From *Storia* to History (and Back):
Fiction, Literature, and Historiography in Postwar Italian Architecture

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ABSTRACT

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In the decades surrounding World War II, Italy was host to an extraordinary abundance of architectural writing. Not merely significant in quantity, these texts were unprecedentedly varied in the range of genres they encompassed. History, criticism, theory, journalism, and fiction all took architecture as their subject matter. This wide range of writerly modes, as distinct from one another in the nature of their prose as in their means of dissemination, was produced by an equally varied cast of figures, such as Bruno Zevi, an architecture historian and politician; Giulio Carlo Argan, an art historian; Italo Calvino, a fiction writer; Giulio Einaudi, a publisher; and Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese, writers and translators. Rather than converging on a single view of architecture, each form of writing embedded in its structure a different theory of architecture. By examining these differences, this dissertation will argue that writing, rather than building practice, became the primary means of architectural debate, and that writing about architecture at that time aimed at both a specialized audience and a broader public.

This dissertation identifies four writerly genres: myths, chronicles, history, and fiction, all of these genres became accepted as forms of historical storia after 1957. The dissertation begins with (hi)stories told in the form of myths. During World War II and in the early postwar, history was oriented toward the future, and the preferred narrative was a form of fictitious, hopeful, half-true story. By the late 1940s, history was considered an objective science, as was literature. Chronicles, as the chronological recollection of events, almost coincided with storytelling. History was concerned with describing present conditions in a more straightforward and unadorned way. Around 1957, coinciding with political events like the Khrushchev report, fiction writers and historians shifted in apparently distinct directions. Authors turned toward the fictive – fantasia – but also rediscovered a distant past. A seminal year for “historicism,” 1957 also marked a return to more conventional writing styles in history. Disillusion and skepticism prevailed, and the only solution to the present condition seemed to be a retreat to the past or an escape into fantasy, and the proliferation of multiple storia.
“DARIA PLEASE STOP USING . . . !!!” is the beginning of many revised chapters I received from Spyros Papapetros, with the font progressively getting bigger and bigger, and louder and louder when I was getting it all wrong. So, first, a big thank you to Spyros Papapetros, my adviser, to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude for my intellectual growth. Thank you for the passion, perseverance, persistence, patience, presence, precision, endurance, and tenacity, but also thanks for the breakfasts at Whitman College, and for *La Cenerentola*. Grazie.

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Spiritus durissima coquit (The spirit digests the hardest things). © Einaudi Archive.
**Introduction**

The distinction between history and theory, as well as history and fiction, has a long history in and of itself that lacks a detailed cultural analysis beyond the limits of historiography. I will argue that during the 1950s, with the onset of postmodern practice, everything in Italian culture became history, but also everything became architecture. Italy was the breeding ground of this combined proliferation: art criticism, architectural practice, and literature, all of these disciplines, methodologies, and ideologies expressed themselves by mingling – and often fighting with one another – within the same historical arena. During this period, the critic became a storyteller, a writer of new critical stories that differed from one another in type, style, writing, and genre.

In Italian, the word *storia* entails the twofold meaning of “history” and “story”: an accurate and chronological account of events as they happened as well as a fictive narrative. The same term also entails both the events and the narrative around these same events, thus encompassing both history and historiography. The word *storia*, its translations, and the multiple possibilities that it implies, is the narrative thread of this narrative. My suggestion is that the writing of history may be determined by the very mistranslation of the word *storia* to “history.” Is *storia* essentially “untranslatable”? My argument is that this understanding of *storia* had an impact in the construction of architectural history outside Italy, even if that impact was the product of a mistranslation.

This dissertation is meant to be a *storia/history* that can be thought of as the *prehistory* of what we consider the history of modern architecture in Italy as written *before* Manfredo Tafuri, whose legacy has dominated the field of Italian architectural
historiography and its reception in the rest of the world. While this historiography was certainly informed by foreign publications, I also argue that this reformed architectural historiography had a distinctly Italian flair in its pasticcio of several research methods, languages, and writing styles, even if later the same historical mélange became internationally accepted as a legitimate or even canonical historiographical genre.

In each given period, architectural literature rehearsed a similar story: following the multiple storie of the prewar era, architectural writers after the Second World War focused their efforts on broader geographical surveys and comprehensive historical narratives. This gradual transition is evident in Bruno Zevi’s Storia dell’architettura moderna (History of Modern Architecture), the first account of modern architecture to carry the word “history” in its title.¹ Unlike the histories of disciplines that claimed to be objective, such as economics and the physical sciences, architectural histories have always maintained a narrative approach. My dissertation describes a shift from an absolute or idealist form of historiography toward a more pragmatic and realist, but also more partial and inevitably non-objective mode of historicizing architecture. Benedetto Croce’s theories of historiography and aesthetics dominated the Italian cultural scene until 1945 and influenced most of the cultural production of the postwar period. Croce’s aesthetics, with his attachment to German idealism, was presented as the only alternative to the aesthetics of fascism. His view of history influenced numerous thinkers and writers, including Antonio Gramsci, Lionello Venturi, and Edoardo Persico. Following Croce’s death in 1952, his historiographical principles continued to inform the texts of historians active after the war. My investigation will later describe a new type of

historiography of modern architecture in Italy, anticipating (but partly coinciding) with well-known figures such as Zevi and Giulio Carlo Argan, and further on, by figures who are not part of this investigation, such as Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co.

World War II acted as a catalyst for the shift from a more Hegelian and Crocean idealistic version of storia to [neo]realism, to a fictional narrative based on concrete sociopolitical events and (initially bleak) present conditions. Although still linked to the “maestro” Don Croce, books such as Discorso tecnico delle arti (1952, Technical discourse on the arts) by Gillo Dorfles and Estetica. Teoria della formatività (1954, Aesthetics. Theory of formativity) by Luigi Pareyson were among the first attempts to overcome Croce’s idealistic approach. Influenced by the American pragmatism of John Dewey and Clement Greenberg, Dorfles offered a more technical approach, while Pareyson included methodological aspects inherited from behavioral sciences and Gestalt theory. The German tradition was still associated with the idea of historicism, whereas the postwar United States’ allure to Italians stemmed from a fascination with fiction, futurology, and popular culture. Italian journal articles of that period marked the beginning of a new type of architectural criticism, incorporating theories of semantics and semiotics produced by authors outside the field of architecture, such as Umberto Eco, that eventually dominated architectural criticism in the early sixties. During the same period, and in opposition to a one-sided approach, “pluralism” also became part of the constitution of the Italian architectural historian and critic, joined among the multiple operations that he had to perform.

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New theories and old histories were published in books, but they were disseminated more powerfully and more rapidly through translations in architectural magazines, also in other more general magazines and literary journals such as *Cultura, Aut Aut, L’espresso*, and *Menabò*. These magazines demonstrated an increasing interest in the discipline of architecture. It was no longer the product of a past historical fiction: post-World War II architecture coincided with massive, rapid (re)construction. New buildings and images of cities were everywhere, both in print and in real space. Short stories, critiques of new projects, and movie reviews were published alongside one another in literary and cultural studies magazines such as *Il Politecnico* (1945-1947), *Metron* (1945-1949), and *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* (1955-2000). This dissertation investigates some of the protagonists in these literary exchanges, some of whom were originally trained as fiction writers, such as Persico, or as engineers, such as Carlo Emilio Gadda. Some literary figures, such as Italo Calvino, wrote about architecture and the city, as did some political thinkers, including Elio Vittorini. In this particular moment of Italian intellectual history, everything was presented under the title of “architecture,” including novels and fictional prose as well as linguistics and the study of syntax and individual words, this endlessly proliferating discourse ultimately producing a new definition of architecture as an expanded practice.

In terms of contribution to the existing literature, this dissertation is meant to fill a gap in architectural historiography and move the clock of postmodern history back to the 1940s and 1950s. In architectural discourse, the attempt to reflect upon the narrative character of architectural historiography has been examined by Italian scholars such as Maria Luisa Scalvini and Maria Grazia Sandri in their 1984 volume *L’immagine*.
storiografica dell’architettura contemporanea da Platz a Giedion (The Historic Image of Contemporary Architecture from Platz to Giedion).³ The authors distinguish several typologies among history books: “books by professional historians, and books by technician-critic militants; books by political emigrants, and atypical books by cultural émigrés; books written in their native language, and books written (or translated) in the language of an adoptive country; books by mature authors, and books by novices.”⁴ By comparing Sigfried Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture*, Adolf Behne’s *Der Moderne Zweckbau*, and Nikolaus Pevsner’s *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, Scalvini and Sandri point out that the authors’ historical approaches are based on selection, which prevents the history of architecture from being inserted among the rigorous scientific disciplines. A common feature of these three texts – which indeed lack the word *storia* in their titles, as all do until the publication of Zevi’s *Storia dell’architettura moderna* in 1950 – is the existence of a plot, of a narrative mode that presupposes a beginning, a middle, and an end. Scalvini and Sandri’s excellent study still confines the history of architecture to its disciplinary field and is not specific to Italy.

To date, little work has been done to examine thoroughly the role of architectural literature as part of a broader cultural and intellectual history of ideas. This dissertation attempts to remedy this by examining literary and architectural historical production within a larger intellectual discourse and as a way to define what historiography is.

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⁴ M. L. Scalvini, M. G. Sandri, p. 15.
Metodo Stori(ografi)co

Methodologically, the transition from *storia* to history and back to stories constitutes an act of translation. The tripartite methodological model of translation set up by Roman Jakobson in 1959, referenced in most works of linguistics and semiotics at that time in Italy, will allow me to describe a set of exchanges in these critical (hi)stories on three different levels: first, an intralingual translation or *rewording*, which is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; second, an interlingual translation or proper translation, which constitutes an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; and finally, the intersemiotic translation or transmutation as the interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems.

*Intralingual* translation in my dissertation concerns the definition of and distinctions between terms such as “literature,” “historiography,” and “professional criticism,” each of which implies a difference of register among various publication formats and audiences. Such distinctions also imply differences among notions of the writer himself: the author of the story, the original storyteller, is a distinct persona from the writer who acts as a mediator and translator.

*Interlingual* translation, the translation from one language to another (Italian to English, English to Italian, German to Italian), constitutes a seminal part of my story since it narrates the itinerant character of ideas as they traveled back and forth between different countries, especially in the exchange between Italy and the United States during the 1930s and 1940s.

Finally, the concept of *intersemiotic* translation will help me to redefine disciplinary boundaries and the transition from one discipline to another, whether from
building construction to literature, or from architectural criticism to fiction writing.
Intersemiotic translation also implies the transition from one media to another, as when a
written text is adapted for film. This form of translation describes the cultural and
intellectual milieu in Italy after the war, when anything was fair game when it came to
thinking and teaching about architecture.

Even the inevitable instances of mistranslation eventually became a legitimate
part of composite fictional narratives and helped to generate new historiographical
theories and ideas. Mistranslation in this way is an important concept to consider in how
it changes the way we consider history and storia; it is exactly through some
mistranslations, or loose translations, that stories turned into history. This is the case of
Vittorini’s Americana in which writer-translators like Cesare Pavese, Eugenio Montale,
and Alberto Moravia freely translated stories by American writers such as Sherwood
Anderson, William Faulkner, and Saul Bellow, who thus entered into Italian literary
history. But these translations can also be thought of as looser translations that turned
history into a further story.

Mistranslation also goes the other way around. Zevi’s Verso un’architettura
organica was translated as Towards an Organic Architecture, yet the English version
resulted in a totally different book.⁵ Saper vedere l’architettura. Saggio
sull’interpretazione spaziale dell’architettura (literal translation: How to look at
architecture: An essay on the spatial interpretation of architecture), indebted to Croce’s
aesthetic, lost this Italian reference in the English title, Architecture as Space: How to
Look at Architecture, which underscores a slightly incorrect reference to the

⁵ B. Zevi, Verso un’architettura organica, Turin: Einaudi 1945, translated as B. Zevi, Towards an Organic
identification of architecture with space in German architectural theory. I will now use these three types of translation to summarize the theoretical argument of my story.

*Interlingual translations: The Historian as Translator.* The core of this dissertation is situated between 1955 to 1957, years that marked the conflation of different historiographical narratives: myths, chronicles, pseudo-chronicles, and histories, which led to the stories that characterized the 1960s. In order to describe these different historiographical narratives it is necessary to go back to the mid-1930s. The mid-1930s to the late 1940s were characterized by the proliferation of publishing houses and their publications, mainly in the format of magazines, as well as translations of foreign books. Both proved to be crucial to the development of specialized and popular culture.

As seen in these publications, the 1930s are a decade devoted to myths, where myth implies not a “fictitious” or “half-true” story, but rather aspiration and nostalgia for a pre-capitalist society: the naïve myth of America as a promised land, the anthropological myth of primitive societies to be examined, and not least, the myth of the intellectual merging with the people. As Alberto Asor Rosa stated, “the intellectual who goes toward the people, most of the time, before concretely and seriously reaching them turns it into a myth, an almost reversed image of himself.”

In Bruno Zevi and Giulio Carlo Argan’s editorial collaborations with the publisher Giulio Einaudi, they enriched the architecture series by following the same criteria, i.e. by translating foreign authors. They suggested translations of certain American and some European architects who expressed their own ideological beliefs.

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7 A. Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e Popolo*, Turin: Einaudi 1965, p. XX.
Zevi advocated for Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan above all. As early as 1939, Argan himself endorsed the translation of Frank Lloyd Wright’s autobiography. It is also thanks to translations that Zevi responded to what he maintained to be a lack of critics of architecture. \(^8\) Indeed, Zevi expressed to his publisher that the main difficulty of having a series on architecture was the lack of serious scholars, and therefore argued for the need to supplement the publications with foreign ones. \(^9\)

*Intralingual translation: The Historian as a Mediator.* An intralingual translation implies the introduction of new genres and registers, or tones, inevitably inherent in different languages. It also reveals distinctions among terms such as literature, historiography, and professional criticism, each of which represents a difference in register among various publication formats and audiences. Italian culture during the early 1940s was marked by the political engagement of intellectuals, who aimed to realize a “New Culture” that would bridge the gap between the intellectual elite and broader segments of the population. Most of the intellectuals at that time belonged to the Communist Party or were related to it in some way: Vittorini, Calvino, Argan, and Delio Cantimori, among many others, as discussed by historians Nello Ajello and Angelo D’Orsi. \(^10\) In this specific historical moment, politics could not be detached from culture. It was only in the late 1940s that the role of the intellectual in Italy started to change. Einaudi expressed this idea in an unpublished letter to the philosopher Norberto Bobbio:

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\(^8\) Bruno Zevi, in writing the preface to Poete’s *Introduction to Urban Planning*, finally and only published in 1958, specifically asked about the translator, as the main text and its translation could not be considered as separate.  
The times: 1949 is not 1945 [...] In 1945 it seemed as though every political book would be a good book (and this wasn’t the case, inasmuch as all the political series are dead or almost dead). But in 1949, no one publishes political books anymore, because today, in order to publish those books, one has to distinguish living works from dead ones, works that are useful to the current generation from those that are useless, and to choose living, useful works one needs culture (that other publishing houses generally do not have).11

The early 1940s were ruled by politics. If in the 1930s translations were a political act, in the early 1940s, life itself meant taking a political stance, literature was a political decision, the intellectual was inevitably politically engaged, and as such there was hardly a difference between politics and culture. As Ajello described it in Intellettuali e PC (Intellectuals and Communist Party), this tendency began to change over the course of the 1940s: “A new idea of the intellectual is born, a new kind of citizen, in which the man of letters and the militant are one and the same, someone different from the traditional intellectual (normally academic and aristocratic).”12 Instead, the second half of the 1940s shifted to the importance of education over propaganda, or so it is claimed. The role of publishing houses at this point run parallel and sometimes encompassed that of

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11 Giulio Einaudi to Norberto Bobbio, 12-13 January 1949, AE Folder Einaudi.
Certainly the 1940s were also characterized by the publication of manuals, some began between the wars, such as the *Manuale dell’architetto* (1945-1946) edited by Mario Ridolfi. According to Manfredo Tafuri, this manual showed a different Italian approach to handbooks, as the *Manuale dell’architetto* compromises between romantic and popular artisanship, combined with a “scientific method,” a characteristic of the Modern movement. The manual genre epitomized the self-perceived capacity to reach out to a broader public and to contribute to their education. In addition, authors of manuals claim to suspend historical judgment, especially politically, as if a manual could be what we would name a pseudo-chronicle. The role of the intellectual started to shift. If earlier intellectuals were delivering rules to follow, they now delivered concepts to learn, as reflected by Zevi’s aforementioned second book, *Saper vedere l’architettura*. Zevi’s book is thought of as a manual of instructions to teach readers “how to see,” a didactic tool for students and young professionals to train their eyes and think critically. But in 1950, in the span of just three years, Zevi turned the same book into *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, and by doing so, led to the last decade examined here, the 1950s, when after educating a larger audience, culture was opened to the masses.

Above all, these diverse personalities and intellectuals met under the collective umbrella that was the Turin-based Einaudi publishing house. With an independent though left-leaning approach, Einaudi was close to the Communist Party but never became the

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already in the Turin of 1935, Einaudi thought to realize a magazine concerning history, and wished to dedicate one single issue to architecture, which at that time, during the fascist regime, was one of the liveliest topics of debate. Through the writer Carlo Levi, Einaudi attempted to get in contact with the eccentric Neapolitan literary and art critic Persico, then in Turin, and expanded the interests of the publishing house to discussion of art and architecture.

Einaudi and its authors began to direct and orient their readers by shaping history. But most importantly, these intellectuals reflect the correspondence between history and chronicle, for their storia is based on documents and on the witnessing of historical events. In the late 1940s, as Franco Calamandrei states in an article in Il Politecnico: “Narrative wins over chronicle,” both in literature and architecture, which implies both a return to an ideology and a return to and refuge in a historical (mainly local) past. Narrative becomes the first tool to tell events: and narrative as literature foreruns historical narratives. Literature (as fiction) and cinema are tools to narrate current events. The consequences of the two World Wars, the victory over fascism, the mainly communist resistenza, the reconstruction – all these events were first chronicled thanks to novellas, novels, and movies, rather than documents; in other words, novels became documents themselves. As an example, the resistenza was first recounted in books written by fiction writers, such as the social novel Il quartiere (The Neighborhood) by Vasco Pratolini, or Calvino’s Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno (The Path to the Nest of...
Spiders), while the homonymous political movement was only first acknowledged and theorized as a historical fact in the early 1960s.

Intersemiotic translation: The Historian as an Interpreter. Finally, the concept of intersemiotic translation introduces the role of interpretation and helps to redefine disciplinary boundaries, and distinguish the transition from one discipline to another, whether from building construction to literature, or from architectural criticism to fiction writing. Intersemiotic translation also implies the transition from one medium to another.

The 1950s were opened to the intermingling of different disciplines, but education at this point was a given and the goal moved toward enlarging the size of the educated audience. Architectural history, stories, and translations undoubtedly contributed to this goal. The 1950s also witnessed the end of “universal stories,” as pointed out by the historian Delio Cantimori or by Giulio Carlo Argan, who accurately expressed that “the time for general history is over, as ours is an epoch of essayists; the mental form of essayists avoids general histories.” Reality, though, was more multi-faceted and contradictory: on one hand, the return to past authors and known legacies (like the German school), and on the other, the turn to imagination, namely fantasia.

This translated into the reinterpretation of past historical narratives. History is never static, and constant interpretations make storia contemporary, as Croce taught in 1919. However, the work of the critic is not a neutral action; rather, it is a matter of choice, as Argan explained. Art and architectural criticism are never dead but alive, and constantly changing. The critic of art is not a translator from a figurative language to a

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17 I. Calvino, Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno, Turin: Einaudi 1947, translated by Archibald Colquhoun as The Path to the Nest of Spiders (1957); V. Pratolini, Il quartiere, Milan: La nuova biblioteca 1944. No English translation.
19 “La nostra è un’epoca di saggisti e la forma mentis del saggista rifugge dalle storie generali,” Argan to Foa, 15th March 1954, AE Folder Argan.
written language, or else the critic would have no freedom of expression and could only show devotion, imitation. Quite the opposite, the critic’s task is that of reinterpreting *storia*, giving further and different perspectives. Thus, by offering multiple readings, the historian, turned critic, becomes a writer of different stories. Interpretation also leads to the impossibility of an integration between history, now story, and objective science, as attempted in the 1940s with the coincidence of history with chronicles. The integration failed. Once again, historians have to live with the impossibility of translating the word *storia*.

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**Sei Storie**

While Jakobson’s tripartite classification of translation serves as a methodological model, it does not reflect the structure of this dissertation; all three of these types of translation more or less coexist throughout the following chapters. This dissertation is organized, instead, by six quasi-chronologically disparate yet conceptually interlinked stories. Each of these six narratives mainly revolves around one “character” and his related publications: the architect and architectural historian Zevi and his *L’architettura. Cronache e storia*; the art, literature, and architectural critic Persico and his writings in *Domus* and *Casabella*; the writer and politician Vittorini and his journal *Il Politecnico*; the writer Calvino and his early writings; the publisher Einaudi and his historical series; and the art critic Argan and his diverse writings in *L’arte, Metron*, and *Domus*. 
These journals and magazines cover a wide range of interests, whether architecture (L'Architettura. Cronache e storia, Casabella, Domus, Zodiac), literature (Menabò), philosophy and aesthetics (Aut Aut), politics and culture (Il Politecnico), or more general interest (Cronache, L’Espresso). These five publishing avenues exemplify different ways of writing about architecture and theories of aesthetics across countries (particularly Italy and the United States) through their tone and writing style, in the gradual shifting from a well-defined discipline to the blurring of disciplinary boundaries, and from a well-defined cultivated audience to a wider public. While each of my stories will deploy a journal, historian, critic, or publisher as main character, the stories will also be comprised of many supporting characters and perspectives culled from other journals, related books, and other publications, so that ultimately each storia also paints a micro-history around a particular theoretical topic. Here are the synopses of these six stories:

Chapter one introduces a new historiography as expressed by Bruno Zevi through his magazine L’architettura. Cronache e storia in the mid- to late fifties, and describes the rediscovered, if ever forgotten, role of history in architectural debates about practice. Zevi, who christened Persico as the pioneer of the so-called metodo storico (historical method), saw architectural history as an integral part of design. History became a skill to be taught at the drafting table, initiated with Zevi’s seminal Storia dell’architettura moderna, the last and only attempt in Italy at that time to write a comprehensive history of the modern movement through past architects, architectural theories, and buildings. The same effort, however, also showed how history represents the choice of its writer, and how Zevi’s subjective selection made the book at the same time a history and his story.
Chapter two is embedded in fascist Italy – the 1930s – and in its intellectual outcome. Here the architectural and literary critic Persico embodies a method of writing and conceiving history as myth – “myth” meaning an idealized reality. Persico exemplifies myth in three different ways: the myth of his own persona, the mythical legacy of his writing and future reception, and his position against the constructed rhetorical myths of fascism. The story of his persona and architectural criticism narrates the reception of a book that could have been but never was: I refer to the first critical history of modern architecture that was envisioned but never realized by Persico. Here myth turned to the irrational and touched upon the capacity to appeal to the masses.

Chapter three traces the work and lives of Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini in the 1930s. This work created both the controversial myth of America as a “free land” and disenchantment thereof, which are core to both Pavese’s literary works and translations as well as to Vittorini’s political and educational project in the magazine Il Politecnico. Founded in 1945 and edited by Vittorini, Il Politecnico epitomizes an almost epical and propagandist tone while writing, and making or remaking, the events of history through politics, translated literature, and architecture.

Chapter four maps the return to historical narrative in the form of chronology in the late 1940s, in the work of Italo Calvino. During this period, Calvino assumed a realist approach to literature and architecture, an approach long overlooked by his biographers. Three of Calvino’s texts are instructive about his approach to realism and fiction: Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno (1947, The Path to the Nest of Spiders), Ultimo viene il corvo (1949, The Crow Comes Last), and La speculazione edilizia, (1955, A Plunge into Real
Calvino and Einaudi considered naming these works “Chronicles of the Fifties,” thus confirming the true-to-life narrative they sought in their writings. The narratives by Calvino also recasts the intellectual and historical awareness of writers and architects between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s. Past, present, and future are described and observed through architectural construction.

Chapter five deals with the editorial policies of the publishing house of Giulio Einaudi. Einaudi wished to educate and inform the larger public by combining historical analysis with scientific rigor. To this end, among Einaudi’s series, the art series edited by Argan and the architecture series edited by Zevi played a crucial role. All of the series begin with the same image, an ostrich with the motto *Spiritus durissima coquit* (The spirit digests the hardest things), which underscores its idealist influence. Zevi’s work on Frank Lloyd Wright made Wright’s fictive writing accessible to audiences that in the past had criticized those same books as “too full of lyricism à la Whitman” and “too fictionalized.” After Zevi’s *Storia* in 1950, Einaudi’s ostrich had proven able to digest the hardest things, such as finding scientific rigor in architectural fictions.

Finally, chapter six crystallizes the relation between history as an empirical science and history as *fantasia*. It is through the work of an art historian such as Giulio Carlo Argan that we can observe the overlap between rational historical reconstruction and fiction. The work of the Turin-born author whose education was embedded in Crocean idealism went through several changes that culminated in the 1965 *Progetto e...*
Destino, in which Argan finally described a compromise between Progetto and Destino, in other words between one’s projected freedom, one’s fantasia, and a predetermined fate, or a story that has already been written.

Each a mode of writing history, these kind of stories that proliferated into the late 1950s established a foundation for future storie in the years to come.

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Chapter 1 - From Chronicle to *Storia*: Bruno Zevi and a New Audience for Architecture

In 1952, Bruno Zevi wrote a piece in the magazine *Metron* commemorating Benedetto Croce, or *Don* Benedetto as he was called in old age, who died that same year. Titled “Benedetto Croce e la riforma della storiografia architettonica” (Benedetto Croce and the reform of history in the field of architecture), Zevi’s article claimed that a new kind of historiography was needed and Croce could provide a methodological model. The aim of this new historiography was not to identify artistic values departing from the mere selection of major works and authors but instead to consider architecture in relation to the notion of land and town planning. “In short the reform of historical methods at least with regards to architecture must take in to account two fundamental needs:

La riforma architettonica deve soddisfare ambedue queste istanze: restringere sul piano del giudizio qualitativo, e allargare gli orizzonti sul piano della cultura. Entro questo programma trovano posto e funzione la poesia architettonica, la letteratura architettonica, l’architettura minore e tutta quella prosa edilizia che pur configura gli aggregati umani e vivifica il paesaggio.

The necessity of a more restricted and critically qualified vision when the question involved pertains to a judgment of quality, and a wider outlook when the subject under examination pertains to the more general field of culture. In such a conception of history the ‘poetry’ or supreme values of architecture will find their place as much as the ‘common prose’ of building which after all
Zevi predicted that the lyric and the poetic side of architecture will replace the mere chronicle and for that reason a new language around architecture had to be found. The idealist Croce, the most influential thinker for literary, art, and architectural criticism in Italy in the early twentieth century, as well as the founder of the history of history, or historiography (*storiografia*), would be the “father” of that new science.

Zevi redefines architecture as an expanded field, which includes literature and several other disciplines, but still maintains its specificity. Among these disciplines, historiography, a literature about architecture, is both part of architecture itself and an instrument for creating and influencing architecture. History and architectural historiography, even more so, belong to a broader cultural production. Therefore everything becomes history, yet such history has to be taught, or in fact be written, which means *designed* on the drawing table.

Four main points need to be considered as components of this history as encompassing both *architettura* and *storia*: first, the integration of ancient and more recent, including present, history; second, the integration of different disciplinary fields into the discipline; third, the integration of readership and authorship in the writing of history; and finally fourth, the integration between theory and practice. All of these factors differentiate historical activities in the domain of architecture but also reintegrate

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them in the same narrative. In the end, all of these architectural stories have to be taught both as part of a university curriculum as well as through books and magazines for a variety of audiences, as Zevi’s publications would attest.

Integration of Past and Present

Based on the writings of Croce, Zevi introduced the main distinction between history and chronicle, which gives the subtitle to the magazine *L'architettura. Cronache e storia*, that Zevi founded in 1955. [Figure 2] In *L’architettura*, Zevi recuperated the distinction between cronaca and storia made clear by Croce, as different yet interdependent approaches to historical narrative. Croce writes:

La verità è, che cronaca e storia non sono distinguibili come due forme di storia, che si compiono a vicenda o che siano l’una subordinata all’altra, ma come due diversi atteggiamenti spirituali. La storia è la storia viva, la cronaca la storia morta; la storia la storia contemporanea, e la cronaca, la storia passata; la storia è principalmente un atto di pensiero, la cronaca un atto di volontà.

The truth is that chronicle and history are not distinguishable as two forms of history, mutually complementary, or as one subordinate to the other, but as two different spiritual attitudes. History is living chronicle, chronicle is dead history; history is contemporary history, chronicle is past history; history is principally an act of thought, chronicle an act of will.²

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Following Croce, *storia* (history) is something alive and deals with contemporary events. The (in)famous Croce aphorism “every true history is contemporary history” sums up this view.³ When history has “passed,” when history becomes a dead document, it turns into what Croce named chronicle. *Cronaca* and *storia* embody two different attitudes: *cronaca* is a (staged) passive recount of events in their chronological unfolding, *storia* is the interpretation of them, therefore *cronaca* pertains to philology, *storia* to philosophy, and these two different fields dictate the way one thinks about events. In this regard, the temporal distance of past events becomes irrelevant: a remote past is equal to a recent past, or to the present, because the way the historian deals with the events becomes relevant instead. Documents from a distant past turn to lively histories when viewed through a new perspective.

In other words, a chronicle is dead history, and to become history, it has to be constantly re-interpreted and re-invented. To a certain extent, the actor of this re-invention is the historian, who transforms himself from chronicler to storyteller. Moreover, whereas history is a thinking story, there is no longer any thought in the chronicle, which has turned into dead memory, is only remembered. Yet, it is in the recollection of this memory that the “making” of history lays, and where *fantasia* comes into play. Croce included such a fantastic element in the making of history, as he stated: “This sort of imagination, which is really quite indispensable to the historian, is the imagination that is inseparable from the historical synthesis, the imagination in and for thought, the concreteness of thought, which is never an abstract concept, but always a

Figure 1 Bruno Zevi, 1952. © Fondazione Bruno Zevi.
Figure 2 L’Architettura. Cronache e Storia. I, n.1, May–June 1955. Cover by Marcello Nizzoli.
relation to judgment, not indetermination but determination. It is nevertheless to be radically distinguished from the free poetic imagination.”  

Namely, invention, the fictive component, makes the writer a historian.

From the narrative point of view, the philosopher and historian Hayden White introduced a further difference between chronicle and storia, where chronicle is a historical construction that allows gaps and discontinuity and storia is a narrative construction that requires conclusions. “Chronicle terminates, storia ends,” which is also to say the main difference between chronicle and storia is that the latter constructs a new reality. Indeed White adds: “Narrativizing history violates reality in order to fill all gaps, in order to give the idea of continuity and coherence, in order to give a meaning instead of offering inane fantasies that populate our nightmares about the devastating power of time passing.”

The progression of Zevi’s books and publications reflected the rapid transition from myth to chronicles to a comprehensive storia – history apt to fill these gaps; it revealed the role of storia in architectural education and practice. Zevi’s first three major books, all with the Turin-based publishing house Einaudi, serves as a micro-history of this shift from storie to an attempted storia - history: Verso un’architettura organica (Towards an Organic Architecture), published in 1945, developed into his more comprehensive Storia dell’architettura moderna (History of Modern Architecture), published in 1950, passed through Saper vedere l’architettura (Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture), published in 1948 and are mainly thought of as educational

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4 Ibid., p. 39.
tools to offer methods and norms, both to students and practicing architects.\(^7\) [Figure 3-7]

Similarly, in literature, another trilogy bid farewell to the genre of chronicle. The writer Vasco Pratolini published *Metello*, a historical novel, part of the trilogy *Una storia italiana* (*an Italian Story*), basically ratifying the end of neorealism, which espoused a supposedly true-to-life narrative. In *Metello*, Pratolini attempted to narrate Italian history from the unification of Italy to the fascist era. He had the ambitious project of digging into the past to understand the present. When he published *Metello* in 1955, written in 1952, he told this “story” starting from Florence as Italian capital at the end of the nineteenth century. By narrating Florence, Pratolini narrates Italy and its working class. The author did not succeed, however, and failed in realizing and legitimizing the historical mode as a literary and artistic trend. In fact, realist writers concealed the big fear of history masqueraded as fantasy. Interestingly enough, only a few years earlier, in 1946 and 1947, Pratolini had published two books both presented as chronicles: *Cronaca Familiare* (*Family Chronicle*) and *Cronache di poveri amanti* (*A Tale of Poor Lovers*, or *Chronicles of Poor Lovers* in its Italian original title).\(^8\) But after this wave of chronicles in the late 1940s, chronicles would become obsolete as a literary genre by the mid-1950s.


\(^8\) Polemics against *Metello* did not fade until the end of the fifties. V. Pratolini, *Cronache di poveri amanti* Florence: Vallecchi 1946; *Cronaca familiare*, Firenze: Vallecchi 1947.
Figure 3 Bruno Zevi, *Verso un'architettura organica*, Turin: Einaudi 1945. Frank Lloyd Wright’s “Falling Water” on the jacket.
Figure 5 Bruno Zevi, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, Turin: Einaudi 1950.
Figure 6 Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l’architettura*, Turin: Einaudi 1948.
As Alberto Asor Rosa wrote: “In 1955 Vasco Pratolini published *Il Metello*, a novel hailed as the passage from neorealism to realism, the passage from a sketchy sort of post-*resistenza* chronicle to the real novel.” Pratolini’s book seals the end of Italian neorealism, what I would consider a passage from narrative that takes everyday life as its object to enter the realm of the fantastic. In 1955, though, mixing historical and fictional accounts was not a legitimate way of writing either history or literature quite yet. The historical novel was a genre banned by publishing houses; consider here the infamous case of Elio Vittorini who twice rejected the now highly praised novel *Il Gattopardo (The Leopard)* by Tomasi di Lampedusa, and which, in 1963, became a celebrated film by Luchino Visconti, mainly for mixing historical and fictional characters. By choosing this genre, Pratolini clearly intended to oppose the obsolete true-to-life narrative. The choice too of grouping *Il Metello* and two other novels under the title *An Italian Story* not only insisted on the fictive “story” and not on history, but also, because of the indeterminate article, implied that this was only one among many possible other narratives.

Vicissitudes within the architectural discourse ran along these same lines. Zevi’s *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* in 1955, *Figure 2* organically replaced the mainly anthological *Metron*, which stopped publishing the same year, reflecting a political, cultural, and intellectual change. *Figure 8*

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10 Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa wrote *Il Gattopardo (The Leopard)* between 1954 and 1956. Vittorini, who was at that time the consultant both for Mondadori and Einaudi rejected it. The book was only published by Feltrinelli in 1958, a year after Lampedusa’s death. For more details on this publishing adventure see M. Marangoni, *Pensare i Libri*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri 1999.
Figure 8 Bruno Zevi’s *Metron*, 53-54, December 1954; last issue before *L’Architettura. Cronache e storia*. 
Both magazines addressed a specific audience of professionals, but in 1955 *Metron* was accused of being mostly a “political” magazine, which it was. Zevi justified his position by asking: “That’s what it is. What human animal in this century can be declared ‘not political truly we do not know it.’”\(^{12}\) Indeed, *Metron* faded because it was the product of its own time, when politics was a byword for life.\(^{13}\)

Quite differently, *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* started with another goal. The magazine opened by reflecting upon the meaning of *storia*, and inquiring about historical consciousness in the architectural discourse, involving both architecture theorists and practicing architects. In the second issue, Zevi further developed his idea about what had to be considered *storia* with a capital S, the telling of events, *Historia Res Gestae*, as in Italian *storia* both signifies the series of events as they happen and the fictive tale, as noted in my introduction. In the Italian version of his second editorial for *L’architettura* titled “Architects and Historians reply,” Zevi explains the subtitle of his magazine, the Italian and the English version read:

\(^{12}\) “*Metron* è stata accusata più volte di essere una rivista ‘politica.’ Lo è. Quale animale umano può dichiararsi ‘non politico’ in questo secolo, veramente non sappiamo,” in *Metron*, n. 39, Nov-Dec 1950, p. 15.

Here Zevi stressed the importance of personal experiences and stories in order to write history. The personal experience provides the personal interpretation and fictive elements necessary to write one’s (hi)story.


Besides personal interpretation, Zevi suggested bridging past experiences with contemporary events, where past experiences are Croce’s dead chronicles, and where *storia* includes present and more contemporary experiences. Manfredo Tafuri recognized in this version of history the influence by the Italianist Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), author of a seminal history of Italian literature and other writings on Enlightenment and Historicism: “the lessons of Francesco De Sanctis, among others, appears in the historiographical method of the young Zevi; the reflection on the past is determined by perspectives made available to the present, while the guiding element is a generous passion directed toward the future. In the stagnant climate of architectural historiography following the war, Zevi’s voice decried a methodological renewal, whose great historical significance must be acknowledged.”

As *L’architettura*, both the magazine and architecture as discipline it envisioned, wanted to promote the presence of chronicles into a more current present that would be the basis for a new *storia*, Zevi presented himself as the redeemer of chronicles turned into history. Further scopes of the magazine were declared in the first editorial, where in a convoluted paragraph Zevi had also blamed the representatives of modern architecture for their detachment from history:

> Questa rivista ha il preciso intento di favorire l’integrazione della nostra cultura architettonica riflettendone tutte le istanze. E il risultato di un atto di ottimismo. Non avremmo trasformato *Metron*, che è stata la

The main aim of this magazine is to try to bring about an integration of our architecture culture, reflecting all its facets. It is an act of faith, the outcome of optimism. We would have not interrupted and changed *Metron*,

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This opening editorial is quite rich and entails different theoretical aspects, which will be touched upon throughout the chapter. The main issue to be raised is the schism, at this point, between history and practice, which has determined, according to Zevi, the lack of a serious theoretical and historical production.

Built architecture (“architecture that one makes”) is compared to a dead chronicle. History of architecture is the reinterpretation of this built and past architecture so that it becomes current again. Zevi resuscitated built architecture by giving it new life through historical interpretation. This further explains the reason behind the use of the word “chronicles” in plural, as we witness a multiplicity of architectural production and also its multiple sets of interpretation (storie).

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Furthermore, the distance between modern, built architecture and historiography had caused, according to Zevi, the schism between past and present, having as a result either political propaganda through contemporary building production, or, the opposing effect, a philological reconstruction of an ancient past. Either way, there had not been any integration between past and present. It has to be acknowledged that the magazine’s rubrics at least tried to bridge this temporal gap: letters to the editor, editorials, and the editorials-in-brief maintained a theoretical and meta-historical approach. The rubric “Storia e Critica” (History and Criticism) tried to cover all temporal examples, yet still separated them. Under the umbrella of “Storia e Critica,” the reader finds “Venti anni fa” (Twenty years ago), “Eredità del’Ottocento,” (Nineteenth Century Legacy), “Monumenti” (Monuments), “L’arte di abitare nel …” (The Art of living in …) and “Un pittore / scultore giudica l’architettura” (A painter / a sculptor judges architecture).

Both the rubric “Monuments” and “Nineteenth Century Legacy” served the purpose to enfold past architecture into contemporary debate. The latter tried to offer monthly examples of how ancient buildings may be interpreted in a modern manner, and become useful to the contemporary architect, as well as the historian. Manfredo Tafuri dubbed the rubric “Eredità dell’800” (Nineteenth Century Legacy), “the antechamber of a mythical Modern Movement” in which Zevi was “annexing larger portions of the recent past.”19 Tafuri opposed Zevi’s work to the work by Guido Canella on the Amsterdam school and on Willem Marinus Dudok, or Aldo Rossi and Vittorio Gregotti’s work on Alessandro Antonelli, who changed the way of thinking about this “prehistory of the new” by turning history into a discreet system composed of different and discontinuous

Indeed, while Canella, Rossi, and Gregotti are proposing different stories not directed toward the idea of a progressive and total history, Zevi is still, in 1957, promoting an integrated version of history. The main example of this history remains Zevi’s 1950 *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, a reassuring, comprehensive post-war narrative, and one that tried to create a continuous story.

Zevi’s stated intent was that of bridging past and present together but also that of “trying to bring about an integration of our architecture culture, reflecting all of its facets,” as well as mingling different tendencies toward a unique and coherent language.

### Multiple authorships and readerships

*L’architettura. Cronache e storia* is not an isolated example. When Zevi founded the journal in 1955, the national popular weekly magazine was *Cronache* [*Figure 9*], a more generalist monthly magazine with a daily newspaper format, where Zevi wrote a weekly column. It eventually turned into the equally generalist magazine *L’.espresso*, but with a new structure and an expanded range of topics. Zevi was appointed editor of *L’.espresso* and his column on architecture topics found a new home [*Figure 10*]. All of these publications gradually distanced themselves from a political way of writing about events, which was the rule in the 1940s, and embraced a more interpretative approach that became popular in the ensuing years [*Figure 11*]. This change emblematically stressed the theoretical difference with the previous version [*Cronache*] of the magazine.

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20 Ibid.
22 Zevi wrote the column in *L’.espresso* until his death in 2000. *Cronache* was published by Tumminelli in Rome. It was first edited by Gualtiero Jacopetti, Roberto Tumminelli and Arrigo Benedetti since 18th May 1954.
Figure 9 The magazine *Cronache* edited by Tuminelli in Rome until 1955.
Figure 10 The magazine *L'espresso*, 1, n. 1, October 2\textsuperscript{nd} 1955, Rome: Nuove Edizioni Romane.
Figure 11 Bruno Zevi’s column in *L’espresso*, I, n. 1, October 2nd 1955, page 12.
Figure 12 Last issue of *Cronache* announcing *L'espresso* as the following issue; Bruno Zevi at bottom left. © Zevi Archive.
[L’*espresso*], in the same way *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* differed from *Metron*. While these journals differed in content, they all reported on current architectural production, and all aimed at a wide target audience. *Cronache*, whose subtitle reads, “Della politica e del costume” (Chronicles about Politics and Habits) told stories about life, politics, art, film, celebrities, and sports. [Figure 12] In the last issue of the magazine, before changing its title to *L’espresso*, the editor-in-chief, Arrigo Benedetti, explained the intent of the new version of this weekly magazine, that also adopted a tabloid format: “*L’espresso* will deal with politics, news, and society, in a few words with the ‘measure of time throughout the history of last week’,.” The chronicles of the previous magazine [*Cronache*], in other words, are turned into history, and the attempt is to achieve history through the events of a most recent past. Yet, the magazine dealt with professional journalists, who, according to Benedetti “will not hide their personalities as novelists, essayists or historians, but by writing about literature, cinema or music, or art and architecture they will remember, on top of everything, to be journalists.”

Here the embedded storyline is: first, everyone has a specific profession, second, everyone writes stories. The same remains true for Zevi himself, who Benedetti described as first an architect, though one who also writes. “The architect can go to the editorial office, but he will still be an architect.” Zevi is a writer but remains an architect, which is quite opposite to what Zevi’s specialized magazine tried to advance, namely architects as multi-faceted, multi-tasking figures: practitioners, writers, storytellers, journalists, and opinion makers, as a cartoon published in *L’Architettura. Cronache e storia* explained.

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Here the architect appears first as a counselor, an artist, and businessman; in the following page of the cartoon the architect becomes an engineer, a legal expert, a master builder; thus expressing the multi-tasking nature of the architect (after Vitruvius) and the intricate character of the discipline. [Figure 13-14]

While *L'espresso* needed to keep a clear-cut distinction among disciplines, architecture magazines insisted on combining the arts, almost a return to the interdisciplinary humanist culture of the Italian Renaissance. Consequently, a history of architecture does not exclude the other disciplines; it is not an exclusive and mono-thematic history, but one that covers a broader area including literature and the arts.

Since its very beginning, Zevi’s magazine had been the expression of the translation and transition among genres, tones, and publics. Or at least it claimed to do so. The very first editorial entitled “Colloquio aperto” (Open discussion) already referred to the use of literature, to Albert Camus, and to his position as an intellectual, insisting on the cooperation between those who practice, those who theorize, and those who read. Indeed, the change in tone implored did not only involve the magazine’s, but also, and even more, of authorship. In fact, along with his conception of past chronicles, and contemporary engagement, the magazine promoted the collaboration of a broader public, so that theory could enter and inform architectural practice.
The Rome Law Courts point the way to an improvement in the ethics of the building trade.

The last months have seen a law suit which has aroused the attention of experts and public opinion. A weekly magazine, *L’Espresso*, had published a series of articles drawing attention to the corruption of the administration of the City of Rome, particularly in regard to speculation in building land carried on by powerful financial groups. The Society Immobiliare which, being an offshoot of the Fazioni, is a chief power in local and building speculation in Rome, took the magazine to court. The case lasted for months and exposed unsuitable, inefficient and unscrupulous methods in the administration of the City Council of Rome which the ex-mayor, eng. Rebicchini, was obliged to answer. Finally, the Court gave its verdict in favour of *L’Espresso*. This decision has shown up all the ignobility many officials who despised of ever being able to raise the ethical standards in Italian town planning and architectural activity. The impression has been that if the Courts pronounce sentences against the powerful, there is still hope to improve the ethics of our profession.

Un giudizio del Tribunale di Roma lancia una voce per la moralizzazione delle imprese nel campo del bilancio.

