

ON MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of paper is to discuss the history of Modern Architecture in Italy, between the beginning of the 20th Century and 1970. We intend to show the main character of Italian architecture by itself and give a context of the main trend of the European Modernism. To do this, we have to discuss the idea of “Modernity” and the relationships between Italy and other centres of creation in Europe in this age.

The discussion is concentrated on the temporal sequence of different architects and a short description of the most significant masterpieces during the 20th Century in Italy. At the same time, we have the task to discuss other works, not very well-known, but represent the specific character of Italian architecture. The paper intends to demonstrate that Italian Modern architecture is a composite scenario of works influenced by the European trend but with its own specific character, especially through some anomalous artists who generated unique masterpieces without master and epigone.

We have analyzed the architecture of the Eclecticism and Art Nouveau, the Futurism, Fascism and Rationalism, the age of the post-war reconstruction and re-design of the cities, the most important issues in this period. According to the poetics of “modernity” we have pointed out some general character that is useful to understand modern architecture in Italy: inventory of contents and functions, asymmetry and dissonance, anti-perspective tridimensionality, four-dimensional decomposition, projection and membrane structures, temporalized space, reintegration of building, town and territory.

The Modern Movement was based on a strong ethical spirit, on a very precise methodology derived from the rational study of problems relating to dwelling on a marked functionalism. This analysis of Modern architecture in Italy must have ended on the Seventies in the twentieth century. After that age, it began the Post-Structuralism thought with a radical change of the process of generation of the architecture.

Keywords : Modern Italian architecture / History of Italian Architecture / Italian Rationalism / Futurism in architecture / critics of architecture.

1. ON MODERN ARCHITECTURE. KEY CONCEPTS

The first topic we may reflect upon is the concept of modern architecture itself. Such an idea has entered the intellectual debate and becomes for us, nowadays, an assumption that cannot be disregarded. Thinking about modern architecture means radically distinguishing it from what modern is not. Modern architecture always proposes itself as a fracture, as a radical change in the way of seeing things as well as in conceiving spaces itself. “Modern” sets itself against ancient or traditional, proudly keeping distances and differences. Such a split, if we think well, is much more spurious or imaginary than what actually appears from the real production. It rather puts itself as a theoretic hypothesis, a polemic hint generated by the culture of the time and turned to the generation of a new society based more on social presuppositions rather than on real taste innovations. To give proof of what we are saying we can hold up as an example the fact that it is nearly impossible to find out a radical turning-point, an event or an author who, all of a sudden, created a coherent and structured “poetics of modern”. Such an acquisition, on the contrary, happened in a period of time which covers at least forty years and two continents. Breaks undoubtedly have taken place, radical authors who have revolutionized the living structures through ingenious and innovative works. But to a strict analysis of their works a sudden invention is never given, rather a slow progress which leads to great masterpieces which, this time, were able to renew taste through their designative valence.

Hence, the birth of modern architecture is not identified by a precise year or a well defined author, even though we cannot deny the contribution of great masters and of particular events. The history of modern architecture, therefore, must be seen as a very articulated succession of composite positions, of very different works and of very complex technical contributions.

If we wish to single out a main reason for the birth of the modern movement in architecture, then we should single it out from the change of the entire society: not a very original consideration but still very complete and motivated. Reading the works of the various modern masters we can notice how the poetic hints are not dissimilar from those of the most archaic past. Technique and science, social aspects, aesthetic visions, a general “sense of taste”, are all aspects which always generated architecture, the responsibility to build a new world. Maybe the only radical difference is to be noted in the loss of religious faith imposed by the laicization of society.

In this article we will deal mainly with architecture that has been projected and built starting from the last thirty years of the 19th century up to the sixties of the 20th. We are aware that every temporal choice is an arbitrary act but in this case we will consider it as an undefined fog rather than a precise choice in terms of space and place.

A second element of definition concerns the choice of geographical boundaries. The main theme is modern Italian architecture. The core of our reflection will therefore be about the production which took place in this country and the influence which foreign masters had on it. Like temporal parameters, geographical boundaries do not have much sense, especially within the sphere of cultural choices. Italy certainly *suffered* and *offered* creative hints and, once again, this balance is not accurately definable.

It is certain that Italy in the 20th century was not any more one of the propelling fulcra in world architecture as it was in the past. The cultural debate has found other composite centres which moved the barycentre away from this country. If during the Romanesque, or the Renaissance or even the Baroque, Italy was undoubtedly one of the places of major architectural production, with the Enlightenment this mandate belongs to other geographical areas. This does not mean that Italy lacked creative hints or great masters; on the contrary, we can find authors of genius capable of exerting an international influence all along the Modern Movement. What cannot be doubted is that Italy was not one of the main engines in taste and production evolution, remaining at the borders of major pivots, such as Germany, France, Holland, Finland, England, United States, Brazil, just to mention a few. With few exceptions, among which is the magnificent season of Futurism which we will deal with later, during the twentieth-century Italy configured itself as a country turned to a grand past, crystallizing on positions which prevented the change of a splendid and unalterable historical inheritance. Such a vision, even though fully reasonable, certainly had the undeniable defect of slowing down the production of new things and the experimentation which in other countries, poorer in ancient architecture, contributed to the construction of a complex tissue of works which reflect the ideas and theories of 20th century architecture.

2. EUROPEAN TRENDS AND ITALIAN INFLUENCE : FROM ECLECTICISM TO ART NOUVEAU

In order to understand the phenomenon of modern architecture in Italy, it is of essential importance the research of the main movements in Europe and America which, since the half of the 19th century, offered fundamental poetic hints to this country. The British movement of Arts and Crafts started to spread over the mainland thanks to Muthesius who made it known mainly in Germany. William Morris was already known in Belgium and in the German area giving a fundamental contribution to the creation of Art Nouveau. In Holland, thanks to the presence of Hendrik Petrus Berlage, the Neo-Gothic revival underwent one of the most innovative and coherent periods, for the creation of an original style which, a few decades later, developed into the so-called School of Amsterdam. At the same time, we find the earliest influence of Frank Lloyd Wright who, in those years, had been discovered in that country thanks to the local Architects Association.

In the field of structural engineering, the technical discoveries occurred in England at the end of the 18th century were very influential in the whole mainland creating a sort of “parallel movement” which, torn away from architectural languages, created a tendency in structural engineering that still persists nowadays. The main centres were certainly England, France and some major German representatives.

Another fundamental contribution at the time was that of the Garden Cities, new town conceptions based on a regional equilibrium and directly opposed to the disasters created by the mature industrial civilization. The centres were England and France, with a very long term influence on Germany, seventy years later.

Every trend is rather composite and presents very variegated branches. The Arts and Crafts style, for example, though owing its birth and one of its major exponents, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, to England, had a very wide influence ambit, sometimes with very different results, but through the common spirit of a shape and space renewal, as well as of an ethics which pushed many architects and artists to work in the field of architecture. Connected to it, we find

Art Nouveau, very much alive in Belgium thanks to the original figures of Victor Horta and Henry van de Velde, outstanding in Austria thanks to the Wiener Secession with Otto Wagner, Joseph Maria Olbrich and Joseph Hoffmann, the Deutscher Werkbund with Peter Behrens. More far away, instead, seems the Catalan Modernism of the great Antoni Gaudí which, though reflecting some of the themes of Arts and Crafts, at a decorative level embodies the spirit which from the Arab world arrives to the flaming Baroque but with an incomparable sense of architecture.

In Italy, Art Nouveau has a great success, especially within the rising middle-class who wanted to wrap itself up in a modern and progressive garment. Art Nouveau in Italy became a real symbol of a renewed society. Various were the great masters of the time, among which we like to remember Raimondo D'Aronco (1), Pietro Fenoglio, Ernesto Basile (2, 3) and Giuseppe Sommaruga. Nevertheless their work, compared with other European masters, seems tardy and dull, turned to an excessive and floral decorativism, a heavy pomposity that is an end in itself, in other words lacking the more radical and innovative contents of other authors. Seen in the light of Horta, Sommaruga's works are similar in terms of language, but lack the volumetric liveliness, the technical innovation and the space freedom which the Belgian master showed, at least in his great masterpieces. Art Nouveau in Italy was always an "imported style", often massive and pompous, nevertheless gifted with a richness which in some cases became emblem of a first-rate creative season. Art Nouveau always puts a huge emphasis on the flowing line as decoration element. While on the European scene this line was capable of wrapping itself up in the generation of complex and innovative spaces, among which the introduction of structural cast iron elements made the building system hollow and free, bright and dense with visual returns, in Italy at that time, even in the highest level cases, the typological reflection prevails. The Art Nouveau buildings, with very few exceptions, look like a traditional villa with a compact structure, in most cases cube-shaped, livened up by a Neo-Gothic turret embellished with a profusion of more or less graceful decorations which compensated the banality of the structure. This is evident in *Casa Fenoglio* in Turin (1902) by Pietro Fenoglio (4) and *Villa Faccanoni* in Sarnico (1907) by Giuseppe Sommaruga. To give proof of this, it is enough to analyse *Palazzo Castiglioni* in Milan (1901-1903) which, at the back of remarkable decoration, merely shows a traditional Neo-Renaissance conformation, devoid of any modern invention (5).

