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ANALOGY AS TECHNIQUE OF “VIRTUALITY” FOR HERITAGE

ANALOGIA JAKO TECHNIKA „WIRTUALNOŚCI” DLA DZIEDZICTWA

Abstract

The essay concerns a reflection, both theoretical and practice – through examples, case studies – on the theme of the technique of analogy applied to the heritage in the field of the Urban and Architectural Composition. As a kind of provocation, it aims to contradict the naïve answer for which, in time of crisis, the use of digital seems to be the solution for all the problems in front of which the crisis, before the pandemic than of other nature, placed us. After the investigation, at the beginning, of the concept of analogy as possible “virtual technique” related to the idea of what is plausible and likely, opposite to that of reality and effectiveness, case studies/applications are presented. Elaborated in different occasions – didactic, of competitions – facing different scales, they are examples in which the study and the knowledge of the architecture of the city virtually produced contemporary project for (and with) the heritage and constitute, in this, experimental verification of the theoretical assumptions.

Keywords: analogy, virtual, heritage, Pompeii, Villa Adriana, Naples

Streszczenie

Esej stanowi refleksję, zarówno teoretyczną, jak i praktyczną – poprzez przykłady i studia przypadków – na temat techniki analogii stosowanej do dziedzictwa w obszarze kompozycji urbanistycznej i architektonicznej. Jako rodzaj prowokacji ma na celu sprzeciwienie się naiwnemu przekonaniu, że w czasach kryzysu wykorzystanie technologii cyfrowych jest rozwiązaniem wszystkich problemów, przed którymi postawił nas kryzys – najpierw pandemii, a potem innej natury. Po wstępnym zbadaniu koncepcji analogii jako możliwej „wirtualnej techniki” związanej z ideą tego, co jest prawdopodobne i możliwe, w opozycji do rzeczywistości i efektywności, przedstawione zostają studia przypadków/zastosowania. Opracowane w różnych kontekstach – dydaktycznych, konkursowych – i różnych skalach, stanowią przykłady, w których badanie i znajomość architektury miasta wygenerowały współczesne projekty dla (i z) dziedzictwa, będąc eksperymentalnym potwierdzeniem założeń teoretycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: analogia, wirtualność, dziedzictwo, Pompeje, Villa Adriana, Neapol

1. PREMISE

Massimo Cacciari looks at Architecture as always hovering between Science and Metier defining it “[...] science, without doubt, as number, form and *collocatio*, forced to reflect on its principles differently from other *technai*,”¹ in this way exalting its theoretical dimension,

¹ M. Cacciari, *Intervento* [in:] G. Carnevale, *Il progetto di architettura e il suo insegnamento*, Città-Studi Edizioni, Milano 1995, p. 43.

its nature of form of meditating thinking and not certainly calculating. Martin Heidegger talked of the reduction to calculability of all the thinking as a typical approach of the western society² and, with worry, as Umberto Galimberti stated,³ observed that an alternative thinking doesn't exist up to the identification of it as calculation: in German *Denken als Rechnen*. This is the point: technique is essential in the philosophical, scientific, economic and technological dimension because it is a structural condition of the western thinking, but the problem is the right measure – *kata metron* for the Greeks – do not go beyond the limit to avoid the absorbing of all the thought of the life's world in the functionality of the technical thinking.⁴ Another philosopher, Maurizio Ferraris, recently spoke on the topic of artificial intelligence with a different approach, downplaying the main worries that sometimes it seems to produce. Ferraris based his reasoning on the difference between organism and mechanism: the natural intelligence is embodied and for this reason a dialectic between nature and a second nature exists, while the mechanism have only a nature, for which they were manufactured. Instead, the first purpose of the organism is the life that faces the second nature, the technical-social world, which can give external purposes and aim to the organism. Following Ferraris, this is the reason why is the humankind the inventor of AI and cannot be differently and AI remains only the last powerful tool he invented. If the position of Maurizio Ferraris can be shared – technology gives us powerful tools for our works – on the other side we have also to pay attention to Galimberti's call avoiding reducing Architecture to the production of images. Architecture is a special form of thinking with the special feature of producing reality: following Vittorio Gregotti is an artistic practice able to realize a creative and critical modification of the state of things.⁵ Thus, it also needs a meditating humanistic thinking: *Denken als Bessimen*.

