

Leonardo Ricci's Palace of Justice in Florence. A Desolate Fragment of an Urban Ideal (1987-1994)

Leonardo Ricci, Palace of Justice, Novoli, Florence, Giovanni Michelucci

/Abstract

The paper traces the political and design events that led the city of Florence and FIAT to involve numerous architects in 1985 for the construction of a new district on the area owned by the car manufacturer. In addition to various office and commercial buildings, the city's Palace of Justice would also be built here. Coordinated by Lawrence Halprin and Bruno Zevi, the architects - Leonardo Ricci, Ralph Erskine, Roberto Gabetti and Aimaro Isola, Luigi Pellegrin, Aldo Loris Rossi, Richard Rogers, Walter Di Salvo, Iginio Cappai and Pietro Mainardis, Gunnar Birkerts and Piero Paoli - drew up an urban plan for the area during three workshops (1987-1988). Leonardo Ricci (initially accompanied by Giovanni Michelucci) is responsible for the design of the Palace of Justice, which will be the only building constructed in the district. Using unpublished documentation, the paper focuses on the purely political reasons why the neighbourhood could not be realised, leaving Ricci's building as a desolate fragment of an urban ideal.

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In Genoa, there are the *Lavatrici* (designed by Aldo Luigi Rizzo, 1980) and the *Biscione* (*Quartiere INA-Casa di Forte Quezzi*, designed by Luigi Daneri, 1956); in Bologna, there is the *Virgolone* (in the Pilaastro neighbourhood suburb, 1975); in Turin, there is the *Fetta di Polenta*¹ (*Scaccabarozzi House*, by Alessandro Antonelli, 1840). The list may go on and on. There are some nicknames, which are not always affectionate, given by citizens to some of the buildings of their cities, which are fitting to the point of becoming their actual names, despite any institutional attempt to erase them. In Florence, there is *Gotham City* – that is, the Palace of Justice designed by Leonardo Ricci, and built after his death between 1999 and 2012, thanks to the collaboration of his wife Mariagrazia Dallerba and his son, Andrea Ricci.

In order to understand the origins of this particular building, which stands out from the plain of the Tuscan regional capital, it is necessary to retrace the political and urban events which led to the creation of the building on that site, and in that shape. The Palace of Justice is located in Novoli, in a northwest area of Florence's old town, which – after Leon Krier's urban plan and its following variations² – to this day, is still missing its author. Yet, the area has attractions that draw citizens from other areas of Florence – suffice to say that many university buildings can be found here – while, until the early 1990s, this was a still very peripheral area, with a strong industrial character and defined by low-quality constructions. This was due to the allotments of the 1960s and to a wide plot of land which belonged to Fiat (700 meters by about 400 meters), where they built a factory between 1938 and 1939.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Novoli was the hub of many urban plans which considered the expansion of Florence towards Prato and Pistoia; hence, towards the northeast. The urban planning councilor of the city of Florence from 1961 to 1965, Edoardo Detti, played a leading role in these proposals: at first, in 1951, with an outline sketch that never turned into an urban plan³; later on, in 1962, by drafting a town planning scheme, which was characterized by a long interchange that should have connected the eastern area of Florence to the western one, linking Fortezza da Basso with a new business area, called "the Harbour", to Castello, to the north-west of Novoli⁴. This area had already been included in the previous general town development plan of 1958, drawn up by Giovanni Michelucci, which consisted in grouping a series of tertiary functions, with the aim of decentralizing some of these from Florence urban nucleus, and of creating a point of convergence between Florence and its western hinterland. Later on, because of several objections, Detti's plan faced many difficulties

1 Respectively: 'washing machines', 'big snake', 'big comma' and 'polenta slice'.

2 Comune di Firenze, Assessorato all'urbanistica, *Piano guida per il recupero urbano di Novoli* (Firenze: Comune di Firenze, 1994); "Novoli. La nuova architettura italiana a Firenze," annexed to *Casabella*, no. 703 (2002): 3-13.

3 Detti worked on this urban planning study together with Lando Bartoli, Sirio Pastorini, Giuseppe Sagrestani e Leonardo Savioli. See Leonardo Savioli, "Il nuovo piano regolatore," *Urbanistica*, no. 12 (1953): 81-96; Edoardo Detti, "Dilemma del futuro di Firenze," *Critica d'Arte*, no. 2 (1954): 161-77; Mariella Zoppi, *Firenze e l'urbanistica: la ricerca del piano* (Roma: Edizioni delle autonomie, 1982), 29-37.

4 Federico Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2014), 62-84. About the 1958 PRG, see also: Augusto Boggiano, Riccardo Foresi, Paolo Sica, and Mariella Zoppi, *Firenze: la questione urbanistica. Scritti e contributi 1945-1975* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1982), 216-255.

before it was approved (only in 1966) by the Ministry and, actually, it has never been put into practice⁵. However, a common thread followed up on the long-wished-for east-west interchange, the keystone of that plan, which links many of Florence urban enterprises of the 1960s and 1970s that were born from different political colors: first, the attempt to draw up a final inter-municipal Florentine plan (1971-1978)⁶ —an idea which was already present in Detti's plan—, and, later on, the National Competition for the Business Area (1976), just north of Novoli⁷. Neither of the proposals was successful.

It was also the wish to act on the guidelines of the 1962 general town development plan which, in the early 1980s, pushed the city hall to contact Fiat with the purpose of proposing that they used a part of their thirty-two hectares in Novoli to build the Palace of Justice⁸. Florence did not have one, and for some years the various town councils had been looking for an area on which to construct a building that could gather together all the numerous court offices of the city, which had always been located unevenly in many different buildings of the old town. The new Palace of Justice operation began in 1984, after Italian cities had been granted public funds by a financial law that was approved by the Italian government in 1981. These funds were specifically destined for the reorganization of the spaces that were necessary for justice⁹. Led by republican mayor Lando Conti, the council, made up of five parties, commissioned a feasibility study to a private company, in order to examine the funding procedures and the consequent ways in which to apply them¹⁰. The council's intention to build the Palace in Novoli was greatly welcomed by Fiat, who seized the favorable opportunity and articulated a reply in which their industrial reconversion and decentralization plans —at that same time, Fiat was interrupting the production activity in many other branches, such as the Lingotto¹¹— embraced the offer of the council and that of other property investments. Fiat would demolish their factories in Novoli to build a new one in a nearby town of the plain (Campi Bisenzio); they would sell the area destined for the Palace of Justice to the city, provided that on the remaining part of their thirty-two hectares the council would construct buildings which had the same

5 On the 1962 PRG, see: Edoardo Detti, "Il faticoso salvataggio di Firenze," *Urbanistica*, no. 39 (1963): 75-86; Zoppi, *Firenze e l'urbanistica*, 79-111; Boggiano, Foresi, Sica and Zoppi, *Firenze: la questione urbanistica*, 257-347; Raimondo Innocenti, "Il piano regolatore di Firenze 1962," in *Edoardo Detti. Architetto e urbanista 1913-1984*, ed. Caterina Lisini and Francesca Mugnai (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2013), 74-9; Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005*, 70-109.

6 Giuseppe De Luca, "Lo Schema strutturale per l'area metropolitana Firenze-Prato-Pistoia," in *La ragione del piano. Giovanni Astengo e l'urbanistica italiana*, ed. Francesco Indovina (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1991), 121-44.

7 For more details see: Francesco Bandini (ed.), *Progetti per l'area direzionale di Firenze: concorso nazionale per la progettazione planivolumetrica di un'area direzionale situata sul territorio fiorentino all'interno dell'area centrale metropolitana* (Firenze: Assessorato all'Urbanistica del Comune di Firenze, 1978).

8 From the beginning of the 1970s onwards, the debate on the area in which to locate the Palace of Justice was particularly heated. In February 1975, the area of the former slaughterhouses and the Centrale del Latte was identified, followed by the land occupied by the former San Salvi mental hospital, then Via Canova and, finally, Novoli. For specific details see: Stefano Lambardi, "Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze" (PhD diss., University of Florence, 2006), 171-173.

9 Law No 119 of 30 March 1981, Art. 18, accessed November 27, 2021, https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/_Documenti/VERSIONE-I/Attivit-i/Contabilit-e_finanza_pubblica/Archivio-d/Finanziari/1981/LF1981.pdf.

10 Archivio Storico Comunale di Firenze (ASCF), Register of council resolutions, session of 20 January 1984. Session no. 711/218. The Municipality of Florence assigns a feasibility study to the company Edilpro.

11 Francesca Castagneto, *Fiat-Lingotto a Torino: Renzo Piano* (Firenze: Alinea, 1999).

volume of their factories, and which would be destined for both private and public tertiary activities, as well as for their own sales office¹².