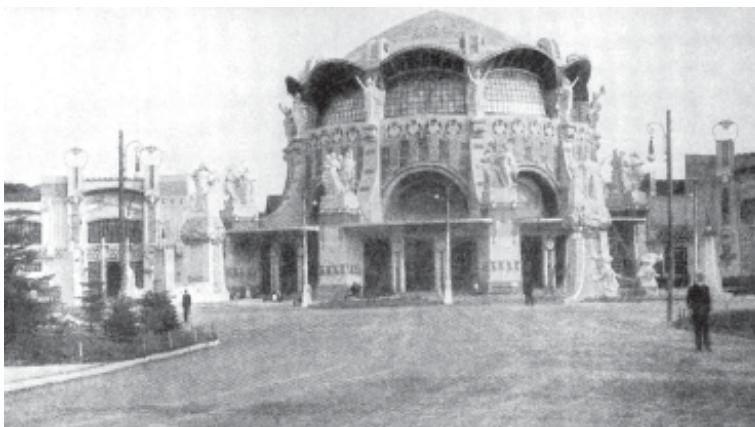


Figure 1: Raimondo D'Aronco, *Exhibition of Decorative Arts*, Turin, 1902

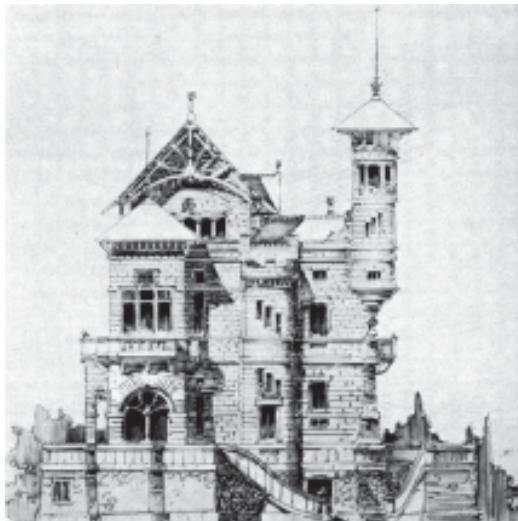


Figure 2: Ernesto Basile, *Florio Villa, Palermo*, 1899-1902.

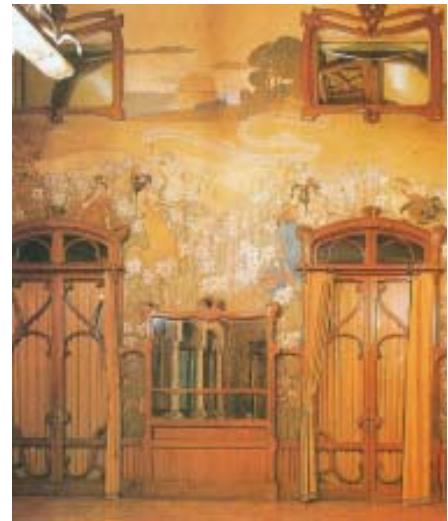


Figure 3: Ernesto Basile, *Decoration for dining room in Hotel Villa Igea, Palermo*, 1899-1902.



Figure 4: Pietro Fenoglio, *Casa Fenoglio*, Turin, 1902.



Figure 5: Giuseppe Sommaruga, *Palazzo Castiglioni*, detail, Milan, 1901-1903.

Seen under the light of new urban developments, Italian Art Nouveau is far more interesting. Like other European cities, between the end of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th Italy underwent one of the most substantial renewal in its history. For the first time urban borders extended and went beyond the town-walls, erected in various periods, but nearly always about the Renaissance. In many cases these suburban areas where the places in which the wealthy industrialists of the time found their elite residence. In many towns were thus born whole sectors, whose main style was in between Eclecticism, Neo- Gothic and Art Nouveau, with examples which very often were mediocre and only now and then of a good level. This is the case of *Quartiere Coppedé* in Rome, carried out by the architect Gino Coppedé, where we can find an interesting mixture of various styles, turreted dwellings, flaming Gothicism, all in the frame of a great linguistic coherence and certain stenographic effect. However just the date of the works completion testifies the huge delay of these experiences. In 1927, at the death of the architect, works were not finished yet, a period in which the European and American debates were far more advanced, centred on Rationalism, Existenzminimum and the Wright's Organic research. Nevertheless, Italian Art Nouveau was a rich phenomenon and probably the first impetus toward the modern renewal of taste.

European trends were much more rich and designative. Though belonging to Art Nouveau, we already find the presence of elements which later became symbols of Rationalism, such as purity of shape, cubist articulation, progressive loss of decorative aspects, complexity in the inner spatial articulation, free plan. We dwell upon this description as in it we can find a process of influence on Italian architecture that we will also find later.

3. FUTURISM

The age of the so-called Historical Avant-Garde opens what many have defined as “the crisis of Modern”, indicating the complete break of traditional values and the birth of a world in which the undoing of national and civil balances wore away the customary view on reality. In several places of Europe and America, artistic movements were born, which proposed a view on society, based on dramatic intensity and with no way out, whose rules and systems were unable to interpret social, political and scientific innovations, occurred from the half of the 19th century. As the term – borrowed from the military jargon – itself demonstrates, “avant-garde” sets itself as violent and polemic break. Those who stucked to it were not only artists with a common poetic view; we can find painters, sculptors, actors and architects, philosophers and directors, all aimed at a common desecrating work, each one according to his own movement and work ambit. The position of art itself does not become secondary and merely aesthetic, but is part of the means, nearly always aggressive and disrespectful, by which society renovates itself. The avant-garde artist gushes out and deconsecrates, his art must shock and create a debate not only within the limits of the restricted ambits to which it pertains, but within the whole society. Vanguards create programmatic manifestos, public performances that often lead to fights between the actors and the public. Obviously, these are not manifestations of madness, but expression of a historical period that was dense with tensions which, subsequently, led to two world wars with evident disasters at all levels.

Concerning the analysis of Italian architecture, emphasis must be put on Futurism, one of the most interesting movements of the time, which comprised all aspects of society. It is true that the movement was born in Paris, but it was the work of an Italian artist, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who became its main author and theorist, the authentic guide spirit of a whole generation of authors. Futurism was a purely Italian phenomenon and its creative charge manifested itself from the first years of the 20th century (the first Futurist Manifesto is of 1909) to the First World War, a period which saw many of its main exponents killed during the conflict. One of the most displayed poetic themes was just about physical strength, speed, grimace and war action, courage, war and heroic ardour, so it is not hard to understand how most of them lost their lives in the armed battle which they themselves proclaimed.

In architecture Futurism had a huge innovative valence with wide after-effects, which nowadays we still find in some authors. In modern age, we may consider Futurism as one of the most designative and original Italian movements, whose influence is recognizable in Russian Constructivism, in Czechoslovak Cubism, in the same architecture of the twenty-year Fascist period in Italy, though limited only to the work of a few great masters. Zaha Hadid herself, as she herself admitted, shows both formal and poetic adherence to Russian Constructivism, but the drawings and the works of many Italian Futurist masters remind us of her works. Futurism tends to be rather limited from the historical point of view, but we should remember that many writers and artists survived the war and brought their creative influence to later generations, especially in theatrical and musical neo-avant-garde environments during the Sixties such as in the work of Karlheinz Stockhausen.

The most important and complex among Futurist architects certainly was Antonio Sant'Elia (6, 7, 8). His work cannot be said to be limited to architectural ambitions. He conceived a total outlook of the new Modern town, a stormy abyss made of machines and speed, enormous structures and buildings included in a complex visionary system which, nevertheless, was prophetic. Present towns, directly or indirectly, are actually based on those settings. The main idea was that of magniloquent macrostructures (then recalled by the visionary architecture of the Radical Architecture Movement, sixty years later) which were junctions at many levels. His work cannot be exactly defined utopian as it did not prefigure impossible sceneries, rather long-range visions, already rooted in the society of the time but still in course of development. He also had a professional career before his premature death, but his works did not arouse great interest, being part of a very sober Art Nouveau style.



Figure 6: Antonio Sant'Elia, *Electricity Factory*, project, 1910-1915.



Figure 7: Antonio Sant'Elia, *Milan Railway Station*, sketch, 1914.