Starting with this premise, the topic of this essay will be the confutation of the idea for which, related to heritage, the use of the virtual seems to be the only possible answer to the difficulties that the crisis, first pandemic then related to the wars, posed to us in a recent past. The feeling is that we perhaps are giving in, too quickly and lightly, to pressures that come from 'outside' of architecture. Heritage has to continue to be inhabited, remembering that:

Grammar tells us that the Latin *habitare* is a frequentative (or intensive) verb of *habere* (to have). This means, first of all, to have continuously or repeatedly. Therefore, “to inhabit” refers to having with continuity. The inhabitant, then, “has” the place in which he lives. Not so much in the sense that he possesses it or has ownership of it, but in that he disposes of it, knows it, is familiar with it, is practical with it. [...] Then there is another concrete meaning that the verb inhabiting has. Inhabiting means – Heidegger had already recalled it – to build. Therefore, being in the world as inhabiting means building a world. The construction of a world is always, however, the reconstruction of a world already given.⁶

² M. Heidegger [1952], *L'abbandono*, Il melangolo, Genova 1998.

³ U. Galimberti, *Critica al pensiero calcolante*, “Festival dell'economia. Intersezioni”, Trento, 2.06.2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk54lGTLbfM> (access: 22.08.2024).

⁴ M. Ferraris, *Intelligenza artificiale e intelligenza naturale*, “Che cosa hanno detto veramente i filosofi”, 9th edition, San Giovanni in Persiceto (BO), 15.02.2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2AX3isxTj4> (access: 22.08.2024).

⁵ V. Gregotti, *L'architettura del realismo critico*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2004.

⁶ S. Ghisu, *Essere, abitare, costruire, vedere*, “XAOS. Giornale di confine”, 1.10.2005. https://giornalediconfine.net/spazidelcontemporaneo/sebastiano_ghisu_abitare.htm (access: 13.08.2024).

Consequently, there is a possible ‘virtual way’ of inhabiting heritage, which is the one we intend to discuss here, also in this case remembering that ‘virtual’ is not a perfect synonym of ‘digital’ but has its original meaning in opposition to ‘real, effective’ and, as in the vocabulary, relative to entities that, although not corresponding to real objects, can be introduced or considered for certain purposes of calculation, representation or logical deduction. In this sense ‘virtuality’ could have a lot to do with architecture and its project, through analogy intended as technique of architectural and urban composition.

The term ‘analogy’ derives from the Greek *ἀναλογία*, ‘relation of similarity, equality of ratios, mathematical proportion’, derivative of *ἀνάλογος* ‘analogous’ and is defined, in the vocabulary, as

Relationship of similarity between two objects, such that from the equality or similarity observed between some elements of such objects one can deduce the equality or similarity of all their other elements. More generally, in common use, the relationship that the mind perceives between two or more things that have, in their constitution, in their behaviour, in their processes, some common trait.⁷

In this sense it is a bond, at times unstable, certainly complex but also very interesting that calls into question our memory and, to some extent, also our autobiography.

In the ‘old’ dispute between the supporters of Aldo Rossi’s *The Architecture of the City* and those of *A Scientific Autobiography*, often seen, wrongly, as irreconcilable, it is worth recalling here the text that holds these two souls together: the *Introduction* to Boullée.⁸ It is there that Rossi, speaking of Boullée, suggested the beautiful definition of ‘exalted rationalism’ that he contrasts with that of ‘conventional rationalism’ by adding the adjective ‘autobiographical’. Using the dictionary again, if rationalism is a “[...] philosophical direction centred on theories of reality and thought understood, as ‘rational’ or ‘intelligible’, as knowable in a complete sense through reason,”⁹ this rationalism exalts itself – where exaltation is “the act of exalting, in the sense of raising to a dignity, ennobling”¹⁰ – through the inventive act which, autobiographically, derives the materials for the project from our memory.

Therefore, analogy is a very powerful and effective tool. Hofstadter defined it in his *lectio magistralis* on the occasion of his honorary degree by the Alma Mater Studiorum-University of Bologna in 2013: Analogy,

[...] consists mainly in the very rapid perception of important, but often hidden, common elements between two situations – or rather between two mental structures. One of these two mental structures has just been built and represents a new circumstance in our life [...]. The other mental structure is old, in the sense that it already existed in our brain [...]. In a word, therefore, an adequate analogy allows a person [...] to associate a new thing with an already existing concept, that is, to treat something fresh and unfamiliar as if it were familiar [...].

⁷ *Analogia* [in:] Treccani, <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/analogia/> (access: 24.08.2024).

⁸ The three quoted books are: A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, Marsilio, Padova 1966, A. Rossi, *Autobiografia scientifica*, Pratiche, Parma 1990, and É.L. Boullée, *Architettura. Saggio sull'arte*, intr. A. Rossi, Marsilio, Padova 1967. English editions of the two books by Aldo Rossi in the Series “Opposition Books” exist and are in the list of references.

⁹ *Razionalismo* [in:] Treccani, <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/razionalismo/> (access: 24.08.2024).

¹⁰ *Esaltazione* [in:] Treccani, <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/esaltazione/> (access: 24.08.2024).