An example of this recent victory, a procès qui a attiré l’attention of experts and public opinion, was cited in Rome, *L’Espresso*. *L’Espresso* had published a series of articles which pointed out the corruption of the administration of the City of Rome, and in this case the magazine was successful. The Court’s decision put the authorities to shame and laid down a precedent in the sphere of municipal administration. *L’Espresso* urges the authorities to be honest in their dealings with the public and to use their powers properly. The Society Immobiliare who, thus one
Un processo e la moralizzazione dell'attività edilizia

di Bruno Zevi

La scena sociale che si deteriora progressivamente e minaccia di travolgere anche la loro onorabilità e, in primo luogo, di offendere la loro coscienza?

La posizione degli architetti, è insieme nascondere, è estremamente difficile. Il loro lavoro dipende in larga misura dalla burocrazia che assegna incarichi, fa raccomanda-

zioni, elegge permessi, favorisce o sbozza il disbrigo delle pratiche professionali; e dipende da grossi enti privati come la Società Immobiliare che premiano, con la forza della loro potenza economica, sulla burocrazia. La professione dell'architetto è stressata nell'ambito di interessi che di regola si compongono su terreno illegittimo dei com-

promessi porta a sostenere l'iniziativa privata anche quando essa risulta dai confini morali e travalica gli interessi colettivi giuridicamente rappresentati dalla burocrazia; né può rompere con questa perché dalle omonie della burocrazia dipende il successo delle speculazioni private, e principalmente perché la stessa burocrazia, controllando un am-

pio settore dell'attività edilizia, è un cliente rilevante degli architetti.

In questo difficile impasse, i più si disperano. S'appoggiano col dire: "il mondo è fata-

colo". Temo che assolto rilistare un incarico dell'Immobiliare anche se contraddice le loro convinzioni urbanistiche a perché altrimenti qualcun altro lo seguirà peggio di me. Non pensano neppure alla possibilità di denunciare un fenomeno di corruzione e perché è difficile avere le prove, i consensi non lasciano ricordare e poi in burocrazia tutte se

tienti, e si cambiano un funzionale, ne verrà uno peggio.

In tale situazione sociale e psicologica, non possiamo chiedere ai soli architetti di operare una rivoluzione, di moralizzare un paese la cui coscienza è ormai così inerte e assoggettata alla corruzione che gli unici irregolari appaiono coloro che la denunciano.

Tuttavia Arrigo Benedetti e Manlio Canevagi hanno visto l'Immobiliare. Non sostenuti da potenze finanziarie né da partiti di maggioranza né dal Vaticano, sono stati assolti. I cittadini, i professionisti, gli architetti tra i quali regnavano un assoluto scofismo sui risultati del processo, hanno tirato un meraviglioso sospiro di sollievo. Questa volta i dubbi e gli ostacoli hanno prevalso sui dominatori della politica e della finanza.

V'è dunque ragione di non arrendersi. Il processo ha segnato un deciso punto in favore della moralizzazione delle amministrazioni pubbliche e dell'iniziativa privata. Con questo, d'accordo, il mondo non cambia di colpo, per una sentenza del Tribunale. Ma appare suscettibile di miglioramenti; vi sono zone di resistenza alla dilagante corruzione e uomini che, senza essere eroi o senza morire di fame, hanno il coraggio della moralità e dimo-

strano come l'affrontare questi piccoli rischi sia produttivo per tutti, segnatamente per la propria felicità. Di questo si tratta, anche per gli architetti della loro felicità. Perché il lavoro, la sentirsi

ingranniti e professionalmente, la prosperità sono bellissime cose, ma non bastano senza quella coscienza morale, quelle urgenze, quella professione dell'architetto che solo ammettono una piena felicità. Ecco il tema: malgrado il carattere irritare della professione e i mille ostacoli, è giusto che anche gli architetti siano felici.

El Tribunal de Roma indica come se può ottenere una moralizzazione delle attività edilizie

Mentre avviva tue luogo un processo che solleva lo sconvolgimento di tante e tante istanze, la "opinione pubblica italiana. Il seminario "L'Espresso" ha pubblicato una serie di articoli sulla cospirazione della burocrazia di Roma, special-

mente in lo riferimento a la speculazione di terreni di costruzione bollati e col posesse_ggi finanziari. La "Società Immobiliare" che per un'incastriazione del Vaticano costituisce la principale funzione di la speculazione immobiliare y

edilizia di Roma, ha querellato seminario per difesa. El proceso dura menses meses e resti

enti incertidumes, interdelaciones, disobediencias administered by parte de la Municipalidad de Roma, realizadas por la cual el propio ex-Prefecto la multa fue solicitado a uno esclusivamente en el Seminario. Este último llegó finalemente a la conclusión de que L'Espresso

buena resolución. La apalata de muchas argucias, que habían ya perdido las esperanzas de poder moralizar la actividad urbana e imponer en Roma la moralidad. Si el Tribunal
dominado lo recibió o los poderes, ello quiere decir que tal acto fue posible hacer algo para moralizar a nuestra profesión.
Zevi actually concluded his first editorial with a plea to the public, asking for the readers’ collaboration on the magazine; the magazine should become the platform for a public debate, without the need for contributors to have a specific training:

To collaborate with us it is not necessary to be creative geniuses, professional historians, or writers. Every architect, every engineer, every director of building agencies, every student has a story to tell, a problem to solve, a suggestion to submit to a public opinion. This is what the magazine does, it constitutes a ‘service’ for all, builders and planners, architects and clients, archaeologists and technicians, politicians and historians. With the risk of appearing eclectic, channeling different forces and complementary interests, it is necessary to re-establish an extensive debate, an agreement designed to promote and extend the freedom of architecture.25

Zevi appears to endanger the role of the architectural critic in terms of professional expertise, appealing to that same populism predicated in the 1930s by Gramsci. Does this undermine the role of the “professional” architectural critic like Zevi

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himself? Yes and no. Could this be read as undermining the role of the intellectual? Certainly not. Even if preaching and introducing an opening to the public, even while promoting the conversation and dialogue around architecture for a wider audience outside architecture’s professional circles, Zevi as well as his architect colleagues maintain an elitist position characteristic of Italian intellectuals at that time. The contributors, and readers, are still, most of the time, practicing architects like Ernesto Nathan Rogers or Vittorio Gregotti, as well as affirmed architecture critics such as Francesco Tentori or Reyner Banham.

Zevi insisted on making readers active participants in the magazine, thus aligning with the period’s inclination toward opening up to a broader public. He advanced wider participation, but one that did not end in producing historical texts, rather that insisted on the importance of educating the masses, masses that were still very distinct from the intellectuals. Indeed in the end and in spite of intentions to the contrary, *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* remained a platform for a special audience, of architects, architecture students, and architectural authors.

History played a crucial role in the formation of the architectural public. But if we follow Zevi, the separation among disciplines and among professions only produced bad historians, or no historians at all. The absence of professional historians of architecture was a contentious topic with a long history itself, one that signified the lack of a substantial and valuable theoretical production. In 1951, when thinking about a series of books about architecture, Zevi lamented with his editor Giulio Einaudi the abundance of architects who could not build – failed architects – and naïf writers, who essentially could not write. In an unpublished letter to Einaudi, Zevi accused critics and historians to be a
class of failed and frustrated practicing architects.\textsuperscript{26} \textbf{[Figure 15-16]}

Il programma iniziale era notevolmente ardito – quattro volumi ogni anno – e, malgrado gli sforzi, non è stato realizzato. A parte alcuni difetti organizzativi facilmente superabili, la vera ragione della mancata realizzazione va ricercata nella carenza di studiosi di architettura. Gli autori mancano perché la maggior parte degli scrittori di cose di architettura o sono professionisti incapaci e non desiderosi di scrivere e di studiare, o sono storici di arte, generalmente disinteressati di architettura, o sono filologi provinciali di cultura italiana o non aggiornata.  

The initial program was a daring one – four volumes each year – but it hasn’t been realized. Besides some organizational deficiencies, easy to be solved, the real reason of this fallacy is caused by the lack of historians of architecture. [emphasis in the text] Authors are lacking because most of those who write about architectural ‘things’ are failed professionals, and not scholars willing to write and study; or they are art historians, generally disinterested in architecture, or they are provincial philologists interested in Italian culture but not even an updated one.\textsuperscript{27}

So mainly Zevi faulted the lack of an integration between theory and practice, and of having practicing architects interested in history. To those, Edoardo Persico would have added “those who have nothing to say!”\textsuperscript{28} Thus the critic who writes risks becoming like the character Quinto Anfossi in Italo Calvino’s \textit{A Plunge into Real Estate}, a nearly failed intellectual who aspired to an academic career, then tries his luck in building speculation, yet fails both in the intellectual and the practical field.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{26} Bruno Zevi to Giulio Einaudi, without date probably end 1951. Einaudi Archive.  
\textsuperscript{27} B. Zevi, “Funzione e problemi della collana storica di architettura,” p. 18, probably end 1951.  
\textsuperscript{28} E. Persico, “Punto e da capo per l’architettura,” in \textit{Domus}, n. 83, November 1934, p. 3.  
\textsuperscript{29} Calvino wrote \textit{La Speculazione edilizia} between April 5\textsuperscript{th} 1956 and July 12\textsuperscript{th} 1957. Chapter IV takes this novel as the ending point in architectural neorealism.
Funzione e problemi della COLLANA STORICA DI ARCHITETTURA

La collana storica di architettura è nata con l'intento di riempire una lacuna nella cultura italiana. Questa lacuna, come've noto, è costituita dall'inadeguatezza delle pubblicazioni architettoniche rispetto a quelle delle altre arti figurative, inadeguatezza ingiustificata anche sul terreno commerciale, dato il crescente interesse suscitato dalle pubblicazioni di architettura.

Il programma iniziale era notevolmente arduo - quattro volumi ogni anno - e, malgrado gli sforzi, non è stato realizzato. A parte alcuni difetti organizzativi facilmente superabili, il vero problema della mancanza di realizzazione va ricercato nella carenza di studiosi di architettura, gli autori mancano perciò la maggior parte degli scrittori di cose d'architettura o sono professionisti inesperti o non desiderosi di scrivere e di studiare, o sono storici di arte, generalmente disinteressati di architettura, o sono filologhi provinciali di cultura limitata o non aggiornata.

La collana deve infatti rispondere a un requisito scientifico ma anche ad un livello culturale rigoroso. Si tratta di inserire l'architettura nel mondo della cultura, Pochissima gente è capace di far questo, e ciò è vero in Italia e anche fuori d'Italia.

Malgrado ch'io avessi il desiderio di pubblicare un numero assai maggiore di volumi, devo constatare che non è uscito finora in Italia nessun volume ch'io avrei voluto inserire nella nostra collana. Gli unici due libri possibili - CULTURE OF CITIES di Manford e SPACE TIME AND ARCHITECTURE di Nikos - erano già stati fatti da altri editori e, dal resto, gli altri due, non rispondevano a pieno ai criteri della colazione.

I libri pubblicati finora sono stati tre:
- NAPOLI IMPREVISTA di Roberto Pane
- WALTER GROPIUS E LA BAUHAUS di Giulio Carlo Argan
- MICHELOZZO ARCHITETTO di Ottavio Morisani

Tutte e tre questi libri rispondono ai criteri su menzionati.

Sono in lavorazione o in corso di traduzione o in trattativa:
- DISCORSI SULL'ARCHITETTURA di Louis Sullivan, traduzione di Riccardo Musatti, introduzione di Zevi
- LA NASCITA DELL'URBANISTICA MODERNA, comprendente le traduzioni di "Garden Cities of Tomorrow" di Howard e di "Der Stadtbau" di Camillo Sitte
- L'ARCHITETTURA DELL'AMERICA LATINA di Mario Buschiazza
- L'AUTOBIOGRAFIA di Frank Lloyd Wright

Figure 15 “Funzione e problemi della collana storica di architettura” (Function and Problems of the Historical Series on Architecture), Bruno Zevi to Giulio Einaudi, probably at end of 1951. © Einaudi Archive.
Per altri volumi sono stati fatti contratti ma dubito che avranno un seguito per le ragioni indicate inizialmente e perché il compenso a forfait di 200.000 lire è assolutamente insufficiente. Alcuni di questi volumi sono:

GALEAZZO ALESSI di Mario Labò
IL TEATRO GRECO di Paolo Verzone
ALVAR AALTO di Ingemar Gardella
STUDI SULL'ARCHEOLOGIA E SOCIOLOGIA di Enrico Calenda

Data questa situazione, non vi è da prevedere che i volumi pubblicati nel futuro saranno molto più numerosi. La collana non potrà rispondere all'esigenza di riempire la lacuna dell'ignoranza dell'architettura. Ma sarà uno strumento utile se pubblicherà periodicamente dei libri culturalmente sicuri. Questi libri non potrebbero trovar luogo in nessun'altra collezione Einaudi, dato che i SAGH possono comprendere solo testi di interesse generale. Ritengo perciò essenziale continuare la collana così come, senza forzarla, senza rinunciare all'importanza ma senza diminuirla.

Questa collana però evidentemente non potrà colmare la lacuna culturale di cui si è parlato se non comprendrà una serie di volumi più agili, la cui realizzazione possa essere affidata ad un gruppo preciso di persone capaci di compilare insieme tutti o almeno per una parte dei volumi. Si sottopone perciò all'esame la seguente proposta:

una collana illustrativa delle CITTÀ ITALIANE, concepita come guida urbanistica-architettonica, volumi di circa 100 pagine per le grandi città e di circa 56 pagine per i centri minori.

Tale proposta, già discussta da altri editori e da alcuni membri della Casa Einaudi, va ritenuta sicura commercialmente. E' una collana di grande diffusione che, se ben fatta, potrebbe costituire uno strumento indispensabile per gli studiosi e per i cultori d'arte fino alla categoria dei turisti. Ma è un'impreza che non si può affrontare parzialmente, redigendo un volume alla volta perché, in questo caso, le spese redazionali (disegni, indagini, collaborazione di studiosi, fotografie) divengono enormi. Si tratterebbe di costituire un apposito ufficio dedicato essenzialmente a questa collana, di cui dovrebbero uscire almeno dieci volumi ogni anno. Sono disposto ad illustrare, durante la redazione dei collaboratori Einaudi, i criteri con i quali la collana potrebbe essere diretta, ma si tratta di una grossa impresa dal punto di vista finanziario e, benché si possa prevedere un notevole successo commerciale e l'eventuale appoggio di grosse organizzazioni (Touring, Turismo, ACH, o simili), è chiaro che bisogna partire da un piano organizzativo efficiente.

Concludendo questa breve relazione, ritengo che l'attuale collana debba rimanere così come e ma che, vicino ad essa o come parte di essa, debba essere studiata un'iniziativa di più largo respiro.

Bruno Zevi
The contradiction and tension of Zevi’s own discourse is also evident: Zevi himself had an integrated education, as he wished to become a person of letters, an art critic, while his father wanted him to become an engineer. In a personal reminiscence, Zevi testifies that: “we had an argument, then we agreed on something in-between: architecture, which is partly engineering and partly art.” Thus Zevi himself risks being that failed practitioner that has to settle for something “in-between,” that is, for an artistic method of practicing architectural history and criticism.

Integration of History as Theory and Practice into Teaching

L’architettura. Cronache e storia also covered the topic of the teaching of history within university pedagogy. In September 1957, a convention of South American teachers of architectural history was held in Tucumán, Argentina, attended by scholars and architects from around the world, to address an urgent topic: the teaching of history and its role within the formation of the historian and the architect, “an integrated figure.” The discussion seemed to mark the beginning of a new approach: the need for a historical consciousness was recognized as the new highlight of architectural culture. Zevi offered the welcoming remarks with the following emphasis, later published in his magazine L’architettura. Cronache e storia. The English version, which usually reads as a brief and concise summary of the Italian editorial, reads as follow:

Today, however, we feel that modern architecture cannot progress unless it acknowledges its relationship with the history of the last hundred and that of earlier times. But the history of ancient architecture should be taught with a

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30 R. Dulio, Introduzione a Bruno Zevi, p. 5.
modern critical mentality: it must serve to create better architects, not only specialized historians of art. The study of history creates a critical consciousness whose usefulness can be checked at the drawing table (tavolo da disegno) better that in the library.\textsuperscript{31}

This could now be achieved, especially in Italy, thanks to the use of magazines, and thanks to the integration of past and present. Zevi centered a later editorial, “Architectural history for modern architects,” published in September 1957, on the symposium;\textsuperscript{32} [Figure 17] he focused his attention on four main points: the symposium is a clear sign of a growing historical awareness; it treats the teaching of history in a different way, free from the academic constraints that often prevail in Europe; it tries to touch upon the delicate issue of the relation between history of art and history of culture, “an integration philosophically explained but didactically neglected”\textsuperscript{33} and fourth, “it sincerely suggests a question ‘how could historical knowledge serve the modern architect?’”\textsuperscript{34} Architecture production fits in a historical discourse but more than anything needs to be thought of as a broader discipline among the arts, but under the same nomenclature: history.

Suffice it to say, Zevi was eager to emphasize that his publications and his magazine had been insisting on the importance of the history of architecture within the architects’ education and curriculum, pointing out that the same urge had then become a common feature of other magazines such as \textit{The Architectural Review} and \textit{Progressive}.


\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 292.

\textsuperscript{34} “A che serve la conoscenza storica all’architetto moderno?”, \textit{ibid.}, p. 292.
La storia dell’architettura per gli architetti moderni

di Bruno Zevi

Die Geschichte der Architektur für moderne Baumeister


La historia de la arquitectura por los arquitectos modernos

Los profesores sudamericanos de historia de la ar- quitectura han celebrado un congreso en Tucumán (Argentina). Las discusiones resultaron sumamente interesantes ya que, como había sido señalado, la exigencia de una consciencia histórica constituye el fundamento más novedoso de la cultura arquitectónica moderna. En los tiempos de la Bauhaus, la historia era todavía considerada como un «espejo» del currículo ar- cediano. Hoy día, por el contrario, notamos que la arquitectura moderna no podrá evolucionar si no la consideramos en relación con la historia de las últi-imas cien años y con aquello más antiguo. Pero también la historia de la arquitectura antigua ha de ser entendida con una mentalidad crítica suave, mo- derna. Es preciso recordar que la misión de ser arquitecto exige no ser dogmático e invariable, sino crear arquitectura moderna y no modernización, cuyas reflexiones metodológicas deben reflejar- se incluso en los discursos disciplinares, de los que por lo común imparten todavía criterios de tipo dogmati- tico y positivista. En la revista de esta revista nosotros tratamos todos los menos de darse un ejemplo de cómo un edificio antiguo puede ser «rebautizado» y de manera moderna, cuyo, útil para la ar- quitectura contemporánea. Para ello se debe ser profundizando y extendiendo la enseñanza universitaria, según lo este formulado por el congreso de Tucumán.

Figure 17 Bruno Zevi, “La storia dell’architettura per gli architetti moderni” (Architectural History for Modern Architects), in L’Architettura. Cronache e Storia, III, n. 23, September 1957, page 293.
Architecture, along with general magazines such as House Beautiful, not to mention Cronache, now L’espresso.\textsuperscript{35} Zevi is here obliquely responding to Sigfried Giedion’s article “History and the Architect,” first published in Zodiac in English in 1957.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{[Figure 18]} In it, Giedion encourages the study of history of architecture both for the historian and for the practicing architect. He articulates why history is important and how it can be taught in the architect’s curriculum. He suggests the idea of a history that is not static but dynamic, in almost Crocean terms: “we have ceased to regard history as a static process, in which past, present and future are listed in separate columns […] dead as dust, but as an inseparable part of our living human destiny.”\textsuperscript{37} Thus history should be taught not as series of notions but as a method, precisely as a designing process. If Zevi’s editorial in September 1957 is a covert response to Giedion on the teaching of history, Zevi’s later brief editorial is a declared criticism of Giedion’s idea of history and historical categories. In the brief editorial of February 1958, “Categorie e storia Giedioniane” (Giedionian categories and history), Zevi quoted Giedion’s article. While disagreeing on a number of points, the two authors agreed over Giedion’s premise that if “modern architects who have overcome the pragmatic mentality of 1920s finally feel the need to return to history, history has to become an integral part of the scholarly curriculum of the architect.”\textsuperscript{38} While agreeing with Giedion in the importance of history for the architect, Zevi diverges from the Swiss historian and his former teacher at

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 292.
\textsuperscript{36} B. Zevi, “Categorie e storia Giedioniane,” (English version with no title: Giedionian categories and history), in L’architettura. Cronache e storia, III, n. 28, Feb 1958, p. 654. The article by Giedion, “History and the Architect,” was published in Zodiac, 1, 1957, pp. 53-61. The collection Architecture, You and Me, which contains an English version of this essay was first published in German as volume 18 of the Rowohls Deutsche Enzyklopädie under the title Architektur und Gemeinschaft (Hamburg, 1956).
Harvard on methodological grounds *aprops* Giedion’s reliance on nineteenth-century art historical models. Here the English version sums up well the much longer Italian editorial:

Sigfried Giedion, in a recent article, claimed that the history of architecture should be taught as the history of spatial conceptions following the methods applied by Wölfflin, Riegl and Schmarsow. We agree as to spatial conceptions, but not as to the method. Wölfflin, Riegl and Schmarsow were great masters of architectural criticism, but they were bound to a nineteenth century way of thinking that argued according to abstract figure ‘categories’ and not according to concrete artistic personalities. Our problem is to pass from architectural ‘philosophy’ to architectural history, not merely to replace the preceding philosophy of volumes and decoration with a ‘philosophy’ of spaces.\(^{39}\)

Even if not directly related to Zevi’s piece on Giedion, the same page of the magazine and the opposite page ironically, or by no coincidence, show a cartoon with two men’s heads wearing blinkers, framing the piece on Giedion, and the title of another editorial-in-brief reads “ideological blinkers.” \(^{[Figure 19-20]}\) Zevi obviously agreed with Giedion on the idea of space as an essential component in considering architecture. But the reference to “concrete personalities” shows instead Zevi’s connection to Adolfo Venturi’s school of art criticism, for which architecture, as a form of art, is determined by its author.

Zevi had earlier focused one of his editorials on Venturi, whose work had been celebrated in a symposium in Florence in 1956. Venturi has been particularly outstanding

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\(^{39}\) *Ibid.*
Figure 18 *Zodiac*, 1, 1957, Walter Gropius on the cover; includes Sigfried Giedion’s article “History and the Architect.”
Figure 19 “Parrocchi Ideologici” (Ideological blinkers); above the cartoon a short editorial on “Categorie e storia giedioniane” (Giedionian Categories and History), in L’Architettura. Cronache e storia, III, n. 28, Feb 1958, page 654.
di cui, nell’articolo, si propone una tripartizione incredibilmente ingenua (I periodo), dalle civiltà babylonene ed egiziane al Pantheon; non esiste lo spazio interno, ma solo il decorbuismetaneasia, a gove avventò magnifiche delle forme con la luce di II periodo, dal Pantheon all’ottocento; è caratterizzato dallo spazio interno nelle sue varie versioni; III periodo, il nostro: lo spazio interno del secondo periodo continua, ma è integrato da una ripresa degli impegni volumetrici del primo periodo, dall’interpretazione tra spazio interno ed esterno, quindi da una concezione spazio-temporale. Il Giedion si confessa: egli è legato ai criteri di interpretazione storica di tre testi, e Rinascimento e Barocco di Heinrich Wolfflin del 1885, l’arte industriale e tecnica di August Schmarsow del 1905. Tre testi fondamentali per tutti, ma sintomatici della mentalità catolica tedesca del secolo scorso, pregna di concezioni, di formazioni, di leggi, di principi e concetti e per lo più dimensionale delle personalità creatrici degli spazi architettonici concreti e storici. Non meraviglia quindi che il Giedion affermi: e i paesi latini, e il mondo anglosassone, non hanno appresa fino a poco tempo fa la nuova tradizione formativa lentamente negli ultimi 70 anni, ciò che concepisce la storia dell’architettura come storia delle concezioni spaziali. Solo recentemente hanno cominciato a aggiungersi. Spalle constatate come il Giedion conosse poco la storia dell’architettura italiana per la quale, da oltre 50 anni, si esprime da De Sanctis in poi, la personalità creatrice è al centro della storia dell’arte. L’Italia considera il Wolfflin, il Riel, lo Schmarsow grandi storici moderni giudica i criteri categoriali da essi asseriti. Nell’apprendere la ricerca sugli spazi architettonici, il Giedion poteva accettare questi criteri e, in quanto lo ha fatto, è rimasta intrisa nel «volliainsimo» più o meno dialettizzato: il suo compito era proprio di stilizzare le concezioni spaziali dell’ottocento tedesco passando dalla categoria alla personalità, dalla storia di astrazioni alla storia degli artisti. Un insegnamento della storia dell’architettura che meccanicamente sostituisce agli antichi «ordini» e «proporzioni» le moderne «concezioni spaziali» ha solo l’apparenza del progresso; il metodo rimane lo stesso, astratto e antistorico. Per molti aspetti l’Italia deve aggiungersi, ma non per questo.

Sono citati
Nel gennaio 1955, M. Marcel Génestron, presidente dell’Associazione Provinciale degli Architetti, protestava contro l’abitudine di ignorare, nei discorsi ufficiali di inaugurazione di edifici pubblici, il nome dell’architetto; tutti erano nominati e lodati, il promotore, il donatore, il direttore, il presidente, meno l’architetto. Riepilogando la tecnica Da-Rand-Soudain, direttore della rivista “L’Architecture Française”, ha scritto una lettera indignata al Segretario di Stato alle Arti e alle Lettere del governo francese. L’ha coinvolta a stata diremato una circolare a tutti i funzionario; la stampa è stata convocata ed addebitata in proposito i nomi degli architetti appariranno nelle relazioni, nei discorsi e nei comunicati-stampa. Virtù e vergogna architettoniche, d’ora in poi, in Francia saranno pubbliche.

Paracochi ideologici
in the field of the history of architecture in Italy for being the first modern art historian to take up the history of architecture and apply to monuments the same aesthetic criteria that had been previously applied only to painting and sculpture. He encountered the opposition of those historians of architecture, beginning with Gustavo Giovannoni, whose ideas were still “stuffed with positivism.”\textsuperscript{40} Venturi opposed a history of typologies as put forward by Giovannoni. In \textit{L’Arte}, Venturi writes: “A history of morphological types is an history of abstractions, whereas the artistic style of each different personality is something real. Disguised as science, the history of morphological types had become a history of fantasies.”\textsuperscript{41} The attempt by Giovannoni to offer a scientific historical method is criticized both by Venturi and Zevi. They reduce it to an imaginative and random history rather than a history that can claim objectivity, with the capacity to draw general rules from the particular. Zevi had also praised Venturi for being a different kind of critic and historian, moved by a “modern spirit” \textit{(spirito moderno)}, whose work he praised for being constantly alive:

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}
Una biografia di Adolfo Venturi resta animata, pungente, stimolatrice di nuovi problemi, mentre I contributi degli “specialisti” tradizionali di storia dell'architettura sono di regola freddi e noiosi, tutti calati in un'erudizione Che sembra dimentica dell'architettura come arte e del giudizio sul valore poetico o letterario o prosastico di un monumento come compito basilare dello storico vero.

A biography of Adolfo Venturi remains alive, pungent, stimulating new problems, whereas the traditional contributions in the history of architecture are normally cold and boring, all immersed in a kind of erudition that seems to forget architecture as a form of art, and about the judging of a poetic, or literary, or prosaic value of a monument as the basic task of the real historian.42

If architecture could find a coherent historical-critical direction, and such a model be promoted, the entire education system of architecture could be intelligible, and different educators would be teaching one and only subject, namely what Zevi deemed “Architettura nella sua storia” (Architecture in its history). As much as it was essential for the results of historical knowledge be tested at the drawing table, the interrelation of different disciplines within the educational curriculum became essential.

A class on the history of architecture had to shape the critical mentality of the students so that they could develop critical skills to evaluate monuments and buildings. And the importance of a history of architecture related to a strong and much wider cultural knowledge. “Students should know history, some economy, sociology or psychology. It is essential that they acknowledge people like Riegl, but it would be to no avail if they then ignore who John Dewey is,” wrote Zevi, confirming his reliance on the American pragmatist tradition, as opposed to the German idealism of either Kant or

Hegel reflected in Riegl’s art history as well as Giedion’s. German references rooted students to past traditions while American theories would drive them toward the future and new instances.

In a later talk in 1963 given at an American Institute of Architects conference on the methods of teaching history in architecture schools, Zevi further developed these ideas; he began his talk by showing why all three prevailing systems of teaching architecture, the *bottega* (master’s workshop), the Beaux Arts, and the Bauhaus, were outdated and inadequate. “In the method of the *bottega*, employed since the Renaissance, a young man who wanted to be an architect would select a master, would go to work and learn in his *bottega*, or office.”43 In all schools where you could have few students and a great personality among the teachers, this method could continue. But the question became whether this could be a method of mass education, or remain only a method applied in an elite school. Another drawback to this method is that to follow a master is not really a guarantee that one could get his process and not merely his results. Zevi mentioned as examples those who despite being for years at Taliesin or in Mies van der Rohe’s school often did not comprehend the essence of the design process at all. “They got the results; they became little Wrights, little Mieses. And then where are the masters, where are the great personalities today? It looks as if the new generation is not producing heroes.”44

What would then be the solution for educating a larger group of students without losing the privileged one-to-one relationship with a maestro? Zevi does not suggest a

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specific solution, but argues that the study of history illustrates different examples, as his own books *Saper vedere* and *Storia dell’architettura moderna* do, and could substitute for direct collaboration with an individual master architect. Zevi had a chance to practice his historical (design) method at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia [IUAV] in Venice, where he taught until 1963, as well as in Rome, where he started teaching immediately after Venice. Zevi’s institutional shift also marked a notable transition in the teaching approach of Italian architecture schools. Unlike what IUAV later became known for after the arrival of Tafuri, under the directorship of Samona at the time it remained linked to a more practical approach, albeit with a historical and eventually a more theoretical perspective, whereas in Rome, history and eclecticism became the dominant modes.

Indeed, the legitimation of a design practice through examples of past architecture represents a tradition with a long past. Zevi’s later work on Biagio Rossetti, the 1956 exhibition of and consequent volume on his works, published in 1960, and those on Michelangelo in 1964, constituted concrete examples of the operative role of history, both in research and in the formal results of his projects.\(^{45}\) Zevi opened the 1962 academic year in Venice with a talk on the contemporary repercussions of Michelangelo as an architect entitled “Attualità di Michelangelo architetto” (Contemporary Aspect/The actuality of Michelangelo as architect); the research on Michelangelo done by the Venice students was then exhibited in Rome in 1964.\(^{46}\) Students produced “critical models,” as a re-interpretation of Michelangelo work.\(^{47}\)

\(^{46}\) 10th March 1962.
Overall, Zevi’s *L’architettura* fulfilled some of the objectives it declared when it started. The insertion of Italian architecture into a wider international debate had been achieved by offering a valid and respected magazine showing Italian production. The magazine also aimed to complete a program of integrating different disciplines, which it also seemed to have succeeded at, and to offer an instrument to practicing architects. But the main objective of achieving a dialogue between contemporary architecture and the architecture of the past had barely succeeded. Zevi himself admitted this in 1957, while celebrating the magazine’s two-year anniversary.48 The short English version of the editorial sums up his view: “Despite our studying these problems month after month, we have still not achieved a true cultural integration, and what we do is only a survey of its various components. In fact, a periodical publication is not a book; its intent is the recording of the prevailing cultural climate. If this climate is eclectic, an integration cannot be accomplished which, if enforced, would remain merely theoretical.”49 Zevi’s books had been able to bridge temporalities, his magazine had not, partially because of the nature of the media itself. The format of a monthly magazine seemed to prevent such an integration from happening. Controversially, Zevi seemed also to imply that such integration meant an univocal version of history. Like Calvino’s Quinto Anfossi, torn between theory and practice, in the end Zevi was and remained a “historicist” man, holding to the role of one history and to historical progression as the solution to the fate of man.50 He pointed out that while a book tackles a problem and offers a solution to it, a magazine

49 Ibid.
should analyze, amplify, and document, but not conclude—in fact, conclusions kill vitality. And this brings us back to Hayden White’s distinction between chronicles and history. Following White, chronicles simply “terminate” with no attempt to construct a continuity, while histories “end,” offering a constructed conclusion. In the case of Zevi, he confirmed himself as the redeemer of chronicles, that could be transformed into history in books but not in his magazine. He tried to construct a continuity of history through integration, yet still in 1957, that meant offering certainties and conclusions, more than variations and potentialities. Zevi’s books are particular narratives characterized by plot, by a beginning, a middle, and an end; quite the opposite happened in his magazine, where his editorials left only open-ended questions. That was the difference between book and journal in historical method.

Indeed, Zevi’s editorial “Problemi architettonici” (Architectural problems) ended by declaring that an integration between chronicles and storia did not happen either: “a real integration of historical and critical method did not emerge: the distance between chronicles and history remains till this day.” Zevi however confirmed himself as a good storyteller for the historians to come, one who definitely integrated historical practice into his teaching methods. If for Zevi a Crocean synthesis between different attitudes and approaches toward historiography seemed not to have happened, the next chapters will unfold all these different approaches, as they appeared in books and magazines in the preceding two decades in an attempt to explain such failure.

Chapter 2 - Punto e da capo - Back to Square One: Origins, Myth, and *Metodo Storico* in Edoardo Persico’s Architectural Legacy

The best way to talk about a myth is, to narrate it, and start by introducing its main characters. Between 1948 and 1951, Giulio Einaudi released Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* written between 1929 and 1935, following a multi-year effort by the Communist Party to have them published.\(^1\) The publication caused a sensation, and one of its main consequences was a new awareness of the intellectual’s position in public life and multidisciplinary role in society. In his earlier book “Letteratura e vita nazionale” (Literature and national life, 1930), Gramsci had suggested the need to bridge the gap between intellectuals – in this case architects – and the people (or nation) and to “create a taste for the masses, as well as elevate such taste.”\(^2\)

In those same years, Zevi introduced the eclectic literary critic, fiction writer, as well as art and architecture critic Edoardo Persico as the representative of a historical method who could uniquely bridge history and practice. Both Persico and Zevi underlined the role of architecture in building a new society. Persico was born in Naples and was professionally and intellectually active from 1929 until his death in January 1936. His name only became established in architectural discourse thanks to Zevi’s twelve pages on Persico’s career in his *Storia dell’architettura moderna* published in 1950.\(^3\) Zevi elevated Persico to the rank of a mythological figure together with his American mythic hero, Frank Lloyd Wright. What Gramsci, Persico, and partially Wright have in common is the creation of a personal mythology through their intellectual

\(^1\) Antonio Gramsci started writing his *Prison Notebooks* in 1929, after almost three years in prison. Gramsci’s texts were published by Einaudi between 1948 and 1951.
formation, that arrived late in life or after they died. -- Persico died in 1936 and Gramsci in 1937 and the discovery of all three dates back to the late 1940s and early 1950s. Wright also experienced somehow an afterlife very late in his life in the 1940s. As a political thinker, literary and art critic, and architect, each of these figures achieved mythological status through writing, while also contributing to the creation of a collective myth via their drive to elevate and educate the masses.

This chapter is concerned with origins, the mythical phase that characterizes the start of every historical event, yet my main argument in this chapter is that myth, during this period, also becomes a method to write history.

Myths have been widely theorized and discussed in philosophical discourse. As a form of narrative, mythos (word or discourse) is the opposite of logos (a scientific rational thought), and it is normally conceived as a collective creation of the mind with religious, anthropological, sociological, or philosophical meanings. Yet, certainly myths have two contrasting sides. They mystify or hide true events, but on the other hand, even if false, they are able to detect and partly create realities, or narrate them through allegories. Unlike Plato, who accused myth of being a vehicle for “false news,” in the years pertaining to this story, Benedetto Croce, who, as we saw in the first chapter, was the most influential literary critic and philosopher both to Italian architecture critics and other intellectuals, had a very peculiar understanding of myth. Croce explains his views at length by reexamining the overlooked interpretation of myth proposed by the eighteenth century philosopher Giambattista Vico, who distinguished a number of different systems of mythic structures. In his Philosophy of Giambattista Vico, Croce distinguishes among different types of myth:
First, the theory of myth as allegory of philosophical truths (moral, political and so forth), and secondly, the theory of myth as the history of actual persons and events, adorned by the fancy which made heroes into gods (Euphemerism). […] A third system, also not without some ancient precedent, derived myths from particular nations, […] or from the original works of individual philosophers and poets. […] Myth is not an eternal form but a contingent product of the mind, born at a certain time and capable of dying or already dead.4

Vico, via Croce, essentially develops three forms of myth: myth as a form of narrative masking a timeless philosophical story; myth as the embellishment of reality; and third, myth as a signifier of the historical time and geographic space in which it originates. If Vico refused the idea of myth as a mere fable, in other texts, he also rejected myth as a tale embedded in its own time, which results, in a word, to understanding myth as “not a fable but history of such a kind as could be constructed by primitive minds, and strictly considered by them as an account of actual fact.” And Croce continues: “To Vico fables conceal the truth, but myths are not fable, they are indeed history. Also mythologies entail the inadequate form of the mind, namely the semi-imaginative form, identical with mythology.”5 In other words, myths are part of history, and it is hard to establish a definite distinction between these two practices.

Croce is particularly attentive to Vico’s historical interpretation of myth. In his earlier work La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell’arte (History Subsumed under a General Concept of the Arts, 1893), Croce first defined history as an artistic knowledge or artistic narrative. Croce rejects history as a form of science, that is, a

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5 Ibid., p. 64.
discipline that can develop general concepts and rules out of the particular. In a way, myth pertains to the illogical narrative, which is part of the historiographical development. This is surprising, considering that Croce accepted intuition as a part of historical thinking but harshly condemned the irrational, magical, religious part of history. Indeed, for Croce, intuition does not coincide with the irrational but is the first knowledge we have of the world, yet still distinct from logical thought.\textsuperscript{6}

Additionally, in his 1938 \textit{La storia come pensiero e azione} \textit{(History as the Story of Liberty)}, Croce explained the philosophy of history as a hybrid form of myth, as a dual narrative including a “history as thought” \textit{(storia pensata)} and an accidental history \textit{(storia accidentale)}. The “thought history” as history according to a thought-out plan is the essence – the Hegelian and immutable spirit – and the accidental component is the construction attached to it. This latter history is changeable according to its narrator, and develops in addition to the historical events.\textsuperscript{7} Via these two types, Croce essentially described the philosophy of history as a mental construction. This historical duality also creates for him a form of allegory, a different mode of telling a \textit{series of events}. \textit{History/Geschichte} then implies both the events and the telling of these events. Myth is a component open to different interpretations.

\textsuperscript{6} It’s only later that Croce theorized his synthesis between intuition and logical thought. He described intuition as our first experience of the world; second comes the logical thought that helps us to comprehend. Knowledge is the synthesis between the two. Croce does not consider the irrational as part of history. He writes: “There is talk, too, of the need for allotting an important part to the “irrational” in history: as though the irrational were an element of history and of reality and not merely the shadow projected by the rational, the negative aspect of its reality, intelligible and capable of representation only in so far as the rational is represented and understood,” \textit{(1938)}, B. Croce, \textit{History as the Story of Liberty}. New York: Norton & co. 1941, p. 163. In other words everything that may seem irrational at first can be explained rationally.

\textsuperscript{7} “Storia accidentale” is also explained by Croce as “non necessary” or “not essential,” which might represent a criticism of Hegel’s duality between “essential” and “non essential” history. For Croce both were part of history and historiography (which, for Croce coincide.)
Croce stressed the importance of myth in history for its intermediate nature between religion and praxis. Also, it is thanks to the creation of myths that ruling classes can convey ideas and ideologies to the masses. This mediation between religion and praxis as well as the ruling class and the masses is crucial in the case of Persico.

Though, the irrational condemned by Croce was used by the Fascist regime to appeal to the masses. The historian Delio Cantimori attributed the intellectual elite’s distancing from the masses in their incapacity to include the irrational element, as part of their rhetoric. On the opposite side, fascist politicians had been able to integrate the irrational in their propaganda so as to gain approval from the masses. Intellectuals needed to regain that public and approach common people, “going toward the people”.

What did “going toward the people” mean? The involvement of the intellectual in practices of populism stems from the complexities of the historical Italian background. Unlike other European countries, Italy had never experienced a popular revolution. Italy has never witnessed in its history the coincidence between and among the lower classes to have political changes, like France had with the revolution. Originating from the thoughts of the Southernist Gaetano Salvemini, in Prison Notebooks Gramsci contends that the Italian Risorgimento did not witness enough participation of the popular masses to the events that defined the Italian national unity. Undeniably, most political decisions have been made from above. This also holds true for the position that the intellectual holds in society, a position that had also become mythical.

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8 To this matter, Delio Cantimori insisted on the task of the intellectual in creating some of those myths to appeal to the masses and educate them. Cantimori detected Mussolini’s ability to use populist myths to promote his politics. See Patricia Chiantera-Stutte, Delio Cantimori, Rome: Carocci 2011.
A mythical figure: Edoardo Persico

It is within this shifting context of mythical construction informed by the work of Croce that the myth of Persico was started by Zevi in the early 1950s. Persico exemplifies myth in different ways: the myth of his own persona, the search for mythical origins, the mythical legacy of his writing, and finally the opposition of his own myth-making against other constructed myths, like the fascists’ rhetorical myths. Once again, with Persico, myth becomes a *method to write history*.

Besides becoming a myth, Persico remains a riddle. As of today, it seems that his political position did not rest with any known political affiliation. Born in Naples in 1900, he moved to Turin in 1927 and to Milan two years later. [Figure 1 -2] He mainly was a self-taught man; he started projects and left them unfinished. He began studying law, with the intention of writing a thesis about the right to strike, and later he wrote a novel that he never published. Among his many projects, he planned to have his own publishing house (together with the printmakers Ribet), but this too never materialized.\(^\text{10}\) The cause of his death remains unsolved; he was found dead lying in his bed in January 1936. This could have been a natural death due to his ill health or general living conditions (rumors had it he was so indigent that he could not pay his bills and lived in an attic); or a suicide (that’s the least probable option, for he loved life), or a political homicide (Persico was a busybody and his unclear political position, pro- or anti-fascist, made him a target for political powers). Whatever the reason, his abrupt death at the age of thirty-five contributed to the myth of Persico as a thinker and intellectual, to such an extent that the

Figure 1 Edoardo Persico, December 1935. © Giulia Veronesi, Tutte le Opere, Milan: Edizioni di Comunità 1964.
Figure 2 Edoardo Persico. © Andrea Cammilleri, *Dentro il labirinto*, Milan: Skira 2012.
popular Italian fiction writer and writer of detective stories Antonio Cammilleri made Persico the protagonist of his *Dentro il Labirinto* (Within the Labyrinth).\(^{11}\) \[Figure 3\]

The latter is a sort of “docufiction” – historical research mixed with a fictive reconstruction based on public fascination with a mysterious death, an ideal subject for a detective story. According to Cammilleri, Persico lived in poverty and went through several family dramas, but also met strong Italian intellectuals at that time such as Piero Gobetti, Pietro Maria Bardi, Alberto Sartoris, and Alfonso Gatto.\(^{12}\) Cammilleri suggested that his death may have been the deed of OVRA,\(^{13}\) the fascist police, since Persico expressed views that aligned both with fascism and anti-fascism, as well as with hardline Catholicism, liberalism, and socialism, which made him a problematic but also risky figure for the fascists. In that particular period, it was not rare for people to disappear because of their political and/or ambiguous affiliation.\(^{14}\) Yet, this same ambiguity made Persico an object of whimsical attraction.

Persico began as a critic of art and literature. Only in 1931 did he become a critic of architecture, while running *Casabella* with Giuseppe Pagano. Certainly he was a prolific and brilliant writer, but he did not produce a single finished book nor even a midsized essay; neither of his two major architectural texts, “Punto e da capo per l’architettura” (Back to Square One for Architecture, 1934) and “Profezia

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\(^{12}\) Piero Gobetti (Turin 1901-1926) was an active anti-fascist journalist, Pietro Maria Bardi (La Spezia 1900 – San Paolo del Brasile 1999) was an art critic, Alberto Sartoris (Turin 1901 – Pompaples 1998) was an Italian architect, and Alfonso Gatto (Salerno 1909- Orbetello 1976) was a poet and writer.

\(^{13}\) OVRA was the fascist secret police. Active from 1930 to 1943, it was responsible for controlling and repressing any antifascist activity and organization. The acronym was never explained; it could have been “Opera Volontaria per la Repressione dell’Antifascismo” (Voluntary Association for the Repression of Antifascism), “Organizzazione di Vigilanza e Repressione dell’Antifascismo” (Association for the Surveillance and Repression of Antifascism), among many others.

\(^{14}\) The archetypical novel about this type of disappearance is *La scomparsa di Majorana* (*The mystery of Majorana*) by Leonardo Sciascia, author of *A ciascuno il suo* (*To Each his Own*) published in 1975 by Einaudi, in which Sciascia tells the story of the physicist Ettore Majorana who mysteriously disappeared in 1938.
Figure 3  Andrea Camilleri, *Dentro il labirinto*, Milan: Skira 2012.
dell’architettura” (Prophecy of Architecture, 1935), exceeds ten pages. His plan to compile a comprehensive historical narrative of architecture never materialized. Indeed, his first critical history of modern architecture was envisioned and sketched out but never realized. His disparate writings were published as fragments, aphorisms, and articles, mostly in Casabella and Domus, and never cohered into a comprehensive history.

