



Book of Proceedings



7th ISUFitaly International Conference | Naples, 19-21 February 2026

CITY RENEWAL AND URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The morphological values of city traces



ISUFItaly
International Seminar on Urban Form
Italian Network

7th ISUFItaly International Conference | Naples, 19-21 February 2026



**CITY RENEWAL AND
URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY**
The morphological values of city traces



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edited by

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Naples and 7th ISUFItaly International Conference

ISUF Italy decided to hold its 7th International Conference in Naples, hosted by the Department of Architecture at the University of Naples "Federico II". The topic, *City Renewal and Urban Archaeology. The Morphological Value of City Traces*, has prompted a wide-ranging reflection on the role that traces – material but perhaps also immaterial – accumulated over time can play in the processes of interpretation, conservation and transformation of the contemporary city, understood as a space in which the various layers of history coexist and overlap.

The choice of this topic originates from the awareness that the challenges posed by our times – in which cities and territories are undergoing rapid and profound transformations driven by environmental, economic and social dynamics that are often indifferent to the values of the urban form – cannot be addressed exclusively through approaches focused on technological innovation, functional efficiency and the speed of intervention processes. Rather, they require a renewed focus on the historical and morphological complexity of urban and territorial contexts, reaffirming the value of a tradition of study to which Italian research has made theoretical and methodological contributions of the highest importance throughout the 20th century, and which regards the city as a complex historical organism, whose significance also lies in the capacity of its forms to preserve, transmit and reinterpret over time the traces of the transformations that have shaped its structure.

In this sense, discussing the *Morphological Value of City Traces* has meant not only addressing material remains of the past to be protected for their 'documentary' value, but interpreting such evidences as active elements in the construction of urban forms, whose 'monumental' value – that is, their formal value – should often be revealed through the project. The notion of 'trace' has proved, in the richness and variety of the contributions presented, to be a particularly fruitful interpretative category within the different theoretical and methodological approaches that characterise the field of urban morphology studies today. Road alignments that survive functional changes, land divisions that continue to guide the organisation of the built environment, typological continuities, settlement systems that maintain recognisable structural relationships with geographical forms, spatial configurations and relationships between the built environment and open space that

help define the identity of places were just some of the themes addressed during the conference.

The relationship between *City Renewal and Urban Archaeology* played a central role in the debate that unfolded over the three days of the conference. Whilst, on the one hand, the reference to urban archaeology was not interpreted exclusively in a disciplinary sense but was adopted as a thinking paradigm capable of guiding a stratigraphic reading of the city – in which the various temporalities that accompanied its formation emerge as essential components of its current structure – on the other hand, particular attention was devoted to the role of architectural and urban design in engaging with such legacies.

As the archaeologist Andreina Ricci observed, when fragments of the past emerge within the contemporary city, they often produce a sort of 'wound', as their morphological structure conflicts with the systems of order of the city on the surface. Furthermore, it is not uncommon that these remains do not appear because they are 'sought' through excavation, but resurface suddenly during infrastructure works, natural disasters or urban regeneration processes. In this sense, urban archaeology poses a question to the project that is as complex as it is urgent, concerning the composition of spatial systems belonging to different temporalities that are sometimes mutually in conflict. Precisely from this perspective, one of the most original aspects to emerge from the conference concerns the role attributed to the architectural project as a tool for knowledge and interpretation, as well as for the transformation, of the stratified city. Far from being regarded as a subsequent and separate phase from morphological and archaeological analysis, design was frequently presented in the papers as a critical tool capable of revealing latent relationships, recognising hidden continuities and constructing new forms of dialogue between different temporalities. Urban traces, in fact, never present themselves as mere objective data to be recorded or preserved but require an interpretative process that grasps their meaning within the city's overall structure. In this process, the project plays an essential role: it not only protects or enhances what remains but re-situates it within new systems of spatial relations that represent shared values. In this sense, the project does not take the form of an act of superimposition upon the existing but proves to be a practice of critical interpretation of duration, capable of transforming urban memory into an active resource for the construction of the city of the future.

The choice of Naples as the venue for the conference has lent further significance to these reflections. Few European cities, in fact, demonstrate with equal clarity the depth of the stratifications that characterise the relationship between urban form and history. From the Greek-Roman city to the processes of modern and contemporary expansion, Naples offers an emblematic example of how the traces of the past continue to operate within current urban configurations, influencing their spatial organisation, settlement dynamics and possibilities for transformation. In this sense, the city represented not only the physical venue of the

conference, but also a significant cultural reference.

The response from the academic community has been particularly significant. The proceedings bring together 182 papers, organised into the conference's three main thematic areas – *Theory, Reading and Design* – and their respective sub-sections, offering a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on urban form and the relationships between urban archaeology, morphology and design. The conference also confirmed the international dimension of the academic community associated with ISUF. Although the event was organised as part of ISUFItaly's activities, alongside the participation of scholars from numerous Italian universities, the volume brings together contributions developed within European and non-European contexts, demonstrating the network's ability to connect different research experiences, cultural traditions and geographical contexts around a shared reflection on urban form.

We entrust these Proceedings to the academic community in the hope that the reflections gathered here may help to stimulate further research into the morphological value of urban traces and their role in urban renewal processes. At a time in history when the pressure for change appears ever more intense, recognising and interpreting the forms of permanence represents not merely an exercise in knowledge, but an essential condition for building transformations capable of combining memory, identity and a responsible vision of the future.

