

Leonardo Savioli: Didactics and Projects for “Space Involvement”

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ABSTRACT

Leonardo Savioli taught to the generation of Radical Architects by the end of the 1960s, succeeding, at that particular period, to accept their experimental ideas in a mutual and fruitful exchange. Thanks to his curiosity, ability to dialogue and above all to the ability to “live his time”, Savioli’s projects show attention to the user, leaving him the freedom to imagine the place to live “made to measure”. Savioli realizes his “space involvement” – taught in the course of “Interior Architecture and Design”, from 1966 to 1970 – both through the use of prefabricated elements in concrete, as in his studio realized in 1968, and through the metal, extendable and modular. During the creative and idealistic years one should highlight and note the cultural exchange and generational “handing down of the baton”.

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KEYWORDS

Leonardo Savioli, space involvement, participated architecture, Piper, Radical Architecture

Introduction

A series of events dedicated to Leonardo Savioli in memorial of his centennial, 1917-2017, has recently ended. These events included tours to his studio realised between 1968-1970 in the hills of Galluzzo in Florence, that has been frequented and open to collaborators, students and friends.¹

Savioli was a scholar of Michelucci and, by the end of the 1960s, he was teaching Radical Architects from Florence and some of his most substantial projects are associated to that period; such as the new Flower Market in Pescia, announced in 1969, or the less known designed for the "International Competition for the Resolution of the Leisure Time", won at Cannes in 1971.²

The attempt to eliminate space as a representation but to express it as a living reality derives, as is known, from experiences that dominate the international scene over that period, such as Action Painting, Pop Art and Programmed Art, while in Italy Giancarlo De Carlo encourages the participation of users in the project for Villaggio Matteotti in Terni, in 1969.³ From this point of view,

worthy of merit is Savioli's *The city of Tomorrow* where as far back as 1965 he clarifies the task of the architect who is to enable the user to take an individual part, a "space of action", in other words in relation to "a new dimension in which one lives" and thus the result will be given "more than from a "project", from a combination of operations that register/record and select our existence [...] that solicits and is solicited by actions in our life".⁴

Teaching 'space involvement'

Savioli will forever be remembered as a university professor who "shaped a school [...] of quality; his talks did 'inside the architecture' and were therefore able to produce".⁵ He let artists and experimental architects such as Bruno Munari or the MID group take an active dialectical part in the lesson.⁶ Rather than impart notions and methods to the students, they were stimulated in the search for the "perception of space, emotional involvement, existential condition".⁷

As from 1966-1967 and up to 1969-1970, during the course of "Interior Architecture and Design" Savioli faces the question of 'Space

1. I edited the Architecture Section at the exhibition "Nello spazio intorno all'uomo. Disegni e modelli di Leonardo Savioli", promoted by State Archives of Florence 23 september / 8 october 2017, within of the enterprise "Savioli 100. 1917/2017. L'eredità di un architetto toscano a un secolo dalla nascita".



FIG. 1 Book cover of *Ipotesi di spazio* by Leonardo Savioli.

2. Carolina De Falco, *Leonardo Savioli. Ipotesi di spazio: dalla "casa abitata" al "frammento di città"* (Florence: Edifir, 2012), 1-166.

