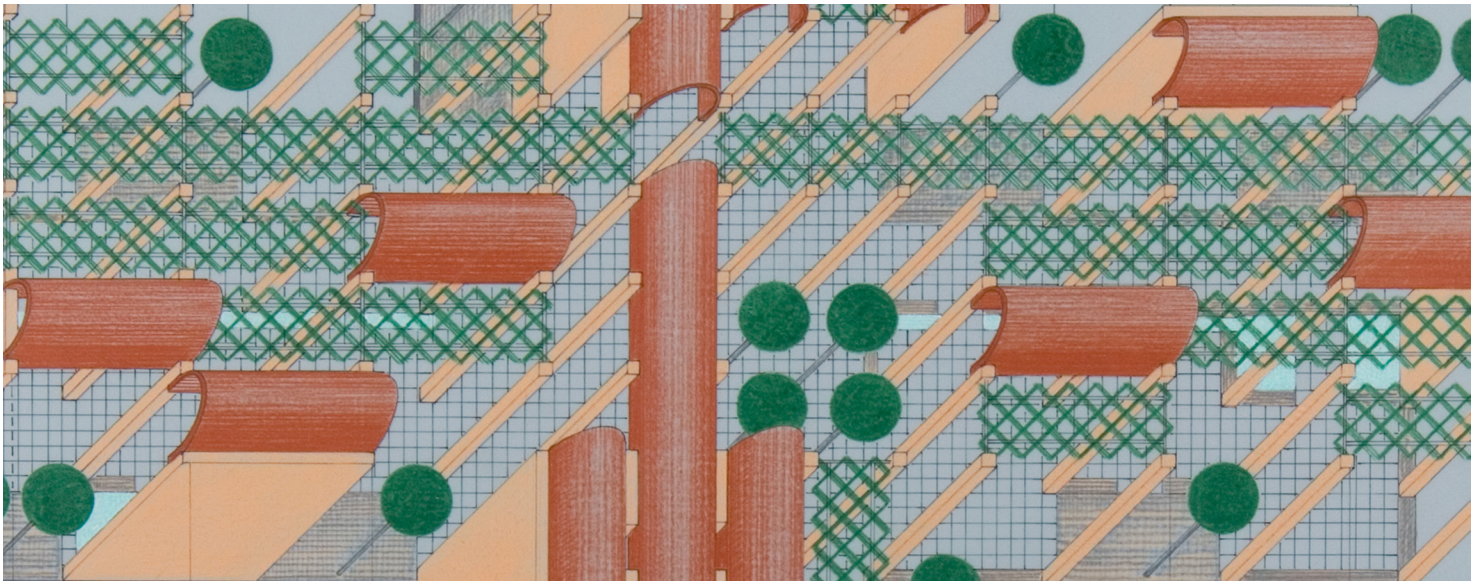
Few and Simple Elements: Lauretta Vinciarelli, the Puglia Project, and the Idea of 'Spatial Fabric'

Jolanda Devalle



Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà, detail from Drawing no. 11 for the Puglia Project, 1975–7. Ink and colored pencil on Mylar, 17 1/4 x 17 1/4 in. (44 x 44 cm). Lauretta Vinciarelli Papers, courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.

Lauretta Vinciarelli (1943–2011) was a Roman architect, artist, and educator. After earning her doctorate in architecture and urban planning from La Sapienza in Rome, she moved to New York in 1969, where she became involved with the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS), as well as the ReVisions group. Beginning in the mid-1970s, she taught at numerous architecture schools, including Pratt Institute, Columbia University, City College, the University of Illinois, and Rice University.[1] Today, Vinciarelli is perhaps better known for her striking and luminous watercolor paintings, which she began producing in the 1980s, and for her close artistic and personal collaboration with American minimalist artist Donald Judd, with whom she was both romantically and professionally connected for a decade. This essay instead seeks to foreground Vinciarelli's contributions as an architect, theorist, and educator through a close reading of the Puglia Project (1975–77)—a scheme that offers a revealing cross-section of her thinking, including her interest in typology and her concept of "spatial fabric." In particular, it brings to light an analytical approach to architectural design that is deserving of reappraisal today.

1 Vinciarelli's work is the subject of three monographs: Rebecca Siefert, *Into the Light: The Art and Architecture of Lauretta Vinciarelli* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020); *Clear Light: The architecture of Lauretta Vinciarelli,* ed. George Ranalli, Camille Farey, Ida Panicelli, et al. (Hong Kong: Oscar Riera Ojeda Publishers Limited, 2015); *Not Architecture But Evidence That It Exists*, ed. Brooke Hodge (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).

Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà.
From George Ranalli ed., *Young Architects* (New Haven: Yale School of Architecture, 1980).

The Puglia Project (1975–77) is an unbuilt design for a park in the region of Puglia, in Southern Italy. It consists of thirteen ink-and-color drawings on mylar paper of various sizes, and the project was the result of one of several collaborations between Vinciarelli and Sicilian architect Leonardo Foderà. The two met in 1975 in Manhattan at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IUAS), then directed by Peter Eisenmann. At the time, Foderà was a 23-year-old Fulbright scholar who had recently relocated from Palermo having just finished his architecture studies.[2] The pair soon began to collaborate, firstly on the Puglia Project and later on two proposals developed for Donald Judd's complex in Marfa, Texas.[3] Deeply impressed by the Puglia Project, Judd purchased the entire series shortly after its completion. Echoes of its elements can be discerned in the pergolas, water features, and courtyards of La Mansana de Chinati ("The Block"), realized during the 1970s and 1980s—a testament to what Foderà describes as a strong "communion of interests" between Judd and Vinciarelli.[4] Beyond Judd's appreciation, the project garnered considerable interest within architectural circles. It was featured in the June 1977 special issue of *Architectural Design* titled "America Now: Drawings towards a more Modern Architecture," which was edited by Robert Stern to accompany a major exhibition of American architectural drawings held in New York and London.[5] The project also appeared in the July 1978 issue of *Domus* and in *Architecture and Urbanism (A+U)*.[6] More recently, the drawings were showcased in a 2019 solo exhibition of Vinciarelli's work at Judd Foundation at 101 Spring Street, New York.[7]

2 Leonardo Foderà (b. 1952) is an architect and urban planner. He graduated in architecture in 1975. From 1976 to 1978 he was a Fulbright Scholar at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York City. In the following years, he held academic roles as Visiting Professor at the Rhode Island School of Design and as a Visiting Critic at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. Foderà is also the author of numerous essays and publications, among which he curated the re-edition of Hittorff and Zanth's book *Architecture Moderne de la Sicile* (Paris, 1935). Among his major projects are the master plans for the towns of Partinico and Ribera and detailed plans for the historic center of Palermo. He has also worked extensively on the preservation and renovation of monumental, landscape, and/or industrial heritage sites, including Villa Valguarnera in Bagheria (eighteenth century), Villa Belmonte in Palermo (early nineteenth century), Villa Patti in Caltagirone (late nineteenth century), and the wine cellars of the Rapitalà estates. More recently his focus has turned to large coastal settlements in Sicily: particularly the historic tuna fisheries (*tonnare*) of Scopello and Foderà di Magazzinazzi, where work is currently in progress.

