

Lina Bo Bardi: Unbuilt in Sicily

In August 1940 the magazine *Domus*, in a special issue dedicated to the *casa al mare*, publishes the project of the *Casa sul mare di Sicilia* by Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani. It was one of the first projects of Lina Bo, a utopian project whose representations indicate a way of proceedings that coagulates theory and imagination conceived as an indissoluble relationship of 'doing'.

Add to the 'unconventional' drawings of the project, plans, perspectives and perspective section, indicating a very personal way in the use of graphic language, we can find a synthesis' drawing that underlines how the representation is intended both as an extension of the mind, and as order structure of a speech.

It is a project, which because of its visionary character, contains an idea of landscape, living, relationship with the history, that a possible realisation would not allow it to take shape with such expressive intensity. This paper deals with a graphic reading of the dwelling designed by Lina Bo through new digital representations that not only implement the existing graphic corpus but also try to retrace the project's ways that often the word, entrusted to architectural criticism, cannot identify.

If this sentence is true, then the drawing conceived as analysis and then as a critical tool, is the medium between words and things.

Keywords: history, representation, unbuilt, Sicily, digital

Eclectic character, architect, scenographer, urban planner, designer and also illustrator, Lina Bo, from the early years of her youth, has revealed a particular inclination towards drawing manifested by her watercolors produced when she was eleven years old that testify to the need to represent the world and especially the idea that we have of it.

A watercolor of 1929, painted at the age of fifteen, on *Piazza Montanara* (Fig. 1), as well as showing the ability to modulate the sign to highlight the plans sequence, describes, through the expression of the subjects' faces, the human condition that the square welcomed.

The urban space described by the young Lina has been destroyed, and her watercolor is witness, along with vintage photos, of an image of a lost Rome.

Worth here transcribing the description of the square –which comes from the network *Roma Sparita - Storia e Cultura-* to emphasise the close union between the literary text and architectural image:

In Rome there was a small picturesque square of which there is no longer trace: Piazza Montanara. It was located close to the remains of Teatro di Marcello, between Via Montanara and Vicolo del Teatro di Marcello, stretching almost to the church of San Nicola in Carcere, from which only a little block separated it, and with a system of bystreets it was linked to what is now Piazza Bocca della Verità. It was a very picturesque square. Rural people arrive there: stewards, foremen, yokels, peasants, corporals... the whole hierarchy of the countryside was represented by a colorful humanity made of women dressed with the bust covered in red apron and striped blouse, and of men in clumsy clothes but with the inevitable hat.

Then there were the strolling players, the laborers who came to look for seasonal work, who often camped overnight in the crevices of the square to be ready early in the morning to be hired and starting with their shovels and hoes on their shoulders, singing.



Fig. 1. Lina Bo Bardi, *Piazza Montanara*, 1929, watercolor. Published in Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (ed.), *Lina Bo Bardi* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1994).



Fig. 2. Enrico Bo, *Piazza Guglielmo Pepe*, oil. Published in Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (ed.), *Lina Bo Bardi* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1994).



Fig. 3. Lina Bo Bardi, watercolor. Published in Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (ed.), *Lina Bo Bardi* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1994).

The popular Roman voice, with that sense of superiority that always has characterised it, called them *burini*. It is believed that the square's name derived from this type of frequentation. Actually, Montanara is the name of the fifteenth century family, then died out, who first began to build in the square.

With such frequentation could not miss in the square also flourishing small commercial activities such as grocery store, haberdashery, peddling of alcohol, the sale of fabrics and hats, hardware. While preferred exercise outdoors surgeons and tooth-puller or scribes. Famous was the *barbiere della meluccia* who used mouthing customers a small apple, always the same, while shaving, for tending their cheeks. The last customer of the day could eat it.

Belli left us, in his verses, the indelible memory of some characters of the square: the scribe, who exercised in the square calling and declaiming his skills, but also the *Santaccia*, a prostitute rather famous.