The Conference Chairs

Giuseppe Strappa

Renato Capozzi

Federica Visconti



Urban Archaeology and Design

In recent years, the relationship between urban archaeology, urban morphology and contemporary design has returned to the center of international architectural debate. At a stage where the project mainly engages with the existing city – with its layered structures, permanences, and discontinuities – the material traces of the past no longer appear merely as testimonies to be preserved, but as active components through which the transformative possibilities of the contemporary city may be critically interpreted.

It is within this framework that the seventh ISUIItaly Conference, *City Renewal and Urban Archaeology. The Morphological Value of City Traces*, takes place, focusing on the morphological value of urban traces and on the role that archaeology and design may assume within processes of urban renewal. The proceedings collect contributions from different disciplinary, geographical, and cultural fields, united by a shared attempt to interpret the city as a complex organism shaped by permanences, fractures, superimpositions, and rewritings.

As Aldo Rossi wrote, “the city is in its history”, and its form coincides with the sedimentation of urban facts capable of traversing time and constructing permanences within transformation. From this perspective, archaeological traces are not merely residual materials belonging to concluded historical epochs, but elements capable of orienting new interpretations of urban structure, revealing deep continuities between the ancient and the contemporary city.

In this sense, the reference to urban archaeology takes on a central meaning. Not as a practice aimed at the enhancement of the individual artifact or of one historical phase prevailing over another, but as a design-oriented gaze directed toward the urban phenomenon as a whole, understood through the continuity of its transformations and stratifications. The city is thus interpreted as a processual organism, in which different temporalities coexist within a single evolutionary process, making archaeology not a separate field, but a structural component of reflection on the design of the existing city.

Many of the contributions included in the volume emphasize on the layered and processual nature of the city, on the dialectic between void and built form, between surfacing and concealment, between fragment and urban order. What emerges are readings that interpret ruins, substructures, historical infrastructures, ancient traces, and typological permanences

as matrices capable of generating new spatial configurations and new social relationships. The archaeological city is therefore understood not as a specialist *enclave* detached from urban life, but as an integral part of an inhabited and continuously re-signified environment. The archaeological issue, approached in terms of continuity rather than as the mere enhancement of the isolated fragment, may thus become an opportunity to orient directions of urban development capable of working through relationships between parts, structural permanences, and connections among different temporalities of the city, opposing logics of isolation and separation of urban materials.

Within this framework, the morphological issue takes on a central role. It is not simply a matter of recognizing the persistence of forms over time, but of understanding the processes through which such forms are transformed, reinterpreted, and reactivated. The morphological approach, recalled transversally in many of the studies collected in the volume, does not coincide with a static description of the city; rather, it constitutes an interpretative method capable of reading the relationships between settlement structure, topography, use, temporality, and transformation. Urban morphology thus becomes both a critical and a design tool: it allows latent continuities, resistant geometries, structural permanences, and evolutionary possibilities within historical and contemporary fabrics to be identified.

Research developed within the Italian typomorphological school has shown, in this regard, how the city may be interpreted as an organism in continuous transformation, within which typological processes do not constitute static elements but structures capable of adaptation, mutation, and permanence. Urban form therefore appears as the outcome of multiple and overlapping layers, in which erosion and deposition, continuity and fracture, absence and recomposition coexist within the same transformative dynamic. The contemporary city thus emerges as a complex morphological structure in which different temporalities coexist in conditions of reciprocal interference. Michel Foucault recalled how history does not proceed through linear sequences, but through "series of discontinuous depths", while Michel Serres described time as a "lacunary and sporadic" matter, composed of returns, suspensions, and accelerations. Urban traces therefore do not appear as fixed or completed elements, but as unstable materials continuously exposed to processes of transformation, reuse, and re-signification. Many of the contributions in the volume move precisely within this tension: between memory and design, permanence and mutation, continuity and discontinuity. The notion of the "trace" is continuously redefined: no longer a simple material residue, but an ordering principle, a latent figure, an invisible infrastructure, threshold, margin, urban void. In some cases, the trace guides processes of urban recomposition; in others, it acts as an element of resistance or as an opportunity to redefine the relationship between the consolidated city, landscape, and public space.

Through this plurality of positions, the proceedings convey an image of the contemporary city as an intrinsically stratified and

relational reality, in which architectural and urban design are called upon to engage not with not isolated objects, but with complex systems of permanences and transformations. Urban archaeology is thus removed both from a purely specialist dimension, confined to archaeological expertise alone, and from an exclusively technical one, to be relocated within a broader reflection on the social and spatial meaning of design.

As Vittorio Gregotti recalled, conservation without design risks becoming a form of immobilization of reality; on the contrary, design may restore an operative dimension to archaeological traces by reinserting them into the living processes of the city. What emerges is therefore an idea of design as an interpretative and processual practice, capable of operating through relationships between different times, between surfaces and subsoil conditions, between memory and contemporary use, between lost fragments and new forms of urban continuity.

In this sense, urban archaeology is not interpreted as a practice aimed at the simple conservation of the past, but as an integral part of a design reflection on the existing city, on its processes of transformation and on the continuities that can still be built between different urban temporalities and strata.

Bruna Di Palma
Francesca Coppolino
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Call and organization

City Renewal and Urban Archaeology The Morphological Value of City Traces

ISUFItaly, International Seminar on Urban Form, Italian Network, organizes its seventh Conference in Naples on 19-21 February 2026. The theme of the conference is "City Renewal and Urban Archaeology. The Morphological Value of City Traces". Following the previous ISUFItaly conferences themes, dealing mainly with the relationships between urban morphology, history and architectural design, the seventh Conference aims to pose the problem of the relationship between the emergence of urban archaeological traces and the often conspicuous morphological value that this formal legacy can potentially generate through urban design as tool to establish links between contemporary city and artefacts from the past: through the creation of large-scale urban archaeological parks or the construction of archaeological roofs; through establishing unprecedented relationship with infrastructures related to underground level different from those of the city 'in surface'.

