

## DRAWING AS A RESEARCH PRODUCT

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### Abstract

Starting from the examination of the regulations and the various documents that have established, guided and informed the Evaluation of Research Quality (VQR) actions in Italy from 2004 to 2014, we want to provide an argumentative comparison field to the possibility of evaluating Drawing as a research product, to try to understand what could be the characteristics and the assumptions that can be viable in order to see it as an essential quality as process of control and elaboration of the conceptual reflections inherent architecture and the city.

### Keywords

Evaluation, Drawing, Architecture

### 1. Preface

The Evaluation of Research Quality (VQR)<sup>1</sup> is divided into Areas, Competition Sectors and Scientific-Disciplinary Sectors, concerns both the Institutions (Universities, Research Institutions and other voluntary institutions) as a whole, and both the Departments and its assimilated internal divisions, and, therefore, does not in any way concern the individual researchers.

This process has been entrusted to Groups of experts for the Evaluation (GEV), appointed by the National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR), which in turn have appointed external auditors chosen jointly for the preparation of peer review reports.

The valuation of research products, in particular in the 08a-Architecture area, as defined in the last evaluation exercise of university

research, 2011-2014<sup>2</sup>, has planned to follow the method of informed peer review, which consists of use different valuation methods, such as the peer review entrusted to external auditors (usually at least two), chosen as a rule by two different members of the GEV; and the direct valuation by the GEV, which was carried out through a peer review inside the GEV according to the same procedures as the peer review entrusted to external auditors, or through bibliometric analysis, carried out using the indicators and algorithms contained in the *Criteri* document.

This procedure made it possible to make the valuation paths comparable, since the products susceptible to bibliometric evaluation were not *automatically* (i.e. automatically using the final class suggested by the application of the bibliometric algorithm) attributed to the merit

<sup>1</sup> So far, the Quality of Research (VQR) exercises in Italy have been two: the first (VQR 2004-2010) took place from January 2012 to July 2013, the second (VQR 2011-2014) from December 2015 to February 2017.

<sup>2</sup> For the second evaluation exercise, the Group of Experts for the Evaluation of Area 08a, Architecture (GEV08a), was coordinated by Cristina Bianchetti and set up by Alessandra Capuano, Michela Cigola, Riccardo Dalla Negra, Maurizio D'Amato, Diamantini Corrado, Riccardo Florio, Giovanna Franco, Tullia Iori, Stefano Francesco Musso, Carlo Olmo, Susanna Pasquali, Sara Protasoni, Teresa Stoppani, Maria Cristina Tonelli, Maria Chiara Torricelli.

Cfr.: Criteri per la valutazione dei prodotti di ricerca Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione dell'Area 08a ARCHITETTURA (GEV08a), 20 November 2015; Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca 2011-2014 (VQR 2011-2014), Rapporto finale di area, Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione dell'Area Architettura (GEV08a), 31 January 2017; Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca 2011-2014 (VQR 2011-2014), Rapporto finale ANVUR, 21 February 2017; Report of the Group of Experts charged by ANVUR to advice on the process 'Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca (VQR)'. An independent assessment on the past VQRs carried out by ANVUR, 2019.

classes provided by the Call<sup>3</sup>, but all the indicators competing with the formulation of the evaluation elements were weighted by the GEV experts.

In the area of Architecture, due to cultural traditions, prevailing types of production, lack of solid databases and lack of familiarity with bibliometric methods, it was decided to resort to peer review for all products, combining this evaluation with the bibliometric one, when requested.

A cautious and shareable choice today, but that will probably be questioned in the coming years, posing the problem of managing a difficult transition, considering on one hand the epistemic contrast between the two evaluation methods and on the other the fact that evaluations cannot be made directly<sup>4</sup>.

As has already been observed<sup>5</sup>, the second exercise of the VQR was an *extended social process* that prompted a lively debate within it, involving a large part of the scientific community outside.

The feeling generated by this process is of being in a delicate moment of transformation of the practices and models of research in the Architecture area.