At the end of his lecture, Hofstadter returned to underline the main prerogative of analogy consisting in the ability to relate novelty to what has already been experienced, allowing man to ‘orient himself in the present.’¹¹

At length we could also discuss the definition of analogy given by Giorgio Agamben who, in the preface to Melandri’s book, specifies it as follows: “Analogy is the device that, in every antinomy and in every *aporia*, exhibits their logical inevitability and, at the same time, makes possible not so much their composition, but their movement and their transformation,”¹² making explicit all the inventive power that analogy offers to those who want to use it. An inventive power that becomes a design tool but also makes the design a tool of knowledge, as Aldo Rossi has masterfully reminded us in his books and in his works.

Three different design experiences will try to clarify these theoretical propositions of this Premise.

2. ANALOGY AS DIDACTIC METHOD. POMPEII’S ANALOGOUS *INSULÆ*

During a teaching experience in a first-year design laboratory, it was decided to work on the archaeological city of Pompeii, assumed not so much as a place for the project, but rather as ‘material’ from which to draw to propose that students learn from the ancient city. The hypothesis was that, in this way, would be also possible to fill some gaps that arise from the too little space dedicated, in the current organization of the study courses, to the history of ancient architecture, the teaching of which, in the best of cases, is transferred to the second year preceded by an immersion in contemporaneity in the belief that the possibility of truly understanding the values of contemporaneity doesn’t exist in the absence of the knowledge of the ancient. How can one explain Mies van der Rohe’s studies for patio houses without knowing the Greek house in Olynthus? How can one explain Louis Kahn’s wall architecture without knowing Roman architecture? And one could continue for a long time because, to paraphrase the title of a famous and useful little book, *Gli antichi ci riguardano* [The Ancients Concern Us] (Canfora, 2014). Lastly, it was still hypothesized that working on Pompeii could be a useful way to introduce some questions regarding the relationship between architecture and the city.

The students’ path was built through successive exercises, after having told them the extraordinary lesson that the ancient city still offers us especially in its system of interscalar relationship that link the form of the house to the form of the *insula* and the form of the *insula* to the form of the entire city (Ill. 1). This peculiarity, often lost by the contemporary city, is mostly evident in Pompeii, in the *regio VI* and in the *insula* where the House of the Tragic Poet overlooks on the head along *via delle Terme* behind the Roman forum.

The first exercise was to redraw references of patio houses, taken from every age: from the ancient city itself to the contemporary, obviously passing through the Modern experience. Starting from the references, the work focused on the variations, sometimes triggered by the need to adapt the oldest houses to our ways of living, sometimes to adapt them to

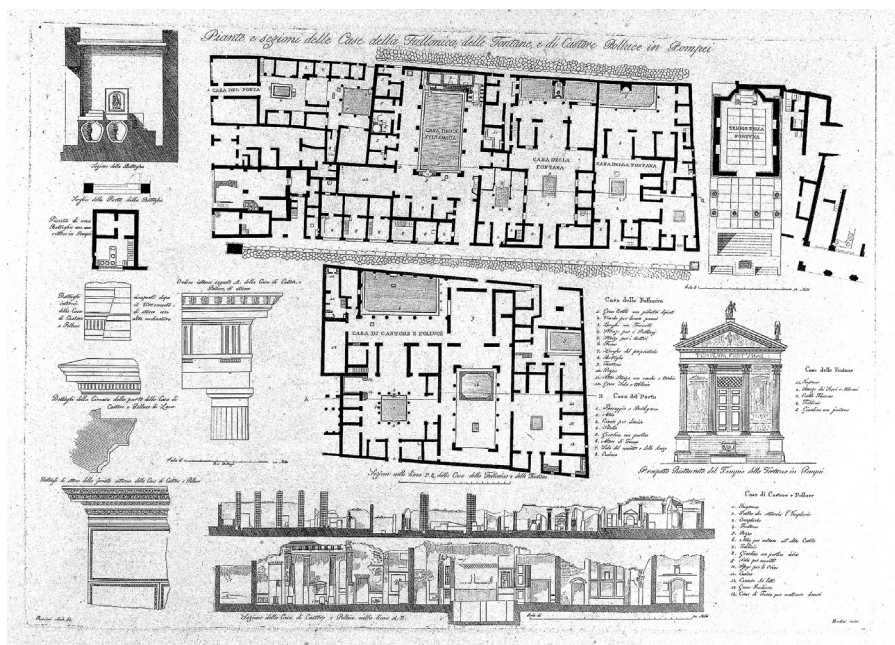
¹¹ M. Landsberger, *Progettare per analogie*, “Territorio” 2017, no. 80, pp. 87–96.