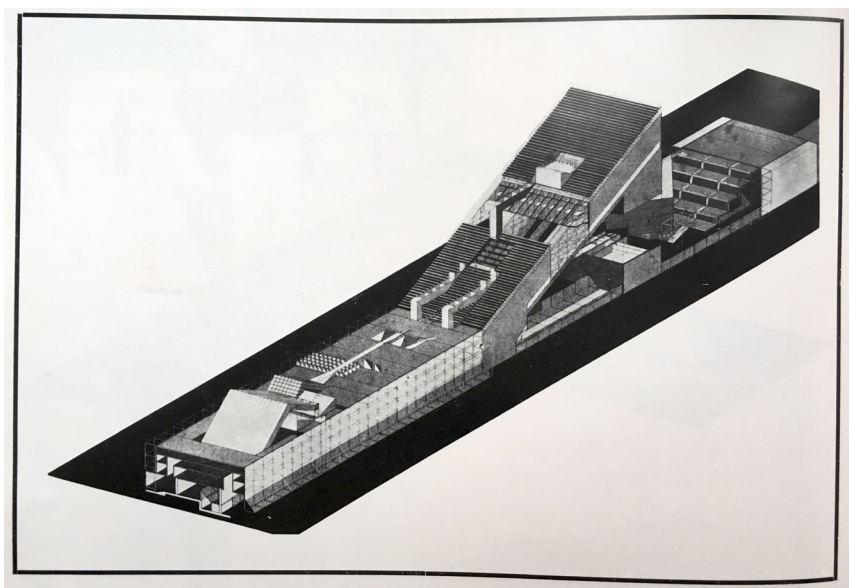
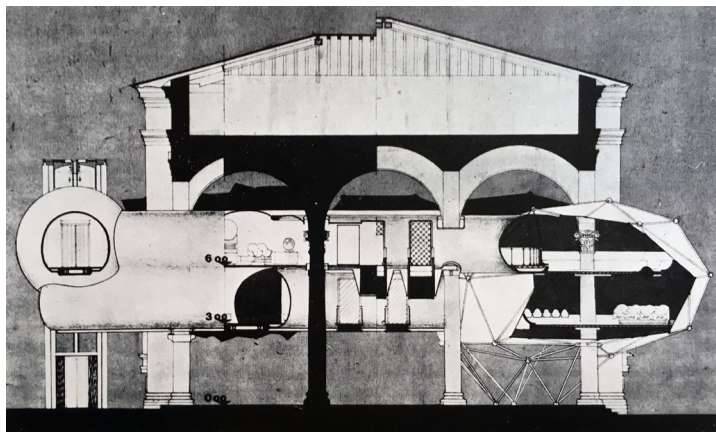
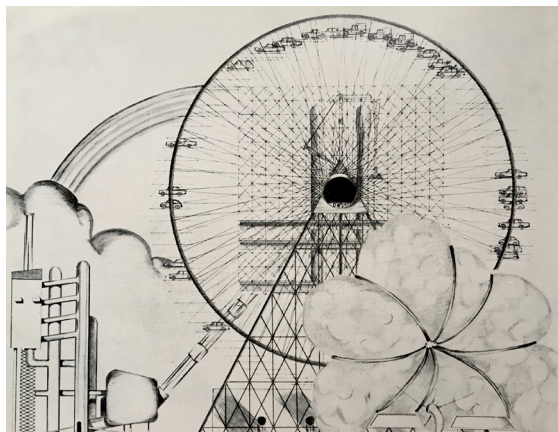
3. Daniel Chenut, *Ipotesi per un habitat contemporaneo* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1968). Alberto Donti, *Architetture per la nuova città: esperienze a confronto* (Alinea: Firenze 1992), 287.

4. Leonardo Savioli, *La città di domani* (1965), 22, in Archivio di Stato di Firenze (from now ASF), Leonardo Savioli, *Materiali relativi a progetti*, 222.

5. Bruno Zevi, "Tra i due Leonardi fiorentini", in Rosalia Manno Tolu, Lara Vinca Masini and Alessandro Poli eds. *Tra i due Leonardi fiorentini*, in *Leonardo Savioli: il segno generatore di formaspaio* (Firenze: Edimond, 1995), 42.

6. Lara Vinca Masini, "Leonardo Savioli: il segno generatore di forma-spazio", in Rosalia Manno Tolu, Lara Vinca Masini and Alessandro Poli eds, cit., 13.

7. Alberto Breschi, "Leonardo Savioli, un maestro", in Rosalia Manno Tolu, Lara Vinca Masini and Alessandro Poli eds., cit., 75.



FIGS. 2-4 Projects by the students of "Interior Architecture and Industrial Design" course, by Savioli. (from Leonardo Savioli, *ipotesi di spazio*) At the bottom is the project of the "Synthesis architectures in Santa Croce neighborhood" by Breschi.

Involvement' with research on the adaptability of avant garde languages to contemporary architecture. Amongst the students were some of the major exponents of Radical Architecture, such as Alberto Breschi, founder of ZZiggurat and assistant to Savioli from 1969, and Adolfo Natalini, at his side from 1966, the year of the latter's degree.⁸ Natalini's thesis already contains one of the orientations of the Superstudios: the will to transform "an elementary and primordial, illuminist and Kahnian geometry" into a Pop key, while, on the other hand, the monument building and the 'great design' were "fragmented in a Savioli tendency".⁹