The styles of research are undergoing rapid changes: internationalization takes on more space, a sort of "object of desire", not only due to the ever-increasing diffusion of the English language, but above all due to the significant presence of works shared among several authors; the traditional geographical and registries of excellence are redesigned, less and less linked to single and few reference figures. Compared to the first VQR there is a significant improvement due to the desire of many researchers not to remain confined to the local circuit debate. In the Report of the first VQR<sup>6</sup> it was hoped that research in Architecture could «give itself more rigorous and selective production methods»; we can say that this direction has been taken, we can perceive the evident signals of a conscious research for good production and dissemination rules.

However, if it is true that it is done a little better, it is also true that the same thing is almost always done, with an unstoppable race towards

articles on magazines and the detriment of all other types of products, a race also fueled by the role that the scientific journals and the class A ones are increasingly occupying themselves in the area of evaluation. We witness, with the best expression of research, to production logics that push and compress research on short times, privilege reassuring themes to the detriment of innovation and, often, research appears to be devoted almost exclusively to evaluation, we produced for be evaluated.

It becomes necessary, therefore, that these production logics become virtuous, avoiding to restrict the area and interests of research. Architecture is a *Bundle of Knowledge*, a bundle that holds together different things: historical and critical essays, drawings, projects, normative documents, experimental results, techniques, patents, exhibitions, and more. This ability to gather different reflections must be preserved and encouraged, on one hand by encouraging research in the territories of international networks, also running the risk of arriving at repetitive and unoriginal results, and on the other giving support to the most considered logics, those for example of traditional research, often more sophisticated, critical and original, but sometimes not very incisive and isolated, free from constraints linked to evaluation procedures, which can favor the specificity of some sectors in which Italian research reaches relevant quality levels also in the international field.

## 2. Research products

The second VQR has extended the type of products, inserting a broader range within each segment. This greater differentiation is very pertinent to the research area of Architecture due to its recognized characteristic of a composite area, which focuses on the study and construction of the physical environment in its broadest sense. Different ways of research are closely interrelated to drawing practices, theoretical-critical reflections, heritage investigation techniques, and each disciplinary grouping practices its declared tradition in the use of the means of transmitting its

<sup>3</sup> Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca 2011-2014 (VQR 2011-2014), Bando di partecipazione, 11 November 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Rapporto finale di area, Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione dell'Area Architettura (GEV08a), 31 January 2017, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Here, in extreme synthesis, are some considerations contained in the Rapporto finale di area, Gruppo di Esperti

della Valutazione dell'Area Architettura (GEV08a, VQR 2011-2014), 31 January 2017, in particular on pages 11 to 16.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca 2004-2010 (VQR 2004-2010) Rapporto finale di area Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione dell'Area Ingegneria e Architettura (GEV08), 30 June 2013.

scientific results. A variety of expression, therefore, which is matched by a diversified typology of products, which, far from determining a hierarchy of value according to the order of listing, aims to specify only the qualities that distance scientific products from those that are merely educational or informative.

The Annex 1 of the Criteri document<sup>7</sup> fully describes the characteristics of the different product categories, which are listed here only by macro type, any further details refer to the reading of the document: 1. Scientific monographs and similar research outputs, 2. Journal contributions, 3 Book contribution, 4. Other types of scientific products, 5. Patents<sup>8</sup>.

Particular attention, due to the nature of the contribution presented here, deserve the products described in point 4. (*Other types of scientific products*) which are: *Drawings, Architectural projects, Exhibitions, Art prototypes and related projects, Databases and software, Thematic maps, audiovisual and multimedia products*, for which it is necessary to specify that they are objects of evaluation for their own characteristics and not as objects of publication<sup>9</sup>.

Although the scientific disciplinary sector to which my disciplines<sup>10</sup> belong can be engaged by all the products as listed in point 4., with the exception of *architectural projects* and *art prototypes and related projects*, I will dwell on the possibilities of declination of the concept of Drawing and its inferences in relation to the evaluation processes, referring for the other research products to what has already been described in the aforementioned *Annex 1* to the *Criteri* document<sup>11</sup>.