The theme of urban continuity/discontinuity in the contemporary city and the role of urban architecture as a necessary intermediary, or condition of possibilities, between the historical city, the public space and possible congruent transformations in the contemporary age, are thus re-proposed.

The Conference Chairs
Giuseppe Strappa
Renato Capozzi
Federica Visconti

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READING

R_Reading urban form

R.1 Morphological analysis of historical fabrics

R.2 Spatial analysis of the urban form

R.3 Reading urban archaeology as a tool for the regeneration and renewal of the city

R.4 Dialectical relationship between underlying forms (*Ichnoi*) and emerging forms



Nobile rovina. *Desinunt ista, non pereunt*

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Keywords: Ruin, Survivances, Memory, Architectural theory
Conference theme: Reading urban form. Spatial analysis of the urban form

Abstract. Three paths to ruin. Before being a work, or great work, it is primarily a remnant: cessation of function, uselessness, achieved gratuitousness. Must we infer its appeal is an attempt to redeem architecture from the yoke of the immense mechanism of utility holding under its iron heel every interstice of the capitalist Großstadt? An extreme, extraordinarily naive strategy to escape the hinges of the ratio of late modernity with its efficiency, functionality, and profit. Or is it a link to Bataille's grande tradition, that long Western season founded on the underground, cohesive unity of the diverse expressions composing life's colorful mosaic? Or an unexpected, clever move to anticipate-annul the work of time, confirming nihil sub sole novum: quid est quod est? ipsum quod fuit. Finally, spoliation – loss faced with a diametrical reversal of meaning, claiming a new condition, an unprecedented integrity born of liberation and denuding: «a work of art makes manifest the wholeness of the Form». If ruin is the result of the formless, the non-instituted, gradually consuming the formed – the Vorstellung – here we hypothesize a stalemate, a conquered equilibrium. The object lies not in the motility of passing, but in frozen suspension. Ruins thus appear as emblemata: ancient codes lost, yet still revealing with rough evidence the rational writing that generated and ordered them (und die Toten/ knospen und blühen).

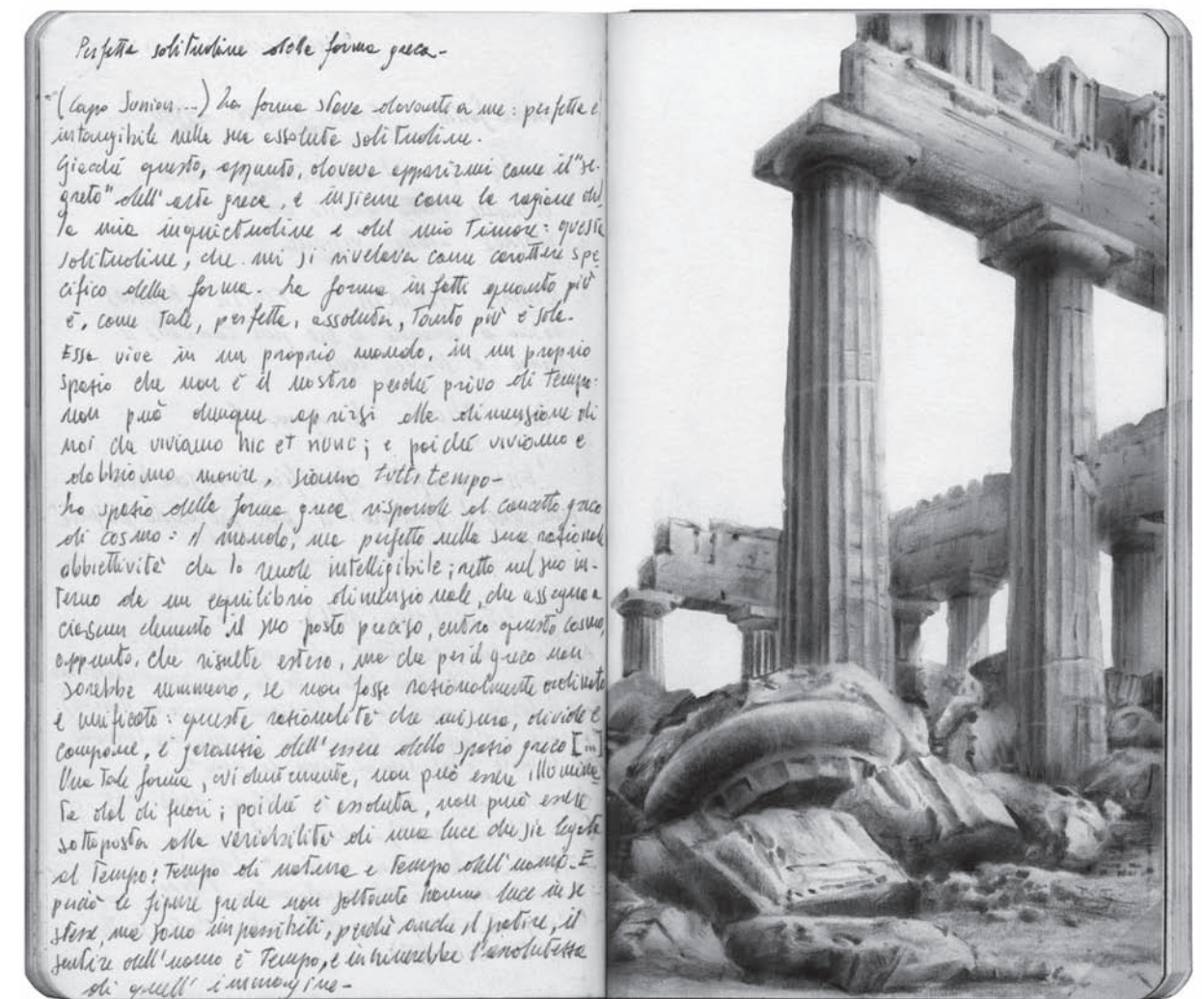


Figure 1. F. Arrigoni, *Shapes of Withering* (from the Black Notebooks).