Recalling the concepts of Detti's general town development plan —specifically, the prevalence of tertiary activities in the western area of the city—, in order to facilitate the Fiat operation and accommodate the interests of the most important Florentine insurance company, La Fondiaria, which owned one hundred and eighty hectares in Castello (which also was an area to the west of the old town¹³), on the 26th of March 1985, the council adopted a variation of Detti's town development plan —that is, the variation of the town development plan to the north-western area for the realization of the new business area—, which would be realized through the drawing up of two detailed development plans, one for each area¹⁴. In this way, the town council and the two private titans exposed themselves to the criticism of both the citizens and politicians belonging to opposition parties, who viewed them as the 'cementers' of the city. However, the security linked to the continuation of the development line preconized by Detti minimized the impact of the complaints: no one could claim that the variation of Novoli (as well as that of Castello) was defying the 'sacred' indications of the general town development plan of 1962. It was in this way that the necessary conditions of the planning of a complete renovation of the Fiat and Novoli areas, and therefore the birth of the design for the Palace of Justice¹⁵, were achieved: from an industrial area to a region dedicated to public and private tertiary activities, to a business and residential area. In December 1984, the council appointed Bruno Zevi to supervise the detailed development plan for Novoli¹⁶. That was not the first time that Zevi had something to do with Florence: after the Second World War, thanks to his friendship with Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, the Roman critic came very close to winning the post of history of architecture at Florence University and promoted the exhibition of Frank Lloyd Wright which was held in 1951 at Palazzo Strozzi¹⁷.

In the meantime, however, the preliminary design of the new general town development plan was being defined and presented at the city hall. It was the result of the work of a group of urban planners involved with the socialist and communist environment, who had been the council's consultants since 1982 —, among whom were Detti's dear friends, Giovanni Astengo and Giuseppe

12 Mario Lupano, "Firenze: un avvenire urbatettonico dietro le spalle," *Domus*, no. 695 (1988): 4.

13 In addition to Novoli, the variant also concerns the Castello area (two hundred hectares of green agricultural land, near Peretola airport), which Fondiaria Assicurazioni plans to transform into a residential district for about 14,000 inhabitants. For specific details see: Lupano, "Firenze: un avvenire urbatettonico dietro le spalle", 4; Raimondo Innocenti, "Il piano di recupero per l'area ex Fiat di Novoli a Firenze: il contributo di Leonardo Ricci," in *La figura e l'opera di Leonardo Ricci nel centenario della sua nascita*, ed. Paolo Caggiano and Corinna Vasić Vatovec (Pisa: ETS, 2020), 82.

14 ASCF, Register of council resolutions, session of 26 March 1985.

15 Giovanni Klaus Koenig, "Per una storia del progetto Fiat a Novoli, Firenze 1989", *Zodiac*, no. 5 (1991): 193.

16 ASCF, Register of council resolutions, session no. 8341 of 14 December 1984. Collaborating with Bruno Zevi: Luca Zevi and Sara Rossi.

17 Lorenzo Mingardi, *Contro l'analfabetismo architettonico. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti nel dibattito culturale degli anni Cinquanta* (Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Ragghianti, 2020), 40-41.

Campos Venuti¹⁸—, at a time when the Italian Socialist and Communist Parties (respectively PSI and PCI) still had a say in the matters of Palazzo Vecchio. Indeed, from 1983, the progressive wing of the city government had been wiped out by the ‘moral question’: the socialist president of the province of Florence, Renato Righi, was involved in the P2 Masonic lodge scandal and, in 1982, the PCI was involved in a case of suspected corruption which regarded the construction of the Sollicciano prison¹⁹.

The preliminary design of the new general town development plan defined the idea of building a business area between Novoli and Castello as obsolete²⁰. Furthermore, it formulated particularly severe predictions for the growth of the city. The town planners working on the plan intended to fight against the land rent and the uncontrolled growth in construction of the city²¹ which, starting from 1983, were by no means the first items on the agenda of a city government with such a strong Christian-democratic character. The predictions of the plan and those of the variation conflicted in many points, especially in the matter of the dimensioning and the interventions on the areas of Fiat and Fondiaria. The tensions were temporarily smoothed out when the mayoral elections of May 1985, after a long discussion between the parties, established the formation of a new left-wing council, led by socialist mayor Massimo Bogianckino, with Stefano Bassi as town planning councilor. Believing it possible to reduce the gap between the preliminary general town development plan and its variation, and viewing the proposals brought forward by the private companies (Fiat and Fondiaria) as a vital occasion, the council decided to carry out both approval procedures at the same time²².

“We will create a masterpiece”

In order to give the Novoli plan a unitary urban configuration, as suggested by Zevi, the council and Fiat thought of an ambitious project that consisted in inviting various nationally and internationally famous architects to draw up, all together and through three workshops, the architectural and urban plan of the new area. The Council and Cesare Romiti, Fiat CEO, immediately accepted Zevi’s proposal: on the other hand, the restoration of their image would certainly have a great impact and protect the car company from the accusations which, as mentioned above, had already been made by various parties, of getting an urban plan out of nowhere. What had happened a few years back (1982) in Naples was

still often discussed in the Italian debate on architectural culture: the project for the business area of Naples, designed by Kenzo Tange, had prompted the strong criticism of the public opinion, and this was due not exclusively to the fact that it was an intervention that decidedly de-semantized the character of the city²³.

The designers who would work on Novoli had not been chosen yet but, adopting Zevi’s suggestion, Fiat, through its design society, Program, which was partly formed by architects and technicians of the city administration, appointed American landscape architect Lawrence Halprin to coordinate the activities of the workshop. Halprin had already been asked by Fiat to participate in the consultation for the restoration of Fiat Turin’s factory, the Lingotto²⁴, two years before. Halprin’s role was veritably crucial, as he did not just coordinate the design meetings but, even before choosing the architects, the city council had clearly expressed to Fiat and Zevi the necessity of the generating element of the project to be a park. This was not merely a formal choice, as it had specific political reasons. During the elections of the previous year, the Verdi (Green Party) had obtained an un hoped-for three percent of the votes and, by conquering two seats, they certainly had a stabilizing role within a council that was held together by a precarious balance and whose members had struggled before to agree on the name of the mayor and on those of the councilors. During a city council, the two Green councilors, supported by the Communists, clearly stated their wish to have a park realized in the Fiat area: “the green part of the Fiat project will have to find the immediate realization of one of its significant shares for the Novoli neighborhood”.²⁵ The city council established that eighteen of the thirty-two available hectares would be destined to a public green area.²⁶ “In order to function as a real part of the city, Novoli needs greenery above all else”²⁷, confirmed Alberto Giordano, responsible for Fiat’s institutional relations, after the administration’s *diktat*.

As a way of introducing Halprin to Florence and allowing its citizens to get acquainted with his work, Fiat and the city hall, through the direction of the omnipresent Zevi, organized the exhibition *Changing Places. I luoghi che cambiano*²⁸ at Fortezza da Basso. On this occasion, the landscape architect showed to the scientific community and the people of Florence his first studies for Novoli, which were characterized by the presence of a ‘picturesque’ park in the middle

18 The group is coordinated by architect Paolo Bettini. The members are: Marcello Berlincioni, Pierluigi Costa, Renzo Manetti, Luciano Piazza, Odoardo Reali. The general consultants are: Giovanni Astengo, Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Fernando Clemente, Paolo Maretto, Luciano Pontuale, Giuseppe Stancarelli. For specific details see: Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale*, 282.

19 Giorgio Morales, *Le scale consumate: politica e amministrazione a Firenze, 1965-1985* (Firenze: Ponte alle Grazie, 1989), 74-82; 96-99; 101-122.

20 Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale*, 282.

21 Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Pierluigi Costa, Luciano Piazza and Odoardo Reali, *Firenze. Per una urbanistica della qualità. Progetto preliminare di piano regolatore 1985* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1985), 42-43.

22 Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale*, 287-289.

23 Giuseppe Firitano and Gian Aldo Della Rocca, *Il centro direzionale di Napoli: cronistoria tecnico-amministrativa* (Padova: Cedam, 1992).

24 Innocenti, “Il piano di recupero per l’area ex Fiat di Novoli a Firenze: il contributo di Leonardo Ricci”, 83.

25 ASCF, Register of council resolutions, session of 23 September 1985. Intervention by Giovanni Bellini (PCI).

26 Lupano, “Firenze: un avvenire urbatettonico dietro le spalle”, 4.

27 Intervention by Alberto Giordano (FIAT’s Head of Institutional Relations). Silvia Del Pozzo, “Ti rifaccio Firenze”, *Panorama*, 4 October 1987, 122.

28 Italo Castore (ed.), *Lawrence Halprin, i luoghi che cambiano, Exhibition catalogue, Florence, Fortezza da Basso, 10-21 December 1986* (Torino: ECO, 1986); Lawrence Halprin, “I luoghi che cambiano,” *La Nuova Città*, no. 2 (1987): 7-11. On 10 December 1986, the Michelucci Foundation organized a debate at Palazzo dei Congressi on the theme of the recovery of the urban landscape, with particular reference to the problems of Florence’s development. Michelucci and Halprin met for the first time on this occasion. See Lawrence Halprin, Giovanni Michelucci and Bruno Zevi, “Il recupero del paesaggio urbano,” *La Nuova Città*, no. 2 (1987): 2-6.

of the Fiat area, with a stream that ran down from the north-west corner — where they had already decided that the Palace of Justice should be— and many ponds. It was, however, just a concept: Halprin was willing to rethink his studies together with the other architects who would be involved in the operation.

