale. Later the idea of a general theme was abandoned and we went back to the "informative" biennale. Here I am excluding the 1980 Biennale, where the rise of postmodern architecture was the theme. I have always been against the 1980 Architecture Biennale because I think that postmodernism was really a negative

Negative Comment on Post-modernism
Attitude towards history

VENICE AND THE NEW MODERNISM

Vittorio Gregotti



In the article *Venice and the New Modernism*, Gregotti expressed an open attitude towards new and old. There is no conservation without development and change.

New design in historical context
Authenticity in conservation

The idea that Venice could be conceived of as a city of the 'new modernity' might at first seem paradoxical, for everyone thinks of Venice as the ancient city *par excellence*, a myth linked to that of its completely natural origin, which seems to allow of no transformation, particularly toward the modern. Even those who have a more than touristic acquaintance with Venice, who are aware that it has been extensively and continually manhandled, and indeed to what extent violation, contamination and stratification constitute the very fabric of the city, cling to the myth of its ever-renewing unity. Whether observer or active participant, each tries to reconcile innovations with this myth, which, since the fall of the political oligarchy that fostered it, has petrified the city of Venice into a romantic, inscrutable labyrinth.

During the last century this attempt to see things in terms of the mythical unity of the city has become increasingly uncertain in aim and method. It has opened up a series of 'cracks' by the very attempt to adapt, to show respect without exactly knowing for what or, more importantly, how, and in a number of important places in the city it has produced worrying examples — more numerous than one might think — of an inability to understand the structure, the principles of settlement and the organization of this extraordinary city. Only the great architects, Kahn, Wright, Le Corbusier, who through sheer force of quality might have been able to contribute to the richness of Venice, have been rejected, and this has been a great loss.

During the last twenty years, just when the myth of unity was becoming less certain, there have also been persistent efforts (particularly at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia) to analyse and understand the complex but certainly not unfathomable rules which have governed the formation of Venice and the surrounding region. Some convictions have gradually emerged, with far-reaching results. First, there has been a return to clarifying the vital relationship between Venice and its lagoon. This is not simply a matter of conservation (indeed, as Venice itself teaches, there is no conservation without development and change) but is essential for an understanding of the morphological roots of the city. Today — though this was not always so — Venice is the strongest point in a vast and discontinuous system, a veritable mimesis of the strategic principles of the old 'Stato da mar' (seastate). Ranging from Chioggia to Mestre, from Pellestrina to the islands, Venice emerges as a great city, disparate but indivisible. Second, the resistance of Venice to extensive modernization, first during the Renaissance, then in the nineteenth century, has left an urban narrative which is incomparably richer than that remaining in most European cities, whose connection with the ancient city, in the wake of the expansionist

cyclone of the bureaucratic nineteenth century, is more apparent than real. Venice was in fact extensively altered in the nineteenth century, but the attempt to rationalize it quite simply failed, and within this system, particularly on the island of Venice itself, there remain incomplete or unresolved areas which could be improved with 'microsurgery'.

Are these not in fact the conditions for a new urban modernity? A city based on a diffuse, precise and flexible rationality; endowed by virtue of its discontinuity with extensive open spaces; geared to public transport and pedestrian accessibility; free (for those able to interpret water as an opportunity and not an obstacle) from the traffic congestion which plagues other cities; blessed with extraordinary and unexploited potential in the quality of its living conditions. A city whose livelihood will never be affected by the inevitable problem of the large amount of space which must be given over to the manufacture of industrial goods will thus be in a better position to contend with its sole occupation of tourism. This, inasmuch as it comprises its sole occupation, is one of its riches as well as being one of its misfortunes. Above all, Venice has inherited a considerable richness of morphology, more complex than the commoner dialectic between street and block. A series of subtle conjunctions and disjunctions, particularly between the public and the private, mediate the relationship between site, typology and architecture. The extensive terminology of urban parts (*campo, riva, piscina, sottoportego, riva, salizzada, calle, campiello*) is evidence not only of the large variety of possible combinations but also of the rigour of the rules which govern them.

Today the slogan 'Venice, city of modernity' has yet another significance. Modern architecture *needs* Venice, the quintessential 'place', because of gradual and profound changes which have occurred during the last two decades. The first of these changes is the breakdown of the unitary system which goes under the name of 'Modern Movement' — a unity of hopes, that is, since there never was a unified theory. This state of fragmentation, a consequence of the varying interpretations of modernism, has given rise to absurd distortions — but also some new possibilities. Nevertheless, the common ideal of social progress — and not just technical progress — that went with 'modernism' has ceased to exist, and functionalism has largely been reduced to mannered empiricism. Moreover, there is no longer even the possibility of a common approach — and this is true not only in the discipline of architecture. Another significant change is that modern architecture has stopped being avant-garde — with a corresponding change in attitude with regard to history and tradition — despite the fact that the condition of mass culture forces it continually towards the modish, the slogan, and the

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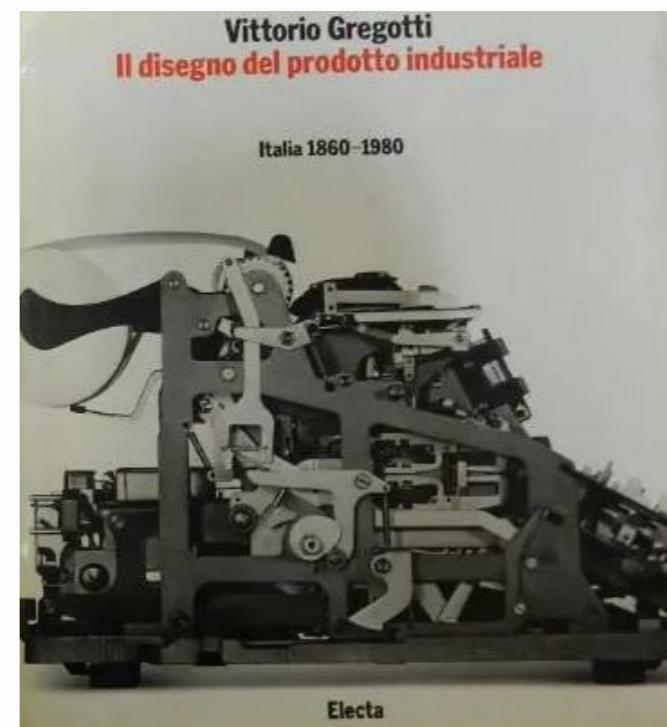
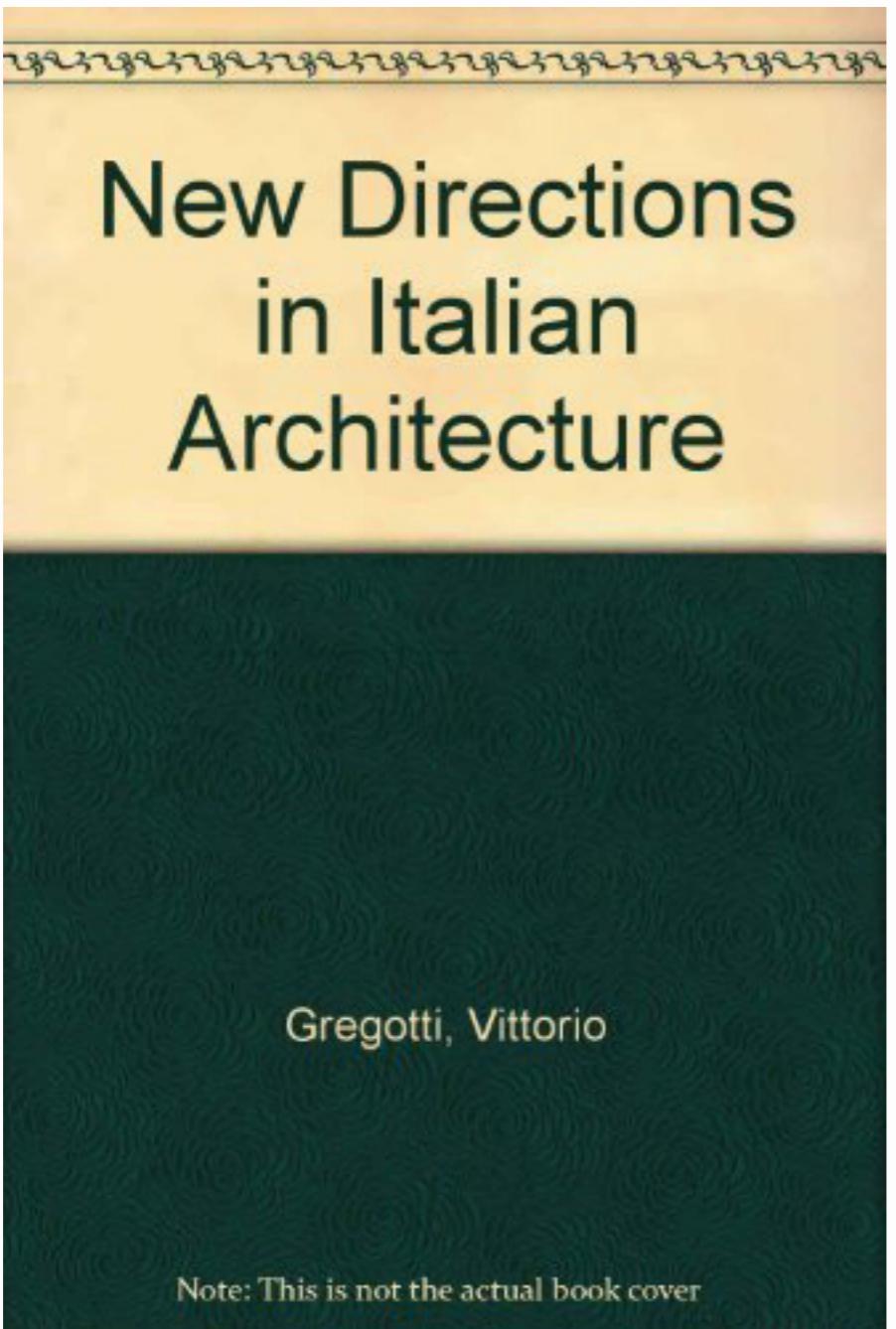
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Formation of modern movement