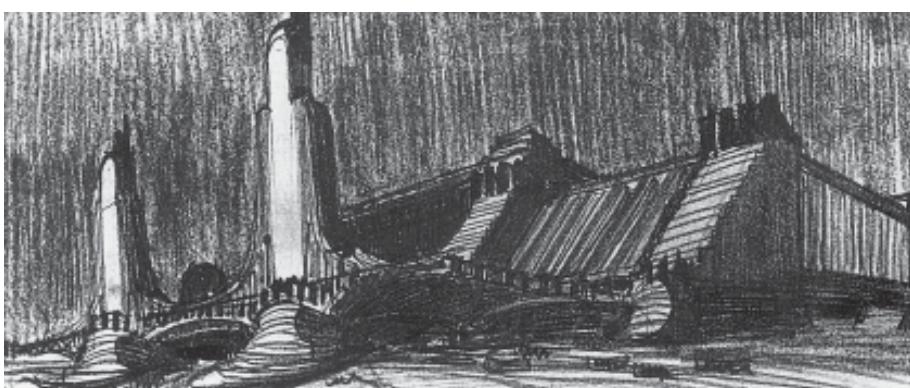


Figure 8: Antonio Sant'Elia, *Building*, project, 1910-1915.

However the unrefined level of Sant'Elia has very rich contours thanks to the work of some talented architects. Enrico Prampolini was certainly one of the most interesting, being the most illustrious representative of architectural Futurism during the first post-war period. His work was a cultured one, his being in close contact with many European avant-garde, such as the Parisian Dada, the Der Sturm, the Novembergruppe and the Bauhaus. The inferior inventive freshness was counterbalanced by a greater coherence and outcomes which were included in the ambit of international debates. His *Padiglione Futurista all'Esposizione del Valentino* in Turin (1928) can be included in the Cubist research belonging to the German area but presents some original elements which we do not find elsewhere (9). The use of big letters, for example, not as a decorative element but as integrating part of the architectural structure is a new theme that will then be retaken by the advertisement graphics and in the architecture of the Nineties as "communicative skins". We find the same innovative prospects in the *Architettura polimaterica per E-42*, a project for the EUR exhibition in Rome in 1942 (10), which somehow marks the end of Italian Futurism. Simple and organic sketches, referred to the German expressionist views but endowed with an inner coherence with initial Futurist art.



Figure 9: Enrico Prampolini, *Padiglione Futurista all'Esposizione del Valentino*, Turin, 1928.

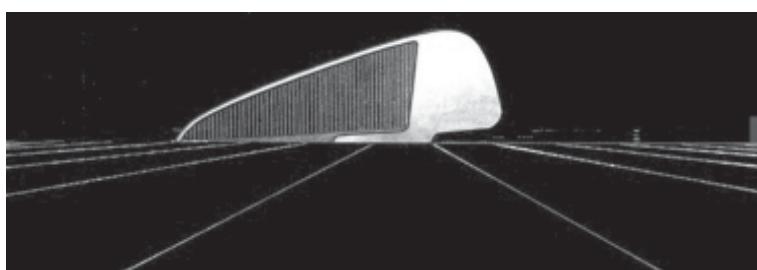


Figure 10: Enrico Prampolini, *Architettura polimaterica per E-42*, sketch, 1942.

Fortunato Depero is maybe the most versatile among Futurist authors, capable of successfully devoting himself to architecture works - such as the *Padiglione del libro per le case editrici Bestetti, Tumminelli and Treves* in 1927 (11) – paintings, scenographies, design and textile works, advertisement graphics and so on. We are looking at an author who faces artistic work in an integral manner, creating a coherent world made of shapes and communication systems. Considering Depero, we reflect upon the fact that it is impossible to divide his work as painter from that of advertisement graphic designer, internal decorator, architect and scenographer. It is true that his architectural works were very limited (like those of Sant'Elia, after all), but the great unity of his outcomes sets him as one of the most interesting cases of Italian “integral art”. Not dissimilar in level and versatility is the furniture, inner design and pottery articles maker, Nicola D'Julgheroff. The interesting *Casa Mazzotti* in Albissola (1934) is one of the few examples left of Futurist architecture (12). The analysis of the building suggests that the style of D'Julgheroff is not particularly original. We find elements dear to the “Streamline” style that especially in America, though with marked Deco trends, characterized the years between the two world wars. The Italian example seems interesting but of a minor level compared with overseas experiences, though we need to note how a few refined details make the work of D'Julgheroff unique, especially in the amused use of colours directly taken from Futurist painting.

We cannot say the same for Mario Chiattone (13), in some aspects similar to Sant'Elia, but less powerful in his figurations. He seems to be more influenced by Viennese Jugendstil, especially by the work of Olbrich and, even more, Hoffmann. Many critics emphasize his want of inventiveness, but we need to lay stress on the way his work is very cultured and measured, endowed with great elegance and capable of reacting to the proto-rationalist hints which were already present in the work of the two Viennese.



Figure 11: Fortunato Depero, *Padiglione del libro per le case editrici Bestetti, Tumminelli and Treves*, 1927.



Figure 12: Nicola Dujlgheroff, *Casa Mazzotta*, Albissola, 1934.

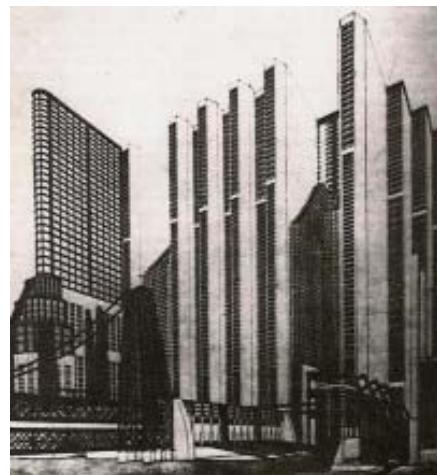


Figure 13: Mario Chiattone, *Metropolitan Building*, 1914.

Like in Depero, in Virgilio Marchi (14) we find the idea of ephemeral architecture. His initial production offers the same reflection present in Sant'Elia and Chiattone: grand buildings erected on tumultuous streets, even though in this case the language is more realistic and in harmony with a rather dry Art Nouveau, similar to some stylemes of van de Velde or to the Wiener Schule (Viennese School), like in his project *Città* (1930). Elsewhere he shows a partiality for German Expressionism themes, though with less vigorous results. Curved masses and imposing architectural structures are also present. The project for a theatre, in 1931, recalls the features of *Volksbühne* by Oskar Kaufmann erected in Berlin in 1913-'14.



Figure 14: Virgilio Marchi, *Building Studio*, 1919.

Some personalities who, though growing with Italian Futurism, transcend it through their extraordinary work, deserve special attention. Luciano Baldessari is perhaps one of the most interesting ones, chiefly because his work covers a long period of time and includes different sectors not only in architecture but also in art and inner design. His most well-known creations, such as the *Padiglione Breda* (1952), are based on wide efforts, organic curves capable of enveloping space (15). Nevertheless, such choices always place themselves within the framework of plastic purism, of pictorial derivation, without precluding some very original inventions later left forgotten.



Figure 15: Luciano Baldessari, *Breda Pavilion*, 1952.

Still a nearly unknown author, even in Italy, is Cesare Augusto Poggi (16, 17). His works were rather unique and without equal not only in the Italian outline but also in the international one. Apparently he can be placed in the ambit of German expressionism or American Streamline due to his formal plasticism, actually, considering his poetic curiosity, his fondness for printed steel as the predominant material in his works and his visionary aspect, we can assert that he lives in an anomalous position within a complex and composite intellectual environment.

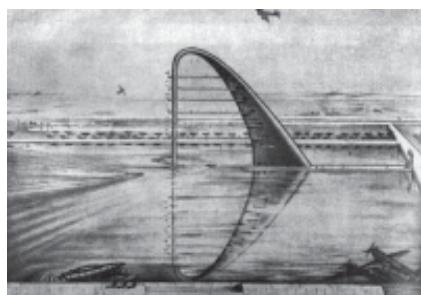


Figure 16: Cesare Augusto Poggi, Seaside pavilion for pollysporties, 1933.



Figure 17: Cesare Augusto Poggi, Giant radio-lighthouse arch for G. Marconi for the E-42 Exhibition in Rome, 1942.

Many are the authors who adhered to the futurist movement or who may be connected to it. The majority to the magniloquent Sant'Elia (Tullio Cralli, *Ponte Belvedere*, 1931), others to the rising twentieth-century style, which was so important for Fascism and the affirmation of a monumental image of the regime; others still follow a language closer to Rationalism (Luigi Colombo, alias Fillia, and his *Progetto di chiesa futurista* (18), Guido Fiorini who directly worked with Le Corbusier and was mainly interested in the problems of structural engineering, *Grattacieli in tensostruttura*, 1931 [19]) or, again, works that echo with the idea of machine or ships (Quirino De Giorgio, *Monumento ai caduti del mare*, 1930 [20]). Again we can find those who adhere to the Streamline style previously mentioned when dealing with Djulgheroff (Vinicio Palladini, *Studio per un albergo ad Ostia-mare*, 1931) and finally those who recall the Dutch themes by De StjL, that is plane splitting and explosion of the building box, crystallized at the moment of disintegration (Manilo Costa, *Casa d'Arte* in La Spezia, 1932; Ivo Pannaggi and his painted architecture such as *Funzione architettonica H-03* in the year 1926; the most interesting works of Alberto Sartoris, in between different genres, among which we remember the *Cappella-bar futurista*, 1927).