Starting from the summer of 1987, the Program society and Bruno Zevi had been choosing the names of the architects who would work in Novoli, and the dates of the three workshops, which would take place every three months from September 1987 to March 1988, were decided. Two names had already been agreed upon by the council more than a year before, as the architects who would work on the Palace of Justice: Leonardo Ricci and Giovanni Michelucci. Ricci was chosen because he had designed the Palace of Justice of Savona (1981), and therefore was familiar with the topic, as well as because not only he knew the area, as he had worked on Novoli during the preliminary analysis carried out to draw up Detti's Plan, but also because he had a very privileged relationship with Zevi²⁹. Michelucci was chosen because he was the '*maestro*' of modern Florentine architecture and could certainly be 'used' by the (public and private) clients as a defender of the operation. After some excellent rejections, such as Giancarlo De Carlo's, who was, by then, a veteran of 'collective' design — thanks to his experience in the school he founded, the ILAUD³⁰ — but he was reluctant to accept projects where he was not the absolute protagonist, in September 1987, the Program society sent the *lettera di incarico* (letter of appointment) to eleven architects³¹: Ricci, Michelucci (who, however, did not participate in any of the meetings), Ralph Erskine (who, after the second meeting, pulled himself out of the project), Roberto Gabetti and Aimaro Isola, Luigi Pellegrin, Aldo Loris Rossi, Richard Rogers, Walter Di Salvo, Iginio Cappai and Pietro Mainardis, Gunnar Birkerts, and, finally, Piero Paoli, who was Adalberto Libera's student and a professor of the Architecture Department at the Florence University. The participation of Florentine architects in the operation — especially of the professors of Architectural Composition of the architecture department— was useful to immediately suppress the localist jealousies of the designers, typical of a very provincial city like Florence.³² It was a homogeneous group of architects, whose attention to form was one of the fundamental points of their itinerary. Furthermore, all the architects were on great terms with Zevi, who doubtlessly was the *deus ex machina* of an operation which implied a very eloquent declaration of intent: it is through architecture, not urban planning, that a city is

29 Bruno Zevi, "Leonardo Ricci (1918-94), il migliore architetto italiano," *Architettura Cronache e Storia*, no. 470 (1994): 834-838.

30 Università IUAV di Venezia, Archivio Progetti (AP), Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086, Letter from Giancarlo De Carlo to Program and FIVI (Fiat Iniziative Valorizzazioni), 27 August 1987: "After the meeting in Turin on 30 July last, a careful examination of the materials I had been given, and an inspection in Florence to visit the area in question and the urban fabric surrounding it, I came to the conclusion that the proposed operation — in terms of design procedure, distribution of activities and above all building density— is not suited either to the character of the city or to promoting its more balanced development. I am therefore obliged to inform you that I cannot accept the assignment".

31 AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Assignment letter dated 10 September 1987 from the Program to Cappai and Mainardis to be part of the Novoli operation. Each architectural firm is paid thirty-five million to participate in the workshops.

32 Koenig, "Per una storia del progetto Fiat a Novoli, Firenze," 194.

built. In the mid-1980s, the debate on disciplinary autonomies was still intense within the architectural cultural environment. This is not the place to retrace the heated diatribes which, especially in the early 1970s, had encouraged a separation between architectural and urban design. One only needs to think of IUAV's inner controversy on the foundation of an urbanism degree course.³³ "We will create a masterpiece", Zevi declared, "which will be the result of a clash of ideas on the goals we set. And we will start a methodological revolution which will place architecture before urbanism".³⁴ Zevi's words highlight the national weight of the Florentine project: it was not an event that would be confined to the local chronicles: it found its place in a framework that held a wide appeal for all of the Italian architectural culture.

Novoli would be designed through a summation of the individual buildings which would form the urban plan. "Urbanism, in the way in which we have viewed it so far", Giovanni Klaus Koenig writes, "has proved to be the wrong cure for a harmonious growth of the modern city. Our wonderful old towns, on the other hand, have grown in a people-oriented way with no need for plans and restrictions [...]. Should the skeleton of a detailed plan come out of these workshops, it will mean that we have found the right medicine to administer to other patients as well".³⁵ It was not by chance that the architects who participated in the project never believed in a clear separation between the two disciplines, starting with Ricci: "an urban plan which is born from the city and, at the same time, generates it and highlights the architecture of the buildings".³⁶ Such a declaration of intent regarding the superiority of architectural design — that is, an urban settlement which would be the summation of individual design matrices—, contributed to the arising of significant tensions with those who, on the contrary, blindly believed in the dogmatic strength of planning, like Astengo and Campos Venuti who, at that very time, were working on the new general town development plan for Florence. Besides, we will see how urban planners undoubtedly had an extremely relevant role in the final dropping of the operation, which was almost a vindication of the superiority of the discipline. What was strongly stated by the architects who participated in the workshops —that is, the superiority of architectural design over urban planning—, fed the wish to build a kind of new old town far from the old town. The Fiat area, which had the same extension of Florence's Roman nucleus of foundation, would become a "neighborhood restored in a modern style", Ricci writes, "in order to move some of the congesting tertiary functions away from the old town and grant a dormant

33 Leonardo Ciacci, "L'insegnamento dell'urbanistica in Italia. Ricucire lo strappo e ...andare oltre," *Planum Magazine*, no. 20 (2014), last accessed November 26, 2021, <http://www.planum.net/l-insegnamento-dell-urbanistica-in-italia-ricucire-lo-strappo-e-andare-oltre>; Alessandra Marin, "Una nuova scuola per un uomo nuovo. Il corso di laurea in urbanistica e il nuovo assetto dipartimentale," in *Officina Iuav*, 1925-1980, ed. Guido Zucconi and Martina Carraro (Venezia, Marsilio: 2011), 189-205.

34 "Il gran rifiuto di Michelucci. Perché non vuole progettare il nuovo palazzo di giustizia," *Il Corriere di Firenze* (20 dicembre 1987).

35 Del Pozzo, "Ti rifaccio Firenze," 125.

36 AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Bruno Zevi, Sara Rossi and Luca Zevi, Amministrazione Comunale di Firenze. Assessorato all'Urbanistica. La prima fase di elaborazione del complesso polifunzionale di Novoli, report (1988): 15.

urban settlement those particular elements which can transform a suburb into a city".³⁷ In the 1980s, the dream of recreating the old town in the outskirts of the city was certainly not an innovation: to mention an example from the same century, we may think of the INA-Casa built-up areas (1949-1963) and of how the designers of those housing complexes insisted on the very same items of the Plan for Novoli. That experience —which had not produced neighborhoods that were integrated with the rest of the urban nucleus, but rather a series of islands unevenly located on the territory— should have sufficed, more than twenty years later, to prove how impossible it was to automatically create an urban tessuto by default. However, in the case of Novoli, there was, at the drawing table, a remarkable group of architects of great experience and vision as the project protagonists invited by Fiat. Ricci clarifies the aim to create the urban fabric out of nowhere by taking inspiration from the historic town: "it was almost about concentrating time, and it had happened throughout history, a building followed the previous one, with which it would be measured, compared and accented, thus achieving a rich, varied and harmonious general composition; and Florence did realize one of the greatest urban systems: Piazza della Signoria, Loggia dei Lanzi, Palazzo Vecchio, Uffizi, Corridoio Vasariano, Ponte Vecchio, Chiesa Santa Felicita, Palazzo Pitti, Belvedere".³⁸ Even the height of the buildings would have to be significant because:

Novoli is a neighborhood with no particular architectural emergencies, at least in the southern area, the one which was built in the 1960s. It presents itself as a compact housing mass, with a horrible, although impressive, plastic weight, where references to the city and territory are scarce. Yet, one only needs to climb up the Region buildings, near the Fiat area, to see the hills, Fiesole, the dome of the Duomo, Palazzo Vecchio and the other great urban and territorial landmarks of Florence, and it is easy to understand how the city, until Poggi's plan, essentially developed through poles, establishing structuring connections between these nodes [...]. Therefore, the intervention on the Fiat area may aim to the construction of a pole too and, particularly, the Palace of Justice, for its scared, civil and — above all — public relevance.³⁹

The workshops

Halprin was the master of ceremonies of the workshops. The American architect had experimented with this work method already but, while Halprin's American workshops were examples of participatory design, opened up to the population, the Florentine meetings were held in private spaces. They consisted

37 Casa Studio Ricci (CSR), Leonardo Ricci, Centro direzionale Firenze. Piano particolareggiato dell'area Fiat. Report [1989].

38 Casa Studio Ricci (CSR), Leonardo Ricci, Centro direzionale Firenze. Piano particolareggiato dell'area Fiat. Report [1989].

39 Paolo Baldeschi, "Leonardo Ricci e il progetto del Palazzo di Giustizia di Firenze," *Dossier di urbanistica e cultura del territorio*, no. 16 (1991): 7.

of "initiation rites and alchemies to extract urbanism from architecture, not the other way round".⁴⁰ The first workshop (13-16 September 1987), in fact, was held at the isolated Villa La Safficiata, on the hills of Scandicci not far from the Charterhouse of Galluzzo. Besides the architects and some city hall technicians, there was Giovanni Klaus Koenig, who was an architectural historian who, however, had a vocation for chronicles. In one of his detailed accounts, rich in anecdotes about the workshops, we read that "this was more an actual troupe than a team of architects, complete with technical support, simultaneous interpreters, photographers and a TV crew".⁴¹ At the end of the three-day workshop, they had drawn up a sort of master plan (even though it was just a sketch) —*Declaration of intent drawing*—, establishing specific key points upon which all the participants agreed and which would not be changed again until the definitive version of the master plan. In order to create the 'city-effect', the new constructions had to respect the urban principles linked to density, thus forming an architectural *continuum*⁴²: "the buildings had to create a continuous line, not stand on their own on the area", Halprin writes, "the maximum urban density must be continuous everywhere along the edges of the area".⁴³ The interventions "must visually overlap or touch each other according to the Florentine tradition".⁴⁴ Furthermore, it was decided that a diagonal line, between San Donato bridge and Bersanti road, continuing beyond Guidone boulevard, would be the structure matrix of the park, thus establishing a connection with the historic city, towards the Duomo-San Miniato axis. Following this line, the main elements of the drawing were inserted: the main entrance of the park with the information and documentation center, which consisted in an elevated square, pathways and ponds —to be used as important compositional factors—, and the Palace of Justice.