This whole world was completely destroyed between 1926 and 1934 for the construction of Via del Mare (now Via del Teatro di Marcello) and the reorganisation of the entire road network and enhancement of the Colle Capitolino. This whole area, including the current Piazza della Bocca della Verità, underwent a radical transformation and it is now quite complex to figure out how it had to be this area.¹

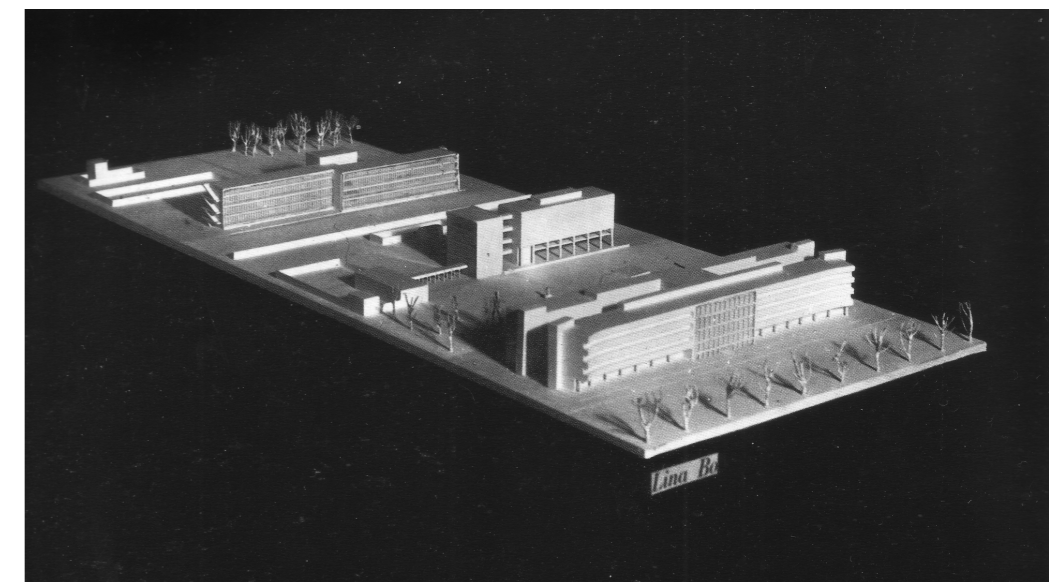


Fig. 4. Lina Bo Bardi, Thesis, 1939, model. Published in Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (ed.), *Lina Bo Bardi* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1994).

The telling of the square's history harmonises well with the watercolor of the young Bo Bardi because every drawing of Lina points to a possible literary text unwritten, evokes memories, and urges imagination.

Lina Bo's peculiar way of representing had certainly not originated through a 'natural talent' but, most likely, referred to the artistic sensibility of her father, Enrico Bo, anarchist with an adventurous life, dotted with many trades. He was the owner of a factory toys, graphic artist, builder in Rome largely of the popular Testaccio district. One need only look at the oil painting by her father, *Piazza Guglielmo Pepe* (Fig. 2), to trace representational similarities with the drawings of his young daughter (Fig. 3). The personal and professional experience of Lina Bo Bardi is an original and exciting aspect in the history of modern architecture.

She graduated in 1939, almost twenty-six, from the Faculty of Architecture of Rome with a thesis about the project of a building for assistance for mothers and children (Fig. 4), in a period when the Roman school, led by Marcello Piacentini and Gustavo Giovannoni, focused its interest mainly on the historical disciplines rather than on projects. She first moved to Milan, where she worked with Giò Ponti and Carlo Pagani, and a few years later to Brazil, her second homeland.²

Immediately, after her graduation, in August 1940, the *Domus* journal, in a special issue dedicated to the 'beach house', she published the project of *Casa sul Mare di Sicilia*³ by Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo

¹ "Roma Sparita – Piazza Montanara," *Roma Sparita: Storia e Cultura*, <http://www.romasparita.eu/storia-cultura/279-roma-sparita-piazza-montanara> (accessed June 16, 2017).