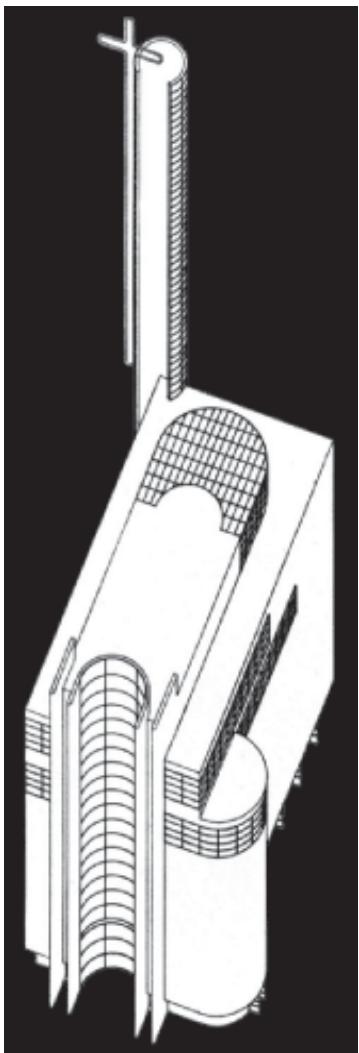


Figure 18: Luigi Colombo (con P. Oriani),
Project for a Futurist church, undated.

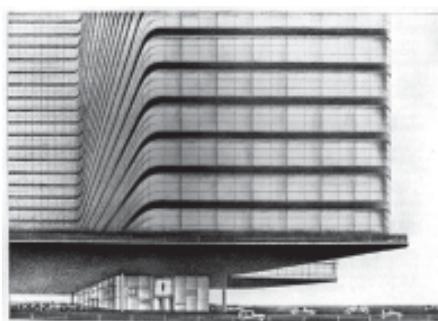


Figure 19: Guido Fiorini,
Skyscraper with tensile structure, 1931.



Figure 20: Quirino De Giorgio,
Sailors War Memorial, 1930.

Futurism somehow betrayed the ingenious programmatic lines it had at the beginning. Unlike Cubism, that had wonderful realizations both in pictorial and architectural fields, Futurism in architecture basically gave no contribution and did not by any degree reach the achievements it attained in painting. In Russia things were different for Constructivism and many were the excellent results; perhaps we need to look in that direction in order to understand one of the possible outcomes of Italian futurist theories.

4. ARCHITECTURE BETWEEN THE TWO WARS: FASCISM AND RATIONALISM

In the eye of historiography of European architecture, the period between the two wars looks problematic. From the social point of view it was characterized by long periods of serious economic crisis and social revolutions which led to the criminal ascent of Nazi-Fascist dictatorships in the whole Europe. The judgement of many on this period is a negative one, though we need to consider that (very few) “lights” and “shadows” of the events which occurred always coexist. Often, in architectural critics, the events occurred at the time are interpreted in the light of political events, according to the wing of the various architects. Even though such position may be questionable and meaningless, it generated a long debate, especially in Germany and in Italy, due to the fact that many architects plainly sided with the dictatorial regimes.

The most emblematic case in Italy concerns two of the main protagonists in architecture: Giuseppe Terragni and Marcello Piacentini whom we cite as an example for a wider theoretical discussion. They more or less represent the opposed poles in the Italian architectural outline between the two wars. The former has always been perceived as the clever interpreter of European Rationalism, a unique figure in the entire outline of world architecture, gifted with a wonderful spatial skill and a sophisticated intellect that led him to elaborate projects characterized by a great linguistic complexity. Even an intellectual like Peter Eisenman admitted his greatness and to him he referred when working out his complex generative theories of shape in the Seventies and Eighties. Well, according to many writers, Terragni was great *though* fascist. We want to point out that his siding with Benito Mussolini's regime is considered a very serious guilt which Italian culture has tried to exorcize in the last sixty years. Every time people referred to a valuable thinker who had had connections with Fascism, they always tried to justify such position. Terragni started from a few European avant-garde positions, even Futurist we may say, but filtered from visions of Russian Constructivism. The *Novocomum* (21) demonstrates the closeness to some of Golosov's ideas, while in his masterpiece, *Casa del Fascio* (in Como as well) (22), the research seems closer to the De Stijl neoplasticism, though showing a metaphysical abstraction which was independent of it. The composition of the building facades, all quite different, recalls a work of clearing of the initial mass. Other works seem to be less tormented and are considered masterpieces of Italian Rationalism, like *Asilo Sant'Elia* (23), *Casa Rustici* and the apartments *Giuliani-Frigerio* in Como. Each work differs in structure and logic, but always we find a thought on a coherent and high-level modern style, which makes Terragni one of the absolute protagonists of Modern architecture.



Figure 21: Giuseppe Terragni, *Novocomum*, Como, 1927-1928.



Figure 22: Giuseppe Terragni, *Casa del Fascio*, Como, 1932-1936.

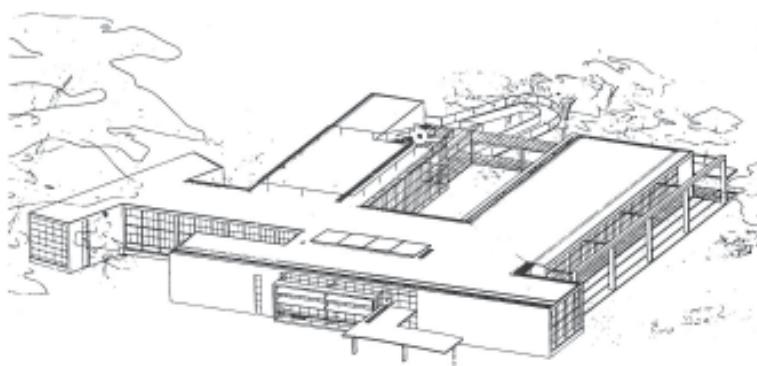


Figure 23: Giuseppe Terragni, *Asilo Sant'Elia*, Como, 1936-1937.

Actually, as a recent census on the works of Italian rationalism has shown, the outline of Italian architecture during the period between the two wars looks very composite and structured. It is impossible to divide all trends into fascists and anti-fascists, rather into clever interpreters of rationalist currents that, often with an independent spirit, worked out a personal view of European and American directions, using an autonomous language. Indeed Italian Rationalism must not be confused with the Fascist regime.

Besides, another important information is to be considered. Many of the protagonists of architecture between the two wars survived World War Two and worked during the post-war reconstruction years realizing projects which, in many cases, were of an even superior level compared to what they produced during the fascist period. This continuity makes it difficult to classify Italian Rationalism into a definite and univocal image.

Most architectural stories celebrate the birth of Italian Rationalism with the “Group 7”, seven architects (Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Adalberto Libera, Gino Pollini, Carlo Enrico Rava, Giuseppe Terragni) who planned mediation tasks between the great classical Italian tradition and the innovating spirit that crossed Europe. They praised a tradition in course of transformation sticking to logic and rationality, a creation of buildings that answer the purpose they are meant for. One of the foundations was the production of few basic building types, reducing individual choices and adapting to mass production. In general, the programmatic

declarations of “Group 7” were cautious in order to avoid direct conflicts. Even one of the most important plan of the period, *Casa Elettrica* (24) by Figini and Pollini, 1930, made for the Triennial of Monza, appears as a rather minor event compared with the disruptive debates taking place in Europe, especially in Germany. Such “call to order” after the avant-garde was not shared in countries on the other side of the Alps due to the fact that Italy had very powerful cultural personalities in key places, capable of leading public opinion. The same did not occur in Germany, for example, where, because of the particular cultural atmosphere, the avant-garde never stopped being designative and biting, except for the Nazi period, when they anyhow smouldered in the ashes and later explode again during the second post-war period. In Italy, Gustavo Giovannoni was the person we are about to describe, with a dangerous ardour for architecture of classical derivation seen as more authentically stuck to *Italian spirit*, an empty word that caused heavy damage during those decades. *Ca' Brutta (Ugly House)* (25) by Giovanni Muzio (1919-’23) is one of the most significative examples of this period and one of the first cases of “Novecento style” (Style Ninehundreds), a massive and monumental language, referred to classical but lacking the superfetative decoration, limiting itself to cautious classicist quotations (26). The phenomenon was typically Italian and constituted the majority of cases, but there were also very refined authors who, interpreting Austrian trends, offered interesting examples of cultured architecture. This is the case of Giovanni Greppi, of the great Giò Ponti (27) and, above all, Giuseppe De Finetti (apprentice with Adolf Loos), perhaps the most “European” among his contemporaries for the range of interests, experience and culture. All this in Milan, an elevated cultural centre, though not the only one (28).