Architecture of the Postwar reconstruction

Professional, political and productive context

architecutral language

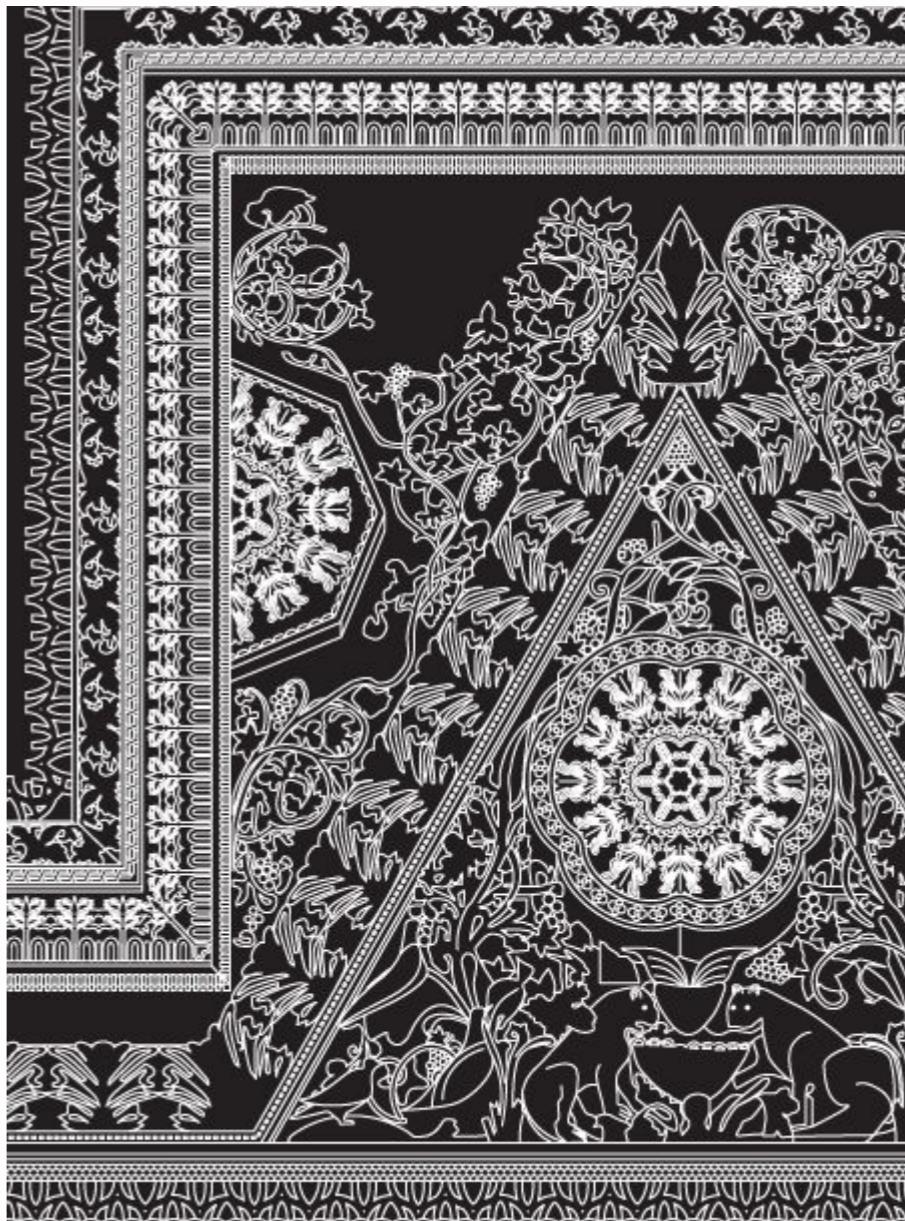


**Economics
Society
Capitalism**

VG: Well, we must first clarify what globalization is. It is not the relationship between civilizations but rather a neocolonial attempt to homogenize values, behaviours and consumption. This is the condition in which capitalism has found itself since it shifted from being industrial in nature to being financial and global in character. Financial capitalism generates points of view regarding its relationship to architecture and landscape that are completely different from those of industrial capitalism.

Today the architect is extremely weak. The architect now has less and less influence with regard to the development of the territory and the city; he is one of the less important actors. Think about the fact that large-scale building projects today are usually overseen by powerful real estate companies that have certain priorities – marketing, economics, safety – a fact which makes architects entirely secondary players. To give you a

VG: The relationships between things are as important as the things themselves. The spaces between buildings need to be designed just as much as the buildings do. If we had the opportunity to control very large development projects, we could imagine attempting to address the territory and its geographical, historical and natural features. If we could look at things from this point of view, I am absolutely convinced that we could put forward interesting proposals. The problem is that the



Interview with Vittorio Gregotti
San Rocco 02
Rolf Jenni, Christian Inderbitzin and Milica Topalovic



In 1966 Vittorio Gregotti published **Il territorio dell'architettura** (**The Territory of Architecture**). Although this text has yet to be translated into English, a translation of Gregotti's "**La forma del territorio**" (**The Form of the Territory**), which came out in Edilizia Moderna a year before the publication of his book, recently appeared in the Dutch magazine OASE (OASE 80: On Territories). Gregotti's book is probably the first detailed discussion of

what later started to be called landscape urbanism. In the book, Gregotti supports the idea of architecture as a modification of the environment. Nevertheless, Gregotti understands modifications as landscape interventions happening in an empty, natural context – monumental gestures before an empty background (such as his contemporary designs for the University of Calabria and a housing development in Cefalù).