² '1951. Mi sono naturalizzata brasiliana. Quando si nasce, non si sceglie niente, si nasce per caso. Non sono nata qui, ho scelto questo posto per viverci. Per questo, il Brasile è due volte il mio Paese, è la mia 'Patria di Scelta', e io mi sento cittadina di tutte le città, da Cariri al Triangolo Mineiro, alle Città dell'Interno e a quelle di Frontiera.' Lina Bo Bardi, "Curriculum letterario," in Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz, *Lina Bo Bardi* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1994), 12.

³ Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani, "Casa sul mare in Sicilia," *Domus* 18 (August 1940), 30–35.



Fig. 5. Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani, House in Sicily, 1940
Published in Lina Bo Bardi e Carlo Pagani, "Casa sul mare in Sicilia," *Domus* 18 (Agosto 1940).

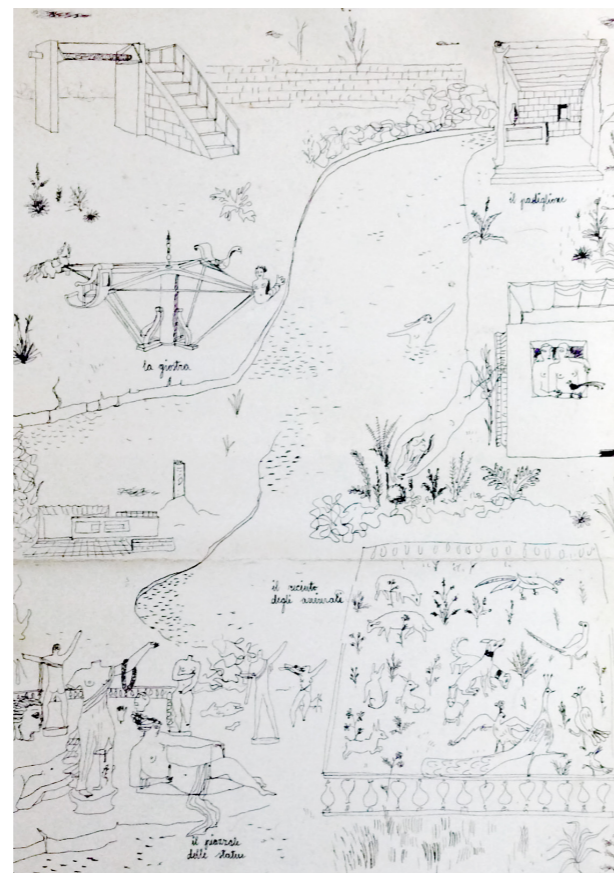


Fig. 6. Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani, drawing unknown.
Published in Marcelo Carvalho Ferraz (ed.), *Lina Bo Bardi* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 1994).

Pagani. It is one of her first projects, a sort of real debut, a utopian project whose representations indicate a way of proceeding that coagulates theory and imagination conceived as inseparable relationship of 'doing architecture'.

Add to the 'unconventional' drawings' project, plans, perspectives and perspective section, indicating a very particular manner of the graphic language used by Lina Bo, a synthesis drawing (Fig. 5) which emphasises how the representation is intended both as an extension of the mind and as the order structure of a dialogue that relates architecture to the elements of culture of the Magna Graecia. This representation recalls another drawing that relates to *Studio per un giardino*, also made with Carlo Pagani, published in the catalog of an exhibition on Lina Bo Bardi organised in 1993 in São Paulo by the Lina Bo Institute and P. M. Bardi (Fig. 6).

