

# HISTORY IN THE VOID: GIUSEPPE SAMONÀ'S 1967 PROPOSAL FOR MONTECITORIO COMPETITION

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**Abstract.** Giuseppe Samonà was one of the most influential figures in 20th century Italian architecture and urban culture. In 1967, Samonà and his team submitted a competition proposal for the extension of the Camera dei deputati in Rome, considered by many to be one of the most significant and conceptually mature projects of his career. By examining the design and the report appended to the competition submittal the author explores the concept of the void that is the backbone of the project and finds that it has a twofold interpretation. Apart from the obvious physical manifestation of emptying, the void is also a meditative device, an incorporeal entity that relies on the body of the new insert to show the complexity of the history of the Roman site. It is in this inversion of the usual interpretation of the concept of void as being independent nothingness that allure of the project itself lies. By presenting the archival material and contemporary research, the author brings into focus a part of Samonà's extraordinary contribution to the architecture and urban culture of the 20th century that surprisingly remains unrevealed to non-Italian audiences.

**Keywords:** Giuseppe Samonà, void, history, Montecitorio, Parliament building, architecture competition.

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## 1. Introduction

At the age of seventy-nine, Giuseppe Samonà had already had a long and distinguished career when he and his team submitted a proposal for the extension of the Parliament building at Montecitorio in Rome in 1967. The project titled *Martedì* constitutes both a succinct collection of concepts regarding a proposed architectural intervention within the context of a historic urban environment, as well as a salient extract from Samonà's overarching concern with the influence of history on design development, which he would further elaborate in the book *L'unità architettura-urbanistica* (Samonà, 1975). In the explanatory text "Relazione generale del progetto per l'edificio dei nuovi uffici della Camera dei Deputati" that accompanied the drawings, Samonà depicted history as an "infinite field of past events" perceived in the present in which the architect's task is the ambitious project of uncovering "all the relationships" that form the historical narrative of the Montecitorio site (Samonà, 1967).<sup>1</sup> The paradigm that emerged from Samonà's exploratory examination of the

urban context as a multiplicity within infinite possible historical arrangements both implicitly and explicitly figures in his argument, embodying a unique form of polytemporal constitution.

Parallel to Samonà's engagement with the "everythingness" of history, he introduced the concept of the void as a fundamental principle guiding his project. While Samonà probed this notion during the 1950s and 1960s, a comprehensive theoretical exploration of the void remained unwritten. In the following discussion, I investigate the concept of the void, interpreting it as a physical manifestation of "pruning" but also as a paradoxical space where the richness of history, exemplified in the Montecitorio project, dissolves into nothingness – an antithesis to a building. Samonà, in his discussion, referred to the void interchangeably, oscillating between viewing it as a tangible construct and as a tool for contemplation on the nature of the historical city. I claim that the allure of the proposal lies in the space between the notion of the void as constitutive of urban space and the overdetermination of architectural history manifested in a multiplicity of references to the past.

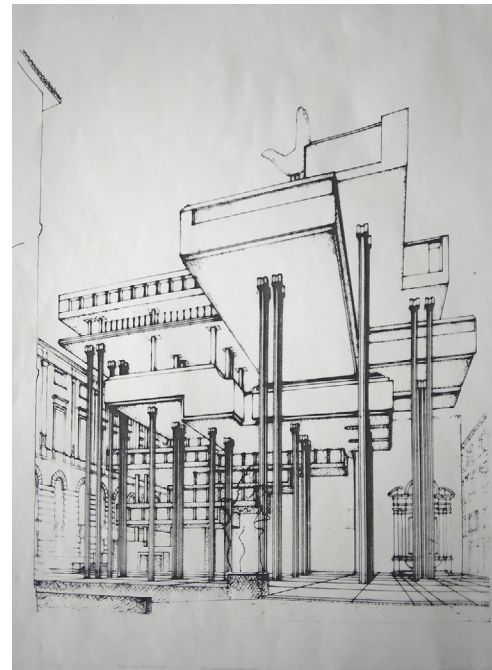
Despite serving as the conceptual backbone of the Montecitorio project and being integral to comprehending Samonà's approach to the historical city, the concept of the void has not been thoroughly discussed in relation

<sup>1</sup> Part of the competition report *Martedì* was published in Tafuri, M. (1968). *Il concorso per i nuovi Uffici della Camera dei deputati: un bilancio dell'architettura italiana* (p. 98). Rome: Edizioni universitarie italiane. (Translations in the text are by the author.)