This is because the *Drawing* contains in itself enucleated all the other possible forms of

representation, from data banks to thematic maps, up to multimedia products, both for the conviction that through the Drawing and with the Drawing we place ourselves within the generative process of architecture and participate, as protagonists of the action or as observers of the decrypted becoming, to the concretization of the indissoluble formation of the link between sign and thought. The sign thus becomes a clue, a revealing signal, which leads unreservedly to architecture and decrees its poetic recognition, in an ever different interpretative attribution.

### 3. *The Drawing as a "research product"*<sup>12</sup>

How can the Drawing be evaluated as a research product?

What are the inspiring principles and how can these principles be translated into the expressive forms of representation?

Starting from the declaration of the SSD ICAR/17 which in its incipit defines the Drawing: "[...] cognitive means of the laws that govern the formal structure, instrument for the analysis of existing values, **expressive act**"<sup>13</sup>, we propose a reflection in depth of the action of drawing as a complex operation of transposition of the different realities, factual or prefigured, insists significantly on the continuing transcriptional action in which the necessary hermeneus of the cognitive aspects is imposed in order to supervise the continuous passages between the pre-figurative and its restitution.

The elaborative parabola that presides over the process of sign rewriting within the architectural drawing finds a fruitful area in the synaptic junction that is established between figurative gestation of the expressive models of

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Attachment n. 1 Prodotti attinenti l'Area dell'Architettura, to the document Criteri per la valutazione dei prodotti di ricerca Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione dell'Area 08a ARCHITETTURA (GEV08a), 20 November 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The list in the Call for Proposals (VQR 2011-2014) is concluded by the item: The following are not considered publications that can be evaluated for the purposes of VQR: 1. Purely educational manuals and texts; 2. Reviews of a single work, without critical analysis of the literature on the subject; 3. Short encyclopedic or dictionary entries without originality; 4. Brief notes on an editorial sentence with no originality or merely recognition; 5. Short catalog cards without independent scientific contributions.

<sup>9</sup> "The publication or the prize or the mention have the character of a filter that attests the public dimension of the research that is realized in the product", in Attachment n. 1 Prodotti attinenti l'Area dell'Architettura, al documento

Criteri per la valutazione dei prodotti di ricerca Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione dell'Area 08a ARCHITETTURA (GEV08a), 20 November 2015, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> My disciplinary scientific sector is ICAR/17-Disegno.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Attachment n. 1 Prodotti attinenti l'Area dell'Architettura to the document Criteri per la valutazione dei prodotti di ricerca Gruppo di Esperti della Valutazione dell'Area 08a ARCHITETTURA (GEV08a), 20 November 2015, pp. 27-30.

<sup>12</sup> The title is borrowed, almost completely, from a volume recently published by Roberta Amirante (Amirante, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> The declaration of the SSD sector refers to Attachments A, B and D of Decree 30 October 2015 del MIUR, Rideterminazione dei macrosettori e dei settori concorsuali, (Decree n. 855), published in Supplemento ordinario n. 63 alla "Gazzetta Ufficiale," n. 271 del 20 November 2015 - Serie generale.

form and the architecture itself.

If it is true that drawing draws its value and its quality from the intrinsic potentiality of a critical moment of synthesis and, therefore, of communication and explanation of the ideational proximity, it is also true that this role of intermediary originates from the strength of its belonging to the whole process of architecture construction in prefigurative terms. "The project is to the architect as the character of a novel is to the author: it goes beyond it constantly. It is necessary not to lose it. The drawing follows him. But the project is a character with many authors, and it becomes intelligent only when it is taken like this, it is obsessive and impertinent otherwise. Drawing is the desire of intelligence" (Siza Vieira, 1995).

The formal and figurative research that permeates the architectural choices, even within the contemporary thanks to the possibility of using computerized tools that accelerate the return of mental processes, seems to find itself precisely in the osmosis of the interchangeability between idea and its immediate verification, between imagination and sudden representation, one of the keys for its best expression (Florio, 2012).

This desirable combination of graphic restitution, infographics and sketch can be a harbinger of further considerations on the traces of the drawing that contain and explain the foundational and significant moments of the drawing process.