"I was afraid it would be a mess"⁴⁵, Ricci said in a worried tone, but it wasn't. The second workshop was organized from the 8th to the 10th of December of that same year, which was to be held at the Fiat's branch in Belfiore, in Florence. Each architect already had a clear idea of the area on which they had to work on and of the functions they had to turn into architectural spaces: the second

40 Lupano, "Firenze: un avvenire urbatettonico dietro le spalle," 4.

41 Koenig, "Per una storia del progetto Fiat a Novoli, Firenze," 192. "The alternation of spatial compression - twenty people around a table - and decompression, with swimming in the pool and relaxing outdoors, was a kind of mental sauna, which should be followed by every group therapist who wants to get the most out of every brainstorming session". Ricci also testifies to the many people present: "There were about fifty of us in a villa near Florence. To me, who is used to living alone in order to concentrate on my work, it seemed more like a social party than a business meeting when I arrived. I must confess, however, that the atmosphere was exhilarating. For the first time, what we had been hoping for years seemed to come true: a collaboration between public, private, intellectual, social and economic forces to produce a collective work for the benefit of the citizens of Florence": CSR, Ricci, Centro direzionale Firenze. Piano particolareggiato dell'area Fiat. Report [1989].

42 AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Aldo Loris Rossi, "Progetto Novoli ed idee (non richieste) per Firenze".

43 AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Lawrence Halprin, "Elementi per il masterplan".

44 AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Lawrence Halprin, "Elementi per il masterplan".

45 Del Pozzo, "Ti rifaccio Firenze," 125.

meeting aimed at systematizing a unitary plani-volumetric representation⁴⁶: “we meet at a great table” Ricci writes, “to draw a kind of *sinopite* and later move on to the fresco where each of us paints their subject [...] At the end of the second three-day workshop, we shouted ‘miracle!’ as a sketch had been created, which was not a drawing yet, but contained the seeds of a future life”.⁴⁷ In the final drawing, the buildings were placed around Halprin’s park, which looked like a sort of spiral, whose diagonal line was intersected by a circumference with a smaller diameter and which identified the civic square of the complex, with the Palace of Justice and the public offices designed by Cappai-Mainardis and Birkerts⁴⁸ looking out onto it.

Ricci and Michelucci

Michelucci did not participate in the two workshops because of his advanced age (he was ninety-six years old in 1987) and also because he had had doubts about Halprin and the idea of an artificial park right away.⁴⁹ Besides, he wrote: “Florence needs works that can comprehend its entirety, not a design for a small piece of it”.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Ricci and Michelucci set to work. We do not have drawings on which they worked together, four-handedly; however, we do have very important documents that have helped us define the genesis of the building. From January 1987, Michelucci started to study the Palace, for which he had drawn several sketches, where the megalithic scale of the intervention was, above all else, already evident. Furthermore, some of the *topoi*, which were recurrent in all his drawings, had already been expressed there and probably traced the guidelines shared by both of the designers: the highlighting of a central pathway that would be the backbone of the project, an abundance of paths, which had always shaped the work of the two architects, a big round square—which was the catalyst space of social life—, which welcomed the citizens before judging them.⁵¹ These essential aspects were always present, even in the project that Ricci designed by himself and that we can still admire today. Attentive to the requests of the clients, Ricci and Michelucci’s project was, right from the start, a unique building that could host a number of spaces devoted

46 “Dear colleagues, after workshop I we had the opportunity to meet individually with each of you and to enter into a creative debate that has advanced our planning for Novoli. [...] We have enclosed for your information a sort of collage of all the things we have developed together, a sort of “state of the art” at the present time. We hope that this information will help you to move forward in your thinking before the next workshop [...] Our hope for the next workshop is to synthesize all your projects, identify the elements that need a solution, and particularly to integrate the work of each team with the work of all the others also by means of a model”. AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Letter from Program (Fiat design and consulting service) to Cappai and Mainardis’s firm, 25 November 1987.

47 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Centro direzionale Firenze. Piano particolareggiato dell’area Fiat. Report [1989].

48 Innocenti, “Il piano di recupero per l’area ex Fiat di Novoli a Firenze: il contributo di Leonardo Ricci,” 85-6.

49 “Before I met you personally, I had the vague idea, not at all motivated, that you were a strict theoretician of some branch of architecture. When we met in my studio in Fiesole [...] an immediate sympathy was born in me for you. [...] At my age one can love nature profoundly, but not with the panic-stricken abandon with which you love it; I love it as a terrible imprint of God, not as a marvelous spectacle, which the more imposing it is, the more it cries out to me with its death cry: you will die”. Letter from Michelucci to Halprin, in Lambardi, “Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze,” 68.

50 Renzo Cassigoli, “Se la Fiat ha fretta non posso seguirla,” *L’Unità*, 22 December 1987, 15.

51 Lambardi, “Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze,” 19.

Veneto 23- dicembre -87
 Carissimo ed amato Giovanni,
 ho ricevuto (ringraziando dagli Stati Uniti) una tua lettera in risposta alla mia da Lexington dopo che sono andato da Halprin a S. Francisco. Una lettera che mi ha fatto e che mi fa molto soffrire. Una lettera che ^{non} comprende né alla verità né a quella che tu credi la verità. Una lettera imprudente e crudele che debbo rifiutare. E forse perché l'abbiate i fatti diretti ed inconfutabili. Possono essere più espliciti delle parole di amore (amore che in questo momento tu rifiuti) e base che io non ti esprima, come è vero, quanto io ti amo, ma come sono andati gli eventi.
 Quando reppi dell'incarico del Palazzo di Giustizia di Firenze insieme con te e, che lo aveva amato vent'anni, ero felice come un represso. Con te avevo iniziato e con te avevo voluto finire. Questo, e più, è la verità.
 Halprin aveva avuto dalla Fiat l'incarico di fare il "master-plan" dell'area di Novoli. Tu fosti il primo ad essere contrario.
 Ci fu quest'estate il primo workshop. Tu non partecisti

venire perché con Marco. Io non potevo non partecipare. Dovetti venire a Firenze dagli Stati Uniti ma non potevo che, Michelucci, non Marco andò con me. Due anni fa Marco per venire. Parlando delle mode, come lui le ama. Io non ne ho paura. E' me ne dolo e con serenità. Come per te del resto. E mi angustia di meno. Mi ama con serenità tu a dire qualche cosa parola rivolto a me. Io lo chiedo in quel workshop di difendere la "vecchia" posizione e, se ricordi, non gli ti volevo per dal primo piano per metterli al comando di quello che aveva succeduto me al terzo piano abbandonati gli altri (quando tu potresti ricoverarmi) per impararli di tutto.
 Poi ripartii per l'America. Prima di partire il Comune (in persona l'assessore Barni ed il figlio di Zani) mi pregare no di andare a S. Francisco per vedere alcuni caseggiati (tuo, mio e di altri) rispetto a quelli di Largo. Fu un incontro non facile ma credo che il risultato fu buono. Poi questo ti ricordi. Solo per metterli al comando.
 Poi sono venuto per il secondo workshop al quale ti avrei pensato di partecipare. Anche se, ovviamente non per dieci ore al giorno. Tu non sei venuto di proposito.

1a

not only to the legal functions, but also to other relational activities. The “city of justice” that Michelucci had imagined seemed to find a real application in the building.

However, on the margins of the second workshop, an event that had a remarkable relevance for the development of the project took place: Michelucci resigned his appointment. We do not know why. According to Michelucci “the Palace of Justice is a wrong architectural object. I propose a city of justice instead”.⁵² Basically, he did not think it possible that a palace that contained in itself all the legal functions, built on a scrap of land in the outskirts of the city, could create a connection with it. What he had initially deemed to be an added value to the project, now wasn’t⁵³.

“It is not quite exact to say that I am resigning” Michelucci declared after the second workshop, protesting, “I said that I am not able to design a palace of justice unless I can talk first to the justice operators themselves [...] The thing has been set in that way already. Everything has already been done in an incredibly short amount of time. The project was designed during the first two ‘workshops’. If Fiat is in a hurry, I cannot follow them. I need to clarify the thought of justice in order to know exactly which spaces and shapes I have to create, the relationship between the judge and the judged, how to create a connection with the public and legal events: how can I think the courtrooms, then? Where do I place the judge? High up? Terrible. Or below, to bring him closer to the man? The

52 Giovanni Michelucci, *Dove si incontrano gli angeli. Pensieri fiabe e sogni* (Fiesole: Fondazione Giovanni Michelucci, 1997), 25.