to the proposal. Building upon Samonà's concept for the Novissime project from 1964, scholars like Giovanni Marras and Claudia Angarano have briefly discussed the void, acknowledging its constructive value in urban composition. They recognize the void as an element in constructing the finite image of the ancient city, yet also point out its paradoxical role as a demarcator of the urban environment (Angarano, 2020; Marras, 2006, 2019, 2021). Luciano Semerani, who collaborated with Samonà in the 60s, described how students implemented the theory of voids in the studios during that period, working as if at the "operating table" and meticulously removing superfetations from the old fabric of Venice. In the case of the competition for the Tronchetto Basin (Novissime), Semerani explains that the aim of emptying was to reintroduce a sense of spatial indefiniteness and formation of the internal symmetrical horizon visible from the outside of the island. He is thus pointing to the concept of emptying as a crucial aspect of the "intelligent seeing" that I will introduce later in the text (Semerani, 2006, p. 274). René Soletti, in particular, is perhaps most articulate when he describes the void as an organizing principle "that configures a space not limited by elements themselves" (Soletti, 2020). In the text that follows, I rely on the competition report, drawing submittal, other archival findings and documents, Samonà's writings, as well as writings on his work, to delve deeper into the concept of void as a conceptual framework for the Montecitorio project.

Although the proposal for the extension of the Parliament building remained on paper, it is considered to be one of the most successful proposals for the intervention within historic city of the Italian postwar period and one of the most mature in Samonà's fifty year long career. Perspectival drawings of the new building at Montecitorio, visually powerful as they are, found their way into the imagination of the Italian architectural public (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Yet, the theoretical thought presented in *Relazione*, remains unrevealed outside Italian circles, and, except from the brief study done by Manfredo Tafuri and sporadic quotations, has not been placed in the context of Samonà's significant impact on architectural culture in Italy and broader. The goal of this research is three-fold: first is to provide a new reading of the competition proposal in light of the acquired archival material. The second is to introduce the theoretical concept of void as a strategic tool in design for working in history. Third, perhaps the most significant intention of this work is to begin filling the gap in existing research outside Italy by making Samonà's work accessible to English-speaking readers.

Italian scholars have extensively debated Samonà's perspective on history and modernity from multiple viewpoints. Studies point towards specific compositional methods and "incomplete belonging to modernity" in the archi-



**Figure 1.** Perspective of the building from the north side of the site, with Ernesto Basile's Parliament building in the background on the left (source: IUAV Archivio Progetti, 1967)

tect's work providing for a successful suspension between languages of modernity and tradition (Dilauro, 2020; Infuzzi, 1992; Pogacnik, 2006; Tafuri, 1975, 1990; Valerio, 2020). The architect's perspective, as expressed in the subsequent text, is paralleled only by the esteem with which many regarded his project. However, despite Samonà's extensive impact as a director of one of the most significant architecture schools (IUAV) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as his significant contributions as an educator, designer and theorist within the fields of architecture and urban planning, his legacy has yet to be fully recognized outside of Italy.

## 2. Samonà: the "Sacred Monster" at Montecitorio

The site of Montecitorio Palace and its surrounding has a long history of urban transformations and the reasons for its unfinished structurization remain an object of discussion today (Carlotti et al., 2018). The last on the trajectory of interventions from ancient times to the present on the site was the construction of the Parliament building by Ernesto Basile, Samonà's early Sicilian mentor, in 1927 (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup>

Basile, a prominent proponent of the Italian version of Art Nouveau, created parliament architecture that was an amalgam of design ambitions of an eclectic nature that

<sup>2</sup> To see the development process and earlier drawings of the project, see Kim, I. (2007, November). Giuseppe Samonà at the Palazzo del Montecitorio, Rome 1967. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, 6(2), 221–228.

<sup>3</sup> Ernesto Basile was one of Samonà's early teachers, but the student departed from him early in his career due to disagreements.



**Figure 2.** Site as it stands today with Basile's building to the left of the image (source: Google Earth Pro, 2024)



**Figure 3.** Site plan showing Basile's cubical addition in the medieval fabric of Rome. The upper portion of the building with a curvilinear facade is 17th century Lorenzo Bernini's palace commissioned by Pope Innocent X, later adopted by Carlo Fontana. Number 1 indicates the location of Piazza del Parlamento (source: IUAV Archivio Progetti, 1967)

drew on his Sicilian background and the nineteenth century's procedure of "sventramento," or gutting (Figure 3).<sup>4</sup> The building turned out to be the significant complicating factor, an elephant in the room, in rethinking the new intervention as it is the seat of the parliament and the source of the institutional life of Rome and Italy that was both in terms of its conceptual and formal characteristics source of anti-history. The end result of Basile's intervention was a "conversation between the deaf" at Montecitorio as Tafuri wrote in his analysis with an offending tone, bewildered at

the building's incapacity to communicate in the city that after all, was always a "field of intersubjective meanings" (Tafuri, 1968, p. 22).