In this distinction the whole relationship that has emerged between the so-called traditional drawing and the digital drawing is grafted entirely: refined simulation systems of the world that await two different conceptions and ways of anticipating future time or restitution of the present-past. If on one hand the first traces the surfaces returning value to the body incision through a restraining capacity of the visual and metric return perimeters, the second responds through a temporal compression that proposes everything as inexorably inscribed in a future dimension. "Virtual reality is thus not given as what can happen but as immediately happened, as an accelerated present" (Purini, 2000).

If the fast drawing, the free drawing, the sketch in the meaning of "thought of genius" (de Gérando, 1799-1800), expresses all its semantic appeal and drags behind it, in the dense and incisive thickness of its lines, the depth of the footprints that the architect performs and chases over time, reaching the ultimate and longed-for threshold of

recognizing one's poetics, it is also true that the outcomes of the infographic representation seem, apparently, to retain nothing of this pregnant ideational and constructive path.

In order to discern the sedimented paths that are also hidden within the infographics, it is necessary to perform an action backwards, retrace and try to find the heuristic roots that have allowed the idea to become the exploration of perimeters in all possible configurations.

Therefore, it is a matter of establishing a cognitive action that aims at finding the matrices (where the term matrix is used here as value of origin, fundamental cause, inspiring element), which constituted the inspiring premise of the initial cognitions and subsequent mutations of signs.

Reverse reading produces in retrospect a declaration of the syntactical relations that have induced and induce the results made manifest and which, in some cases, restore, in the graphic narration, the surprise of unexpected configurations.

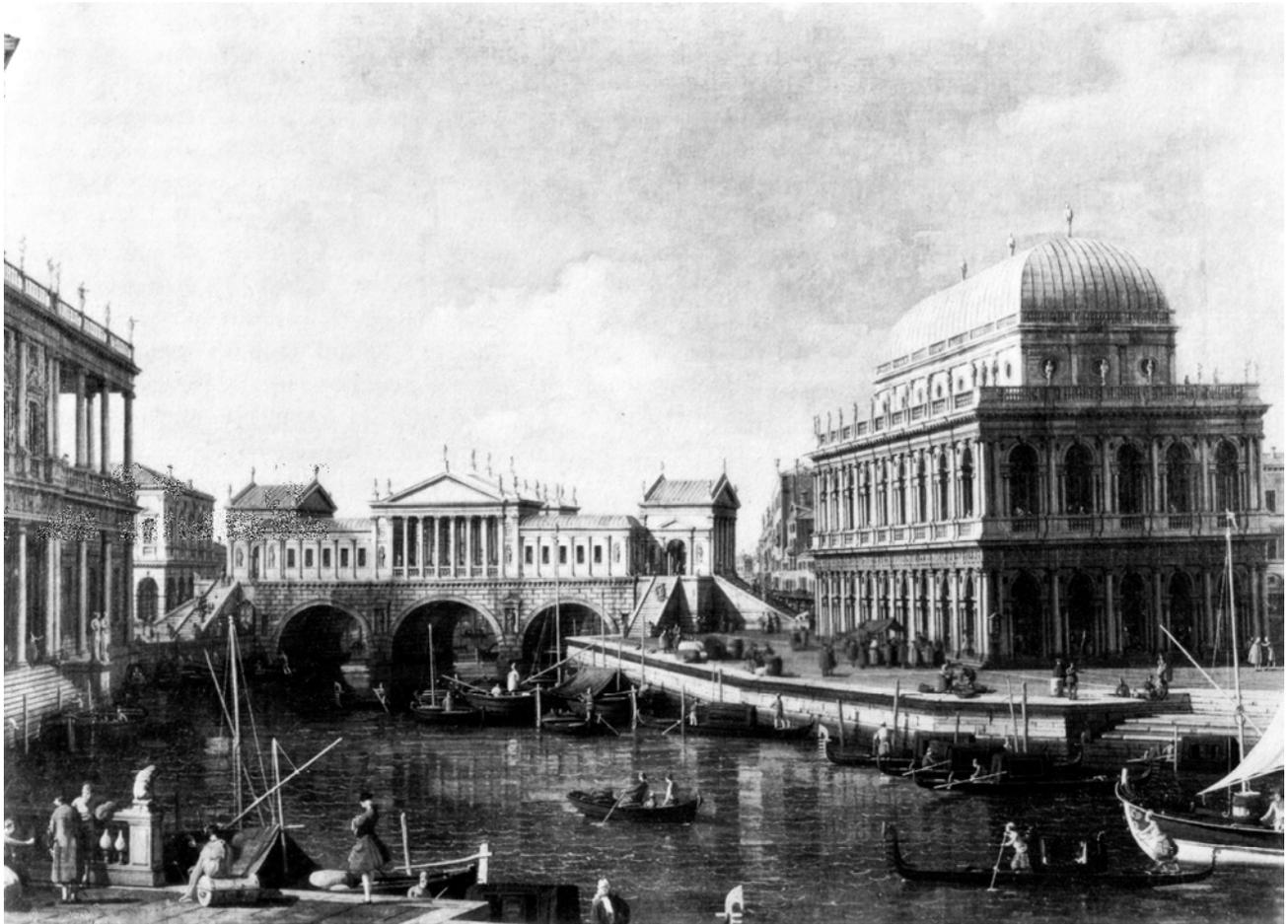
This ability, and possibility, to look into things to capture their hidden meaning without tampering with the alchemy of the code, referring to the sign production that springs from the architect's experience, can lead back to a condition of poetic expression.