Persico became known even among a more generalist public. In 1935, just two years after starting his publishing house, Giulio Einaudi asked Attilio Cabiati in an unpublished letter to write an article about the Roosevelt Plan, while planning a special issue of his magazine, La Cultura, about architecture. This was a way for Einaudi to insert himself into the fervid architectural debate. Persico would edit this issue of the journal, and in the long term Einaudi thought Persico could edit a volume on architecture to be part of the Einaudi Encyclopedia; an idea, as we will see in the fifth chapter, that came back in the forties. But neither the issue nor the encyclopedia ever materialized, because of Persico’s decision to retreat from the project. [Figures 4 to 7] The purpose of the meeting between Einaudi and Persico is revealed three decades later, by a letter by Einaudi to Persico’s close acquaintance, Giulia Veronesi, written in 1965. Einaudi wrote to Veronesi to say he was sorry not to be the one to edit Persico’s papers. He confesses an almost “mythical admiration” for the critic, adding:

Ricordo una conferenza di lui a Torino, che fu per me allora giovanissimo […] una specie di “iniziazione” ai misteri di un’estetica dell’uomo, in contrapposizione non solo all’estetica dominante, ma anche I remember a lecture by him in Turin; it was for me, at that time I was so young […] a sort of initiation to the mysteries of a man’s aesthetic, [which was] unlike the dominant
a quella – almeno cosi parve a me allora – differs from the dominant Croce aesthetic.  

But it is Giulia Veronesi’s edition of the two-volume collection of most of Persico’s texts published by Edizioni di Comunità that made Persico mythical for generations to come. Her two volumes of Persico’s Tutte le opere are still the most widely used source for Persico’s writings. Her mission seemed to be that of creating a national hero, so, at times, her historical account becomes questionable. For example, a propos Persico’s critical commentary “The Turin FIAT Works” published in in Motor Italia and describing the condition of Fiat workers, Veronesi idolizes Persico as a FIAT worker.  

Alla Fiat, sarà uomo di fatica, le bianche mani aristocratiche i pavimenti e i gradini della sconfinata fabbrica, sarà veramente piegato fino a terra. Ma proprio allora, alzando gli occhi “vedrà”. Vicini a lui più del suo Dio, del quale gli sembrano assumere il volto, vedrà gli operai della Fiat, sarà uno di loro, con la loro pazienza, il loro ordine, la loro fatica, la loro speranza; e la loro volontà. Da allora, la sua vita sarà nuova.  

He would be a drudge for Fiat, he would wash the floors and the stairs of the immense factory with his white aristocratic hands, he would be really curved on the floor. But just then, he would see ‘SEE.’ Near him, closer than his God, he would see the Fiat workers, with a God’s face, he would be one of them, with their patience, their order, their fatigue, their hope; and their will. Since then, his life would be anew.  

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15 Einaudi to Veronesi, 13th May 1965 (AE, Veronesi folder). Einaudi also asked Soldati to contribute with an article on American architecture and skyscrapers. Soldati and Einaudi had already collaborated on a series of novels and short stories aiming to be valuable literary products that could at the same time appeal to the masses. See Einaudi to Soldati, 12th November 1934. L. Marangoni, Pensare i libri, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri 1999, p. 19.  
17 Novembre 1934

Edoardo Persico
Via dei Colli n.23
Milano

Caro Persico,

Saremmo molto lieti se potessimo annoverarLa tra i collaboratori de LA CULTURA. Come l’amico Levi Le ha scritto, noi stiamo preparando un numero unico sull’architettura, che contiamo di far uscire fra un paio di mesi. Attendiamo con grande desiderio l’articolo di cui Lei ha fatto cenno, e La ringraziamo sin d’ora per tutti gli altri collaboratori che Ella potrà procurarci: c’interessano tanto gli argomenti quanto i nomi da Lei indicati.

Con i più cordiali saluti.

[Signature]

Figure 4 Einaudi asks Persico to collaborate on his magazine La Cultura. Giulio Einaudi to Edoardo Persico, November 27th 1934. © Einaudi Archive.
Caro Einaudi,

non son venuto a Torino, ma Le ho scritto perché ho vissuto dei giorni molto tristi. Oggi, finalmente, ho un po' di pace, ed è Lei la prima persona di cui mi ricordo.

Mi dia notizia del numero famoso, e conti sulla mia buona volontà di riguadagnare questi giorni perduti. Naturalmente, scriverò oggi stesso a Carlo per quanto riguarda il materiale da inviare. La supplico di non essere in collera.

Mi scriva, pure, del "Repertorio Einaudi", autorizzandomi a sottoporlo un progetto definitivo: argomenti, collaboratori, indicazioni, ecc.

Come vede, ho diritto alla Sua indulgenza, almeno per i buoni propositi.

Mi scrivano piazza XXII Marzo n. 4. Le sarei molto grato di questo perché vado raramente in ufficio, e ricevo così la corrispondenza con enorme ritardo.

Cordialmente Suo

Ed. Persico

Figure 5 Persico writes back to Einaudi that he is interested in collaborating with the publishing house. Edoardo Persico to Giulio Einaudi, probably late 1934. © Einaudi Archive.
Einaudi solicits Persico to submit materials for the realization of the magazine. Giulio Einaudi to Edoardo Persico, March 5th 1935. © Einaudi Archive.
Egregio sig. Einaudi,

sono stato quattro giorni assente da Torino e tornando domenica sera ho trovato la Sua cortese lettera. Mi dispiace di non aver potuto intervenire alla riunione di sabato per il "Saggiatore", della quale ho ieri avuto una relazione dall'amico Tricomi. Ma parlando con lui di questo argomento mi sono accorto che io non avevo esattamente compreso tutti gli inten-dimenti con cui sorge la nuova rivista, alla quale avevo dato la mia adesione come ad opera di carattere esclusivamente scientifico. Invece vedo ora che l'iniziativa può avere in futuro degli sviluppi ai quali non desidererei associarmi, e perciò preferisco fin da ora, con rincrescimento, ritirare la mia adesione.

Voglia scusarmi, e gradire l'espressione della mia stima e i miei cordiali saluti.

[Signature] Persico

Figure 7 Persico changes his mind. He will not collaborate on the magazine. Edoardo Persico to Giulio Einaudi, December 12th 1939. (Likely a mistake and probably 1935 as Persico died on January 1936). © Einaudi Archive.
Veronesi’s heroic prose may sound as delirious and raving as some of the most feverish personal manuscripts by Persico himself, such as the letters he wrote to some of his close friends. But her eulogistic attitude also shows that it was an entire circle of Persico devotees that created his myth—a myth that Persico initially created himself in his dramatic interactions with writers. Persico deserves a critical portrayal than this uncritical raving style; indeed, he set an equally lyric tone in his own writings, in which one can find a mythical shade of more subtle kind. Persico’s style was unusual and eccentric, and often embedded with fantastic ideas.

Although he left a number of brilliant writings, it is still hard to believe that he would have written the history he planned, even had he not died young. However, his ideas and suggestions were eventually taken over by later historians of architecture, first of all by his friend and devotee, Veronesi, and later on by Zevi, who even suggested building a history of architecture from Persico’s texts so as to give them a narrative sequence. In a section of his 1950 *Storia dell’Architettura Moderna* dedicated to Persico, Zevi writes:

Chi esamina la letteratura critica sul movimento architettonico moderno nei Those who examine the critical literary sequence. In a section of his 1950 *Storia dell’Architettura Moderna* dedicated to Persico, Zevi writes:

Chi esamina la letteratura critica sul movimento architettonico moderno nei Those who examine the critical

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18 See for example Persico’s letters to Piero Gobetti, who at that time was one of the most respected intellectuals in Naples. In the late twenties, Piero Gobetti was initially very close to Persico, and happy to accept Persico’s suggestions for new novels that were never to be realized, like *Il porto lontano* (*The Distant Harbor*). Following an amicable correspondence with the Turin writer, Persico would then start harassing him with nonsense and feverish letters: “Please let us remain friends and have some pity toward this idiot / moron who really loves you.” “Ah, Gobetti, if I were in Turin now! Next to you! […] It is necessary that you help me forever: if I do not have your help I will be lost forever, really,” “I know I do not deserve your very bitter letter, however, I beg your pardon, once again, for all my wrongdoing.” “I hug you, and I am sure you don’t feel any resentment towards me.” “I am looking forward to a letter from you, you will make me so happy! You cannot imagine how I suffered thinking you would forget about me! I only have your friendship: therefore don’t laugh about my feelings.” “I thank you for your advice, quite the contrary, I beg you to scold me often, it will serve me well.” “If you had me in Turin, even with a bunch of slaps, I would be a different man today.” Persico to Gobetti 26th March, 16th April, 12th May, 12th July, 15th July, 28th July, 2nd September, 28th October, 7th November, 19th November, end of November, 19th December, 30th December 1924 (wrongly dated by Giulia Veronesi 30th November, repeated by Riccardo Mariani), 24th January 1925. All in *Tutte le Opere*, Vol. I, pp. 315, 317, 318, 322, 324, 326, 329, 332, 334, 335, 337; *Oltre l’architettura* cit. pp. 243-245, 251, 253, 255, 257-262.
vari paesi del mondo constata che, fino al 1950, il contributo italiano è stato fra i più poveri. Eppure ogni storia della storiografia artistica dovrebbe registrare un apporto originale e significativo: il pensiero di Edoardo Persico. Se il suo nome è ancora largamente ignorato fuori d’Italia e spesso non compare nemmeno nelle più aggiornate selezioni di critica d’arte, ciò avviene perché non ha prodotto un libro, né una serie organica di saggi, sull’architettura moderna. Il suo pensiero, espresso a sprazzi, per illuminazioni, in brani epigrafici talora inspiegabilmente allusivi, non presenta uno sviluppo individuabile con chiarezza. Anche leggendo la raccolta completa degli scritti è difficile afferrane la visione storica e le motivazioni ideali: viene il desiderio di scomporli distribuendone le parti in sequenza logica, quasi di riscrivere Persico con le sue stesse parole per compiere quel lavoro che la divampante febbre intellettuale, la rapidità di una mente capace di folgorazioni geniali specie in senso reattivo all’ambiente in cui viveva, un sentimento così sconsolato della civiltà da indurre più all’intervento delucidatore di una crisi.

movement in the various countries, up to 1950, will find that the Italian contribution was among the poorest. Yet, every history of historiography should record an original and significant contribution: that of Edoardo Persico. If his name is still largely ignored outside Italy, and he appears only rarely in recent art criticism, this is because he has neither produced a book nor an organic series of essays on modern architecture. His thoughts are expressed in flashes and epigraphic texts, at times inexplicably allusive, but not clearly developed. Even by reading his complete collection of writings on his vision of history, it is difficult to grasp ideals and motivations. We have the desire to compose these sparse parts in a logical sequence, to rewrite Persico in his own words, in order to make that work that his raging intellectual fever, the speed of his brilliant mind, especially in reaction to the environment in which he lived, and finally his premature death, did not permit to happen.19

Zevi anticipated Persico’s contribution to an Italian historiography of architecture based on the critical tradition of Croce. He described Persico as a pioneer of the so-called *metodo storico* (historical method), by which he meant that practitioners have to know the history of architecture and it should inform their design, but also that the history of architecture should be informed by its practice. This operative history is different from Manfredo Tafuri’s “operative criticism,” a criticism practiced by historians like Giedion and Zevi who aimed to influence the professional field, by supporting and promoting architects with whom they had an intellectual exchange.

While Persico thought that history must be viewed independently from the practice of architecture, he also thought that practice was part of history, and that history could be [re]written through design practice. It is exactly through exhibition design, a form of architectural practice, that Persico demonstrates his theoretical positions. This was not uncommon in those years, the historian Riccardo Mariani commented that the thirties were characterized by the coincidence of theory and practice: “in order to exist, modern architecture needs not only the building but also a literature related to it.”

It has been noted that the first historians of modern architecture, from Gustav Adolf Platz to Adolf Behne, and from Henry-Russell Hitchcock to Sigfried Giedion, act more as militant architectural critics.

Indeed, in *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, Zevi spent twelve pages portraying Persico as the protagonist of prewar Italian architectural criticism even though he acknowledged Persico’s relative marginality due to the fact that he never produced a

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20 “*In effetti, come molti scorreranno di lì a poco, l’architettura moderna, per esistere, ha bisogno tanto dell’opera quanto di una propria specifica letteratura,*” R. Mariani, *Razionalismo e architettura moderna – storia di una polemica*, Milano: Edizioni Continuità 1989, p. 16.
book (something which in fact later added to Persico’s appeal). Zevi pointed out Persico’s importance for his groundbreaking role, since the canonical histories of modern architecture by Pevsner, Giedion, and Behrendt had not been published when Persico died in 1936. “He touched upon the most crucial points of a modern historical interpretation,” Zevi writes. The main interest for Zevi was Persico’s search for the origins of modern architecture, and Zevi especially shared Persico’s refusal of a technical and technocratic interpretation of them. Persico insisted that:


Modern architecture is not what Americans cynically think of as the engineering solution of the ‘building problem’ [English in the original], it is not Le Corbusier’s standard, or Taut’s (answer to) ‘Sozialen Fragen’ [German in the original]. Its destiny and prophecy is to claim the fundamental freedom of the spirit.

Zevi seemed also to use Persico as a device to criticize Giedion’s position toward history. Zevi described as “extraordinary” Persico’s characterization of Wright and expressionism as “vital tendencies” of modern architecture, pointing out in his *Storia dell’architettura moderna* that “Giedion neglects both of them.”

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Indeed Persico looked to history in order to find the most ancient origins or the “pre-history” of Italian culture. And what are origins if not myths, the desperate search for one’s origin? Each beginning is historical, but the origins are always mythical. Moreover, this is precisely the origin of what Bruno Zevi later described as the “historical method” — a historiographical mode based on a research of origins. Persico seemed to embody the origins of a historical method by becoming the method himself. Yet, Zevi’s fascination with Persico is in detecting these modern origins precisely in Wright. Persico was not yet touched by the myth of America as a promised land, quite the opposite, it was Zevi who would later highlight Persico as a pioneer in having recognized Wright as one of the founders of a modern type of architecture and the expression of a “Free Spirit,” as a symbol of freedom and individuality. On the contrary, Persico made clear reference to the European origins of Wright’s practice: “I know how much comes from Ruskin and Morris in this American who designs floating houses on a river but preaches the standard.” In other words, America’s development of a new architecture was first informed by Europe. To Persico, the myth of America had an European pre-history. To become a pioneer Wright had to wait a few years before blooming in Zevi’s historiography.

Persico also tries to insert Italian intellectuals in the origin of a modern architecture. In his last years, active as an architecture critic, he engaged in the European

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28 The American myth will be analyzed in the following chapter. Ironically the American myth faded when the United States started to be influenced by Europe and to integrate European theories.
debate—“we are the wisest men in Europe,” he would write—which he reflected in the field of architecture.

With one of his two major architectural texts, “Back to Square One,” Persico participated in the architectural debate around the state of Italian architecture within a broader European discourse. Persico continued promoting Carlo Rava’s article, “Dell’europeismo in architettura” (About Europeanism in Architecture) written in 1928, in which he explained how a new Italian architecture needed to follow European examples such as Fahrenkamp in Germany while maintaining a national character. But just three years later, the same author, Rava, retreated in his pro-European stance by promoting a more Mediterranean character in “Panorama del razionalismo” pitching in on the promotion of the Mediterranean myth. Persico found a major contradiction in this article by Rava and replied by writing “Back to Square One for Architecture,” written for Domus, while he was still the main editor of Casabella. [Figure 8–9] “Back to Square One” can be considered Persico’s most important architectural manifesto, pointing to the deficiencies of both Italian and European critics and predicting the failure of Italian architects to undergo a much-needed renewal. The title of the piece is indeterminate, and contains its own contradictions. In Italian, punto e da capo means “back to square one.” But in a longer syntax, da capo also means to “begin anew,” to

30 Edoardo Persico got closer to Gio Ponti at that time, and the latter asked him to write this editorial for Domus in November 1934. Gio Ponti wrote a small introduction to the text, referring to it as compelling one “[proponiamo ai nostri lettori […] la lettura di questo saggio, serio e documentato, che Edoardo Perisco ha scritto apposta per Domus, p.1” E. Persico, “Punto e da capo per l’architettura,” in Domus, n. 83, November 1934, pp. 1-9.
Figure 8 Cover of *Domus*, November 1934; included Edoardo Persico’s “Punto e da capo per l’architettura.”
Lo stile nell’architettura e nell’arredamento moderno, a cura di Gio Ponti

**PUNTO E DA CAPO PER L’ARCHITETTURA**

Proponiamo ai nostri lettori, anche a quelli che fino ad oggi siano restati indifferenti alla polemica sull’architettura nuova, la difficile lettura di questo saggio, serio e documentato, che Edoardo Persico ha scritto apposta per Domus. Domus ha accompagnato, in tutta la sua estensione e in tutte le espressioni che apparivano da incoraggiare, il manifestarsi dell’architettura moderna da noi. Oggi diverso, e pur conseguente, è il suo compito: da un lato illustrare esaurientemente tutto ciò che di utile e pratico è destinato all’abitazione ed all’arredamento; da un altro, contribuire — attraverso una selezione sempre più severa di esemplari — alla formazione di un gusto che sia espressione di una civiltà.

Questo studio è un contributo, anche in senso accademico, alla formazione di un gusto dell’architettura moderna, gusto che nel nostro Paese deve essere rivelato su basi non dibattitistiche. Contributo altresì ad un esercizio responsabile della critica dell’architettura, che ha dato così scarsi provi di sè a proposito del concorso per la «Domus Litoria», capovolgendo un problema così alto di civiltà in uno di pura scenografia.

Persico ritiene che la formazione dell’architetto moderno sia da riprendere presso di noi, affinché l’arte pratica raggiunga, anche in Italia, l’autorità che altrove le viene da una effettiva tradizione moderna.

In questo saggio, stabilisce la carenza di una serie critica italiana d’architettura moderna, e l’inconsistenza di quella straniera a cui la nostra fa capo, l’autore reputa come pericolosi ed equivoci gli attributi di «mediterranea» o «corporativa» applicati senz’altro all’architettura nazionale con lo scopo di legittimarla in Italia.

Il primo di questi argomenti gli sembra arbitrario, in quanto le opere dei nostri artisti rimangono tuttavia, e fatalmente, nell’ambito di quel gusto internazionale espresso inevitabilmente da talune esigenze dell’epoca, e dai fattori tecnici. Il secondo non gli sembra ancora chiaro, attribuito ad opere che per il loro contenuto non derivano da quella realtà sociale corporativa che si va realizzando da noi. La struttura teorica dell’architettura «nostra» è però, secondo Persico, ancora troppo incerta e prevedibile perché valga a definire uno stile nuovo in Italia, uno stile nuovo italiano. Occorre dunque formare questa struttura.

Il saggio si conclude con un «punto e da capo», cioè con l’invito a stabilire i primi termini di un problema, che all’inferno d’ogni errore critico, rappresenti da noi l’adeguarsi del gusto agli ideali della civiltà nuova, un problema, come si vede, della moralità più viva ed attuale.

**GIO PONTI**

Chi avesse modo di scorrere tutta la polemica recente sull’architettura, dispera per i giornali e le riviste italiane, si documenterebbe dopo questa fatica non tanto sull’argomento della discussione, quanto sulle forme di falsa critica che Cresce enumerata nel «Brevario di estetica». Secondo il filosofo, le forme capitali sono otto, ma l’inverso nel lettore della polemica risulterebbe a stabilirsi almeno nove, summandoli le critiche che non hanno merito da dire, e che possono perciò parlare di tutto indifferenemente. In verità, questa non è nemmeno falsa critica, perché non corrisponde a nessuna idea sia pure errata dell’arte; la chiamiamo così per comodità di linguaggio, e ne teniamo conto perché è stata fra gli aspetti più vistosi della polemica. Naturalmente, non tutte le cose che si siano scritte per questa occasione sono da buttare via, d’assegnare ad una bibliografia dell’ignoranza; ognuno leggerà con profitto, ne «L’Arté» ed in «Casabella», gli articoli di Lionello Venturi, di Giulio Carlo Argan, di Giuseppe Pagano, e di Carlo Levi. Degli altri, senz’altro, arrivare al mucchio della cartaccia, si può dire che sono stati utili mezzi di incitamento e di raccolta proporzionati alle esigenze della vita quotidiana; e ve ne sono di chiaro ed onesti. Alcuni di P. M. Bardi, altri raccolti da Gio Ponti ne: La casa all’italiana (1), di Plinio Marconi; di Alberto Sartoris (2). Ma, a voler restare sul solo, di tutta la gran discussione non rimane più di quel tanto che secondo il giurato di Courier (3) è il minimo per comporre una «breviario»: si e no trenta pagine. Sono quelle che abbiamo indicate: ne «L’Arté», il saggio di Argan su: Il pensiero critico di Antonio Sant’Elia; in «Casabella», Per l’architettura nuova di Venturi, Punti di partenza della nuova architettura di Argan, L’estetica delle costruzioni in acciaio di Pagano, Considerazioni sull’architettura di Levi (4). Dei libri che, direttamente o indirettamente, si rifanno alla polemica non è il caso di parlare, perché gli autori, tutti più o meno interessati alla disputa, non vi hanno messo un talento od un impegno maggiore che negli articoli:

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Figure 9 Edoardo Persico, “Punto e da capo per l’architettura,” in Domus, n. 83, November 1934, pages 1-9, with a preface by Gio Ponti.
“begin from scratch.” Therefore, on the one hand, it stands for the possibility that Rationalism can lead to a new period in architecture, following the European example, which, as Persico noted, Italian architects failed to realize. On the other hand, *da capo* means to start once again after a debate, the debate being the one between Rationalism and Functionalism that produced no real alternative. Persico ends the article by reminding his readers that:

> La storia del razionalismo italiano è quella di un’esasperazione sentimentale: incosciente del sentimento che la metteva sullo stesso piano dell’architettura tedesca e della russa, si è esaurita in una ricerca disperatamente romantica. I razionalisti italiani sono così degli antistorici: inconsapevoli dell’unica realtà necessaria alla loro conquista.

The history of Italian Rationalism is that of a sentimental exasperation: unconscious of the sentiment that was placing it on the same page of the German and Russian architecture, it was exhausted in a desperately romantic search. Thus, Italian Rationalists are anti-historical: unconscious of the only necessary reality to their conquest.31

Persico detected the danger in the Italian architects’ “retreat.” Like Germany and Russia, Italy was regressing to a form of romanticism by returning to traditional ideas. These traditionalist movements, such as the one supporting Italy’s *mediterraneità,* seemed to become anti-historical steps, backward steps instead of forward steps. For Persico, moving back to square one was a missed chance to start a new direction. Rational architects should not borrow forms from previous historical times and thus miss their chance to develop a new architecture.

He once again was ahead of the architectural criticism of his time, in accusing Italian architects of an inability to detach themselves from the past, and implement or even propose a new Italian – as well as European – taste.

To give a sense of the context in which Persico was operating, it is important to note that between 1926 and 1931, Italian architectural discourse was primarily concerned with the definition of Rationalism, and the debate surrounding the use of the words “rational” and “functional.” The founding of Gruppo 7 (1926-1927) marked the official birth of Italian razionalismo, with the publication of four theoretical essays in La rassegna Italiana between December 1926 and May 1927. In these articles the group explains their intents and what they think architettura razionale must be. These articles do not take the form of a manifesto; rather, they appear to be critiques and reflections on specific topics. In these four texts, razionalità is meant to be a synthesis between two stances: one is close to funzionalismo (funzionalità is the source and reason of beauty), and the other is ascribable to what is thought to be architettura classica. Tradition and classical style (classicità) is for them deeply embedded in Italy. Classicità is intended here as a reference to the “spirit” of classicism and not to classicist form – an important distinction – and this “spirit” will always be visible. The members of Gruppo 7 wanted to reach a compromise between tradition and the Spirito Nuovo, explicitly referring to Le Corbusier, and they aimed to level individual differences (which is why they signed each of their

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32 Gruppo 7 was composed by Ubaldo Castagnola, Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Gino Pollini, Carlo Enrico Rava, Giuseppe Terragni. They started with a polemic tone, gathering around the Politecnico di Milano and declaring they want to convey the “spirito nuovo.” “Il existe un esprit nouveau” they say by quoting Le Corbusier. The articles by Gruppo 7 were collected and published in M. Cenammo, Materiali per l’analisi dell’architettura moderna. La prima esposizione Italiana di architettura razionale, (Napoli: Fiorentino 1973), pp. 37-90.

four articles en masse). The problem of this new architecture’s style became the central topic of discussion with the group of *tradizionalisti*, and stirred up the problematic of an eventual Italian supremacy in modern architecture, through a Mediterranean interpretation of the Rationalist vocabulary.

Referring to Carlo Enrico Rava’s essays “Panorama on Rationalism” and “Europeanism,” Persico quotes Rava in “Back to Square One”: 34

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Affermazione - in seno al razionalismo europeo - di una decisa tendenza italiana lineare e intransigente.” E ancora:
“precisazione dei caratteri della tendenza razionalista italiana.

Affermazione di “classicismo” e di “mediterraneità” – intesi nello spirito, e non nella forma o nel folklore –, in contrasto col “nordismo,” col “barocchismo” e “coll’arbitrio romantico” di una parte della nuova architettura europea.” Queste poche righe bastano a provare di quali equivoci si è giovata la polemica nel proposito di smussare tutti gli angoli, e di andare d’accordo con Dio e con il diavolo.

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35 E. Persico, “Punto e da capo per l’architettura,” in *Domus*, n. 83, Nov 1934, p. 3.
Persico mainly criticized Rava’s ambiguity in trying to balance between both directions: European and Italian, modern and classic. He criticized Rava – and rationalist architects – for their ambiguity in wanting to adhere to both stances. But mainly he accused them for appealing to the concept of *mediterraneità* without really suggesting a new style. Thus, he argued that they failed to achieve a national and more essential taste or style. Persico detected the crisis and the imminent decline of Italian architecture, as evident in contemporary architectural practice, which was withdrawing toward mannerist classicist styles. The only solution for Italian architecture would be to achieve again, “for the first time since the war, a frankly European experience, but the limits emerge in the weakness with which they [the protagonists of Italian Rationalism] tackle the conflict on practical ground.”

It seems that Persico’s main concern for architecture of his period was the unrealized execution of Gruppo 7’s declaration.

### A Prophecy of Architecture

Lastly, in 1935 Persico published his most lyrical text, “Prophecy of Architecture,” in which he continued to support modernism over classicism, claiming that the debate came down to taste, not substance. Though, the concept of prophecy, different from myth, is also one of Croce’s legacies, and most important, it includes the divine within the idea of myth, and one where to look for a pre-history. Indeed, in *Storia d’Europa nel secolo decimonono* (*History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*) of 1931, Croce considered *profezia* (prophecy) not as a history foretelling the future (which is the

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36 " […] tentare in Italia, per la prima volta dopo la guerra, un’esperienza francamente europea […] i limiti emergono nella fragilità con cui affrontano lo scontro sul terreno pratico," E. Persico, “Punto e da capo per l’architettura,” in *Domus*, Nov 1934, p. 4.
Figure 10 Cover of the first edition of *Profezia dell’architettura* (Prophecy of Architecture) by Edoardo Persico, published in Milan by I Coriandoli Muggiani Editore in 1945. “Profezia” was a conference held in Turin, January 21st 1935.
Figure 11 “Prophecy of Architecture” is the only text by Edoardo Persico to be translated into English. Translation by Diane Ghirardo in *Archetype*, Spring and Summer 1979.
ancient definition of the term), but as a past that can inform the present. A prophecy is a learned lesson, a past example to be used as an experience for the present. Besides, the Crocean history cannot be contemplated, but has to be lived through work and action.\footnote{Non la storia del futuro (come i vecchi trattatisti definivano la profezia), ma quella del passato che si ricapitola nel presente, è necessaria all’opera e all’azione che non sarebbe veramente tale se non fosse rischiarata da luce di verità; e da tale necessità è nata anche questa rimeditazione che abbiamo voluto fare, e invitare a fare, della storia del secolo decimonono.” B. Croce, Storia d’Europa nel secolo decimonono [1930], Milan: Adelphi 1991, p. 429.} In Persico’s prophecy, architecture acquires a divine task and can build a new world: “We believe in a new world. This is the prophecy of architecture. […] Its destiny, its prophecy is to claim the fundamental freedom of spirit.”\footnote{“Il suo destino [dell’architettura moderna] la sua profezia, è di rivendicare la fondamentale libertà dello spirito,” E. Persico, “Profezia dell’architettura,” p. 61.} The statement is idealistic enough to be quoted in the opening of Zevi’s autobiography Zevi su Zevi in 1977.\footnote{B. Zevi, “Benedetto Croce e la riforma della storiografia architettonica,” in Zevi su Zevi, Milano: Editrice Magma 1977, pp. 23-31. The speech has been held at the IUAV in 1952 and the text has not longer been published in later editions of the book.}

The essay’s style is quite lyrical. As Diane Ghirardo points out in her introduction to the first English translation of this text: “his [Persico’s] citations from Croce’s charges of superficiality, puerility, hyperbole, rhetoric, theatricality, haranguing, decreeing, crying, singing and flag-waving, with reference to certain features of the Revolutions of 1848 applied equally to the phenomenon of Fascism in the 1930s.”\footnote{D. Ghirardo, “Prophecy of Architecture,” in Archetype, Volume 1, Summer 1979, Number II, p. 17.} [Figure 11]

Persico’s reference to modern architecture’s “destiny, prophecy, and freedom of spirit” implies his idealistic connection to Hegel through Croce, to whom Persico was attached with an almost fanatic or religious adherence. The religious quasi-fanaticism was also detected by the historian Angelo D’Orsi who described Croce’s legacy among Persico’s intellectual milieu, and points out that: “The young fellow [Persico] who started by studying law, without too much certainty, seemed to be interested in Croce’s neo-idealism in the name of a philosophical religion, while Croce still was the most respected
D’Orsi, with his historical and literary perspective, places the young Persico within Neapolitan Catholicism. He describes Persico’s position as that of a militant Catholic, oriented more towards the divine than the magical. Following his Catholic beliefs, as well as Croce’s writings, Persico argued that architecture had more of a divine task than a political one. Additionally, through Croce, the very Catholic Persico identified a spiritual problem in the history of architecture. Croce detected two general driving principles for every form of art: the first concerns the reasons that have moved the artist, such as his ideas, traditions, habits, and influences; the second concerns the “artistic synthesis,” in other words the artist’s vision. This is what Croce called the “psychological problem or the spiritual problem of art,” its Hegelian spirit, so to speak. Nevertheless, to Croce, architecture does not always have a spiritual interpretation as art, whereas for Persico it does, and it is also deeply connected to religion. Croce rejects any irrational interpretation, any divination, i.e. the “imaginative universals created by the animating fancy.”


42 D’Orsi mentions Persico’s idea of starting his own magazine, Cattolici, but that also never materialized. Persico wrote to his friend Curcio and signed letters as “Cattolici. Editor in chief Edoardo Persico.” Although D’Orsi doubts the magazine ever existed, De Seta in his introduction to *Edoardo Persico* thought the magazine did exist because there are letters mentioning subscriptions. C. De Seta, *Il destino dell’architettura*. Persico, Giolli, Pagano, Napoli: Laterza 1985, p. 135.

43 It is necessary to study the practical reasons that have operated in the artist’s mind, as the ideas and the time, the traditions, the habits of school, the influences of foreign countries, the sentimentality of these or those architectural and decorative forms; and so on. It is necessary to not give in to these, but to seek the artistic synthesis, that is the essential and dominant moment in which the artist has achieved his own vision or image, which transforms the practical work into artistic work. In B. Croce, “Di alcune difficoltà concernenti la storia artistica dell’architettura,” [1904] in *La storia artistica dell’architettura*, p. 88.

44 B. Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, London: H. Latimer 1913, p. 70. Hegel is never directly mentioned in the text, and for Croce architecture has an autonomous character. The relation between Persico and Hegel, at that time, is uncertain, because Hegel’s *Aesthetics* had not been translated until much later (it was published in 1963 by Feltrinelli in Milan). Hegel is mainly filtered and known through Croce, especially to those who could not read German. During the “uncertain years” as Calvino called them, namely 1955-57, after the publication of the Kruschev Report, Einaudi goes through an economic crisis, and thinks about translating the *Aesthetic* by Hegel but this was not materialized. Marangoni explains that “Croce intellectual Hegemony” may be the reason behind this delay. L. Marangoni, *Pensare I Libri* 762-763.
from the mind’s need to allay its desire to understand the phenomena of nature. The irrational is a product of man’s needs in a condition of moral poverty. But at this point, Persico detaches himself from the Neapolitan philosopher, as to Persico everything is part of history and inserted in a broader religious scheme.

**European Origins**

Within European styles, Persico preferred the German school over the French. In a letter to his brother Renato, while begging him for money, Persico revealed his umpteenth project, this time to be realized by a new publishing house “characterized by its German style,” different from the French-style publishing house (the printmakers Ribet) he claimed to be working with at the time. Why the need for two different publishing houses? Persico was planning to have another personal “modern publishing house titled ‘E.P. ed., which stands for Edoardo Persico editor.’” The difference between the two houses – both fictional – would be Persico’s personal touch. Both publishing houses – would be modified according to Persico’s own taste but following two different directions.45 Croce gave a clearer explanation of the difference between the German and French schools of publishing:

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Nella forma dei libri francesi c’è la ricerca della conversazione; in quella dei libri tedeschi, del sistema. Nella forma dei libri French books aim for conversational form, German books for a system. Italian books, in general, aim for oration. If I
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italiani c’è, invece, generalmente, la ricerca oratoria. Per diletto mi rivolgo ai libri francesi; per istudio, a libri tedeschi; quando voglio annoiarmi ai libri italiani.

This may give us a sense of what Persico thought to be the difference between the two national “styles” of publishing but also between the two nations. A French publishing house would publish literature and narrative books (what Ribet was supposed to do), whereas a German publishing house would produce systematic books on the history of architecture. Persico’s own production would have resulted in the combination of the two, as all his texts show a mix of a scientific rigor and fictive ironic invention, through historical allusions, well-chosen examples, and innuendo. His prose is definitely informed by rhetorical devices.

Persico also expressed the importance of the German Bauhaus and the German school:

In Germania – sempre senza contare Kant e Schopenhauer, Schelling e Hartmann, che si trovano in tutte le bibliografie – pensiamo a Semper e al suo “Kunstwerden,” a Ostendorf, a Behrens, che alla teoria di Semper oppone la concezione teleologica di Riegl del “Kunstwollen.” Pensiamo, per l’Inghilterra, a Belcher. E, poi, a van de Velde, a De Baudot. Pensiamo ai luoghi dove maggiormente si è affermata la

In Germany – not counting Kant, Schopenhauer, Schelling, and Hartmann, who are found in all the bibliographies – think of Semper and his Kunstwerden, Ostendorf, Behrens, Riegl’s conception of Kunstwollen against Semper’s notion. In England there is Belcher; and then there is Van de Velde and De Baudot. Think of where the new architecture has been affirmed: industrial Berlin, Herriot’s

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nuova architettura: la Berlino industriale, Lyon, Weimar, where Gropius founded la Lione di Herriot, Weimar, dove Gropius fonda il Bauhaus.\footnote{Translation by Diane Ghirardo, “Prophecy of Architecture,” in Archetype, Volume 1, Summer 1979, Number II, p.19. In the original Italian: E. Persico, Profezia dell’architettura, Conference held in Turin, 21st January 1935, published in Milano: I Coriandoli, Muggiani Editore 1945, p. 53. The birth of Rationalism in the social-democratic Germany was linked to the normalisation and rationalisation of a nation. He knew what was happening both in recent architectural production and in contemporary art theory discourse.}

However, even if he promoted an international attitude (biased towards Germany), Persico could not read any other language but some French. Indeed, even though he complained about Italian architects’ lack of a European vision, Persico himself never left his native country. He never actually visited Paris or Moscow, although he claimed he had. Riccardo Mariani asserted that Persico extensively wrote about the Russian avant-garde and Moscow, pretending/as if he had been there, but he probably did not even have a passport.\footnote{Interview with the author, 24th August 2010.} Mariani also reminisced: “Persico could barely read French and asked Anna Maria Mazzucchelli to translate excerpts of European histories of architecture.”\footnote{Riccardo Mariani currently teaches history in Florence. He wrote several books on Italian Rationalism and Edoardo Persico. He worked with Anna Maria Mazzucchelli, chief editor of Casabella when Persico was one of the editors-in-chief. He lives between Florence and Ginèvre, where according to the Feltrinelli archive, he has most of Persico’s writings that were property of the foundation. Currently Riccardo Mariani and the Fondazione Feltrinelli in Milano are in litigation. Conversation with the author, 24th August 2010.} In fact, he probably read Adolf Behne, Gustav Adolf Platz, and other German texts published in European magazines thanks to both his collaborators, Anna Maria Mazzucchelli, then editor and translator in Einaudi, chief editor in Casabella, and wife of Giulio Carlo Argan\footnote{Anna Maria Mazzucchelli was a central figure in the editorial world at that time. She collaborated with Einaudi as a translator, and she was working for Casabella with Pagano until 1938 and Persico since 1934 till his death. She married Giulio Carlo Argan in 1939. Cesare De Seta notes that she probably played a big role in balancing the relation between Persico and Pagano and that it is thanks to her that after Persico’s death Casabella kept an open-minded and European vision. See C. De Seta, “Edoardo Persico e Giuseppe Pagano a “Casabella,” in Il destino dell’architettura. Persico, Giolli, Pagano, Napoli: Laterza 1985.} and Giulia Veronesi (the latter translated the first edition of
Der Moderne Zweckbau by Behne into Italian in 1968). Whether Persico could speak German is hard to know, but as he was a good reader of French, he quoted extensively in this language, as in his “Profezia dell’architettura” where he quotes Enrico Thovez; in “Punto e da capo:” Maurice Denis, Blaise Cendrars, Julien Benda, and Docuchaeff; in “Ci siamo seduti,” André Gide, Arthur Rimbaud, or in “Introduzione a Le Corbusier” in which he mentioned and quoted Le Corbusier’s writings and Giedion’s “Préface aux oeuvres de Le Corbusier.” Only Giulia Veronesi, in her extremely flattering two-page biography of Persico in her edited volumes talks about his “European experience” and says he travelled to Paris. Both Mariani and Cesare De Seta doubt this is true, ascribing Veronesi’s version to her fascination with Persico. Paolo Caputo accepted Aurelio Gorgerino’s claim that Persico abused European culture by picking and choosing theories, from French or German books, translated by someone else. He expressly talked about fictionalized reality in regard to Persico’s travels to Yugoslavia and Russia. Also, Ignazio Gardella confirmed Persico’s mid-European predisposition as being a “generic and book-based sensibility since, despite his boasting, he had never been outside of Italy.” Mario Romano does not recall Persico traveling abroad through the period

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52 This was after the International Exhibition of decorative art in 1925: L’art décoratif et industriel de l’URSS, Paris/Moscow: Edition du Comité de la section de l’URSS à l’Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs 1925.


55 Conversation with the author, 24th August 2010.

56 “Per Gorgerino, Persico usava e abusava della cultura europea che riportava acriticamente all’attenzione della cultura italiana, a volte impossessandosi di tesi lette su riviste o libri francesi o tedeschi (che si faceva tradurre) e, comunque, a suo avviso: “a quel tempo anche Ponti faceva il trasferimento di modelli culturali…” P. Caputo, “Lo conoscevo bene… testimonianza su Persico,” in G. Denti, Profezia di Persico, Milano: Clup 1989, p. 86. Caputo also reminds us that he was not the only one doing this at the time — Gio Ponti also referenced foreign examples.

from 1932 to 1936. Agnolo Domenico Pica remembered stories concerning a journey to Yugoslavia, but suspects them to be made up.

**Against the fascist myth; the VI Milan Triennale 1936**

Finally, and not least of all, Persico claimed to defend the Italian position against some of the demagogic rhetoric of populist myths constructed and supported by the fascist regime, above all the myth of *mediterraneità*, in his few designed projects. If critics of Italian Rationalists were concerned with their inability to be “European,” their provinciality poses contradiction: Persico criticized them for invoking the myth of *mediterraneità* as the manifestation of a rational architecture, which ultimately became part of fascist propaganda. He seemed to criticize both the affiliation of *mediterraneità* with the fascist regime and the inclination of Italian architects toward the rational rather than the intuitive side of things – a criticism that signaled his affinity with figures such as Wright.

In the exhibition of *architettura razionale* in 1928, the works exhibited run a gamut of examples that seek to reach a compromise between *italianità* and *mediterraneità*.58

This did not mean the use of arches and columns representative of a monumental style, but instead entailed different compositions of volumes (we could mention, for example, the Casa del Fascio by Terragni and Casa per un artista by Figini and Pollini). Still, the Italian fringe was looking for a compromise and had a wary attitude, which soon led them away from the more radical European experiences. Fillia wrote: “the greyness, the monotony and collectivism that dominates the production of European colleagues are

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opposed to the Italian temperament, full of lyricism and individuality.”\textsuperscript{59} It is clear how much pride the first Italian Rationalists took in distinguishing themselves from European architectural production.\textsuperscript{60}

Though the word “Rationalism,” along with “Organic,” had a wide and divergent use, it has never been sufficiently clarified. It is an aesthetic form, which becomes an ethical one; it is a moral battle against indifferent behaviors. When in 1931 Alberto Sartoris tried to define what he meant by architettura razionale, he used the words razionale, funzionale, elementare, and organico indiscriminately as if they were synonyms. These characteristics can be achieved through qualities such as “bareness,” “openness,” “order,” “harmony,” “balance,” “geometry,” “simplicity,” and “purity” as opposed to “waste,” “ornament,” “decoration,” “imitation,” “heaviness,” and “academicism.”\textsuperscript{61} This vagueness had been used to covert concepts such as classicism, mediterraneità, or italianità into fascist myths. Mussolini wanted to give Italy a new imperial face, and architecture had to contribute to it. Architecture’s role was no longer that of representing the modern state, but of reviving the myth of a new Roman empire. Against Mussolini’s myth, Pagano and Persico shared the participation to the 6th Milan Triennale in 1936, whose theme was “Decoration.” Despite the fact that Pagano participated to this exhibition with Mario Sironi and Carlo Alberto Felice, the Triennale

\textsuperscript{59} “L’individualità lirica di ogni singolo architetto… poiché il grigiore, la monotonia e il collettivismo che domina la produzione europea dei colleghi sono contrari al temperamento italiano, ricco di lirismo e individualità,” Alias Luigi Colombo. Fillia, L’Ambrosiano, 16/2/1931, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{60} Considering Dutch architecture, in 1926 the Gruppo 7 reported the same reservations about the more radical aspects of European Rationalism, especially the frequent mistake of pushing the limits of Rationalism too far: “moving away from our very spirit,” they sensed “some clinical impressions of the architecture of Le Corbusier and Rationalism … as barbaric, Nordic … that gives life to inhuman, nightmarish, and squalid visions.” Gruppo 7 e Giuseppe Terragni in Popolo d’Italia 30/3/1930.

\textsuperscript{61} “[...] nudità, trasparenza, ordine, armonia, equilibrio, geometria, semplicità, purezza come contrapposto all’ornamento allo spreco, all’imitazione alla decorazione alla pesantezza e all’accademismo,” in A. Sartoris, Gli elementi dell’architettura funzionale, Milano: Hoepli 1931, p. 32.
was essentially considered to be the Triennale by Pagano and Persico, for the work they
displayed.62 This impression arose not because of their role in organizing the exhibition,
but rather because of their two differing positions in it. Persico and Pagano took different
directions against the prevailing fascist myths thus presenting an alternative version of
what myth could consists of. On one side of the Salone d’onore, on the second floor of
the Palazzo dell’Arte, was the exhibition designed by Persico along with Marcello
Nizzoli, Giulio Palanti, and Lucio Fontana, in which Persico appealed to the idea of a
different monumentality. [Figure 12]

On the other side, Pagano designed the exhibition of rural architecture (Mostra
dell’architettura rurale nel bacino del Mediterraneo) with Guarniero Daniel.63 Pagano
searched for more ancient origins in minor architecture, which led the way to the popular
myth of the resistenza in the 1940s. [Figure 13]

In his project, Persico used the term “European Renaissance” to refer to the ability to
create a new language in architecture that could serve practical and contingent needs,
while at the same time asserting the importance of a broader view taken from the
European perspective. He wanted to present a monumental project yet, European. Even
though he favored a European orientation, he opposed merely imitating European models
– namely the early German examples – in favor of original invention. His Triennale
design is characterized by the absence of the German direction that Persico had earlier
supported. His contradictory return to classicism was for him the only way to avoid the


63 The result of this exhibition would be the publication of G. Daniel and G. Pagano, Architettura rurale italiana, Milan: Quaderni della Triennale 1936.
Figure 12 Marcello Nizzoli, Giancarlo Palanti, Edoardo Persico: Salone d’Onore, VI Milan Triennale, 1936. In the background, *Nike* by Lucio Fontana.
Figure 13  Giuseppe Pagano and Guarniero Daniel, gallery of the exhibition, Architettura VI Milan Triennale, 1936.
risk of falling back into the nostalgic and “romantic” styles – reminiscent of Germany’s *Heimatstil*. Persico turned here to the classical spirit, celebrating this theme of a classic monumentality by placing Lucio Fontana’s Nike at the center of the Salone. [Figure 14 - 15] The Nike represents a pacified Europe, but also seemed to project the room toward the divine. With it, Persico, still connected to Croce, declared the desire to elevate architecture to a higher spirit, removing the idea of classicism from the fascist myth.