The similarities between the two drawings are very clear. The topic of the fence, the drawing of the balustrade, the roof garden with the same curtains, the statues that refer to the Magna Graecia, and especially, in the upper right corner, the central perspective of a brick and wood pavilion are absolutely identical to the one in the *Casa in Sicilia* project. This perfect similarity leads to two different reflections. The former, according to which the published drawing in the catalog may refer

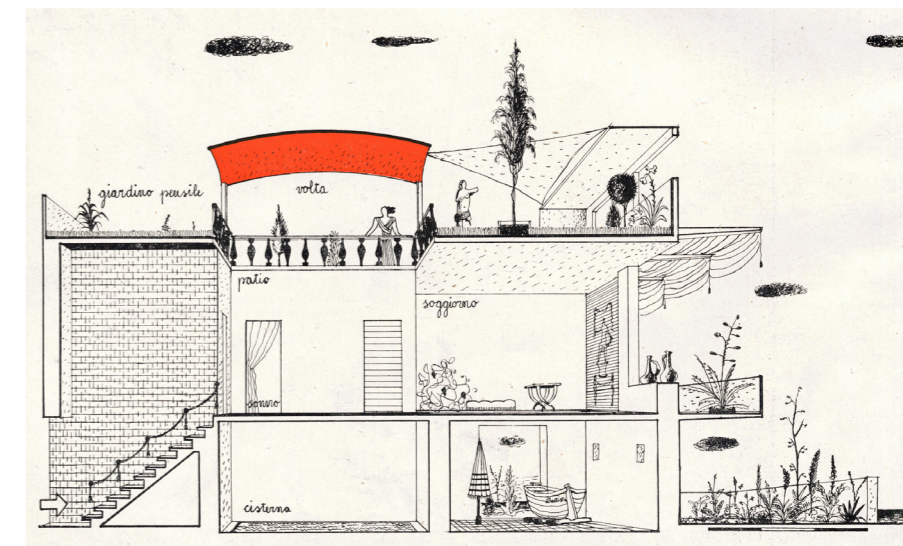


Fig. 7. Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani, House in Sicily, 1940,
perspective section.
Published in Lina Bo Bardi e Carlo Pagani, "Casa sul mare in Sicilia," *Domus* 18 (Agosto 1940).

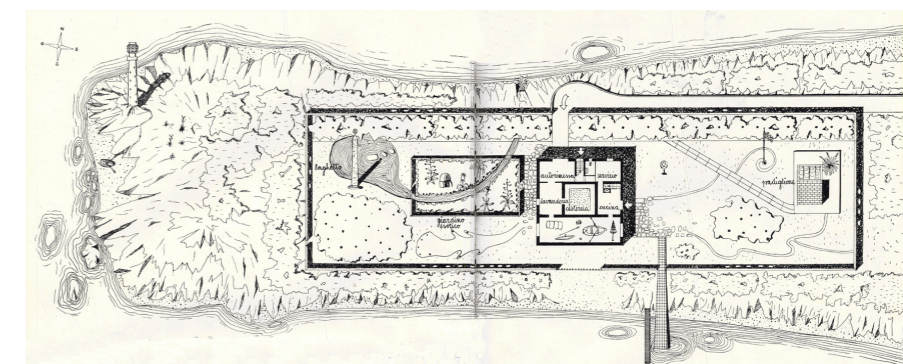


Fig. 8. Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani, House in Sicily, 1940,
plan.
Published in Lina Bo Bardi e Carlo Pagani, "Casa sul mare in Sicilia," *Domus* 18 (Agosto 1940).

is the project in Sicily and concerns the drafting of an initial project proposal; the latter, perhaps the most plausible, is that an architect, actually owning his/her own figurative repertoire, uses the elements of his/her 'catalog' in similar spatial situations to that where the element has been used.

The design of the *Casa in Sicilia*, for its visionary character, contains an idea of landscape, living, relating with the history, that an eventual realisation would not allow it to take shape with such expressive intensity.