Expected, therefore, that the expressive form of the Drawing cannot be restricted to the only restitution of the Architectural Heritage of our Cultural Heritage, read in its past, in the immediate present and in the future projection, such as for example the take-over drawings and all the representations aimed at achieving different levels of knowledge useful for identifying intervention and protection actions, and that indeed the Drawing to be understood as a research product must free itself from these representative events that claim the complementary presence of the advertising production for documenting the process of research, it is believed that the Drawing usable areas as a Research product should be connected to an intellectual consideration that aims to rewrite architecture thinking.

Is it possible to talk about programmatic drawing?

And what is meant by this definition?

We could try to give an answer by appealing to what Magnago Lampugnani wrote: "The drawings, preserving intact the architectural thoughts, give the possibility to save much of what would



**Fig. 1:** Canaletto, *Basilica di Vicenza e Ponte di Rialto*, 1742, Galleria Nazionale, Parma.

otherwise be lost in architectural consumerism [...] Creativity manifests itself in its purest form; visions, not debased by compromises, unfold more freely [...] Architectural drawings become [...] as precise as convincing professions of cultural faith, which, acquiring their own artistic value, can rightly present themselves as autonomous works [...] an intellectual contribution to architecture" (Magnago Lampugnani, 1982).

The architectural drawings become as precise as convincing professions of cultural faith, the representation is, therefore, a complex operation, read in its gnoseological function from the intellect (Contessi, G.), which first constructs an articulated series of diaphragms, slowly, and then causes the abatement through engravings full of meaning that, once the codes have been decrypted, initiation codes belonging to a graphic hermeticism that first hides and separates (Bolzoni, 1995)<sup>14</sup>, push towards dispensing horizons of new territories of imagination,

cognitive interpretation and ideational prefiguration.

These new territories of the imagination could be referable, by way of example, to some drawings which, thanks to their expressive force, disconnected from any direct reference to the real or achievable dimension of the thing represented, have been able to look beyond the closest horizon and have conceived and started a new meditation on the concepts of architecture.

One of the most significant paradigmatic representations in this sense is the Basilica of Vicenza and Ponte di Rialto of Canaletto (Fig. 1), an architectural "capriccio" made in 1742, depicting three Palladian projects included in the Venetian context of Rialto. Two of the buildings represented, Palazzo Chiericati and the Basilica, were actually built in Vicenza; the third represents the second version of a project by Andrea Palladio from 1569 for the Rialto bridge published in *I Quattro Libri* (Ersetig, 2009). "Suggested [...] by

<sup>14</sup> "Writing has served, often and for a long time, to mask what had been entrusted to it: it has not united men, but separated

them, opposing those who knew how to encrypt and decipher those who were incapable of it" (Barthes, R. & Mauriés, 1981).