Vittorio Gregotti

De vorm van het territorium

Welke mogelijkheden biedt een antropologische en geografische vormanalyse van het landschap om problemen op te lossen die het gevolg zijn van de multidimensionale benadering van de omgeving door de architect, die zijn esthetiek drukt op zowel artefacten als het natuurlijke milieu dat aan de mens vooraf ging? Om dit te onderzoeken laten wij elke theoretische pretentie varen. Het concept landschap – als een ensemble van elementen – wordt weloverwogen dubbelzinnig gebruikt. De wijze, waarop we de geografische dimensie gaan behandelen, is representatief voor een nieuwe benadering van het thema en zijn relatie tot de structuur van de architecturale vorm. Deze aanpak is niet exclusief, integendeel, hij is erop

gericht om methodologieën en formele benaderingen te definiëren, die aan verschillende schalen kunnen worden aangepast. Vanuit het perspectief van deze verschillende dimensies moet in de eerste plaats worden bepaald in hoeverre de planologische kwestie van het territorium, en vooral het daarmee samenhangende probleem van codificatie, verwijderd is geraakt van de problematiek van de architecturale ruimte, door haar te verplaatsen naar het niveau van de geografische ruimte. Vervolgens moeten er interventiemiddelen worden gevonden, die met de verschillende niveaus overeenkomen.

De elementen van de transformatie van het landschap door de tijd heen vigeren tussen klimaat- en seizoenschommelingen, via koloniale infrastructuur en landontginning, en de wreuk van naturelementen (de woestijn die een stad bedekt, de overstroming van grote gebieden). Meer in het algemeen omvat deze metamorfose ook de beelden die door de functionele exploitatie worden opgeroepen en die we kunnen herkennen dankzij een aangepast waarnemingsniveau – door hetzelfde technologische proces teweeggebracht.

Vittorio Gregotti

The Form of the Territory

In this text we aim to investigate the possibilities of a formal anthropological and geographic analysis of landscape, regarding the different issues that are connected to a multidimensional approach of the environment by the architect, who stamps his aesthetics on both the artefact and the natural environment that existed before the advent of man. We will leave aside any pretence of a theoretical nature in this matter. The concept of the landscape as an ensemble of elements is used here with calculated ambiguity. We will deal with the geographic dimension in a way that exemplifies an undoubtedly new approach to this theme in relation to the structuring of form in architecture. This method is not exclusive, on the

contrary, it aims to define formal methodologies and approaches that are adaptable to different scales. From this perspective of the dimensional level, we must first determine to which extent the issues of territorial planning, considered from the point of view of the specific codification problems that they imply, have generally shifted the problematic of architectural space by elevating it to the level of geographic space. Next, we will have to find the means of intervention that correspond with the different scales.

The elements of temporal landscape transformation range from climatic and seasonal variations to the infrastructures of colonisation and from the cultivation of the soil to the revenge of the natural elements (the desert that engulfs the town, the flooding of large areas). On a wider scale, this metamorphosis includes the images generated by functional exploitation – images that can be apprehended through an adjusted level of our perception, caused by the same technological process.

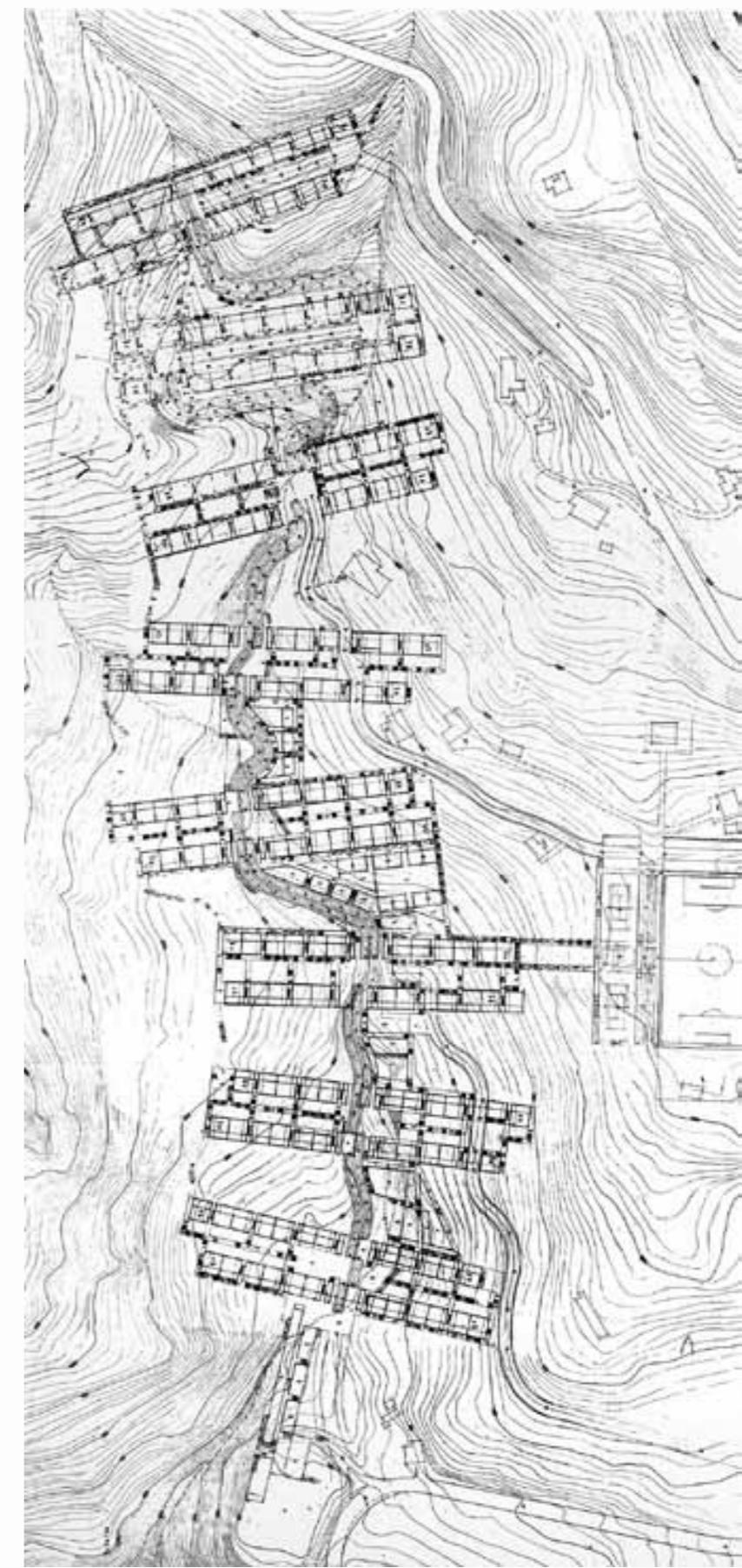
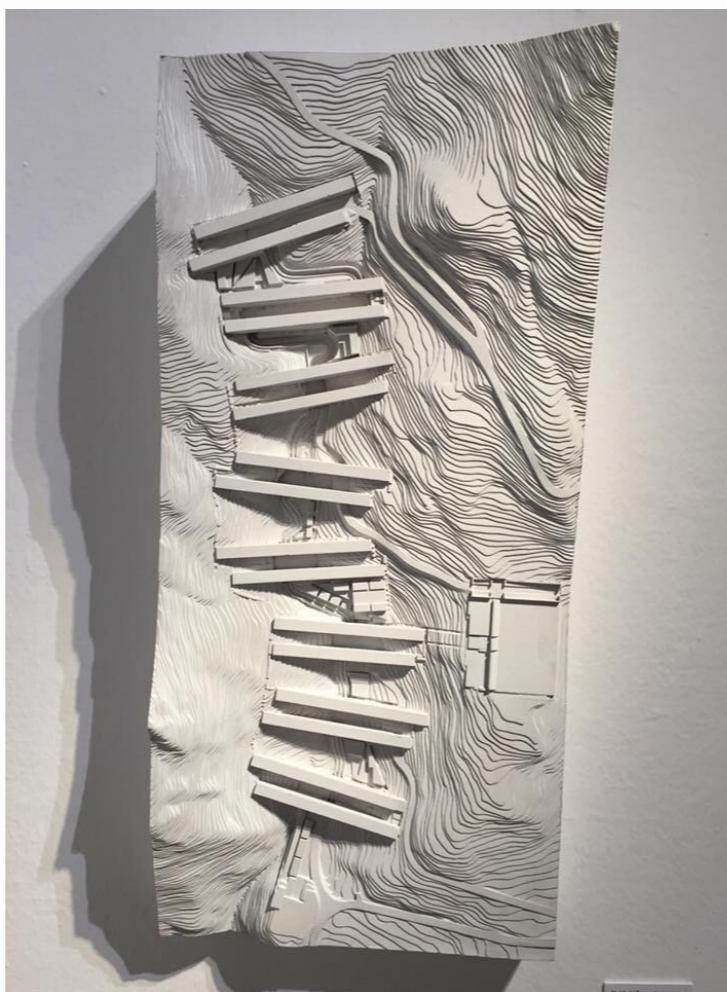
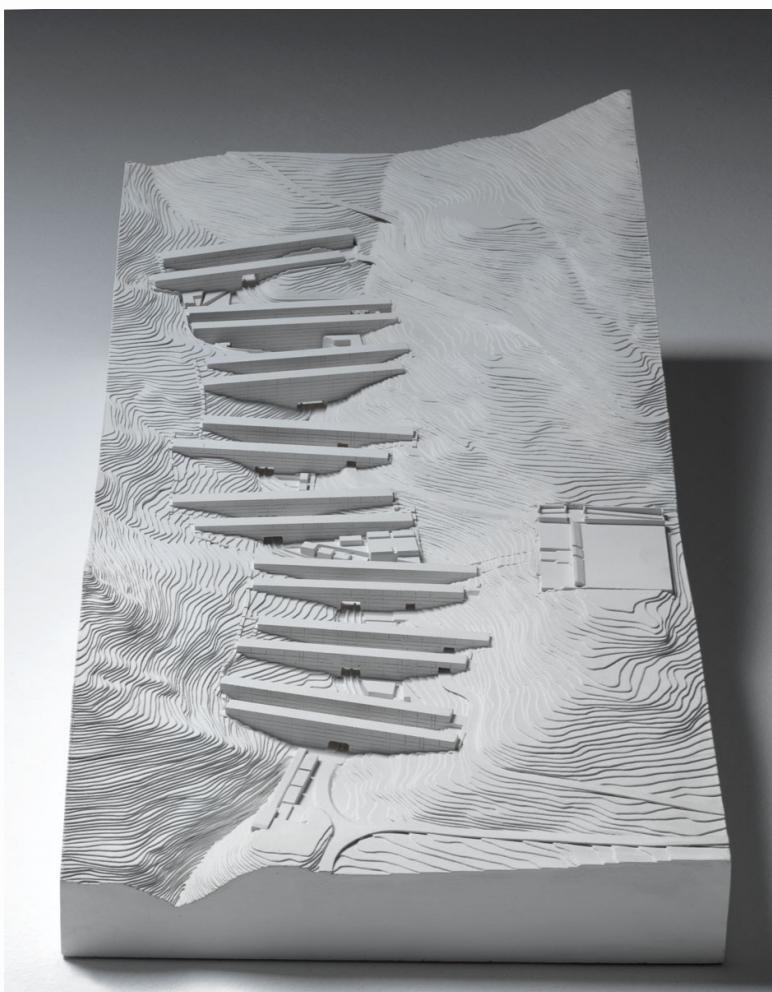
In a period of five years, we can build polders or colonise a desert; it takes just a couple of years for a hydroelectric reservoir to disrupt the configuration of an entire valley; an