53 Giovanni Michelucci, “Un Palazzo per la Giustizia?,” *La Nuova Città*, no. 4-5 (1988): 2.

Non parlo mai male - Puffi di altri appuntamenti. (3)
 Secondo me non importanti - Ma un peccato le tue scelte.
 In quel mondo stupido, se qualcuno ti ha rifiutato bene, e se
 con Aldo Luis Ricci (ed a noi si sono affiatati Vitti spallini)
 abbiamo unificato l'impugnazione e l'impugnazione californiana
 Me so felice.
 Tomaso a Venezia tiene la tua lettera. Dov'è restata, e c'è
 ed infinita.
 Come se io stessi fare il "mio" perfetto. Quando invece
 avevo lavorato per alcuni mesi per preparare il "mio" perfetto.
 Hai preferito, nell'atto della tua voce d'annuncio fare
 il "Kio".
 A questo punto, amato Giovanni, non so più cosa dire.
 Tu che hai sempre parlato della "felicità" dell'architetto
 hai voluto distogliere, in questa occasione, quella poca
 mia "felicità" di architetto. Perché la mia architettura
 è sempre nata dalla implicità. Dalla disposizione di
 vivere in un mondo che a me non piace ma al quale
 voglio dare per quel che posso, con le uniche mie forze,
 un piccolo contributo alla vita.

Non alle "felicità" ma ad una continuità dell'esistenza. (6)
 Scusami Giovanni questa lettera addolorata ma
 necessaria. Tu Giovanni mi hai detto.
 Forse perché io ti sono venuto a Pordenone.
 Vincerò. Forse perché tu mi ami molto, ed
 molto, molto meno. Ti abbraccio.
 Buon Natale! Buon anno!
 1989

1b

architectural completeness of every building depends on what, as an institution, it represents for the city. In order to define Palazzo Vecchio or the Cathedral, I need to have a clear idea of what they stand for: the civic power and the religious power, the same goes for justice".⁵⁴

As always, in relationships between men, besides their ideas, and different design or formal orientations, character plays a major role. Despite the fact that Michelucci was Ricci's indisputable teacher (to which Ricci admitted himself)⁵⁵, the two often disagreed because their huge egos did not allow any dialogue. "I have seen ambitions run wild"⁵⁶, Michelucci declared, probably jealous of Ricci's position, who, in spite of his Venician residence, was certainly more at the center of the project than Michelucci, and worked well not only with Halprin, whom he also met in the USA,⁵⁷ but also with the other architects who participated in the project. Michelucci was not one of them and probably wished he had been given the protagonist role, not the co-protagonist one. Throughout 1988 and 1989, he would continue to draw numerous possible solutions for the building: a clear sign of a particular interest in the topic, on which he would continue to reflect for a long time. In this whirlwind of prosperous graphical production, it seemed that the architect from Pistoia had returned to 1945—even though this was a very different context—, to those sketches for the restoration of the areas around Ponte Vecchio, which were both fascinating and completely solipsistic, as no

54 Cassigoli, "Se la Fiat ha fretta non posso seguirla," 15.

55 CSR, Curriculum vitae di Leonardo Ricci. Ricci graduated with Michelucci in 1941, with a thesis titled Teatro al chiuso, teatro all'aperto [Indoor theatre, outdoor theatre] on the Boboli Gardens.

56 Cassigoli, "Se la Fiat ha fretta non posso seguirla," 15.

57 AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Letter from Italo Castore (Program) to Cappai and Mainardis's firm, 3 November 1987.

Fig. 1a, 1b

Letter from Leonardo Ricci to Giovanni Michelucci, Venice 23 December 1987. Fondazione Giovanni Michelucci, Archivio Giovanni Michelucci.

one had commissioned them. "I had worked for some months on the preparation of our project", Ricci wrote to him in December 1987, "you preferred, looking down on me from your ivory tower, to design yours"⁵⁸ [Fig. 1]. In Michelucci's graphic studies of 1988 and 1989, we can see a completely transformed building, which did not have the scale of a single object, as it reached the typical size and complexity of a city. After all, the concept of a miniature city is a trait that had inspired the fantasy of the architect from Pistoia since the 1930s.

Achille Occhetto's *diktat*

After the conclusions of the second workshop, during the first months of 1988, there was criticism from many cultural institutions, such as INU (National Institute of Urban Planning) and Italia Nostra, against the Fiat variation (including the aspect concerning the Fondiaria area). Furthermore, the Region of Tuscany imposed some limitations for the approval of the variation, specifically in regards to the dimensioning of the buildings, which led to the re-elaboration of the variation.⁵⁹

But the project went on. The third workshop took place in March 1988, once again at Villa La Sfacciata, where the drawing of the area was defined in a more detailed way. Each architect produced not only drawings, but also models of their intervention. The final plan clearly showed the methodological approach wanted by Zevi and Halprin—that is, "a harmony of dissonances"⁶⁰—, which was the result of individual architectural episodes that were very different from each other. The central space of the park welcomed the ways out of the buildings, which seemed conflicting: by looking at the final plan-volumetric representation, it almost feels like the single buildings could have been developed endlessly, far beyond the Fiat area in which they were 'confined'. The plan resembled a painting by one of the members of the De Stijl group, of whose formal instances Zevi and the other participating architects were particularly fond.

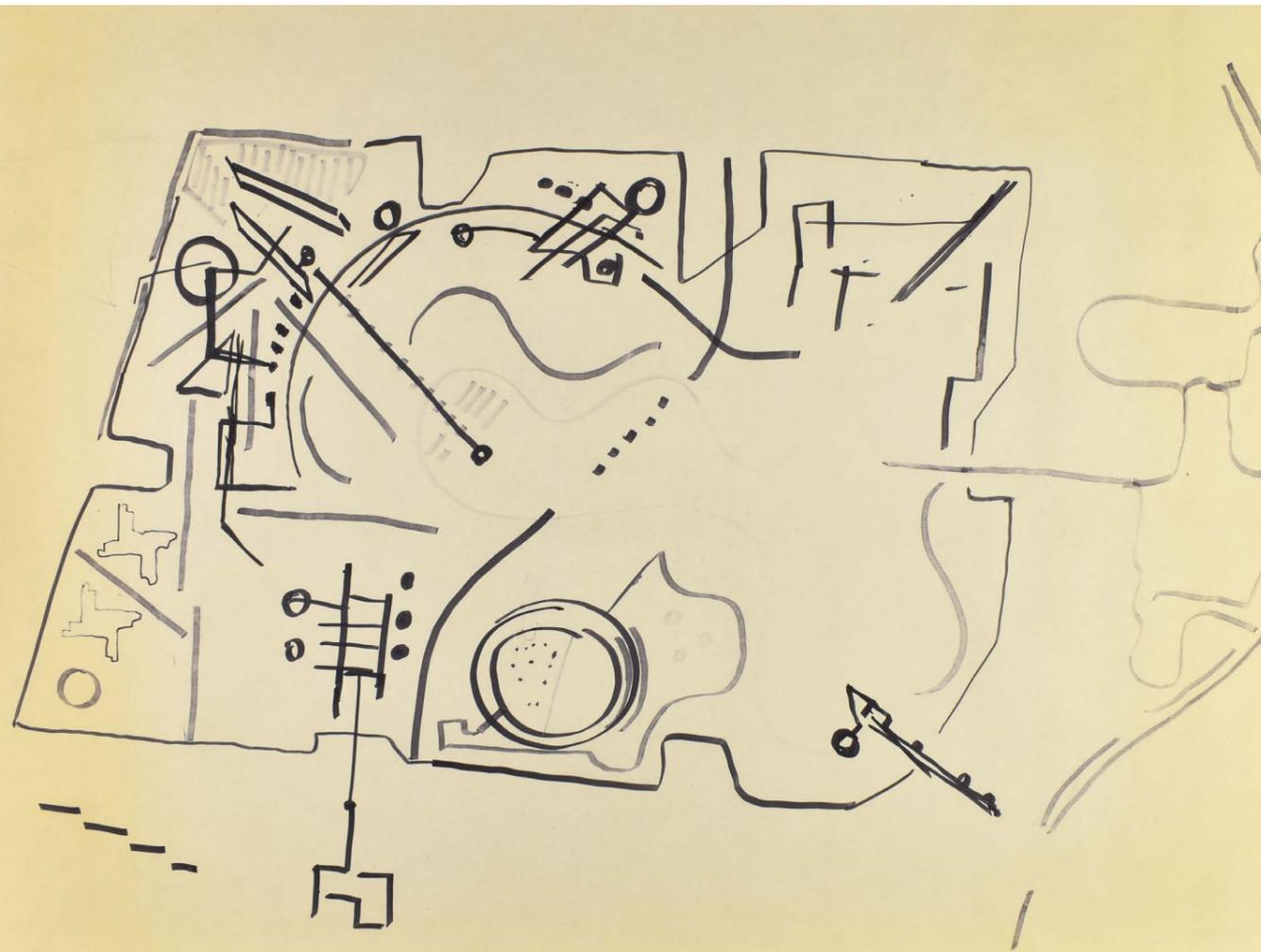
On the 22nd of April 1988, Florence mayor Massimo Bogianckino, Fiat CEO Cesare Romiti, Zevi and Halprin showed, at Palazzo Vecchio, during a press conference, the new Novoli project.⁶¹ Despite the mayor's triumphant tone, the realization of the project seemed arduous. There were serious political problems within the city administration: the precarious inner balance between the parties (PCI, PSI, PSDI, PLI), which initially allowed the formation of the council, was

58 Letter from Ricci to Michelucci, 23 December 1987. Included in Corinna Vasić Vatovec, "Leonardo Ricci e Giovanni Michelucci: confronti preliminari," *La Nuova Città*, no. 2 (2001): 119.