But he also translates into design the Crocean synthesis among the arts: architecture, sculpture, and the figurative arts. His design is inconsistently highly monumental but one that tries to become modern. Even if very different in the materials used, the design for the Salone d’onore at the VI Triennale is in some way reminiscent of the project for the Sala delle Medaglie d’Oro, at the Italian Aeronautics Exhibition in 1934, which Persico had designed with Marcello Nizzoli. [Figure 18] While the may look different the structural logic underlying the project is the same. Neither spaces present solid or continuous partitions, but rather diaphragms of columns. In the Italian Aeronautics Exhibition, the structure was a rarified steel construction but within one room, whereas in the VI Triennale, Persico had to work within a solid space, so he objectified the wall as a series of solid partitions and intervals, thus obtaining a quasi-mystical rather than mythical space. Through this strategy, the space itself and its design implemented Persico’s idea of classicism meeting modernity. Indeed, the repetition of partitions – columns – stands for modern serial production interpreted through the lenses of a classic

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66 A series of Roman artworks is hanging on a column. Persico previously had edited a volume on Roman art and published it in *Domus*. E. Persico, *Arte Romana*, supplement to *Domus* December 1935.
Figure 14 Marcello Nizzoli, Giancarlo Palanti, Edoardo Persico: Salone d’Onore, VI Milan Triennale, 1936.
Figure 15 Lucio Fontana’s Nike close up.
Figure 16  Edoardo Persico, sketch for the VI Milan Triennale, 1936. © Einaudi Archive.
Figure 17 Casabella Headquarters a few days before Edoardo Persico’s death. Roman art on the walls.
Figure 18 Marcello Nizzoli, Edoardo Persico: Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro, Mostra Aeronautica Italiana, Milan, 1934.
An ancient principle of a colonnade. In Persico’s words, they represent “the ancient principle of a colonnade” but the chiaroscuro almost becomes “a synthesis of the two fundamental elements of modern architecture: the practical one, series production; the aesthetic one, the expressionist side.”

The historian Giorgio Ciucci also suggested that such architecture contains a mystical world of art in which the myth of Athena – here represented by Nike, goddess of victory – shelters warriors but also contains works of peace. Indeed, the VI Triennale can be considered as Persico’s theoretical and practical testament, one in which his fragmented and contradictory beliefs came together in one room: he preached against a monumental myth thus offering just an alternative and equally monumental one. What’s more, the 1936 Triennale marked for Persico the integration of history and practice; it marked the implementation of what Zevi would later name metodo storico (historical method), namely making history through architectural practice.

Both Persico and Pagano dived into the problematic terrain of history and the role of architectural practice within it. They both started from a similar premise, as they both conceived architecture as serving a social aim, but they ended up with different results. Pagano decided to address the opposite aspect of myth, which is the search for a primitive origin and taste. Together with Guarniero Daniel, he explored rural architecture—an architecture without names, the architecture of unknown parts of Italy, whose taste and style he wanted to suggest as the alternative to the monumental myth. Pagano celebrated

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this “other side” with his exhibition on “rural housing” and an emphasis on “minor”
architecture such as barns and isolated houses. Pagano’s idea of history tackles a different
idea of people, a history of the anonymous and the forgotten, one that could help
rediscover a national taste. The populism of Pagano sought to introduce ethical values to
rural work within the fascist propaganda, and against the corruption that he saw in
monumental classicism. [See Figure 13 and 19]

So, the two rooms [sale] by the two architects ideally “faced” each other. But,
neither were successful: in the following years, classicism came to be associated more
and more with fascism, and rural architecture with resistance and anti-fascism; the latter
became another kind of rhetorical myth and saw its success during the late 1940s. They
both seem to approach two different sides of populism as described by Asor Rosa: the
first type is conservative, reactionary and at the same time nationalist. It appeals to the
masses as a political entity, and relates to dictatorship and the fascist regime. The second
meaning of populism is democratic and influenced the residenza and the intellectuals of
the left, it is closely related to the role that the intellectual holds. But the intellectual still
depicts ‘people’ as a romanticized entity with positive qualities, but that still needs to be
educated. Both versions contribute to the creation of a different myth.69

Since the rise of Mussolini and the fascist regime, Italy had become an empire.

Persico died in January 1936 before the Triennale opened, and shortly thereafter Pagano

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69 Manfredo Tafuri translated populism into architectural terms in his text: “U.S.S.R. Berlin, 1922: From Populism to
Architectural Press, 1985, pp. 121-181. After exploring various utopian manifestations of German humanism and
expressionism, Tafuri examines the impact of the 1922 exhibition of Russian artists in the politicization of dada and the
introduction of a constructivist utopia based on the technological organization of the real. An attempt to read the Italian
neorealism within architectural European and American realisms of the XX Century is in M. Tafuri, Architettura e
Realsimo, in AA.VV., Le avventure delle idee nell’architettura 1750-1980, edited by V. Magnago Lampugnani, Milan
1985, pp. 123-145. Tafuri also widely covers this topic in History of Italian Architecture, [1982] Cambridge, Mass:
Figure 13 Giuseppe Pagano and Guarniero Daniel, gallery of the exhibition, Architettura VI Milan Triennale, 1936.
resigned from the directorship of the same Triennale. Leone Ginzburg, husband of the novelist Natalia Ginzburg who at the time worked as editor for Einaudi, was imprisoned and killed on February 5, 1943. On September 6, 1944, Giuseppe Pagano died in a concentration camp, as did Gianluigi Banfi, who died on April 10, 1945, among many other intellectuals. Fascism left Italy behind the other European countries. Because of the regime’s censorship, the intellectual and architectural debates were confined to an Italian, if not provincial, sphere. By defending the concept of *mediterraneità* and the myth of *italianità*, Italian architecture was delayed in entering a modern European or international debate. Prophetically, Persico had frantically preached being part of this debate.

Overall Persico is a mythical figure who belonged to his precise historical moment. Despite such fragmentariness, his legacy did not fall unheard. Zevi exaggerated when he compared Persico to Dante or the Italianist scholar De Sanctis, as “great intellectuals who harshly criticized their country,” but he rightly valued Persico as pioneer of the *metodo storico* (historical method). Similarly, in art history, both Lionello Venturi and Giulio Carlo Argan recognized Persico’s intuitions and “prophecies” as above all the creation of an analogy between Wright and Cezanne. Persico’s prophetic statement, “the new architecture is really born only in the fracture of impressionism: I am here alluding to F. L. Wright,” is quoted by Venturi in his 1936

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71 Also in the early forties, Persico may have influenced Zevi’s writing, which was characterized by a short length, a lyrical, quasi-mythical tone, and a political manifesto-like tone. (During that period, Zevi was editing *Quaderni Italiani* [1940-1942] in his house in Boston, Massachusetts, signing as “Bruno Archi”). His narratives are characterized by the presence of heroes and anti-heroes, like Loos or Wright versus Terragni, Gabetti or Isola, some of them still present in Zevi’s *Storia*. The protagonist of Zevi’s myth, Frank Lloyd Wright, is also a character already introduced in Italy by Persico in the thirties as one of the forerunners of the Modern movement.
Storia della critica d’arte (History of Art Criticism). Gramsci blazed a trail by considering the intellectual’s role; as the philosopher Norberto Bobbio wrote, “Gramsci was a pioneer in primarily theorizing the role of the intellectuals whose detention and death contributed to Gramsci’s aura and mythical legacy.” Both Persico and Gramsci belonged to a category of intellectuals that preached the urge to move toward the people, integrating popular elements and culture, but excluded the populist from the popular. Thus, Persico’s myth acquired both an active and a passive connotation. What he did not conclude – the non-finished, the “should have been but never was,” the non-accomplished – created his myth. Not having accomplished a comprehensive history of modern architecture contributed to the creation of a fantasy, a “fancy which made heroes into God,” as Croce would write. Persico is certainly not the only one to write about buildings he never visited or events he did not experience, and his former writing as a literary critic and novelist revealed his capacity for fantastic descriptions. As a fervent reader of Croce, we may consider his fictive slant to be consistent with the philosopher’s statement that “imagination is essential to any historian who wants to be more than a mere chronicler […] because imagination is indiscernible from historical synthesis.” In other words, his invention of a fictional narrative was what made him a historian, although his most narrative examples are to be found in literature and art criticism. Persico contributed to the making of other mythical personalities among architects, as has been previously discussed a propos Wright. Yet I would argue that the religious, quasi-

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mystical component allows us to consider Persico’s writing as more intuitive, mythical, and irrational rather than fantastic. He expressed his thought through flashes, inspirations, and epigraphs, sometimes too elusive to be understood. He still belonged to a quasi-futurist generation of writers who supported the aesthetic of the fragment, which explains his feverish unfinished book projects. Bruno Zevi fantasized about “recomposing these fragments and giving them a logical sequence”\textsuperscript{76} in order to create the book that could have been but never was. Zevi just partially did this in his more cohesive narrative \textit{Storia dell’architettura moderna} (\textit{History of Modern Architecture}).

After Persico’s death in 1936, the idea of “myth” started acquiring a different connotation. While Persico realized the myth as a historical method in writing fragmented stories and in implementing history through design, the myth of the 1940s, as advanced by Pagano, went in search of ancient origins, via a distant ancestral past, or for other “future origins” epitomized by the myth of America in the 1940s.

\footnote{B. Zevi, \textit{Storia dell’architettura moderna}, p. 191.}
The traditional mode of perceiving the invisible and therefore of perceiving the acorn is intuition. Intuition also includes what I would call a mythical sensibility, for when a myth strikes us, it seems true and gives sudden insight. As James Hillman explains, in psychology intuition means “direct and immediate knowledge […] immediate or innate apprehension of a complex group of data.”\(^1\) Intuition is both thoughtless and also not a feeling state; it is a clear, quick and full apprehension, “the significant feature being the immediacy of the process.” Intuitions “occur to a person without any known process of cogitation or reflective thinking.”\(^2\) There is no rationality to the thought.

While the myth considered in the previous chapter was treated with respect to its content, this chapter explains myth as a rhetorical device, which includes the irrational and the form of intuition that is our first knowledge of events. In the mid-1950s myth took on a different meaning than the one considered so far.

In 1957, Roland Barthes, explained myth as a rhetorical device, a narrative form rather than content, and one that is rooted in its specific historical moment. Barthes explained myth as a grammatical category, a type of speech: “What is a myth today?” asks Barthes, and then replies: “I shall give at the outset a first, very simple answer, which is perfectly consistent with etymology: *myth is a type of speech.*”\(^3\) Myth is a

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system of communication and a mode of signification; therefore, myth is not defined by the content it conveys, but by the way in which it conveys this message. In a footnote, Barthes claimed that “innumerable other meanings of the word myth can be cited against this. But I have tried to define things, not words”\textsuperscript{4}—and I will do the same. Interestingly enough, Barthes suggests that myths belong to their historical period; consequently, ancient myths exist, but eternal myths do not. We can infer that myths only exist within history, and that they all have a history. I would then borrow this concept to present myth itself as a kind of historiography. And this is exactly how the stories here are conceived—as rhetorical myths embedded in their times—whereas the previous chapter covered the idea of myth by examining its content.

Also in 1957, Northrop Frye published \textit{Anatomy of Criticism}, four essays on the tropes of fictions, already a reflection on the modes of writing and the categorization of those writings. Frye distinguished between realism and myth, where myth is a mode of expression as for Barthes, but one that tends to mimic reality as it could eventually be. Specifically, his second essay on archetypical criticism focuses on the theory of myths. While considering painting, Frye maintains that “‘realism’ connotes emphasis on what the picture represents; ‘stylization,’” whether primitive or sophisticated, connotes an emphasis on pictorial structure, namely the frame.”\textsuperscript{5} To draw a comparison, in literature, which is the art of writing, realism concerns what the word stands for, and stylization places its emphasis on the structure of the text. It follows that “realism is an art of

\textsuperscript{4} I\textit{bid.}  
implicit simile, and myth is an art of implicit metaphorical identity;“⁶ realism stands for the sameness, myth epitomizes the likeness.

Frye also points out a further distinction that we will later use. Myth is one extreme of literary construct, and naturalism is its opposite. “In between lies the whole area of romance, […] not the historical mode of the first essay, […] but the tendency to displace myth in a human direction, and yet, in contrast to “realism,” to conventionalize the content in an idealized direction.”⁷

Nevertheless, in addition to these two literary myths, a previous one—that of Cesare Pavese—comes to a slightly different conclusion: once the myth touches reality, he argues, it becomes history. But that myth is also a pre-history of some sort, one that is outside its time and that includes the primitive. For Pavese the mythical moment is by definition “pre-historical” because “the myth preexists the form.”⁸ Pavese identified this “prehistoric” myth in American literature.

Yet, Pavese contends that if a myth is sincere it can only originate from an existing culture, namely from a geographical and historical ground, as the American one, definitely a temporal myth whose destiny was that of perishing.⁹ If it were not rooted in history it would merely become a superstition, or a false wonder. In other words, myth is a pre-historical moment but one that can only be the result of contingent and precise historical moments, at once within and outside history.

⁶ Ibid., p. 136.
⁷ Ibid., pp. 136-137.
Pavese extensively wrote about myth. “Del mito, del simbolo e d’altro” (“Of Myth as symbol, and the other”) is an article published in *Feria d’agosto (August Holiday)* in 1946. Here, the literary conception of myth reads as follows: “the word myth lies behind an ecstatic conception. Myth is the first perception of the world, in a psychological sense the child first experiences the world through a myth.”10 Myth is our first perception of events, it is a first irrational knowledge of the world. Pavese named these half-true stories fables. Each man gets to know the world rationally, but this reality is not new to our eyes, on the contrary, this same reality already appeared as an unconscious myth. To know is to see for the second time. Though, these infantile encounters with the world do not just happen once rather they recur several times. Here, Pavese also borrows from Vico and his concept of repetition.11 Pavese writes:

Il mito è ciò che accade e riaccade infinite volte nel mondo sublunare eppure è unico, fuori del tempo, così come una festa ricorrente si svolge ogni volta come fosse la prima, in un tempo che è il tempo della festa, del non temporale, del mito. Prima che favola, vicenda meravigliosa, il mito fu una semplice norma, un comportamento significativo, un rito che santificò la realtà. E fu anche l’impulso la carica magnetica che sola poté indurre gli uomini a compiere opere.

Myth is that which happens and happens again infinite times in the sub-lunar world and yet is unique, outside of time, the same way a feast recurs but always happens as if it were the first time, the time that is the time of the feast, of the non-temporal, of myth. Before it was fairy tale, wondrous event, myth was a norm, a memorable action, a ritual that sanctified reality. And it was also the magnetic pulse that by itself could inspire people to create.12

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11 It is precisely because of Vico’s influence that Vittorini attacked Pavese.

Yet, all his writings reflect different worlds of symbols masked as a veiled realism. Myth is at the origin of every act of creation. Unlike Croce, Pavese accepts the irrational.

To sum up Pavese, Barthes and Frye all investigate the connection among history, reality and narratives in the realm of literature. Pavese’s myth is a pre-temporal story that can become history, Barthes’s myth is an historical storytelling (a form of historiography) attached to the events, Frye’s myth is also a rhetorical device but one that tries to imitate reality. The latter two imply an a-posteriori construction, as they structure a narrative around history, while the first is embedded in the history while it happens. In all of them myth is a peculiar rhetorical device to first know the world and then convey it.

These three categories of myth, can be applied to the architectural historiography and literature of postwar Italy. While the first category is contemporary to the period I am considering, the 1940s, the remaining two date from 1957, the year that also sealed the beginning of a new wave of historical awareness. Likewise, before becoming a fable, a “wondrous event,” a myth is a sudden initial moment of intuition, followed by an almost religious revelation. The origin of creation lies in this sudden intuitive moment.

A Mythological Geography: Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, *Il Politecnico and Americana*

Pavese wrote about myth at the end of what we consider the mythical period to be, i.e. 1949 and 1950, but the mythical tension that animated the works by Pavese and fellow writer Elio Vittorini is the most precious and unique outcome of the previous years starting in the late 1920s.
As the literary critic Dominique Fernandez rightly noted, none of the three pioneering advocates of the American myth – the anti-fascist writer Giaime Pintor, Elio Vittorini and Pavese – visited the US to verify their dreams. Emilio Cecchi, the author of a memoir suggestively titled *America Amara* (Bittersweet America), did not travel to America as well.³ Still, all of them supported and nourished the “American myth,” the origin of which dated back to the 1930s. It partly coincided with the fascist regime, and served almost as a reaction to it, even if it started eight years earlier and lasted seven years longer than the demise of Mussolini.

The myth of America, both in its literary and architectural version is well expressed through the pages of *Il Politecnico* founded by the writer and politician Vittorini and published by Einaudi from September 1945 till December 1947.¹⁴ Vittorini was born in 1908 in Syracuse, Sicily. [Figure 1] At 17, he interrupted his studies and moved to Northern Italy, devoting himself to many jobs, but also engaging with literature. He began to form himself as a writer in Florence, where he worked as a proofreader and as an editorial consultant before collaborating with the magazine *Solaria.* Around *Solaria* during the 1930s, Vittorini met various writers willing to achieve a literary renewal, such as the writers Corrado Alvaro, Ignazio Silone or Romano Bilenchi. In *Solariae* Vittorini published his first short stories, and he published periodically his first novel, *The Red Carnation,* [*Il garofalo rosso*], written between 1933 and 1934, a loosely autobiographical story about the political formation of a teenager.¹⁵ In 1938,

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¹³ Fernandez, Dominique, *Il mito dell’America negli intellettuali italiani dal 1930 al 1950*, Caltanissetta: S. Sciascia 1969. I can mention Pavese, Vittorini, Persico but also Emilio Salgari who wrote about adventures all around the world without leaving Turin, Edoardo Persico, the early Italo Calvino and many others.  
¹⁵ In the forties, the reigning style in literature was still a ‘true to life’ narrative, and more than anything else, American examples seemed to fit this model. The writing technique, is closely linked to realism, but gradually acquires more
Vittorini moved to Milan. Here, and until 1945, he lived the most productive period of his intellectual life. He progressively detached himself from the fascist sympathies of his youth, and started reflecting on the true nature of the fascist regime. Subsequently, he wrote his most famous work, *Conversazione in Sicilia* (*Conversation in Sicily*) published in 1941, which is mainly a fictional memoir, where Vittorini tries to combine an Italian provincial/regional tradition with American enthusiasms. Based on his experience with the Resistance, which he joined in September 1943, Vittorini wrote the novel *Uomini e no* (*Men and not Men*) in 1945, an epic and lyric evocation of the partisan struggle. Its main theme is the war waged in Milan, but the protagonist lives an impossible love story between war battle. The language is lively and dry, full of action but also dense with struggling and pain. Vittorini depicts life according to the canon of neo-realism, but reality is mixed with the surreal, like the dead speaking to the living.

In those same years, Vittorini started his collaboration with the Einaudi publishing house, beginning in 1945 with *Il Politecnico*, which integrated literature with politics, architecture, and urbanism. [Figure 2] Throughout its publication the aims of *Il Politecnico* had remained mainly educational: “we had compiled collections, translated, lyrical and poetic tones. Real data are lived again on a symbolic level in an attempt to reproduce the technique of many American writers. So here there is realism in content, but myth in the narrative rhetoric and structure.

*Conversazione in Sicilia* tells the story of Silvestro Ferrauto, a typographer working in north of Italy, who returns for three days in Sicily to visit his mother. The meeting with the mother, the remote landscapes of the island, many childhood memories, a series of conversations, traveling companions, the inhabitants of the country are all themes investigated by Vittorini. But what matters the most is that meetings and conversations are ‘symbolic:’ the protagonist has an interview with the shadow of his dead brother soldier, the old white-haired man we meet in the home could be the father, but it could also be just a memory. These characters are both real and symbolic, without a concrete physiognomy, sometimes even without names, replaced by epithets such as ‘mustached’ or ‘without a mustache.’ Therefore the novel has elements of both realism and symbolism. Vittorini uses nuanced and evocative prose with engineered and rhetorical effects (iterations and metaphors), mingled with humble and everyday vocabulary, thus recreating the basic characteristics of a myth. So more than a true to life story the book ends up to be a series of mythical recollections, and nostalgia for a lost family past. Vittorini aimed to go back to a remote past and recover the roots of Italian culture by elevating the myth of Italian people and the nostalgia for a simpler kind of life. He doesn’t really succeed.

Noteworthy are the philosophical meditations and moral inspirations, which are the basis for the whole affair, and the title *Men and not Men* directly expresses the division of mankind into men worthy of the name, and men who violate and trample humanity.
Figure 1 Elio Vittorini.
Figure 2 Elio Vittorini, *Il Politecnico*, Turin: Einaudi 1945. The first issue, with graphic design by Albe Steiner.
Figure 3 Carlo Cattaneo, Il politecnico, Milan 1839.
expressed, informed, been polemical but we didn’t say much new. Our intention was and stayed one of educating,” Vittorini stated in a 1946 issue of their journal.\(^\text{18}\) In this, *Il Politecnico* is indicative of a moment in which educational tasks passed from academia to publishing houses, Einaudi being one of these.

Among Vittorini’s encounters with architecture, *Il Politecnico* is the most multifaceted one—the one in which he sought the collaboration of many authors, among them Franco Calamandrei, Italo Calvino, Franco Fortini, Giansiro Ferrata, Giulio Preti, and Giulio Carlo Argan, just to name a few, and the graphic designer Albe Steiner. [See figure 2] *Il Politecnico* was first published as a weekly magazine and then became monthly from May 1946 to December 1947. As the title suggests, the magazine had to host multiple (*poli*) techniques, and Vittorini was operating in the most “poli-technic” city: Milan. He took inspiration from the encyclopaedic project of the 19\(^{th}\) century Risorgimento by Carlo Cattaneo, who had edited a magazine by the same name, *Il Politecnico*, from 1839 to 1844. Cattaneo, who had a positivist and illuminist education, subtitled the magazine “a monthly inventory of studies applied to a social culture and prosperity.” [Figure 3] Polytechnic would also mean a higher yet practical education school in which architecture would be taught, after the Paris Ecole Polytechnique in the 19\(^{th}\) century, even in its title the journal posed as a school. Explaining the genesis of the magazine, literary historian Marina Zancan mentions that Cattaneo’s work was circulating among intellectuals by the end of the 1930s.\(^\text{19}\) It was not surprising, then, that Vittorini took it as a model. With *Il Politecnico* Vittorini tried to accomplish a holistic project, one able to combine a humanist knowledge and a scientific one. The aim was to

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connect politics and culture, science and literature, Marxism and Catholicism. *Il Politecnico* tried to realize all of this at once, and attempted to achieve that new kind of humanism as defined by the historian Delio Cantimori, who strove to create a revolutionary language emptied from fascist rhetoric.²⁰

In his first editorial piece for *Il Politecnico*, Vittorini underlined the same multidisciplinary tendency apt to create a new culture: “Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music, Poetry … and the other arts of imagination stem from the need within civilization that is as imperious as that of existing.”²¹

Vittorini placed architecture among arts of the imagination, as one form of technical practice likely to realize a new culture. The magazine explicitly solicited the realization of a “Nuova Cultura” (New Culture): a non-aristocratic, non-elitist culture open to the masses, as the traditional Italian intellectual class had been. At the same time Vittorini theorised a distinction between politics and culture, and the superiority, to a certain extent, of the latter over the former when it pertains to the making of history and the realization of a new society, one that “should not be of comfort, but should free men from their suffering.”²²

Architecture and civil engineering were the means to realize this society, and America was one example to follow. In the third issue of the magazine, a piece with no author, probably Vittorini himself, is centered around the Tennessee Valley Authority with the title “TVA: Una vittoria democratica” (TVA: A democratic victory). The article presents the TVA as “one of the initiatives that do justice to the democracy of the United

²⁰ D. Cantimori, *Umanesimo e religione nel rinascimento*, Turin, Einaudi 1975, p. 3.
States.”

Because of the role of the state in regulating the Tennessee Valley water system, the TVA, as a multi-state agency but governed federally, was a means to surmise private property. The author goes on to explain how a similar process should be followed as an example by the Italian state.

Architecture occupies the pages of the magazine, among politics and literature, with articles by Ernesto Nathan Rogers on the reconstruction, “Una casa a ciascuno” (A house for each of us) on 20th October 1945, “Testimonianza di un caduto” (Testament by a fallen man) by Mario Labo on 15th December 1945, and “Bauhaus” by Giuseppe Trevisani on 2nd March 1946.

The interest in architecture, enlarged to include cities in the second series of the magazine, where we find “Le città del mondo” (World Cities – June 1946). The series started with New York, followed by Chartres (July–August 1946), but also included “L’ora di Wright e la voce di Le Corbusier” (Wright’s Time and Le Corbusier’s Voice) by Giulia Veronesi (July–August 1946), “Urbanistica e progresso sociale” (Urban Planning and Social Progress) by Giulio Carlo Argan (September–December 1946), and “Le vie dell’artigianato” (The Ways of Craftsmanship) by Ettore Sottsass (November 1947).

In “L’ora di Wright e la voce di Le Corbusier” (Wright’s Time and Le Corbusier’s Voice), Giulia Veronesi, Edoardo Persico devotee, ratified once again Frank Lloyd Wright as a hero in public culture, by asserting that “Italy acknowledged him too late, Frank Lloyd Wright is already eighty years old, despite the fact that Persico had already

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24 Il Politecnico, 4, 20th October 1945, p. 3; 12, 15th December 1945, p. 1; 23, 2nd March 1946, p. 3.
La vendita dei “cozzali”

In ogni ora della Reggia, grande e perfetta, è di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera che non si può avvicinare dalla finestra. É la camera della Camera, di una camera que
Figure 5 E.N. Rogers, “Architettura e Società. Una casa a ciascuno,” in *Il Politecnico*, 4, October 20th 1945, page 3.
Figure 6 Giuseppe Trevisani, “Bauhaus,” and Gianniro Ferrata on Carlo Cattaneo and his XIX Century version of Il Politecnico Il Politecnico, 23, March 2nd 1946, page 3.
noticed him ten years earlier.”

Then, in 1947 according to Veronesi, Wright’s role can be considered established. Wright, the architect of “capitalist Americans,” preached to leave the city due to the “alienation” it nurtures, and move to the countryside. Veronesi recognizes this solution to be possible only in America “in a society that supports a change of men’s life in all its facets.”

So when it comes to Le Corbusier Veronesi asks:

Credevamo che Le Corbusier, partito recentemente per l’America allo scopo di trovarvi un suggerimento, un aiuto alla risoluzione del problema architettonico in Europa, avesse voluto accostarsi al vecchio maestro […] non è stato così. Anche Le Corbusier è un architetto borghese […] Che gli ha detto l’America? Nulla. Sembra. We thought that Le Corbusier, who recently visited America in search for new ideas, in search for some help in order to find a solution to the European architecture problem, would approach the old Master […] this was not the case. Le Corbusier is a bourgeois architect too […] What did America tell him? Nothing. So it seems.

Veronesi criticized the Swiss / French architect for not finding an American solution to a European problem.

Indeed, Il Politecnico played a primary role in proposing America as the example of a new society and new urban organization, and as a free new society, as the American myth proposed. The first city that opens Vittorini’s column on the “World Cities” is in fact New York. “America stands for the future, a city belonging to the entire world and not only to its citizens,” he writes. [Figure 7] The city stands for a new opportunity to

27 Ibid., p. 77.
28 Ibid.
exist Italian provinciality and becomes a parameter for a more worldly society. The idea conveyed about New York and other cities derives from images, recent or remote images, thanks to which we can create a visual picture of the city. These images can only be enriched by our memory, Vittorini writes: “We have created images from afar and nearby; those who came to us from the outside, reproducing reality, in print, colors, images, did not cancel these previous images we had; quite the opposite, they enriched them.”

Such images give the reader a posteriori recollection, which is like the original; the myth epitomizes the like, but it is not quite the same – whereas realism would stand for the same. [Figures 7-8]

Eventually Vittorini gathered these various essays about cities in the volume *Le città del mondo* (*World Cities*), edited between 1952 and 1959, and whose excerpts had first been published in *Il Politecnico* and other magazines as a monthly column under the same title. He finally released the book in 1969, maintaining its structure as a compilation. Among Italian cities, Vittorini singles out Sicily. The Sicilian background is described in a mythical and nostalgic way, though at the same time grounded on a real and historical background. Sicily is charged with symbols, and stands for the history of the world, which Vittorini considers to be like one big city. In all of these cities, the characters incessantly travel on the island, trying to escape their past for a new destination and a new future, which Vittorini projects onto America.

In the same text about New York, Vittorini unfolded this historical credo:

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L’una, la politica, agisce in genere sul piano della cronaca. La cultura, invece, non può non svolgersi all’infuori da ogni legge di tattica e di strategia, sul piano diretto della storia. Essa cerca la verità e la politica, se volesse dirigerla, non farebbe che tentare di chiuderla nella parte già trovata della verità.

In general, politics deals with chronicles. Culture, on the other hand, can only exist without any strategy, and within history. Culture is in search of truth, and if politics could influence it, this would happen only within the part of truth that culture already found.\(^\text{31}\)

**Il Politecnico** illuminated the larger condition of intellectual debate right after the war. Vittorini partly blamed the intellectuals for not having been able to avoid the rise of fascism. The main defeat caused by fascism had been paid by culture—the entire occidental culture—because it had not been powerful enough to avoid it: “Culture had preached, taught, elaborated principles and values, discovered continents, built machines, but it could not identify with society, it did not lead to it,”\(^\text{32}\) Vittorini argues. Now that the Italian panorama was finally fervid and full of hope, intellectuals were urged to recover the time that had been lost, and try to insert Italy into a more international debate, the kind of debate envisioned by Persico much earlier and from which Italy had been cut off for quite a while.

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\(^{31}\) “L’una, la politica, agisce in genere sul piano della cronaca. La cultura, invece, non può non svolgersi all’infuori da ogni legge di tattica e di strategia, sul piano diretto della storia. Essa cerca la verità e la politica, se volesse dirigerla, non farebbe che tentare di chiuderla nella parte già trovata della verità,” E. Vittorini, *Il Politecnico*, 31-32, July-August 1946.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Le città del mondo

Vi sono nel mondo città che non appartengono solo ai loro cittadini, ma a tutto il mondo. Esse sono nel cuore degli uomini di tutta il mondo, non altro che col loro nome il più delle volte: da come lo abbiamo sentito pronunciare un giorno della nostra infanzia a come lo abbiamo visto segnato su un atlante un altro giorno, e attraverso i modi infiniti in cui si è confermato in noi leggendo libri e giornali, ricevendo una lettera, ricevendo una cartolina, discorrendo con uno sconosciuto. Immaginiamo se ne stiamo fatti che si sono accumulati entro di noi da lontanissime a recenti; e quelle che ci sono giunte dall’esterno riproducendo in qualche modo la realtà, in stampe, in colori, in fotografie, non le hanno cancellate, le hanno piuttosto arricchite, formano con esse un punto o un altro della rete interiore di città che avvolge di entusiasmo e di angoscia, di incentivi e di esitazioni, la nostra coscienza di esistere. Anche le città perdute, di cui ci ha parlato la storia, Babylonìa o Cartagine, sono presenti in queste città, pur non vedute, in cui ancora oggi possiamo credere. Il modo in cui pensiamo a Nuova York o Shanghai, o a Londra, o a San Francisco, non include la speranza inconfessabile che in esse ritroveremo, se un giorno le visitassimo, tutto quanto dell’uomo risulta come già inghiottito dai deserti?

Ma il sentimento col quale le possediamo, queste città di tutti, che sono le grandi, le famose, e insieme delle famose e non grandi, delle non famose e piccole, non è un semplice desiderio di evasione dal cerchio stretto di cose che ci circondano; raccolte ben di più, riassume ogni forza non nazionale e una anche razionale del nostro spirito; trovando sempre i suoi carri spettivi concreti in bisogni concreti, trovando storia nelle trasmutazioni della storia, e traducendosi, alla fine, in una esigenza di universalità che ci porta ad agire proprio sul cerchio immediato delle cose che ci circondano. E’ un sentimento, dunque, che conta scoprire a noi stessi nel suo vero senso; per impedirgli di fermoarsi, come può, a fatto romantico; e per trasferirlo, invece, delle conseguenze positive. La nostra rivista, che per tanta parte di sé considera le cose del mondo come problemi, non vuole, tuttavia, ignorare un sentimento simile; e apre qui una rubrica in cui, il più spesso possibile, sarà seguita la suggestione del nome d’una di queste città di tutti, Nuova York o Manila, Tiflis, Leningrado, Venezia, Londra o Chartres, Singapore o San Francisco, e cercato il valore puramente d’apparizione d’ognuna di esse.

Per la nostra fantasia di ribelli a una società provinciale, troppo disposta alle sìste e agli idillii in mezzo al silenzio della natura, New York significa La Città, un luogo dove gli uomini avessero assunto, senza eazioni né rimorsi, con tutto il coraggio e la per- tinacia, il proprio compito di innalzare e trasformare a forza di creanza la torpida faccia del mondo. Un luogo dove essi si dessero consegnato a milioni e a milioni, sempre più numerosi e furbisci, per motivicarvi il loro lavoro, gli commerci, le passioni. Ed anche se un grafico ci informa che gli abitanti di Manhattan Island aumentaro fino al 1910, diminuisero poi, New York continua a rappresentare per noi questa crescita enorme e teso di creanza umana.

New York as a Babel of languages and cultures.
Beside architecture and cities, in *Il Politecnico* one could read about issues of contemporary history (such as, the civil war in Spain, Stakhanovism in the United States, or the Yugoslavian resistance), and about cultural history (such as Italian idealism), science, music, and cinema. But literary texts, were also prominent, particularly by American authors (echoing Vittorini’s collection *Americana*), such as translations of Hemingway, Whitman, and Conrad, For instance, Ernest Hemingway’s novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* had been translated into Italian and published as a series starting with the first issue of *Il Politecnico*.

The graphic layout by Albe Steiner also played an important role in the magazine, providing a seminal example for years to come, especially in the editorial publications of the left. The graphic design paralleled the journal’s contents and the way they were conveyed. The editors used short titles similar to slogans, choosing only red and black characters. In fact, the alternation of “reds” and “blacks” was reminiscent of Soviet avant-garde graphic design. But it also introduced a new way to relate images to texts, similar to the way they were related in American cartoons. This became clear from the very first issue of the magazine. [see figure 2] Vittorini had already understood the potential of this new graphic design to such an extent that his first edition of *Americana* used images to illustrate, and narrate, part of the fictional stories. [Figures 9-10] If Steiner was mainly influenced by Soviet artists, Vittorini may have been influenced by American popular magazines, which, at the beginning of the century, were narrating (extra)ordinary stories of everyday life with the help of photographic documentation, at times with more images and only few lines of text. By then, photography was part of the common American history and no longer something innovative. It also orchestrates ideas,
Figure 9 *Americana* frontispiece (1947).
Tale partito, al quale si atteneva, cagiva un rumoremento di sciocca, occorrente trasportarti in luogo meno visibile che non il grande casello di poppa. I pochi ufficiali di batteria s'erano ritirati nascosti, in conformità dell'ordine ricevuto nel caso in cui fosse stato necessario far strada con qualche nassaggio sul ponte, non a mano e non a mano: solo il capitano Vere aveva cominciato la sua passeggiata sul ponte, e non si raccordò naturalmente, durante il colloquio con Claggett, a diminuire la distanza; inoltre durante il colloquio la voce del capitano Vere non si alzò di tanto e quella di Claggett era stata arginata e bassa; e, verso il carcere, le scintille del mare, contribuivano a far sì che i due uomini non fossero visti: ma gli nomostanti il prolungarsi del colloquio aveva già abbastanza attirato l'attenzione dei gabbieri a riva o dei marinai che si trovavano nella catena o più vicini.

Avendo ormai visto sul da farsi, il capitano Vere si girò con prontezza. Si volse di colpo a Claggett e chiese: «Mastro d'armi, Billy è alla guardia ora?»

«No, Vostro Onore», Ali che, «Signor Wilkes» chiamò rivolgendosi all'impetrante più vicino, «dite ad Albert di venire da me». Albert era l'ordinanza del capitano, una specie di servo nella discrezione del quale il suo padrone aveva molta fiducia. Il giovane apparve. «Conosci Rood?»

«Sì, signore.»


XV

Quando il gabbiere si trovò chiuso nella cabina col comandante e Claggett fu un poco sorpreso. Ma fu una sorpresa priva di incomprensione e di diffidenza. In una natura essenzialmente onesta e umana, e priva di esperienza, il pre-

Vecchia New York.
content, and images; finally captions are thought to hold the page together. On the other hand, the magazine was also receptive of European trends, such as Italian neo-realism in cinema. The critic Marco Forti later described how the neorealist cinematographic epic introduced a new taste toward the image vis-à-vis its “reportage of cities” and its “rhythmic alternation of texts and images.” The American – European influences started reversing its flow.

In April 1946 *Il Politecnico* turned from a weekly to a monthly magazine, for the ostensible reason that it was not selling enough, or so Vittorini claimed: “The reason for our crisis lies in the fact that our Italian society does not allow anyone who is poor to spend fifteen lire a week for a bit of culture, nor allows poor intellectuals to disseminate their ideas.” The monthly issue intensified the presence of young Italian authors and increased the content of literature but simultaneously insisted on the translation of foreign ones. One could find in *Il Politecnico* the first translations of György Lukács, “Prussianesimo e nazismo attraverso la letteratura,” (Prussianism and Nazism in literature) some anticipations of the *Lettere dal Carcere* (*Prison Notebooks*) by Gramsci, which had been unknown till 1945, and also the publication of the aforementioned news about the world (*World Cities*). [See figures 7-8]

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36 Gramsci letters were first published a a book by Einaudi in 1947 but some of them appeared earlier in *Il Politecnico*, 33-34, September-December 1946, pp. 1-11.
Unfortunately, Einaudi, who published the magazine, recognized the importance of *Il Politecnico* but could not support it any longer. He mainly blamed Vittorini for having lost the public’s interest. In an unpublished interview by Folco Portinari, probably from late 1940s Einaudi writes that:

Vittorini dice adesso che abbiamo fatto la battaglia bisogna che riflettiamo sulle cose, ragioniamo di più, andiamo più sulle riflessione, non sulla battaglia. E devo dire che è stato il momento che ha indicato la mancanza di slancio all’interno del gruppo che formava il gruppo “Politecnico” quindi anche finiva con il corrispondere a una mancanza di interesse da parte di pubblico.

Now Vittorini says we are done with battles, and, it is time to reflect on things, to do more reasoning about them, to dive into reflection, not to start a new battle. And I should confess this was when the “Politecnico” group lost the enthusiasm, so it coincided with a lack of interest from the public side.37  [Figures 11-12]

The readers of *Il Politecnico* represented on the other hand the state of crisis and dissatisfaction of a wide segment of young Italian progressive intellectuals, who were attracted not by idealism or Crocean philosophy, but strangely to certain trends belonging to the anti-communist fields developed in France and America. But their political faith was certain. “They were communist, therefore,” Onofri claimed, “it was necessary to keep the publication going.” Yet, *Il Politecnico* did not last much longer. Despite economic problems haunting the magazine, it ended because of the infamous political arguments between Palmiro Togliatti and Mario Alicata, at that time heads of the Communist Party, around the end of 1946. In fact, while for Togliatti every project had to

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37 Giulio Einaudi interviewed by Folco Portinari. Giulio Einaudi Archive. No date.
La dimensione di essere provocatori, ma non in modoواء, di essere provvisti di un merito, di un merito che non sia quello di un uomo, e di fare tutte quelle cose, ma che sia un mondo, un mondo. Forse un mondo che possa essere fatto di mondo, un mondo di una vita di un mondo, di una vita di un mondo, di una vita di un mondo, di una vita di un mondo, di una vita di un mondo.
Milano, 11 maggio 1946

Caro Pavese,

ho ricevuto la tua lettera del 27/4 e del 4 corrente. Come al solito, invece di affrontare le questioni anche voi vi siete messi inauditiamente a girarle.

La vostra seduta per i quaderni di "Politecnico" secondo me è inconclusiva e poco promettente. Ci corre il rischio che "Politecnico" vada avanti per suo conto e faccia una cosa non rispondente alle esigenze culturali italiane e della tradizione della Casa editrice Einaudi. In settimana Calamandrei si incontrerà con Giaffi, Pantini e Balbo a Torino. Spero che tu, quando verrai a Milano, e a Torino porterai un po' di sordore per incanalarla questa faccenda sulla linea giusta, che vuole essere una linea culturale seria e non una improvvisazione giornalistica e che deve rappresentare una fusione tra le esigenze di cultura umanistica e le esigenze di una cultura che potremmo chiamare tecnica.

La prima potrebbe essere quella rappresentata dalla vecchia tradizione della Casa editrice, la seconda dalla tendenza Politecnico-Vittorini. Minimale una buona volta di chiuderla in gruppi, gruppetti e affermiamo questo strumento rappresentato dalla Casa editrice Einaudi che dovrebbe pesare nell'umanità più fertile di tutte le tendenze vive della cultura italiana nei vari centri per farli con un'unica larga direttiva che possa veramente rispondere alle esigenze di tuttita.

Il tuo biglietto ultimo mi dimostra che la telepatia non è un mito. Difatti vorrei organizzare una segreteria centrale a Milano convogliando quassù la Napoli. Ma una segreteria centrale ha bisogno di avere la persona che abitualmente tiene i rapporti col collaboratori per smetterla per sempre.
serve the communist political agenda, for Vittorini literature and culture had to differentiate themselves from politics, they were independent disciplines with an autonomous project. To Vittorini art was “a manifestation of experience and discovery of the truth, but art should NOT imitate reality, rather should be able to explain and interpret it.”\(^\text{38}\) It should not be the same but should be \textit{like} the real event. It seems as Vittorini’s myth always heads toward the idea that literature can be autonomous from politics and have its own scheme. To him mythical tales were all tools to acquire an interpretation of reality. A different understanding of a national culture, a different conception of the intellectual, and a different idea about the relation between culture and the masses determined the end of the \textit{Il Politecnico}.\(^\text{39}\)

\textbf{Translating America}

The myth of America and its literature have been widely described.\(^\text{40}\) But we can agree with Claudio Antonelli, and his exhaustive book about Pavese and Vittorini, that the thirties and forties became a myth mostly thanks to translations. Pavese would write in 1946 that:

\(^{38}\) According to Vittorini, art is “an absolute and independent resource,” which has the ability to answer human enquiries. The right and the duty of literature is to “pursue a course of independent research.” Because of this basic approach, Vittorini had remarkable contrasts with the secretary of the communist party, Palmiro Togliatti, who sought instead a direct connection of art in support of the political line of the party. To this matter see Vittoria, Albertina, Togliatti e gli intellettuali, Rome: Carrocci 2014, pp. 24-37.


Il decennio dal ’30 al ’40 che passerà nella storia della nostra cultura come quello delle traduzioni, non l’abbiamo fatto per ozio, né Cecchi né altri. Esso è stato un momento fatale, e proprio nel suo apparante esotismo e ribellismo, è pulsata l’unica vena vitale della nostra recente cultura politica. L’Italia era estraniata, imbarbarita, calcificata, bisognava scuoterla, decongestionarla e riesporla a tutti i venti primaverili dell’Europa e del mondo.

The decades of the thirties and forties will be remembered in the history of our culture as the decades of translations, we did not do it for laziness, neither Cecchi nor other people. It has been a fatal moment, and precisely for its apparent exoticism and rebellion, the only and unique vein of our recent political culture had pulsated. Italy had become estranged, barbarized, calcified, we needed to shake it, to relieve it from its congestion, and to expose it to all spring winds from Europe and from the world.41

Undeniably, Pavese and Vittorini initiated a new season in the editorial field, when writers became translators themselves thus translating history. Pavese considered translation to be as difficult, and equally an act of creation, as writing; thus, he argued, translating was equal to writing.42 Though, translating is remaking like the original language, but is never quite the same. “Likeness” is a myth as Frye described. They are like “passages”—moments of transition from one language to a different one, but also from one meaning to another meaning. To borrow from Walter Benjamin, “translations do not say the same thing but have to find that intended effect.”43 Therefore translators become writers and the new (hi)storytellers. Translations also become myths as they mainly function as rhetorical devices, valued as narratives not content, as Barthes had observed; myths, however, that are rooted in a specific historical moment.

42 On the collaboration among publishing houses, see L. Mangoni, Civiltà della crisi, Rome: Viella 2013, p. 185.
43 W. Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” [1923], pp. 254-263.
But mainly translations constituted a political act, first because they stood against Mussolini’s demand that all proper names must be Italianized in an attempt to preserve and defend the Italian language. Second, and inevitably, the decision to translate and publish specific books or the works of certain authors implied a political stance, such as the decision to publish Russian rather than American authors. Threatened by fascist censorship, Italian historians and editors could avoid censorship by not authoring their books but by translating foreign writers, so to open the Italian borders to larger horizons. Translations thus became a new method for building a new culture and opening up history and literature to a wider market.

But, by banning or delaying the publication of works considered ‘decadent,’ fascist censorship inadvertently promoted the American myth. One above all stood out, Mario Soldati’s America primo amore (America First Love) in which the author narrates his travels to the United States between 1929 and 1931 after Soldati earned a travel fellowship to Columbia University. Soldati envisioned in New York an academic career he could not have in his home country. [Figure 14]

To be conveyed, the American myth needed translations. In 1941 Vittorini was able to compile his seminal anthology of translations of American novelists entitled Americana. [Figure 15 to 17] The first edition, published by Bompiani, was introduced by a poem written by Vittorini, but because it was considered praising America too much it was suppressed, and the book was confiscated by fascist censorship. It was replaced by

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44 The Italianization, so to speak, of proper names demanded by Mussolini during the 1930s was also an attempt to preserve and defend the Italian language by translating every name. As a result, books used the names Edgardo Allan Poe or Ernesto Hemingway.