The house, on two levels, is set almost centrally, behind a fence whose shape is that of a 'stretched' rectangle, as if it was the combination of two diagonal rectangles $\sqrt{3}$ derived from the square on the short side. The fence is surrounded by high white walls that 'create, under the blinding sea and rock of Sicily painting, an atmosphere of rest, an atmosphere of immense summer silence'.⁴

Indeed, by observing the perspective section drawn by the authors (Fig. 7), it is clear that the height of the wall of the fence is small and, therefore, it is in contrast with the words in the text

⁴ Bo Bardi and Pagani, "Casa sul mare," 31.

accompanying the description of this house; here the drawing shows its strength, all its significant power. The drawing, as language, in its contiguity with the word, includes and excludes stresses and deliberately hides.

The house is thought of as the 'alteration of the earth's crust' of a small promontory whose margins are formed by steep rocks in which grow and creep wild shrubs, a prerogative of the sunny seascape of Sicily. A high lighthouse stands at the tip of the promontory almost to guard the house.

The general layout (Fig. 8) is the representation that, besides the graphical composition of figure 5, provides more to the imagination the elements of a poetic 'building'. The use of shadow gives cognizance of volumetric relationships and of the consistency of the elements as well as informing about the harmony of the composition. The strict formal layout of the fence, the rectangle $\sqrt{3}$, the house, a square, the exotic garden, another rectangle, the pavilion, another square, contrast with the meandering of the stream that flows into a small pond, small walkways that lead to the obelisk and to a pavilion and a walkway of random inclined arrangement, also leading to the pavilion. Within the fence of the exotic garden stand hibiscus plants, euphorbia, cactus and palm trees and two huts, the memory of the primitive hut indicating, probably, the concept of living.

The representation's system of the general plan, as well as other orthogonal projections that tell the project, does not perfectly follow the rules of the representation science because there is the presence of representation in plan and elevation; into the drawing, indeed, the lighthouse, the obelisk, the umbrella into the shed and the spherical astrolabe are represented in vertical projection. Within the exotic garden, however, the hut is shown in axonometric projection.

Taking shape as a real utopian hypothesis, this project, on paper, strongly expresses the idea of living and in this respect references the Heideggerian thought according to which

building and thinking are always, each in their own way, inescapable for dwelling. Both, however, are also insufficient for dwelling until they separately wait for their activities, without listening to each other. They can do this when both, the building and the thinking, belong to the living, remain within their limits and know that the one and the other come from the workshop of a long experience and a relentless pursuit.⁵

The plan of the house, at the entrance height, already has a strict formal layout and the correspondence of the alignments among parties is mainly determined by the use of load-bearing masonry. The ground floor includes the garage, the laundry, the kitchen, the private quarters of housekeeper, a large boathouse and storage for equipment related to recreational marine activity. The central space, a square in the square, contains the tank probably entrusted to collect rainwater. A path above the rocks can bring the boat into the sea and adjacent is a quay for mooring.

The access to the main floor of the house is via a staircase with a ramp located centrally on the north side of the driveway entrance, and from it you can reach the covered central patio, a clear nod to the Greek house to which the authors make explicit reference. The patio is the centerpiece of the house because 'around it unfolds life and life converges there'.⁶ The master bedroom with dressing room and bathroom with oval tub face to the east, and to the west are a room with two beds and the office which is connected to the kitchen below by a staircase and a small elevator. To the south the large living and music space is furnished with a big bed for a guest, with the piano and the dining table set against the west wall; a sliding door, with equal dimensions to those of the square patio's side, allows a close relationship between the two spaces. The perspective sections (Fig. 9) evidence this relationship from the point of view of the connection between the parts. From visual perception of the interior we gather, in a single glance, many central elements of the project: the sharpness of white walls, the scarlet red of the wall's patio, background of the head of an ancient excavation horse, the relationship with the blue sky, with the seascape, with the overlooking volcanic islands in eruption; small vessels of different shape, resting on the windowsill of the large window, reminiscent of the forms of Greek pottery.