3 After the Puglia Project, Vinciarelli and Foderà's collaboration continued with a proposal for a garden at the Walker House entitled 'Project for a Productive Garden in an Urban Center in Southwest Texas' (1979), as well as the series 'Marfa 2a' (1980), a study aimed at synthesizing two local typologies, that of industrial hangars and courtyard houses. The two series are held at Judd Foundation.

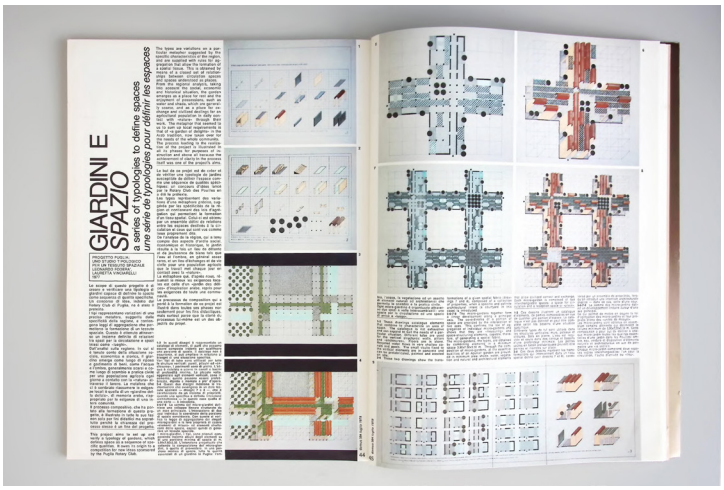
4 Leonardo Foderà in email communication with the author, April 2025.

5 The two exhibitions of contemporary American architectural drawings were held in New York at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum and at the Drawing Center from September 20, 1977, through November 6, 1977.

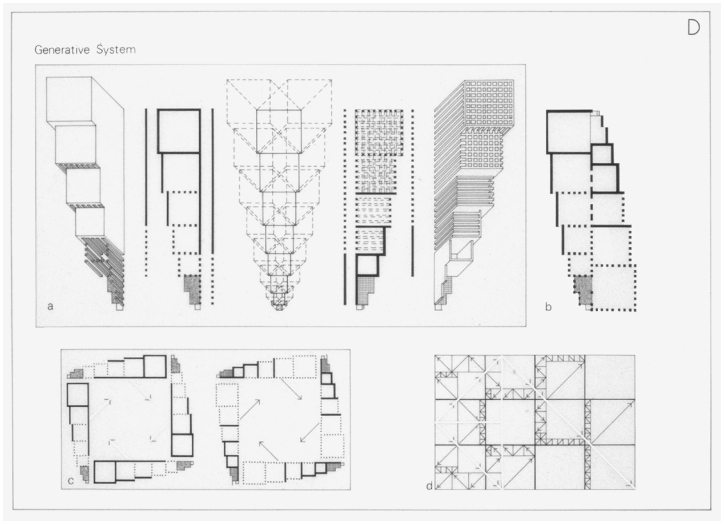
6 "America Now: Drawings Towards a More Modern Architecture," special issue, *Architectural Design* 47, no. 6 (June 1977): 404, 410; "Puglia Project and Marfa 2a," *A+U* (April 1981)

7 *Lauretta Vinciarelli* exhibition, Judd Foundation, 101 Spring Street, New York, NY, March 30–July 20, 2019, https://juddfoundation.org/program/lauretta-vinciarelli/. See also the announcement on e-flux: https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/265971/lauretta-vinciarelli.

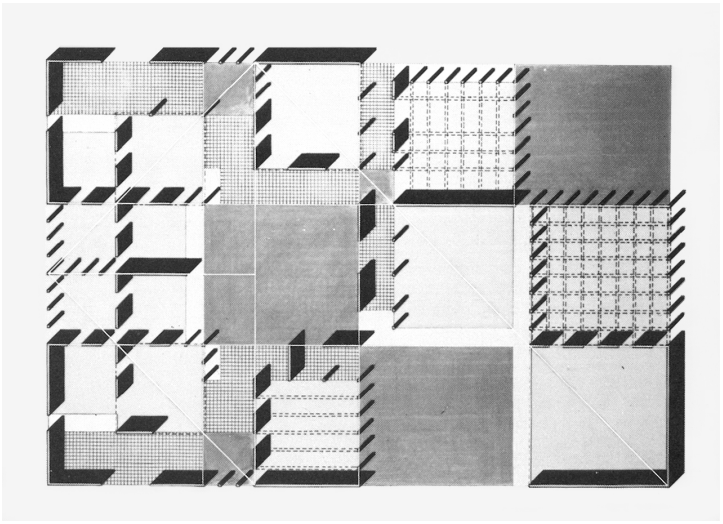
Lauretta Vinciarelli, Pool, La Mansana de Chinati/The Block, January 1982. Lauretta Vinciarelli Papers, courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.



Spread from Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà, "Giardini e Spazio: A Series of Typologies to Define Spaces," *Domus*, no. 584 (July 1978): 44–45.



Lauretta Vinciarelli, Drawing for Generative System, c. 1975. Ink on vellum, dimensions unknown. Lauretta Vinciarelli Papers, courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.



Lauretta Vinciarelli, *Plan of the Spatial Fabric*, c. 1975. Photograph by Eeva Inkeri. From Susanna Torre ed., *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977), 176.