45 Authors were mainly referring to the United States as America, Latin America was barely mentioned. From now on, I will refer to the United States as America. See for example M. Soldati, America primo amore, Firenze: Bemporad 1935, then Einaudi in 1945, E. Cecchi, America Amara, 1940 has a chapter on Mexico.
Figure 14 M. Soldati, *America primo amore (America First Love)*, Florence: Bemporad 1935.
Figure 15 Cover of first edition of *Americana*, edited by Elio Vittorini, Milan: Bompiani 1941.
Figure 16 Cover of second edition of Americana, edited by Vittorini and with an introduction by Emilio Cecchi, Milan: Bompiani 1942.
Figure 17 *Americana*, table of contents: on top, American authors, on bottom, the list of translators, all of them Italian writers.
Figure 18 Cesare Pavese to Elio Vittorini, May 22nd 1942. Pavese writes to Vittorini about Americana; Vittorini’s poem has been replaced by Emilio Cecchi’s introduction that downplays the role and quality of American literature in order for the book to be published, avoiding fascist censorship. Pavese, however, praises Vittorini’s original poem. © Einaudi Archive.
an introduction by Emilio Cecchi in 1942, softening the tones. It was only thanks to this change in the introduction that the book could be reprinted after the first seizure by the Fascist censorship.\footnote{E. Vittorini (ed.), *Americana*, Milan: Bompiani 1941. Due to Fascist censorship the same book was published with an introduction by Emilio Cecchi: E. Vittorini (ed.), *Americana*, Milan: Bompiani 1942. On the substitution of Vittorini’s poem with Cecchi’s text see: G. D’Ina, G. Zaccaria, *Caro Bompiani: Lettere con l’editore*, Milan: Bompiani 2007, pp. 39-46.}

\textbf{Figure 16} *Americana* became a legend within a legend, a myth within the myth, so to speak, among young Italian intellectuals. Thanks to it, young writers discovered North American literature as a new model: the most audacious and well-documented evidence of a new literary paradigm.

But what was the main reason for communist intellectuals to look at the United States? It goes without saying that it was not because of its capitalist system, as the myth was actually a pre-capitalist aspiration. Rather, they felt close to the immigrants that traveled from Sicily or the south of Italy to discover a new world.\footnote{It also goes without saying that the main supporters of American culture came from the edges of Italy – Pavese came from Piedmont, and Vittorini from Sicily, so as its opponents came from fortresses of Italian culture – Emilio Cecchi was from Florence and Mario Praz from Rome.}

This new world was an idea, which only gradually became a popular myth.

*Americana* originated a myth compiling fragments from the works of the most famous and important American writers, from Edgar Allan Poe to Nathaniel Hawthorne, from Jack London to John Steinbeck and more, all translated by some of the greatest Italian writers.\footnote{Giansiro Ferrata, Enrico Fulchignoni, Piero Gadda Conti, Carlo Linati, Eugenio Montale, Alberto Moravia, Umberto Morra, Cesare Pavese, Guido Piovene, Elio Vittorini were the translators of American writers in E. Vittorini (ed.), *Americana*, Milan: Bompiani 1942.} These writers-translators insisted on the simplicity of the language mixed with American slang as well as the sparse prose of Ernest Hemingway and Herman Melville’s heavily symbolic language. To reach a new way of story-telling Vittorini appraised the linguistic ‘primitivism’ of the Americans, so as to introduce the elementary force characteristic of American writers. The quasi-journalistic and bare prose
of Hemingway, for instance, was nevertheless charged with symbolic echoes and lyric suggestions, which were emphasized even more by the Italian translator, whose translations were looser than the original, so that translating actually became like writing anew.

Interestingly enough, the first book translated by Cesare Pavese was *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, the symbol of many American symbols, and a myth of myths itself. Ironically, one of the first books by the architecture critic Lewis Mumford is his monograph *Herman Melville: A Story of his Life and Vision*, published in 1929. Among the multiple symbols of the saga, Mumford’s book entails the double meaning of a new interest in the American author, as the representation of the American renaissance.

But Italian authors mainly praised American writing as supporting the myth of the American as savage but full of ingenuity. The fictional characters were workers, housewives, and regular men, provincial men, and *l’uomo di strada* (the man in the street). Like these characters all Italian ‘Americanists,’ had a ‘peripheral’ provenance: Piedmont, Sicily, Sardinia. They came from the edges of the peninsula rather than from the intellectual centers like Rome, Florence or even Naples. American authors were able to describe these scenes of everyday life, while dignifying their characters. Nevertheless, what these authors recognized was an ingenuous interest for the everyday life, embedded with a mythical aura that Italian authors had created.

The primitive myth is only rejected by Pavese as he understood that the realistic depiction of everyday life by American writers, like Anderson or Faulkner, not only had a true to life approach, rather were creating a world of myths—the same sort of mythical
tension that animates his own and Vittorini’s work. Pavese fought against the “primitivist” myth of America, claiming that Whitman and Melville were not primitive. In fact, he described Melville as “a Greek” for his refined prose and his capacity to include mythology in his work. Pavese studied Greek mythology early at school, he devoured Shakespeare, Boiardo, Boccaccio and all the Italian Renaissance writers, and finally *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman. After many years and deeds, crossing the Hudson River and the Mississippi, the entire Atlantic and Pacific Ocean, the ancient myth of Homer met the modern American myth. For Pavese these two shared a common ground in their “matter of factness”, they combine the fundamental hieratic tone of the Homeric epic with the vitality of the American story. Making Homer contemporary and Hemingway a classic was the success of the Einaudi millennium series, that published literary classics.

In an unpublished letter to Einaudi, Pavese mentioned Fernanda Pivano for her ability to keep the solemnity and the matter of factness in her translations, referring to the *Spoony River Anthology* – published by Einaudi in 1943. [Figure 19]

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49 Though the myth of America is also what led to the first realist movie, *Ossessione*, by Luchino Visconti, 1943, which shows life as it is, and it is based upon *The Postman always rings twice* by James Cain.

50 “Un Greco veramente è Melville,” C. Pavese, “Preface” to *Moby Dick* Turin: Frassinelli1932, in C. Pavese *Letteratura Americana e altri saggi*, Turin: Einaudi 1951, p. XVII. Also Pavese was questioning the myth of the Far West by claiming that there was enough, and even more, happening in the East. Pavese for instance uses Sinclair to demonstrate how this author is excellent in depicting a social milieu but weak in the language he is using. Pavese understands that the true-to-life style is not to be considered art. To Pavese these authors cannot enter the myth. He excludes them from it. Writers with a neorealist tendency decided to write at times books as documents and at times books as works of art, Pavese focused on those works of art, whose narrative can be considered as such. Though in his text about Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* by Pavese considers American classics not as realist, but as able to throw a new spiritual light upon everyday life and reveal a deep symbolic nature. American realism tends to “name things so to free their spiritual and explosive charge,” C. Pavese *ibid.*, p. 35. For Pavese Americans are not realists.

51 Pavese to Untersteiner 7th May and 12th Jan 1948, Pavese, *Lettere 1945-1950*, pp. 24, and 211. In August 1926 Pavese wrote some letters to his advisor Augusto Monti explaining his passion for the American and Greek myths.
American Architecture

In their editorial collaborations with Einaudi, Bruno Zevi and Giulio Carlo Argan enriched the architecture series by following the same criteria. They suggested translations of certain American and some European architects who expressed their own ideological beliefs. Zevi advocated for Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan above all. As early as 1939, Argan himself endorsed the translation of Frank Lloyd Wright’s An Autobiography [Figure 20]. It is also thanks to translations that Zevi explained and replied to what he maintained to be a lack of critics of architecture. Indeed, Zevi expressed to his publisher that the main difficulty in having a series on architecture was the lack of serious scholars, and therefore argued for the need to supplement the publications with foreign ones. [Figure 21-22]

What did architecture historians find in America, and American architecture? Like for Vittorini and Pavese, for Zevi and Argan, the United States was the land of pioneers, of freedom, of a long tradition of democracy, the only historical tradition that Italy did not have. It was the land of popular culture, “America is true, kills the elites: but in Italy we have too many Madame Bovary,” writes Zevi while lamenting and underlining the gap between the intellectual elites and the ‘masses’-- the same masses Zevi wished to educate. Indeed, European culture was still attached to and influenced by idealism, in the name of Croce, whereas American civilization, once the United States exhausted the possibility of territorial expansion, was ostensibly bringing to the fore a more democratic way of thinking about education and new technology. As for the latter,

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52 Bruno Zevi, in writing the preface to Poete’s Introduction to Urban Planning, finally and only published in 1958, specifically asked about the translator, as the main text and its translation could not be considered as separate.
caro Calvino,
Vittorini mi ha detto a suo tempo che il libro non lo interessa per la sua collana; e allora ti pregherei di farmelo mandare a casa perché il proprietario me l’ha già chiesto una decina di volte e vorrei sistemare questa cosa prima di partire. Ti ne ricorderai? Ti pregherei proprio.
E anche di un’altra cosa dovrei preoccupi. Ne ho accennato a Palagano giorni fa ma immagino che se ne sia dimenticato e comunque io non gli ho dato gli indirizzi. Avrei bisogno che mandaste in America lo Spoon River a questa gente che me l’ha chiesto per biblioteche varie alla quale non posso farlo pagare appunto perché me lo chiedono per le biblioteche e per la quale mi dispiacerebbe dovendo pagare io perché mi sento di giorno in giorno sempre meno milionario. Gli indirizzi sono questi:

Mr. Carl Van Vechten, 101 Central Park West, New York City, N.Y. (U.S.A.)
Mr. Donald Gallup, Yale University Library, Yale Station, New Haven, Conn. (U.S.A.)
Dr. Charles W. Bernardin, 639 E. 234th St., Fordham University, Bronx, New York 58 (U.S.A.)

Mrs. Hannah Josephson, 127 West 12th Street, New York, N.Y. (U.S.A.)

Io sono stata a Torino solo per poche ore che ho impegnato per la maggior parte con Natalia e non so quando ritornerò; ma ti pregherei davvero di abbigliarmi queste faccende perché parte alla fine della settimana e vorrei essere certa che tutto è a posto. Per toglierti il fastidio di una lettera, mi diletta di fare solo una telefonata alla mia mamma, che mi fa da segretaria in un modo da fare invidia a Cecil B. DeMille.

Sono certa che mi farai questa cortesia e spero di vederti presto ti saluto con molta cordialità

[Signature]

Figure 19 Fernanda Pivano to Italo Calvino, July 18th 1950. Pivano solicits Calvino to send copies of her translated Spoon River Anthology to the United States. © Einaudi Archive.
Figure 20 Giulio Einaudi to Giulio Carlo Argan, April 23rd 1941. Einaudi asks Argan details about Wright’s autobiography, as to who holds the copyrights. © Einaudi Archive.
Figure 21 Bruno Zevi to Giulio Einaudi, probably end of 1951. Zevi complains about the lack of architecture critics while discussing “Funzione e problemi della collana storica di architettura” (Function and Problems of the Historical Series on Architecture). © Einaudi Archive.
Per altri volumi sono stati fatti contratti ma dubito che avranno un seguito per le ragioni elencate inizialmente e perche il compenso a forfait di 200.000 lire è assolutamente insufficiente, alcuni di questi volumi sono:

GALBAZZO ALESSI di Mario Labò
IL TEATRO GRECO di Paolo Verzone
ALVAR AALTO di Ingemar Gardella
STUDI SULL'ARCHITETTURA SICILIANA di Enrico Celandra

Data questa situazione, non vi e' da prevedere che i volumi pubblicati nel futuro saranno molto più numerosi. La collana non potra' rispondere all'esigenza di riempire la lacuna dell'ignoranza dell'architettura. Ma sarà' uno strumento utile se pubblicherà' periodicamente dei libri culturalmente sicuri. Questi libri non potrebbero trovar luogo in nessun'altra collezione Einaudi, dato che i SABU possono comprare solo testi di interesse generale. Ritengo pertanto essenziale continuare la collana così com'è senza forzarne l'importanza ma senza diminuirla.

Questa collana però' evidentemente non potra' colmare la lacuna culturale di cui si è parlato se non comprendersi' una serie di volumi più agili, la cui redazione possa essere affidata ad un gruppo precisone persone capaci di compilare insieme tutti o la maggior parte dei volumi. Si sottopone perciò all'esame la seguente proposta:

una collana illustrativa delle CITTA' ITALIANE, concepita come guida urbano-architettonica, Volumetti di circa 100 pagine per le grandi città e di circa 50 pagine per i centri minori.

Tale proposta, gia' distesa da altri editori e da alcuni membri della Casa Einaudi, va ritenuta sicura commercialmente. E' una collana di grande diffusione che, se ben fatta, potrebbe costituire uno strumento indispensabile per gli studiosi e per i sotteri di arte fino alla categoria dei turisti. Ma e' un'impresa che non si puo affrontare parzialmente, rendendo un volume alla volta perche', in questo caso, la spese redazionali (disegni, incisioni, collaborazione di studiosi locali, fotografie) divengono enormi. Si tratterebbe di costituire un apposito ufficio dedicato assai a questa collana, di cui dovrebbero uscire almeno dici volumi ogni anno. Sono disposto ad illustrare, durante la riunione dei collaboratori Einaudi, i criteri con i quali la collana potrebbe essere diretta, ma si tratta di una grossa impresa dal punto di vista finanziario e, benché si possa prevedere un notevole successo commerciale e l'eventuale appoggio di grosse organizzazioni (Touring, Turismo, ACI, o simili), e' chiaro che bisogna partire da un piano organizzativo efficace.

Concludendo questa breve relazione, ritengo che l'attuale collana debba rimanere così come e' ma che, vicino ad essa o come parte di essa, debba essere studiata un'initiativa di piu' largo respiro.

Bruno Zevi
American architecture was also the land of the Balloon Frame, of the Chicago school (Henry Hobson Richardson and Louis Sullivan) until the last and supreme hero: Frank Lloyd Wright. Argan had presented Wright as a sort of architectural literary counterpart, the pioneer of a new world, the poet of the prairies, the “Whitman or Melville of architecture.” He stood for the purely creative artist, the uncompromising genius who had redeemed modern architecture from social prejudice, from middle-class limitations and the austere restrictions of the minimum standard of living. Of course, Zevi brought to history the figure of Wright, after his experience in the United States. In his biography on Zevi, Roberto Dulio offered an explicative portrayal of the period. Zevi boarded in Naples on February 21st, 1940, and arrived in New York eight days later. He first spent a year as an exchange student at Columbia University before transferring to Cambridge, Massachusetts and attending the Graduate School of Design (GSD) at Harvard University. There, Zevi experienced a more integrated approach to education. As an exchange student at Columbia, he had enrolled in Drawing and Paintings and Sculpture classes under Leopold Arnaud, dean of the school of architecture following Joseph Hudnut. The latter tried to establish a tight relation between school and profession thus updating the studio pedagogy, still linked to a Beaux Art methodology up till then. When Hudnut left for Harvard, Arnaud returned to a more conventional pedagogy, one of the reasons Zevi might have left Columbia to attend Harvard. Here he discovered Wright. As early as 1941, before earning his degree in architecture at the GSD under Gropius’s deanship, Zevi had contributed to the publication of an anti-Gropius pamphlet

57 Ibid.
titled *An Opinion on Architecture*, in which he distanced himself from Gropius’s teamwork ideology and supported instead the “right of the genius” explicitly identified in Wright’s texts. Zevi promoted Wright’s individualism but masked it as the expression of “freedom.” Wright’s architecture was considered by Zevi an architecture without dogma, an open, non-theoretical architecture; and also an architecture that was not European, so to speak, and like the work of literature it had not been contaminated by Europe yet. Indeed, as pointed out by Dulio, Wright created a myth out of his fight to emancipate American architecture from European architectural culture, especially Gropius and Le Corbusier. Incidentally the discovery of Wright by Zevi was what Aztec primitivism and Japanese primitivism were to Wright himself: a new and ‘pure’ world, which manifested itself in the visual architectural culture, changing its figurative and symbolic worlds. In Zevi’s *Architettura e Storiografia* (Architecture and Historiography), the chapter on primitivism was to a certain extent a reinterpretation of Pavese and Vittorini’s linguistic quest for primitivism in the Italian language, the same quest for purism and primitive myth that had enthralled these two writers. [Figure 23] Also the connection that Zevi drew between prehistory and modern architecture was a search for myths as primitive symbols similar to the myths of prehistory envisioned by Pavese. Zevi directly referenced Freud in investigating and finding out the “totems and taboos” so to speak, of native people in order to understand the original and innate need of men that a mechanic civilization was repressing.\footnote{B. Zevi, *Architettura e Storiografia*, Milan: Tamburini 1950, pp. 94-95.} “Anyone who read *Introduction* by Sigmund Freud would remember that psychoanalysis investigates the habits, the totem and taboos of primitive
people, so to understand the originals and natural needs of men” Zevi writes.\textsuperscript{59} For example Zevi reads the presence of a chimney in American skyscrapers as the innate need of man for fire: “Even in American skyscrapers, despite its prohibitive cost and technical difficulties, every living room in every apartment has a chimney: does not this mean that the fondness for fire is within human nature?”\textsuperscript{60} Moreover, in his search for primitive symbols Zevi also addressed the need for a new monumentality, a monumentality connected to primordial symbols, which differed from the constructed monumental myth of the State preached by Fascism. “Dolmen and Menhir that inhabit pre-historic areas […] do not prove that monumentality is an original primal need of men, the religious symbol that stands for the reality of their destiny.”\textsuperscript{61} There was an urge to go back to this ancestral monumental architecture rather than a new vane and decomposed decorativism. “Each solution originates from experience, still largely inexperienced, and from the legendary and arcane appeal of prehistory.”\textsuperscript{62} This is not distant from Pavese’s myth as a pre-historical moment that preexists our knowledge of the world and that represents our first perception of the world itself. Nevertheless, America became another of these artificial myths. Like Vittorini and Pavese in literature, Zevi wished to provide a new model in architecture by looking at other geographies. The myth of America is that of a country that thinks one can constantly reinvent oneself, yet such reinvention, as this chapter proves includes the remaking of history in a different

\textsuperscript{59} “Chiunque abbia letto anche la sola Introduzione di Sigmund Freud ricorderà che la psicoterapia perlustra i costumi, i totem, i tabù dei popoli primitivi per estrarre la conoscenza dei bisogni originari e connaturali dell’uomo,” B. Zevi, Architettura e Storiografia, Milan: Tamburini 1950, pp. 94-95.

\textsuperscript{60} “Il fatto che persino nei grattacieli americani si costruisca, malgrado il costo proibitivo e le difficoltà tecniche, un caminetto nel soggiorno di ogni appartamento non denota che l’affetto per il fuoco è insito nell’uomo?” B. Zevi, Architettura e Storiografia, Milan: Tamburini 1950, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{61} “I dolmen e i menhir che popolano le zone preistoriche […] non dimostrano che la monumentalità è un bisogno originario dell’uomo il simbolo religioso delle realtà sostanziali del suo destino,” ibid.

country or continent. Translations also concerned architecture books but witnessed a delay compared to literature: the democratic myth was suggested by Wright’s book *An Organic Architecture. The Architecture of Democracy*, translated into Italian in 1945 as *Architettura organica. L’architettura della democrazia.* In 1944 Zevi suggested to Einaudi the translation of Louis Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats*, which Zevi described as “the masterpiece by the great architect of the last Century,” as well as Sullivan’s, *The Autobiography of an Idea*. Zevi also proposed two works by Lewis Mumford: *The Culture of Cities*, “the most important work on urban studies ever published” and Mumford *Technics and Civilization*. But they did not happen. The writer Natalia Ginzburg, who was working as an Einaudi editor at the time criticized *Kindergarten Chats* for its lyricism à la Whitman, and for being nothing close to architecture.

*Figure 24*

Einaudi himself dismissed Sullivan’s text as something:

È letteralmente illeggibile, con tutte le sue digressioni, il linguaggio esaltato e profetico, il lirismo alla Whitman; il lettore profano – come credo anche quello non profano – non regge alla prova di indovinare il pensiero architettonico dell’autore in quell’oceano di metafore e di visioni di un gusto, poi, nettamente scaduto. Certo, ci si rende conto di essere Unreadable, with all these digressions, and fanatical and prophetic language, the lyricism à la Whitman, the profane reader – as I believe the non profane as well – does not bear having to guess the author’s architectural thought amidst that ocean of metaphors and visions of a taste, then, clearly out of date. Sure enough, we are aware of being in front of a classic, to

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64 Zevi to Einaudi. No date. Folder Zevi Einaudi Archive.

alla presenza di un classico, di avere fra le mani un importante documento: ma una pubblicazione nella tua collana non può reggersi su motivi così estrinsecamente filologici e quasi celebrativi.

As for Wright’s books, the first translation of his *An Autobiography* was suggested by Giulio Carlo Argan back in 1939 and rejected by Einaudi for being “too fictionalized and heavy for my Saggi [Essays]. This kind of book presupposes a public, which is already interested in the person and work of Wright – something that does not exist even among the most educated Italian readers. I cannot make up my mind about it.” First, Einaudi believed that the element *fantasia* in a book written by an architect would never be accepted by the general public. Second, Wright was relatively unknown in Italy at that point. Certainly the situation was very different in 1949, when Wright’s name had become well known beyond the specialized public, and well after Einaudi’s 1945 publication of Zevi’s *Towards an Organic Architecture*, of which Wright’s autobiography could have been considered a sort of appendix. Nevertheless, both Zevi and Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, who had organized a Wright retrospective in Florence in 1951, showed interest in publishing Wright’s autobiography, and strongly supported it. Einaudi eventually regretted his earlier decision.68

66 Einaudi to Zevi, 22nd February 1952, AE Folder Zevi.
67 “Cosa troppo massiccia e romanzata per i miei Saggi. Questo tipo di libro presuppone un pubblico già precedentemente interessato alla persona e all’opera di Wright – cosa che non si può dire nemmeno dei più colti dei lettori italiani. Non so decidermi a farlo,” Einaudi to Argan, 2nd October 1941, AE Folder Argan.
68 In 1943 Pavese contacted Argan about an Italian edition of Wright’s Autobiography, and Zevi pushed the translation in 1944.
quale, ritornando sulla propria decisione favorevole riguardante il libro di Schönbeg, coglie l'occasione per provare Mila di studiare a fondo il problema delle nostre pubblicazioni di letteratura musicale e in modo da dare a questo filone del "Saggi" una sua consistenza e un suo rilievo.

"Kindergarten Chats" di Sullivan: questo libro di discorsi sull'architettura di un pioniere americano dell'architettura moderna, tradotto da Riccardo Musatti per "Poligono" (editore che ha celebrato la sua attività), è stato vivamente colto giusto da Bruno Z vi per la collana da lui diretta. Testo traduzione di sono giunti da pochi giorni. Balli ha esaminato il libro e, pur riconoscendo il valore di certe intuizioni sull'architettura e i rapporti tra architettura e società, lo giudica espressamente prolioso, caricato di divagazioni poco pertinenti e tutto pervaso da un "whitmanismo" retorico e di maniera. Natalia, che ha pure dato una scorsa all'opera, concorda con il giudizio di Bollati e afferma che il libro è stato in maniera negativa sull'opera da lui tanto raccomandata.

"Jubilate" di Amadio: Dario Procini ha finalmente consegnato la traduzione di questo romanzo, di cui era prevista la pubblicazione nella "P.B.S.L." Natalia ha esaminato la traduzione e ritiene che il libro, per il suo livello letterario, figuri bene nei "Coralli".

"Commedia e proverbi" di De Musset: Natalia ritiene necessario, per questo particolare titolo, una prefazione che vada al di là della semplice nota informativa che si usa promettere ai volumi dei "Miliardi" i cui autori sono mediamente conosciuti al pubblico della collana. Vasti alcuni nomi, il Consiglio fa cadere la sua scelta su Trompoe, al quale si decide di offrire l'incarico della prefazione.

LE/1
The story about Wright’s copyright became a mythical tale in and on itself. Another Einaudi collaborator Giulio Bollati suggested that Ragghianti write to Einaudi and push for the autobiography’s publication. Mondadori had already bought the rights from the Rosa e Ballo publishing house, even though Wright, during his stay in Florence, claimed to be the sole owner. This claim ended up being nowhere close to the truth, but was another fictive story by Wright. In fact, Wright had given his word separately both to Ragghianti and Zevi. [Figures 25 to 27]

The story will keep going. Some years later, on 1st January 1954, Argan informed Luciano Foà, about a new book by Wright, A Testament, not yet published:

Probabilmente sarà come tutti gli altri di Wright: pieno di cose strampalate e di paradossi, ma anche di idee geniali […] Io non sono certo di quei patiti di Wright che pigliano per oro colato tutte le parole del “profeta”: tuttavia è sempre un colosso, e un libro che riassuma, come pare, le sue idee geniali.

It will probably be like every book by Wright: full of eccentricities and paradoxes, but also genial ideas […] I am not a fanatical follower of Wright, someone who takes word by word all that the ‘prophet’ writes as being the truth: however, he is still a giant, and

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69 The Mondadori Publishing House started in 1907 by publishing educative magazines such as: “popolare istruittivo.” [popular instruction]. Mondadori also published the work of futurist and avant-garde artists such as Soffici, De Chirico, Carrà normally associated with a more conservative side, suffice it to say the work by Gabriele D’Annunzio, but also Luigi Pirandello and Giovanni Verga. Mondadori was close to the fascist regime. In 1929 it started the series of detective novels, a genre that can be considered the most prolific of its popular series, but it is with foreign authors that Mondadori experienced an unexpected success in 1933 and became one of the main Italian publishing houses. The series “Medusa” also enhanced the importance of the author as well of the translator. Cesare Pavese and Corrado Alvaro are the first translators. Elio Vittorini edited this series starting in 1960, stressing the foreign component by adding a further sub-series: Nuovi Scrittori Stranieri [New Foreign Writers]. A year later he additionally started the series for Einaudi (Il Nuovo Politecnico). On the one hand, being affiliated with the fascist regime led Mondadori to support Italian authors and their narrative. On the other hand Mondadori provided a strong connection to the United States, especially concerning popular culture. In 1935 the publishing house signed an agreement with Walt Disney and led to the publication of the entire Disney material (Mickey Mouse on top of everything). To follow up on the American trend, after WWII Mondadori started a series of weekly popular culture magazines, mimicking the illustrated American journals. In these same years after the war the initiation of low-cost / paperback books was one of the main and most important activities sponsored by Mondadori. Einaudi had a more independent role despite its authors being more politically engaged.

esperienze di sessant’anni di architettura non può che essere interessante. a book that sums up, as it seems, his sixty years of experience as an architect can only be of interest.  

[Figure 28]

And indeed, Einaudi agreed, in 1954 the general public was ready to accept stories written by architects as scientific evidence of a historical progression, accepting the past by looking at the future as represented by the United States. Einaudi will only publish Wright’s *A Testament* in 1963, and *A Living City* in 1966.  

Interestingly enough, most of the translators were women, and most of them authors’ wives: Tullia Calabi, Zevi’s wife; Anna Maria Mazzucchelli, Argan’s wife; Esther Judith Singer, Calvino’s wife; Fernanda Pivano, Ettore Sottsass’ wife; and Giulia Veronesi (also Persico’s assistant), all started as translators, and only gradually became contributors and authors themselves. Nevertheless, they still maintain a secondary position in architectural historiography, overshadowed by their male counterparts.

**The Organic anti-myth**

Ultimately, a chapter about the American myth could not be complete without the myth of the organic. Zevi’s fascination for America translated in his commitment to academia following the American example, and in *Towards an Organic Architecture* [1945] a book about the accomplishment and realization of a new architecture, Zevi

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71 Argan to Foà, 1st January 1954 AE Folder Argan. On 15th October 1958 Zevi solicited Einaudi to buy the copyrights and have it published in his series. AE Folder Zevi.  
73 The book was published by Einaudi in 1945 with no images, and Wright Fallingwater on its cover.
Caro Einaudi,

durante il soggiorno di Wright in Italia, ho più volte parlato con lui dei diritti di traduzione dell'Autobiografia. Egli non ricordava affatto di aver ceduto i diritti a Rosa e Balley; agli dice che probabilmente tali diritti sono stati ceduti all'editore e non da lui, e aggiunge che l'editore non ne aveva diritto. Comunque, agli e' dispostissimo a cederli, ansa dice che e' pronto a farlo solo se la traduzione sarà rivista da me. Percio' puoi cominciare le pratiche subito, Wright e' interamente dalla nostra parte, e, quando tu avrai messo a posto le cose con l'editore, fammelo sapere e scrivero' io a lui.

In molti negozii di Venezia e di Roma, non si trova più la STORIA DELL'ARCHITETTURA MODERNA. Come mai? Ho ricevuto delle lamentele. Escluderei l'ipotesi che l'edizione stia per esaurirsi. Comunque, ben prima che cio' avvenga, desidero essere avvisato, poiche', sin da quando e' uscito il libro, ho cominciato a lavorare per le integrazioni necessarie alla seconda edizione.

Ho il piacere di annunciarvi che nel premio internazionale di critica d'arte, ULISSE-CORTINA, su 57 concorrenti siamo rimasti in tre in lizza. Sara' aggiudicato il 22 luglio. Benche', conoscendo gli umori e le tendenze politiche della maggior parte della commissione, io non ci conti troppo, in un modo o nell'altro ritengo che il libro (SAEP VEDERE L'ARCHITETTURA) sar' nominato. Percio', due cose: anzitutto che il libro si trovi in vendita a Cortina, e, qualora vinca il premio o una parte di esso, sia rilanciato con una striscia reclamistica PREMIO INTERNAZIONALE ULISSE-CORTINA PER LA CRITICA D'ARTE.

Per quanto riguarda infine la comunicazione del 5 luglio, nella seconda meta' di settembre, sar' certamente di ritorno dal giro di conferenze in Argentina (partiro' alla fine di luglio). Saro' ben lieto percio' di partecipare alla riunione. Desidero intanto informare che la maggior parte dei libri contrattati o non sono stati scritti oppure, esaminati, ho dovuto scartarli come non confacenti al livello scientifico e divulgativo della collana.

ACCASCINA, PARIELLO, GARDELLA, LABO' non hanno scritto i volumi che possono perciò considerarsi esclusi da ogni programma. BONELLI e MATTHIAS hanno scritto i loro volumi, ma il materiale fotografico e, in un caso, il contenuto era tale che non ho potuto accettare i volumi. VERZONE sta completando il suo saggio e vorrei che voi faceste pressione con lui, ZING ha pubblicato molti dei suoi disegni destinati al suo volume in un volume edito a spese sua che gli era necessario per un concorso universitario. Ritengo perciò che anche su questo si debba fare una croce sopra.

Rimangono in piedi, oltre il VERZONE, il SITTE-HOWARD la cui traduzione si sta completando; il SULLIVAN, che non appare nel vostro elenco, perciò e' una traduzione che sta curando Riccardo Musatti. Io ho vari programmi per questa collana e da tempo ho chiesto un colloquio con Einaudi per esaminarli. Ma non
Carissimo Einaudi,

mi scrive Wright dandomi personalmente i diritti di traduzione in italiano della sua AUTOBIOGRAFIA. Egli ritiene che l'editore non abbia alcun diritto poiché egli si riserva questi diritti. Comunque egli non conceda di fare la traduzione italiana a meno che io la controlli.

A tale scopo, penso che la miglior cosa da fare sia che la traduzione la faccia mia moglie, la quale è assolutamente bilingue, ed io la controlli. Ma mia moglie - saggia! - vista l'esperienza del marito, non vuol fare questa traduzione senza un congruo anticipo! Non posso che darle ragione.

Ho fatto il calcolo che, deta la lunghezza e l'estrema difficoltà del linguaggio di Wright, sulla base media del pagamento delle traduzioni, verrebbero fuori circa 400.000 lire. Anzi si potrebbe fare un forfait; anticipo: 200.000 lire.

Il volume dovrebbe venir fuori nella collana storico e sarebbe un grande vantaggio per questa collana. Ci saranno illustrazioni come nella *xxxi* edizione inglese. Di queste illustrazioni mi occuperò io.

In attesa di un contratto (il nome di mia moglie è TULLIA ZEVI), ti saluto cordialmente

Bruno Zevi

F.S. Per ciò che riguarda il volume degli ATTI del Congresso delle Proporzioni, si attende il ritorno dall'America di Ivan Matteo Lombardo, per stabilire le modalità. Segno la cosa.

Figure 26 Bruno Zevi to Giulio Einaudi, October 4<sup>th</sup> 1951. Zevi assures that Wright gave him the copyright to his autobiography. © Einaudi Archive.
Caro Bollati,
avrà certamente letto la lettera che ho diretto qualche giorno fa ad Einaudi, in guisa di ennimo svegliarino.
Spero di riavere presto le bozze impagnate del mio Cinema arte figurativa, E le illustrazioni? Sì possono avere i bozzi?
Ancora sìamo, a quel che pare, in altissimo mare per il Riegl. Io le avendo una lettera di Giuseppe Galassi, che mi farà il piacevole di rimandarmi, che le attesta come è attesa la pubblicazione del Riegl. Avete messo in bozze? In tal caso, potresto favorire con due copie, per modo da soddisfare al desiderio del Galassi? Egli senza dubbio ne parlerà a lungo nell’appendice del suo volume, e sarà per il libro cosa favorevolissima.
Ancora attendo di sapere se avete approvato la proposta di impaginazione che vi feci per la Pittura fiamminga. Ripeto: una breve introduzione generale, poi le tavole a pagina intera e le tavole a colore, infine (sempre in carta patinata) le pagine a due colonne con le biografie critiche degli artisti e le schede critiche delle opere, con le illustrazioni minori. Thesaurus.
Ho bisogno di avere il via, per far copiare tutto adeguatamente. Potrei intanto mandarvi le illustrazioni a piena pagina, e siete d’accordo con la lista che le consegnai per le illustrazioni a coloare?
Per quanto riguarda l’Autobiografia di Wright, il Maestro mi ha dato personalmente il consenso per l’edizione, che curerò io stesso, anche per la necessità di aggiunte e di note, mentre è necessaria una introduzione critica, e adeguate illustrazioni. Il Maestro desidera – fa condizione, debbo dire – che io stesso mi occupi dell’altra cosa. La prego di riferirne ad Einaudi.

Spero vivamente in una sua cortese e sollecita risposta, e frattanto mi abbia con cordiali saluti

Carlo L. Ragghianti
Caro Foà,

Ricevo questo avviso di un nuovo libro di Wright. Non è ancora uscito o almeno non è ancora arrivato in Italia. Probabilmente sarà come tutti gli altri di Wright: pieno di cose strampalate e di paradossi, ma anche di idee geniali. Credo che il successo di una traduzione, che unisce a breve distanza dall'originale, sarebbe sicuro. Te non sono certo di quei passi di Wright che pigliano per oro colato tutte le parole del "profeta": tuttavia è sempre un colosso, e un libro che riassuma, come pare, le sue esperienze di sessant'anni di architettura non può che essere interessante.

Parlano a Einaudi, nel caso che voglia assicurarsi fin d'ora l'opzione, salvo a decidere poi dopo aver visto il libro.

Tanti saluti cordiali

Argan

Figure 28 Giulio Carlo Argan to Luciano Foà, January 1st 1954. Argan informs Foà about a new book by Wright: A Testament. © Einaudi Archive.
specifically points out that the object of the book is “to describe the architectural trend of the last few years.” He opens his narrative by claiming that “these pages do not pretend to be either a history or a theory of modern architecture. Still less are they an attempt to put forward a programme for a future architectural movement. They are the summary of impressions regarding the actual condition of architecture which I received while working at the School of Architecture of the University of Rome and at the Graduate School of Design of Harvard University.” Indeed they are impressions, fragments, intuitions, what Hillman names “direct and immediate knowledge.” Thirty years later Tafuri would state that in Towards an Organic Architecture ”even if Zevi did not want to propose a linguistic model what he suggested by using Wright and Alto as models “were too mythical not to become appropriate to any use.”

Organic architecture represented the anti-rational, the new mythic, the antithesis of a constructed monumental architecture, one that can only serve the myths of the State.

L’Architettura Organica è perciò l’antitesi dell’architettura monumentale asservita ai miti statali. Si oppone all’asse maggiore e all’asse minore del neoclassicismo contemporaneo, al neoclassicismo degli archi e delle colonne, e a quel falso che si nasconde dietro le forme pseudo-moderne dell’architettura monumentale odierna. Organic architecture is the opposite of a monumental architecture submitted to the State’s myths. It opposes the major and minor axis of a contemporary neoclassicism, to a neoclassicism made of arches and columns, and to the falsity hidden beyond the pseudo-modern forms of a

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75 Ibid.
contemporary monumental architecture.  

The conception of the “organic” remained as blurred as that of the “rational” for the architects of the thirties, and ultimately became an alternative myth. Organic was essentially the opposite of the rational Persico was talking about. Persico’s Prophecy had certainly influenced the roman architecture historian, but Persico never mentioned the term; Zevi introduced organic first in the architectural debate and mainly thanks to Wright’s London lectures, in 1939. Indeed, in the first part of his book Zevi mentioned a new direction different from the modern architecture professed by Le Corbusier. In the chapter “Meanings and limits of the term “Organic” towards architecture” Zevi would later introduce the categories of organic and inorganic, derived from the polarities of Heinrich Wölfflin, via Walter Behrendt’s 1937 book on modern architecture and its chapters on Organic Architecture and Frank Lloyd Wright. The inorganic was regular, controlled, oppressing, and the organic irregular, open, therefore democratic.  

It was not until ten years later, that Zevi was able to establish Wright’s organicist contribution as the starting point of the entire modern movement and as the basis for a solution of the crisis brought by rationalism, thus bridging romanticism and rationalism. And as a matter of fact, the original formal “organic” principles, as propounded in Italy after the Second World War by Zevi, demanded a drastic solution – that of turning to another cultural tradition – and the renewal was to be found in the work of Wright. To

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77 APAO declaration, in Metron. N. 2, 1945, translation by the author.
many Italian intellectuals, nourished on Crocean idealism, Wright’s work appeared as the only defense of poetry in architecture, as opposed to the prosaic, economic, sociological, and technical building of the pure rationalists.\(^{80}\)

Wright’s *Organic Architecture* may have been the primary influence, but Gramsci’s definition of the organic intellectual was at that time also circulating among Italian leftist literati. According to Gramsci the intellectual can aim to represent the people only when the relation between the two is based on an “organic cohesion between sentiment-passion and comprehension.”\(^{81}\) The people feel but do not know, the intellectuals know but not always comprehend or feel. The two lead to two extremes: blind passion and bigotry on one side, pedantry and philistinism on the other. The major mistake of an intellectual is to think he knows without comprehending and especially without feeling. The organic intellectual cannot be detached from the people, according to Gramsci.\(^{82}\) Indeed the organic seems to bridge the gap between the two spheres, the people and the intellectual elite, and that bridge was again offered by the American example.

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\(^{80}\) The attempt to create synthesis between organicism and functionalism had been an on-going process – a logical cultural exchange, a lively burst of sparks from one theoretical pole to the other – and the bridge between them had been attempted in Italy already during the thirties. Ernesto Nathan Rogers expressed this connection in an article published in *Aut Aut* in 1951: “Since 1910, Mies van der Rohe discovered and admired Frank Lloyd Wright. […] if Mies rationalized the organic, in between the two wars, Alvar Aalto gave back a more organic rationalism; in other words, he emphasized the organic element in the composition of different cultural forces that had already happened. “Da quando, nel 1910, Mies van der Rohe ha ammirato Frank Lloyd Wright, l’esperienza americana ha avuto la sua originale consacrazione europea: noi abbiamo inteso Wright soprattutto attraverso la mediazione di Mies. Se Mies ha razionalizzato l’organico, nel periodo tra le due guerre, Alvar Aalto ha reso più organico il razionale, cioè ha accentuato l’elemento organico nella composizione delle diverse forze culturali che era già avvenuta,” in E.N. Rogers, “Situazione dell’architettura italiana,” *Aut Aut*, 5 Sept 1951, pp. 453-454.

\(^{81}\) “Un’adesione organica in cui il sentimento-passione diventa comprensione quindi sapere,” in A. Gramsci, *Passaggio dal sapere al comprendere, al sentire e viceversa, dal sentire al comprendere, al sapere*, Quaderno XVIII, Einaudi p. XXII.

America as impossible future

In the end, the myth of America did not follow a regular path, and had its peaks: in 1930-1935 (coinciding with Pavese’s articles); a steady line between 1934 and 1940, with two downturns in 1936 and 1938; one other main peak in 1941-1942 (Americana by Vittorini, Quaderni Italiani by Bruno Zevi); finally, a long decline with some exceptions due to the large number of translations in Italy after the demise of the regime (1944-46), the publication of Il Politecnico (1945-47) and Towards an Organic Architecture (1945). From then, to the end of 1940s it inevitably decayed. In architecture, the American myth existed only so long as America was pictured as a virgin land, with no external influences. When it was apparent that Europe had influenced American architecture, even slightly, its myth started to decline. Even in literature, a new generation of American supporters tried to defend American literature’s independence so to preserve its “pure” or “virgin” myth. On one hand Americans tried to build their independence from Europe, on the other hand they were already following European models.83

In literature Pavese seemed to set the end of the myth in 1950, when he wrote “Il mito” now in the volume American Literature:

Un assoluto, un attimo intemporale ma per la sua stessa natura tende a farsi storia, ad accadere tra gli uomini, a diventare ciò poesia o teoria, con ciò negandosi come mito, come fuori-del-tempo, e

The myth is an absolute, an instant without time, but, due to its own nature, it suddenly becomes poetry or theory. By doing so, by becoming poetry or theory, it denies itself as a myth, as being outside of

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83 Lewis Mumford, Wyck Brooks, H. L. Mencken, Waldo Franz attacked humanist as conservative and preached a re-examination of literature and reality of American life.
sottoponendosi all’indagine genetico-causele degli storici. time, and becomes an investigation for the historians.84

So when the myth is written, and is expressed as poetry, it becomes embedded in history and thus is an object and subject of its own time. Once the myth is understood, it enters history and human life. Here it is no longer mythical. Besides, this same poetry fades away when the poetic phantasy discovers its own nature, when the rules and theories behind its creation are revealed. Myths are not only concerned with origins, are not merely a story told, but realities lived. In that same 1950 Pavese tragically ended his life, and Vittorini stopped his creative career. After Pavese died, on August 31st 1950, in an unpublished letter Ernesto de Martino wrote to Einaudi and asked his intentions regarding the Serie Viola (Violet Series) — a series publishing anthropology and ethnographic books edited by Pavese.85 De Martino insisted in changing the direction Pavese imprinted on the series. De Martino accused Pavese to have supported the irrational element idealizing the myth, the primitive world, the “dark side”, and preaching

85 The series of religious, anthropological, and psychological books for the “Violet series” (named after the color of the book covers) was an Einaudi series proposed by Pavese in 1948, and mainly edited by him till 1950 and De Martino till 1956. It was mainly known for its publication of texts on tribal cultures: Charles Robert Aldrich, Mente primitiva e civiltà moderna, (Primitive Mind and Modern Civilization) 1949; Ewald Volhard, Il cannibalismo (Cannibalism) 1949; Bronislaw Malinoswki, Sesso e repressione sessuale tra i selvaggi, (Sexual Life of Savages) 1950; Adolphus Peter Elkin, Gli aborigeni australiani, (The Australian Aborigens), 1956. On primitivism and magic: Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, L’anima primitiva (Primitive Mentality) 1948; De Martino, Il mondo magico: prolegomeni a una storia del magismo (The Realm of the Magical. Introduction to a History of the Magical), 1948; E. De Martino, Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico (Ritual Death and Lamenting in Ancient World) 1958; C. G. Jung, K. Kerényi, Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia, (Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis) 1948; James Frazer, Il ramo d’oro: studio della magia e della religione, (The Golden Bough) 1950; Karoly Kerényi Miti e misteri (Myths and misteries) 1950; Emile Durkheim, Le origini dei poteri magici, (The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life) 1951.
a new direction toward the historicist tradition Italy was known for.\textsuperscript{86} And indeed Pavese had previously confessed that the characteristic of the violet series should have been “that of opposing the raging historicism.” [storicismo imperversante]\textsuperscript{87} But Pavese could not oppose the process of history, when the interest toward myth declined, the new intent became that of realizing lasting manuals, publications that could offer more directions and instruction rather than narratives. Myths also became historicized. The Violet Series, with his mix of books on psychoanalysis, religions and ethnology would “reinforce the crisis of a bourgeois class” Einaudi claimed, and more than anything they would lead the public toward mystical readings. Given that every Einaudi series would reach a wide and cultivated public rather than a mere narrow circle of experts, the aim geared toward guiding a, so far, disoriented public. To this end, Einaudi wished to separate himself from the modern taste “for the obscure sides of the soul.”\textsuperscript{88} And after 1950 the Publishing House did indeed lean toward an historical approach in all its publications, as we will describe in the fifth chapter.

America with its short past had represented a different and new kind of historical consciousness, and the future of history. As early as 1946, Pavese had reminded a student leaving Italy to study abroad, that Italy was stuck in a motionless historical stasis. Students should leave Italy and find their place where history happens, that place being America. He mentioned America as the outpost of history. “As intellectuals we always have to be where history progresses. History forgets about some countries. Every river

\textsuperscript{86} “Tropposimpateticocconcerteformediirrazionalismo,scientificamenteerrateepoliticamenteospette,cheattraversol’ideleggiamentodelmonoprimitivo,delsacro,delmito,etc.,avevano tenutobattesimoauchi aspettidell’involuzione culturale (e politica) della borghesiaagonizzante.” The latter remained unheard and on November 18th 1950 de Martino solicited a decision regarding the series. De Martino to Einaudi, 31\textsuperscript{st}August 1950, in Pavese e De Martino, \textit{La collana viola}, pp. 181-182.