Wir suchen überall das Unbedingte und finden immer nur Dinge: «We seek everywhere the unconditioned and find only things»; every discourse on the antique is, primarily, the discovery of a permanence, of a duration, of a resistance. Architecture encounters the ancient through the vestiges and remnants that time has accumulated and which constitute the presupposition, the *hypokeimenon* itself of the project; a fold of thought, the hollow within which the fault line of time becomes an instrument capable of uniting by separating and separating by uniting. Rendered enigmatic by too many inferences or disaggregated due to the numerous injuries suffered, every fragment of the world is a plexus hinged on oblivions and discoveries, on grammars and lexicons, on rhythms and strata, on evident phenomena and underlying narratives (*affabulazioni*), which are the materials to be put “in rhyme” and in resonance within the work. To be coherent – *co-haerentis*, that is, cohesive, connected, adherent – to the reasons and potentialities of one’s own pre-text is not a submissive inclination or an apology for the existing, but rather serves as a tactic of liberation from every equivalence and false universality; and the inextinguishable breath – *Nur hat ein jeder sein Maß* – is the end of every realist design. It is well known how, for Georg Simmel, the ruin was nothing but a «characteristic unity», a *neue Form* capable of freezing into a still image – *ein ruhendes Bild* – the universal hostility between natural forces and the creative intuition of the soul, between Nature and formative spirituality, between unendlichen *Fruchtbarkeit des Lebens and Formen* (Simmel, 1959). A dispute that, over time, inverts the direction of the vector: where the natural had been reduced to a passive resource for formalisation, now it is nature itself that shatters the internal unity of the artefact, returning the latter to immediate life, *unmittelbaren Leben*. It follows that the ruin approximates a reabsorption, a peaceful return to the original home, the «realisation of an address located in the deepest layer of existence», extinguishing itself in the womb of the «good Mother» – *eine Rückkehr zu der “guten Mutter”*. Such dynamism, such movement, is what endures latent beneath the quiet «magnificence» and the silent «decay» narrated in the *Capricci* staged by Panini, Codazzi, the Riccis, and Robert: «The essence of life is to generate from its own bosom that which guides it and dissolves it, that which opposes it and, by conquering it, is conquered; it preserves itself and rises above its own product, almost taking the path that bypasses it; and that its product opposes it, independent and judge, is precisely its original factual condition, the way in which it lives» (Simmel, 1968). The interval where the conflict between unendlichen *Fruchtbarkeit des Lebens and Formen*, between the motility of creative life and the fixity of the object produced according to a principle of morphology, is properly detectable, is the architectural construction). *Ruo, is, rui, utum, ere* = to fall, to ruin, to decay, to sink, to rush down (*ruire*), to go to ruin, to collapse, to throw down, to demolish, to precipitate [...] *Quo moriture ruis*, Virg. where are you going to precipitate [...] from *Vocabula Latini Italioque Sermonis*, Turin 1883. An appropriate postscript: ruin shall only be that which concerns the world of artefacts, the artificed world, the world of the second degree, successive, anthropic: «thus in nature a divine artificer wisdom moulds and forms from within, with the utmost ease, matter through those reasons by which the vital and motive force conjoined to it is penetrated. What is a work of art if not the mind of the artificer penetrating separate matter? What is the work of nature if not the mind of nature intrinsic to matter itself... Will you hesitate, then, to admit precise reasons in nature? Just as human art, which operates from the outside, produces according to contingent reasons, and moulds contingent forms, natural art, which generates and expresses substantial structure from the bosom of matter, operates through essential and perennial reasons» (Marsilii Ficini Florentini, 1576).

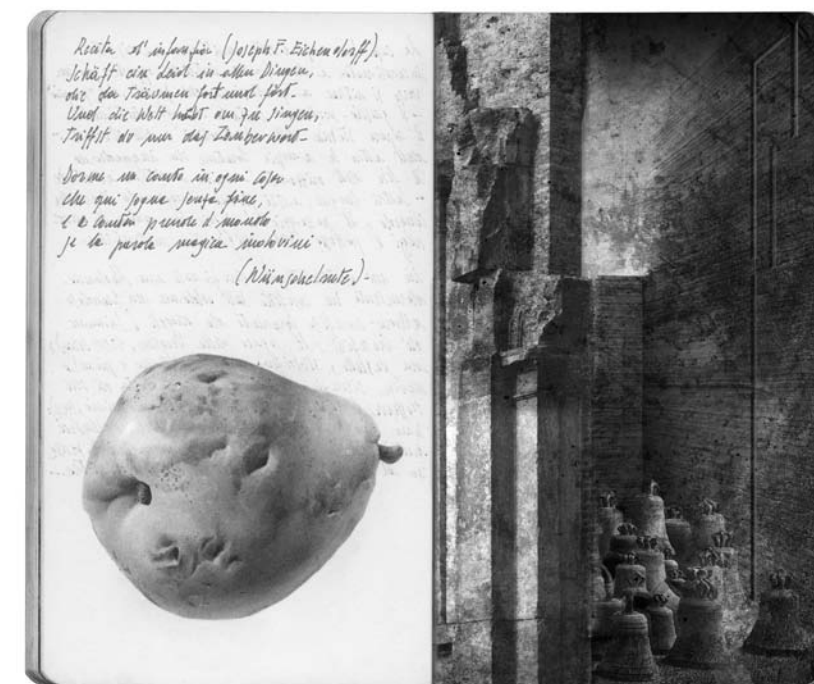


Figure 2. F. Arrigoni, *Shapes of Withering* (from the Black Notebooks).