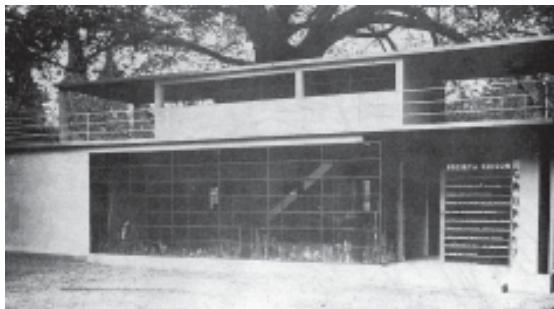


Figure 24: Luigi Figini e Gino Pollini, *Casa Elettrica*, Monza, Triennale Exhibition, 1930.



Figure 25: Giovanni Muzio, *Ca' Brutta*, Milan, 1919-1923.



Figure 26: Giovanni Muzio, *Palazzo dell'Arte*, Milan, 1932-1933.



Figure 27: Giò Ponti ed Emilio Lancia, *Casa Rasini*, Milan, 1933-1934.



Figure 28: Giuseppe De Finetti,
Casa della Meridiana, Milan, 1925.

The Roman school was equally important and full of events. However the prominent figure was that of Marello Piacentini, mentioned at the beginning, a figure of nearly absolute power, architect of the Fascist regime and very clever author of a celebrative style derived from an austere classicism, suitable to interpret the Mussolinian propaganda and its vain references to the imperial Roman spirit (29). This dominant position – though not the only one and co-present with high-level architectures – generated an outline of works well spread all over the Italian territory. One of the interesting aspects about the Fascist regime in Italy really was that of public works, an extensive and diffused requalification initiative, the building of schools and railway stations, land reclamation, summer health resorts for children and young people and even the foundation of new towns, in the motherland and in the territories occupied by the colonial policy of the time. The subject here becomes “slippery” as this period in Italian history is still the object of many delicate debates. Undoubtedly Mussolinian politics, from the ideological and historical point of view, made basic mistakes, but sometimes interventions relating to public works showed great far-sightedness and quality. Architecture is the mirror of time. Many interventions were criminal and many were of high-level, thus frequently it is not possible to draw a distinction between good and bad architecture considering only the support given to the regime. The resettlement of Brescia’s old city centre, the demolition of the slums of Via Conciliazione in front of the Vatican (30), and many others, are all examples of a coarse propaganda action indifferent to the very delicate nature of Italian historical centres. Then, such position was a winning one. The majority of productions in that time were heavy, obedient and uncritical to the power centre dictates.



Figure 29: Marcello Piacentini, *Rector Palace, University in Rome*, Rome, 1934.



Figure 30: Marcello Piacentini, *Via Conciliazione*, urban plan, Rome, 1940.

Nevertheless the figure of Piacentini and his followers (in addition, inferior to him) did not restrain a production of very high quality which manifested itself through some key figures. Perhaps the most important one is that of Adalberto Libera (31). In 1928, he organized in Rome the first exhibition of "Rational Architecture", where the works of "Group 7" as well as those of other young architects were on display. The reaction was lukewarm, also because none of the projects constituted a true and real avant-garde. The second edition, in 1931, characterized itself in a rather different way as the polemic tension reached very high peaks. Terragni had just completed the *Novocomum*, which had been realized through a true and real coup de main by this architect who had deposited the papers for a classicist building, while realizing another, very innovative, one instead. The debate which had risen involved several critics who denounced a situation become gangrenous, in which a few professionals, gifted with a very poor artistic talent, held offices of absolute power, unfavourably outlining a bad habit in the planning field. Thanks again to Adalberto Libera, the Miar (Italian Movement for Rational Architecture) was founded, of which he himself was the secretary; a movement that spread in all main cities, involving very interesting personalities, such as Giuseppe Pagano. In spite of the cleverness of the Miar group, finally it was defeated. The reasons are quite simple. Mussolini who, at the beginning, seemed to support the avant-garde spirits of their programme, later made a volte-face revealing himself as he really was: a political despot turned to the repression of any kind of opposition.



Figure 31: Adalberto Libera, *Malaparte House*, Capri, 1938-1940.

The modernist mask had been used at the beginning in order to justify an empty progressive propaganda with which the regime had no connection. The success of Marcello Piacentini with regard to the project of the University Town in Rome testifies the direction undertaken by most people in architecture. But it would be wrong to look at Italian architecture of the time under a unitary light. Miar's shattering shifts the scene of Italian architecture merely on individual paths or on debates in the major Italian architecture magazines; a very important phenomenon which has always characterized the architectural thought of the country.

Beside the academy, there were personalities, more or less connected to the regime, endowed with great originality, who realized works of international level, capable of being fundamental reference points in 20th century Italian architecture. The same Adalberto Libera is a prominent figure, not only under the organizational point of view but under the artistic one as well. During his first creative season, he adhered to Futurism, shifting then to positions closer to Italian Rationalism, though permeated by a very personal style. His was an interesting evolutionary parabola that, following the language of lightness, took him to realize buildings in which a coherent fusion between language and structural idea is present. He boasts some of the most important achievements in Italian architecture, always turned to a personal style and a creative cleverness, never failing in the course of his long career. Nevertheless, the fall of Fascism had strong emotional repercussions on him too. During the post-war period his research shifted to a growingly exaggerated abstraction, without ever forgetting the social themes which made him realize several important working-class neighbourhoods, in cooperation with other great Italian authors.

The figures of Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini are, if ever possible, even more eminent, especially when connected to Rationalism. They absorbed in a clever way European influences, chiefly those of masters like Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, through a series of leading works. Beside the already mentioned *Casa elettrica*, they became symbol of a spirit of cooperation between artists and enlightened industrialists which constituted one of the most original traits of Italian architecture during the whole course of the twentieth century. We are talking about the buyer Adriano Olivetti, one of the main Italian industrialists, famous for the production of typewriters and calculators; he was a great patron, engaged in the cultural, aesthetical and social aspects connected to his factories. The *Officine Olivetti* were thus born in Ivrea (1939-'41), together with the houses for the employees and the nursery schools for the workers' children. Their work became impossible to classify within the Regime, as their contribution is completely independent from it. It lacks any reference to a pompous language, typical of a regime propaganda. Their work is genuinely rationalist and free from any vernacular or expressive form, an aspect which often characterizes Italian production. For this reason their whole work, both pre-war and post-war, must be considered authentically and unyieldingly rationalist, therefore included within a wider cultural current.

Not so for the BBPR group (Gian Luigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers), one of the most important manifestations of Italian rationalist class architecture, at the same time very far away from lecorbusieriane figurative purism that, instead, characterized Figini and Pollini. In spite of such difference, their methodological setting is rigorous and based on a model of work that prefers logic and rationality. Under the linguistic point of view they are witnesses of that time, elaborating works of great figurative lightness, like in *Colonia elioterapica* in Legnano (1936), and through the total transparency of *Monumento ai Morti nei campi nazisti* (1946), showing a compositive refinement later recalled in *Padiglione USA alla triennale*, in 1951. Post-war production spins around one of the most known masterpieces in Italian architecture, *Torre Velasca* of 1954-'58, showing traces of Brutalist influences, though remeditated with an unconventional and clever typological solution,

together with facade plan and use of materials, which were nearly unique in the international outline (32, 33).



Figure 32: BBPR, *Torre Velasca*, Milan, 1954-1958.



Figure 33: BBPR, *Torre Velasca*, Milan, 1954-1958.

The figure of Luigi Moretti is of the utmost interest, for the high level reached by his more original works, for the international level he reached during his life and for the peculiar human vicissitudes. He started his activity very young with a series of *Case del Fascio*. The theme was rather usual, during the twenty-year Fascist period, but all of Moretti's works were characterized by a strong plastic dynamism, great spatial freedom and a clear conceptual system. Moretti was a political activist, so much that during the post-war period he was arrested for Neo-fascist propaganda. Like Terragni, his deep belief in the Fascist creed did not fail even when, after the military defeat, illusions crumbled. He was also at the centre of a very famous scandal during the Seventies, the *Watergate* in Washington (1961) centralized upon a project of his, that caused president Nixon to resign, because of corruption connected to the financial aspects of the project, though Moretti was not directly involved. His work is hardly classifiable as it includes, contemporaneously, several classicist, monumental, at times expressionist aspects, endowed with a very peculiar rationalism and original language free from purist aesthetics. Many are his important works. Beside his *Case del Fascio*, we need to remember the very famous *Accademia di Scherma* (34) at the Italic Forum in Rome (1933-'36), gifted with a purism that is absolute in its general conception. There, windows were concentrated in the lower part of the prism, covered with marble of Carrara, giving to the complex particular monumentality and mass, as well as great dynamism. Post-war projects mark a very personal, at times disquieting, linguistic research. The *House of Astrea Co-operative Society* in Rome (1950) looks unhinged, disjointed. We can see De Stijl's teachings, though revived by the loss of the right angle. Actually, solutions are determined by a climatic necessity. The site on which the estate was meant to rise was particularly problematic; the architect broke the envelope in order to favour ventilation and natural lighting. The planimetric solution is of great interest, both for its cleverness and its anomaly. The same occurred for the villa called *La Saracena* in Santa Marinella (1954) near Rome (35), whose completely closed and severe front on the street, dominated by the big circular entrance penthouse, sets itself against the total opening of the *front on sea (seafront, lungomare)*. Planimetry, like many of his works during this period, is curvilinear, drawn without a geometric rule; peculiar fact considering that Moretti always

took interest in the relationship between mathematics and architecture in order to define a project as perfect. Besides, we need to remember Rome's *Villaggio Olimpico* (in cooperation with Libera) of 1958, a huge urban complex realized on occasion of the Olympic games which recalls the themes relating to the government projects of that period, though enlivened by a formal research of his own.