A long terrace, adjacent to the longer side of the living room allows a view of the sea and a volcano, probably Stromboli Island. From the terrace, through two symmetrical staircases posed to the east and west, one reaches the roof garden: 'Here, there is the rest in the sun or in the shade of the sail stretched over the soft flowery meadow. All around myrtle bushes and cactus plants grow between slabs of lava; graphite here and there.'⁷

The south façade, in its essence, informs us of the base and the tripartite division of the openings of the first floor and the roof garden almost recalling the rhythmic rigor of the base, of the stem and entablature in the architectural order.

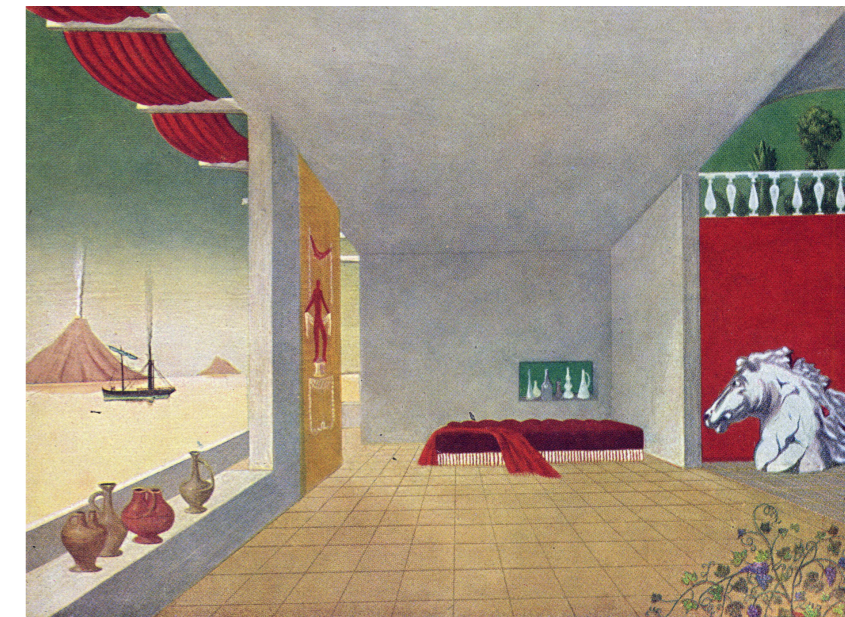


Fig. 9. Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani, House in Sicily, 1940, perspective section. Published in Lina Bo Bardi e Carlo Pagani, "Casa sul mare in Sicilia," *Domus* 18 (Agosto 1940).

⁶ Bo Bardi and Pagani, "Casa sul mare," 30.

⁷ Bo Bardi and Pagani, "Casa sul mare," 31.

⁵ Gianni Vattimo (ed.), "Costruire abitare pensare," in *Saggi e discorsi* (Milano: Mursia, 1976), 107–108.