rated in the *Capricci* staged by Panini, Codazzi, the Riccis, and Robert: «The essence of life is to generate from its own bosom that which guides it and dissolves it, that which opposes it and, by conquering it, is conquered; it preserves itself and rises above its own product, almost taking the path that bypasses it; and that its product opposes it, independent and judge, is precisely its original factual condition, the way in which it lives» (Simmel, 1968). The interval where the conflict between unendlichen *Fruchtbarkeit des Lebens and Formen*, between the motility of creative life and the fixity of the object produced according to a principle of morphology, is properly detectable, is the architectural construction). *Ruo, is, rui, utum, ere* = to fall, to ruin, to decay, to sink, to rush down (*ruire*), to go to ruin, to collapse, to throw down, to demolish, to precipitate [...] *Quo moriture ruis*, Virg. where are you going to precipitate [...] from *Vocabula Latini Italioque Sermonis*, Turin 1883. An appropriate postscript: ruin shall only be that which concerns the world of artefacts, the artificed world, the world of the second degree, successive, anthropic: «thus in nature a divine artificer wisdom moulds and forms from within, with the utmost ease, matter through those reasons by which the vital and motive force conjoined to it is penetrated. What is a work of art if not the mind of the artificer penetrating separate matter? What is the work of nature if not the mind of nature intrinsic to matter itself... Will you hesitate, then, to admit precise reasons in nature? Just as human art, which operates from the outside, produces according to contingent reasons, and moulds contingent forms, natural art, which generates and expresses substantial structure from the bosom of matter, operates through essential and perennial reasons» (Marsilii Ficini Florentini, 1576).

«Maxime avendo io concordati li dicti suoi con quelli poche di reliquie delli antichi ediftii et sculpture per l'Italia sonno rimase delle quali io stimo avere visto et considerato la maggior parte» (Della Valle, 1786): the words of Francesco di Giorgio testify how, almost three hundred years prior to the decisive Winckelmannian renewal, the harsh confrontation between past literary

sources – here the Vitruvian treatise – and contemporary empirical conditions – that factual evidence, that most singular artefact encountered – constituted the core of that fifteenth-century *archailoghia*. This discipline was concerned with maintaining a balance between theory and empiricism, between the desire to establish the «principles of our artifices», of general tone and value, and the study of the monument «struck down by time», understood as a precious deposit of technical knowledge and tectonic wisdom. It is perhaps within this framework that we can understand the warm reception accorded to the fourth Vitruvian edition, also known as the “Giocondina”, printed in Venice in 1511 by Giovanni de Tridino, 110 in-folio with 140 woodcut engravings (Tafari, 1966 and Vagnetti, Marcucci, 1978) - the *Editio Princeps* of the treatise, also known as the “Sulpiciana”, had been drafted, according to the reconstruction made by Giovanni Poleni, in 1486.

Its editor, Fra' Giocondo, beyond being a «dotto e diligente literato», can be recognised by the stigmata of the militant intellectual; that is, one who investigates «cose antique» in order to increase the toolkit – conceptual, but not only – of the «ottimo architetto» (Brenzoni, 1960). A process, therefore, that inevitably leads to resolving the erudite contribution into the manual, into the collection-handbook of solutions prepared and reproducible: a toolbox from which to draw for the fatigue and uncertainties of the daily routine. It is necessary to safeguard this fabril, artisan vocation, compressed and sometimes unacknowledged within/behind magniloquent postures, yet present in the accounts of the Roman sojourns of Brunelleschi, Alberti, Cronaca, Falconetto, Filarete, Cornaro, and Ghirlandaio. A pronunciation that induced Vasari to note how the aforementioned friar «ricorrè in quello autore [Vitruvius Ed.] infiniti errori non stati infino allora conosciuti, e questo poté fare agevolmente per essere stato pratico in tutte le dottrine» (Boase, 1979 and Vasari, 1996). Intellectual understanding, that is to say theory, and deviation-overcoming, that is praxis: a common ring, a reciprocal mirroring. The way – the method – within which the archaic/revenant has returned as living experience, tactile phenomenon, *ein Lebendiges für die Lebendigen geschrieben, ein Leben selbst* (Pater, 2010 and Goethe, 1988). Eugenio Garin has emphasised in numerous passages how the first humanists were men engaged in the domains of politics, morality, law, economics, government, and the maintenance of the *civitas/urbs* (Garin, 1951 and Garin, 2013): active life, the method of trial and error, the will to modify the existing datum, whether it presents itself as the outcome of historical condensation or whether it restores a virginal state of nature. The confrontation and investigation of the ancient were not a fifteenth-century prerogative; it is, in turn, the outcome of a filiation, of a story; but precisely when the *studia humanitatis*, hinged on philology, show the utmost care, intransigent rigour, the exact deciphering of language, it is precisely then that such “falling in love” and such recovery assume the traits of a firm critical distance, of an explicit disenchantment, sometimes of a melancholic pose streaked with irony. The continuum that had welded antiquity and the Middle Ages breaks in the consciousness of a historicity that is entirely earthly as it is irreversible: «the Renaissance myth of the classical, precisely in the act in which it defines it in its characteristics, marks the death of the ancient [...] because only the Renaissance, or rather humanistic philology, became conscious of a rupture that the Middle Ages had indeed matured, bringing it to exasperation» (Garin, 1951).