The national competition for the new building for the offices of the Chamber of Deputies was held in March of 1967 for the site that was a residue from this early 20th restructuring intended to visually connect the parliament building with the church of St. Peter. It was based on the Master plan for the city of Rome from December 1965, approved by the presidential decree and resolutions adopted by the Bureau in January and April of 1966. According to the decree a new edifice was to be built on the area "bounded by via della Missione, Piazza del Parlamento (within the planimetric limits of the demolitions carried out for the construction of the Palazzo Basile), via di Campo Marzio and, on the remaining site, by the property of the administration and third parties" ([Archival material], 1966–67; Tafuri, 1968, pp. 142–146). Instructions for the new insert in the historic city were strikingly brief: a harmonious relationship was to be established with particular emphasis on the height of the surrounding buildings and physical connections with Palazzo di Montecitorio and the new subterranean garage. This request is followed by a long list of services that the new premise needed to host. Required functions included 540 writing rooms for the Deputies, a library with supporting services, a restaurant, two apartments for representatives, offices for the former President, a bank, a post-office, offices for the research department, offices for legislation and parliamentary inquiries, and a garage for 700–800 cars. In response to the dry, functional, urbanistic, and ideological challenges posed by the competition requirements for the site, architects expressed a broad spectrum of desires and intentions. These ranged from onsite infill standstill to the radical utopia of modern code, aiming to structure the unfinished historical palimpsest of this part of the city of Rome (Tafuri, 1968, pp. 9–14; Raitano, 2021).

Group Martedì, led by Samonà, and seventeen other teams, some of which were led by key architects of the time, were reimbursed with 1500000 Lit, and the story of the competition remained on paper, leaving many proponents of modern interventions in the historic city disillusioned. As for Samonà, in *Relazione*, he drew a distinction between a monument like Bernini's Palazzo Ludovici and a "built document" – a term he used somewhat derogatorily – to describe Palazzo Basile (Samonà, 1967, p. 7). He respectfully acknowledged Bernini's building "with which any substantial relation will be excluded" due to its "too strong preexistence" with the intention to transfer all interests for the future whole towards piazza Montecitorio "for the long vistas." The architect considered it crucial that the new project unveil the pedestrian piazza that would serve as a link between the "unremarkable" piazza del Parlamento and piazza Montecitorio. In his view the cultural setup of the Roman site naturally lent itself towards open architectural solutions, with the new insert being a contemplative juncture in the historical center.

<sup>4</sup> To understand the climate of Sicilian *terza via* see Palazzolo, G. (2010). *L'architettura di Giuseppe Samonà a Messina*. Palermo: Grafil.



While Samonà's project exemplifies his specific theoretical approach to the historic city, it can also be seen as reflection of the cultural frustration with planning politics shared by many Italian architects of the period (Dal Co, 1975, pp. 105–112). According to Manuela Raitano, after the competition, Bruno Zevi convened reimbursed architects at InArch for further discussion (Raitano, 2021, p. 139). At this meeting, Samonà responded to the theme of programmatic concerns by claiming that he had "no interest in the practical realization of the project" and that the competition was an opportunity for him to experiment further with the concept of emptiness. Whether this view of the competition request reflects disillusionment, self-defense, or escapism on the part of the architect, as noted by Raitano, or simply a personal choice—as Samonà dismissed competition requirements in the competition from 1964 for Trenchetto in Venice—it is unusual for a socially aware architect with a strong intention to build to see a competition as platform for theoretical exploration.

As will become evident, the failure to designate a winner was seen by many, including Tafuri and Zevi, as detrimental to Italian architectural culture and a lost opportunity to introduce a modern insert into the fabric of Rome. Not only was the question of modern intervention in the ancient city fraught with challenges and the position of the architect-intellectual in the postwar reconstruction difficult, compounded by the reality that private interests overshadowed the needs of the nation's construction projects. Now institutions lacked the capacity to effectively strategize competitions and adhere to their own urban plan. In this context, the key to the competition's failure lay not only in functionally unrealistic requests, such as the site's inability to accommodate the required square footage but also in the fact that competition was not recognized as a potentially urbanistic endeavor and therefore could not offer a viable urban solution.