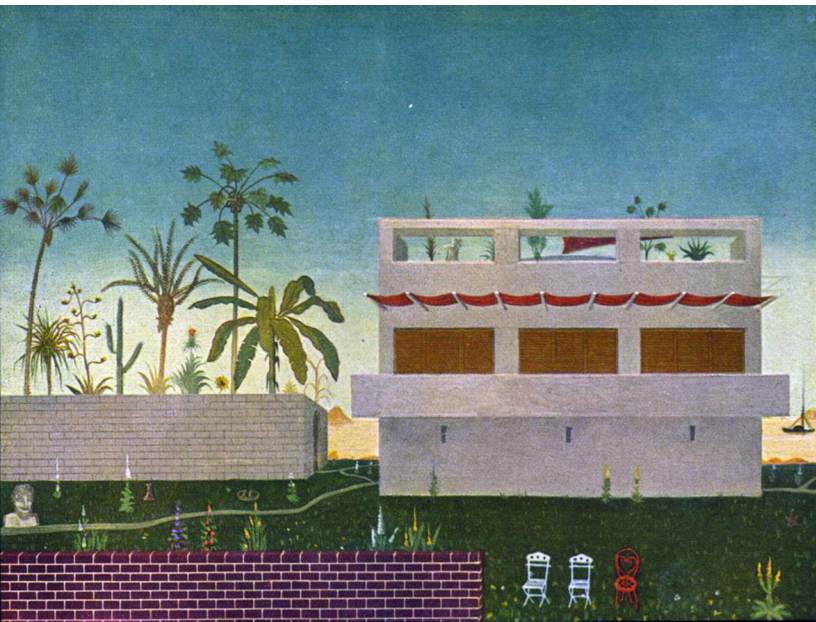


Fig. 10. Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani, House in Sicily, 1940, perspective.
Published in Lina Bo Bardi e Carlo Pagani, "Casa sul mare in Sicilia," *Domus* 18 (Agosto 1940).

As Sarah Catalano rightly says, certainly looking at the façade (Fig. 10), 'the architectural language used is rationalist, in a Mediterranean version, showing attention to local weather conditions and to the relationship with the landscape: a stereometrically defined pure volume, smooth and white surfaces, marked by large openings that open to the sea.'⁸

The topic of the Mediterranean is one of the central themes of architecture critics who operate in the Mediterranean basin and who track this character even in European architecture built during the Modern Movement, especially by those architects who came very often to Italy.

To summarise the salient aspects of this character it seems appropriate to refer to

the words of Nicola Marzot that, very clearly, outline the significant traits:

The Mediterranean can express and reveal to the observer at different levels, which form the possible invariant, each of which plays a crucial role in the qualification of public space, connoting it formally and historically. The first level is related to the way in which the architecture relates to the ground, whether it is natural or artificial. In this sense, the Mediterranean architecture does not 'rest' in order to preserve intact the primitive morphology, but it 'turns into space' in the ground, becoming an integral part, almost resulting in mineralized landscape. In the first case, exemplified by a settlement of rule of the classical temple, an 'additive' logic prevails, filling the natural space of objects, each of which retains its intrinsic characteristic, sublimated by the condition of mutual detachment evoked by the role of the stylobate. In the second one a logic of 'subtractive' character prevails transforming the morphology of the support, natural and/or artificial one, through architecture, altering its character by virtue of a system of operations that interacts with inertia to the modification of the same support, recalling the original meaning of *templum* as 'clearing', evoked by Heidegger as an emblematic 'place'. In the first case the architecture 'gives itself' regardless of the presence of the landscape that includes it and that pre-exists, for contrast and/or difference, while in the second one the architecture 'reveals itself', in the Heideggerian sense, through the system of operations conducted on the

landscape itself, whereby the one and the other include each other through interaction. The archetype of a 'subtractive' attitude than to the landscape is the cave, as the result of a primitive 'removal' operation of matter from the living body of the natural landscape. Symmetrically, that original gesture, in a metonymic process, is inscribed on the rough inner surface of the atrium, determining the circumstantial character, that is the ability to present (and not to represent) without any form of mediation its own construction and transformation process. In its original formulation, the Mediterranean architecture is characterised therefore by elementary operations of transformation of the primal ground. The process by which it generates is comparable to that of sculpture, plastic, by way of 'digging' paraphrasing Michelangelo. [...] A fourth aspect is related to a trend aspiration of Mediterranean architecture to identify itself with the landscape in which it is going to include, in continuity with its morphology, without giving up to its own abstracting character. Thus nature and artifice become complementary factors associated within a vision of the world where natural and human forces are assimilated in common creative yearning, according to a romantic declination of architecture never completely died down.⁹

To investigate some aspects of the project, it was appropriate to target the cognitive process by the redrawing of it, a kind of mimesis, in reverse, of the compositional process. Indeed, the drawing is one of the tools of architectural criticism, and when it investigates a project in *absentia*, becomes a real act of interpretation. This consideration allows you to drive out an old basic misunderstanding for which the architecture drawing is only a tool intended as a simple means and not as something refined, used to achieve a purpose.