¹² G. Agamben, *Archeologia di un’archeologia* [in:] E. Melandri, *La linea e il circolo. Studio logico-filosofico sull’analogia*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2004, pp. XI–XXXV.



III. 1. Pompeii. Figure-background plan, source: F. Visconti, *Pompeii. Città moderna = Moderne Stadt*, E. Wasmuth Verlag, Tübingen 2017, p. 35.

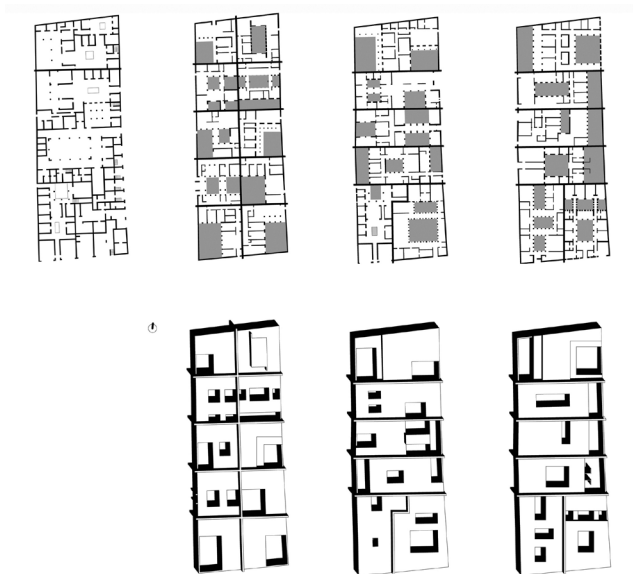
the assigned dimensions of the plot, still in an abstract hypothesis with respect to which, however, constraints had already been assigned: the most important of all was that all the rooms of the house had to overlook the patio and that only the entrance door could be opened on the outside façade. Finally, the students discovered that, in the last phase of the course, the design exercises were intended, having preliminarily verified forms and dimensions, to build nine “analogous *insulae*” on the dimensions and form of the insula of the Tragic Poet of Pompeii (III. 2).



III. 2. Pompeii. Insula del Poeta Tragico, source: L. Rossini, *Le antichità di Pompeii*, Roma 1831, courtesy of German Archaeological Institute in Rome.

Sometimes the analogous insula replicates the subdivision into plots of the original – three houses from *cardine* to *cardine* on the north head and two houses, including that of the poet, rotated to arrange the entrance on the most important road at the opposite head – sometimes the organization of the plots was more different as in the case of the ten square houses along a herringbone pattern.

The typological plan of the houses reveals the references adopted: in some cases, more explicitly quoted in others in a more allusive way. The plan with shadows, instead, highlights how the simple idea of ‘marking’ the subdivisions between the plots with a sort of fire walls, slightly higher than the houses and protruding onto the streets, makes it possible to read the unity of the project beyond the typological and perhaps linguistic variations of the individual works (Ill. 3).



Ill. 3. Pompeii. Analogous Insulae, source: F. Visconti, *Pompeii. Città moderna = Moderne Stadt*, E. Wasmuth Verlag, Tübingen 2017, pp. 98–103.

3. ANALOGY AS DESIGN TECHNIQUE. *CIVITAS HADRIANA*

In the occasion of an international competition for the buffer zone of Villa Adriana, the dealing was with a heritage ‘in presence’ – the Villa – but calling into question, analogically, a heritage *in absentia* – again Pompeii and the ancient city.¹³ The archaeological complex

¹³ The project described in the paragraph was elaborated for the “International Call Designing the UNESCO Buffer Zone-Piranesi Prix de Rome”, promoted in 2018 by Accademia Adrianea di Architettura e Archeologia onlus. Design team of DiARC_Department of Architecture of University Federico II of Naples: V. Pezza, J. Gomes da Silva, P. Portoghesi (team leaders), R. Capozzi, G. Multari, F. Visconti, G. Fusco, C. Orfeo. Consultants: I. Norton (landscape architecture); L. Boursier (agronomy); H-J. Beste (archaeology); G. Cafiero (museography); R. Picone, L. Veronese (resto-

of Villa Adriana, the extra-urban residence of the emperor Hadrian who built it over twenty years from 118 to 138 AD, is an extraordinary system of buildings that were constructed as analogical reproductions of the architecture that Hadrian had known and admired in his trips in Egypt, Greece, Syria and in the vast lands of his empire. In addition, on a surface area of over 120 hectares, the villa lies on a morphological system that exalts and ‘measures’, arranging itself along a plateau between two tributaries of the Aniene river. Visited and surveyed by scholars of all times – from the 16th to the 18th century, among others Pirro Ligorio, Francesco Contini, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Jacques Gondoin and Francesco Piranesi – the Villa testifies above all Romans’ intelligence in building by collaborating with the Earth, a wisdom that today appears lost as the territory around the archaeological complex confirms between abandonment, incautious establishment of extractive and industrial activities, urbanization in the ‘shapeless forms’ of sprawl.