### 3. General report of the project for the new office building of the chamber of the deputies: a theoretical framework

The project report (*Relazione* in the further text), penned by Samonà for the competition, encapsulates his ideas on intervening in the historic city during the 60's and 70's. While serving as an appendix to the drawing set, *Relazione* is not an independent piece of writing or robust manifesto for the historic city. Rather, it acts as a conceptual toolbox, presenting ideas from his other sources and repurposing them for this specific occasion. The text is segmented into six parts: On the Historic City, Project, Hypotheses for the Structure and Materials, Quantitative Analysis, Project Choices, and Notes on the Development of the project.

Samonà initiates the discussion by asserting, "Among the parts of the city, one that includes the historic center is recognized as the most significant of the urban structure" (Samonà, 1967, p. 1). The historic city, as described

by Samonà, is a contemplative space where new interventions become a fresh medium – a "point of exchange" – relative to the surrounding historic environment. Samonà's theoretical framework for the Montecitorio project is built on the correlation between the "historical finitude" of the historic city and the "voids." In *Relazione*, as well as in his other writings, he emphasizes that the historical processes of the old city have concluded, making way for a multifarious temporal domain that forms the foundation of the project.

Samonà's advocacy for formal completeness and temporal arrest, initially striking as a modernist error proposed again, is his effort to connect the modern subject to historical reality without the 19<sup>th</sup> century "aberrations." This raises the question: if the historic city is both formally and functionally complete, what do we build when we intervene within it?

### 4. Void

The concept of void, as described by Samonà in *Relazione*, is a tool that is, I claim, part of his non-reductivist approach towards design in the built environment, which, for him, should be a source of contemplation and a place where intersubjectivity thrives. According to Samonà, the ancient city continually reestablishes its connection with the human psyche, enabling it to foster a connection between historic formations and the collective awareness of its inhabitants, thereby addressing "universal spiritual needs." The *Relazione* demonstrates that the concept of finitude (of the old city) has both a figurative and narrative quality in the context of the historic city, yet its subjective experience is boundless:

Gradually, as long as we feel our contents present in the ancient city, stimuli to our relationships, the ancient structure will go to selecting them; suggesting to us, through its various components, a whole series of relationships formulated through the figurative elements, to be discovered in the physical reality of the historic environment itself (Samonà, 1967, p. 5).

The "finitude" requires intelligent seeing on the part of the modern subject that cannot be treated as a theoretical construct, devoid of historical reality. The void, in my interpretation, is both metaphorical and metaphysical, and is a tool for this intelligent seeing. Samonà's writings show that void can be found (i.e. pre-existing condition) or deliberately created; it can be a consequence of spontaneous historical development or one of the driving forces of the conscious creative process, demolition included, within an urban framework. It is essential to discern that in both scenarios the void is to be perceived as a constitutive space, not a lack in a manner of a total annihilation of all things as it is understood in certain philosophical traditions.

In the introductory section of *Relazione* entitled "On the Historic City," Samonà conveys to the jury that the

creation of empty spaces will be a central aspect of the future intervention:

The new buildings in this context will therefore arise, not as a mimetic aspect, or worse, as a non-cultured testimony of a present figuration, but as *preparatory built artifact*, in fact, to the creations of those *great voids* [emphasis added], facts of stability and monumentality (Samonà, 1967, p. 7).

*Il vuoto* is a cognitive and experiential space that unveils the interrelation between the extraordinary unity of the historical content and the modern perceiver; it facilitates an immersive experience, revealing the "extratemporal" aspects of ancient architectural structures. But in order to allow for this "pure and simple contemplation," the way Samonà perceives the process, one has to find an adequate temporal framework and do the fine-tuning of the historic material, case by case:

[...] the unique operation that precedes the conservation of the values of the historic center consists in bringing back the center to conditions of considerably lower social density typical of the previous century. The problem is posed of the removal (decentralizing) from the compact area of the historic city all those facts of the administrative, technical and political character that generated the congestion; leaving there only those for which we can measure values of representational character and associative celebrative aspect (Samonà, 1967, p. 6).

Samonà's quest for the re-presentation of the "lost totality" and, paradoxically, the conscious observer to perceive its disintegration, brought him to *una museografica intesa in un modo nuovo*; his personal rendering of going back in time (Samonà, 1969, p. 14). As he himself noted, museography cannot be understood as "preserving the city in its death" but as a sign of its true vitality, one populated with human subjects in accordance with the city's original capacities. In *Relazione* there is a pendulous motion from the new museification of the old city to the poetic vision of emptiness that speaks for itself:

The destruction and demolition of what is not consequent with those structures (discontinuous superfetations and encumbrance in the organization of these units to be studied and planned) leave empty spaces in which it is no longer necessary to reconstruct. Voids that have the eloquence of characterizing themselves as a vision of the historical city through pieces from its own figurative discourse towards the outside; voids that revitalize the articulations of the historical fabric and its monuments; they imprint a prestige and highly significant character of the signs of our creation (Samonà, 1967, p. 7).