\textsuperscript{88} Einaudi to Pavese, AE Pavese.
has elbows, dead angles. Today, as yesterday, being born in Italy is like missing a
train.”89 That train seemed to be the train that departing from the North of Italy stopped in
Eboli, the southern city where the painter and writer Carlo Levi set his seminal
autobiographical novel Crist Stopped at Eboli.90 Levi’s style is close to the neorealist
narrative for its detailed documentation of landscapes and constructions, and his
sociological depiction, though, all the characters are described surrounded by an almost
mythological and pre-historical landscape. Southern Italy and farmers are depicted as
archaic and primitive, hanging in the balance between legend and reality, fable and
magic, a sort of complacency of a remote past but also the condemnation of the deep
poverty in which they lived.91

This chapter ends with Pavese and a brief reference to his great novel The Moon
and the Bonfires. The nameless narrator returns to Italy from California after the Second
World War. He has done well in America, but success has not taken the edge off his
memories of childhood, when he was an orphan living at the mercy of a bitterly poor
farmer. He wants to learn what happened in his native village over the long, terrible years
of Fascism; perhaps, he even thinks, he will settle down. And yet as he uncovers a
personal secret and the savage history of the war, a tale of betrayal and reprisal, sex and
death, he finds that the past still haunts the present.

90 Written in Florence between 1943 and 1944, it was published by Einaudi the following year. It was the result of Levi’s two years in political exile following his anti-fascist activity. The fictive time, the chronology of events as they are told in the book, do not coincide with the real time, the time that the author spent in exile in Lucania.
91 The problems of Southern Italy became the center of few other authors at that time. We can think about Vittorini’s Conversazione in Sicilia, Francesco Jovine’s Le terre del sacramento, more on this topic in Alberto Asor Rosa, Breve storia della letteratura italiana, Turin: Einaudi 2013, p. 272. Levi is maybe one of the few authors not to lower himself to mere populism, thanks to his cultural approach and his true attempt to understand the very poor conditions in which people lived, but at the same time considering their intrinsic values. Lastly, Carlo Levi got closer to the neorealist group in 1954 – as a painter – and he was then able to combine the mythical and the real. What Asor Rosa termed an “intellectual going toward the people.” Alberto Asor Rosa, conversation with the author, August 12th 2013.
This work of realist fiction seems to foresee the historical turn taking place in the fifties. Pavese’s immigrant hero touched the mythical American ground, and the land of the future allowed him to make some fortune. But it did not last very long. Somehow he feels the urge to go back to reality and to its past, represented by his Italian hometown. Like a premonition for the years to come Italian writers cannot escape their past and present reality by dreaming about another continent. One way or another they are condemned to look toward the future by historicizing the past and analyzing the present of their own country. America does not offer room for yearning any longer.
Caro Pavese,

voi in transizione, il tuo articolo sul Mitos il Simbolico, e che mi sembra la poesia di quel genere «avventuriero della 'infanzia favolosa» e me poco simpatico». Non ho letto molto e in fretta, e mi interrogo perché mi sembra che tu stessi in un certo punto si espri mi favorevolmente nei riguardi di questo genere. Il propos.

to è una bella differenza tra la poesia che adori proposta in Italia, e questa che vorrei sperimentare con una nuova mira di casalinghi interessati, in compagnia di Marilù Strozzi, e other. Mi piacerebbe ve lo parli anche per la mia poesia che volere in altro ambito, l'italiano, ma nel caso tu così che una buona stretta verso l'Unità. Ti farebbe bene.

Andiamo veniamo alla nostra faccenda, tutto qui aggiungere la mia situazione, no con: non prendere la direzione del 'Radiocorsiva' ma ne essere soltanto la parte musicale, pensa all'archivio di quindicimila ma - vorrei, vorrei, vorrei, vorrei, vorrei. Per questo è necessario che tu torni a Torino. E se vi potrebbe venire non collocare a Parigi, come tu hai progettato, dire che gli altri tuoi ragazzi, che lo abbia suggerito il fratello al quale mi aveste affidato come segretario privato, e lei a te, e poi che ha fatto a Giudice proprio. Anche tutti il ferro avete te in questo servizio, e quindi la strada per un sollevato ritorno.

Sta bene. Tuo aff. Mila

Potrebbe tornare a Parma? Tuttavia, non mi tirare le orecchie e delle.
Figure 30 “Best Wishes” to all subscribers of Il Politecnico in 1947; readers can choose a book from among the Einaudi publishing house series.
Chapter 4 - From Building Interiors to Real Estate: Italo Calvino’s Urban Fictions

“Places, events, people, names in this story are absolutely fictive, and references to reality cannot be found except by accident.”

– I. Calvino, *A Plunge into Real Estate*

Oscar Wilde’s Miss Prism says in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, “Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.” Sharp Cecily replies, “Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn’t possibly have happened.” Memory entails both chronicles of a real past and stories of an imagined past. Architecture in the early work of Italo Calvino embodies this ambivalence at its best. Calvino minutely described and used urban settings to set his narratives as if they were real; architecture is what builds the realistic backbone of the fictive story, the believable and tangible part. Rather than acting simply as a set design or a side theme in Calvino’s narrative, architecture itself becomes the protagonist. Likewise, architecture and the city drive and modify the process of writing, at times becoming the narrator of the story itself. Architecture becomes to Calvino the historiographic device to remember the past, analyze the present, and hope for the future. I will touch upon all of these three temporal categories, and consider the role of architecture and its relation to Calvino’s position toward historical consciousness during the 1940s and 1950s.

It is for this reason that the first works by Calvino are considered quasi-realist

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1 “Il luoghi, i fatti, le persone, i nomi di questo racconto sono assolutamente fantastici e non possono esservi trovati riferimenti con la realtà se non per caso,” I. Calvino, *La speculazione edilizia*, [1956-57], Turin: Einaudi 1963. Translation by the author.

even if realism and neorealism are difficult to define. In her Il viaggio testuale (The Textual Journey), the Italianist and literary critic Maria Corti summed up three phases of neorealism using temporal distinctions. The first phase is the realism of the thirties, characterized by its anti-fascist narrative, for example Moravia’s Gli Indifferenti (The Time of Indifference) published in 1929. The second phase of neorealism is characterized by the genre of “memory” and “collective chronicles” (1943–1948), which coincided with the main neorealist production, witnessing the conflation between literature and cinema. But this second phase is most well-known for being specifically characterized by its narrative intent—the authors’ desire to denounce events and politics. This is also the phase when Calvino started to write his first collection of short stories. Finally, the third phase of neorealism implies the ideological codification, the creation of national-popular heroes within the framework of the Communist Party (1951–1955).

Supposedly, the built environment bestows reality to these fictional narratives, as do architecture and the city in Calvino’s œuvre. In his novels, Calvino enlarged workers’ houses and limited bourgeois mansions. He started in the forties by having his characters dwell in communal housing during the resistenza, and then by lodging them in typical residential structures like the infamous palazzine, town houses or “little palaces” of the fifties.

Several of Calvino’s books belong to this second phase of neorealism. He started his career in 1947 with the novel Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno (Path to the Nest of Spiders)
set against the backdrop of World War II. An account of his life in the resistenza, its title, though, was already turning realism into fairy tale; the role of architecture and the distance to the city are also crucial in this book. It was followed by Ultimo viene il corvo (The Crow Comes Last), a collection of short stories published in 1949, which consists of thirty stories inspired by the novelist’s experiences fighting with the Communist Garibaldi Brigades in the Alps during the final phases of the war. [Figures 2-3]

However, Calvino’s realism is not really his forte, and most of these early writings were rejected by Italian publishing houses or have not been translated. For instance, he wrote Il bianco veliero (The White Sailing Ship) in 1949, a book that his friend and fellow writer Elio Vittorini rejected and thus remained one of the greatest books you’ll never read. It took him more time to write I Giovani del Po (Young People by the Po River), which was started in 1951 but not published until 1957 and 1958, than The Cloven Viscount, written the same summer (1951). After “The White Sailing Ship” and Young People by the Po River, Calvino tried a third “realistic-social-grotesque-Gogolian” novel set in working-class Turin: La collana della regina (The Queen’s Necklace, 1953), which was also never published. Finally in 1963 Calvino published Marcovaldo or the Seasons in the City, another collection of short stories, some written as early as 1953, in which a melancholic Marcovaldo cannot adapt to a city without nature. But his short novel La speculazione edilizia (A Plunge into Real Estate), [Figure 4] a fictive, though truthful, story about building construction, which evoked the construction boom and building speculation of the 1950s, epitomizes his views on the contemporary state of architecture while mixing

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6 First published in 1947 as Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno by Einaudi.
7 Some of these stories have been translated in I. Calvino, Adam, One Afternoon: and other stories, translated by Archibald Colquhoun and Petty Wright, London: Secker & Warburg 1957. Some of them have never been translated.
8 A good survey about his production is “Chronology,” in I. Calvino, La Speculazione edilizia, Turin: Einaudi 1963, pp. 9-33; and A. Asor Rosa, Breve Storia della letteratura italiana, Torino: Einaudi 2013, p. XX.
Figure 1 Italo Calvino, 1947.
Figure 2 First edition of Italo Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Turin: Einaudi 1947. On the cover, a painting by Ennio Morlotti.
Figure 3 Italo Calvino, *Ultimo viene il corvo*, Turin: Einaudi 1949.
Figure 4 Italo Calvino, *La speculazione edilizia*, Turin: Einaudi 1963.
fiction with chronicle. *A Plunge into Real Estate* was conceived around 1955 as part of a trilogy that Einaudi suggested naming *Chronicles of the fifties*, and a shorter version of it had already been published in *Botteghe Oscure* in 1957. This book marked Calvino’s shift in style from a more true-to-life period to the fantastic style he is usually associated with. The literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa locates *A Plunge into Real Estate* as the beginning of a new phase in Calvino’s career, one that “opens up a new moment in Calvino’s work”—precisely the moment in which Calvino expressed “the will to reflect the movements of history (and thus of social classes) and his fantasy, unable to find again in that story the juices that nourish and satisfy it.” In fact, Calvino described current events but mixed them with fantasy. Therefore, I consider *A Plunge into Real Estate* as the conclusion of Calvino’s realist moment, the last in which he tried to anchor his narrative to actual places, actual facts, and true-to-life characters. In this mixture of realism and fantasy, the city and its architecture are everywhere.

The main character of this short novel, the quasi-autobiographic intellectual Quinto Anfossi, tired of his unexceptional and unprofitable career, tries, in vain, for better luck in the real estate in the Riviera, not far from Calvino’s hometown, Sanremo. But he fails. Both in literature and architectural debate, the year that “A plunge to Real Estate” was written, 1957, was a seminal year of rupture. At the end of 1956, the Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet invasion led to widespread disapproval of the

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12 Articles about the wild building expansion of the Riviera pervade architectural publication during the fifties.
Communist Party. Before this moment, news disseminated by the Party was considered truthful and part of an objective history. Intellectual production was mainly attached to political engagement. Once there was little distinction between political propaganda and literature, there was little room for fictive construction, but only realist chronicles. Influenced by Soviet propaganda with a realist attitude, the prevailing mood did not support fairy tales; publishing houses and intellectuals would rarely admit that texts were works of imagination. Indeed, up until 1956, Italian literature, for the most part, reflected the ideas of certain political movements, such as the Communist Party. 1957 marked a paradigm shift in politics and literature. As a political event, the publication a year earlier, of the secret report by Khrushchev made clear that “Uncle Stalin,” the Communist Party could lie. The New York Times reported on it in March, and the American State Department published a first version of its report in June. From this moment on, it was revealed not only that Stalin was not the good hero that everyone had thought he was, but that that “hero” had been lying. The report crushed the great realist narrative and the trust invested in it. It marked a narrative shock, shaking the generation’s intellectuals. It was a sudden and irreparable withdrawal from the truth as a value. If before storytelling had been considered sincere, all of a sudden all storytelling became fairytale. The world of socialist realism became a world of fables. And at this point, not just fantasy but also historical fiction were again accepted as high forms of literature. Calvino, himself a member of the communist party, left the party in 1957. It was in those years that Giulio Einaudi commissioned from his “fabulous” author the volume of Italian Folktales, which Calvino selected and translated from the nineteenth-century collections.
of folklorists, both published and unpublished, in various dialects. This volume also had an academic and a historical component – in terms of research, an introduction, and footnotes – which briefly aroused in Calvino a dormant vocation to be an academic. In 1957, after producing the *Italian Folktales*, Calvino published the novel *The Baron in the Trees*. A year later, he published his collection of *Racconti* (Short stories), a volume which contained all the shorter fiction he had written until then; in Calvino’s words, “In short, by now I was able to afford to publish stories that were just called *Short Stories*.”

Calvino underlines the possibility, not granted up to that point, of having stories not masked as chronicles, stories that could be intellectually legitimized as such.

In those same years Calvino also completed the trio of the Ancestors (Antenati) incorporating *The Baron in the Trees*, *The Cloven Viscount*, and *The Nonexistent Knight* in which he retraced the existential and historical past of mankind using a fairy tale construction.

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16 They were collected in 1960 as “I nostri antenati” [our Ancestors] and the volume included: *Il visconte dimezzato* [1952], *Il barone rampante* [1957], and *Il cavaliere inesistente* [1959] all published by Einaudi. In English first translated as *The Nonexistent Knight and The Cloven Viscount*, Archibald Colquhoun (transl.), London: Collins 1962; *The Baron in the Tree*, Archibald Colquhoun (transl.), London: Collins 1959. In *The Cloven Viscount*, it is no longer the war that deforms or forms the people and things surrounding the narrating consciousness, but the presence of distortion personified in the character of Medardo, through whom the young narrator perceives or experiences reality. The story of Cosimo, “the baron in the trees,” is narrated through the eyes of his eight-year-old brother, and here the distortion is provided by Cosimo’s eccentricity in relation to the world. Medardo and Cosimo, as later Agilulf, the “Nonexistent Knight,” are allegorical personifications of a way of being in the world, an existential condition. Later, in *CosMICOMICS* and *t zero*, the distortion is produced by subversion of the logic of spatiotemporal categories and by the atemporal and diffuse consciousness of the narrator. What I would like to emphasize is that the same geometrical construction, – with logic and a well-structured composition – support the narrative.
Figure 5 Italo Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, Turin: Einaudi 1952.
Figure 6 Italo Calvino, *Il barone rampante*, Turin: Einaudi 1957.
Figure 7 Italo Calvino, *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Turin: Einaudi 1959.
These novels were a device to discuss philosophical conditions with no melancholic retreat to the past.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Architecture as Story Character}

From the very beginning, in Calvino’s short stories in his \textit{The Crow Comes Last}, buildings and landscapes are characters in the plot. Similarly, descriptions in the story are never moments of suspension within the narrative or just mere and static \textit{ekphrasis}. In fact, descriptions, depictions of rooms, and detailed landscapes offer impressions, optical illusions, changes in perspectives, mental integrations. The interiority of the protagonists gradually reveals itself through the images that they have of the world framed by building interiors.\textsuperscript{18} The short story “The House of the Beehives” focuses on an isolated house hidden among bushes where a man hides out after committing murder. The house shelters him and his crime. The only evidence of the event is through another house, that of the female victim, as the murdered woman never returns home. The story’s beginning leads to her house on top of the hill:

\begin{quote}
One more example lies in \textit{The Nonexistent Knight}, which abandons the nineteenth-century Stevensonian model by foregrounding the narrator as a child—an observer but not the pivotal center of the action, as is reflected in the young character’s consciousness. The persona, or in Calvino’s words, the “symbolic transposition key,” allowing the passage from autobiography to fiction and from lived experience to discourse, is moving farther away not only from the author (who could hardly identify with the Amazon nun, Bradamante), but also from us.” Calvino’s distinction between rationality and fiction is partly discussed in De Lauretis, Teresa, “Narrative Discourse in Calvino: Praxis or Poiesis?”, \textit{PMLA}, published by: Modern Language Association, Vol. 90, No. 3 (May, 1975), pp. 416–420. “Whereas the nameless narrators of the previous novels, however incidental to the action, impose themselves on the reader as a distinct presence from the opening lines, in \textit{The Nonexistent Knight} the narrator appears only in Chapter iv and, although a character in the novel, she has two totally differentiated functions, Bradamante the warrior and Suor Teodora the nun-narrator. In fact, it is precisely the clashing incongruity of these two characters, whose dedoublement has no justification and whose final assimilation is at best mechanical, that first indicates what is later confirmed by the numerous self-referential parentheses: the narrator has no function in relation to action development, nor is she there to favor the author’s identification or to provide a specific point of view. On the contrary, her voice is totally outside the narrative context and is thus capable of attracting the attention to the very act of narrating as discourse, that is, creation by means of language, and to the structuring process of writing (écriture).

\textsuperscript{17} The landscapes described in \textit{A Plunge into Real Estate} or the internal spaces in \textit{The Watcher} are other examples of description as active characters in the story.
È difficile vederla da lontano e anche uno che c’è già stato una volta non ricorda la strada per tornarci; un sentiero c’era e l’ho distrutto a vangate, coprendolo di rovi che attecchissero e cancellassero ogni traccia. Casa mia me la son scelta bene, perduta su questa riva di ginestre, bassa su un piano che non è vista da valle, bianca per un intonaco calcinoso, rosa dai buchi delle finestre come un osso.

It is difficult to see from far away and even if someone had already been here once they could not remember the way back; there was a path here at one time, but I made brambles grow over it and wiped out every trace. It’s well chosen, this home of mine, lost in this bank of broom, on a single floor that can’t be seen from the valley, and covered in a chalky whitewash with windows picked out in red. ¹⁹

This onset further implies the importance of the route leading toward it. Here, the house of the beehives is on top of the hill, while in “The Same Thing as Blood” the house of the communist is midway to the top of the hill, a small construction with only one low room; from the outside at night, it looks like a pile of stones. The house in general is a secure place, where one can go back in search for comfort, safety, and family. And when a man loses his house, he too is lost. For example, in “Uomini senza casa” (Men without a Roof), the house is lost, denied to its residents; it becomes a removed imperative, a secret reason for perennial dissatisfaction. In “The Enchanted Garden,” written in 1948, two children venture out on the road and come upon a secret garden. The garden hides a villa at the end, a house with flashing window panels and yellow and orange curtains. “Everything in the garden was like that: lovely but impossible to enjoy properly.” ²⁰
fantastic is eventually left to the characters, and the detailed description of the villa opposes the fantastic adventures of the two young brothers venturing within it. Now we enter.

But between the slits of a venetian blind they saw a beautiful shady room, with collections of butterflies hanging on the walls. And in the room was a pale little boy. Lucky boy, he must be the owner of this villa and garden […] the garden and games and tea trays, the swimming pool and paths, were only granted to him by some enormous mistake, as if he were incapable of enjoying them and felt the bitterness of the mistake as his own fault.21

The massive construction seems to haunt its young inhabitants. This, as well as typologies other than the house, represent constrictions, in a similar way to Dino Buzzati’s 1937 “Seven Floors,” a surrealist short story in which each floor of a hospital coincides with the gravity of a patient’s illness. The closer you get to the bottom, the closer you are to the end of your own life. In Buzzati’s story, Giuseppe Corte is continuously moved by doctors toward the bottom floor of the Sanatorium, the symbol for death. Unable to accept the gravity of his illness, he stays in denial until the very end.

Does he get sicker because he gets closer to the bottom, or is he moved closer as a consequence of getting sicker? In other words, is architecture making him sick or contributing to his death? In both cases architecture acts as the visible chart of the patient’s pathological condition. But it may be architecture itself that is sick. Moreover, architecture “chronicles” his sickness; instead of being the object of a chronicle, architecture becomes the person that narrates the chronicle; architecture is not only “protagonist” but also becomes the narrator. The same happens to be true in other Calvino stories, as in “Angst in the Barracks,” where distress is felt by the architecture. Here, the barracks write the story themselves. They are essentially the author of a (personal) history. This once again contrasts with the architectural chronicles but adds an engaged, personal tone.

Il male, a rifletterci, gli era cominciato in prigione, la notte dopo essere stato preso: […] Le celle della prigione, gli uffici squallidi, i volti nervosi degli ufficiali tedeschi e fascisti, gli alberghi fastosi e devastati gremiti dalla folla spaurita degli ostaggi, la caserma infine con la sua angosciosa geometria di scale, corridoi e camerette, i suoi abitatori ottusi e pallidi, tutte maglie di una rete di disperazione che stringeva il mondo. Ora i vetri della grande finestra erano quadrati e dipinti di turchino, ma il terzo della seconda fila mancava, il penultimo aveva

His illness started while in jail, the night after being caught: […] Prison cells, squalid offices, nervous faces of German fascists and officials, the solemn but devastated hotels full of fearful hostages, finally the barracks with its distressing geometry of stairs, corridors and deserted dormitories, its obtuse and pale inhabitants, all parts of a network of desperate people that grips the world. The glasses of the big window were square and painted in light blue, but the third in the second row was missing: and this was
una grossa fenditura: e questo era doloroso, terribile.\textsuperscript{22}

doloroso, terribile.

The barracks imprison visitors in the geometry of corridors, staircases, and balconies. They become a monument to injustice. Injustice is housed in the barracks that have become law. Once again, architecture is not just another character, but both the narrator of the story and its main character; it embodies society and the state. “The barracks, massive monument to injustice become law, looming over him with its stone staircases, scraped off doors, dreary offices”\textsuperscript{23}—this passage further demonstrates Calvino’s propensity toward the fantastic and the surreal. But it mainly expresses architecture as the real narrator of the \textit{fabula}, the neutral third person, ("it") that narrates the story.

In addition, “The Enchanted Garden” “The House of the Beehives,” “Waiting for Death in a Hotel,” “Angst in the Barracks,” “Fear on the Footpath,” “Going to the Headquarters,” “Seen in the Canteen,” “Theft in a Cakeshop” are all titles in the collection of Calvino’s stories. When read in sequence, their titles create a quasi–short story. Each title mentions a place, and the place always implies an action or a movement. Furthermore, the presence of an architectonic structure rules most of these stories. In “I figli poltroni” (Lazy Sons) we gain an understanding of a family unfolding through the different rooms of their house. The father heavily steps from one room to the other. The


\textsuperscript{23} “La caserma, enorme monumento dell’ingiustizia diventata legge, incombeva ancora su di lui con le scale di pietra, le sue porte scrostate, i suoi uffici squallidi, i suoi cavalli di frisia, a condannare quegli imprudenti slanci della memorie,” \textit{Ibid.}
mother, on the other hand, belongs to the kitchen, cleans glasses and tables, does the dishes or the laundry. The older brother says:

"Vendetela, la casa e mangiamoci i soldi," — Sell the house, and we’ll spend the money; — and meanwhile the cracks in the ceilings widen and lines of ants trace the walls, and weeds and brambles keep growing higher in the rank garden. Soon nothing will be left of our house but a ruin covered with vines.24

The father’s anger toward his lazy sons unfolds through the interiors of the house: he shouts while walking down the stairs, he runs within the house, shuts the doors, closes the gate. The boys keep sleeping, then they eventually wake up. The main character has breakfast, rearranges his books; his brother oversleeps, then walks to the city to play pool. They all eat together in the kitchen, the brother goes out again, and our protagonist reads in his bedroom waiting for his brother to return, longing to hear about the city. At the end of the story, smoking at the window, they comment on the hill and the bright road that leads to the city.

Likewise, Calvino’s narrative follows a natural progression from the interior toward the city by mirroring the political and social trend of post-war reconstruction. Indeed, the progression from building housing to rebuilding the city was by far the most

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pressing issue, arousing the greatest passion and debate among architects during the earliest years of reconstruction.25

From Building Interiors to Building Speculation.

While the majority of events in both The Crow Comes Last (1947) and The Path to the Nest of Spiders (1949) happen inside buildings, the later novels A Plunge into Real Estate (1957), Smog (1958), and Marcovaldo (written in 1953, yet published 1963) are centered around urban settings. At first, stories and events unfold within the four walls of an interior, while an ideology distances these buildings from the city, typically far away and down the hill. The “House of the Beehives” is on top of the hill, the house of the communist half-way up. Repeatedly, the city reveals itself to the protagonist over and over, and he sees it from above or far away. It is often forbidden to him and holds the smell of death. Nature underlines the geographical and conceptual remoteness from that city, Calvino writes: “May everything go to similar ruin in the cities of the human race; may I, as I walk along one day, see the tops of chimneys emerging from the earth, meet parts of streets falling off into ravines, and stumble on strips of railway lines in the middle of the forest.”26 There is a gradual progression from the interior of the house to the exterior of the cityscape. But the path cannot be walked twice, and the city only hosts ruins and destruction. Calvino’s writings recount his walks as bearing witness to the past.


Despite picturing a gloomy city, Calvino did not avoid brightness altogether in his earlier writings. At times, architecture showcases hope for the future, and is the element to transmit hope. For example, in “Waiting for Death in a Hotel,” a short story about prisoners during World War II who are awaiting their death sentence from the Nazis, the hotel (turned into a jail) stands for hope. It is through architecture that Diego can dream about the future by hoping to be back in the same facility once it could be a hotel again. The architectural element could set the characters free. “If we survive, when all this is over, I want to come back to this hotel for a week, when it opens again for tourists,” even if the protagonist Diego cannot get closer to the window, because none is waiting for him. The window represents the only element of contact with the external world, but you can get close to it, both to the window and the outside world, only if someone is waiting for you on the other side of the wall. The window represents the liminal state between freedom and confinement, the element beyond which the free world starts: “at a certain time in the morning, the prisoners’ wives began to arrive and started gesturing, their faces toward the windows.” While the protagonists’ hope failed in the urban development of A Plunge into Real Estate, here there is room for hope. Indeed, the structure of the hotel per se does not transmit any loss of freedom: “There was nothing about the big hotel, recently devoted to a barracks and a prison, that could give concrete shape to the inmates’ loss of freedom, no iron bars or high walls.” It is the spatiality of the hotel that cheered up the

28 “A una cert’ora del mattino cominciavano ad arrivare le mogli dei prigionieri e si mettevano a fare gesti, con il viso alzato verso le finestre,” Ibid., p. 228. English: Ibid., p. 104.
29 “Il grande albergo da poco degradato da caserma a prigione non aveva oggetti che servissero all’animo per concretizzare quel senso di libertà perduta, come inferriate o muraglie,” Ibid.
inmates’ mood. But Calvino is also using architecture, disguised as a third person, as
the narrator, and in this way moves further away from realism.

Calvino’s gloomy vision of cities, to him a complex symbol, does not remain sombre for
long even in *A Plunge into Real Estate*, which evokes the construction boom of the
1950s, and denounces building speculation and the horrors of massive building
construction on the coast. Nevertheless, the description of the city is realistic and tragic,
while ironic:

Quando Quinto saliva alla sua villa, un
tempo dominante la distesa dei tetti della
città nuova e I bassi quartieri della marina
e il porto, più in qua il mucchio di casa
muffite e lichenose della città vecchia, tra
il versante della collina a ponente dove
sopra gli orti s’infittiva l’oliveto, e, a
levante, un reame di vile e alberghi verdi
come un bosco, sotto il dosso brullo dei
campi di garofali scintillanti di serre fino
al Capo: ora più nulla, non vedeva che un
sovraporsi geometrico di parallelepipedi
e poliedri, spigoli e lati di case, di qua e di
là, tetti, finestre, muri ciechi per servitù
contigue con solo i finestrini smerigliati
dei gabinetti uno sopra l’altro.

When he came home, Quinto had
once been able to look out over the
roofs of the new town and the poorer
quarters down by the sea front and the
harbor. In between were the crowded
houses of the old part of town, with
their moldy, lichenous walls, lying
between the hill to the west, where the
olive groves clustered thickly above
the gardens, and to the east, the green
swarm of villas and hotels stretching
beneath the bare flank of the carnation
fields, glinting with greenhouses as
far as the Point. But all he could see
these days was a geometrical
arrangement of parallelepipeds and
polyhedrons ranked one above the
other, corners and sides of houses,
clustering roofs and windows and
blank walls pierced only by the
Despite Calvino’s consideration of the difference between nature and the city, geometrical constructions pile up in a grotesque way. The old city is still dense, but permeated with nature, while grey concrete fights for dominance and ultimately reigns supreme. Calvino has moved his readers from the finished building to building (in) construction and property speculation; however, we are not in the city yet. But ultimately, A Plunge I to the real estate had hardly the tone of a dry chronicle, a chronological report of events, as indeed suggested by the title originally planned – “The Chronicles of the Fifties.” Together with “The Watcher” and a third story of which Calvino wrote only a few pages, “Che spavento l’estate;” (“What a Fright that Summer”), A Plunge into Real Estate focused on the reaction of the intellectual to the negative reality around him.31 Unfortunately, by the time Calvino managed to complete “The Watcher,” too much time had elapsed, and already in the 1960s that climate had passed. Interviewed by Corti, Calvino underlined how by then he felt “the need to search for new forms, and so the series remained unfinished.”32 Nevertheless, Calvino himself acknowledged that in A Plunge into Real Estate he accomplished the integration between a neutral narrative and an almost autobiographical approach; in other words, he blended together the quasi-chronicle with the personal story,

thus aligning with the standard of realism. In fact, when introducing a new Einaudi series (*I Gettoni*—Tokens), Vittorini canonized the autobiographical genre by stating that in Italy readers now need autobiographies, and “neither historical essays nor creative literature fulfil the task of witnessing cellular historical changes but inside narratives of private lives.”

Effectively in his introduction to the book written in 1956, Calvino had noted that if “I were to award an Oscar to my best characters, I would again choose among those of *A Plunge into Real Estate*: the Oscar for the best ‘all-round’ objective character goes to the contractor, the one for the best subjective, semi-autobiographical character goes to Quinto.”

This statement confirms the tension between Calvino’s different approaches to personal writing and neutral reporting, between dream and reality, but at the same time he develops a synthesis of the two. Although architecture as building specifically becomes Calvino’s anchor to reality, he also highlights the role of architecture in real estate and contracting.

While Calvino is intentional in his ambivalence, Vittorini criticized such ambiguity, and the tension between these two different attitudes was also the center of Calvino’s argument with his friend, who eloquently tagged Calvino’s work as *realismo a carica fiabesca* (realism with a fantasy slant) or *fiaba a carica realistica* (fantasy with a realistic slant), voicing their different positions. Vittorini doubted Calvino could write

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33 “In Italia si ha bisogno di autobiografia. Né il saggio storico né la letteratura creativa possono adempiere a questo compito, che è quello di registrare mutamenti cellulari della storia in seno alla vita privata,” Elio Vittorini on the flap of the *Gettoni* series, Einaudi 1955.

34 “La speculazione edilizia tra le storie che ho scritto è quella in cui sento di avere detto più cose, ed è anche quella che più si avvicina ad un romanzo, anche se è breve. E dovendo assegnare gli ‘Oscar’ ai migliori miei personaggi, sceglierei pure tra quelli della Speculazione edilizia: all’impressario darei l’Oscar per il miglior personaggio oggettivo, ‘a tutto tondo,’ e a Quinto per il miglior personaggio soggettivo, semiautobiografico.” I. Calvino, *La speculazione edilizia*, p. 6. Translation by the author.

something that would be simultaneously both essay and tale. Not that this would be impossible in general, quite the opposite, but it would be so for Calvino.\(^{36}\) In a letter to Calvino, the Sicilian writer complimented his friend, while clearly expressing their different opinions:

Caro Calvino, voglio ripeterti in iscritto che il tuo racconto della speculazione edilizia mi è piaciuto moltissimo – e anche come cosa in sé, non solo come significato letterario-culturale, come tendenza, come neo-balzachismo, ecc. ecc. - questo pure col difetto che tu stesso lamenti del punto di vista autobiografico che poi è difetto perché non l'hai voluto accettare fino in fondo e scontarlo facendotene quell’ “io” dichiarato che a volte può finire con il diventare oggettivo in un senso di antenna radio come l’io dantesco, mentre travestito in terza persona, si sa, si brucia ogni possibilità del genere alle spalle né d’altra parte piglia la pertinenza definita dei personaggi – cose, […] e perciò naviga nel vago, senza sapersi precisare con un mestiere, con una mentalità, con un orizzonte specifico.

Dear Calvino, I would like to tell you again, in writing, that I very much enjoyed your piece about real estate – as a piece per se, not only for its literary and cultural meaning, as a trend, as neo-Balzachism, etc., etc. – this despite your complaint about the deficiency of the autobiographical point of view, which is a deficiency because you refused to fully accept it making that proclaimed “I” that sometimes can end up objective, the way a radio antenna is, like the Dantean I, while dressed in the third person, we know, misses any similar chance, and on the other hand it does not even entirely belong to the characters – things, […], and therefore dives into vagueness, without knowing how to take on form in a profession, a mentality, a specific horizon.\(^{37}\) [Figure 8]

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\(^{37}\) Vittorini to Calvino, 25\(^{th}\) November 1955, AE Folder Italo Calvino.
Figure 8 Elio Vittorini to Italo Calvino, November 25th 1955. Vittorini enjoyed *A Plunge into Real Estate* but criticizes Calvino for not embracing the subjective stance. © Einaudi Archive.
While critical about Calvino’s novel, Vittorini singled out Calvino’s style; as editor of Il Politecnico Vittorini particularly valued Calvino’s analysis on issues concerning building construction, as these had been at the center of Il Politecnico since its very foundation. But Vittorini detected in Calvino’s prose a deep objective mimesis of the negative aspects of reality. As a side comment, Vittorini controversially insisted that the text’s weakest point is precisely that Calvino embraces neither an objective nor a subjective stance: “All weak points in the tale are related to a dysfunction in the objectivity of the character Quinto – thus his debates with his intellectual friends in Milan, thus his meetings full of guilt toward the controversial workers in Sanremo.”

To prove the case, Vittorini mentioned the Florentine poet Dante, who uses that first person pronoun “I” in his Divine Comedy, like a radar that captures the objectivity of life via the use of first person. Again: “That proclaimed “I” that sometimes can become objective like a radar similar to Dante’s I, while masqueraded as third person, we know, burns any similar chance and on the other hand he does not entirely take the part of the characters.”

One could contend that if architecture is the actual narrator here, then the use of the first or third person that Vittorini criticized Calvino for does not really matter in the end; there is always an “it”—that is, architecture, posing as an “I” that narrates things. Vittorini blamed Calvino’s “neo-Balzachism” as his lack of hope in the future. The neo-Balzachism implied Calvino’s hopeless position, as he saw in building speculation only a further naïve illusion, a failed hope for the intellectual Quinto, who miserably failed in trying

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to change his life. To Vittorini, Calvino’s main fault is that he projects his dilemma onto the main character, Quinto Anfossi, using a third-person narrative. Namely, Quinto, like Calvino, is torn, though this isn’t explicit. Instead, Calvino’s stance would have been much clearer with the use of a first-person narrative. By keeping the third-person voice, he aligned with a more objective way of writing, proving that what Vittorini meant by “objective dysfunction” (disfunzione oggettiva) was valid.

[Figure 8]

Indeed, Calvino’s style in A Plunge into Real Estate illustrated the cultural and intellectual period of despair, and the author chose building construction to display it. The character Quinto projected onto the dishonest contractor Caisotti a model of man of action. On the opposite side, the intellectual Quinto, unable to achieve anything tangible, tries to achieve success by plunging into something as concrete as real estate and building construction, while observing the “busiest construction engineer Travaglia.” Quinto Anfossi realized that, along with his brother Ampelio, by being intellectuals, he was:

Quinto ancora senz’arte né parte, Ampelio
un travet dei laboratori universitari che
sarebbe arrivato alla cattedra a
sessant’anni; insomma, ormai non c’erano
dubbi, due falliti; e a guardarli si sentiva
più che mai soddisfatto di sé e ostentava
con loro la sua morale di uomo che bada
al sodo, alle cose pratiche. Ma vi metteva
un sovrappiù di passione.

A man still without arts or parts;
Ampelio a dishwasher in some
university laboratory who might get a
chair at the age of sixty. A pair of
failures, there was no longer any
doubt about it. As he looked at them,
he felt more than ever satisfied with
himself, and in declining with them
he paraded his own philosophy of life,
that of the practical man that put first things first.\textsuperscript{40}

Quinto wished to construct something concrete, solid, and tangible, and not just to linger upon his theoretical, abstract, and intellectual ideas. Quinto wanted to take a risk, he wanted to ride the wave of the moment and follow present events. This quasi-autobiographical protagonist represents the young intellectual torn between his cerebral interests – which do not pay off – and the appeal of earning easy money through property investment: “If everybody is building, why don’t we build too? [...] Quinto ultimately decides to come home to try his hand at real estate.”\textsuperscript{41} But the neo-Balzachism that Vittorini mentioned is Calvino’s dim realization that the intellectual Quinto can never avoid his dismal fate. Architecture is what carries Quinto from his failure as an intellectual to his failure as an entrepreneur, as Quinto at the end cannot do anything but accept his failure in both fields. Also, Quinto’s intellectual friends, Bensi, Cerveteri, and Masera, seem to have left things unfinished as Quinto is observing his incomplete building. The negativity kicks in at the end of the book, and architecture offers a further useful comparison:


\textsuperscript{41} “Se tutti costruiscono perché non costruiamo anche noi? [...] Ed ora, appunto, Quinto faceva ritorno alla sua città natale per intraprendervi una speculazione edilizia,” \textit{Ibid}, p. 43. English: \textit{Ibid.}, p. 166.
I lavori procedevano così lentì che da un viaggio all’altro Quinto trovava tutto allo stesso punto. Ormai gli pareva che la forma della casa fosse quella; terminata non riusciva a immaginarsela. Tutta la sua passione per la pratica, per la realtà concreta, eccola lì: un mucchio di materiale inutilizzato che non riusciva a essere nulla, velleità, tentativi non portati a termine.

The work was going ahead so slowly that it looked the same from one visit to the next. This, he felt, was as far as it was ever going to get: he couldn’t even imagine it finished. So this was where his passion for concrete reality had led him, to this shapeless heap of bricks and beams lying there unused. It had been a mere caprice, something started and then dropped half way.\textsuperscript{42}

Time has passed, but nothing has changed; the incomplete building represents a waste of time and money, but also the perfect stagnation of the situation. Calvino’s analysis is indeed as negative as the condition of a shapeless heap of bricks.

**Narrative Wins over Chronicle**

Likewise, in architectural history and theory, architecture itself became the narrator of personal stories, first by chronicling political events and later only by narrating personal stories, as we have seen in Zevi’s 1955 *L’Architettura. Cronache e Storia*, in which chronicles and history go together, with the latter mainly comprising chronicles. In his seminal article “Figures of Neorealism in Italian Architecture,” Bruno Reichlin attempted to translate the literary neorealist mode into architecture. His list of literary works includes Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Cronache di un amore* of 1950 (*Chronicles of a Love*, translated into English as *Story of a Love Affair*); the novelist Vasco Pratolini’s *Cronache di Poveri Amanti* of 1947 (*Chronicles of Poor Lovers*, translated

into English as *A Tale of Poor Lovers* in 1949), made into a film by Carlo Lizzani in 1954; and, obviously, Zevi’s above-mentioned magazine.\(^{43}\) [Figure 9] It is useful to reflect on the alternating English translations of “chronicle” in the titles – “story” or “tale” – each one suggesting a different approach to narrative. Etymologically, “story” focuses more on the narrative; it can be fictitious or it could have happened. While a “tale” stresses the fantastic, it is usually made up and carries a sense of exaggeration. But in Italy, these titles are only some examples among many others at the time, including the theatrical piece *Cronaca* by Leopoldo Trieste and a later book by Vittorini himself, *Cronache di Napoli*.

“Chronicles” in Vittorini’s work convey intellectual and political events, with architecture and the city as its background. However, Vittorini had criticized the lightness and superficiality of tales, which could become propaganda. In the same way he had argued that culture and politics should remain on different levels in his magazine *Il Politecnico*. Vittorini pitches in on the difference between chronicle and *storia* to mark the difference between politics and culture: “Politics, in general, acts within the realm of chronicles. Culture, instead, can only happen outside any tactic or strategic rule on the direct plan of history.”\(^{44}\) Surprisingly, no political strategies should enter history, but what if history could then entertain? What if historians could become enjoyable writers, whose narrative could entertain its readers? Consequently, the realm of history shifted its gears toward fiction.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{44}\) “L’una, la politica, agisce in genere sul piano della cronaca. La cultura, invece, non può non svolgersi all’infuori da ogni legge di tattica e di strategia sul piano diretto della storia,” in *Il Politecnico*, n. 31-32, July-August 1946.

\(^{45}\) On Vittorini, *Il Politecnico*, and the writing of history see chapter III.
Figure 9 Movie poster for *Cronache di Poveri Amanti* (Tale of Poor Lovers) directed by Carlo Lizzani, based on Vasco Pratolini’s novel and featuring Marcello Mastroianni, 1954.
The text by Reichlin is one of the few attempts to find a correspondence between neorealism in cinema and literature and realism in architecture. Earlier in 1985, Manfredo Tafuri had tried to investigate the term “realism” in architecture and had also attempted to translate and recast the infamous book *Scrittori e Popolo* by Alberto Asor Rosa into architectural terms. Tafuri here drew comparisons between novels and the built environment. He suggested the Tiburtino District in Rome as an example of neorealist architecture, although its designer Carlo Aymonino would eventually write, “Today, overall, considering that moment, we could facetiously call it ‘Neo-realistic.’”

Ironically, Carlo Aymonino apologetically described his project in *Casabella Continuità*: “Storia e cronaca del Quartier Tiburtino” in that same year 1957. Aymonino’s project was one of the many projects resulting after the Second World War reconstruction.

**[Figure 10]** Planners and architects, sociologists and engineers had to work very quickly, and provide housing for millions of people. This overwhelming necessity for housing led to uncontrolled development and wild expansion, which neither architects nor politicians had been able to manage. Consequently, building speculation and issues concerning the integration between new and old constructions were common features throughout the pages of most architecture magazines. As early as 1945, in *Il Politecnico* Ernesto Nathan Rogers wrote “Architecture and Society: A Home for Everyone,” in which he problematically argued the shift from private aristocratic housing to much-needed decent

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and adequate popular dwellings:

Poco a poco il nuovo costume della società si impose all’edilizia: dietro le facciate ornate incominciarono a disporsi i vani degli appartamenti, in logica armonia con le necessità. Ma si trattava delle case dei benestanti: le popolazioni operaie si annidavano sempre più dense in orrende catapecchie; perciò fu già gran cosa che dalla sciocca imitazione dei palazzi aristocratici, si passasse al tentativo di costruzioni più serie. Little by little, new social habits won over construction: new rooms are harmoniously arranged behind adorned facades. But these were wealthy houses: workers nested in even more dense and awful shacks; it is for this reason that it had been at least positive that builders attempted more serious constructions by simply imitating aristocratic palaces.  

[Figure 11]

Townhouses and intensive housing developments correspond to the three levels of the middle class: upper, middle, and lower; the proletariat is ideally and, to a degree, physically set apart. In the city center, with the major urban renovations that had begun even before Fascism and, later, on a few representative sites such as the university grounds and the E42 (the World Exhibition planned for Rome in 1942), bourgeois haughtiness constituted its own strength. Between these manifestations of unquestioned power and the suburbs of the less well-off, a vast connective tissue, a buffer zone intended to house the white-collar ranks of a ponderous tertiary sector was growing. As Mario Manieri Elia pointed out in Modern Italy, “by now it is clear to everyone that the urban development scheme, behind its academic mask and quite above the utopian ideas of ‘town-planning,’ was not born – as it was in the

Figure 10 Quartiere Tiburtino Roma, 1949, Ludovico Quaroni, Mario Ridolfi, Carlo Aymonino. © Sistema Archivistico Nazionale.
Figure 11 E.N. Rogers, “Architettura e Società. Una casa a ciascuno,” in Il Politecnico, 4, October 20th 1945, page 3.
progressivist illusion of the fifties, and still more in the bad faith or stupidity of some of them – out of a commitment to check and control property speculation.”

Something similar to Quinto’s actions and those of his colleagues in *A Plunge into Real Estate*.

In this sense the townhouse, or *palazzina*, could well be called a masterpiece for the way in which it was suited, with a typology within the taste of the more advanced conservatives, to an exploitation of land designed so as not to obstruct itself, and for its capacity to extend this design, at times even verging on suffocation, in a virtually unlimited manner. This is exactly what the regulations of the Piacentini urban development scheme of 1931 guaranteed, with the simplest possible quantitative standards: maximum height 19 m, three stories, plus the ground floor, plus the attic (extended two-thirds the length of the house); frontage of 28 m, extendable to 38 m if stepped back (not less than 4 m); separation 5.7 m.

The townhouse described by Calvino was similar to this description, and as Manieri Elia described it, “a volume whose every proportion was laid down in advance, along with its ‘detachment’ and ‘regression’; even the tricks used to get round these prescriptions were codified.”

Once all the quantities had been fixed, the whole of the fifties were taken up with trying out different kinds of form aimed at “variations” within the “norm.” The only thing left was to break the rules, as a “plus-value” able to compensate for the eventual minus-value of salable area. [Figure 12]

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51 Ibid.
Figure 12 An example of *Palazzine*, via Etiopia Roma, 1949-1954, Mario Ridolfi. 
© Sistema Archivistico Nazionale
Similarly, Calvino differentiated among social classes based on their dwellings, which become an element that differentiates them. For example, in one of his earlier short stories, “Goatherd at Luncheon,” when the young narrator reflects upon what differentiated his bourgeois family from the condition of the young shepherd, the interior of a living room is what underlines this distinction:

Nostro padre non capisce le differenze che ci sono tra la gente, la differenza tra una sala da pranzo come la nostra, coi mobili incisi, i tappeti dai cupi disegni, le maioliche, e quelle loro case di pietra affumicate, con per pavimento terra battuta […], ma io so quant’è difficile parlarsi tra essere umani e a ogni momento sento le distanze tra le classi e le civiltà aprirsi sotto di me come voragini.