"Space Involvement" concerned, in particular, the design of a Piper, the show business and entertainment Club in vogue at that time that revolutionised "the manner in which 'dance' is conceived, no longer as individualistic but as a global ceremony".¹⁰ New spatial theories were expressed in which the user was no longer to endure the 'conceptual' space of the project designer but could intervene living it and therefore modifying it.¹¹ In this respect Koenig had noticed that the Piper project was "amongst the most extravagant inventions that may be seen today" stressing that Savioli's course was "amongst the few amusing and witty things, that do not anaesthetise the younger generation's faculty to

8. Adolfo Natalini, "Arti visive e spazio di coinvolgimento", *Casabella*, (328, 1968), 34-36.

9. Roberto Gargiani, Beatrice Lampariello, *Superstudio* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 3.

10. "Piper Club a Roma", *L'architettura cronache e storia*, (138, 1967), 789.

11. Leonardo Savioli "Spazio di coinvolgimento", *Casabella* (326, 1968), 32.

create".¹² The research carried out by the students is published by Savioli in the volume *Ipotesi di spazio (Space Hypothesis)*, in 1972.¹³ [Fig. 1] It is particularly interesting to leaf through the pages of the book and to observe the projects, also reading the explanatory reports, which are furthermore actual. The Piper is considered as a modern square: "it's the *environment*, the parking, the programmed space, the light paths, and on every occasion, it's a pretext for stimulation, for communication".¹⁴ The main solicitation is the visual one, perceived as a "new dimension", indeed it is observed that "the perceptual datum has been strongly inserted between aesthetics and human psychology, fully influencing the critical examination", causing a dissociation of man from its own time "bringing it to the new dimension of a 'technological and mechanical' current time"¹⁵. [Figs. 2-4]

The copious exchange in experience between Mentor and scholars also existed with those who were external assistants to Savioli in that period, such as Pietro De Rossi, who realised the Piper in Torino 1966 together with Giorgio Ceretti,¹⁶ or Maurizio Sacripanti, second prize at the Competition for the Italian stand at Osaka in 1970 with a 'space in movement', a kind of Escher module of a quarters-facility.¹⁷ Whatever the case, on the other hand, Savioli himself in a note drawn up for the biography to be written for the exhibition dedicated to his professional career, at Faenza in 1982, recalls: "Piper: as one of the generators of Radical Architecture".¹⁸

In the preface to the book, Leonardo Ricci, who was then Dean of the University, highlights the validity, four years after the student revolts, of that research aimed at stimulating a new attitude to design, wishing to "all those who, between utopia and reality, feel the need that between theory and practice the distance decreases until it coincides" that this may happen soon. In this sense, it is worth stressing the effort made by Savioli in his projects.¹⁹

Studio Savioli and the prefabricated window

As regards "Habitat 67", the residential complex presented at the Expo in Montreal, Moshe Safdie highlights that interaction between the architect and the users "consists in breaking down the building into small components, fit for industrial production [...] each inhabitant is to be able to move the walls, change the floor, in other words adapt the home to own habits".²⁰ On the other hand, Savioli writes two years earlier: "The day will come when we rent or buy a house and they will just give us a roof with toilet facilities, and we will need to provide for all the rest, including the walls. This we will do without turning to the mason or even the carpenter: walls and furniture will be cement prefabs"²¹. In support of the user in preparing own space in an innovative manner with respect to the tendency that favours traditional building methods, Savioli proposes prefabricated elements from the 'minimal home module' project with which he won the

12. Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura in Toscana* (Torino: ERI, 1968), 3.

13. Leonardo Savioli, "Per un nuovo rapporto tra l'utente e il suo spazio", in Idem, *Ipotesi di spazio* (Florence: Giglio & Garisenda editrice, 1972), 8-9.

14. Lorenzo Cremonini, "L'uso della luce in architettura", in Leonardo Savioli, *Ipotesi di spazio*, cit., 29. The word "environment" is written in english.

15. Ibid., 28.

16. Silvio Micheli, *La cultura architettonica italiana*, in Marco Biraghi, Gabriella Lo Ricco, Silvia Micheli, Mario Viganò (eds.), *Italia 60/70. Una stagione dell'architettura* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2010), 23. One remembers the exhibition "Radical City", held at the State Archives of Turin from 30 May to 30 June 2012, edited by Emanuele Piccardo.

17. Achille Perilli, "Il segno utopico di Maurizio Sacripanti", *Controspazio*, (2, 1997). Cfr. Maria Luisa Neri and Laura Thermes, *Maurizio Sacripanti maestro di architettura* (Roma: Gangemi, 1998).