"Creative conservation" points towards metahistorical considerations, the meditative aspect of the museification in which the historic center is, as he writes years after the

competition, left "to the tranquility that the human brain requires to live it" (Samonà, 1984, p. 17). In his habitual manner of questioning familiar preconceptions, Samonà is deconstructing and recharging the conventional idea of preservation of historical heritage: "new museography" embodies conservation that pursues clarity and extratemporal values inherent to metahistorical concerns. In his contribution to the book on Roberto Pane, he will later elaborate:

I don't want to say that ... it is desirable for every old city to become a museum... but in case that one wants to orient urban purpose/destiny towards its celebrative and illustrative aspects and scientific activity, I would think of a museography understood in a new way, given its immersion in the social context and extended to the entire old city (Samonà, 1969, p. 7).

The ultimate objective of the creative conservation is to showcase unique character and emotional impact of the historic environment.

The strategy of emptying developed in the context of the interactive yet formally frozen, contained, temporal framework (i.e. old city) was Samonà's response to the fermenting issues of the Italian architecture and urban culture. He reacted not only to modernist non-contextual planning policies but also opposed contemporary tendencies in historic preservation, which he referred to as "false protection of tradition," akin to the views of Roberto Pane or Benedetto Croce, among others. Furthermore, the theory of voids and "creative conservation" reflect Giovannonesque *diradamento* or theory of pruning in relationship to decentralization of the historic center, albeit without a picturesque sentiment of Samonà's master (di Marco, 2014, pp. 96–119; Kim, 2006, pp. 61–87). Gustavo Giovannoni's *diradamento* or thinning implied fine-tuning the historical matrix and restoring equilibrium in a manner reminiscent of earlier preservation theorists such as Camillo Boito or urban theorists like Camillo Sitte. His theory advocated selectively demolishing small, disconnected sections, allowing specific areas to remain undeveloped or undergo minimal intervention. Giovannoni poetically spoke about the benefits of pruning, which would allow sunrays to enter the old neighborhood, opening new vistas and enabling old houses to breathe within the new arrangement of the historic city (Giovannoni, 1931; Stabile, 2017). Although the strategy proposed by the older master might lead to an abrupt interruption in time or a somewhat "violent operation," as Tafuri named it, for both Samonà and Giovannoni, it was intended to unfold the pleasurable autonomy of the historic center.

## 5. Design process

The concept of "pruning" elucidates the initial sense of void – a body-less space carved out within a historically charged context. In *Relazione*, a second void emerges, a more ambiguous concept resulting from the physical

body's insertion into Montecitorio's space. In neither case is the void an undefinable abstraction, even though it demands a certain level of abstract thinking. Instead, it is a tangible presence, historically constituted and intricately linked to the architectural elements that define it. Even when considering the first type of void, which may possess relatively simple physical characteristics post-“pruning,” it should potentially radiate subliminal messages, leaving us with the enigma of how history unfolded.

If the first sense of void is intuitively clear and transparent, the second kind is imbued with a nuanced complexity. In the instance of the Novissime project for the city of Venice, a precursor to the Montecitorio competition, the notion of emptiness appears straightforward: specific segments of the Trenchetto site demanded meticulous clearance and restoration to its 18th-century rendition. This moment in history, according to Samonà, represented a state of totality when the city had not yet undergone functions inappropriate to its original formation. However, in the Montecitorio project, the situation is different: how does one create a void, an ambient meditative incorporeal environment, with something? A partial answer to this question can be found in Polesello's interpretation of the theory of voids as an

expansion of place-space and, in fact, a reversal of the normal conditions of visual experience: a void can only be measurable with reference to elements external to it, and the connection between the externals guarantees us to know the position in this void, in an absolutely identical way to the techniques used for navigation (Polesello, 1987, pp. 11–22).

Samonà's drawings present us with a set of volumes, surfaces and vertical elements tied to the ground in such a manner that the object itself echoes the surrounding history perpetually avoiding its own identity formation. In the *Relazione* he elucidates the lack of stability in the composition: “The very high porch, the movements of the volumes, the functional conception of the whole are all found, even in different forms, not yet stabilized, in these sketches” (Samonà, 1967, p. 29). While there are numerous predecessors to the project, including figures like Perret, Wright, Mies, and Le Corbusier, it is crucial to understand that almost none of the historical language inherited and relied upon by Samonà is used conventionally.