Do not be surprised to read, in this paragraph, about personalities and events following World War Two. Many of the architects, trained in the period between the two wars, carried on their work during the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies, refining the debate on Rationalism and leaving a very personal trace in international debates. Dealing with Italian Rationalism, it should be noted how its vicissitudes cross political events, thus making it impossible to limit its story to the pre-war period.

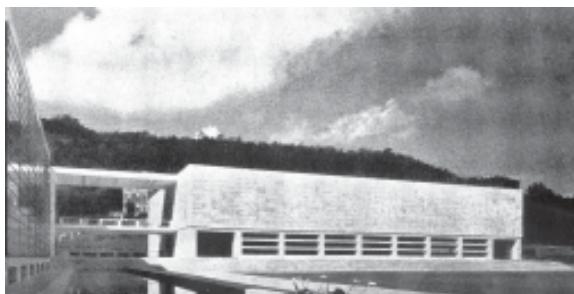


Figure 34: Luigi Moretti, *Fencing Academy*, Foro Italico, Rome, 1936.



Figure 35: Luigi Moretti, *Villa "La Saracena"*, Rome, Santa Marinella, 1954.

Even the figure of Giuseppe Vaccaro embodies this position. He was the author of some of the most significant projects during the Mussolinian period, such as *Palazzo delle Poste* (36) in Naples (1928-'36) and the *Auditorium* in Rome (1935). He was one of the major and clever authors during the twenty-year Fascist period. Though sticking to it, he succeeded to work out a high-quality research, inspired by German Expressionism, characterized by very personal features. Always endowed with a very high-level urban sense, that was perceptible from every single building. The foundation of his architecture, though monumental, is never rhetorical and can be dynamic and magniloquent at the same time, capable of solving, with great elegance and simplicity, spatial matters. Such aspect is also found in every detail, solved by means of a masterly knowledge of materials and of their use. Likely, he is the only one among Italians in that period to master in such a free-and-easy way both big and small dimensions. His talent remains intact even in the post-war period, when he realizes some important working-class neighbourhood buildings, though always original in their planning and showing solutions of elegant simplicity, like the *Nursery School* in Piacenza (1953-'55).

Angiolo Mazzoni is another very important figure, only recently analyzed and not yet fully known. He was a planner, who mainly dealt with public works, especially those relating to the Italian Post and Telegraph and to the Railway Company (37). His are hundreds of railway stations spread over the Italian territory, built under the huge Mussolinian influence on public works. His activity, in spite of the vast amount of work, was tireless, always endowed with a marked personal and never repetitive trait. Perhaps the most evident trait of Mazzoni was his simplicity. His works showed great dynamism, a use of limited and recurrent materials (mainly travertine marble and burnished brick on sight), typological unconventional solutions, like

Lido di Ostia Post Office in Rome, Ostia Lido (1934), showing its circular structure, opened in its half on the square before it with a large penthouse. Repetition can never be found, only coherence within a never exhausting language.

Likewise can be said for Clemente Busiri-Vici, famous architect of the time, nowadays far less known, as it often happens because of historiographical mistakes. His most well-known work is the magnificent *Colonia marina “XXVIII Ottobre”* (1935) (38). He was the prolific author of many projects that never suffered a quality diminution. In many works, like most of his contemporaries, he adopted a “naval” aesthetics. Portholes and smooth *streamline* solutions for buildings which constituted figurative avant-garde within machine aesthetics. The description of his work would deserve a further search and, above all, a more detailed study in Italy as well, where we cannot find adequate studies on the subject.



Figure 36: Giuseppe Vaccaro, *Post and telegraph Office*, Naples, 1929-1935.



Figure 37: Angiolo Mazzoni, *Tower for water in Rome Terminal Railway Station*, Rome, 1938-1943.



Figure 38: Clemente Busiri-Vici, *Colonia marina “XXVIII Ottobre”*, Cattolica, 1935.

Giovanni Michelucci, defined as “the youngest architect in Italy” at the age of 100, is a completely unclassifiable personality. It is very easy to explain this paradox. He was born in 1891 and died two days before his becoming centenarian. His untiring activity as a planner and cultured man never failed him till the last moments of his life. This is the reason of his “eternal youth”. He started planning important works very late. The first significant building was Florence Santa Maria Novella Railway Station (1933-’36), one of the highest level masterpieces of Italian Rationalism, though, at the same time, shifting from it due to plastic inventions, dynamism and close relationship with the surrounding delicate historical environment (39). Starting from this work he gets closer to a marked sculptural expressionism, which sets him as one of the most anomalous and original contemporary architects, entirely free from trends of his time. *The Church of San Giovanni Battista* near Florence (1960-’64) is one of his most famous works (40, 41). The sculptural aspect is evident and spatial penetration reaches very high levels, to the point that Le Corbusier, on visiting Michelucci, was deeply impressed. Michelucci represents a true and real isolated case. His is not sculpture, rather architecture inspired by plastic masses which, through a very refined use of light, is able to depict spaces of great figurative complexity. The planimetric shape of his works is always very original and, often, contrary to the current typologies, always clear and functional despite the anomaly. He crosses over currents and defines an unrepeatable style.

As we might understand by these short notes on Italian Rationalism, the outline looks composite, full of events and contradictions, but endowed with a great intellectual liveliness. Different schools can be identified, often in conflict with each other. The ideological clashes which took place at that time, were meant to continue even during the post-war period, nurturing a debate between two great schools, the one in Milan and the other in Rome. Obviously such positions were very often ideological being undoubted the high quality of both. One thing seems certain: the period between the two wars is rich in great figures, among whom we could only chose but some for these few pages, hoping to offer a sufficiently clear outline of the main trends in that time.

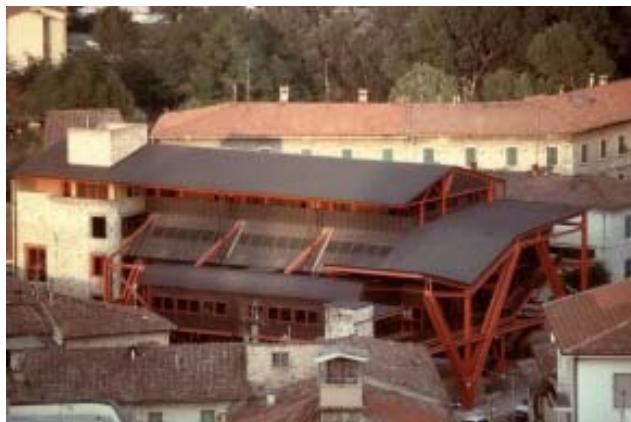


Figure 39: Giovanni Michelucci, *Bank Monte dei Paschi di Siena*, Colle Val d'Elsa, 1973-1978.



Figure 40: Giovanni Michelucci,
Church of San Giovanni Battista, Florence, 1960-1964.

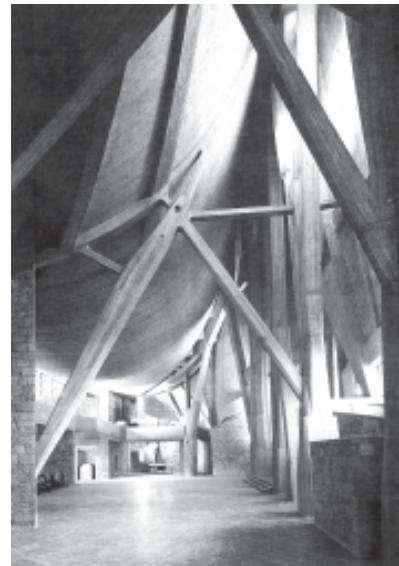


Figure 41: Giovanni Michelucci,
Church of San Giovanni Battista,
Florence, 1960-1964.

5. THE YEARS OF POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION AND THE RE-DESIGN OF TOWNS: PRACTICAL REALISM

Following World War Two, the European outline opens up with very serious crisis, not only under the human point of view but also under the economic one. The territory is devastated by destructions and human and material losses are heavy.