18. Savioli disappears in that year. The manuscript sheet is published in Massimiliano Nocchi, *Leonardo Savioli. Allestire, arredare, abitare* (Firenze: Alinea, 2008), 85.

19. Leonardo Ricci, "Preface", in Leonardo Savioli, *Ipotesi di spazio*, cit., 2.

20. Bruno Zevi, "Autobiografia di Moshe Safdie", *Cronache di architettura* (vol. 8, 842, 1973) 81 and Moshe Safdie, *Beyond Habitat*, Tundra Books, Montreal 1970. Cfr. Nilda Valentin, *Moshe Safdie*, Roma, Kappa, 2010.

21. Paolo Bugiatti, "Gli architetti ci propongono l'appartamento 'su misura'", *Corriere della Sera*, (8 march 1965), ASF, Savioli, *Materiali relativi a progetti*, 218.

'Gold Seal' at the 'La Casa abitata' (The inhabited homes) exhibition on display in Florence in 1965, published in "Domus" and praised as "it belongs to a study of great interest that he is carrying out with a new approach to prefabrication".²² It concerns, Savioli underlines, the ability to construct "a unique and unrepeatable piece with repeatable elements, to use prefabricated concrete elements in such a way as to allow freedom, fantasy, and thereby ambience"²³. Savioli demonstrates how this outstanding variety is possible by using a self-same element in the building in Via Piagentina,



FIG. 5 Savioli study, main façade with a "block" window (photo by the author, 2010. Currently the studio is in disuse).

in 1964, in which the openings show the multiple variations on the topic of windows, one of his most significant prefabricated elements, which becomes one of the characterizing theme of his studio.²⁴ As his professional activity expands, this leads to the realisation in 1968 of the studio. Since the death of the Master in 1982, it has become a true place of cult, thanks to the availability of his wife, the artist Flora Wieckmann who has allowed tours of the studio.²⁵ Although it is a work of art of small dimensions it is the expression of the mature evolution of Savioli's train of thought in the second half of the 1960s when he experiments new meanings attributing "the capacity for continuous, open, variable testimony of everyday existence to spatial wrapping".²⁶

The studio has a rectangular and compact volume plan and was realized in a lower level in front of the house (the latter having been built in the 1950s), so as to create a roof garden with open, transparent, dome skylights which are spacious and allow an evocative lighting from above, directly onto the space destined for paintings. [Fig. 5] From the main façade the incredible steel and crystal prism of the main entrance door stands out and enables one to glimpse the inside within, and reflects the garden at the front and the circular pool by means of a transparent game of mirrors. Next to the entrance and on the side facade one can see a small series of cement 'block' windows: an invention, a true object of design, inserted to create and vary movement in the sole glass window. [Fig. 6] The prefabricated relief box-like blocks, with red wooden, protruding frames interrupt the surrounding landscape.²⁷

The new Flower Market and the City for Leisure Time

The project for the new Flower Market in Pescia, as is known, won amongst 72 competitors in the 1970 competition and was praised as "one of the few emerging works in Italian architecture panorama" of

22. Lara Vinca Masini and Agnoldomenico Pica, "La casa abitata", *Domus*, (426, 1965), 45.

23. ASF, Savioli, *Materiali relativi a progetti*, 178.

24. Carolina De Falco, "From the "finestra arredata" to the prefab windows", in Salvatore Cozzolino, Françoise Klein, Marc Streker, Renata Valente (eds.), *Threshold Seuil Soglia IWS 2012* (Firenze: Alinea, 2013), 110-117.

25. From her donated in 2008 to the Tuscany Region and closed to her death in 2011, the studio was open to the centenary celebration, but its adaptive reuse is desirable. In this regard, see the video *Leonardo Savioli: Edificio A_INCIS e Studio Savioli* that I presented at the International Congress and video-exhibition Paolo Mellano and Gentucca Canella (eds.) *Conservazione, tutela, ridestituzione per l'architettura italiana del secondo Novecento* (Torino 12/13 december 2017).