In the exploration outlined in the *Relazione* Samonà wanders through metaphorical and real charge of architectural elements, sampling atmospheres and recalls, placing particular emphasis on the “correspondences and dependences” between them. This meticulous scrutiny sets the stage for one of the key realizations in Samonà's design process when it comes to Montecitorio project. The void is approached with a unique linguistic (structuralist) perspective. Samonà explains:

Considering the urban environment of the complex in its meaningful values that take the coherence

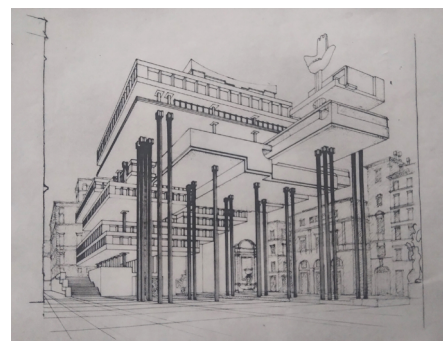
of the formal elements of its whole together, it is sought, to isolate and examine its various parts, be they signed works, architectural aggregations, documents of a nearer past, arranging, consequently, the edifice in such a position and with such a figuration as to enter into dialogue with *all the elements* [emphases added] identified in their historical process of formation (Samonà, 1967, p. 4).

This distinct viewpoint based on creation of interrelated multiple architectural references with different historical dates informs every architectural decision in the project for the Parliament. For instance, “Samonian pilotis,” a re-interpretation of Corbusean pilotis are employed to achieve effects of levitation within the ancient city rather than a floating effect in the lush greenery (Figure 4).

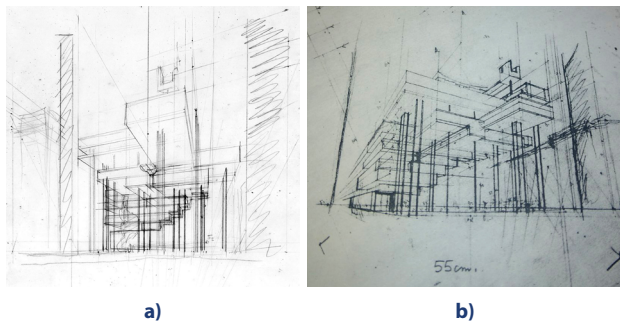
Cornices transform into third-dimensional floating volumes, challenging traditional forms. The plaza undergoes a shift in interpretation, evolving into a space ad infinitum: “For those who come from Montecitorio Square, it will seem from the raised square that they have before them an infinite space, filtered through the pillars ... arranged in deep shadow” (Samonà, 1967, p. 28). The “giant order” is reimagined as a set of “elegant quadruple pylons which do not compromise transparency” (Samonà, 1967, p. 27). The deliberate denial of gravity and emphasis on detachment and transparency within the historic environment highlight Samonà's commitment to avoiding recognizability or reminiscence to something outside the building itself.

Samonà's architectural approach unfolds as a strategic selection of structure, driven by the “intrinsic expressive value of the skeleton,” which encourages an emptying out from the virtual dimension of the site volume. By deliberately sidestepping the constraints of regulating lines on the site, he creates effect of levitation and an illusion of infinity beneath the building, employing terminology that underscores his goal of achieving an “open architecture.” This approach aligns with his compositional hypothesis, envisioning the new offices of the Chamber of Deputies as a *locus of exchange*, rather than a fixed entity. (Figures 5a and 5b)

Not adhering to the outer boundaries of the area does not stem from a desire to contest the existing



**Figure 4.** Perspective of the building from the North-East Corner of the site, as seen from Piazza del Parlamento (source: IUAV Archivio Progetti, 1967)



**Figure 5.** Perspectival sketches showing the use of the expressive value of the structure to, paradoxically, “empty” the site. Achieved are the effects of levitation – denial of gravity – of the building and infinity at the level of the ground (source: IUAV Archivio Progetti, 1967)

context but is instead linked to the compositional idea that the new office building of the Chamber of Deputies could serve as a point of exchange and figurative clarification in relation to its historical surroundings (Samonà, 1967, p. 8).