My father does not understand the things that divide people, the difference between a dining room like ours, with its inlaid furniture, dark-patterned carpets, and majolica plates, and those homes of theirs, with smoky stone walls, beaten-earth floors […], but I’m too well aware of the difficulties of communication between human beings, and sense at every minute the guls that separate the classes, the abysses that politeness opens up under me.  

This makes Calvino even more ambiguously realist, in the way that Vittorini conceived realism: as trying to denounce present political conditions and attempting to overcome social gaps and diversities. Yet, although Calvino engaged in contemporary debates, he still, ambiguously, insisted on the independent value of literature, which could undertake much more if it is free from political constraints. Literature could

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express additional ideas; writers cannot compete with politicians, as writers only write about events, whereas politicians mold them. In his pivotal text explaining his poetics, “Il Midollo del Leone” (“To the Lion’s Marrow”) written in 1955, Calvino mainly traced what the goal of a novel should be, i.e. that of defining “our time – it should be an image explaining how we fit in this world.”\(^{53}\) He warned authors not to compete with politicians, though he simultaneously promotes the position of the intellectual as an active maker of history. This sums up the complicated intricacy between theory and practice, as well as the inferred separation between writing and acting. Moreover, the comparison of architecture and its critique is easy to draw, as the writer should not become like the critic described by Benedetto Croce, namely a failed architect; indeed, he should be able to express and suggest more than the discipline does. The relation between practice and theory, between the writing of history and the making of history, haunted both Calvino and his friend Vittorini. Writers debated about whether literature should engage with or remain independent from politics, and whether politics had to be a byword not only for life but also for fiction. Above all, Calvino rejected the injection of chronicles into literature as well as the use of politics for literary purposes. The mutual contamination of politics with literature is for Calvino a bad sign for both, in that it limits their reciprocal freedom of expression. “When politicians and politically minded people pay too much attention to literature, it is a bad sign – a bad sign mostly for literature, because it is then that literature is in most danger.”\(^{54}\)


The building speculation offered material to Calvino as well as to other intellectuals at that time for discussing their role in both political and urban debates. In the same way, architects considered how architecture might or might not become political. *A Plunge into Real Estate* is one of many works by Calvino that reflect this coincidence, yet tension between intellectual life and social problems via the urban domain.

It is also this domain that allows them to make the transition from reality to fiction. In fact, it is still a matter of debate whether Calvino was a realist. Calvino himself never used the term “realism” but instead “integral,” as he admitted in a letter to the literary critic Giuseppe de Robertis: “I am happy it was me who discovered and mentioned him [the writer Beppe Fenoglio] to Elio Vittorini. Also I strongly agree with your definition: not NEO but integral, and Happy XIX Century.”

Calvino never wrote a realistic-objective story, or a psychological story or fantasy. He was convinced that politics and economy necessitate documentary research and not literary approximations. He thought about *fabula fictia* as something that could not engage with specialized problems. Novels as accounts had a limited life; as these were more apt to “inform how the world works,” narrative should instead express “new existential situations.” For Calvino, to inform is a task more proper to journalism or sociological inquiries. Nevertheless, even if he had claimed to be against the journalistic novel as a genre, even if he distinguished between journalism and historical fictions, reportage and literature, the two become inevitably conflated. And with no doubt, in some of his short stories, Calvino’s prose is like the genre of the news story, where

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55 Calvino to De Robertis, 12th January 1950, AE Archive.
architecture builds the backbone of the text. Take this early example, back into an interior, from “The Cat and the Policeman (1948):”

Una sera la polizia fece una corsa nei quartieri operai e circondò tutta una casa. Era un grande edificio dall’aria sfatta, come se il sostenere tanta umanità assiepata ne avesse deformato i piani e i muri, avesse ridotto anch’essi ad una vecchia carne porosa, callosa ed incrostata. Intorno al cortile ingombro di barili di immondizie correvano a ogni piano le ringhiere dei ballatoi di ferro rugginosi e storte; ed a queste ringhiere, e a spaghi tirati dall’una all’altra, panni appesi e stracci, e lungo i ballatoi porte-finestre con legni al posto di vetri, traversati dai neri tubi delle stufe, a al termine del ballatoi, uno sopra l’altro come in scrostate torri, le baracche dei cessi, tutto così un piano sopra l’altro, intervallati dalle finestrelle dei mezzanini rumorose di macchine da cucire e vaporose di minestra, fino in cima, all’inferriata delle soffitte, alle grande sbilenche, ai cenciosi abbaini aperti come forni. Un labirinto di logore scale traversava dalle cantine al tetto il corpo della vecchia casa come nere vene dalle ramificazioni

One evening the police made a raid on the working-class quarter and cordoned off an entire tenement. It was a large block with a tired, shabby air about it, as if supporting so much hedged-in humanity had deformed the walls and floors, turned them into porous, calloused flesh. The courtyard was cluttered with barrels of refuse, and round each floor ran railings and landings of twisted rusty iron, the railings with clothes and rags draped all over them, the landings with windows covered in bits of wood through which stuck the blackened pipes of stoves; at the end of each landing, one above the other like turrets in a ruined castle, were lavatory huts, interspersed from floor to floor by little windows clattering with sewing-machines and smoky with cooking, right on up to the battered skylights, the crooked gutters and the filthy attics. Criss-crossing up from the basement to the roof of the old building ran a labyrinth of foul stairs, like black veins, along which
But the conflation of journalism and historical fiction is slowly turning chronicle into history, and as mentioned, the culture of denunciation is now definitely part of history. This long description captures the importance of architecture and its role as the sign of poor living conditions in the shabby air of the tenement, which Calvino denounces as representing and unveiling the hedged-in working-class population that inhabits it. Calvino exaggerated with adjectives and adverbs: muddy wheels, shabby air, ruined castle, tousled women. But this shabbiness also comes through in the architecture itself, as gloomy adjectives go along with architectonic details like crooked gutters, filthy attics, the old building with a labyrinth of foul stairs. Moreover, the architectonic finishing builds up the climax of the story as still half-closed doors hide mysteries and as anxiety grows through the description of the “labyrinth of foul stairs,” as the police climb up the stairs trying to unravel a secret. The entire story is filled with architectural

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58 The novel as a report on poor conditions was widespread at this time; I will only mention as one example Carlo Levi’s memoir, Christ Stopped at Eboli [1945] New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux 1947.
elements so that architecture is part of the disquieting atmosphere: “The policeman groped his way through blind white corridors, a labyrinth of sheets […] then vanished up a narrow staircase leading to an attic.”\(^{59}\) Architecture becomes indeterminable. After all, through architecture Calvino accomplished a precise analysis of the present condition. But the actions are also cinematic in the architectonical sense as the reader’s anxiety climbs up the stairs together with the policeman walking them up. Calvino unusually pushes the description to the tiniest detail so that it is the architecture and the interior itself that becomes the story and can depict the poor quality of the building. In “The Cat and the Policeman,” as in \textit{A Plunge into Real Estate}, though, Calvino maintains the neutral use of the third-person narrator, which Vittorini had criticized. Vittorini detected Calvino’s missed opportunity to embrace realism through a personal approach, in a period when writers wanted to be subjective and poetic, while at the same time aimed to chronicle an historical moment. Calvino did not take a position either within his own narrative – Anfossi maintains his opacity – or as the narrating voice. In fact, he refused to embrace his main character and his writing. Though as a persona he can neither report a chronicle nor tell a story, he inevitably grafts the wonders of fantasy of his characters’ world into an enlightened scientific imaginary provided by the architectonic setting. \textit{A Plunge into Real Estate} is an interesting example because the author attempts to denounce building “speculation” where the description of the built environment grounds the scene in a more true-to-life and current topic.

Architecture as Anti-Nostalgic Relation to the Past and Leap Toward the Future.

Even if architecture and the city contribute to Calvino’s thoughts about the concept of past and of the telling of this past, Calvino rarely had a nostalgic attitude toward both of them. In *A Plunge into a Real Estate* Quinto expresses the impossibility of changing what is already happening, and what already is:

“What can one do though?” and sometimes too he felt a positive satisfaction at a particular piece of damage that was quite beyond repair, some residue of boyish desire to épater stirring in him, or perhaps it was the shrugging assumption of wisdom on the part of the man who knows there’s no use fighting against History. All the same, Quinto was offended by the spectacle of this landscape, *his* landscape, being overwhelmed by cement before he had ever really possessed it. Basically, though, he was historically minded, anti-nostalgia. He’d seen a bit of the world: hell, what did he care?60

Even the intellectual used the fever of building construction to stay current with the times, and had no regret yet about the future of landscapes. There’s no attachment to

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the past. All the same, Quinto strolled in the countrified outskirts of the town or along the sea front, where “he could still recapture the pulsations of the past, the marginal deposits which memory had preserved.”61 Eventually Calvino lingered between attachment to a nostalgic past and accepting the present condition, but the reality of the present always won. Furthermore, he made it clear that one cannot either control or stop the course of history through intellectual activity, as his characters maintain the impossibility of intervening within the historical flow: “Do you think you’re going to checkmate history with those two? The dialectical process pops out between them like cuckoo from a clock.”62

Calvino’s historical and literary approach thus insisted on the historical Hegelian dual dichotomy, positing the Freudian Eros or sexual desire and Thanatos or death drive as two opposites, and history as the synthesis between them.63 Ultimately A Plunge into Real Estate is partially Calvino’s way to project Italian urban history into its future predicament. As Vittorini mentioned, it represents Calvino’s pessimism about the possibility of change; his belief that the intellectual cannot integrate himself with the workers, and the class gap cannot be bridged. It is not only the built environment that remains unfinished. As already mentioned, Calvino’s investment in real estate ended up in what he describes in his novel as a “shapeless heap of bricks and beams lying there

62 “Bensi congiunse le mani e le strinse fino a farle scricchiolare, mentre il viso gli si contraeva in una risata a denti serrate, imporporandosi. – E credi che siano quelli a mettere in sacco la Storia! Non c’è Eros né Thanatos da cui non salti fuori la dialettica come un diavolino, facendo cucù, - e giù a ridere,” I. Calvino, “A Plunge into Real Estate,” pp. 184-185.
63 Quinto’s two intellectual friends – the poet Cerveteri and the philosopher Bensi – are the two sides of a spectrum. Poetry and philosophy stand on two antithetical poles, but they do meet through the pages of a magazine they are planning to create, which might be named The New Hegel or the Hegelian Left or the Young Marx, or maybe the New Freud, or Eros and Thanatos. Once again Calvino here refers to his intellectual colleagues, at that time both politically and philosophically involved.
unused […] this, he felt, was as far as it was ever going to get; he couldn’t even imagine it finished.”⁶⁴ After everything, this was where Quinto’s passion for concrete reality had led him. But Calvino acknowledged that *A Plunge into Real Estate* had been a passage of some sort. In a letter to Vittorini, Calvino admitted that in addition to *The Argentine Ant* he had thought of another story to describe industrial civilization: “Smog.” Calvino wrote the latter over a summer, and although he was satisfied with the book, he writes: “the story became a more complex type of story; you can feel that *A Plunge into Real Estate* happened in-between.”⁶⁵ ⁷

[Figure 13] Calvino himself identified *A Plunge into Real Estate* as a necessary step toward a more complex type of story, one that would overcome the naturalist and realist kinds of narrative. It was not only necessary to evolve to a different literary genre, but it was also a necessary step to assimilate and understand urban expansion, urban life, and his changing times.

The natural death of Italian realism can be located with the publication of the 1956 novel *Metello* by Pratolini, who despite being a marginal figure of the realist moment caused controversy with his style, particularly because of his attempt to mix fiction with history.⁶⁶ In *Inquiry on Realism (Inchiiesta sul Realismo)*, the writer and literary critic Lorenzo Gigli wittily remarked that in “almost every one of these works there is a rift between chronicle and poetry and when the latter has the upper hand, the

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⁶⁵ “Però è venuto un tipo di racconto più complesso, si sente che è passata in mezzo La speculazione edilizia,” Calvino to Vittorini, September 5th 1958, EA Folder Vittorini.
⁶⁶ *Metello* by Pratolini is the first volume of a trilogy whose comprehensive title would have been *Una storia italiana* [An Italian Story], and in which Pratolini attempted to narrate Italian history from the unification of Italy to the fascist era. Pratolini had the ambitious project of digging into the past to understand the present. *Metello* was written in 1952 but only published in 1955, and tells this “story” starting from Florence as Italian capital at the end of the nineteenth century. By narrating Florence, Pratolini narrates Italy and in particular its working class. Pratolini also authored the novel *Il quartiere* [The Neighborhood] between 1934 and 1935, but only published it in 1945. It is set in the Santa Croce district in Florence. The district is a background but mainly becomes the main character of the novel.
e forse ancora degli altri che ho già in mente ma
che non so se farò in tempo a scrivere. Tenta general-
mente l'incognoscibilità anarchica, con una certa progres-
sione di intensità di racconto in racconto. E' la par-
te che dovrebbe essere piú "nuova" e osmosa, un vero
"libro".

Il libro III La vita difficile dovrebbe contenere una
definizione più complessa e generale d'un rap-
porto col mondo. Sì passa cioè nel campo dei racconti
lungi: La speculazione edilizia. A seconda della Forma ar-
gentina ho pensato di chiudere il libro con un altro
racconto lungo che lo fascina da un decennio sullo scenario
della civiltà industriale: la nascita di un doc. L'ho
scritto quest'estate; ne sono abbastanza contento (lo
leggerò sul prossimo "Nuovi Argomenti"). Però è ven-
to un tipo di racconto piú complesso, ai senti che ci
è passato l'anno in mezzo la speculazione edilizia.
La quale Speculazione edilizia pensavo che in questo
volume non ci entrasse, invece, tra la forma della
nascita di un doc. ci starebbe bene. Quindi il volume
verrebbe a raccogliere tutti i miei racconti lunghi e
brevi d'una certa importanza dal '45 al '58 (esclusi
i tre dell'Entrata in guerra che proprio non saprei
come farli entrare). Da certo la differenza tra alcu-
ni di quelli del Libro I e gli ultimi è forte. Però non
mi convenga fermarmi alla Forma argentina.

La scelta del libro I, Giù idilli difficili, mi riesce
molto dura. L'avei diviso a sua volta in capitoli (che
potrebbero anche non comparire come tali, ma tanto per
dare un ordine): La natura, La guerra, il dopoguerra,
La natura in città, Il mondo della macchina (gli ulti-
mi due sono tutti di roba nuova, che non c'era nel
Corvo, ma in quel genere il non ci ho mai piú la man
facile di un tempo). Ho due criteri diversi di scelta tra
cui continuamente oscillo: o un criterio di risultato
postico, in qualunque direzione sia, cioè puntare sul
libro tutto di buoni racconti; o puntare sull'albo dell'
figurine curiose, di storielle movimentate e diverden-
ti anche se talora cinematografiche o giornalistiche,
insieme di Mille e una notte dal dopoguerra italiano.
Se che (in fondo vorrei che me lo dicesse anche tu) il
primo criterio è quello giusto, l'unico che mi permette
di non fare un libro che va avanti a metà e basta, ma
con quel criterio finisco col non sapere piú se metterci
Parto in una partecipazione e tanti altri racconti di quel
tipo, mentre il fascino di Ultimo viene il serbo presso

Figure 13 Italo Calvino to Elio Vittorini. September 5th 1958. Calvino explains how writing *La speculazione edilizia* has been a pivotal moment in his writing career. © Einaudi Archive.
bad habits gain prevalence.”

In the same publication, Emilio Gadda described a form of rupture between literature as report and literature as a higher form of narrative. Gadda, trained as an engineer, is mainly remembered for his experimental use of languages and dialects, an anticipation to the neo-avant-garde and the literary trends that would characterize the sixties. His masterpiece *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana (That Awful Mess in Via Merulana)* [Figure 14] written in 1957, also centered on the intricacy of an urban setting, using Rome as an example of a late realist experiment almost gearing toward fantasy. His speech reads as follows: “A reader of Kant cannot believe in an objectified, isolated, suspended reality: quite the opposite. […] the event itself, the object itself, is anything but the dead body of reality, the fecal remains of history… I’m really sorry.”

Gadda tried to elevate literature beyond the mere representation of events, believing fiction should entail tension, something beyond the depiction of the actual. If fiction lowered itself to the level of a chronicle, it would become a mere leftover of history. Times were ripe for change, and 1957 marked this change in both literature and architectural debates. Much later, Calvino argued that “naturalist writers (*scrittori naturalisti*) accept the world as it is, while those who do not want to accept it and rather want to change it and explain it will be ‘fabulist writers’ (*scrittori favolosi*).”

The publication of Italian folk tales in November 1956 finally ratified Calvino as “fabulista”;

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67 “A parte alcuni casi (Cesare Pavese) la fusione tra elemento lirico e elemento realistico non è raggiunta, c’è in quasi tutte le opere di questa tendenza una frattura tra cronaca e poesia e quando quest’ultima prevale, il vizio fa anche più spicco, si accentua quello stridore, la cronaca fa parte a sé, come un intermezzo documentario introdotto nel corso di una narrazione che va gradualmente raggruppandosi intorno a un nodo lirico,” *Inchiesta sul Neorealismo* p. 97.

68 “Un lettore di Kant non può credere in una realtà obiettivata, isolata, sospesa nel vuoto; ma della realtà, o piuttosto del fenomeno, ha il senso come di una parvenza caleidoscopica dietro cui si nasconda un ‘quid’ più vero, più sottilemente operante, come dietro il quadrante dell’orologio si nasconde il suo segreto macchinismo. Il dirmi che una scarica di mitra è realtà mi va bene, certo; ma io chiedo al romanzo che dietro a questi due ettogrammi di piombo ci sia una tensione tragica, una conseguenza operante, un mistero, forse le ragioni o le irragioni del fatto… il fatto in sé, l’oggetto in sé, non è che il morto corpo della realtà, il residuo fecale della storia… scusa tanto,” C.E. Gadda, *Inchiesta sul realismo*, p.51

A Plunge into Real Estate was a step toward that direction. Later, writers and historians discovered again that literature could entertain, and Calvino, among them, ultimately turned to his best inclination: fantasy.
Figure 14 First edition of C. E. Gadda, _Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana_, Milan: Garzanti 1957.
Chapter 5 - Officina Einaudi. The Stories behind the Histories of a Publishing House

“Pray my Dear,” quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?”— “Good G…!” cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time.

Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*¹

Carlo Levi introduced the Italian translation of Laurence Sterne’s 1759 text *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* published in Italian by Einaudi in 1958 by reflecting on the time of history represented by the clock. Levi had always been concerned about being simultaneously inside and outside of history. His seminal 1945 novel *Christ Stopped in Eboli* had placed Levi both in and out of history, as well as in and out of geography. [Figure 2] In 1950, when Levi published his own novel *L’Orologio (The Clock)* with Einaudi, he concluded with it his narrative based on political events. [Figure 3] The book opens and ends with a clock; at the beginning, its protagonist has just had a prophetic dream that his clock stopped working, like the flow of historical progression.

This chapter narrates the period before this turning point, the moment in which, as Levi wrote in the introduction to Sterne’s book, authors became consciously aware of history and their position within it. I claim that at this point we encounter two directions: one toward a more ancient past and the second one toward fictive resolutions. Levi’s clock stopped before the proliferation of stories and the collapse of the separation between theory and history, history and architecture. Levi’s narratives serve as a device to explain the reflection of authors and the publisher Einaudi on historicity, i.e. the relation to the past.

¹ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, 1759, Book I, Ch. I.1.
Figure 1 Giulio Einaudi in the 1950s. © Istituto Luce.
Figure 2 Carlo Levi, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, Turin: Einaudi 1945.
Figure 3 Carlo Levi, *L’orologio*, Turin: Einaudi 1950.
This chapter retraces Italian cultural history through the story of one of the main representatives of Italy’s publishing industry, from the late 1930s into the 1950s: the Einaudi Publishing House. Initially the Turin-based house mirrored the changing interests of the nation, and it likewise contributed to shaping and direct these collective interests. The publishing policies of Einaudi manifest two main aspects: the importance of translation in the shaping of culture, and the role of historical thought and chronicles within the publishing world and consequently within Italian culture. At this time, the publishing industry had, in Italy the quasi monopoly of culture, a culture that was produced by an intellectual elite and had not yet become popular. Einaudi’s publishing house both followed and shaped national debates starting with translating foreign authors in all disciplines from literature to politics, and from art history to architectural criticism. It is only later, around the end of the 1950s, that Italian publishers would prefer to re-publish Italian authors, and old historical books showing, to a certain extent, a further Italian retreat to their past storia. Einaudi’s publishing house gathered all the individuals who have contributed to my story so far: Elio Vittorini, Italo Calvino, Delio Cantimori, Cesare Pavese, Bruno Zevi and Giulio Carlo Argan. All of them writers, critics, historians and philosophers made Italian culture; art and architectural debates were an integral component of this culture.

Since the foundation of his publishing house in 1933 Giulio Einaudi expressed the anxiety of being at the same time inside and outside the clock of history, inside and outside society, inside and outside academia and education. More than anything else the main aim of publishing houses was at that time to educate a new audience and enlarge the number of readers. And to this aim in 1947, Einaudi together with the communist
politician Antonio Giolitti planned a series of *Biblioteche Popolari* (Popular Libraries/Series). The *Biblioteca di architettura* (Architecture Library) designed and edited by Bruno Zevi, was among these. In 1947 this series became an example and an incentive for the other series published by the same house. However just two years earlier, in 1945, Einaudi had a different view: “our opinion is that we cannot, at the present moment, start a series about [architectural] problems that in the present conditions are not of vital interest,” Einaudi wrote on 4th January 1945 in a Letter to Zevi.3 **[Figure 4]** In 1947 apparently these “architectural problems” were “vital.”

All of Einaudi’s series wished to combine historical thought with scientific rigour. To this end, Einaudi’s logo deserves attention. Einaudi inherited his logo, the drawing of an Ostrich, from the magazine *La Cultura* published in 1933 till 1936 when the magazine ceased its publication due to fascist censorship. **[Figure 5]** But its origin dates back to 1559 when this animal drawing was first published in a book about the love adventures and military deeds of Monsignor Paolo Giovio: *Dialogo delle imprese militari e amorose di Monsignor Paolo Giovio* (Dialogue on military and love deeds of Monsignor Paolo Giovio). Giovio wanted to seek revenge for the death of his brother so the logo bears the Latin motto: *spiritus durissima coquit* (the spirit digests the hardest things) for its capacity to digest any injustice, and the Ostrich is swallowing a nail. **[Figure 6-7]**

Einaudi used the same image for all of his book series accompanied by the Latin motto, and indeed the philosopher Norberto Bobbio referred to the injustice of fascist censorship when he wrote: “The ostrich of Einaudi never put its head under the sand.” The phrase further underlines Einaudi’s idealist tendencies.

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2 Luisa Marangoni introduced both of them in *Pensare i libri*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri 1999, p. 343.
Roma, 4 gennaio 1945

Bruno Zevi
P.W.E.
Via Veneto 62
Roma

Caro Zevi,


Per quanto si riferisce alla progettata “Collezione di architettura” la nostra opinione è che non possiamo, nel momento presente, iniziare una collezione su problemi che, nelle condizioni presenti, non sono di vitale interesse. Ciò non toglie che alcune delle opere che tu ci hai indicato per la progettata collezione e precisamente Louis Sullivan: The Autobiography of an Idea – The Culture of the Cities – Tecniche and Civilization, possano essere esaminate con molta interesse dalla nostra Casa e possano venire senza altro pubblicate in collezioni già esistenti e che si presentano adatto ad accogliere i libri suindicati. Ad esempio il Sullivan potrebbe benissimo entrare nella collezione dei Saggi. In attesa pertanto di un tuo cortese cenno di risposta e pregandoti di voler inviare alla Casa i volumi in esame, ti prego di sospenderti per la lunga attesa nel rispondere e ti saluto affettuosamente.
Figure 5 Einaudi magazine *La Cultura* published by Einaudi from 1933 till 1936, with the ostrich as a logo. © Archive Archiginnasio Bologna.
Figure 6 The original version of the ostrich, from Monsignor Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo delle imprese militari e amorose di Monsignor Paolo Giovio* (Dialogue on Military and Love Deeds of Monsignor Paolo Giovio), 1559. © Archive Archiginnasio Bologna.
Figure 7 The ostrich is swallowing a nail, symbolizing the capacity to digest any great injustice. *Spiritus durissima coquit* (The spirit digests the hardest things). © Einaudi Archive.
But there is also a second version of the logo developed in the early 1950s. In 1951, Einaudi visited Picasso in Antibes. Back then Picasso was completing a series of illustrations to a French edition of *Natural Histories: A Bestiary* by Jules Renard, from which Einaudi chose one image – Picasso’s drawing of a running ostrich. Picasso gave Einaudi the drawing that represented the original version in his series, and which became the new or revised logo of Einaudi’s paperback series. Here the ostrich is running and the logo lost the Latin motto, which might also suggest a loss in the historical synthesis between theory and praxis.4 [Figure 8]

This history of the logo is emblematic of the strong political history of the house, Einaudi’s Publishing House played a crucial role within Italy’s intellectual and political milieu, as it was founded in Turin in 1933 by a group of young intellectuals who wished to actively contribute “to the making and writing of history.” Among them was Giulio Einaudi, who registered the first logo for the house on November 15th, the politician and writer Leone Ginzburg, his wife the writer Natalia Levi, the musicologist Massimo Mila, the philosopher Norberto Bobbio, the writers Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini. To these founding figures many others joined along the way, including writers Italo Calvino and Carlo Levi, the architects and architecture historians Bruno Zevi and Roberto Pane, the art historians Giulio Carlo Argan and Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti.

The genius loci of Turin is no coincidence. At the edge of Italy, between the 1930s and the 1950s, Turin was probably the least Italian of any Italian cities. It has been at the same time in and outside of time, in and outside of history. In a 1936 speech Mussolini started off by proclaiming Turin “a border city,” mainly for its aristocracy,

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4 There is a very refined and different version of the logo, Manzù drew it in 1961, on the occasion of the publication of a collection of his drawings published in a limited numbers: the 41 drawings of Giacomo Manzù.
Figure 8 An ostrich drawn by Picasso in 1951 for the French edition of Jules Renard’s *Histoires Naturelles*. © Einaudi Archive.
who always remained antifascist. Turin intellectuals supported the idea that the cultural formation and the political education of the individuals are linked to the valorization of personal values, along with an ideal of order and discipline that go along with the culture of an industrial and scientific city, but also with a military tradition. In fact, Turin was the epicenter of Italian industrialization, with Fiat and Lancia factories recruiting workers from each of the poorer Italian regions. When trade unions became established, the first industrial social conflicts started to emerge. The basis of culture is now funded and ruled by a small industrial intelligentsia, a sort of renaissance class where bank, money, and artisanship is replaced by production and industry. Also, it comes as no surprise that the main locus of this intelligentsia and the making of historical culture is Turin rather than Florence, Naples, or Rome, but not yet Milan or Venice. Turin has an illuminist tradition and is somehow independent from the central power of Rome; it does not have the Italian but insular character of Florence or Venice. The enlightenment tradition shows itself in the names of Antonio Monti, the politician Luigi Einaudi, Giulio Einaudi’s father, or Antonio Labriola, Rodolfo Mondolfo, Giovanni Gentile and most importantly Benedetto Croce. Such thinkers were close to the Hegelian Marxism to which Labriola had given the name “philosophy of praxis,” and that will form the basic foundation for most of the left-leaning intellectuals in Italy. Indeed illustrious names such as Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti studied in Turin between 1911 and 1915 thus coming into contact with a fervid intellectual milieu, cradle for future Marxist and left leaning thinkers.\(^5\) Yet, Einaudi distanced himself from a political affiliation despite the clear left-leaning orientation of his publications and collaborators. The historian Luisa Marangoni

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underlined the delicate relation between the communist party and Einaudi’s publishing house, which stayed close to the party but was never officially affiliated with it.⁶

Turin seemed to be the place to be, where to reflect upon history and its written representation. With his customary efficiency Calvino described the city’s peculiar “influence” particularly for historically informed literary work in his piece “Stranger in Turin”:

If one admits that a writer’s work can be influenced by the environment in which it is produced, by the elements of the surrounding scenery, then one has to admit that Turin is the ideal city in which to be a writer. I do not understand how one could manage to write in one of those cities where images of the present are so overwhelming and powerful that they leave the writer no margin of space or silence. Here in Turin you can write because past and future have greater prominence than the present, the force of past history and the anticipation of the future give a concreteness and sense to the discrete, ordered images of today. Turin is a city, which entices the writer toward vigor, linearity, style. It encourages logic, and through logic it opens the way toward madness.⁷

Two major details are worth noting here: first, that in Turin past and future appear to coincide and become present history; and second note the way that Calvino unravels the covert connection between creativity and madness (obviously a reference to Nietzsche’s creative period and mental breakdown in Turin) through linearity and logic. Also Calvino shows his preference for his own imagination over the memories that a place can offer.

While the connection between the rational tradition and creativity in historical writing translates in my next chapter, where we will see how a rational almost scientific construction goes along a fantastic historical [re]construction, here the link between past and present introduces us to a peculiar conception of time in historical writing. The past has to inform the present and the future. Needless to say Benedetto Croce is here an undisputed reference, whose work remained an uncontested reference for Italian intellectuals at least into the late 1950s. Croce started *History: Its Theory and Practice* by describing a “contemporary history.” Croce’s contemporary history is not only a “recent past history” but every history that becomes contemporary, when the historians rewrite it.\(^8\) Croce suggests that history and historiography coincide – respectively, events as they happen and the telling of these events as part of the events themselves. The historical recollection shapes events too.

What did history, historiography and “historicism” mean at that point? The definition of the term is broad, as the extensive work by Georges Iggers describes.\(^9\) Of use will be definitions of “historicism” from three different perspectives. Needless to say, the Italian debate on historicism was mainly indebted to Benedetto Croce. Croce’s historicism differed from the Germans’ in that “everything became history”: the natural sciences were not even disciplines to be considered in order to comprehend or explain reality, which would instead be reduced to history. History did not simply mean erudition, but was a way to participate in current historical reality, the *hic et nunc*.

Instead, German historicism, such as established by Dilthey and Meinecke, in which

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historicism opposed positivism, and historical sciences became autonomous from the natural sciences in that the former focused on an “idiographic” mode addressing the “individual,” while the latter on a “nomothetic” approach imposing a “rule.”¹⁰

Historicism insisted on the uniqueness of the events as they happen in time, but not on a deterministic progression. But the main difference between German historicism and Croce’s version is that German historicism placed architectural production within the general expression of a historical period, insisting on the relation between society and art. Quite the opposite, Croce brings back the artist’s personality, which leaves its imprint on the work of art. Since for Croce everything is art, we can include architecture among the arts. To them, the work of Lionello Venturi, became a further reference. Venturi was still influenced by Crocean idealism and addressed the importance of the creative personality in art, though, he introduced a marked tendency toward formalistic criticism and the theory of “pure visibility.” Indeed Venturi in Turin and Matteo Marangoni in Tuscany, as Argan witnessed himself and wrote in *L’architettura italiana del ‘200 e ‘300*, were its pioneers.¹¹

In addition to the late Croce and Venturi, we should mention a third influence: Gramsci’s materialist historicism, according to which, on the basis of a critical reinterpretation of Croce’s historicism and Marxist theories, history is a result of political practice with which men transform reality. Italian criticism was standing among these multiple influences. To simplify, we can relate German historicism to the separation between the natural sciences and the historical disciplines. Historicism imposes the validity of the *hic et nunc* of ideas and principles, against the idea of a natural law with an

extra-temporal validity. Croce’s historicism included everything in history, and argued that we should adhere to the present in order to comprehend and write about the past. Gramsci sees the exploitation of history as a personal political agenda.

The role of Einaudi will prove to be the perfect example of the attempt to integrate these different traditions applied to the publishing industry. As a matter of fact, Einaudi’s publishing house had always been embedded within Italian historical tradition. All books had an historical take, even books about ethnology or psychoanalysis should fit in that category, in other words such books should eventually try to “historicize the irrational,” as Einaudi himself professed. The intent was not of having monographic works about these topics but eventually the history of thereof. This was the case for the violet series, but also the series of “clear and concise” manuals with good bibliographies that could be regularly updated. Even, Gramsci’s letters were to be published with their history; Marxist works would be “philologically translated with a historic bibliography but with no critical context,” Giolitti wrote. Both authors and publishers did not stop in placing history to the center of their arguments.

Finally, and even more so they used history as a means to reach a wider audience while bridging intellectual elite and popular taste. To this end Einaudi used specific disciplines, like art and architecture, to reach these larger audiences. Indeed, the books by Zevi, along with the architecture series designed and edited by him for Einaudi fitted Einaudi’s plan of engaging and instructing a larger public with a specific discipline in mind.

13 Though, the first volume of Sciences of Construction by Gustavo Colonnetti is the only manual Einaudi realized in the series of manuals before the end of the War (published in 1941).
14 Giolitti to Balbo, 24th November 1946, AE Folder Balbo.
Formation over Information - Zevi’s historiographical trilogy

As mentioned, in the history of its publications, Einaudi followed, represented, and actively shaped the different interests and trends in the public debate involving several literary fields as well as art and architecture. As described in the third chapter, during the late 1930s till the late 1940s, the publishing house favored a given topic: the idea of myth, the search for historical origins, and the fascination with magic as epitomized in the writings of Ernesto De Martino. The latter, together with Cesare Pavese, had been responsible for the so-called Violet Series [Serie Viola] on “Religion, ethnology, and psychology.” [Figure 9-10] But with the premature death of Pavese the series came to a halt. When the interest toward myth declined, the new intent was that of realizing lasting manuals, publications that could offer more directions and instruction rather than narratives. Zevi’s three books Verso un’architettura organica [1945], Saper vedere l’architettura [1948], and finally the Storia dell’architettura moderna [1950], all of them published by Einaudi serve as a micro-history of the progression from a mythological tale toward a comprehensive history.15 [Figures 11 to 16] Storia dell’architettura moderna was also a book that could insist on the importance of history as a method to design architecture. As Zevi emphasizes in his preface to the book

15 In English respectively Towards an Organic Architecture [1950]; Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture [1957]; Storia dell’architettura moderna has never been translated. Ironically, or it came as no surprise, Zevi’s first book, Towards an Organic Architecture had been translated in London in 1950, probably because it was considered the direct and updated continuation of Pevsner’s Pioneers published by the same Faber & Faber in 1936.
Here the direct reference is on Giedion’s work, whom Zevi accused to have reduced history to the history of technical progress starting in the nineteenth-century as described in his *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948). Moreover, in the late 1940s, Zevi’s project was to write a comprehensive narrative and reassure the public who, back then, after the war, needed certainties. While during the forties, Italian historians had expressed their enthusiasm in their discovery of America, and if fiction writers explored the narrative of Mid-western authors like Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow, architectural historians discovered the pioneering Chicago school and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Zevi’s fascination with America translated in his commitment to academia and the teaching of architecture following the American example, as a call to action. As Tafuri would write later, *Towards an Organic Architecture*.

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Architecture was “the manifesto not only of an historiographical choice, but also of a principle of action.”\textsuperscript{17}

Zevi’s first book, Towards an Organic Architecture also revises the history of modern architecture by promoting Wright as its ultimate hero. \textbf{[Figure 16]} This book-length essay, as Zevi described it, was written to amend the historical perspective” that “most notorious histories [storie] of modern architecture – by Platz, Pevsner, Giedion, Behrendt, had built and that had culminated in the name of Gropius and Le Corbusier”.\textsuperscript{18} In placing Wright at the climax of an historical progression, Zevi accomplished a similar historiographical operation to that of Pevsner whose Pioneers culminated with the work of Gropius. Wright was known in Italy since the 1910s. Zevi inserted Wright in a progressive historiographical trajectory, marked by victories and defeats but always oriented toward the future. The subtitle of Zevi’s book “Essay on the development of architectural thought in the past 50 years” (Saggio sullo sviluppo del pensiero architettonico degli ultimi cinquant’anni) stresses the evolution of architectural thought while moving forward and simultaneously building history.\textsuperscript{19} The critic Andrea Oppenheimer Dean has singled out Zevi for “battling Giedion” with his Organic Architecture\textsuperscript{20} and Zevi later acknowledges such polemical intention in one of his articles in Metron published in 1949:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} B. Zevi, Storia dell’architettura moderna, Turin: Einaudi 1945, p. XV.
\textsuperscript{19} I am referring to the Italian version of Towards. The English version does not have a subtitle and presupposes a different reader. Indeed, most references in the Italian version target a specific Italian public.
\textsuperscript{20} A. Oppenheimer Dean, Bruno Zevi on Modern Architecture, New York: Rizzoli 1983, pp. 17-34.
\end{flushright}
Figure 9 Einaudi Violet series: Ernesto de Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico* (Ritual Death and Lamenting in Ancient World), Turin: Einaudi 1958.
Figure 11 Bruno Zevi, *Verso un’architettura organica*, Turin: Einaudi 1945. Frank Lloyd Wright’s “Falling Water” on the jacket.
Figure 12 Bruno Zevi, *Verso un’architettura organica*, cover with the ostrich logo by Einaudi.
Figure 13 Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l’architettura*, Turin: Einaudi 1948.
Figure 14 Bruno Zevi, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, Turin: Einaudi 1950.
Qui sorge il problema di Frank Lloyd Wright. Quando io scrissi il mio primo libro *Verso un’Architettura Organica*, alle persone che si complimentavano con me, rispondevo celando: “non è merito mio, ma del Giedion; io non ho fatto altro che tradurre *Space, Time, and Architecture* con un’unica modifica: ho trasportato il capitolo su F. Ll. Wright dopo quello che concerne Le Corbusier.” Ma non si trattava di variazione di poca conseguenza. Tutte le prospettive storiche si alternano e lo sviluppo dell’architettura moderna appare sotto una nuova luce.

Here the problem of Frank Lloyd Wright arises. After I had written my first book, *Verso un’architettura organica*, I told half-seriously those who complimented me on it, “The praise is not for me but for Giedion. All I did was translate *Space, Time and Architecture* with one modification: I transposed the chapter on F. Ll. Wright so that it followed the one on Le Corbusier”. But this was a variation of no little importance. It changes the whole historical perspective and the development of modern architecture appears in a new light.  

Indeed Zevi’s book was a response to Giedion, but still was, according to Zevi’s own words in the book preface “a chronicle rather than a history.”

In the same article published in *Metron* in 1949, Zevi further explained his debt to Wright and not Giedion) for introducing him to ideas about “space.”

Mi limiterò perciò ad accennare ad un solo punto che sembra il più importante e comunque il più incidente sull’architettura. Si tratta della concezione spaziale. Del modo di immaginare, di progettare, e di costruire gli spazi interni dell’architettura I will limit myself to briefly mention a single point which seems the most important and in every way the most vital to architecture.

I refer to the spatial conception, designing and building of interior spaces in both the fields of architecture and town-planning.

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To this respect Wright’s work is the prelude to Zevi’s second major book *Saper vedere l’architettura. Saggio sull’interpretazione spaziale dell’architettura* (literal translation *How to look at Architecture. Essay on the spatial interpretation of architecture*) translated into English in 1957 as *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture* with the exact same text. [Figure 14-15] The book came three years after *Towards*, as it was published in 1948. It constituted a didactic tool, a manual to guide and lead the reader to the analysis and the understanding of architecture, the attempt to define architecture as space. *Saper vedere* fits in the “educational more than the critical” book model, in that Zevi foremost wants to instruct his audience what architecture is.

Its publication did not go without controversy, indeed, when the book was released by Einaudi, the Publishing House Garzanti claimed the right upon the title as they had just re-published a book by the art critic Matteo Marangoni by the title *Saper vedere un’opera d’arte* (*How to look at a Work of Art* 1945). [Figure 17] Writing to Einaudi, Zevi strongly refuted this claim, and added that by choosing that title he wished to underline the non-specialized character of his book, and to stress its overall and generic tone. What’s more, “the title *Saper vedere* is not an original choice by

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Marangoni,” Zevi claimed in a letter to Einaudi, “professor Toesca first used it, so much as Toesca himself criticized what he thought to be a steal.”

“Nowadays,” Zevi insisted in the same letter to his publisher “‘Saper vedere’ sounds like a critical formula used for general texts, like “l’estetica di …”. This goes toward the intent of writing something that could be at the same time educative and informative. But the term “estetica di…” also points to the intellectual legacy of Croce the author of the most well-known treatise on aesthetics (L’Estetica) in Italy at the time and moreover stresses Zevi presumption of realizing a book that could be compared to the work of the Naples born philosopher. Yet, the same reference – Croce’s aesthetic – was not sufficient for the English version. In fact the English title *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture*, insists on the very issue for which Zevi’s book was criticized by the architectural historian Renato De Fusco, that is its link to August Schmarsow’s spatialism despite the chronological distance that separates the two authors, and despite the difference in the their approach. This is ironic as Zevi would later criticize Giedion for his indebtedance to Schmarsow.

Zevi opened the book by probing the state of general architectural criticism. According to Zevi, every book, every magazine, every newspaper opens with a lament or an apology about the state of architectural education and information: “they [the critics] lament that the public is interested in painting and

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25 Zevi to Einaudi, 22nd March 1948, AE Folder Zevi
26 Ibid.
27 In his own biography Zevi su Zevi Zevi writes: “mi sono sempre considerato crociano segnategicamente da quando questo termine passò di moda” [I have always considered myself a Crocean, signally since this term had become obsolete], in B. Zevi, Zevi su Zevi. Architettura come profezia, Venice: Marsilio 1993, p. 26. In this same book Zevi tells another anecdote. The critic Roberto Pane apparently had told Zevi “The Senator [Croce was Italian senator] liked your book *Saper Vedere*. Why don’t we visit him and say hi?” Zevi could not think this to be true, he agreed but soon changed his mind, just in front of Croce’s door. He added “Professore, I am sorry, I am not joining you. I read every book by Croce, or nearly every book by him. I know already Benedetto Croce.” Ibid., p. 27.
28 Translated in 1957.
29 R. De Fusco, *Che cos’è la critica in sé e quella dell’architettura*, Milan: Mimesis 2013, pp. 118-120.
Figure 17 M. Marangoni, *Saper Vedere un'opera d'arte (How to Look at a Work of Art)*, Milan: Garzanti 1945. First published by Tumminelli in Rome in 1933.
Caro Einaudi,

grazie della tua lettera, cui mi affretto a rispondere.

La protesta di Garzanti non ha, a mio modo di vedere, alcuna giustificazione. Il riferimento al titolo del volume di Marangoni è esatto e esplicitamente dichiarato sia nel testo che nella recensione che ne ho fatto per il tuo Bollettino. Garzanti in caso dovrebbe essere listo che qualcuno abbia ripreso il titolo.

In ogni modo, il titolo "Saper Vedere" non è nemmeno originale del Marangoni. Lo adoperò per la prima volta il prof. Toesca dell'Università di Roma, tanto vero che, quando uscì il volume di Marangoni, il Toesca criticò fortemente quella che poteva sembrare una vera e propria "rubrica" del titolo.

Oggi "saper vedere" ha preso un significato generale nei testi critici, ne' più ne' meno come "L'Estetica di...", e sarebbe buffo che per esempio, il Croce protestasse perché il Vitale ha pubblicato un volume intitolato "L'Estetica dell'Architettura", pretendendo che esso fascia concorrenza all'Estetica sua.

E' perciò inutile aggiungere che, a meno che tu non me lo imponga, non ho alcuna intenzione di variare il titolo in nessuna delle prossime edizioni, in cui invece, come sai, vorrei an-

Figure 18 Bruno Zevi to Giulio Einaudi, March 22nd 1948. Zevi complains about Garzanti, who accused Zevi of stealing Marangoni’s title. © Einaudi Archive.
music, in sculpture or literature, but not architecture […] anyone would be ashamed of not knowing a painting by Matisse or a poem by Eluard but would be at ease in confessing they have no idea who Buontalenti or Neutra are.”

Historians and architectural critics can reverse this phenomenon. It is the aim of historians and theoreticians to integrate architecture in a wider discourse and have it aligned with the other arts, just like Croce did, and just as Einaudi intended.

Nevertheless, the book maintained what the title promised, indeed it served as a teaching tool, used as a textbook in every university to show past examples to encourage future projects, even though without the same impact on a larger public as the 1950 La storia d’architettura moderna would later have. Saper vedere was first planned as a collection of Italian architecture, that the editor Einaudi was happy to realize, but not yet thought as a comprehensive historical survey.

The book shows the importance of illustrations for didactic reasons and for appealing to readers. In a later 1954 letter to Zevi, Einaudi would announce his plans for expanding the illustrative program of a second version of Saper vedere in quest for a wider audience, that, in 1954, is more educated:

Si tratta in fondo di attrarre l’attenzione del pubblico (di certo pubblico che volgare non è, ma nemmeno esperto o qualificato) sull’architettura e facendo ricorso al mezzo cui è più facilmente sensibile e cioè le figure. Quindi penserei a un album (che dovrebbe rientrare nella tua collana, ma

It is basically to attract the attention of the public, a public that is certainly not naive, but also not an expert or qualified in architecture, and by using the means which are more appealing to a broader public: i.e. images. So I would think about an album (which should be in your

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potrebbe differenziarsene, se credi), in cui le didascalie commentassero in particolare il singolo monumento e il testo fornisse una evidente e scorrevole prospettiva storica. Le tavole direi che non dovrebbero essere più di 500 e le illustrazioni anche più, ma tieni conto che almeno 250 vorrei fossero a piena pagina.

collection, but it could be also different if you think it’s best), in which the captions comment on the single monument, and the text would provide a clear and smooth historical perspective. I would say that the illustrated tables should be no more than 500, but keep in mind that I wish that at least 250 of them were full page.  