26. Leonardo Savioli, *La città di domani*, cit.

27. Mario Dogi, "Scomposizione del paesaggio", *Ville Giardini* (69, 1973), 26.

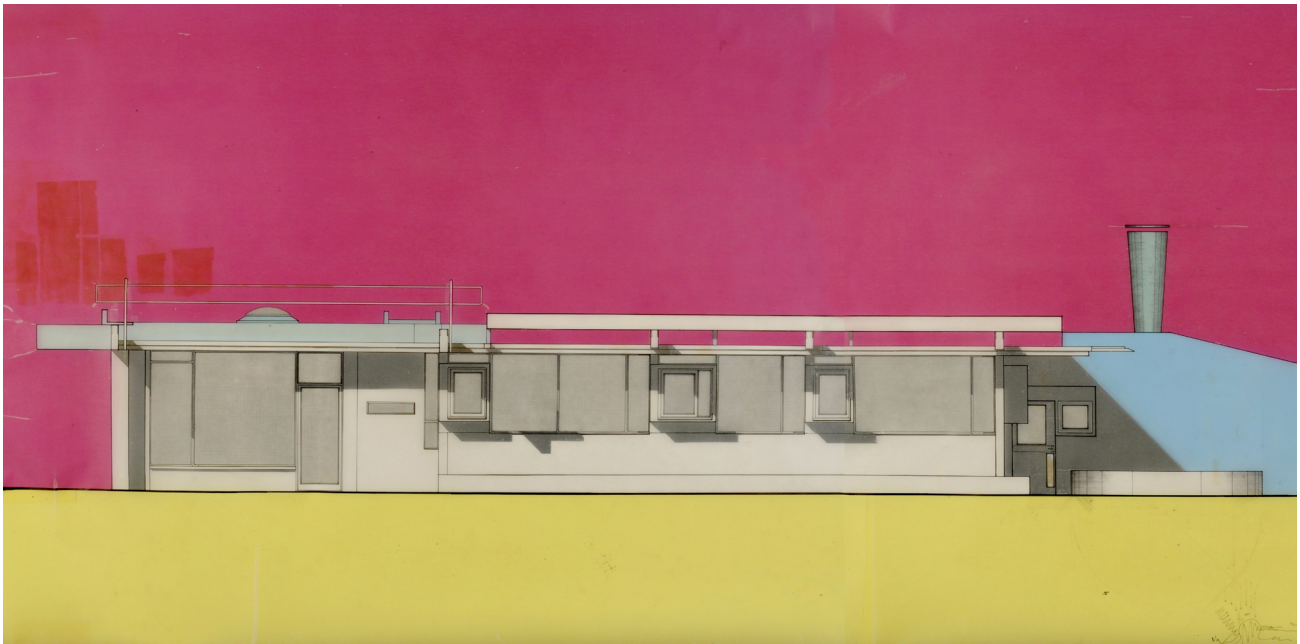


FIG. 6 Savioli study, side façade. Ink and coloured screens on tracing paper, 1:20 scale. ASF, Savioli, Rotoli, P 78, T 6, C 140.

that period.²⁸ [Fig. 7] It is characterised by a metallic reticular structure, modular and extendable, which although responding to the indications of the competition, on the other one it shows interest in the latest projects of Savioli in this more technological material, but also "more ephemeral, more transient, more modular and on the whole more destructible than cement" a sign of his search in continuous evolution.²⁹ [Fig. 8] The cover, without intermediate supports over 11,000 square metres, uses the expressive accentuation of new technologies, aligning itself with the contemporary research of Renzo, Piano and James Stirling.³⁰ On the other hand metal is also the material used in new discos and contemporarily responds to the dry assembly of prefabricated elements.³¹ The user is one again at the center of the project, as can be seen by the study of paths: mechanized for flowers, pedestrian for operators and even for tourists heading to the lookout, in a structure also equipped with a bar and newsstand. [Fig. 9]

In the project of the Flower Market, fortunately realized, Savioli has possibility of putting into practice that idea of modular implementation of his designs and his care for people. But it is possible to contextualise that project also in light of the design for the "International Competition for the Resolution of the Leisure Time", won in Cannes a year later, whose jury included Bruno Zevi, Louis Kahn and Jacob G. Bakema. The competition, indeed, was aimed at the realisation of a multifunctional space, not separated from the residences, in line with the theme discussed since the Triennale of

28. Giovanni Klaus Koenig, "Un piccolo Beaubourg", *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* (273, 1978), 146.

29. Pier Carlo Santini, "Architettura a Firenze, oggi", *Ottagono*, (3, 1966), 40.

30. Giovanni Fanelli, "Leonardo Savioli. L'Opus' dell'anima", in Ezio Godoli (ed.), *Architetture del Novecento. La Toscana* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2001), 137.