The encounter between archaeology and architecture occurs in two distinct semantic realms. The first recognizes a scientific discipline that has gained its own autonomy and requires specific training. Giorgio Rocco notes the unique challenges for architects in this field: the systematic comparison with mutilated fragments, interventions often reduced to foundations, documentation via indirect clues, and cognitive frameworks highly dependent on field evidence (Rocco,



Figure 3. F. Arrigoni, *Shapes of Withering* (from the Black Notebooks).

2002). Precedents for this path – institutions that forged the Janus-faced “architect-archaeologist” working alongside humanities scholars – include the Bauakademie in Berlin (1799), the Italian Archaeological School of Athens (1909), and the Historical-Archaeological Institute of Rhodes (1927). However, a broader horizon exists beyond the basic necessities of topographic restitution and survey. Confronting the surviving object, deprived of its original ties, illuminates a shared trait in twentieth-century poetics: the predilection to evaluate architectural composition as a work on the fragment, facilitating a gradual passage from the order of metaphor to the order of metonymy (Bianchi Bandinelli, 1976 and Bergdoll, Oechslin, 2006). “Ruinism” is an underground stream flowing through architecture and diverse late twentieth-century arts, from Arte Povera to Land Art. Composition becomes an assemblage of pieces, sometimes brutally juxtaposed. The loss of the initial scheme functions as a powerful evocative machine, producing dreamlike leaps. The ruin’s continuous undoing reflects a stubborn memory and an absence that spurs inevitable re-composition. There is no definitive reconciliation of the gap stretched between inherited constraints and the subtle resignification that every new project brings: «*Il faut un antécédent à tout; rien, en aucun genre, ne vient de rien*» (Quatremère de Quincy, 1832). On the front of praxis, contemporary archaeological research converges with design culture around the notion of context, or habitat. The Italian modern movement posited that architecture must root itself deeply in tradition to qualify itself. The true challenge lies in integrating into the connective environments between monuments – be they mountains, coasts, or urban spaces of any era (Rogers, 1957). Distancing from *Kunstarchäologie* meant a progressive transit from studying singular, high-aesthetic finds to caring for diffuse, anonymous legacies. Ruins are merely “icebergs” whose bases rest on a man-shaped subsoil populated by unseen documentary masses. As Valéry suggested, individual monuments are the foam of things, but it is the vast sea of archaeological deposits that truly attracts (Carandini, 2008). This dialectical exchange between monument, historical context, and natural setting is crucial for operations that reco-

gnize themselves as heirs of «*une civilisation du lieu assumé*» (Bonnefoy, 2012). A strong environmental bond distinguishes the ruin from the errant piece, making isolationist conservation inadequate (Fancelli, 2006). Geology, flora, artefacts, and symbolic weavings are tesserae of a vaster mosaic coinciding with the landscape. This rich “archaeological agrarian terrain” was well understood by 18th-century voyageurs in the Italian Mezzogiorno, who observed how water, fire, art, and nature disputed the earth «without changing anything in it but the manner of being beautiful» (Denon, cited in Agostini, 2009). A key exemplar of this intellectual and projectual attitude is the September 1980 planning workshop in Gibellina, organized after the Belice valley earthquake. Participants, including Pierluigi Nicolin, Álvaro Siza, and Francesco Venezia, sought refoundation criteria alternative to the official bureaucratic ideologies governing the reconstruction (Nicolin, 1983 and Venezia, 1990). Official methods treated the disrupted territory as a *tabula rasa*, inviting oblivion by ignoring its history and geography (Nicolin, 1983). Venezia’s group proposed a counter-project for the Segesta monumental complex. A few rapid sketches documented a vast rethinking of the monument’s access node, prioritizing connections among the site’s mountains, peasant rests, motorway viaducts, and the ancient theatre. Their translating artefact was a hidden work: a staircase-well dug into the precipice over the torrent. Subtracted from vision, this apparatus inhabited the in-between – the gap between stone and water, sacred enclosure and profane life, archaic and contemporary. It was an architecture of echoes, shadows, and deposited fragments, acting as the reverse of the sunlit journey awaiting the traveler toward the immobile geometry of the cavea. Compared with ordinary production, these proposals transcend emergency anxiety, founding transformative action on latent territorial vocations. As Guicciardini warned, it is a great error to speak of worldly things “indistinctly and absolutely”, because circumstances require discretion and distinction (Guicciardini, 1965). Experimental application is not the sole product of a finished knowledge that anticipates it. Rather, it is the interval where thought intersects with concrete action, illuminating its ends beyond rigid abstraction. In this, with Luciano Anceschi, we affirm that «every particular case is a nexus charged with theoretical force» (Anceschi, 1989).