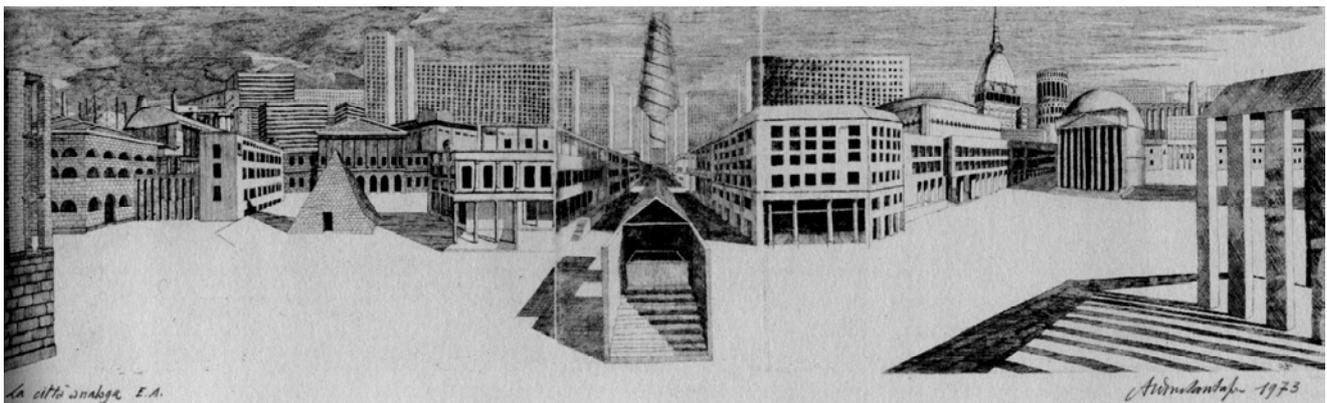


Fig. 2: Arduino Cantàfora, (1973). *La Città analoga* (*The similar city*), Étude III.

Francesco Algarotti, the unique painting "in program" renounces [...] the meteorological and landscape "contextuality" of the most typical Canaletto views to focus his attention on the unreal and meticulous representation of a non-existent city [...] allows to glimpse an «architectural» idea [...] of considerable interest. That idea may also be that of the "analogous city" developed at the time by Aldo Rossi, of more poetic than "scientific" value (Contessi, 1985), and admirably depicted in the drawings of Arduino Cantàfora (Fig. 2-3).

A sort of graphic synopsis of the history of architecture can be found imprinted in the drawing entitled *The Professor's Dream* by Cockerell from 1848 (Cockerell, 1848) (Fig. 4), in which "[...] a new relationship with architecture and history is condensed: there was no more a 'real' solution for a constructive task, but the entire world architecture could be simultaneously imagined and staged [...]" (Nerdinger, 1985). In the sequence of all the components present, one of the many images of the city emerges that, in the

celebration of the historical history of man read through his architecture, shows his contradictions, his fragments of history and expresses his struggle for survival.