31. François Burkhardt, "La 'cattedrale dei fiori' di Pescia rivisitata", in Claudia Massi (ed.), *Mercati dei fiori a Pescia* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2017), 87 and see the book in general.

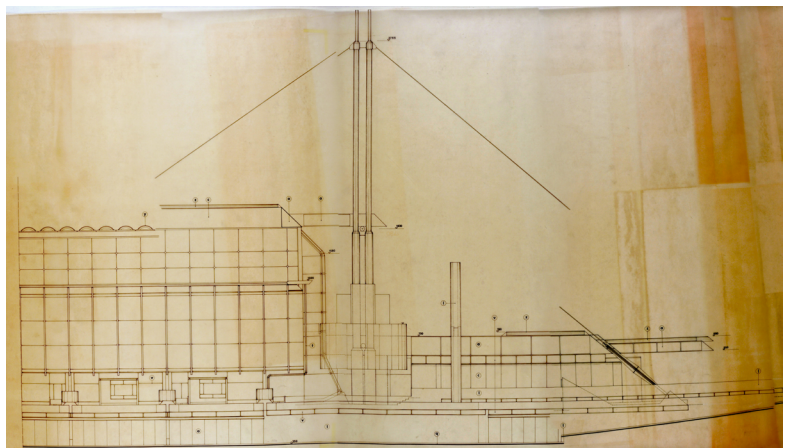


FIG. 7 New Flower Market at Pescia, detail of the façade. Ink on tracing paper. ASF, Savioli, Rotoli, P 85, C 82.

1964 dedicated to 'Leisure Time' and also in the example of the Archigram who had foreseen a true and proper city with spaces dedicated to parties, music and celebrations, conceived as a means of collective recreation.³²

Savioli's work group includes his friend Danilo Santi, Giovanni Corradetti and Alberto Breschi, assisted by engineers, sociologists and designers, amongst whom Remo Buti, co-founder of Global Tools. This on one hand confirms the inclination of Savioli to listen to innovative ideas and his constant upgrading through experimentations with the younger generations, and on the other hand the interest, in that particular historical context, for inter-disciplinary system approaches aimed at resolving urban questions.

Savioli looks into the aspect of human well-being and proposes the construction of a city with parallel levels, evoking the project of Fun Palace of Cedric Price, 1961-1965, flexible centre of instruction and entertainment, formed of an open structure of steel frameworks or the ideas of 'free mounting city' by Yona Friedman, 1968. One should note that Savioli's project foresees the realisation of a 'live' fabric able to organise itself and self-plan according to the will of the citizens.³³ Actually, the project does not propose "a new form of city a new form of free time apparatus, but a new way of relations, so as to obtain optimisation of the interchanges".³⁴ Savioli stresses furthermore that he intends resolving the question of free time "not as a reality in itself and temporary i.e. as a liberating means and *una tantum*".³⁵

Savioli is also respectful and careful regarding the relationship with Nature and establishes a first level made up of natural land, free of property restrictions, while the underground lower level holds warehouses, depots and vehicle traffic is to be found. [Fig. 10] Above the natural land a kind of urban artificial landscape is to be found formed by three prefabricated levels with the possibility of development and growth in each direction, that constitute the support for all types of activity. Three modular meshes rest respectively on said levels and vary in shape and dimension: the first one has artisan workshops, laboratories and small industries, the second one enclosed in a spherical area, is the one dedicated to leisure or sport and includes "a series of prefabricated and multiple objects of rapid use". Furthermore it can characteristically be shifted so as to be arranged on the level for that work or on the natural one, to adapt to the idea of integration between leisure time destination and work time destination. As concerns the third



FIG. 8 New Flower Market at Pescia, detail of the cover (photo by the author).

32. Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), ed. it. *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1986), 339.

33. Alberto Breschi, "Leonardo Savioli, un maestro", in Rosalia Manno Tolu, Lara Vinca Masini and Alessandro Poli eds., cit., 76.

34. ASF, Leonardo Savioli, *Rotoli*, P 71, T2, C7. Handwritten note in the margin of the sheet, the underlining is by the author. See also Leonardo Savioli, Danilo Santi, "La produzione architettonica contemporanea", *Necropoli*, (17-18, 1973), 44.

35. ASF, Leonardo Savioli, *Premio Internazionale di urbanistica ed architettura. I problemi del tempo libero, Relazione di progetto, Materiali relativi a progetti*, 382.