Furthermore, the concept of “erosion of the bodies,” as expressed by Samonà, emerges organically from his choice of structure and is intimately linked to shifts in the gravitational dynamics of the remaining masses. These intentional moves of the strata of the building resembling metaphorical cornices, illustrate the building’s interactive and yet distant response to the existing environment (Figures 6, 7 and 8). As one ascends through the different levels of the structure, from the strategic “shifts” and “stretching” towards key landmarks, to the careful orchestration of volumes allowing light penetration, we witness a deliberate arrangement of strata of the building. As per the description in *Relazione*, at the levels 25.40 and 27.80 two nuclei of the deputy rooms are “shifted” to the corner of the building, “stretching” towards piazza del Parlamento. At level 27.80 m, “everything is moved” towards palazzo Basile. At level 30.20 m, again, “everything is moved” towards Campo Marzio street and the volume is created in such a way that “light can penetrate from below and above.” Ultimately, towards via Campo Marzio, the final “fall in volumes” occurs at the level of the restaurant (Samonà, 1967, p. 15). Samonà’s earlier projects in Torino (1962) and Palermo (1965) established the foundations for these visual explorations, where he experimented with horizontal cornices and the elevation of architectural elements. In the Montecitorio project, these elements undergo a transformative reconfiguration, resulting in an architectural oscillation that serves as a focal point for the missing center.

What underlies this unconventional array of historical references is the “everythingness” of history, as articulated by Samonà in *Relazione*. According to him, the optimal approach to designing within and for a historic center involves deriving insights from *all* the internal relations within its physical configuration. From this architectural reasoning emerges a question: if the void is not merely a

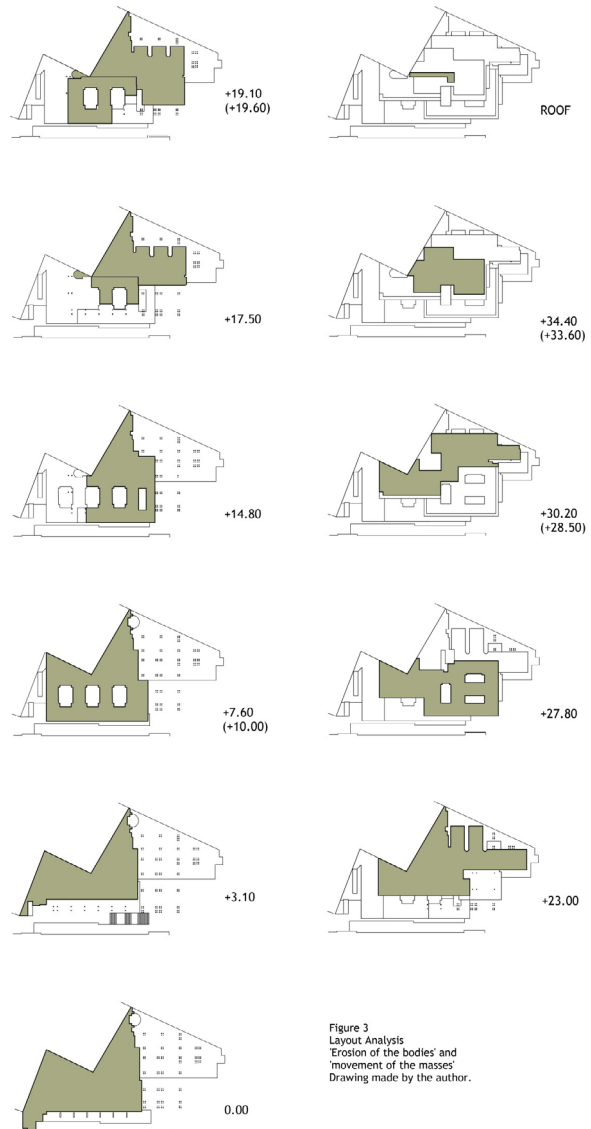
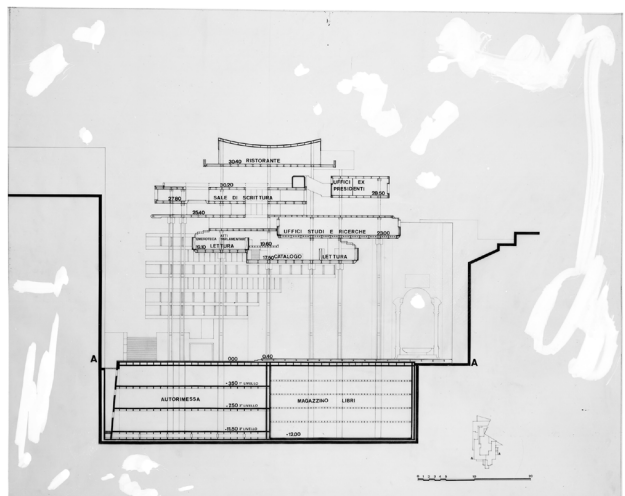