Part 3

Other Projects

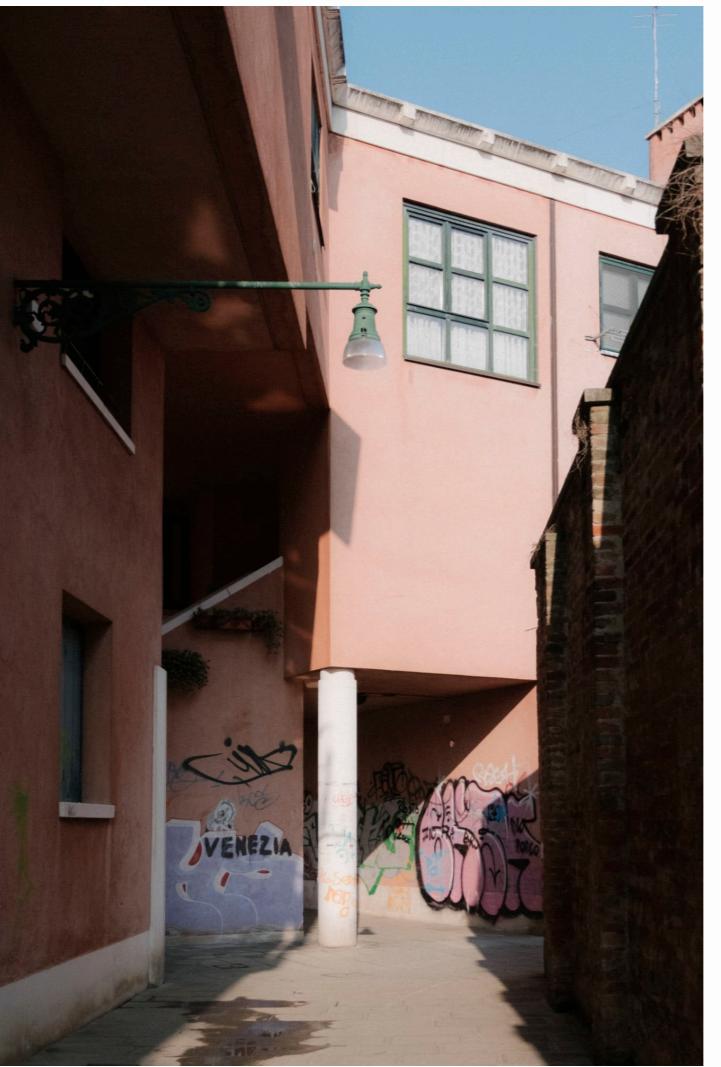
Housing development in Cefalù

order and disorder
stitching of the site



Social Housing in Giudecca

calle
piazza
relation with water



altana



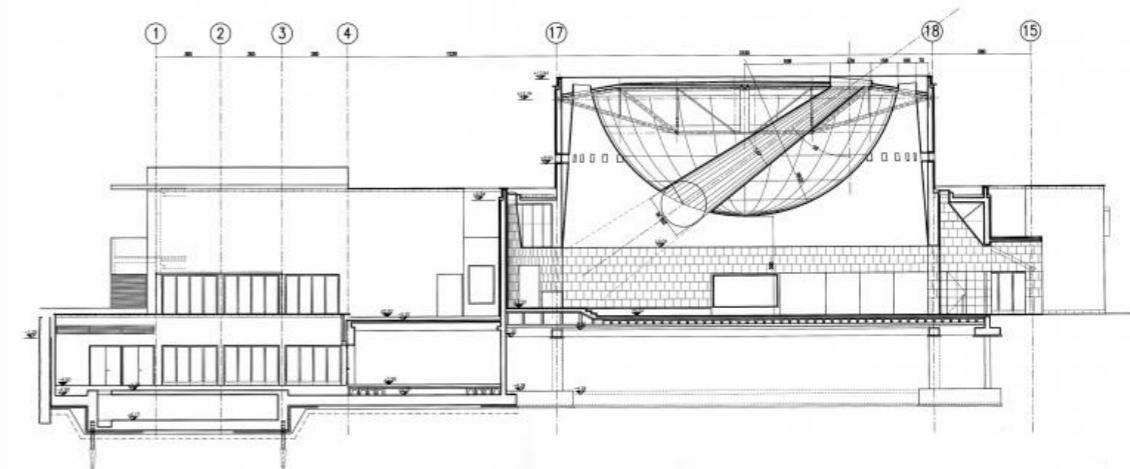
Exhibition: *VENEZIA SI DIFENDE, 1915-1918*