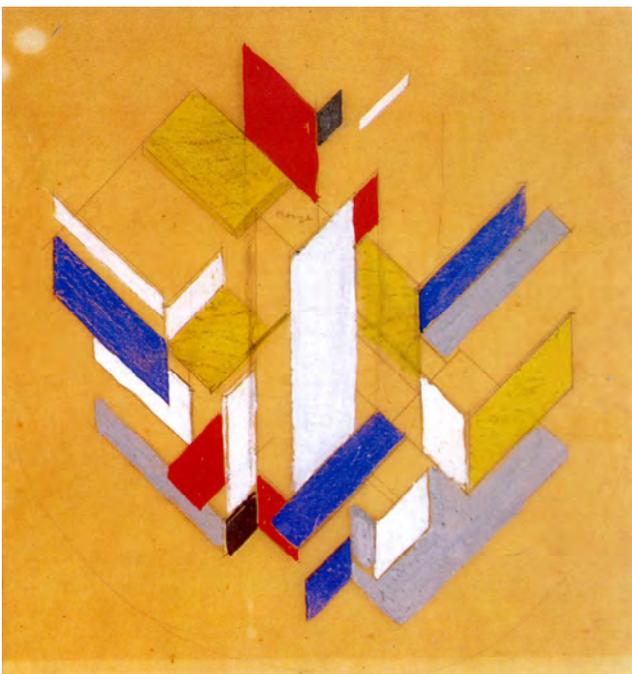
Icastic force and a reference paradigm are to be found also in some drawings by van Doesburg and van Esteren (van Doesburg & Cornelis van Esteren, 1923) (Fig. 5-6), in which the tension towards an architecture of pure color plans is expressed, which do not aspire to drawing an architectural project, but indicate a programmatic abstraction. "We need to talk about these counter-constructions of evocative attitude: the architectural image is placed by van Doesburg on the level of abstract linguistic persuasiveness. His counter-construction operation [...] [becomes] the suggestion of an image of generic spatiality, potentially deducible from the meeting of slabs and colored planes, [...] [which] claims the annulment of the force of gravity, in favor of the liberation of the orthogonal plans composing the building box" (Polano, 1979).



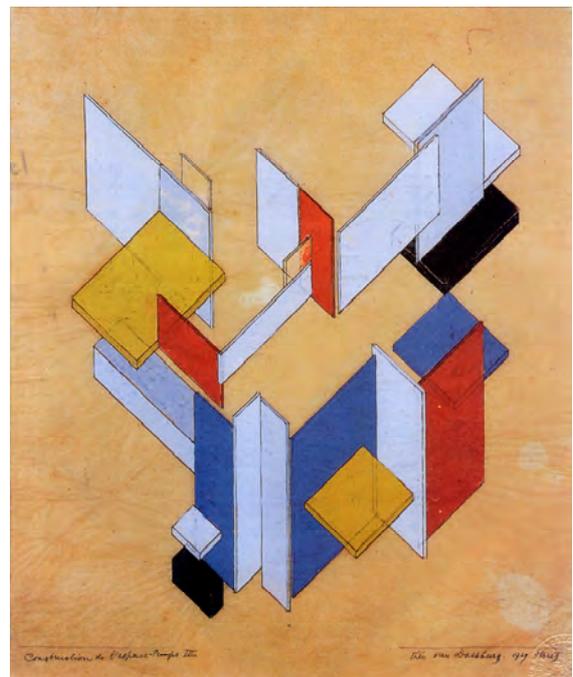
Fig. 3: Arduino Cantàfora, (1973). *La Città analoga*, (*The similar city*).



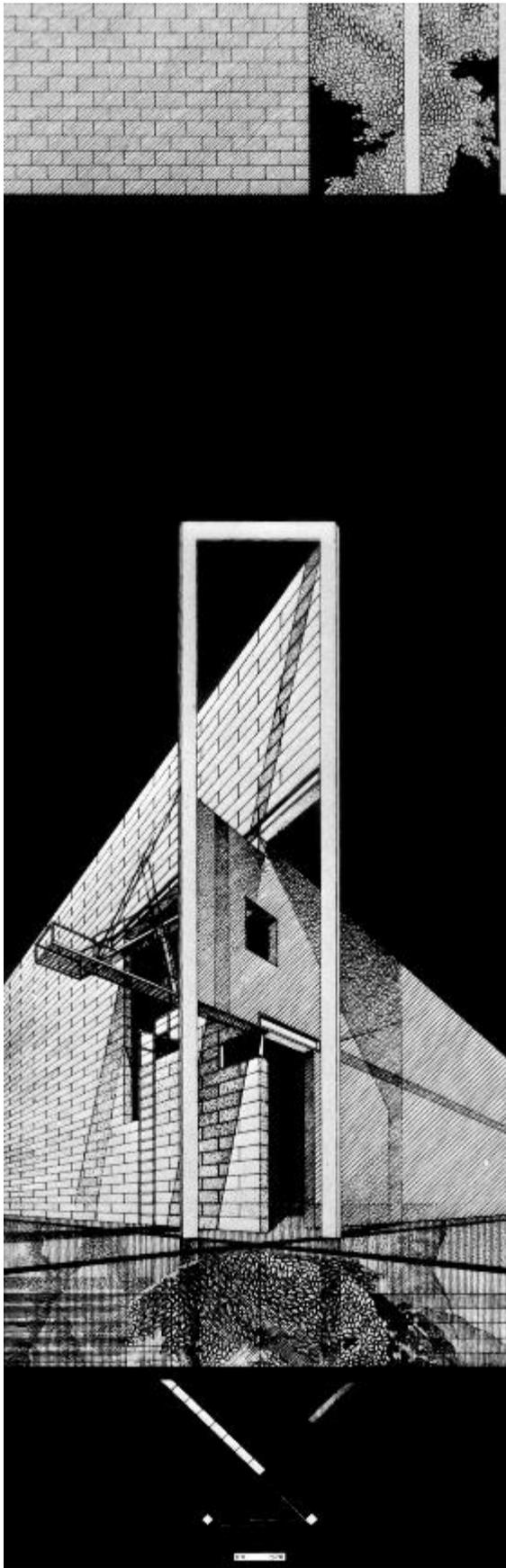
**Fig. 4:** Charles Robert Cockerell, (1848). *The Professor's Dream* (drawing, pencil, pen, gray ink and watercolor, with scratched reflections, 112.2 x 171.1 cm). London: Royal Academy of Arts.