Unlike Germany, for example, where destruction was nearly complete and the majority of architects of the period between the two wars emigrated or died in the conflict, in Italy we witness a certain continuity of the protagonists of intellectual vicissitudes, as we suggested in the previous paragraph. Such important people have already been outlined, therefore the task we are about to take upon ourselves is that of describing the most significant planning themes in the period included between 1945 and the Seventies.

A very important and delicate chapter of history was that related to the architecture of celebratory war memorials, quite different from those of the past especially for the size of the disaster and the brutality of Nazi aggression. Unlike what happened previously, the post-war monument is less emphatic, devoid of rhetoric. The most significant example is *Monumento alle Fosse Ardeatine* in Rome (1944-'47), work of great dramatic nature due to its severe language, absent lights and hanging masses (42).

Undoubtedly, the main architectural theme during the post-war period was the reconstruction of destroyed towns. In a country like Italy, it is impossible to talk about a unitary movement. There was a variegated series of approaches. On one hand, the position of Luigi Piccinato and Mario Ridolfi, who were more turned to a reformulation of the architect's profession according to the principles of the "art rule" and of the project's practices. On the other hand, the Milan School which was mainly concerned with the sociological and typological aspects of urban planning, a setting strictly followed till recent years.

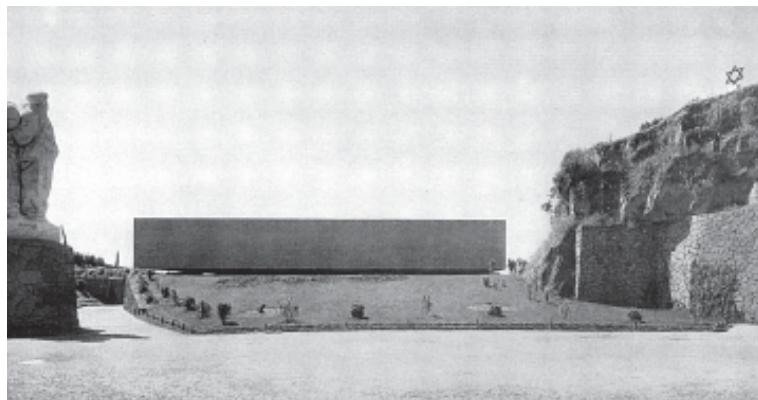


Figure 42: Mario Fiorentino, Michele Capobianco, *Memorial of Fosse Ardeatine*, Rome, 1944-1949.

They shared the concern for “everybody’s house”, a subject stressed during the eighth edition of Milan Triennal, both under the theoretical and the practical point of view, through the realization of the model neighbourhood *QT8* built on the suburban area of Milan by Piero Bottini (43). There were applied the most advanced techniques of the time relating to salubrious buildings planning and to building pre-fabrication.

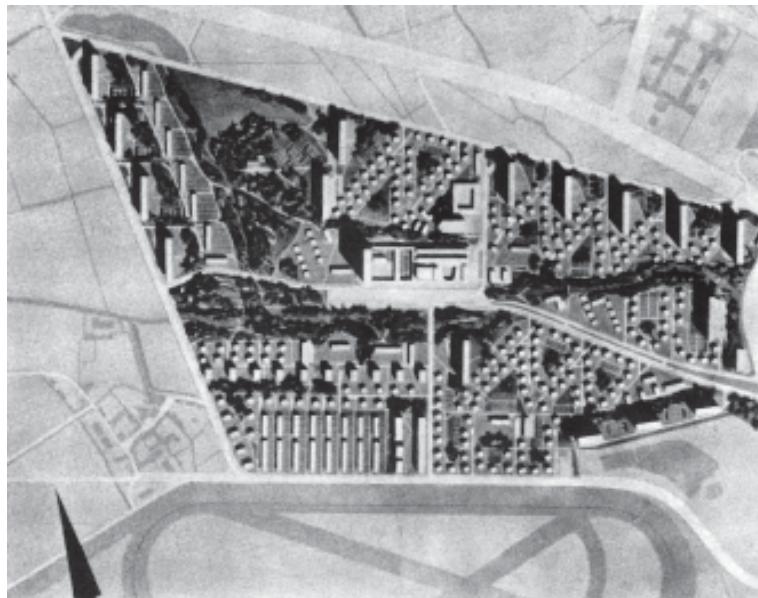


Figure 43: Piero Bottini, and others, *District QT8*, Milan, 1947-1965.

Working-class houses were a sort of national programme that had, under the theoretical point of view, its centres in Milan and Rome. Surely Milan showed a far better programme and outcomes compared with the capital, due to the fact that it could count on a direct continuity with pre-war Rationalism and with more active and wealthier industrial entrepreneurs, in contrast with the bureaucratic slowness of Rome. The figure of Bruno Zevi, in this setting, is of prominent importance as he, coming back from the States, tried to introduce in Italy Frank Lloyd Wright's organic way of thinking. This was carried out with

Great clearness of intention and through the publication of very successful books and magazines. Italian organic movement (gathered under APAO) did not reach its ends due to several reasons: first of all, the huge freedom which characterized the movement and caused the *dispersion of ends* and aims; secondarily because organic architecture was always an imported movement, though with a modest success and several excellent outcomes, interpreted in the light of national character.

Exquisitely Italian appears the so-called "Neo-realism", cinematographic current which played a major role in architectural production as well. It sets itself as objective view on local history, made up of simple routine and not of big events. Architecture reacted to the poetic current by means of works connected with the always rich local tradition. It represented a sort of interpretation of the tissue of working-class routine made by intellectuals of the time, contrasting European currents and above all opposing International Style, on the rise by then.

A closer look at the architectural movements might show how political matters played a major role in its vicissitudes, a topic which we cannot further examine here but that implied, as outcomes, a series of compromises and of shameful opportunism which undermined Italy's economic and cultural well-being and whose influence is still felt nowadays. In a few words, power and all decision-making activities were held by political parties where double-crossing, ambiguity, transformism, deceit together with a vast and unfathomable corruption system prevailed. The higher offices were entrusted to pale figures

Though with strong political recommendations. Public administration as well as many cultural and university institutes thus suffered for the mediocrity of this situation with the consequent hindrance to further developments which, instead, took place in other European countries.

Noteworthy is a nearly unique, high standard case: the Venetian University Institute guided, during the Fifties, by Giuseppe Samonà. He, in opposition to leading trends, intended to found a school of architecture gathering the major intellectual personalities of Italian architecture in that time (Franco Albini, Lodovico Belgioioso, Giancarlo De Carlo, Ignazio Gardella, Giovanni Astengo, Carlo Scarpa, Luigi Piccinato, Bruno Zevi), though never succeeding in breaking Italian endemic rigidity.

One of the most interesting elements during the immediate post-war period was the management of *INA-Casa* (44), a political-financial plan whose main aims were to downsize unemployment, to consider the building industry as subordinated to the leading sectors (favouring small enterprises and preventing it from developing), to control workers' masses (who in that period, started to organize themselves following a left-wing political system) and also to encourage public intervention versus the support of the private one. In a few words, we are facing a twisted political system that, based on corruption and inefficiency, will represent the standard during the whole post-war period, leading then to the heavy problems during the Seventies.



Figure 44: Luigi Carlo Daneri, *District Forte-Quezzi for INA-Casa Institute*, Genova, 1956.

The reason why we are stressing political problems is that the phenomenon of reconstruction is closely connected to them and many of the building and urban problems then arisen were actually due to misgovernment. Thus we can explain the recurrent failure of all working-class neighbourhoods on Italian territory. In spite of the presence, in some cases, of first-rank architects (like *Quartiere Comasina* in Milan, where big names took part in it, such as Piero Bottini, Pietro Lingeri, Giancarlo De Carlo, among the others), the results were worse than predicted. The projects not only were mediocre and badly elaborated, but also were responsible of destroying Italian territory, favouring an uncontrolled growth of towns and creating immense districts lacking any urban rule; in a few words it was a failure, especially under the social point of view. The lack of an adequate planning and the inappropriate urban instruments made so that most of these neighbourhoods became places characterized by a very poor-quality lifestyle, and often ghettos of criminal underworld and poverty. Nevertheless there are some positive examples, though unable to counterbalance the widespread disaster.

Under the strictest architectural point of view, we are facing a quite common situation on the Italian territory: the presence of isolated great masters and of an environment lacking unity and cohesion. Most works built up in those years shows a very limited formal vocabulary, inferred from an impoverished rationalism, simplified and devoid of any ethical content. Such vulgarization led to a progressive refusal of the Modern code and to the turning to a revised historicism, a search for vernacular which later brought to “Neo-Realism” and to a peculiar form of Brutalism.