The *Civitas Hadrianea* project proposes a general redesign of the UNESCO buffer zone, starting from the identification of that system of long-distance relationships between ‘important points’ – the Villa, Villa d’Este, Plauzi’s Sepulchre – also based on the traces of the ancient agricultural organization of this territory (Ill. 4). The design of the riverfront and *Horti Adriani*’s design, gently sloping towards Aniene river, marked every two hundred



Ill. 4. *Civitas Hadrianea*. Masterplan, source: L. Basso Peressut, P.F. Caliarì (eds.), *Piranesi Prix de Rome. Progetti per la Grande Villa Adriana*, Edibus, Verona 2019, p. 330.

ration); O. Niglio, M. Pisani (history of architecture); A. Acierno (urbanism). The results of the International Competition are in: L. Basso Peressut, P.F. Caliarì (eds.), *Piranesi Prix de Rome. Progetti per la Grande Villa Adriana*, Edibus, Verona 2019.

and fifty meters by a *decumanus*, constitute the new underlying structure in which the congress centre – a gate volume suspended over the water – the gate of the archaeological park – a modern Tower of the Winds, based on the Athenian model – and the hub – a courtyard with portico, open towards the Aniene with a large staircase like in the Bramante Cloister of Montecassino Abbey – find their appropriate locations. In some other cases, the ‘composition by analogy’ of Villa Adriana suggested to work by abstraction, starting from some reference architectures of ancient Roman culture. This is the case, first of all, of the *Domus Agricola* that follows the Settefinestre Villa plan in Orbetello (Ill. 5), chosen as reference for its articulation in enclosures that host, alternatively, the building structures of the house and its uncovered areas for agricultural activity, built in relation to the shape of the ground. Similar reasoning, in this case at urban scale, guided the project of the hotel area for which it was decided to build a piece of urban fabric based on the reference of Pompeii (Ill. 6, Ill. 7): an idea that, from the lesson of the ancient city, again testifies the indissoluble interscalar relationship between the form of the city, the form of its elementary part – the *insula* – and the form of the house. New architectures are, thus, placed on the same axes that the study of the historical territory has revealed and where the shape of the ground suggests, taking up, also in this, the ‘lesson’ that Hadrian’s villa – extraordinary architecture of analogy *ante litteram* – offers us as still operating.

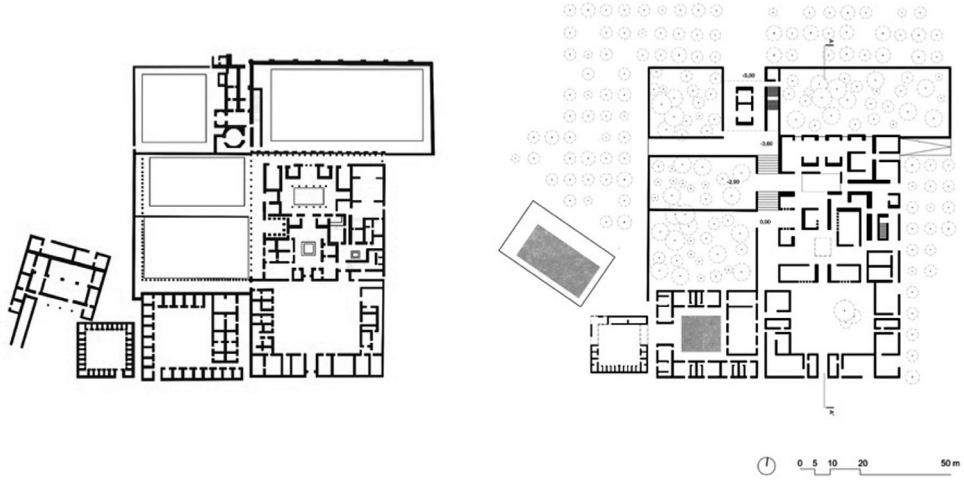
4. ANALOGY AS THEORY. BETWEEN HISTORY, REALITY AND UTOPIA. INVISIBLE CITIES INSIDE VISIBLE NAPLES

The last experience concerns an international workshop inside the Erasmus+ Programme with universities from Cracow, Bucharest and Ljubljana¹⁴ and it represented an occasion to test analogy as technique of architectural and urban composition.