Architectural drawings were very much central to the zeitgeist of the 1970s, and the Puglia Project is emblematic of the period's renewed interest in architectural drawing—both as art form and a means for speculative discourse on architecture.[8] In particular, the use of drawing as a tool of analytical investigation, as well as an act preparatory to design, played a critical role in the Italian, and especially Roman, architectural scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What in the 1980s would be called *architettura disegnata* [drawn architecture] gained momentum in the 1970s through the work of Franco Purini and Laura Thermes, Dario Passi, Studio Labirinto, and G.R.A.U groups, but also through the drawings of Massimo Scolari and Aldo Rossi, not to mention the projects of radical collectives like Archizoom and Superstudio. In short, drawing was a leading theme in the process of revision of the modern movement and the revival of the themes of rationalist architecture (i.e., Neo-rationalism). It was in this atmosphere that Vinciarelli, as she later

8 It is significant to note that Vinciarelli's first solo exhibition, titled *A Discourse on Architecture*, held at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IUAS) from November 15 to December 1978, was contemporaneous with *The OMA: The Sparking Metropolis*, exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum from November 17 to December 17, 1978. The two exhibitions are reported side by side in *Progressive Architecture* (January 1979): 24.

recalled in a 1978 lecture at the New School, made the choice to step away from conventional practice in the early 1970s and to turn to teaching and especially drawings a means to develop a series of theoretical statements that questioned the assumptions of the Modern Movement. "I had to begin from the beginning," she stated, "to find certain basic contradictions or errors in their doctrine and try to see how to develop something less contradictory than that."[9] For Vinciarelli—as for her other architects of her generation—drawing offered a means to speculate on a possible theoretical and methodological re-assessment.

Before discussing the Puglia Project more closely, it is useful to examine Vinciarelli's early 1970s explorations, in which she addresses what she referred to as problematic "facts" through a series of iterative, analytical drawings, reminiscent of the research of Franco Purini and Laura Thermes, for instance their "Sectional Classification of Spatial Situations" (1968).[10] The first "fact" Vinciarelli engages with is the neutral grid—the "compositional device preferred by the modern movement"—that she critiques as fundamentally flawed: while the grid "establishes an order, renders the quantification of an area easier, [and] divides surface in equal parts," it remains, in her words, "mute" and incapable of suggesting meaning. "Meaning only arises the moment we have differences," she observes.[11] For Vinciarelli, the grid operates merely at the syntactic level and her growing skepticism toward the analogy between architecture and language led her to distance herself from the then-prevalent interest in semiotics and structuralist linguistics. Challenging the reductive logic of the homogenous grid, she developed a series of drawings titled the Non-Homogenous Grid (1973–5), in which she experimented with triangulation and the overlapping of multiple grid systems in order to arrive at a system that would be able to suggest something more differentiated, complex and three-dimensional.[12] The second problematic notion she interrogates is the notion of architectural space as being confined solely within a discrete architectural object—a building. Against this Vinciarelli turns her attention to the makeup of historical cities—read the Rossian way, as composed of stratified and complex fabric—as a paradigm in the search for renewed meaning, principles, and methods in architectural design.

PUGLIA AS A "CASE STUDY"

The Puglia Project was therefore developed following Vinciarelli's theoretical investigations, particularly the Non-Homogenous Grid (c. 1973–5) and the Spatial Fabric (1975–6) series. As Foderà notes, the project represented the opportunity to apply these conceptual explorations to a site-specific case study.[13] In this instance, the site was the entire region of Puglia, following a call for ideas issued by the Regional Administration, for the design of public parks across the predominantly flat Apulian landscape. From the outset, Vinciarelli and Foderà questioned the very premise of the brief. The conventional notion of a park—an area of natural respite from urban life—for a region where most people were employed in agriculture while living in small urban centers, struck the architects as absurd. In her 1978 lecture Vinciarelli explains it this way: "We were beginning to ask to each other, Leonardo and myself, what is a park for these people? Because they stay in nature, or I should say in man-made nature,

9 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli" (1978), Giuseppe Zambonini papers, Open Atelier of Design Lecture Series, New School Archives and Special Collections Digital Archive, New York, accessed January 2025, https://digital.archives.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/objects/KA0130_OA_14.

10 See Franco Purini, *Luogo e Progetto* (Roma: Edizioni Kappa, 1976).

11 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.

12 For a more extensive discussion of the *Non-Homogeneous Grid* series, see Rebecca Siefert's book *Into the Light: The Art and Architecture of Lauretta Vinciarelli* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020); 17–21; See also Rebecca Siefert, "Something More Solid and Massive: The Architecture of Lauretta Vinciarelli," in *The Routledge Companion to Women in Architecture* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2021), 301–312.

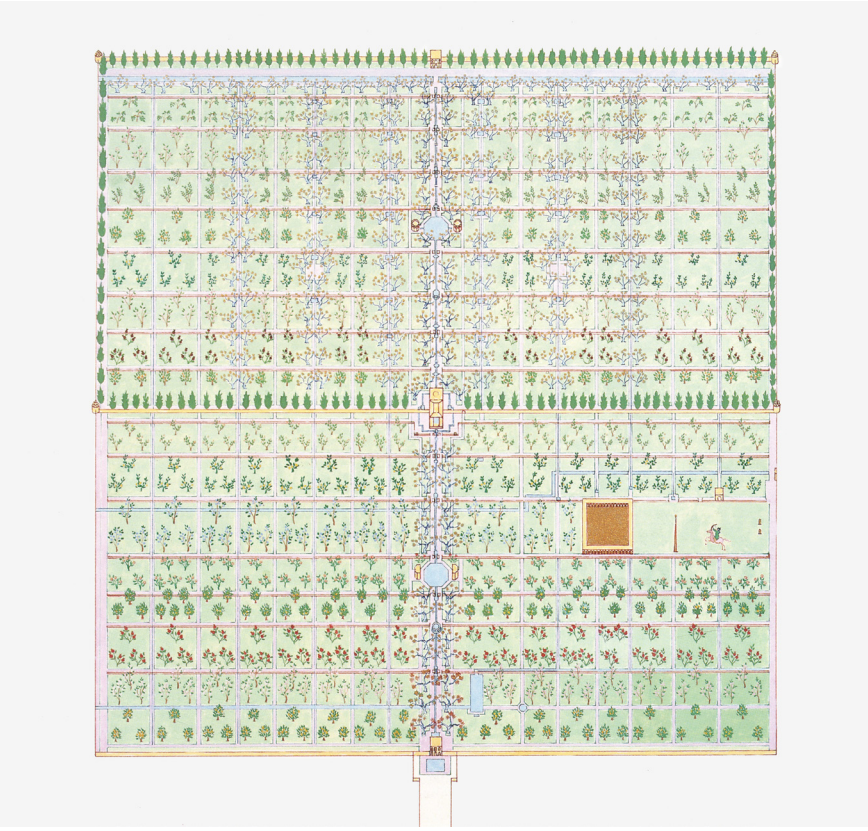
13 Leonardo Foderà in conversation with the author, April 2025.