Due to the particular abundance of the historical inheritance of this country, planners had to face the issue of the relation with the ancient town, key topic in the entire Italian production. The topic is a vast one, but we outline here three directions of research. The first one, a spreading one, which led to post-modernist trends after the Seventies, is made up by a historicist current inclined to confront itself with ancient architecture on the linguistic level. Starting from the Modern Movement, without drawing its fundamental assumptions, such trend made use of materials of the tradition, a fundamentally contemporary language though tainted by historicist elements. It was present in its theoretical assumptions the idea of keeping continuity with the ancient, at least a linguistic one, revised in the light of modern life needs. The supporting theories were of high intellectual value. However only in a few very relevant cases, results were convincing, due to the talent of each and every author rather than to the soundness of the thinking. The relation with memory was at stake and with memory they were playing.

A current, even more interesting than the first one, starts developing within the debate: the wide-spread safeguard of the historical inheritance according to philological criteria. In another context we have outlined the main steps determining its birth. The sophisticated preservation and restoration criteria followed in Italy are not a recent invention, but the result of a slow evolution which lasted at least two hundred years. The basis consists in the need to safeguard the material tissue coming from the past. This represents a precious historical testimony which, if alienated, would lead to the cancellation of memory. It is not a simple matter, since from its enunciation many, at times contrasting, views can be found. Such views consider restoration as ranging from a philological work where no kind of creation is allowed, to an “interpretative” intervention where “the invention of memory” is permitted.

The third aspect we need briefly to deal with, concerns a radically modern architecture, adopting an avant-garde language. Italy has succeeded in elaborating high-level works, be it Rationalism or Organicism. Often the examples belonging to the third current have given rise to much controversy, characterized by alternating outcomes. The debate, though complex, could be summed up with two main positions: on one hand those who totally refused any kind of modern intervention near ancient buildings, considering that the Italian historical tissue is a very delicate system which formed itself throughout thousands of years, unable to stand the figurative violence and the radical novelty of contemporary architecture; on the other hand, people who were pushing for this to take place, convinced that the architecture of each period had contributed to the generation of towns, therefore the Modern had a right to leave its sign.

Many are the cases that could be discussed but we wish to draw your attention to a wonderful protagonist: Carlo Scarpa. He was an outstanding and cultured figure, endowed with a great planning refinement and a deep knowledge of materials that he used with masterhood and precision, to the point of being accused to produce “goldsmith’s art”. We intend to mention only a few works of his vast production, symbolic of the relationship between modern and ancient. He was influenced by the poetics of Frank Lloyd Wright, especially under the spatial point of view, though personal is his use of materials and language that, while at times recalling the themes of the American master, gave rise to a true and real “Scarpian vocabulary” later imitated by many (45, 46). In many cases, he worked in very delicate historical contexts, like the cities of Venice and Vicenza, whose example of *Museo di Castelvecchio*, which he restored between 1958 and 1964, we recall (47). In this, as well as in other works (like the *Fondazione Querini-Stampalia* in Venice, 1949-1956), we find a careful relation with the past. Ancient productions are completely revolutionized in the usage and in the fruition logic through modern, always recognizable and distinct, additions. He never adopts a “mimetic” logic. His intervention must be visible and based on a modern code. Some of his solutions are unconventional but full of poetry, such as the positioning of Cangrande della Scala’s statue on the hanging beam, in Castelvecchio and the series of drawings on the floor of the *Querini-Stampalia* which allow the high tides in Venice (phenomenon taking place by the raising of the lagoon water level) to flood inner rooms following very suggestive geometrical drawings.

We end this review on Italian architecture during the Modern Movement, dealing with a period of deep crisis, the cultural revolution of the Sixties. The crisis started just from the architecture faculties since the teaching inadequacy there was felt in a particularly strong way. City plans had given rise to a series of big mistakes and university education was perceived as inadequate in relation with society in total turmoil. At the beginning of the century, in a rather similar manner, avant-garde poetics were put into practice, undermining every aspect of the old society. The debate had strong political features, particularly in connection with the left-wing. The critics of the time saw an action of great renewal, showing very interesting utopian openings. As a matter of fact many hints appear to be remarkable, above all within the Radical movement,

a sort of union between art and architecture, once more based on the breaking of codes, a provocation, figurative violence. Years later, it seems clear that it was indeed a revolutionary movement boasting several interesting artistic outcomes, but it mainly constituted a “guard change” on the institutional level, though not a political one.



Figure 45: Carlo Scarpa, *Brion Cemetery*, San Vitolo, Treviso, 1970-1973.



Figure 46: Carlo Scarpa, *Brion Cemetery*, San Vitolo, Treviso, 1970-1973.

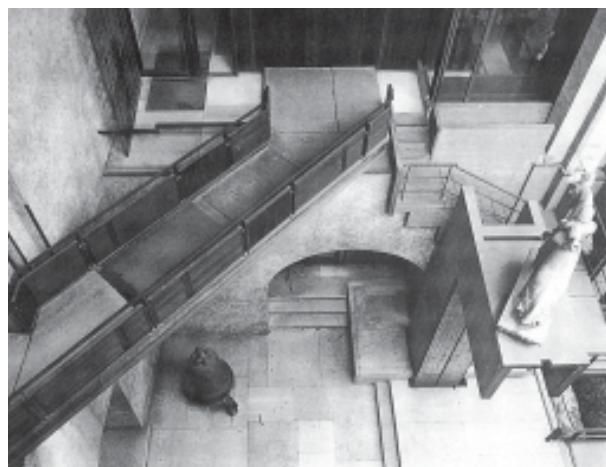


Figure 47: Carlo Scarpa, *Museum in Castelvecchio*, Verona, 1958-1964.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The choice of concluding this article on Modern with the beginning of the Seventies in the twentieth century answers to a very precise need. Under the critics' point of view there is the necessity to offer a coherent cultural vision on architecture, in other words a comprehensive view in which a thread of unitary conception of architecture and of society can be distinguished. The Modern Movement was based on a strong ethical spirit, on a very precise methodology derived from the rational study of problems relating to dwelling and on a marked functionalism. Bruno Zevi stated some invariants in the modern code, very useful to understand the problem:

- inventory of contents and functions
- asymmetry and dissonance
- antiperspective tridimensionality
- four-dimensional decomposition
- projection and membrane structures
- temporalized space
- reintegration of building, town and territory

Modern thus appears as a coherent system, starting to deteriorate just at the eve of the Seventies, in a climate of great political, philosophical and ideological changes which, in those years, started to throw into confusion, in Italy, as well as in the whole Europe, intellectual spheres. In the architectural field, the development of post-structuralist philosophy, which had very strong repercussions both in the ambit of Post-Modern and of Deconstruction, is what mainly marks the epoch-making transition. Radical neo-avantgarde set themselves as violent fractures. In this period, the entire ethical superstructure of Modern Movement was to fall, together with methodologies, composite processes and all the rest. In opposition to a strong rationality and to a sound methodological system, a sort of irreverent irrationality came to life against every method, seen as a useless instrument and symbol of a dogmatic imposition which had to be unhinged in order to get total and unconditioned freedom, bordering grimace and provocation. From here originates a rather odd chapter, partially in contradiction with the past. Though several important critics tend to include post-modern and contemporary periods within the Modern Movement, the critical problem remains open as many are the gaps between these two moments. We chose to set a separation between the two periods leaving to later studies the treatment of the more recent period of Italian architecture's history.

Were we to draw a possible conclusion from the Modern period of Italian architecture, we can assert that this country played a marginal role in relation to the great European events and was never the engine generating historical events of long-term significance. Futurism is often reputed to be the most original movement in the Italian outline but his influences on architecture showed up rather late and were always limited, though of long-term theoretical significance. Rationalism and Organicism were always imported movements, though many Italian personalities showed a certain degree of independence from the currents from the other side of the Alps and created absolute masterpieces in the field of modern architecture. The post-war period does not present substantial differences from this provincial nature of Italy.

Were it possible to give a comprehensive opinion on Italian architectural vicissitudes, we might say that it is based on great isolated figures, masters of undisputed value, very original in their works, capable of giving innovative stimuli to the contemporary architectural way of thinking, by means of high-level works. Nevertheless, their activity never becomes a joint effort. It is not possible to single out a unitary movement. Even the presence of schools of thought and of coherent trends, were short-lived and had a scarce impact. Inner tensions or outer pressures always determine an easy disgregation of intents, at times confused and at times clear, anyhow never well organized.

One of the basic problems we notice in Italy is the presence of varied Accademies tending to maintain a rigid position and to dictate inalienable dogmas thank to the greatness of the various masters. Such position determined, throughout the years, the creation of schools following different trends, located in several universities and cultural institutes. The most evident result was that of limiting the education of young architects within very narrow boundaries, splitting up architecture into strictly defined currents, even when such differences were in fact softened and hardly definable. In recent times, a very strong barrier came to divide at least two sides: the rationalists (if we may call so a trend tending to a sort of “rationalist classicism”) and organicist. Such struggle became of an exclusive kind, implying that siding with one of the two currents prevented, a priori, from siding with the other. Each conception of one of these two schools was programmatic, inalienable and polemic, showing evident mistakes under the disciplinary and historiographical point of view.

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