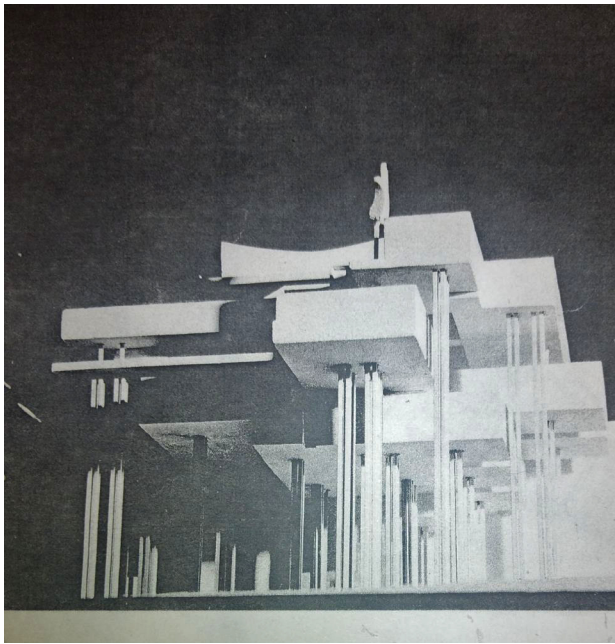
Figure 3  
Layout Analysis  
“Erosion of the bodies” and  
“movement of the masses”  
Drawing made by the author.

**Figure 6.** Layout analysis showing “erosion of the body” of the building and shifting strata at different levels (source: Drawing by the author)



**Figure 7.** Cross section illustrating “erosion of the body” (source: IUAV Archivio Progetti, 1967)





**Figure 8.** Model of the building showing 3D “point of exchange” (*punto di scambio*) (source: IUAV Archivio Progetti, 1967)

negative term describing the absence of something, and if the new insertion is intended to engage in a dialogue with the entirety of the history of the Roman site, then what constitutes it? In *Relazione*, Samonà elucidates that the new building serves as a medium responsive to the environment in its totality. His underlying assumption is that human subjects perceive reality and construct knowledge only in the saturated presence, a presence enriched with multiple temporal frames, akin to the history of presence later developed by Michel Foucault. Consequently, the medium proposed at the Roman site acts as an agency for the diffusion of historical information; it lacks substance in and of itself as there are no fixed architectural meanings in the elements that are shuffled and reshuffled. Following this line of reasoning, the past in the Montecitorio project should be viewed as an interactive field that selectively permeates the present, resembling a Serresian morphed filter irregularly perforated, rather than something that can be presented as a corporeal entity. In this clever morphing, it is useful for us to see the void in Montecitorio as an entity that depends on the body without itself being a body, much like the “flow of traffic depends on cars without being reducible to the cars that give rise to it,” as Vanessa de Harven explains in her insightful discussion of the void in Stoic philosophy and argues that nothing can still be something (Harven, 2015, p. 406).

## 6. Conclusions

It is the dreamlike tapestry of Freud’s weaver, “the transparency of the ancient behind the filigree of wiry iron structure,” as Tafuri put it, that figures in Samonà’s project as the model of bringing the past to the present with

a fresh view of their interconnectedness, without “stylistic mimetism” nor “exaltation of formalistic brutalism or pseudo-avant-garde” (Tafuri, 1980, p. 61; Samonà, 1967, p. 28). What aspects of historical material remained latent, which manifested as visible determinants filtered through the lenses of the present? Samonà’s authentic resistance to the simplification of architecture’s historical narrative leads him to cross-examine the sequence of things and the ceaseless revival of memories, events, and ruptures that architecture carries within itself, as if being immune to temporal linearity. As he claimed, history is not the history of significant events but moments of anachronism, a rematerialization of the past in all its complexity in the present. It is this underlying information that is presented as the void, a subliminal historical network that situates the subject in the whole of the historic city.

The paradox, or perhaps irony, as Marco Pogačnik already recognized in Samonà’s work, is that the new insert at Montecitorio—an overdetermined object of architecture, carrying a multiplicity of historical references and interpretations within itself—is an antithesis of the building, a “moment of active contemplation” (Pogačnik, 2006, p. 24). It is ironic in that it deviates from the traditional notion of constructing a building but is consistent with Samonà’s perception of the void as a construct from which “historical things” can arise. Thus, the void in the Montecitorio project has a specific twist; it encompasses and collapses the “everythingness” of historical material and pretends to mirror both immediately present and distant architectures, emanating both architecture’s real features and shadowy experiences. The sculptures are there for those who might miss the message of the void.

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