all day long. I mean, to give them a picnic space would be absolutely ridiculous, because they have lunch every day in the fields. So it would be highly inappropriate."[14] In particular Vinciarelli felt "very ill at ease" with the picturesque landscape tradition embedded in the park typology—and the legacy of British landscape design with its simulated naturalism.[15] Foderà clarifies that the notion itself of "landscape" as a separate design category was actively problematized by the two architects, as well as the sharp distinction existing between landscape design, urban planning, and architecture existing in practice as well as in academia at the time.[16] The Puglia Project is thus positioned as an attempt to reconcile these divisions and an effort to reclaim a broader scope and responsibility for architecture towards the environment at large, discussions in which, as Foderà recalls, Donald Judd was very influential.[17]

THE MARVEL GARDEN AND THE APULIAN *VILLA*

To resolve these contradictions embedded in the competition brief, Vinciarelli and Foderà turned to two historical precedents of urban gardens. The first was what they called the Islamic "marvel garden" or *giardino delle delizie* [garden of delights]—a tradition that, according to Vinciarelli, remained legible in architectural and landscape artifacts across the territory of Apulia and Southern Italy at large.[18] The marvel garden served as the fundamental paradigm for their project: a distinctly *architectural* conception of the garden and, as Vinciarelli put it, "the opposite of the picturesque approach."[19] Unlike the picturesque garden which sought to simulate nature, in the marvel garden "natural elements are very clearly manipulated into architectural elements," she observed, "and the built part is preponderant over the vegetative part."[20] In later interviews, Vinciarelli expressed a lasting interest in the timelessness of such models. She pointed to the *hortus conclusus,* a walled-in garden—a form also frequently invoked by Donald Judd—as "something that has been done since humanity started," adding that "these sort of archetypes and types were very much studied in Italy."[21] Drawn to the apparent stability of certain formal archetypes, Vinciarelli remarked in 1986 that her guiding principle in design was to give form to society's "longing for permanence."[22] Foderà similarly recalls that the pair were searching for "archetypal forms of striking visual appeal" and were very drawn to the minimalism and atavistic simplicity found in the work of Gunnar Asplund, Louis Kahn, and Luis Barragán, whose celebrated exhibition at MoMA opened in the summer of 1976.[23] In this light, Vinciarelli's assertion that the marvel garden had served as "metaphor"—a paradigm and ideal to orient their design—comes sharply into focus.[24]

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid. Foderà noted that Judd was frequently part of their conversations at that time and was becoming increasingly interested in architecture.
18 This lingering heritage that traces back to the ninth century and tenth century, before the Norman period, when southern Italy and Puglia, in particular, was subject to long-standing Byzantine rule and the most significant Islamic historical presence in the Italian peninsula. Notably, between 847 and 871, an Emirate settled in the city of Bari. See Barbara M Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).
19 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.
20 Ibid.
21 Vinciarelli, interview by Rainer Judd and Barbara Hunt McLanahan, February 25, 2008, New York; transcript, Oral History Project, Judd Foundation, Marfa TX. As cited in Rebecca Siefert, *Into the Light*, 97.
22 Vinciarelli, "Statement on My Work" (1986), later published in *Emerging Voices: A New Generation of Architects in America*, edited by Gerald Allen (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 1986), 36. As cited in Rebecca Siefert, *Into the Light*, 115.
23 Leonardo Fodera in conversation with the author, April 2025.
24 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.



Reconstruction of the garden of Bagh-i Hizar, Isfahan, by Engelbert Kaempfer in *Amoenitarium Exoticarum*, 1712.
From Attilio Petruccioli ed., *Il giardino islamico: architettura, natura, paesaggio* (Milan: Electa, 1994), 49.

The second historical reference was distinctly more local and came from Vinciarelli and Foderà's direct observation of the towns across Puglia. They looked to the typical Apulian *villa comunale*—or simply *villa*—synonymous in this region, not with a building type, but with a public garden. Emerging in the late nineteenth century, and gaining more defined form in the early twentieth century, these urban gardens—over 110 of which exist across in the region—share a recurring set of formal elements that evoke the Italianate gardens of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[25] We find for instance paths lined with monumental oak or pine trees, geometric flowerbeds framed in boxwood, park benches, fountains, commemorative statues, gazebos, lighting, and playground areas.[26] Surface treatments such as precious or hard surfaces play an equally important role in distinguishing the villa as a space of exception within the town, in particular the use of *chianche*, the distinctive limestone pavers of Puglia, stands out, as does the use of pinkish tender *tufo* stone and dry-stone walling.

25 Most *villas* throughout the Puglia region appear to have come together in the early 1900s, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. Several villas are designed around major monuments to fallen soldiers of WWI.

26 An extensive survey of over 110 villas has been gathered by the Puglia Region and published in *Giardini pubblici storici della Puglia*, eds. Giacinto Giglio (2014); material from this research is accessible here: https://www.giardinidellapuglia.it/i-giardini/.

View of the *villa comunale* of the town of Rutigliano in the province of Bari, circa 1990s. From Giacinto Giglio ed., *Giardini pubblici storici della Puglia* (2014).

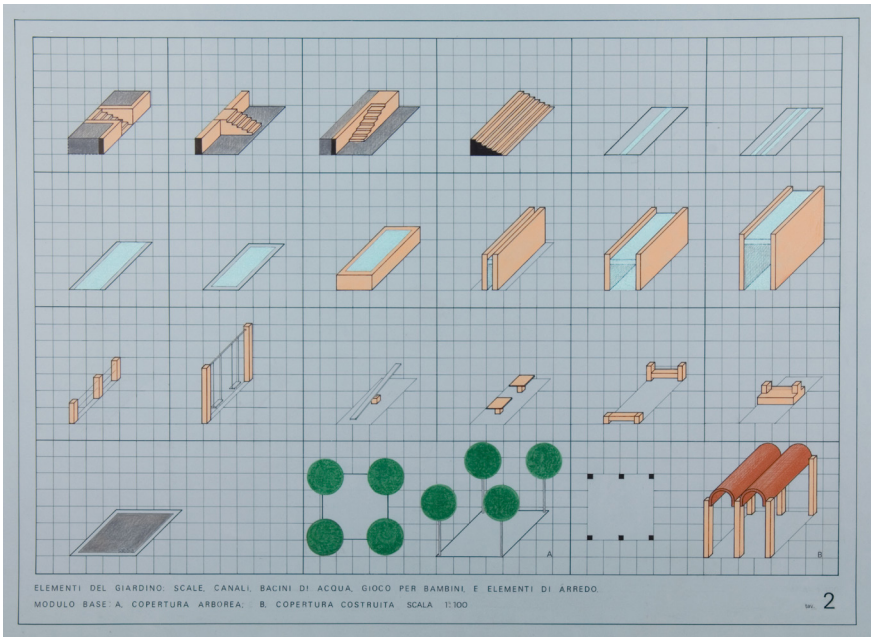
All these elements come together in a unique way in each Apulian town, yet they remain somewhat constant, making the villa a clearly recognizable type across the region. Conceived as public place for leisure, enjoyment, and socializing for townspeople, the villa forms the familiar stage for civic life: strolling, sitting, conversing, and informal gathering. It functions as the town's central meeting place, the setting for everything from romantic encounters to impromptu discussions to arranging teams for the next day's work in the fields. Though composed of non-prescriptive elements—paving, seating, lighting, water features, trees, and planting—the villa coalesces into an ensemble that is a familiar, even domestic stage that informally choreographs civic life.