The new representations, perspectives, sections and perspective sections, outcomes of an hermeneutic and then identifiable in *Vorstellung*,¹⁰ have been produced since the drawings were published in *Domus* in 1940. They do not only provide new unpublished images of the project, but they are helpful for new 'readings' that indicate an action project that consists of the coexistence of theory and practice in the compositional process of Lina Bo, whose figures combined in a single architectural view, the house, the town and the landscape.

The drawing, as the proper place of architectural criticism, is a tool that allows, more so than any other, to get closer to the recognisable consistency of the design process for its continuous 'coming and going' that is characteristic of both the drawing and the form's construction, which, without it, cannot take 'body'. Therefore, the drawing conceived as analysis and critical tool, is the medium between words and things, which when 'drawn', provide the only survey instrument capable of retracing the critical points of the project, like the hidden ones, which the word often can identify only in an obviously different way.

8 Sarah Catalano, "Casa sul mare di Sicilia: Progetto d'esordio di Lina Bo Bardi e Carlo Pagani," *Salvare Palermo* 22 (2008), 19.

9 Nicola Marzot, "Architetture scolpite: Alcune invarianti del paesaggio mediterraneo," *Architettura* 7-8 (2003), 25-26.

10 The deutsch term *Vorstellung* indicates representation as a purely interpretative action.

To reconstruct the thought of Lina Bo Bardi, through the reconstruction of some unbuilt projects, it is necessary to rely on digital representation, as it allows multiple hermeneutic manifestations.

The construction of the digital model is the logical consequence for the verification of the project's intentions, not only because the model contains the expressions of the 'translator', in this case those who re-draw, but above all because it allows you to view all the problems that would arise if those representations were materialised in a true, real, architectural 'body'.

We must intend the digital model as a 'starting point' for the graphical analysis of the architecture and not as its outcome; in fact, it is associated with other graphics, sometimes not derived from the model, useful for understanding of the architecture. The construction of the model is not an action of putting into the form a simple image that is an operation often carried out for the representation of the project, but it is the hermeneutic and critical result of the drawing substantially tending to the analysis of the shape.

Vincenzo Fasolo, at the end of the 1950s, in a collection of his lectures at the Faculty of Architecture of Rome, proposed:

the graphical analysis as a method for studying architecture, hoped a history of architecture drawn, rather than spoken [...] the method that we propose tends to arouse a self-examination of the architectural values in which in them is permanent so much for the ancient as for the modern. It is precisely a study about the ancient fact in function of the modern that will purchase a greater validity insofar as within it cross the experience and the nobility of ages of architects of high secular civilization. What now we are proposing does not go at the expense of the modern critical method; rather complements it, and it arouses the interest. Because this drawing is observing and then a thinking.¹¹

We believe that, within the indissoluble relationship between drawing and design, the 'digital' representation can provide the history and architectural criticism of additional unedited files of images of unrealised architectures. The goal is ultimately to shed light on and re-build episodes in the history of architecture that are 'mute/silent' in their writing, and have found place only in the drawers of the archives or in the uncoated pages of books and magazines.

¹¹ Vincenzo Fasolo, "Analisi grafica dei valori architettonici: Lezioni del prof. Vincenzo Fasolo" (Rome: Università di Roma, Facoltà di Architettura, s.d.), s.p.

Francesco Maggio

Università degli Studi di Palermo, Dipartimento di Architettura D'ARCH
University of Palermo – Department of Architecture



Francesco Maggio, PhD, is associate professor of Representation in the Department of Architecture of the University of Palermo where he teaches *Laboratorio di Disegno e Rilievo* and *Disegno e Rappresentazione Informatica*. In the last few years, he has been interested in filling of archive drawings and in digital reconstructions of unbuilt architectures. He wrote the books *Architettura demolita* with M. Villa, *Eileen Gray: Interpretazioni grafiche* and *Triennale 1933* and the essays "Small Town Files. Lina Bo Bardi Unbuilt" and "Female Architecture: Unbuilt digital archive" with A. Franchina and S. Vattano.

E-mail: francesco.maggio@unipa.it