Nuova Chiesa Parrocchiale di San Massimiliano Kolbe, Bergamo

Context - Interpretation

Scale - Proportion



Gregotti Associati International
Sezione A-A

Complesso parrocchiale Beata Vergine Maria di Loreto Bergamo

It is composed in an simple way through the interposition of two regular figures.



Interpretation of roof
Light
inverted dome

Corridor

Scale of human



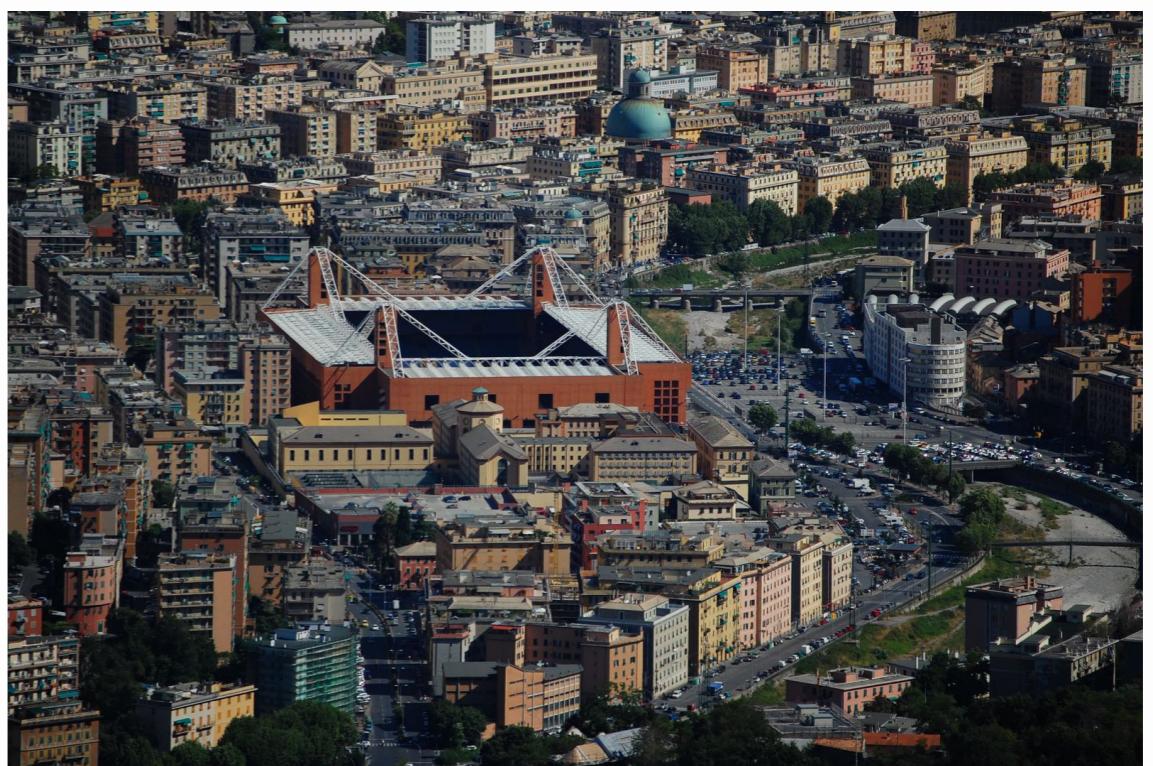
Entrance

Scale of old church

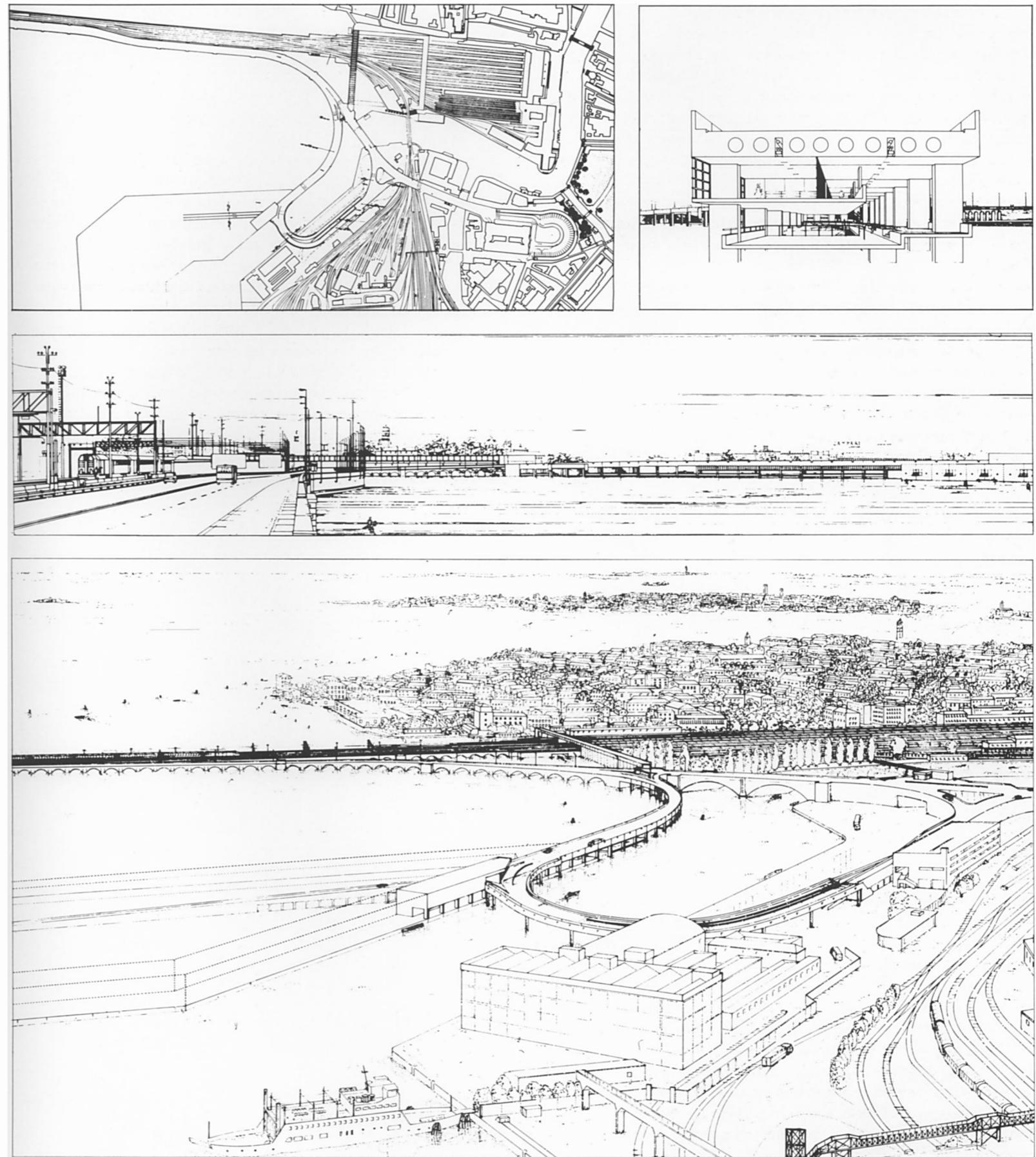


Stadio Comunale Luigi Ferraris, Genoa, 1989

football stadium inserted in the city fabric
grid and finestrations
horizontal layers