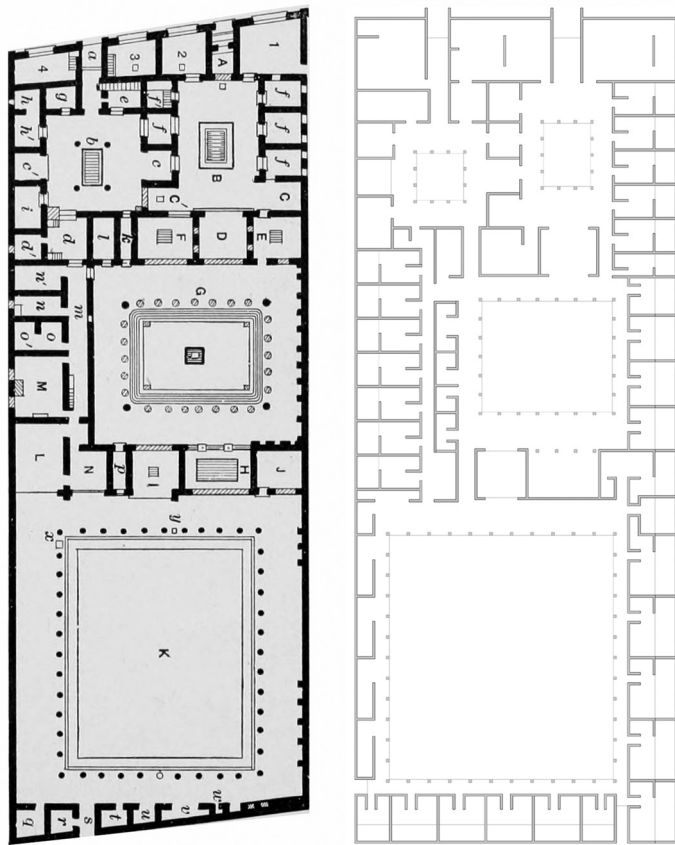
The topic of the workshop was defined starting with the awesomeness given by the reading of the book *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. The *Invisible Cities*, object of the dialogues between Marco Polo and Kublai Kahn, constitute a work of extraordinary value for the capability to evoke, through a description, spaces and places but also, as Calvino himself stated, a set of reflections on the role of modern megacities. If Calvino in some ways criticises the current state of the cities in their recent developments, sharing the idea of Cacciari¹⁵ that, in its dimension of post-metropolis or megalopolis, the city has lost the function for which was born – *donating places*, on the other side “his” cities are still characterized by their own identity and perhaps the topic is how to develop new critical tools for reading a complexity unknown in the past in order to discover that all the 55 invisible cities visited by Marco Polo are co-present, sometimes juxtaposed, sometimes even superimposed, in the contemporary city. In *Invisible Cities*, Kublai Khan asks Marco Polo why he never speaks of his city, Venice.

¹⁴ The Erasmus Blended Intensive Programme “BIP Calvino. Six Memos and Invisible Cities” was promoted in 2024 by University Federico II of Naples (prof. Federica Visconti – Scientific Coordinator, and prof. Renato Capozzi with PhD Claudia Angarano and Oreste Lubrano) with Cracow University of Technology (prof. Tomasz Kozłowski, prof. Anna Mielnik, prof. Marek Początko), University “Ion Mincu” of Bucharest (prof. Beatrice Joger and prof. Oana Diaconescu) and University of Ljubljana (prof. Paul O. Robinson).

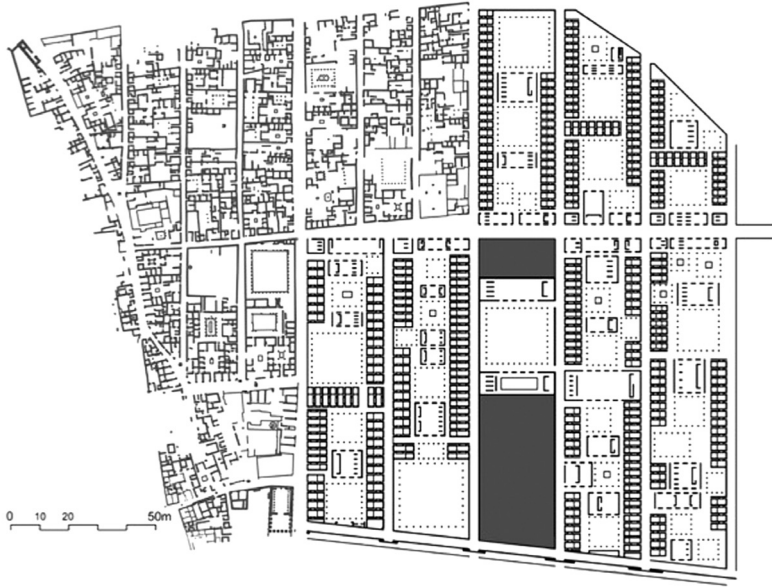
¹⁵ M. Cacciari, *La città*, Pazzini, Villa Verucchio 2004.