FEW AND SIMPLE: THE ELEMENTS OF THE GARDEN

Drawing from the precedents of the Apulian villa comunale and the Islamic marvel garden, Vinciarelli and Foderà re-interpreted the idea of a park as a highly urban and architectural scheme—one defined, like its two historical precedents, by the formal arrangement of a repertoire elements that either contain water or create shade. The title of the series inscribed on the first drawing sheet clearly outlines this intent: "The Park: place of shade, of water and of plants; of meeting, of contemplation, of play and of rest."[27] As Foderà recalls, the objective was to work with very few and simple elements, that the architects proceeded to draw together within a gridded field in axonometric projection, with ink pen and no more than five or six colored pencils.[28] Drawing no.1 introduces the first elements of their catalogue: low curbs, pilasters, walls, boxwood fencing, paving types, vaults, pergolas, and canopies. In drawing no. 2, the taxonomy continues, with stepping and stairs, water channels and pools, playground structures—swings, see-saws, a sand pit—as well as furniture components including benches, stools, tables, and, lastly, two "basic modules" covered

27 In the italian original: "Il Parco luogo dell'ombra, dell'acqua e delle piante; dell'incontro, della contemplazione, del gioco e del riposo."
28 Foderà clarifies that the drawings were produced collaboratively by both the authors. Leonardo Foderà in conversation with the author, April 2025.

by a tree canopy or a vaulted built canopy. The result is a bare and highly abstracted taxonomy, marked—as Foderà's notes—"by a total absence of drama."[29]



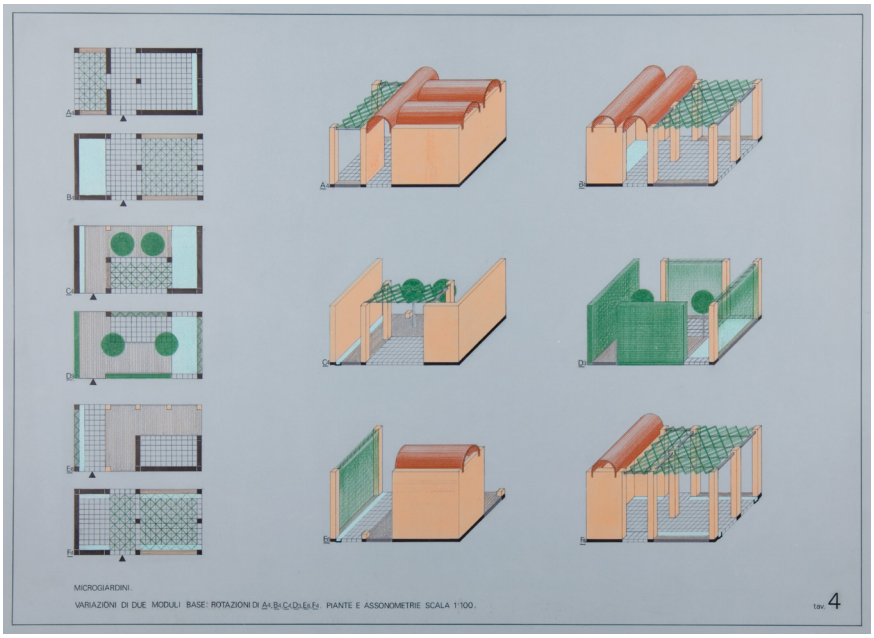
Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà, Drawing no. 2 for the Puglia Project, 1975–7. Ink and colored pencil on Mylar, 17 1/4 x 22 3/4 in. (44 x 58 cm). Lauretta Vinciarelli Papers, courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.

The abstraction of the drawing convention—a pared-down axonometric projection—was deliberately chosen by the authors in place of perspective, in order to leave the depicted elements open to the viewer's interpretation.[30] Yet, as Vinciarelli emphasizes, despite their highly simplified and schematic appearance, these elements are far from arbitrary. Each one references specific local materials and conditions of the Puglia region, part of what Foderà describes as their "obstinate search for specificity"—a sensibility that, he notes, drew them to the work of Barragán.[31] For example, the pinkish hatch used for walls, benches, and pilasters represents the distinctive hue of the Apulian variety of soft tufo limestone; the green blocky partitions represent boxwood hedging, a perennial species widely used in Italian gardens all over the country; and the red tones of the vaulting suggest terracotta construction.[32] Even the design of the water elements was site-specific: in the context of the arid climate of Puglia, the architects envisioned water circulating in shallow, minimal channels and pools lined with pale blue ceramic tiles to evoke an illusion of abundance.[33] Finally, as Vinciarelli clarifies, even the trees—represented as stylized green spheres—stand for the fruit trees commonly found in Puglia—cherries, almonds, figs, citrus varieties, and their rigid, geometric placement echoes the grid-like planting distribution found in Apulian productive orchards.[34]

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Note that the red vaulting is also a nod to the Southern Italian legacy of the Islamic tradition of red vaults and domes. Both Vinciarelli and Foderà made reference to the example of the church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti in Palermo.
33 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.
34 Ibid.

ENDLESS VARIATIONS OF A ROOM: THE MICRO-GARDEN

In drawings no. 3, 4, 5, the basic elements introduced earlier are combined to form small variations of units, what Vinciarelli refers to as "micro-gardens." Each micro-garden measures 3.90 x 7.50 x 3.30 meters and condenses within a minimal footprint all the essential qualities of the marvel garden precedent: shade, water, vegetation, and natural and architectural elements. As Vinciarelli explains, these micro-gardens can be thought of as passageways, but are also rooms in their own right, as each comprises a transitional space and *luogo*—a place of arrival or encounter.[35] A closer look at drawing no. 4 reveals how each micro-garden always includes a combination of spatial conditions. For instance, in module B4, a vaulted passageway is flanked on one side by a niche enclosing a water basin and on the other side by an open colonnade covered with a pergola, while module E4 features instead an open-air passageway set alongside a wall of boxwood hedging and a narrow water channel that leads into a vaulted semi-enclosed chamber.