The shapes, the spoils of a past life. The point of irradiation and central theme is this dual condition: the recognition of life and, at the same time, its urgent, inexhaustible flowing, spreading, dissipating: the wake, the procession of vicissitudes and their attributes; ruin is the exoskeleton of an animal that is no longer in the vicinity, the plaster that has absorbed the legacies of the limb of which it was the rigid custody. This is the specific presence, *bhūta*, that haunts and impregnates the places of abandonment with itself – «der Schein der hier aufgehoben wird, ist der, das früheste sei im Jetzt. In Wahrheit: das Jetzt das innerste Bild des Gewesenen» (Benjamin, 1999). In 1756, the first edition of *Le Antichità Romane* by Giambattista Piranesi, a Venetian architect, was published, divided into four tomes [...] in folio for the booksellers Bouchard and Gravier (Piranesi, 1756 and Ficacci, 2000). The work, a monumental archive of about 250 prints, is the condensation of the studies and professional apprenticeship undertaken by the author since his arrival in Rome in the retinue of the ambassador of the Serenissima, Francesco Venier. Planimetrics, sections, elevations, broad and detailed views, accurate notations: the techniques of graphic restitution are aimed at the understanding, empirical and factual, of «the proud Roman greatness» and a sumptuous manifesto where art is intimately *recta ratio factibilium*, know-how, knowing how to build – many years later, in the repertoire of German-language art criticism, we could identify the opposing interplay of *Kunst-wollen* and *Kunst-können*. Certainly, it is an exercise of admiration and at stake, here, is the will to demonstrate a supremacy, a primacy, a technical-rational dominion over other cultural universes, affirming the opus architectonicum as



Figure 4. F. Arrigoni, *Shapes of Withering* (from the Black Notebooks).

a generalised strategy of artificialisation, well beyond the exercise on the single artefact – *Della magnificenza ed architettura de’ Romani*, Rome 1761: «i Romani per altro ebbero massimamente a cuore ciò ch’eglino [the Greeks Ed.] tralasciaron di fare, cioè lastricare le vie, condottare le acque, e far le cloache sotto terra per isgorgar nel Tevere le immondizie della Città»; yet if compared with each other, the Piranesian collections are as if traversed by a shock that changes their register according to the individual plate: analytical and evocative, controlled and sentimental, objective and nostalgic, monumental and ironic. Indulging the vocation proper to every specific mode of representation, the perfect *tableaux* of orthogonal projections unfold, where the solid staticity of the classic is exposed with the precision of a treatise: *Pianta del Tempio della Fortuna Virile, Dimostrazione in grande delle parti del Tempio della fortuna Virile, Dimostrazione in grande della modinatura della cornice [...] del Portico d’Ottavia, Dimostrazione in grande di alcune delle parti del prim’ordine del Serraglio delle Fiere*. A firmness that is lost when the single sample investigated and caught in its phenomenal condition, part of the city or the contemporary scenery – *Vedute di Roma*, probably from 1748. The engraved view is the occasion for a strong expressive accentuation of the image, obtained through multiple devices such as a partial fidelity in scale relationships, the «scene viewed by angle» (Galli Bibiena, 1989) or from unusual perspective foreshortenings, a portentous tonal contrast – obtained by etching and stroke – the calibrated combination of very deep blacks and bright highlights. Piranesi vestiges faithful to the phenomenal fact (Focillon, 1926), to the «parlanti ruine», he never betrays his adherence to the new science, the memory of the antiquity is archaeology as urgency and care of the sensible given reality, graspable only in excavation and in the patient, difficult measure: Winckelmann’s exhortation, «go and look», certainly does not concern the Venetian; and it is precisely through this adherence to the repeatedly observed sample that the corruption of the rational plane on which rests every model that cannot suffer scratching is revealed. The city is an inextricable mixture of continuity and loss, of transmission and lacuna, of

duration and degeneration: the realm of permutation, «une pépinière de formes – ou plutôt une pépinière de formations au sens géologique, biologique, morphologique, sinon psychanalytique du terme – qui nous indiquent qu'un problème de temps est à l'œuvre» (Didi-Huberman, 2002). A multiplicity and a variety not reducible to one, difficult to grasp in the syntheses and frigid schemes of the mind and free from every control and prediction. Some examples: View of the remains of the Forum of Nerva, View of the Remnant of the Mausoleum of St. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, Of the Castello of the Acqua Giulia, Ruins of the Temple of the Castors, View of the Atrium of the Portico of Octavia, View of the Temple of Jupiter Tonans, View of the Temple of Bacchus, today Church of S. Urbano. The free weaving of the burin records with minute attention every branch, every root, every movement of earth that undermine the integrity and coherence of the original arte-fact and yet the visions show, more than the return to a virginal state of nature, the promiscuity, the multiple temporality, that the context, the great theatre of the city, has accumulated over the seasons. Woods, roofs, ropes, hanging clothes, new masonry, accretions (*superfetazioni*): Rome grows and decays, rises and collapses, and petrification has revealed itself as the extreme illusion of the ancient artifex. And in any case, this slow dying is not consigned to nothingness as much as to an indeterminate modification, to a making of itself upon itself by means of the most heteroclitic contributions and supports; without remorse or astonishment ancient uses are lost, the noble becomes daily, the illustrious falls back into the anonymous: «vedendo io che gli avanzi delle vecchie fabbriche in Roma, sparsi in gran parte per gli orti ed altri luoghi coltivati, vengono a diminuirsi di giorno in giorno o per l'ingiuria de' tempi, o per l'avarizia de' possessori che con barbara licenza gli vanno clandestinamente atterrando, per venderne i frantumi all'uso degli edifizii moderni; mi sono avvisato di confermarli col mezzo delle stampe» (Piranesi, 1756 and Catelli Isola et al., 1963). The engraving stylus and paper, anticipating by a century the prophecies and hierarchies of Victor Hugo, are perceived as the last refuge: the large sheet as the most certain and firm of conceivable dwellings.