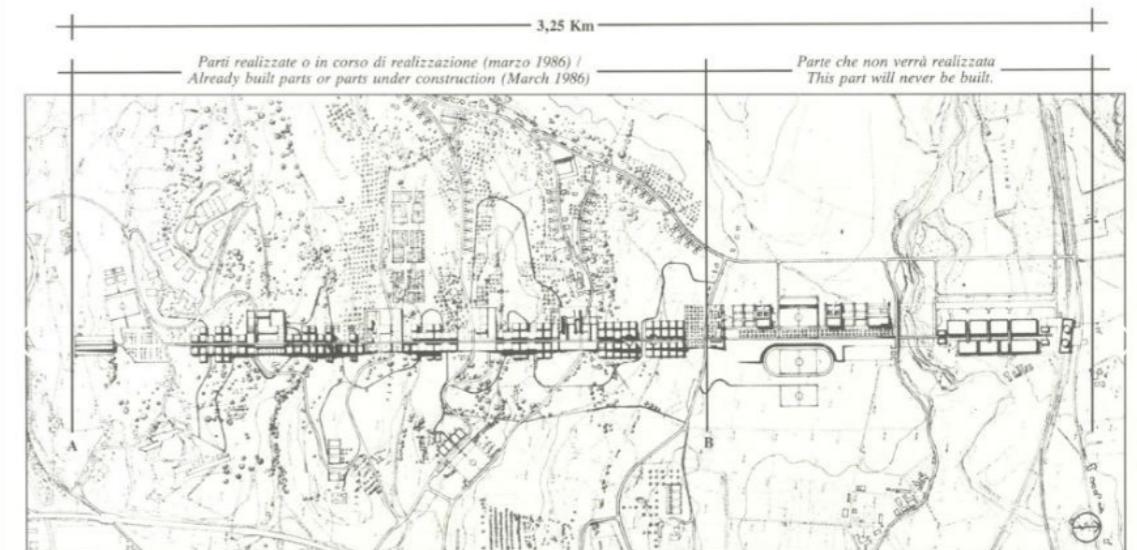
New Arrival Terminal, 1981 with Elvio Casagrande, Carlo Magnani, Filippo Messina, Franco Trabucco, Pier Antonio Val, N. Ventura The scheme for this part of the city is an element of the comprehensive reorganization of the system of access to Venice. Resembling a large palisade, the terminal acts as a precise conclusion to the Grand Canal. A footbridge unites the island of Tronchetto with the tip of Cannaregio, integrating them into a single system.

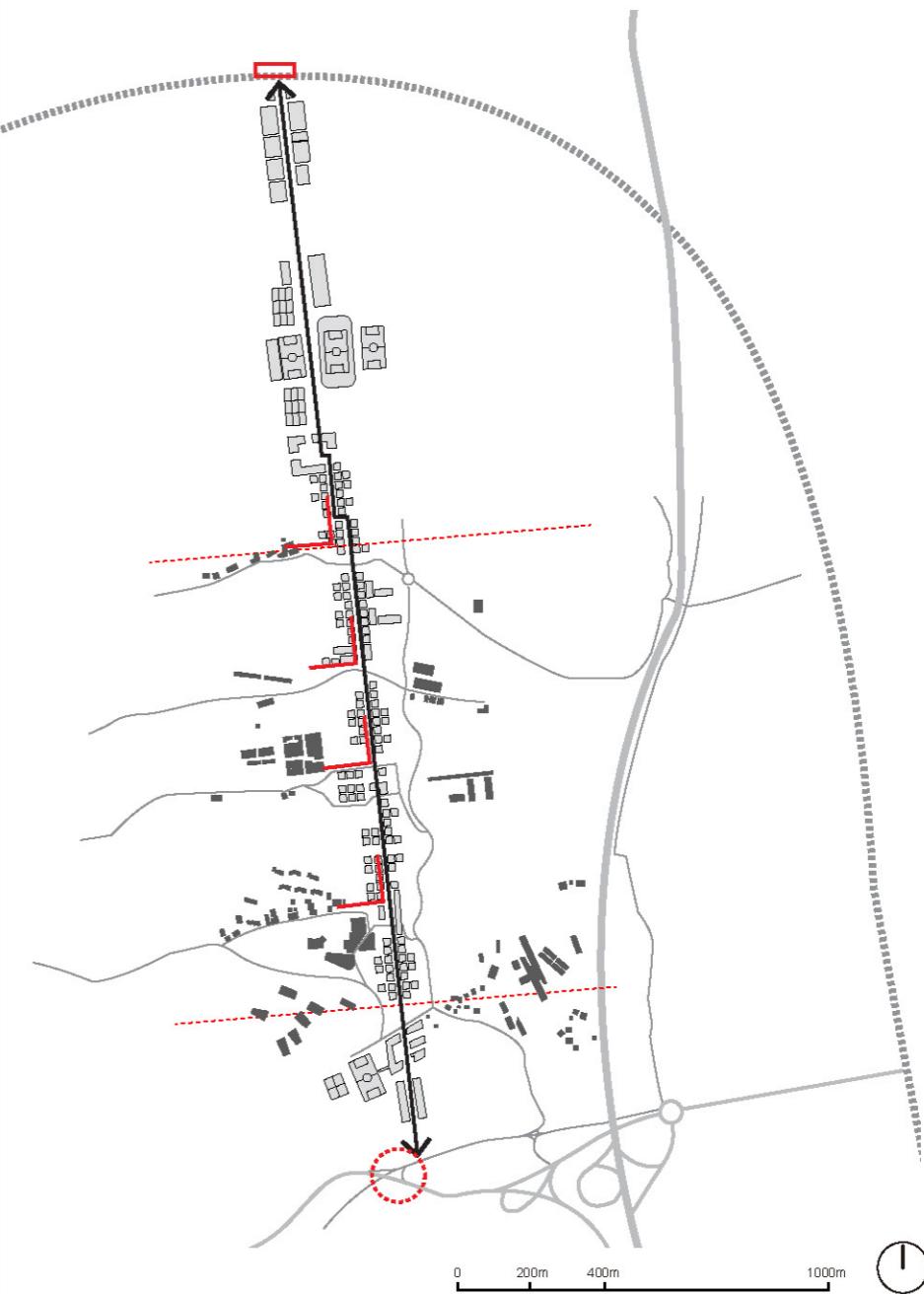
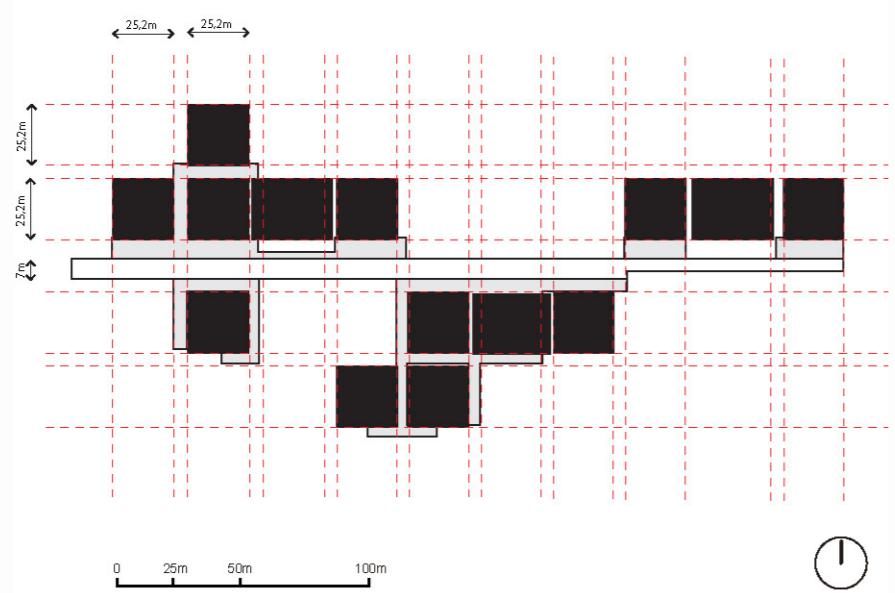
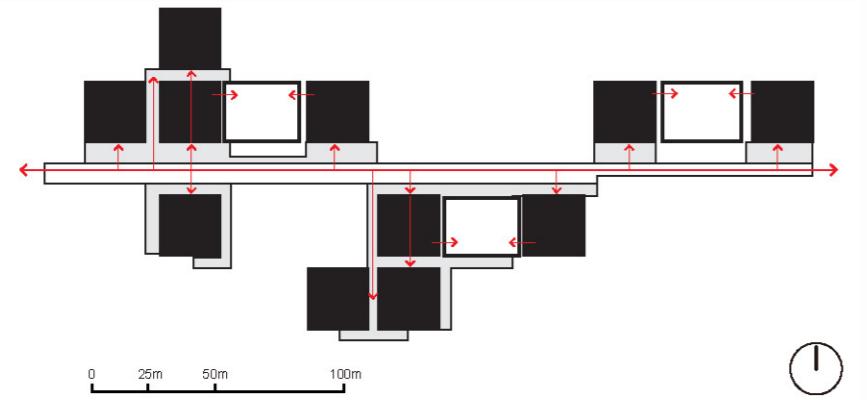