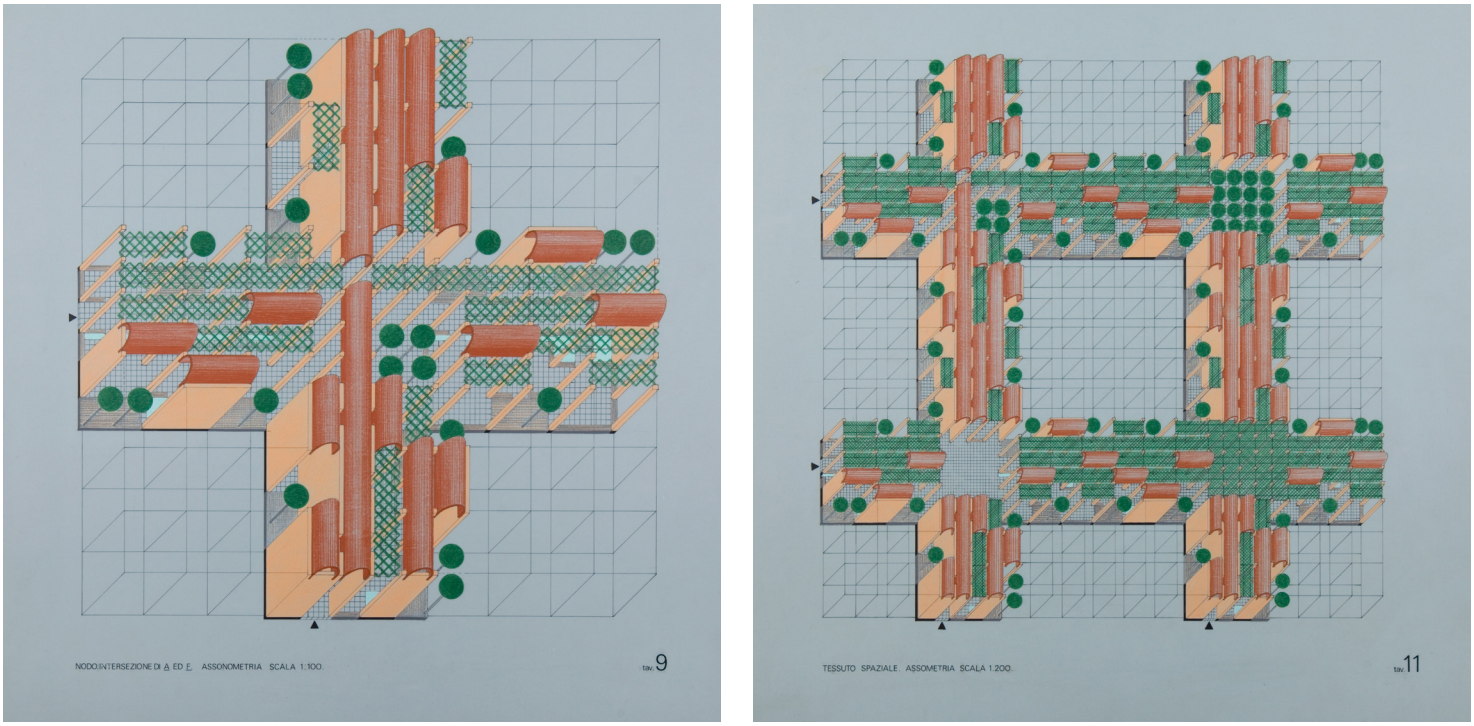
Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà, Drawing no. 4 for the Puglia Project, 1975–7. Ink and colored pencil on Mylar, 17 1/4 x 22 3/4 in. (44 x 58 cm). Lauretta Vinciarelli Papers, courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.

Nothing in these micro-gardens is prescriptive in terms of function or use. However, the variations in the choice of floor treatments, degrees of enclosure, types of cover, water features, and furniture loosely suggest different possibilities and conditions: a solitary niche for withdrawing or an open setting for convivial gatherings. In drawing no. 5, the architects extend these iterations further, introducing stepping elements to allow the micro-gardens to adapt to uneven terrain. Finally, in drawings no. 6 and 7, Vinciarelli and Foderà begin to explore the aggregation of micro-garden into larger linear systems or agglomerations. When linked, the passageway segments of each module align to form an extended route—an articulated promenade punctuated on either side by a seemingly endless variation of rooms, gardens, niches, water pools, pergolas, and open-air courts along the way.

35 Ibid.

THE CONTRARY OF WHAT A BUILDING IS: THE IDEA OF "SPATIAL FABRIC"

In drawings no. 8 and 9, Vinciarelli and Foderà take a step further by intersecting two linear systems, A and E, to form a cross or "intersecting node." Through this act of rotation and intersection, even more conditions and new possibilities start to form, and linearity begins to dissolve in what appears to be a field of conditions. By drawings no. 10 and no.11, four such crosses are combined to form a larger knot-like configuration. Vinciarelli refers to this interwoven field as an instance of *tessuto spaziale*, or "spatial fabric." For Vinciarelli, the notion of spatial fabric was "exactly the contrary of what a building is."[36] It served a means to challenge the notion of *architecture-as-object*, a model in which architectural space is limited and self-contained to the object, hierarchically distinct from its surrounding, which are then relegated to the status of non-architecture or, as she terms it, "a leftover space, or emptiness or a void."[37]