III. 5. Settefinestre Villa and the *Domus Agricola* in their analogical relationship, drawing of Civitas Hadrianea's authors.



III. 6. Exercise of analogy for the hotels from *Casa del Fauno* in Pompei, drawing of R. Capozzi.



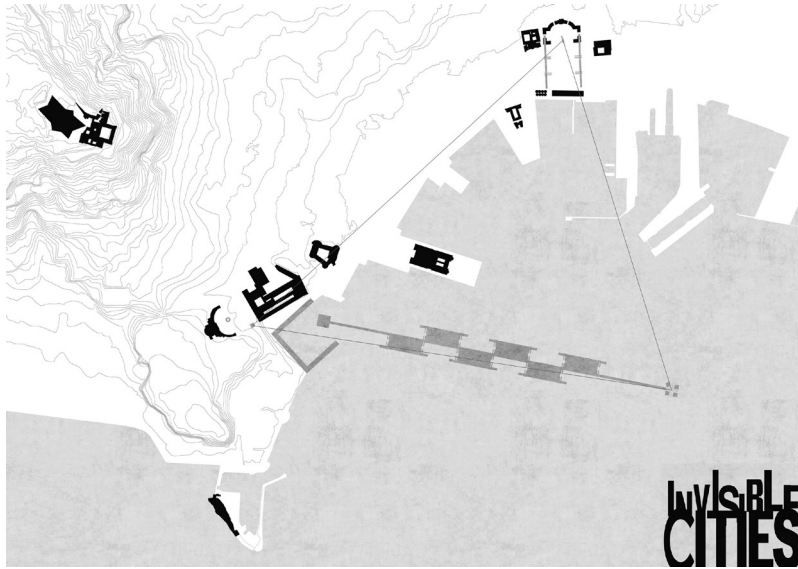
Ill. 7. Analogical collage. The Hotels on the map of Pompeii, drawing of Civitas Hadrianea's authors.

But Marco Polo answers that every time he describes a city, he is saying something of Venice because “[...] to distinguish the quality of the others [cities] I must start with a first one that remain implicit. For me is Venice.”¹⁶

For us is Naples¹⁷ that – as many other stratified cities and with its millenary history – was the object of a work aiming to describe this special feature: many cities within a city, in time and space. The idea of manifold “things” residing within the boundaries of a singular, nonetheless complex, thing alludes to diversified architectural signs, constructs and forms. In this sense the book *Invisible Cities* can be intended as a deep dive into the forms of analogy and also the workshop was this. Four Calvino's cities – Pyrrha, Andria, Zenobia and Fedora – were selected because they contain accurate descriptions of architectures that connote them: a tower, a well, a suspended street, pile works, a metal framework inhabited by globes. These architectural objects have been designed, not only as images but also in their typological structures recalling other similar architectures of other times and places. (Ill. 8). Then, they were sited in appropriate places selected on the map of Naples in order to define an analogous city. The disappeared Bourbon Arsenal reappears between the sea and the Royal Palace and the San Vincenzo pier becomes a suspended structure with its own thickness between towers at the ends. In Piazza del Plebiscito a well connects the city of surface with the underground city. In Piazza Mercato an unprecedented relationship with the sea is built through suspended streets that extend the exedra and a tectonic tower that contains globes with a wall structure for the vertical connections signs the centre. The well, the Mercato's tower and the castle of towers in the sea on the extension of the pier are arranged in reciprocal tension according to a precise triangulation.

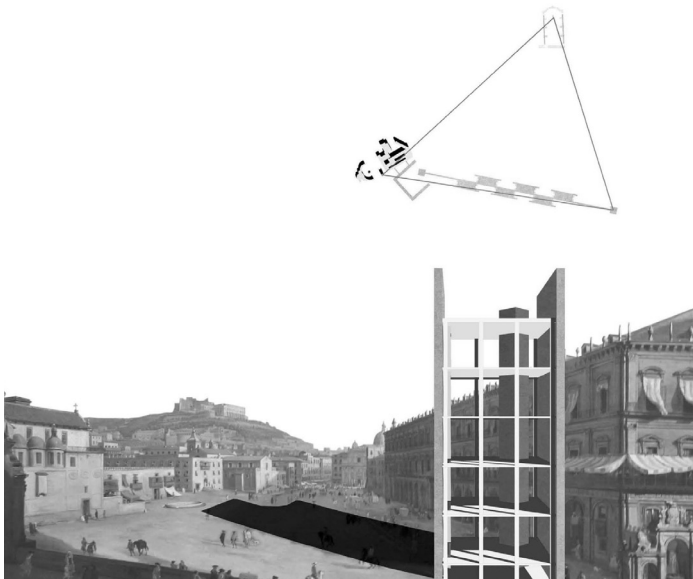
¹⁶ I. Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, Einaudi, Torino 1972, p. 40.