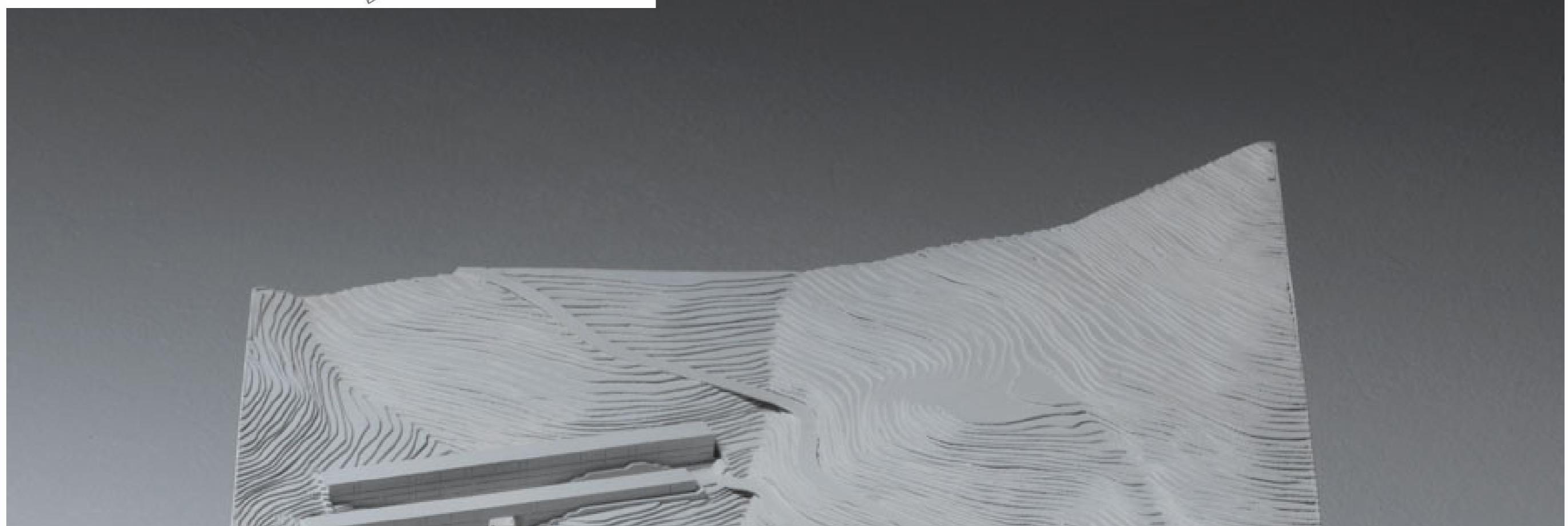
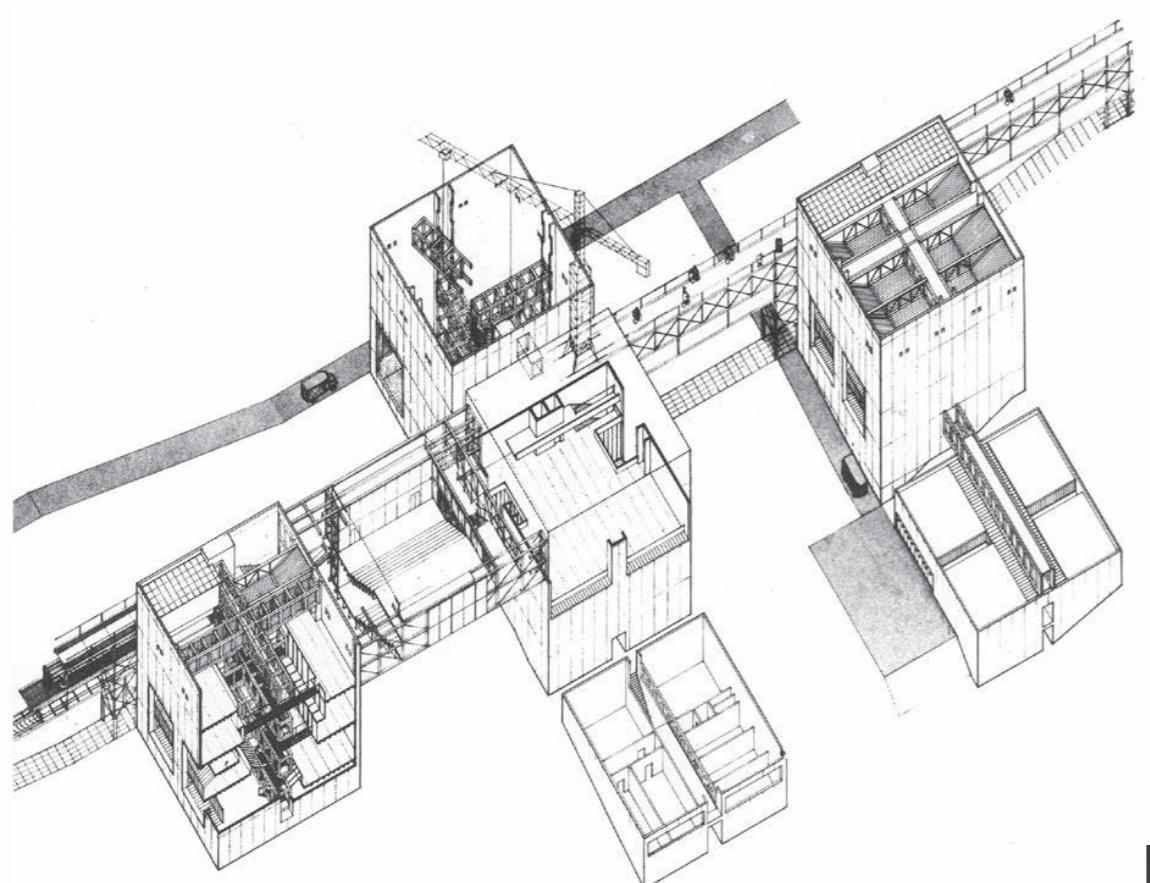
University of Calabria, Cosenza, 1973