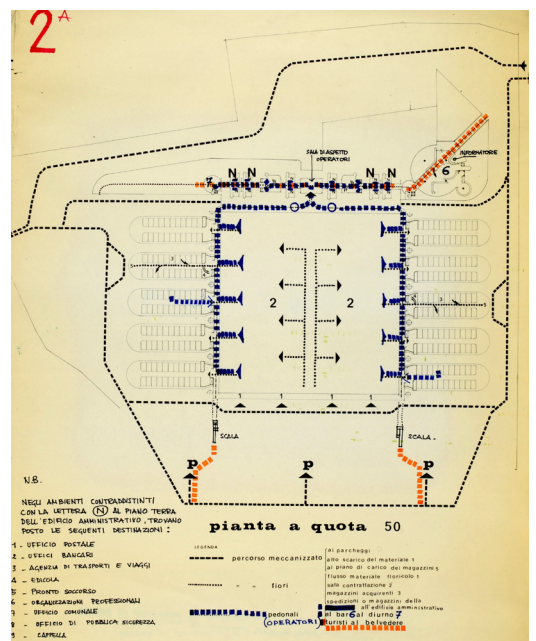


FIG. 9 New Flower Market at Pescia, project plan with indication of the routes. ASF, Savioli, Rotoli P 85 T 01 C 010.

one, it is formed of residences made with mountable units "consumable and destroyable" and available according to the user's choice.

Conclusions

Savioli's aptitude to grasp originality enables him a kind of short circuit: The Master's lessons to the scholars return to him in a reciprocal exchange and contamination. For example one cannot let slip that the triangular matrix structure of the last projects, as at Sermoneta or at Pistoia, the great staircases, the steps on the top of the buildings are amongst the themes proposed in 1969 by Ziggurat of Alberto Breschi, Giuliano Fiorenzoli and Roberto Pecchioli in the "Città Lineare" (Linear City). As, in the other hand, it is possible to find the influence of Savioli in the recent project by Breschi to redevelop the square at Tavernuzze (2006-2015).

In 1979 Natalini writes a letter to Savioli, who is by then seriously ill, in which he recognizes the importance of having him as a Mentor, and declares: "I believe that architecture exists as long as someone, like yourself, makes it a testimony. I have thought it many times while listening to your lessons, or watching the drawings you call projects, or the sculptures you call architectural model".³⁶

In the era of contestations it was difficult for the new generations to recognise a Mentor but at a distance one can attribute that role to Leonardo Savioli, in the innovation of his work, within the Tuscan school.

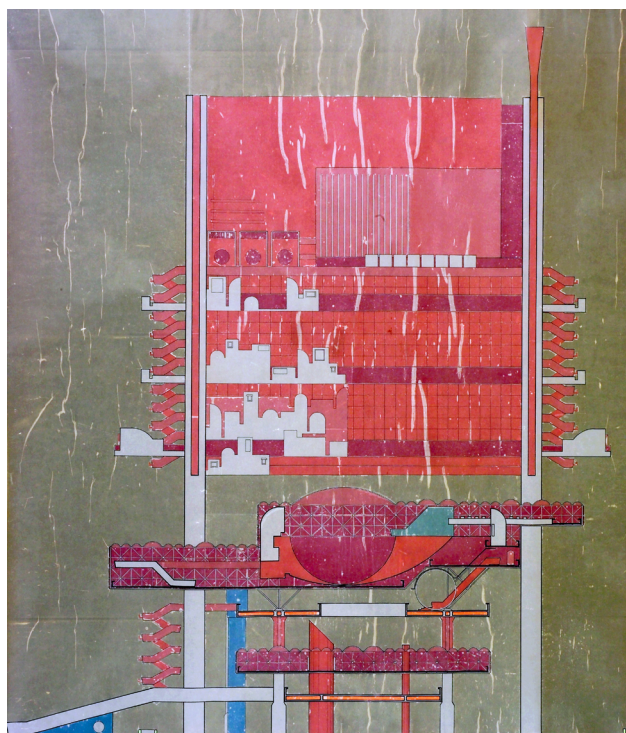


FIG. 10 "Resolution for Leisure Time", project for the competition in Cannes. Ink and coloured screens on tracing paper. ASF, Savioli, Rotoli, P 79, C 70.

36. ASF, Savioli, *Carteggio, Lettere a Leonardo Savioli*, 222, c. 561.