59 Innocenti, "Il piano di recupero per l'area ex Fiat di Novoli a Firenze: il contributo di Leonardo Ricci," 86.

60 Corinna Vasić Vatovec, *Leonardo Ricci: architetto esistenzialista* (Firenze: Edifir, 2005), 93.

61 Lupano, "Firenze: un avvenire urbanettonico dietro le spalle," 4.



2

now irremediably compromised.⁶² Clearly, this was not due solely to the urban events.⁶³

The city council, adopting Zevi's suggestion, appointed Ricci as the indisputable protagonist of the project. Councillor Bassi gave him the task of drawing up the final draft of the result of the three workshops, and that of handing in the detailed plan by June 1989⁶⁴ [Fig. 2]. The work of the other architects had ended with their participation in the third workshop. There should have been a second phase to their appointment, which would have led to the drawing up of the preliminary plan, but that never occurred.

62 Fondazione Zevi, Archivio Bruno Zevi, Comune di Firenze. Piano particolareggiato dell'area Fiat Novoli, 04.02/17 Telegram from Bogianckino to Zevi, April 1989: "Dear President, I am very worried about the Novoli area, stop the Region's prescriptions and very objectionable statements. Campos Venuti and Astengo compromise the forthcoming negotiations and I also believe that the impending rezoning and presumably also the subsequent executive plan of the municipal initiative will nullify the initial impetus. stop. Taking into account that the political situation in the east is not peaceful stop I would urgently like to be able to consult you and I believe it is opportune with Bassi. stop. do you have the opportunity to come to Florence?".

63 Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale*, 291-5.

64 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Centro direzionale Firenze. Piano particolareggiato dell'area Fiat. Report [1989]: "The Master Plan will be the result of a synthesis of the architectural ideas that emerged during the work of the three workshops". See also: ASCR, Register of council resolutions, session of 17 May 1988. Council resolution 3559/2629 entrusted Ricci and Giorgio Santucci (engineer) with the task of drawing up the general plan for the Palazzo di Giustizia.

Fig. 2

Novoli plan designed by Leonardo Ricci [1988]. CSR.

As mentioned above, the preliminary project of the general town development plan had been ready since 1985, drawn up by a group of urban planners who followed the guidelines of Detti's plan; therefore, the north-western areas of Novoli and Castello were suitable for the development of the city, respectively for Fiat and Fondiaria. However, the consultants to the general town development plan believed Fiat's (and Fondiaria's) requests, in terms of the cubic meters to construct, to be unacceptable.⁶⁵ After all, the urban planners for the study of the new general plan had expressed, right from the beginning of the workshops experience, their dislike for the variation project, expressing their doubts to the city council in this regard.⁶⁶

The situation was paradoxical: the technicians of the general town development plan (Campos Venuti, Astengo, Fernando Clemente, Paolo Maretti, Luciano Pontuale, Giuseppe Stancanelli) were paid by Florence city hall, and yet they never missed the chance to undermine the design validity of the variation, which was required by the city council itself and, particularly, by the mayor and councillor Bassi. The favorable opportunity for urban planners, and those who had doubts about the Novoli plan, had arisen since the first months of 1988,⁶⁷ when, as mentioned above, the Region favorably greeted the project, although they contested its volumes. The most reformative and environmentalist wing of the Florentine communist party —which, in the years following the disaster of Chernobyl, had a considerable relevance within the faction⁶⁷—, led by Tommaso Giovacchini and by the Youth Federation, who were overtly against the most conservative PCI wing, stubbornly focused on these aspects, sensitizing the public opinion to the presumed "cementification" of the Florentine outskirts.⁶⁸ This was obviously a pretext to attack the party from the inside, especially if we consider that the Novoli plan included the realization of an eighteen-hectare park and, therefore, satisfied the urban standards of public green areas. In 1989, the Florentine PCI was overtly divided between those in favor and those against the Fiat operation, while the other parties of the council supported the variation. The question ended up obtaining national resonance: in March 1989, during the PCI provincial conference, a motion presented by the Florentine Youth Federation for the zeroing of the variation was approved.⁶⁹ In the previous year, at a time when the future of the party was uncertain, Achille Occhetto, who became the final executioner of the Novoli plan, had been elected secretary of the party. "There's Occhetto on the phone", said a functionary of the Florentine seat of the communist party, on the 28th of June 1989, to province secretary Paolo

65 Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale*, 291-5; Federico Oliva, ed., Campos Venuti, *Città senza cultura. Intervista sull'urbanistica* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 92-93.

66 ASCR, Register of council resolutions, session of 4 May 1987. Intervention by Astengo: "We suggested that the variants be included in the PRG but that the volume be reduced and that 80% of both areas be handed over to the municipality free of charge".

67 Aldo Agosti, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano 1921-1991* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1999), 68.

68 Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale*, 296.

69 Paolini, *Firenze 1946-2005. Una storia urbana e ambientale*, 296.

Cantelli.⁷⁰ “You should consider the possibility of suspending the new variation”, Occhetto told Cantelli; “we”, he continued, “cannot risk compromising the image of the new PCI; the opposition to your urban operation is growing stronger and, frankly, some of the environmentalists’ evaluations should be taken into serious consideration. Surely, you cannot vote for it”.⁷¹ Occhetto sent his emissaries, Fabio Mussi and Gavino Angius, to Florence, in order to manage the change of course. The council communists were, in actual fact, put under receivership, and the Novoli operation fell apart. The disavowal of the work of the Florentine PCI inevitably led to an administration crisis—all the members of the local secretariat of the party resigned—, which was solved on the 2nd of October 1989 with the election of a new city council led by socialist culture councilor Giorgio Morales, pending the 1990 mayoral elections, which confirmed Morales as mayor, with a new five-party council.

The Basilica

As mentioned above, while the detailed plan for the Fiat area was being drawn up (the final draft of the plans created during the workshops), Ricci was given the task of specifically drawing preliminary plans for the Palace of Justice, which he had presented at the city hall in July 1989.

The project that he presented on that occasion, after some relevant changes concerning space and materials, was more or less the building that we see today. However, due to the many complex political and administration-related events, which occurred between Ricci’s death (1994) and the inauguration of the building (2012),⁷² we shall examine the project that was presented at the city hall in 1989: when Ricci was still alive and the Novoli plan had not been obliterated because of the way in which it was conceived from the start and, therefore, when the architect was designing a building which should have established a connection with its architectural surroundings which does not exist today.

As in Savona,⁷³ together with Maria Grazia Dallerba and his son, Andres, Ricci designed a project that, despite its enormous size, diverged from the monumental models which had illustrious predecessors, during fascism in particular, and which continued to inspire the interventions that were contemporary to the Florentine one: one only needs to think of the Palace of Justice of Siena, designed by Pierluigi Spadolini and characterized by a wanted monumentality.⁷⁴

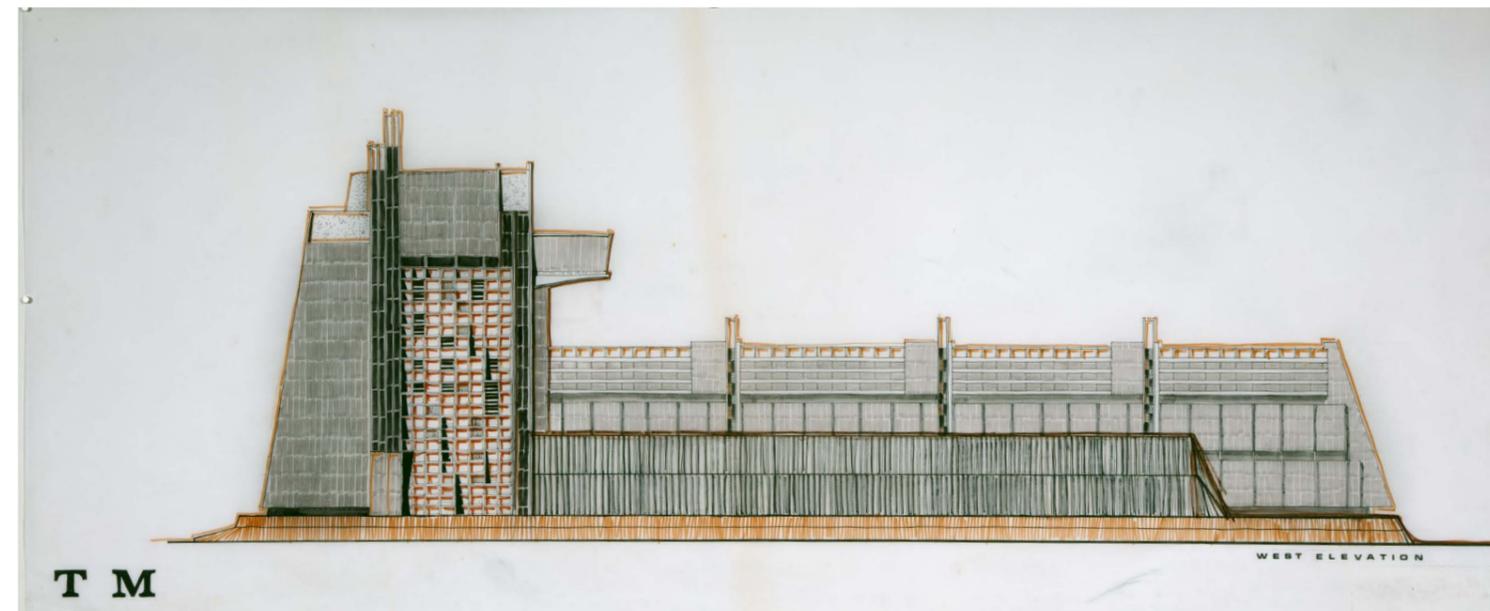
70 Reconstruction reported in Ibid. See also: Paolo Vagheggi, “Firenze, il PCI cambia rotta,” *La Repubblica*, 28 June 1989, last accessed November 27, 2021, <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/06/28/firenze-il-pci-cambia-rotta.html>.