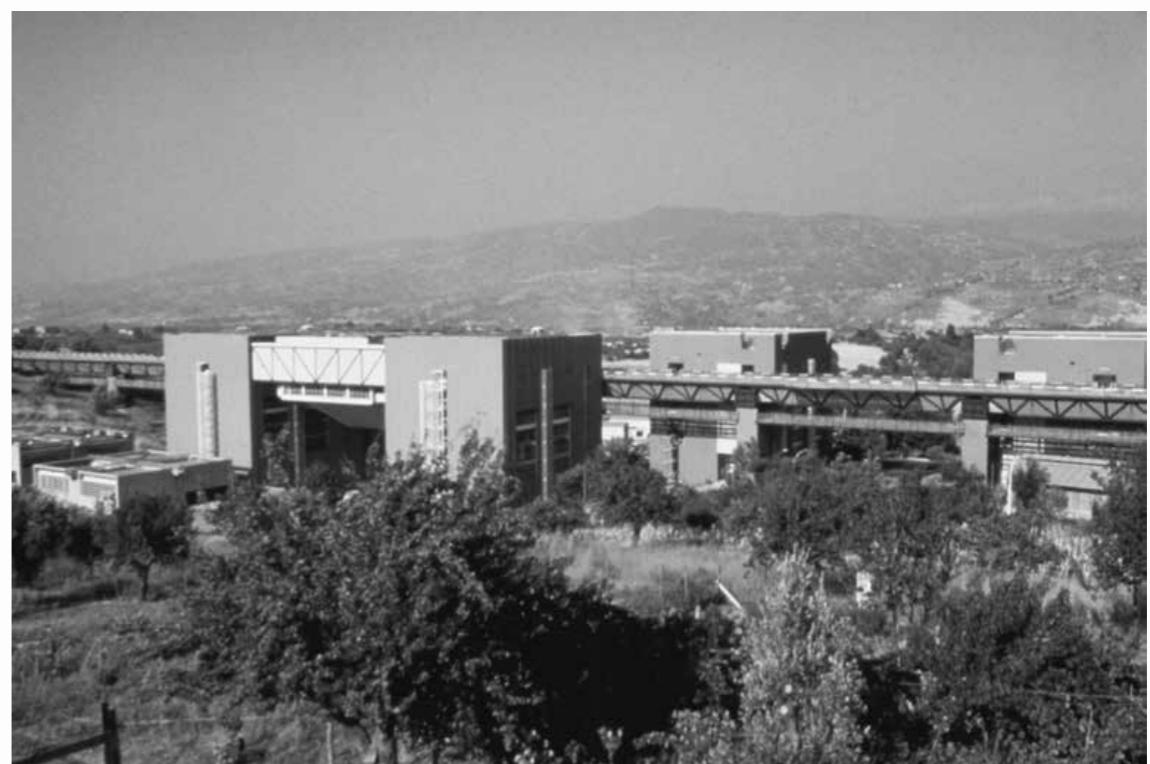
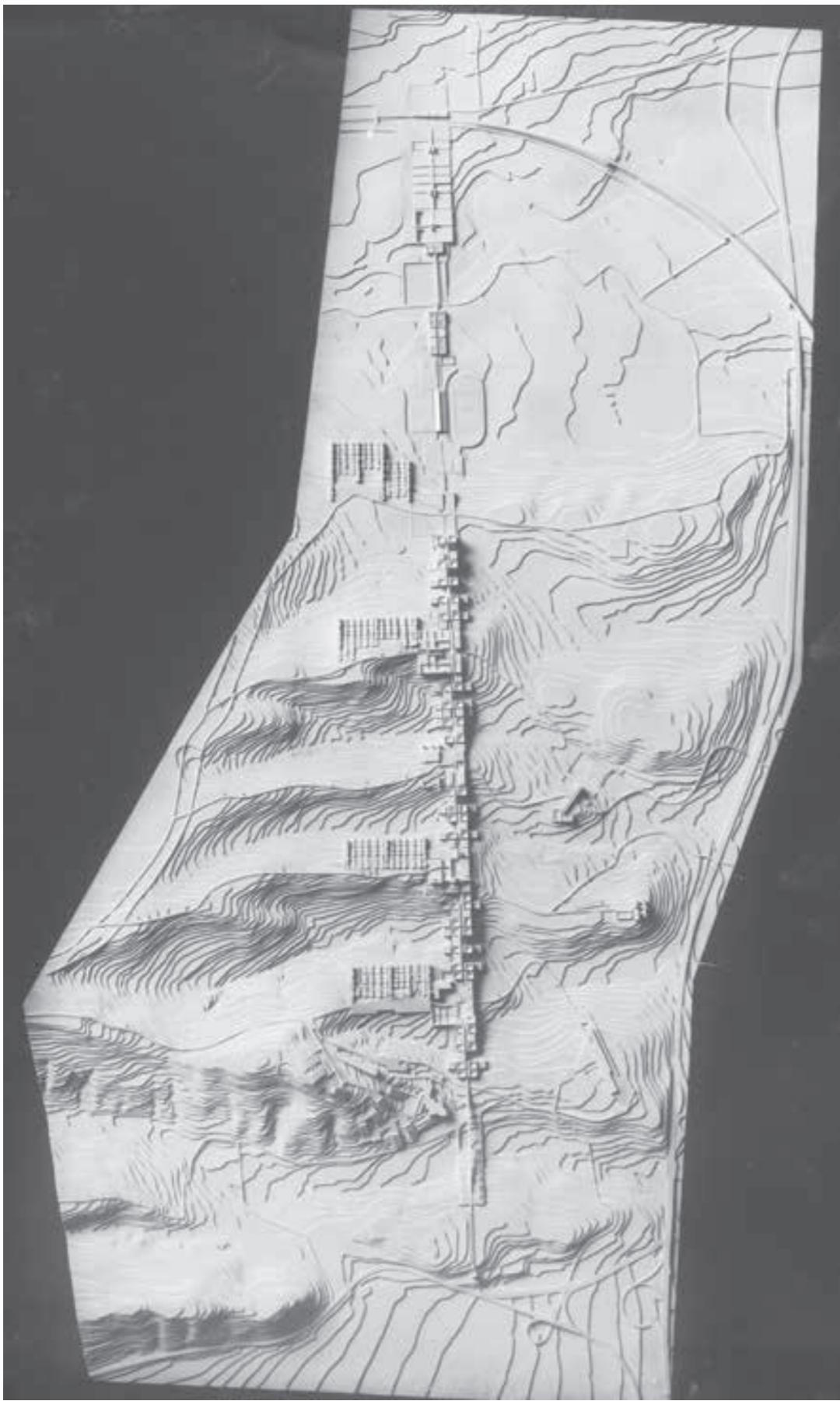
aerial perspective - system
view of drawing - view of thinking

The University of Calabria is the first project which is shown from an aerial perspective (Image I.23).^[21] This manner of presentation was crucial to show the core of the design for the university. Thereafter aerial perspectives have played a major role in Gregotti's way of working, this is a way to think visually about a project in the context of the territory.









Coffee set with tray designed by Vittorio Gregotti

Material: Sterling silver and wood, Year: 1979

Architecutural language
intuition in smaller scale