The seduction of the *nobilissima ruina* for the movements of the imagination resides in its ontological duplicity. The rubble-eikon marks, is proof of, the inevitability of becoming and the sinking of everything into nothingness - «Pare che l'essere delle cose abbia per suo proprio ed unico obbiettivo il morire...» (Leopardi, 1982) - and, simultaneously, highlights the obtuse tenacity of the exalted masses, becoming themselves the active support, the rough core on which to weave the thread of a remembrance, of an emotional and conceptual recovery of what slides, of what is extinguishing itself. A double step between impermanence and constancy, between absence and presence, a continuous flowing between the respective perimeters and separations that grasps the present as stratification, coalescence of multiple temporalities: «Regarde après, comme de jour en jour / Rome, fouillant son antique séjour, / Se rebâtit de tant d'œuvres divines: / Tu jugeras que le démon romain / S'efforce encor d'une fatale main / Ressusciter ces poudreuses ruines» (du Bellay, 1558). A temporal spectrum by no means ordered or homogeneously distributed if to ruinism as the inexorable grip of Nature – practically a luxury of landscape (James, 1909) – we juxtapose the effects caused by the violent precipitation of events: war, attack, accident, earthquake, eruption, landslide, flood, that is, the so-called post-traumatic ruins. The change of *Stimmung* and the change of the intellectual coordinates of reference are entirely explicit; the late Romantic elegy hinged on the union and correspondences of finite and infinite, transient and eternal, evaporates leaving behind a terrain charged with tensions, a plane traversed by the conflicts and contradictions of the recent past. It is this acceleration, this sudden and unexpected decaying that determines the multiplying of intentions and projectualities that go to unfold. The shortening of the temporal interval, the emotional proximity to the

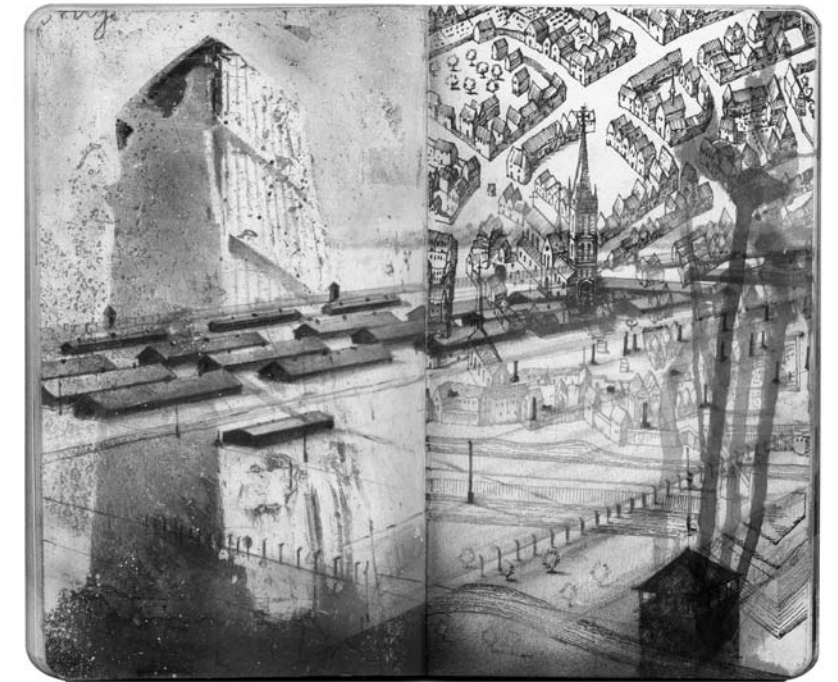


Figure 5. F. Arrigoni, *Shapes of Withering* (from the Black Notebooks).

causes of the catastrophe increases the will for re-establishment, for immediate compensation for the injuries suffered, betraying the need for an a-historical cancellation – the anaesthetising pharmacopoeia of oblivion. A removal that finds implementation through a dual modality. A first, brutal one, consisting in zeroing, in the demolition of any legacy, remnant, slag. One recalls in this regard the building carcasses of German cities luckily escaped from the catastrophic strategy of Anglo-Saxon “area bombing” (or also known as “de-housing”) and in the generality of cases drastically demolished in the immediate post-war period to free the ground for future constructions – a physical as much as psychological clearance, ablations that are the prolegomena to a violent tear from a recent past made unsustainable (Sebald, 2003). A second, in specular oppositional mimesis, which passes through the ideology of the remake *à l'identique* which, in the face of sporadic cases, reveals itself as an operation in fact non-realizable if not at the price of hasty approximations or more calculated amputations – the cuts and removals on the soma of architecture, and of the city, in order to find and re-establish the conditions of a longed-for originality, lost or compromised over time by definitive gaps and repeated cluttering (even if never confessed, the one described reveals itself to be a retrospective thought analogous to that of classical archaeology engaged in revealing the traits of a wounded golden age, a «powerful art almost divine [capable] of making revive the distinguished things that were alive for the living, but which lay buried and dead for a long time due to the reiterated injuries of the semi-living; and of bringing them back from Orcus to the light to make them live again among living men» (Cyriac of Ancona, 1742 and Wilton-Ely, 1978). A fault line between these positions allows understanding the “new” as a graft (Derrida, 1987) on the existing, as an action that entails an overall re-organisation of the artefact, avoiding the immediate reference to its condition of fragment, that is to say of “piece”: the legacy of an explosion-dissolution of a whole that, although phantasmatic, relics as an ideal-typical model, isolated in the aura of an unscrutable insularity. Graft versus collage.

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