71 Reconstruction reported in Ibid. See also: Paolo Vagheggi, “Firenze, il PCI cambia rotta,” *La Repubblica*, 28 June 1989, last accessed November 27, 2021, <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/06/28/firenze-il-pci-cambia-rotta.html>.

72 Innocenti, “Il piano di recupero per l’area ex Fiat di Novoli a Firenze: il contributo di Leonardo Ricci,” 89.

73 For an analysis of the project see: Vasić Vatovec, *Leonardo Ricci: architetto “esistenzialista”*, 45-66; Bruno Zevi, “Strutture-Forma per un’idea sacrale della giustizia. Il palazzo di giustizia di Savona,” *L’architettura. Cronache e Storia*, no. 388 (1988): 86-115; Bruno Zevi, “Il palazzo di giustizia di Savona,” *L’Arca*, no. 16 (1988), 79-85.

74 Leonardo Ricci, “Progetto per il Palazzo di Giustizia sull’area Fiat a Novoli, Firenze,” *Zodiac*, no. 5 (1991): 203.



We do not know why exactly it happened that, from the second half of the 1970s, while he was moving from Florence to Venice, Ricci’s architecture suddenly shifted towards volumes characterized by remarkable gigantism. Such change could not be ascribed to his new city of residence, nor to the influence of his new partners, like his wife Maria Grazia Dallerba, whom he had met long before in Florence. The project for the terrace of the Port Orange Competition in Florida (1973) was probably the first instance in which this tendency strongly emerged [Fig. 3]; and was consolidated later on through the project for the Florence Business Area competition (1977), designed with his friend Savioli. The signals of this shift to a bigger scale had always been present in Ricci’s work—one only needs to think of certain episodes in the Sorgane neighborhood in Florence (1962)—; however, it was since the 1970s that this tendency had become a fixed trait. Approaching the 1980s, the gigantism was often accompanied by a certain isolation of the construction bodies, which did not occur in Ricci’s previous megastructure projects, which aimed to the construction of a single unity, complicated by endless sequences of volumes: just like the assignments that Ricci would give to the students of his courses at the University of Florence, or at the American universities, where he was a visiting professor, or the competition project for the restoration of the Fortezza da Basso (1967).⁷⁵ “When [...] Portoghesi, Gregotti, Rossi met me, they told me: ‘Ricci, you’re an unusual architect, you create unique pieces when serial architecture is needed’. What about old cities, though? There are certain prototypes, like the palace, which had been serial until they were ruined by Neoclassicism, but there are unique pieces too, such as Pisa or Piazza del Campo in Siena, or Piazza San Marco in Venice. What’s the harm in dreaming of unique pieces?”⁷⁶ Many examples of Ricci’s architectures from the 1970s and 1980s ‘suffered’ from gigantism and isolation:

75 Vasić Vatovec, *Leonardo Ricci: architetto “esistenzialista”*, 165-74; Maria Clara Ghia, *La nostra città è tutta la terra. Leonardo Ricci architetto (1918-1994)* (Wuppertal: LapisLocus, 2021), 207-209.

76 Raffaele Raja, “Un sogno in città,” *Costruire*, no. 85 (1990): 177.

Fig. 3
Port Orange Competition
(1973). West elevation. CSR.

from the project for the Service Centre of Pistoia's industrial area (1980) to the competition for the reorganization of the Catena harbor in Mantua (1982) and the integrated Centre *La Terza Porta* at the parterre in Florence (1982). The palaces of justice of Savona and Florence also belong to this particular current.

In Novoli, Ricci was inspired by the construction style of Roman basilicas, by a kind of laic cathedral that stood out against the background to indicate the necessity of a social transformation of justice. Every single part of the building is located around the central space characterized by a trapezoidal diagram of the basilica, closed by a glass covering. The smaller base of the trapezoid is directed towards the Calavana hills of Prato, towards the extreme edge of the city, in the attempt to match its greater base which, instead, looks onto the park and, therefore, towards Florence city center. Such connection between the city and its edges certainly characterized the project that Ricci discussed with Michelucci, who had always been interested in that theme.⁷⁷ In Savona, as well as in Florence, Ricci designed the interiors of many public spaces. These areas have several uses: when the legal activities are interrupted, plays can be staged there, concerts and meetings can be held. "The public access [...] leads to a space which is typical of basilicas, on which all the public pathways look onto, both the ones for the courtrooms and those for the offices"⁷⁸; just like the old town squares⁷⁹, "we want citizens to be free to walk around within the building even when it is closed"⁸⁰, Ricci wrote in the project report. The wish for architecture to be experienced 24/7 had always been a crucial element in Ricci's work: the basilica merely consists of the internal transposition of the external circular square, which characterized the project designed with Michelucci. "The indoor square", Ricci wrote, "becomes a filtering element, opened on all four sides. Around the building and the square, a Reflecting Pool [...] grants safety as it reduces the entries".⁸¹ Ricci thought, maybe because he was inspired by his new Venetian house, of surrounding the entire building, with the exception of a few guarded passages, with a channel of water. Obviously, this solution was never adopted.

The structure bends towards the outside into various building bodies which, by fitting in the great central body, communicate their different destinations; the external façades are thus all different, as they reflect the complexity of the internal space [Fig. 4]. Throughout his production, Ricci had always betrayed symmetry. Indeed, two asymmetrical walls indicate the building entrance: on one side, a very high triangular face; on the other, the front leans on a 45-degree angle to the central axis of the "basilica". A recurrent element in Ricci's mid-1970s projects is

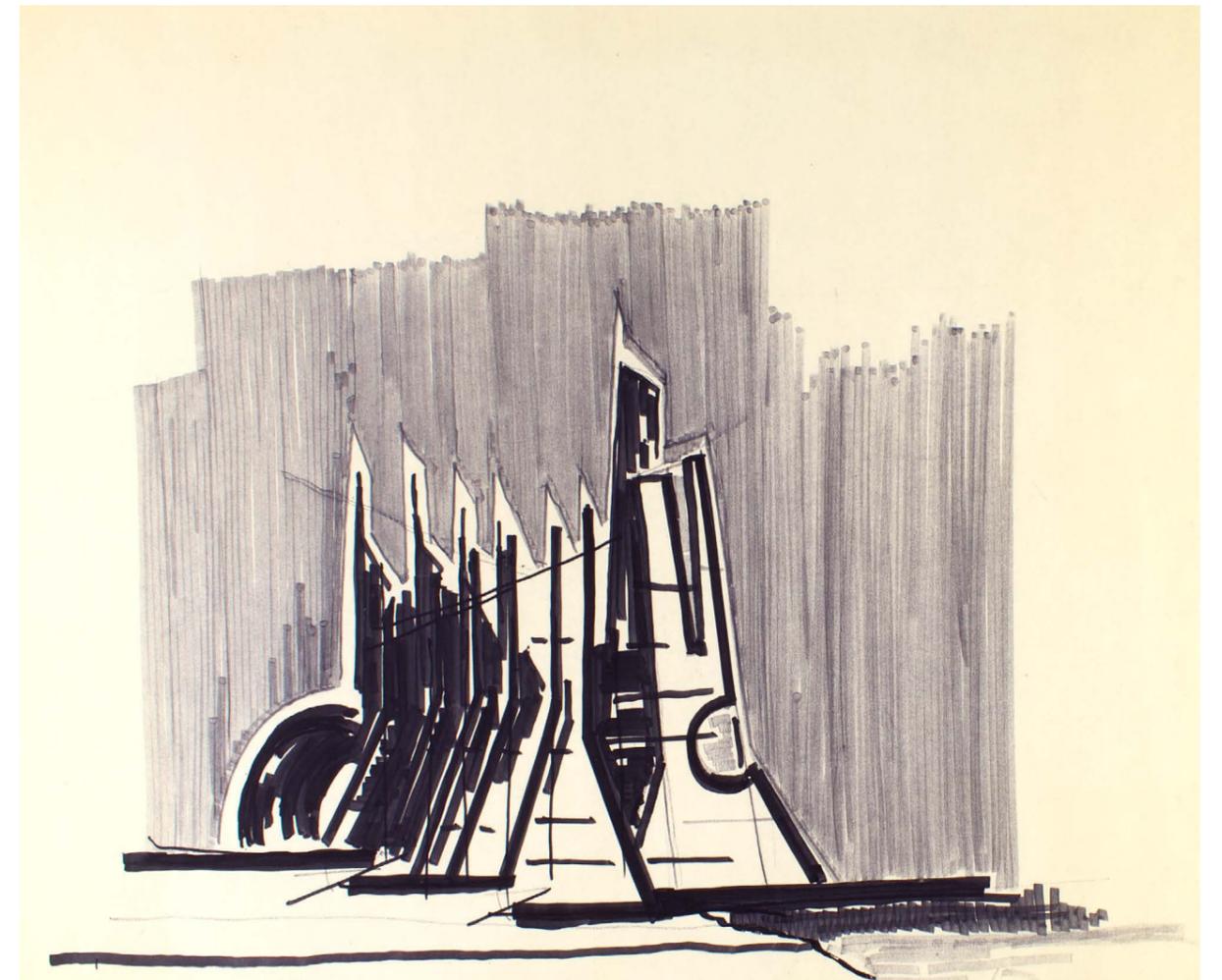
77 Giancarlo Paba, *La città e il limite: i confini della città* (Firenze: La casa Usher, 1990), 30-46.