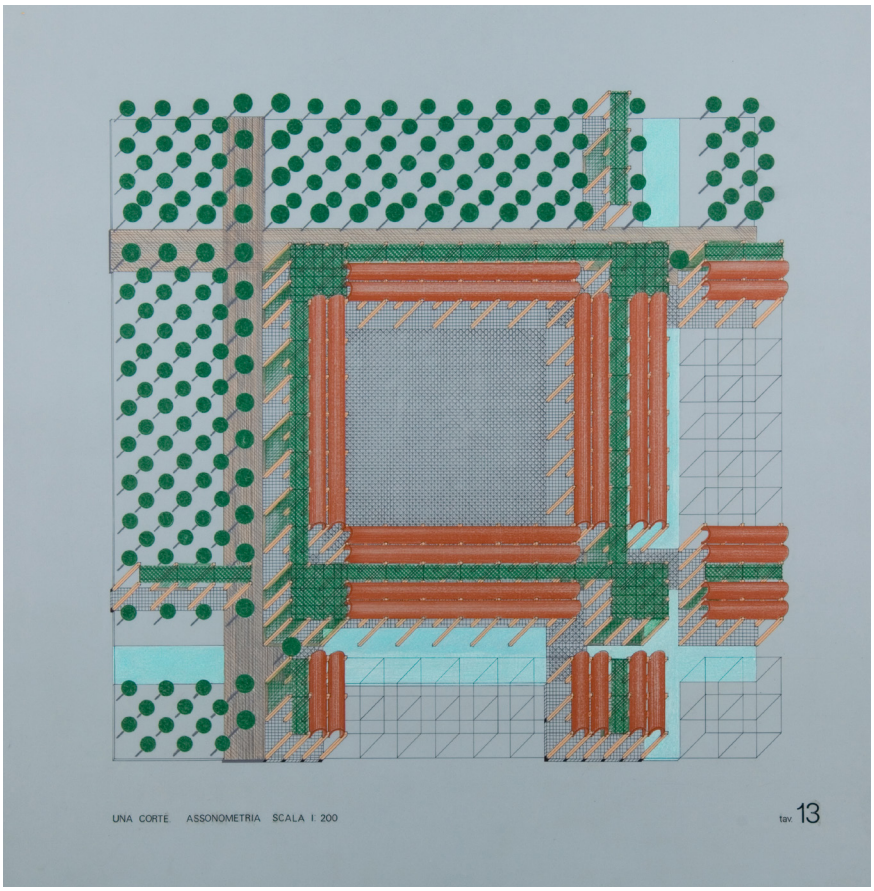
Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà, Drawing no. 9 (left) and no.11 (right) for the Puglia Project, 1975–7. Ink and colored pencil on Mylar, 17 1/4 x 17 1/4 in. (44 x 44 cm). Lauretta Vinciarelli Papers, courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.

If the notion of *architecture-as-object* was for Vinciarelli a legacy of the modernist tradition, then the "spatial fabric" was her proposed counter-strategy to address it: in the spatial fabric all spaces, even the ones that are empty or open, are treated as architectural space and are never "leftover" or "non-architecture." While spaces may be qualitatively different—enclosed or open, built or unbuilt—they are not different in their essence.[38] In this sense, the lesson of the Islamic garden, summoned by Vinciarelli as the project's driving metaphor, seems to emerge very well as a counter-paradigm, an abstract fabric that challenges the distinction between built space and un-built, human-made, and plant space. Incidentally, in the same years Donald Judd would also challenge this notion of art-object

36 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.

vs. surrounding, writing in a 1977 statement: "The space surrounding my work is crucial to it: as much thought has gone into the installation as into a piece itself."[39]

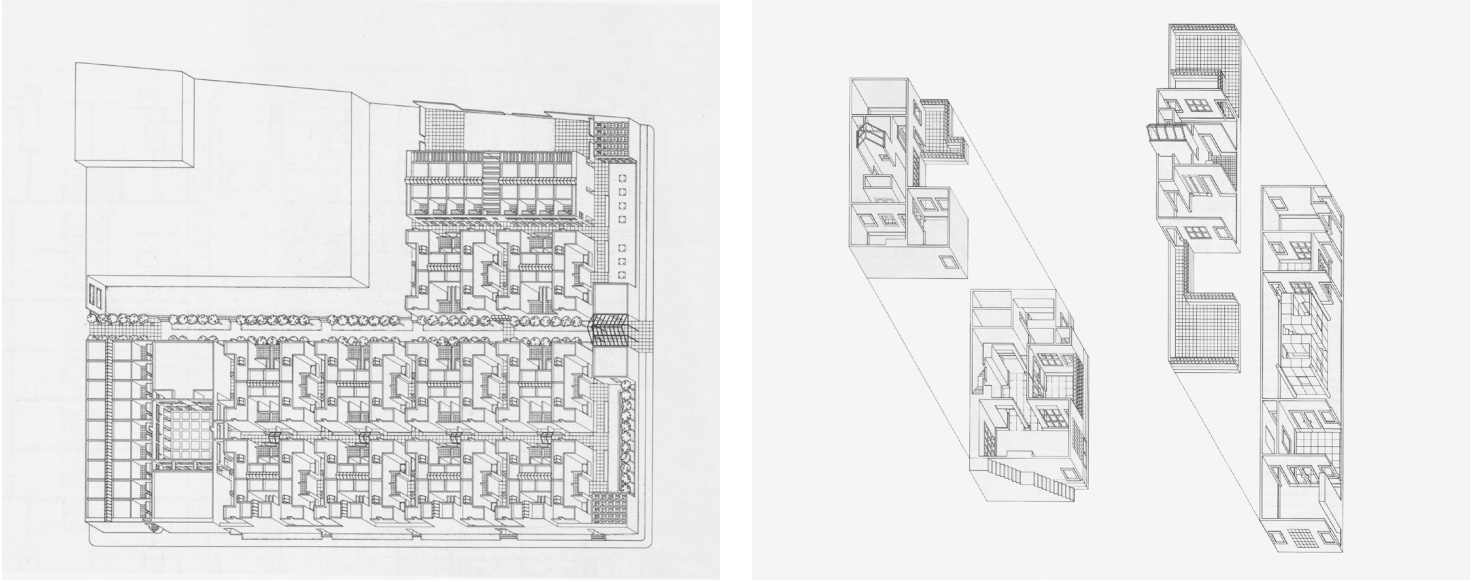
Drawings no. 8, 9, 10, and 11 are perhaps the most visually striking in the series, presenting an evocative field of interwoven elements. Yet for Vinciarelli, these compositions were "not architecture" per se, but "tests" through which to explore "randomly," as she put it, the generative possibilities of the spatial fabric.[40] In the final piece of the series, drawing no. 13, this exploration gives way to a deliberate architectural composition. Here, the spatial fabric is configured intentionally, vaults and pergolas are aligned to form covered pathways defining the perimeter of the central courtyard, while all around, water channels, paving, and tree plantings are disposed axially around this centripetal structure. For the Roman architect, this drawing marks a turning point, the moment where the field, or "collection of properties" as she calls it, crystallizes into a coherent architectural intent, a courtyard type in this case.[41] Typology, which Vinciarelli understood as "synthesis of the social," was a means through which to achieve an architectural outcome that would be greater and more meaningful than "a mere sum of parts."[42]



Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà, Drawing no. 13 for the Puglia Project, 1975–7.
Ink and colored pencil on Mylar, 17 3/8 x 17 3/16 in. (44.2 x 43.8 cm).
Lauretta Vinciarelli Papers, courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.