**Fig. 5:** Theo van Doesburg e Cornelis van Eesteren, (1923). *Contra-Construction Project*.



**Fig. 6:** Theo van Doesburg e Cornelis van Eesteren, (1924). *Construction de l'espace-temps III*.



**Fig. 7:** Franco Purini, (1978). *Angolo (Corner)*.

A large and widespread repertoire is the one that is part of the speculative production of Franco Purini's graphic corpus which, within its systemic critique and with ruthless lucidity, pose a series of questions on the principles of architecture and push to search and, perhaps, to find some answers. In the drawing *Angle* from 1978 (Fig. 7), in which the recurrent scenic condition is perpetuated, deprived of connections with the environment in whose place a field of apparitions is revealed, "[...] the figuration is an end in itself; the architectural references seem to have only the duty of indicating the utility class, that of the architectural figures, in which the author chooses to ask himself to establish an aesthetic overvaluation" (Guillerme, 1981).

At the end of this brief review, certainly that is susceptible of the identification of further paradigms, one could not refer to Rem Koolhaas's *The City of Captive Globe*, both for its subversive energy and both for the emblematic character of the guiding principles of the architecture and the idea of the city, which sees in the change the essence of the metropolitan culture and the essence of the concept of 'city' as a sequence of different states of permanence. The city of Koolhaas is the capital in which science, art and poetry, each one fleshed out in its own lot with the heavy bases of polished stone incorporating ideological laboratories, compete to invent, destroy and restore the world of phenomenal Reality. "*The City of the Captive Globe*" (Fig. 8) is destined to artificial conception and the accelerated birth of theories, interpretations, mental constructions, proposals, and to impose them on the world" (Koolhaas, 1994).

#### 4. Conclusions

In the articulated panorama of Evaluation of Research Quality (VQR) in Italy, the possibility of considering Drawing, in its meaning of an expressive act aimed at the interpretative reading of physical reality, a research product is a result of particular interest.

However, we want to conduct a reflection on the territories of the drawing that invest the critical potential of restoring signs of exploratory investigations, regardless of its usual role of exclusive reference to the real or achievable dimension of the thing represented, to access a different and more meaningful condition of critical questioning of the foundational concepts of the

city in order to arrive at the formulation of new thoughts on architecture.

"We speak about the weight of the "vague" and non-codifiable motivations in the construction of a patrimony of works that, although not being comparable to the real architecture, have great importance in architectural culture" (Contessi, 1985).

*In VQR 2011-2014 the Group for 08a Area Evaluation, Architecture (GEV08a) was a really evaluation laboratory because it evaluated product different from all the others, such as drawings and project drawings.*



**Fig. 8:** Rem Koolhaas, (1972). *The City of Captive Globe*.

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