78 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Palazzo di giustizia. Relazione di progetto (1988). Also in Lambardi, "Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze," 142.

79 Paolo Baldeschi, "Leonardo Ricci e il progetto del Palazzo di Giustizia di Firenze," 7.

80 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Palazzo di giustizia. Relazione di progetto. Also in Lambardi, "Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze," 142.

81 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Palazzo di giustizia. Relazione di progetto. Also in Lambardi, "Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze," 142.



the presence, on the facade, of big triangular surfaces, which he viewed as "fragments of city walls"⁸², the inclination of which is at times a simile of an escarped wall section; at other times –and this seems to be the case of the palace of justice of Florence–, of half a gabled facade, typical of Constantinian basilicas. We can also notice a circular element that recalls a rose window. Many are the transformations of architectural elements from different times in history that Ricci uses: after all, his work had been characterized, since its very start, by a wanted formalist display. Ricci's design pattern is particularly noticeable here, in the facade in front of the park (towards Guidoni boulevard), characterized by a great "Crystal-Palace-like"⁸³ glass wall, similar to the one that had been built in Savona. The three cylindrical volumes in reinforced concrete fit in the inclined glass wall, representing the 'ribs' of the "basilica". Rampant arches can also be found here and were modernized through the use of steel beams that define the rhythm of the facade. The building would have a "structure in reinforced concrete with iron and glass. Almost like a Crystal Palace fitting in a structure in reinforced concrete. External faces, as needed, would be more or less

82 Antonio Nardi, *Leonardo Ricci: testi, opere, sette progetti recenti di Leonardo Ricci* (Pistoia: Comune di Pistoia, 1990), 101.

83 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Palazzo di giustizia. Relazione di progetto. Also in Lambardi, "Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze," 142.

Fig. 4
Palace of Justice in Florence.
Main elevation study [1988].
CSR.

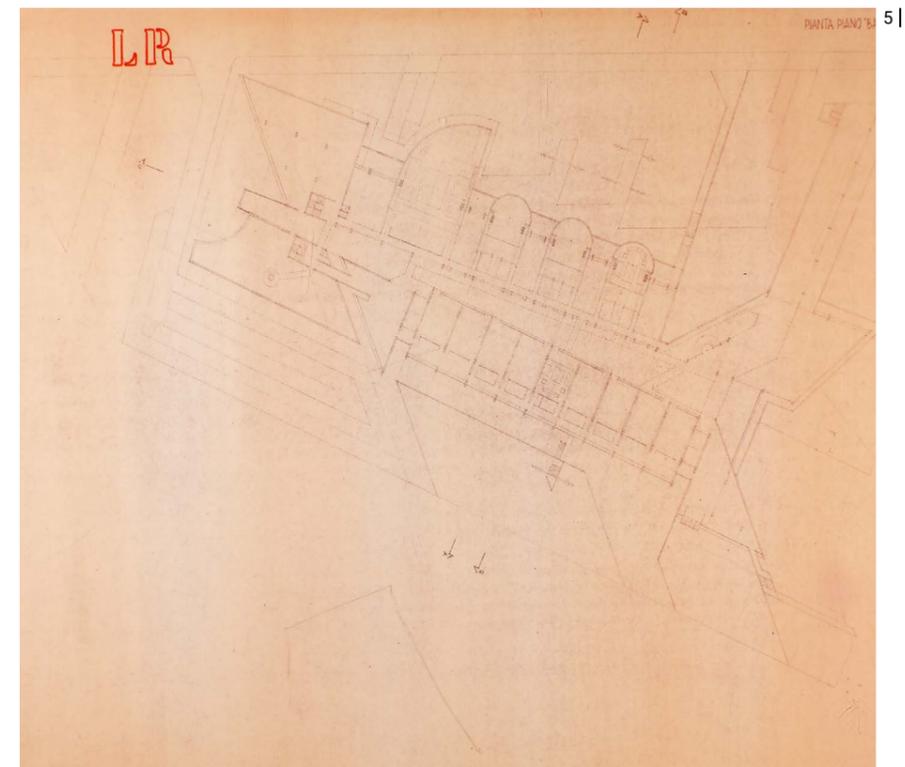
transparent and finished with marble of various colors (recalling the Florentine tradition, see Santa Maria Novella, San Miniato, Battistero, Fiancata del Duomo). Although expressed in a modern way".⁸⁴ The presumed continuity with the old town —which was completely imaginative, considering how very far the Palace is from Florence old town— was a desire which had already been voiced by Ricci since the first workshop; in fact, it is not by accident that the axis of the building is directed towards Santa Maria del Fiore [Fig. 5]. The diagonal line, which was a crucial element in both the diagram and the elevations of the entire project, as well as in others of Ricci's works since the beginning —one only needs to think of the buttresses of the Flower Market of Pescia (1949), designed with Savioli, Giuseppe Giorgio Gori ed Emilio Brizzi—, opens up to another evocative historicist reference which, however, is closer to our time: Futurism. The concise sketch that Ricci had drawn during the first workshop —which is at the Ricci archive of Monterinaldi, but also at Cappai and Mainardis' one, at the design archive of the IUAV University of Venice— clearly seemed to be a homage to Sant'Elia's works: not only because of graphic similarities (like the nature of the background on which the volumes of the building stand), but also because of the continuous search for the diagonal, of which Sant'Elia was also very fond.⁸⁵

Blindness

How should we, nowadays, judge Ricci's building? According to the idea behind its first draft, the Novoli operation was the preconization of many urban operations, which are currently very common: that is, the 'spectacularization' of contemporary architecture for tourist and economic purposes. "I don't think it would be arrogant of me", Ricci wrote, in fact, during the workshops, "to state that the quality of imagined architectures is so great, some of them actually are masterpieces, that they will draw, from the old town, a good portion of tourists who will be able to admire not only the past architectures, but ours too; just as it happens in other cities of the world which did not give in to the mummification of a past that has no hopes for the future".⁸⁶ The new Novoli should have been a modern and subsidiary center for Florence: "the character of the new city center that we want to achieve must refer to all of Florence, not just to its nearby suburbs".⁸⁷

However, history turned out to be very different from the expectations of those workshops. The failed realization of the plan was a bitter defeat not only for the 1980s architecture, but also for architecture *tout court*, as it was incapable of

overcoming mere local political idiosyncrasies. And now, when visiting Novoli and the park designed by Gabetti and Isola —two architects who had participated in the project right from the start and who, later on, in 1998, were appointed by the city council to draw up the *Novoli Recovery Plan*⁸⁸—, one stops to look at the Palace of Justice and can't help feeling great psychological distress, which is understandable: it is an object which has been completely de-semantized from the area on which it stands. This is not due to the fact that Ricci had died by the time the building was constructed and, therefore, altered in some ways from its original version. The explanation is that *Gotham City* was conceived to establish a connection with its peers —*virgoloni, lavatrici, biscioni*— which, in 1989, were completely obliterated by a myopic city politics. Thus, to paraphrase José Saramago, anyone who wished to express a critical judgment on the building would instantly turn into one of the protagonists of *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* (*Blindness*) struck by blindness, because they would not be able to see what the former Fiat area should and could have been. The historian's task is that of mending the epistemological breach created by these events, and of repeating, as often as possible, that the Palace of Justice of Florence cannot be judged, as it is an isolated and desolate fragment of a far more detailed plan which was never realized.



84 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Palazzo di giustizia. Relazione di progetto. Also in Lambardi, "Leonardo Ricci: il Palazzo di giustizia di Firenze," 143.

85 Corinna Vasić Vatovec, "Una ricognizione, contestuale e specifica, sul rapporto di Leonardo Ricci con il Futurismo e con l'opera di Sant'Elia," in *Il manifesto dell'architettura futurista di Sant'Elia e la sua eredità*, ed. Milva Giacomelli, Ezio Godoli and Alessandra Pelosi (Mantova: Universitas Studiorum, 2014), 219.

86 CSR, Leonardo Ricci, Centro direzionale Firenze. Piano particolareggiato dell'area Fiat. Report [1989].

87 AP, Fondo Iginio Cappai e Pietro Mainardis, Progetto Firenze, Area Novoli, np 070086. Italo Castore and Lawrence Halprin, Elementi per il masterplan [Masterplan elements]. Appendix to the letter from Italo Castore and Lawrence Halprin (Program) to Cappai and Mainardis' firm, 25 November 1987.

88 Pietro Giorgieri, Firenze. *Il progetto urbanistico: scritti e contributi, 1975-2010* (Firenze: Alinea, 2010), 250-201.

Fig. 5

Palace of Justice in Florence. "Basilica" floor plan [1989]. CSR.

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