¹⁷ The project was elaborated by the Design team of DiARC _Department of Architecture of University Federico II of Naples: R. Capozzi, F. Visconti (team leaders), C. Angarano, O. Lubrano with students M.F. Bucciero, C. Cretella, A. De Simone, N. Salamone.



Ill. 8. Architectural structures from Calvino's book on the map of Naples, drawing of workshop's team.

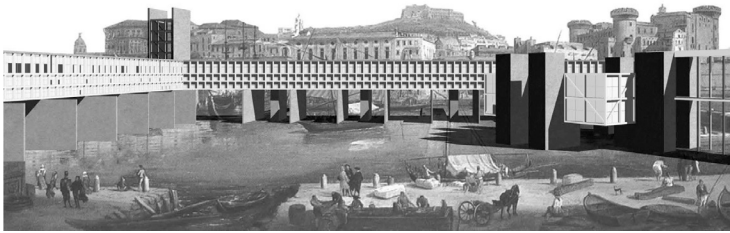
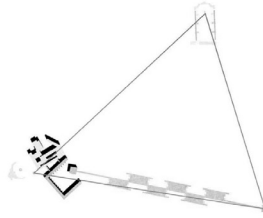
A last series of drawings has been produced (Ill. 9, Ill. 10, Ill. 11, Ill. 12): collages on historical view of the significant places of the city selected for the project in order to affirm, from the theoretical point of view, that analogy is the device able to establish the necessary “[...] dialogue between an idea of past and future [in order to] build a fragment of truth in the present.”¹⁸



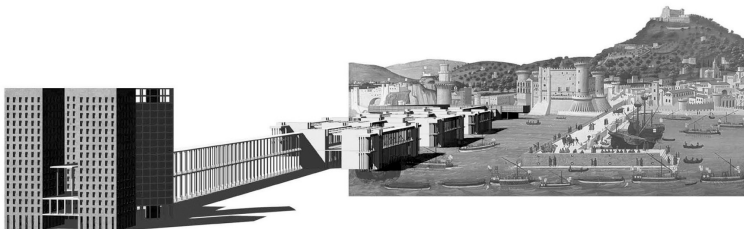
Ill. 9. Calvino's Pyrrha on *Veduta di Napoli con Largo di Palazzo* (today piazza del Plebiscito) by Caspar van Wittel (ca. 1700, before 1736), drawing of workshop's team.

¹⁸ V. Gregotti, *Il mestiere dell'architetto*, Interlinea, Novara 2019, back cover.

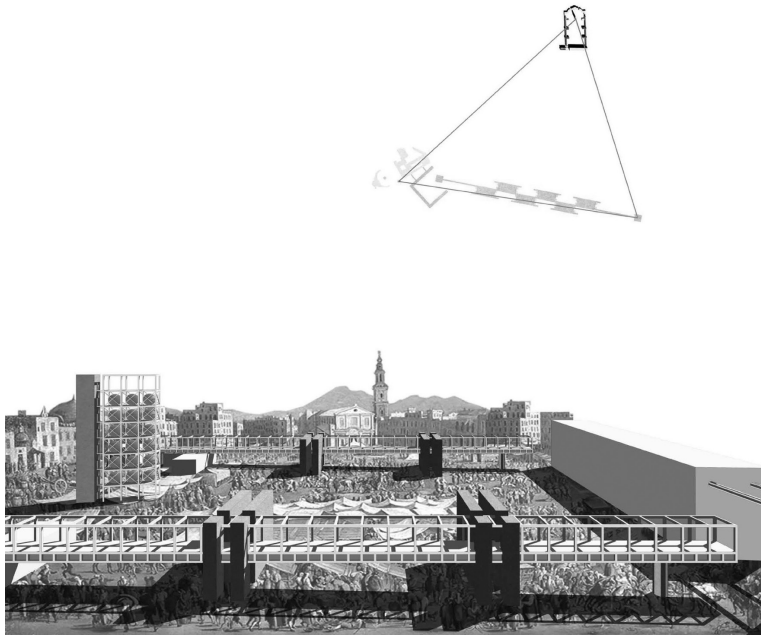
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Ill. 10. Calvino's Andria in *La Drasena* (today piazza del Municipio) by Caspar van Wittel (ca. 1700–1718), drawing of workshop's team.



Ill. 11. Calvino's Zenobia on Tavola Strozzi (1470), drawing of workshop's team.



III. 12. Calvino's Fedora on *La Rivolta di Masaniello* (today piazza Mercato) by Micco Spadaro (post 1647–1660), drawing of workshop's team.

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