39 Donald Judd, "Judd Foundation," 1977. As cited in the brochure that accompanied Lauretta Vinciarelli's 2019 exhibition curated by Caitlin Murray, the Director of Archives and Programs of Judd Foundation at the time.
40 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.
41 Lauretta Vinciarelli and Leonardo Foderà, "Giardini e Spazio: A Series of Typologies to Define Spaces," *Domus*, no. 584 (July 1978): 44–45.
42 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.

Though unbuilt, the Puglia Project stands for several ideas Vinciarelli was developing in those years on architecture—ideas that also found expression in her teaching practice. In fact, by 1978, Vinciarelli had begun to teach a housing studio at Columbia University called Carpet Housing, which in her 1978 interview she defined as "another type of spatial fabric."[43] This studio was one of four studios on housing typology taught at Columbia GSAPP between 1976–1989, alongside studios on types such as the perimeter block, mews or row housing, and garden apartments.[44] Carpet housing, described as a "continuous mat of courtyard houses," was a strategy typically proposed for the lower-density outer boroughs of Queens and Staten Island.[45] Like the Puglia Project, it took the form of a repetitive and fabric-like scheme.[46] While the basic units in the Puglia Project were the so-called "micro-gardens," carpet housing used apartment units as its basic module, combining them into a variety of configurations to produce a carpet-like field, where enclosed volumes alternated with open courtyards in an interwoven composition. A description of one project by Vinciarelli's then-student Perry Kulper published in Columbia's *Precis* Vol. I (1979) strikingly echoes the Apulian scheme; the description notes that the designs addressed the "opposition of fabric and object" and sought the "development of internal streets, which are consistently lined with public rooms, doors, gardens and garden walls," which recalls the promenade passageways of the garden scheme.[47]



Perry Kulper, Carpet housing project at the GSAPP, pen and ink on Canson paper. From Columbia University's *Precis* Vol. 1, "The Street, the House and the Garden" (1979): 8–9. Courtesy Perry Kulper.

43 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.

44 Beginning in 1974, a series of housing-themed experiments were initiated at Columbia University, in response to student demands and aligned with faculty interests. By 1976, the Housing Studio had become a central component of the core academic sequence in the Architecture program, remaining in place until 1989, when incoming dean Bernard Tschumi discontinued the typological approach to housing studios. See James Tice, "Theme and Variations: A Typological Approach to Housing Design, Teaching, and Research" in *Journal of Architectural Education*, vo. 46, no. 3 (Feb 1993): 162–175. See also Rebecca Siefert, *Into the Light: The Art and Architecture of Lauretta Vinciarelli*, (London: Lund Humphries, 2020), 39.

45 James Tice, "Theme and Variations," 164. One carpet housing project in Queens designed by students Ruth Rutholtz and Diana Ming Sung was featured in Making Room: Women and Architecture, *Heresies* issue 11, vol. 3, no. 3 (1981): 23.

46 James Tice, "Theme and Variations," 162–175.

47 See "House Typologies: The Carpet Block" project by Perry Kulper with Lauretta Vinciarelli as critic, in *Precis: The Journal of the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University*, Vol. I House and Garden (1979): 8–9.

Thus, the spatial fabric was a key theme in Vinciarelli's thinking on architecture and its application in housing was deliberate. As she states in her 1978 lecture, carpet housing was a design strategy that allowed housing units to be aggregated in a way that achieves something *more* than an array of "deterministic little apartments" and instead foregrounded "a sequence of spatial experiences." Within this framework, functions were deliberately left interchangeable, granting users the autonomy to decide how and where to place things and use spaces. Critical of the rigid assignment of functions to form, Vinciarelli remarked that in her view: "The kitchen can be everywhere, and you can sleep everywhere." She insisted, "I don't see why I sleep well in a room of 3.5m x 3.5m by 3m. Because that is supposed to be the right size of a bedroom. It's not true, you know." Her critique resonated with and acknowledged the work being undertaken at the time by feminist architecture collectives who were questioning the normative types and images of domestic space: "a very difficult task, so embedded in our minds and imagination is a certain set of domestic images."[48]

The second key theme in Vinciarelli's work was of course typology. The Roman architect had come of age in Italy amid the very active postwar debates on historical continuity and typology. By the mid-1970s, these debates had begun to circulate more widely in the Anglo-American architectural scene. In 1976, for instance, Aldo Rossi—a leading Italian theorist of Neo-Rationalism—was invited by Peter Eisenman to lecture at the IAUS. (On this occurrence, at Rossi's request, Foderà accompanied him to visit Coney Island, riding there on a rickety elevated train).[49] That same year, Anthony Vidler's influential essay "The Third Typology," published in *Oppositions* 7 (1976), introduced the Neo-Rationalist idea of "third typology" as one fundamentally concerned with the city and public space.[50] There were several resonances between Vidler's argument and an article co-authored by Foderà and Vinciarelli, "Reflections on the Rationalist Attitude in Architecture," published *Controspazio* in 1977. In it, they propose typological study—understood not as a fixed or prescriptive, but as an evolving "synthesis of the social"—as a potential antidote to the limitations of previous architectural tools and theories.

Vinciarelli's approach in the Puglia Project should be considered paradigmatic of a broader tendency pursued by several architects in those years, including Franco Purini, Massimo Scolari, the early Rossi, but also Susanna Torre. This tendency sought to develop a grammar of simple forms capable of generating complex systems. Typology played a central role in this pursuit, as it allowed the anchoring of these forms to a sense of permanence and timeless stability, and thus removed form from the dregs of the technocratic project typical of functionalism. In the case of the Puglia Project, the design proposal is both site-specific but also no longer *extemporaneous*—that is, an occasional one-off response to a singular brief—but becomes a system that aspires to coherence across projects. This approach has arguably been largely lost in contemporary practice, where architects often tend to prioritize single occasions and formal invention for its own sake, rather than working through a precise grammar that transcends individual projects and even the single author. By contrast, Vinciarelli, like Donald Judd, was interested in moving beyond the singularity of the author and proposing an analytical system through which to produce a truly collective art and architecture, indifferent to style, made of a few simple forms.

48 "Lecture: Lauretta Vinciarelli," New School Archives.

49 As noted by Leonardo Foderà in email correspondence with the author.

50 Anthony Vidler, "The Third Typology," *Oppositions* 7 (Winter 1976). See also: Kim Förster, *Building Institution: The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies New York, 1967–1985* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2024), 412.

AUTHOR

Jolanda Devalle is an architect and PhD candidate at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (TPOD lab). Devalle's research interests include the history and theory of architecture and domestic space, with a particular focus on the study of 'anthropological turns' in modern architecture.

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