Since Verso un’architettura organica first appeared with no illustrations (because in 1945 Einaudi lacked glossy paper) Saper vedere was Zevi’s first book with images. In the same letter to Zevi, Einaudi further stresses the importance of the use of images, sometimes related to long captions, at the expense of larger texts, so that the readers could better understand the projects. [Figure 19] Apparently Zevi himself had first proposed the increase in illustrations and Einaudi only reiterated and encouraged his proposal.

Caro Zevi sono pienamente d’accordo con te sull’opportunità di un ampliamento dell’apparato illustrativo del Sapere vedere l’architettura che in questo modo potrà meglio rispondere alla sua funzione istituzionale. […] comunque sia il testo

Dear Zevi, I am totally with you about the need to expand the figurative apparatus of Saper vedere l’architettura, which will be able in this way to fulfill its institutional purpose […] either way, in my opinion, both the text and the images should tend

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31 Einaudi to Zevi, Turin, 16th November 1954, Archivi Fondazione Bruno Zevi.
32 This only happened for practical reasons, namely because Einaudi lacked glossy paper to release Towards an Organic Architecture, in R. Dulio, Op. Cit. p. 32.
33 Einaudi finally asked for an update and more illustrations, Einaudi to Zevi, 16th November 1954, AE Folder Zevi.
Einaudi was still attached to a chronicle-like tendency, a work that would just chronologically recount facts instead of a personal interpretation of history, i.e. a new story by Zevi. Einaudi recognized and stressed the importance of bridging past projects and contemporary debate even more than Zevi did, and thought about Zevi’s book as an educational and institutional book. In short, they both wanted to adhere to the past to comprehend the present.

Going back to *Saper Vedere*, while working on its first edition in 1948, Einaudi also had suggested to publish an Italian edition of Giedion’s *Space, Time, and Architecture* but with no success. In 30th November 1948 Zevi received a letter asking if he knew the book by Giedion, to which, three days later Zevi ironically would answer:

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34 Ibid.
35 *Space, Time, and Architecture* was published as *Spazio, tempo e architettura*, Milan: Edizioni Comunità, 1954.
Caro Zevi,

ti ringrazio della sollecita risposta e dell'interesse con cui hai preso in considerazione le questioni che ti avevo prospettato.

Sono pienamente d'accordo con te sull'opportunità di un ampliamento all'apparato illustrativo del Saper vedere l'architettura che in questo modo potrà ancor meglio rispondere alla sua funzione istituzionale.

Quanto alla Storia dell'architettura moderna sarà forse meglio attendere la IV edizione per non trovarci poi con troppa carne al fuoco, tenuto conto dell'altro mio progetto. Che questo, cioè la mia idea di una breve storia dell'architettura italiana, ti abbia trovato calorosamente consenziente mi fa molto piacere.

Si tratta in fondo di attirare l'attenzione del pubblico (di certo pubblico che volgare non è, ma nemmeno esperto o qualificato) sull'architettura e facendo ricorso al mezzo più facilmente sensibile e cioè la figura. Quindi penneresti un album (che dovrebbe rientrare nella tua collana, ma potrebbe differenziarlo, se credi), in cui le didascalie commentassero in particolare il singolo monumento e il testo fornisse una evidente e sorvegliata prospettiva storica. Le parole direi che non dovrebbero essere più di 500 e le illustrazioni anche più, ma tieni conto che almeno 250 parole fossero a piena pagina.

Comunque, sia il testo che le illustrazioni dovrebbero tendere, a mia idea, più che alla trattazione abbreviata ed esauriente, a indicare invece, suggerire, appassionare. Vorrei quasi dire un "Saper vedere" più diretto, in atto, e svolto cronologicamente anziché per problemi.

E' naturalmente solo un'idea embrionale e attendo da te i chiarimenti e le precisazioni che essa ti suggerirà.

Per questo volume, come del resto per tutti i volumi in cui prevale il costo della presentazione editoriale, pensavo di offrirti un compenso a forfait. Ho pensato a una cifra che...
Prof. Bruno Zevi
Via Nomentana 150
Roma

Torino, 30 novembre 1948

Egregio Professore,

La preghiamo di volerci comunicare se Ella conosce l'opera di Sigfried Giedion: _Spazio - Tempo e architettura_, di cui Le alleghiamo il sommario.

In attesa di Sue comunicazioni La preghiamo di gradire i nostri migliori saluti.

GIULIO EINAUDI EDITORE

Figure 20 Giulio Einaudi to Bruno Zevi, November 30th 1948. Einaudi asks Zevi if he knows Giedion's _Space, Time and Architecture_. © Einaudi Archive.
Figure 21 Bruno Zevi to Giulio Einaudi, December 3rd 1948. Zevi not only knows Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture*, he knows it by heart. © Einaudi Archive.
esatte, consiglio definitivamente di tradurlo. Imma-
gino che questo consiglio mi si chiedesse nella sibil-
lina lettera.

Oggi ho passato tre ore con Roberto Pane a rivedere il
testo e le foto del suo libro, che dovrebbe essere il
primo della collezione. È veramente eccellente; ho
dato qualche consiglio per alcune variazioni, ma puoi
contare di aver tutto per la fine del mese. Gli altri
volumi li seguo.

Ho ricevuto il contratto per l'Acocina, che rinvie-
ro, al più presto firmato.

Ti saluto molto cordialmente,

tuo

Bruno Zevi

I received a strange letter asking me if “I know” Space – Time and Architecture and no further detail. Anyway, I can answer easily: not only I know it, but I know it by heart. If you look at Towards an Organic Architecture, you’ll see I quote it in every chapter. What’s you intention? Do you want to publish it? If you want my opinion: the volume is excellent, it’s the best history of modern architecture ever written.¹ [Figure 20 to 22]

Despite considering Giedion’s book “the best history of modern architecture ever written” Zevi did underline the discrepancy with his Towards an Organic Architecture. Zevi did not warn Einaudi against its translation but remarked that he “did not share the interpretative points of view of the author.” and underlined: that “I wrote Towards an Organic Architecture just because I thought his [Giedion’s] conclusions were equivocal.” Zevi also remarked that Space, Time and Architecture’s illustrations however “wonderful in 1941, seven years later are not attractive whatsoever. You will see how in the new version of Towards an Organic Architecture there will be more documentation than the one you find in Giedion’s - at least as for the most recent part of modern architecture.”²

[Figure 20 to 22]

¹ Zevi to Einaudi, 3rd December 1948, AE Folder Zevi.
² “Io non condividevo la prospettiva interpretativa dell’autore, ed anzi scrissi “Verso un’architettura organica” proprio perché mi sembrava che le sue condizioni fossero equivoci. Ora che sto preparando una ampliatissima seconda edizione sono ancora più convinto che sia un libro insufficiente. Ma questo non significa assolutamente nulla: è un
Indeed the new version of *Towards an Organic Architecture* will be *Storia dell’architettura moderna* and in it Zevi extensively praised Giedion’s book “we all have *Space, Time and Architecture* as an example and we draw elements and numbers (statistics) from it,” but he soon underlined its limits “it is a beautiful book; but it is a tendentious one,” and furthermore, “to recognize its scientific values does not mean sharing its perspectives.”

This is how *Storia dell’architettura moderna* started;”-- a book, which starts as the revision of *Towards an Organic Architecture*, in which Zevi overcame the purely educational impulse and reworked his study of Frank Lloyd Wright (which would culminate in a small independent volume on the architect published in 1954, but not by Einaudi) until it transformed into a more comprehensive *storia* about architecture.  

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On the other hand, in a different letter to Einaudi, on 2\(^{nd}\) January 1949 Zevi also explained to his editor that “Giedion’s book is the perfect example of a graphic layout that matches illustrations and texts: “since we have discussed Giedion’s book, I would recommend you to show it to the graphic designer. It’s a concrete example of how I would like the layout of my book to be.”

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1. B. Zevi, *Storia dell’architettura moderna* p. XVII.
3. “Siccome abbiamo parlato del libro del Giedion, ti consiglierei di mostrarlo all’impaginatore perché è un esempio concreto di come mi piacerebbe l’impaginazione,” Zevi to Einaudi, 2\(^{nd}\) January 1949, AE Folder Zevi.
Figure 24 Bruno Zevi, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, Milan: Il Balcone 1955.
Carissimo Einaudi,

sono lieto che il volume del Pane ti sia piaciuto; è veramente eccezionalmente interessante. Ti ringrazio anche della sollecitudine con cui hai inviato la prima rata del compenso, il che mi tranquillizza come direttore della collana. Entro subito negli argomenti posti nella tua lettera.

Impaginazione. Sono d’accordo nel lasciare una notevole libertà di impaginazione, a condizione che essa non sia monotona e che sia fatta da una persona qualificata della tua casa editrice. Non vorrei che si esagerasse né nel tradizionalismo né nella stravaganza. Per questo ho proposto una ventina di foto marginali, le altre nel testo. Escludo che si possa pubblicare prima il testo e poi le fotografie: essi devono essere intramezzati, e il testo – anche questo del Pane assai breve – deve concluire a pag.1 e finire nell’ultima pagina. Siccome abbiamo parlato del libro di Giedion, ti consiglieresti di mostrarlo all’impaginatore perché è un esempio concreto di come mi piacerebbe l’impaginazione. Ci sono alcune pagine con foto in basso, nel centro, e in alto e col margine esterno della pagina tagliato dalle foto che mi piuick assai riuscite. Per ciò che riguarda l’ingrandimento maggiore e minore delle fotografie, e anche la ripresa di particolare vicino alla visione generale, io sono d’accordo nel lasciare piena libertà, salvo poi a discutere il menù e a dare la mia opinione che sarà certamente positiva, perché l’impaginazione delle tue collane mi piace (ad esclusione del “Palladio” di Pane la cui impaginazione mi sembra assai monotona). Una altra cosa: non vorrei che fossero fotografie messe per il verso opposto al senso della lettura. In conclusione, stai pur certo che non avrò dilazioni a quanto prospettato, ma sì bene che Pane sia consultato personalmente.

Formato. Sui cambiamento del formato, non siamo invece d’accordo, ma meno che non si tratti di piccole variazioni che altrui non hanno importanza. Io credo che tu sia portato a proporre un formato più grande del libro di Pane che non è affatto tipico della collezione. Gli altri volumi, come sai, sono monografie e per essi il formato che abbiamo scelto è il migliore. Noi vogliamo fare una collana possibilmente assai ricca di volumi, che dopo un certo tempo si venda in blocco. Se cominciassimo a ingrandire il formato, poi lo ingrandiremmo ancora, giungerebbero al formato del “Palladio” o a quello della collazione da “Il Milione” di Milano, che è assai impaginativa, di cui esce un volume ogni anno, costa moltissimo e non risponde ad alcune funzione culturale. Noi vogliamo fare qualcosa di più delle collezioni popolarissime per esempio della Biblioteca d’Arte Illustrata, e per questa pubblichi volumi dieci volte più grossi, con tutte foto truck originali e con autorì di primo ordine. Ma vogliamo che la collana non costi più di 900 lire a volume pur con la copertina di cartone e una foto a colori in copertina. Prima che più, ripeto, vogliamo pubblicare parecchi volumi perche’, come ben sai, gli unì aiutano la vendita degli altri. Ora gli autori qualificati nel campo dell’architettura sono pochissimi, non bisogna appesantire il loro lavoro, non bisogna concedere loro, d’altra parte, di dimuire in...
On 28th September 1948 (after the publication of Saper Vedere) Zevi informed his editor that he wished to print a new version of *Verso un’architettura organica* since it is a book that “not only offers a new approach, but also the quality and interest of a comprehensive text of history of modern architecture [...] I also would like to change its title to “Organic Architecture” instead of “Toward” considering that organic architecture is now a fact, and not only an approach.”6 Sure enough, by 1948, the word “toward” no longer applied: organic architecture had been at least for Zevi accomplished. Also, a propelling tendency toward the future had become the present, and a myth was obsolete.

On October 9th of the same year Zevi finally suggested as a title *L’architettura moderna dal funzionale all’organico* (Modern Architecture from Functional to Organic). This already suggests the main point of the book, i.e. that organicism is the only solution to the conundrum of functionalism, a debate which would spark harsh controversies among Zevi’s reviewers.

On February 20th 1949 the book originally thought as an updated version of *Towards* had its final title: “I started the third (and hopefully last) version of *Storia dell’architettura moderna* – such as it is becoming – which will be the second version – much larger and almost a new book – of *Towards an Organic Architecture,*” on May 30th he confirmed that the book “is becoming a monumental work, that will become, independently from the values of its ideas, a fundamental and essential tool to architecture students and scholars.”7 Thus implying that this first storia has a covert organic origin. [Figure 26]

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6 “Che abbia non soltanto l’attrattiva di una posizione nuova, ma anche la qualità e l’interesse di un testo completo di storia dell’architettura moderna [...] Vorrei anche cambiare un po’ il titolo, chiamandolo “L’architettura organica” senza il “Verso” dato che ormai l’architettura organica è un fatto, e non più solo un indirizzo,” Zevi to Einaudi, 28th September 1948, AE Folder Zevi.

7 “sta diventando un’opera monumentale, che costituirà, indipendentemente dalla bontà o meno delle idee, uno strumento fondamentale e indispensabile per gli studenti di architettura e per tutti gli studiosi,” Zevi to Einaudi, 30th May 1949, AE Folder Zevi.
Caro Einaudi,

argan mi aveva gia’ informato circa la richiesta della casa editrice fiorentina riguardante alcune foto di Gropius. Dato che il carattere della collana e’ tutt’affatto diverso dal nostro, non ho obbiezioni da fare. 

Pero’, non desidero affatto che il volume di Argan, che mi sara’ consegnato in forma definitiva fra pochi giorni, soffra ritardi a seguito del prestigio del materiale. Ti prego perciò di rispondere che, pur non avendo obbiezioni di principio e promettendo di dare in seguito il materiale fotografico, non possiamo darlo ora che i cliches devono esser fatti.

Non ho piu’ saputo nulla dell’Autobiografia di Wright. Che cosa e’ accaduto? Ti prego di non farti scappare questo magnifico volume.

E il Pane? Ormai sarebbe tempo di farlo uscire.

Io sto continuando il lavoro. Sollecito i vari autori: il Bonelli mi e’ stato consegnato, ed e’ un buon libro. Ma le fotografie non sono ancora complete e perciò attendo a mandartele.

Lo Choisy e’ sotto pressione. Ho gia’ fatto una prima raccolta del materiale illustrativo.

Con la fine dell’ insegnamento universitario, intendo redigere l’ultima edizione della Storia dell’Architettura Moderna che sta divenendo un’opera monumentale, ma che costituirà, indipendentemente dalla bontà o meno delle idee, uno strumento fondamentale e indispensabile per gli studenti di architettura e per tutti gli studiosi.

So che Giorgini ti ha gia’ mandato parte del cliches. Forse alla sede di Roma, Mi raccomando che siano bene conservati, Vorrei che tu li sollecitassi a completare il lavoro, dato che sono bravi, ma di una lentezza esasperante.

Con i piu’ cordiali saluti

Bruno Zevi

Figure 26 Bruno Zevi to Giulio Einaudi, May 30th 1949. Zevi describes his Storia as a “monumental work,” an essential tool to students and scholars, and inquires about Wright’s autobiography. © Einaudi Archive.
On May 4\textsuperscript{th} 1950 while announcing he was almost ready with the “monumental Storia dell’architettura moderna,” Zevi asked Einaudi not to “mention Towards an Organic Architecture because this book, even if it started as a revision of the first work, does not have anything to do with it any longer, being, now, the comprehensive storia of one and a half century of world architecture, and having a systematic bibliography which also constitutes the first attempt in this direction.”\textsuperscript{8} Even if this book grew organically from the previous one, in the end it became a different textual and historiographical organism. [Figure 27]

Certainly the re-writing – as we can think of it – of Towards an Organic Architecture into La storia presented a number of original points. Among Zevi’s “enjoyable pages of narrative,” as Tafuri labeled them, Zevi persistently distinguished between works of poetry and works of prose, namely literature. He was obviously attempting to recuperate, or to insert a contribution and offer a judgment clearly deriving from Croce’s theories and apply them into a different field.\textsuperscript{9} Guido Lopez wrote in a review of Zevi’s La storia: “In brief, we miss a history of modern architecture, or we want to be more exigent, we miss a chronicle upon which, sooner or later, a good soul will decide to build a castle to true History.”\textsuperscript{10} Indeed Zevi’s narrative is still closer to a personal fabula more than to a philological chronologic reconstruction. But Zevi’s La storia neither added much to the

\textsuperscript{8} “Non fare riferimenti a Verso un’architettura organica, perché questo lavoro, iniziato come revisione di quel primo saggio, è risultato in un’opera che non ha più nulla a vedere con l’antico libretto, essendo una storia completa di un secolo e mezzo di architettura mondiale, e avendo una lunga bibliografia sistematica che costituisce il primo tentativo del genere finora fatto,” Einaudi to Zevi, 4\textsuperscript{th} May 1949, AE Folder Zevi.
\textsuperscript{10} “Manca in breve, la storia dell’architettura moderna o se vogliamo essere esigenti manca la cronaca sulla quale, o prima o dopo, un’anima buona si potrà forse decidere a mettere assieme il castello della vera storia,” p. 2 Folder Reviews, 390, fascicolo 5209. AE Archive.
previous volume, *Towards an Organic Architecture*, nor contributed scientifically to a larger debate, and therefore remained, and remains, un-translated.

If the intent is indeed that of writing a comprehensive book, Zevi succeeded in building a reassuring wide-ranging narrative that does not allow gaps or discontinuities but achieves an integration of characters and movements, definitely a history that ends and not a chronicle that terminates. But as Tafuri later wrote, Zevi’s storia was “a suggestive account (racconto or ‘tale’) whose omissions owed much to still embryonic historiographical research and whose daring judgments were soon contradicted by facts,” something Zevi actually blamed Giedion’s book for. Indeed, *La storia* was probably a more objective historical account for its author than it was for its readers.

Like the rest of his books, Zevi’s *Storia* was not received without controversy. Riccardo Musatti in an article entitled “Judged Architecture” acknowledged Zevi’s attempt to historicize contemporary architecture in *Saper vedere*, but recognized in *La storia* the effort of explaining rationalism without adding further polemics around the debate on rationalism versus organicism. According to Musatti it is only at the end of the volume, in the last chapter “Renewal of historical studies of architecture” that the author added arguments that underline the importance of historicizing both ancient and contemporary architecture, even if the later would be overlooked.12

Gillo Dorfles praised the attempt and success in covering two hundred years of history, to write a “comprehensive guide of twentieth century architecture.” It was a good volume that recognized “the issues around the art of building, both from the historical

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and esthetic point of view”. Dorfles criticized the alternative to rationalism offered by Zevi, i.e. organicism. Still he praised the author for “giving our country a didactic work but at the same time a work dense of precious bibliographic and historical notices that make of the book an essential tool to any scholar of the topic.”¹³ Dorfles appreciated the attempt to give a narrative continuity, namely to historicize. Nevertheless, Zevi does not historicize theory but space in his history. Moreover Zevi’s claim to write an instructional tool to teach a critical mode of thinking seemed to be contradicted by a story that firmly decided which architects are or are not entitled to be part of history.

La storia was published as the 136th volume in the Einaudi series I saggi (essays), and was not yet part of an architecture series published by Einaudi and edited by Zevi.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it represented the wider and most comprehensive achievement on architectural history so far, and it stayed as such for almost a decade and with basically no competition in the Italian market. The Pioneers by Pevsner, published in 1945, was re-edited in 1983, while Space, Time and Architecture by Giedion was only translated in 1954 and published by Edizioni Comunità in Milan, not Einaudi. Leonardo Benevolo’s volume by the same name Storia dell’architettura moderna would not appear for another six years until 1960.¹⁵

Zevi’s Storia had indeed a great success, but its success did not match the success that Zevi expected for the architecture series, that despite all the efforts experienced a halt.

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¹⁴ The relation between Einaudi and the art and architecture debate will be described in chapter V.
Caro Einaudi,

eccomi a darti e a chiederti alcune informazioni:

1) attendo le annunciate bozze dal Moretti, che non so se mi interessano di per se stesse, ma anche per prendere atto del formato da te stabilito e per poterli regolare per i cliche del Sitte e del Howard (volume "La nascita dell'urbanistica moderna"). Tutti i disegni sono stati rifatti, le traduzioni finite e ora mi mancano alcune altre illustrazioni che appunto attendono di inserirsi nel nuovo formato.

2) la nuova edizione dello Choisy, non l'ho mai ricevuta. L'avete effettivamente richiesta? Quando si potra' avere? Sono pronto a ordinarela per conto mio, ma vorrei essere certo che poi ve ne facciate venire. Io ho sospeso tutto su questo volume, appunto in attesa di avere una copia della nuova edizione.

3) il Pane vuole il resto del compenso della "Napoli imprevista". Ti prego di mandarglielo. Ci tengo personalmente dato che personalmente mi sono impegnato con lui.

4) il Gropem di Argan e' finito. Tutte le ultime illustrazioni sono state ricevute dall'America. Lo riceverai tra giorni.

5) DULCIS in FUNDO. La monumentale Storia dell'Architettura Moderna (facciamo gli scongiuri) e' finita! Quattro anni di lavoro ne hanno fatto, se non altro, l'opera filologicamente più completa che esista attualmente, 700 illustrazioni (di cui 500 fuori testo), la maggior parte delle quali e' inedita, credo che rendano questo studio indispensabile agli studiosi e agli studenti. Scusa questo immodesto giudizio, e vengo ai problemi.

Se fosse possibile far uscire questo libro prima degli esami estivi, cioè entro il 1 luglio, sarebbe utile agli studenti e anche commercialmente, in questo caso, potrai mandarti subito la prima parte del grosso volume (circa 500 pagine dattiloscritte) che potresti far copiare, mentre io de l'ultima occidenta alla seconda parte e alla bibliografia. Tutte le Tavole fuori testo (76 tavole doppie) potrebbero intanto essere stampate. Per facilitare il lavoro, io sono naturalmente disposto a venire a Torino quando tu o Mèlina lo crediate opportuno per l'ultima correzione delle bozze.

Rispondimi, per favore su questo punto. Io ti spedirei subito il testo e tutti i rimanenti clichè che sono - tutti - già pronti.

Un'altra cosa: qualora tu dovessi annunciare il volume, ti prego di non fare
As early as 1944, Zevi suggested naming his new series of books about architecture Collana Storica di Architettura (Historical Series for Architecture) thus expressing the same concept that lied behind his transition from *Verso un’architettura organica* to *Storia dell’architettura moderna* gradually establishing a sound historical approach, instead of the more general nomenclature *Biblioteca di architettura* (Architectural Library).\footnote{Zevi to Einaudi, 26\textsuperscript{th} April 1949, AE Folder Zevi.}

Already in the thirties, Einaudi’s first series: *I Saggi* (Essays), and the *Biblioteca di cultura storica* (Library of Historical Culture) disclosed the preferences of the publishing house. Embedded in Italian historicist and idealist tradition, Einaudi fitted his publishing activities in them. Indeed *I Saggi* are books characterized by an essay format, a short length, but with an historical approach. These books were characterized by their critical perspective without being too formal or having a too narrow scope and limited audience. At first, architectural texts had to be part of this series, Zevi well expressed the characteristics of *I Saggi*:

> Se ben comprendo qual è il carattere dei ‘Saggi’, escluderei da essi qualunque monografia illustrativa di carattere didattico o manualistico. Io riserverei i ‘Saggi’ a studi di largo respiro, di interesse generale, là dove l’illustrazione serve per completare il testo, e non viceversa [...] In questo modo solo pochi

If I do not get wrong the idea that lies behind the *Saggi*, I would exclude anything monographic or anything illustrated or anything with a didactic or educative character. I would limit the *Saggi* to wider analysis, geared toward a more general interest, where the image serves to complete the text and not the
In other words the role of illustrations in *I saggi* had a more minor role than those in an architecture series. Indeed, for the series *I Saggi* Zevi suggested the *Autobiography* by Wright “the most important name in architecture nowadays.”[18] [Figure 29]

Einaudi thought about an architecture series as a didactic tool by means of historical analysis, and as an instrument for education on the art of building for the general public. Einaudi’s fascination with architecture was not new. As seen in the second chapter, the very first attempt to an architecture slant of the publishing house dates back to 1935. For example, when Einaudi tried to transform the already existing magazine *La Cultura* into a less academic publication, yet with a historical focus, he wished to dedicate one single issue to architecture, as architecture represented one of the most vivid debates at that time. Thanks to Levi, Einaudi had previously contacted the eccentric Edoardo Persico, who lived in Turin, and enlarged the interests of the publishing house to art and architecture discussions. This happened through *La Cultura*, that had the same emblem as Einaudi’s Publishing House – the Ostrich. [see Figure 5] Einaudi explicitly expressed the desire to realize something different and to distinguish himself from the same “soup of

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17 Zevi to Einaudi, 3rd November 1948, AE Folder Zevi.
18 *Ibid.* As we saw in the third chapter the book was at first not endorsed by the rest of the editors and Einaudi.
Caro Einaudi,
rispondo subito alla tua lettera del 28, tanto più che essa collava alcuni problemi di impostazione della collana che vanno risolti. Ti dico quell’è il mio punto di vista sulle questioni di cui mi chiedi affinché tu lo tenga presente nelle decisioni che prenderai.

1. Problemi dei "Saggi". Se ben comprendo quale è il carattere dei "Saggi", escluderei da essi qualunque monografia illustrativa di carattere più o meno didattico e manuale. Io riserverò i "Saggi" a studi di largo respiro, di interesse generale, la dove l’illustrazione serve per completare il testo, e non viceversa. Per questo escluderei qualche saggio su Mendelsohn o Neutra, o Borrani o Brunelleschi. In questo modo solo pochi libri di architettura entreranno nei "Saggi", ma questo non è male. Spero di farvi avere un volume di Samonà che mi pare fatto apposta e che potrebbe uscire nel prossimo anno nei "Saggi".


3. Ciò non significa che non approvi l’idea delle monografie del Roggero. Essa può andar bene, ma è mio dovere fare alcune riserve. Anzi tutto non conosco il Roggero. vorrei sapere se ha già scritto qualcosa, principalmente se ha mai visto anche i suoi libri le opere di Mendelsohn o se le ha giudicate solo dalla fotografia. Il contenuto del suo libro, quale è prospettato nel proemio e aspirativo, e assai poco critico. Se tu rileggi il pergruto Argomento, lo troverai pieno di errori, di frasi come "visione costruttivistica del mondo", e di pochi elementi che ci assicurino una profondità e una cultura critica. Imagino, nel resto, che se il Roggero si è fatto inviare da Mendelsohn tutto il materiale illustrativo, avrà cominciato a scrivere e ci pare che la miglior cosa sarebbe che scrivesse il saggio e poi lo sottopor- rasse per la pubblicazione.

4. Questo a meno che tu non sia sicuro di lui. Nel qual caso sei pure il cont- tato per la mia collazione. Comprasso 100.000 a forfait, dato che non ci sono fotografie originali, e diglio che si metta a contatto con me per tutte le specificazioni della collazione.

5. Per ciò che riguarda gli altri volumi, e segnatamente il Neutra che tu pro- ponmi, noi stabiliremo che le proporzioni della collana dovevano essere: tre vol- lumini di architettura antica e uno di architettura moderna. Questo anche per differenziarla della collana esclusivamente moderna, tipo quella da IL BALCO.

6. Per il Neutra, Comenz, che è un eccellente architetto ed amico, non è la persona più adatta. Il miglior biografo sarebbe invece l’arch. Ettore Soffi- sass Junior di Torino, il quale ha gia raccolto un eccellente materiale ed ha gia’ scritto una parte dello studio.

Ti prego di farmi sapere, punto per punto, se ti pare che questa impostazione sia...
Caro Einaudi,

ho ricevuto il primo assegno di Lire 30.000 e ti ringrazio. Contemporaneamente, ti annuncio la nascita del giovane architetto LUCA ZEVI di chili quattro e mezzo.

La nascita dell'erede mi ha fatto venire in mente un'idea magnifica. Una di quelle idee di cui uno dice: ma come mai non ci avevo pensato prima? Prese'apporto come carito per l'Autobiografia di Wright, di cui non ho avuto da te più notizia.

Dunque si tratta di tradurre e di pubblicare nelle collezioni i due testi basilari dell'urbanistica moderna, anzi dal suo nascente. Il primo volu-
metro e' quello di Camillo Sitte: Stadtbaul, pubblicato nel 1896 in Germania, tradotto in francese, in spagnolo, l'anno scorso in inglese. Volu-
metro fondamentale, breve, una settantina di pagine nella collezione. Sit-
ete e' morto nel 1903 e perciò non credo che vi siano diritti d'autore da chiedere.

L'altro volume e' quello famoso di Ebenezer Howard "Garden Cities", le cui attualità e' dimostrata anche dal fatto che tre o quattro anni or sono ne' stata ripubblicato in America e in Inghilterra una nuova edizione. Anche di questo volu-
metro si potrebbe fare un libretto della collezione dello stesso formato. "Howard e' morto nel 1928.

Un'idea anche migliore potrebbe essere quella di pubblicarli insieme col
titolo: LA GENESI DELL'URBANISTICA MODERNA: SITTE E HOWARD e con una breve
introduzione.

Fammi sapere la tua opinione. Se vuoi informarti per i diritti, lo Howard e' stato ripubblicato da Faber & Faber. II Sitte e' stato pubblicato in inglese dalla Rainhold Publishing Corporation, Copyright 1945.

Sto combinando con Matthiae per un volu-
metro sul Rainhold. Ti sarò preciso fra poco.

Con i più cordiali saluti

[Signature]
literary and aesthetic criticism of which the public can take no longer.”

Persico accepted at first, yet finally refused to participate and the magazine never materialized.

A more remarkable exchange toward the realization of an architectural historical project took place between Zevi and Einaudi in 1948, coinciding with the publication of *Saper vedere l’architettura*, when, on March 18th, Einaudi solicited Zevi for a list of books about architecture. Two months later, on May 20th Zevi informed Einaudi of having contacted some scholars and writers. He did not want to be paid for editing the series, but urged a new format “with an average of fifty original pictures for each volume” and suggested “the first volumes to be realized [should be on]: Borromini, the Pompei house, Gropius, the Orvieto cathedral and medieval architecture, Pietro da Cortona,” mixing both past and contemporary architectures. Zevi mentioned some of the possible contributors, like the architectural historian Roberto Pane. On that same line, on June 27th Zevi wrote he had announced the architecture series during the conference of art criticism in Florence “in front of all art critics, architecture historians, monuments superintendents. They all show their interest, therefore now, after we agreed on all details, we should be ready to start.”

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Einaudi had in mind some historical literary magazines such as *La voce*, or *Rivoluzione liberale*. The latter edited by Piero Gobetti was Einaudi’s main influence for its liberal orientation, anti-fascist position, as well as its relation to the enlightenment tradition.

20 Zevi to Einaudi, 10th May 1948, AE Folder Zevi.

21 “Riassumeva gli accordi presi: quattro volumi all’anno di 100-150 pagine in carta patinata, in un formato nuovo rispetto alle altre collane Einaudi, con una media di cinquanta fotografie originali per volume. Indicava anche i temi dei primi volumi (Borromini, la casa pompeiana, Gropius, il Duomo di Orvieto e l’architettura medievale, Pietro da Cortona), e tra i possibili collaboratori faceva per ora il nome di Roberto Pane (Zevi to Einaudi, 10th May 1948 AE Folder Zevi).

22 “Di fronte a tutti i critici d’arte, gli storici dell’architettura e i soprintendenti ai monumenti. L’interesse suscitato è stato assai notevole e mi pare che ora, presi gli ultimi accordi, si possa senz’altro iniziare,” Zevi to Einaudi, June 27th 1948, AE Folder Zevi.
Caro Einaudi,
grazie del tuo telegramma e della tua lettera
che sono stati estremamente utili. Dopo la riunione a casa mia, sono stato al Congresso di
Critica d’Arte di Firenze, ed ho ufficialmente annunziato la collana di architettura, di fronte a
tutti i critici d’arte, gli storici dell’architettura e i
soprintendenti ai monumenti.

L’interesse suscitato è stato assai notevole e
mi pare che ora, presi gli ultimi accordi, si pos-
sa senz’altro iniziare.

Durante la discussione dei tempi della tua let-
tera, ho trovato una forte opposizione per la cifra stabilita’ a forfait. Tu proponi un compenso
dalle 100 alle 150.000 lire comprese le fotografie,
ma renderai che se queste fotografie sono ori-
ginali, sulla base di 50 fotografie, esse costano
intorno alle 75.000 lire. Se aggiungi i viaggi ne-
cessari per farle (e i monumenti anche di uno stes-
so autore sono sparsi), ci resta troppo poco.

Dopo aver molto insistito e aver combattuto negli
interessi della casa editrice le proposte di chi
voleva aumentare eccessivamente la cifra, ho avuto
l’incarico di chiederti di variare il forfait da
un minimo di 150.000 ad un massimo di 200.000,
iccio’ 50.000 lire in più della tua proposta.
Inoltre i collaboratori hanno richiesto che i di-
ritti stranieri rimanessero a loro, oppure che si
stabilissero delle condizioni per la cessione dei
diritti d’autore nella forma che tu credi.

Vorrei dirti che è consigliabile accettare questi
termini perché, particolarmente per gli architetti
stranieri non ci saranno fotografie originali, ed
allora i compensi potranno diminuire. In altre pa-
role, credo che in totale le tue spese non saranno
But only in 1949, during the 12th and 13th January editorial board meeting within the Einaudi publishing house, the editors actually discussed the realization of a new series of books, one that could reach a larger audience, in order to realize a series that could have a “wide-ranging orientation and that should think about updating, developing a critical spirit, and demolishing old myths.”

Einaudi reiterated the main aim of the series, that of “filling an intellectual gap and insert architecture in general culture,” by publishing “safe books,” by which he meant to have broader, yet specific titles, that could be easy to sell. This also expressed the attempt to move toward future directions, and implied covering issues concerning politics, art, and general culture. He persevered in asking for the collaboration of external consultants, which would help implement the series.

Though, Zevi and Einaudi did not agree in what had to be considered an historical take. Einaudi expected from the architecture series to cover contemporary topics. One of the most important contemporary debates was history. To this end, they had agreed on a ratio: one volume on contemporary architecture, every three on ancient architecture, with Einaudi pressing toward more contemporary publications. Surprisingly, at this moment, Zevi’s conception of history mainly meant a remote past. It will not stay as such for long considering his work in L’architettura. Cronache e storia, in which Zevi clearly expressed the intent to integrate ancient architecture with contemporary topics. What’s more, Zevi did not only consider a more ancient architecture but also a minor architectural production. In the series, he thought about a book by Roberto Pane on the

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24 Foà asked a relation to Zevi on 28th June 1951, AE Folder Zevi.
minor architecture in Naples, Ottavio Morisani’s book on Michelozzo and some texts by Mario Labò on Galeazzo Alessi and by Renato Bonelli on the Orvieto Cathedral. Muscetta also suggested a book by Francesco Fariello on rural architecture. Nonetheless, only the first two would be realized.25

Besides enlarging the audience for what so far appeared to be specialized disciplines, Einaudi had the aspiration of creating a mixture between the new and the old tradition, something that was a trademark for Einaudi’s publication program, providing that his ostrich could indeed digest all, both past and present, the architecture series was the perfect opportunity to solidify such historical mingling.

In his collaborations with editorial consultants, Einaudi held the upper hand. In 28th October 1948 Einaudi passed Zevi a memo from the architect Mario Federico Roggero regarding a book about Erich Mendelsohn specifying that:

A me pare che l’opera sia importante e che il materiale di cui Roggero si è fornito sia di prima mano; mi pare inoltre che il Roggero sia un individuo preparato e ben orientato [...] E intanto che siamo in argomento, dato che: Argan fa un

This work would be important, the material Roggero suggested is primary material and Roggero seemed to be a serious and well-oriented professional [...] and since we are talking about the topic: Argan writes on Gropius, Roggero

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25 Zevi to Einaudi, 2nd August and 28th September 1948, AE Folder Zevi. Roberto Pane, Napoli imprevista was published in 1949, Ottavio Morisani, Michelozzo architetto was published in 1951. Zevi invited Einaudi to stipulate a contract with Mario Affascina for a book about Sicilian architecture in the seventeenth and eighteenth Century. [Zevi to Einaudi, 25th November 1948, AE Folder Zevi] and he further suggested to translate the chapter on Greece in the Histoire de l’Architecture by Auguste Choisy with his own preface, in the same letter Zevi informed Einaudi on a book that he agreed to realize with Ignazio Gardella on Alvar Aalto and one with Vittorio Zinno on Sicilian Villas in the eighteenth century. [Zevi to Einaudi, 30th January 1949, AE Folder Zevi].
Zevi reiterated he disagreed by advancing as an excuse the allotted ratio of ancient vs modern architecture.

Noi stabilimmo che le proporzioni della collana dovevano essere: tre volumi di architettura antica a uno di architettura moderna. Questo anche per differenziarla dalle collane esclusivamente moderne, tipo quella de Il Balcone. Ora, se tu decidi di fare il Mendelsohn, ci sono altri tre contratti da fare, e se decidi di fare il Neutra, essi divengono sei. Naturalmente, se tu sei disposto ad accelerare i tempi della collana, io ne sarei assai lieto. Didn’t we agree on the ratio within the series, i.e. three volumes about ancient architecture to one volume about modern architecture? This happened so we could be different from other publishers’ series, like the one by Il Balcone. Now, if you decide to work on the Mendelsohn [book], we have to stipulate at least three other different contracts, and if you decide to do the Neutra, they will become six.27

Zevi expressed some concerns on both of these book projects by adding that Arnold Whittick had just written an excellent book on Mendelsohn, and instead of Cosenza “excellent architect and friend”, he suggested Ettore Sottsass junior from Turin “who

26 Einaudi to Zevi, 28th October 1948, AE Folder Zevi.
27 Zevi to Einaudi, 28th October 1948, AE Folder Zevi.
already gathered some excellent material and already wrote part of the book [on
Neutra].”28

A few weeks later Zevi insisted: “you say that so we will have three books on
modern (!!!) architecture therefore we would need nine books on ancient architecture. Let
me know if you really think we need to be so rigorous.”29 The publisher’s and the editor’s
positions were different, Zevi defended books as historiographical accounts, Einaudi
wanted to tell other stories too even if informed by the past. Einaudi was interested in
contemporary architecture that for Zevi had still to be written. Einaudi urged to remain
within history while writing it.

To Einaudi, architecture was not only a ‘hot’ topic because of its being at the
center of the postwar debate much more than art was. Einaudi expressed a new interest
because of that compromise between “traditionalism and extravagance” especially in the
innovative layout that Zevi suggested to Einaudi.30 To Einaudi the architecture series was
the means to integrate old and new, high culture and low culture, and “fill a gap in Italian
culture.”31 [Figure 31] But also shared Zevi’s thoughts:

Quell’alternanza tra opere di architettura antica e moderna e opere di architettura
contemporanea, l’esigenza di rivolgersi a un vasto pubblico senza scadere nel
popolare, mantenendo una “piattaforma”

[we need to insist on…] that alternation
between ancient and modern architecture,
and contemporary architecture, and more
than everything the need to address the
general public without becoming populist,

28 Ibid.
29 “Tu mi dici che in questo modo avremmo tre volumi di architettura moderna e allora ce ne vorrebbero nove di
architettura antica. Vedi un po’ se è necessario essere così rigorosi,” Einaudi to Zevi, 13th November 1948, AE Folder
Zevi. Einaudi also suggested to translate Neutra’s Wie baut Amerika?, by this contradicting Zevi’s opinion that the
book was out of fashion and not very interesting.
30 Zevi to Einaudi, 2nd January 1949, AE Folder Zevi.
31 Einaudi to Zevi, 8th November 1951, AE Folder Zevi.
che intendeva rifuggire dal tanfo infecondo dell’archeologismo e della mera erudizione filologica, ma non deve nemmeno confondersi con altre collane o prettamente illustrative o di divulgazione.

to build a sort of cultural platform that could avoid the ‘unproductive stink’ of archeology or mere philological erudition, but also did not have to mingle with other series or being only illustrative or educational.32 [Figure 32]

As an example of the latter Zevi had mentioned the (“yet, excellent”) series by Il Balcone di Milano edited by Ernesto Nathan Rogers, but not without concealing the tension with his own proposed series. Zevi pedantically criticized Rogers series for reducing the architectural debate to a narrative based on the use of images, with no historical reflections, which is surprising given his abundant use of images, especially in his Storia.

Yet, Einaudi had also previously contacted Rogers. And on June 22nd 1950 Einaudi accepted Rogers’ suggestions about a collection of essays; Einaudi further recommended Rogers to write a large preface and to eliminate some fortuitous texts. On 19th December of that same year Einaudi asked Rogers for some advice upon Rudolf Wittkover’s Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism, upon which Rogers gave a positive feedback. Zevi’s opinion on Wittkower’s book was quite different, he described it as “imprecise and full of mistakes, an inaccurate volume” but it was less for the German author’s quality than for the sake of contradicting Rogers. As in fact, Zevi would suggest the same book in 1958.33

32 Zevi to Roggero, 13th December 1948, AE Folder Zevi.
33 Zevi to Einaudi, AE Folder Zevi.
Caro Zevi,

ho avuto la tua relazione sulla “Collana Storica di Architettura” e te ne ringrazio. Pur nella sua brevità, essa tocca i problemi fondamentali della collana e ne indica i limiti attuali: ma può fornire un esempio di studio nelle possibilità di un’evoluzione futuro così che l’impianto e il programma restino appena abbozzi o ancora in forma di esigenza. Anche l’ottima idea di fare una serie di volumi più agili sull’aspetto architettonico-urbanistico delle città italiane, rischia, a mio avviso, di perdere molto del suo valore se non viene considerata entro un programma di più ampie e organiche prospettive.

Ma ti espongo in ordine le mie osservazioni e le mie proposte.

Il proposito di “collaumare una lacuna”, o di “insinuare l’architettura nella cultura”, come tu dici, è certo molto ambizioso e praticamente irrealizzabile, se inteso nel senso di pubblicare esclusivamente opere originali di alto livello critico e scientifico. Convenzio con te che non è facile trovare studiosi all’altezza di un tale compito ed in numero sufficiente ad alimentare e a sollevare la collana. Ma riconoscendo questa difficoltà (che del resto non si lamenta solo per l’architettura), mi pare esattamente ripiegare subito su un programma minimo, su una routine che abbia la sola prospettiva di qualche occasional colpo fortunato o volgere a iniziative come quella della guida architettonico-urbanistica, che, molto brillante e straordinaria in se stessa, pone per il problema di un sensibile mutamento d’impianto e addirittura quello della creazione di una nuova collana.

A mio avviso esiste tutta una serie di possibilità intermedie, che potremmo realizzare organizzando la collana in una forma più articolata e meglio rispondente alle necessità nostre e del pubblico a cui ci rivolgiamo.

La collana potrebbe dunque essere pensata come ripartita in tre settori di attività a) studi critici originali, italiani o stranieri; b) volumi di informazione; c) testi.

Per studi critici originali intendo volumi come quelli già editi di Argan e di Morandi e sono alcuni di quelli in programma (Bulle-Boudet, Il teatro romano di Paolo Verzone, Alvar Aalto di Ignazio Gariella, ecc.). Intendo la ricerca anche a opere di carattere generale, eventualmente da tradurre. Quanto è il settore per il quale la ricerca di buoni volumi è più difficile e perciò mi pare si debba fare ogni sforzo per non lasciarli cadere lo strumenti già consolidati che ci interessano e per consolidare nei nuovi. S’intende che sarà meglio non prendere in considerazione i lavori a carattere troppo erudito o provinciale o certe monografie troppo...
Caro architetto,
La ringrazio della Sua lettera e mi affretto a risponderLe. Un libro su Mendelssohn certamente può inquadrarsi nella collana Einaudi da me curata, che è prevalentemente monografica. Il mio dubbio è che si possa scrivere oggi su Mendelssohn con quell'elevato tono storico-critico che informa i volumi di una collana prevalentemente storica. Per lo meno non lo si può fare facilmente. Per esempio: Lei conoscevra l'eccellente volume di Whittick su Mendelssohn. E' forse una delle monografie più esaurienti scritte su un architetto moderno, eppure non sarebbe adatta per la nostra collana. Lei sa che la casa Editrice Einaudi si è distinta per il livello di selezione delle sue pubblicazioni, e mi pare che il piano in cui agisca sia quello di rivolgersi ad un vasto pubblico senza mai scadere nel semplicismo popolare. Io tengo molto a conservare questa piattaforma nella collana di architettura: essa deve riflettere il tanto insegnato dell'archeologismo e della vera erudizione filologica, non deve nemmeno confondersi con altre collane o prettamente illustrate o di divulgazione (esempio quella, per altri versi eccellente e a cui lo stesso ho due volte collaborato, dell'editoria IL BALCONE di Milano, diretta da Rogers). Non conoscendo esattamente il suo proposito - data la brevità del suo memorandum - non posso persino dire ne' si' ne' no. Le consiglierei di attendere il saggio e poi di sottoporlo ad Einaudi: se va bene per la collana, tanto meglio; altrimenti, potrei sempre trovare una collocazione presso un'altra casa editrice.
Mi interesserebbe poi conoscere il materiale fotografico che Lei possiede: del recente lavoro in America, ha altre cose oltre i progetti pubblicati.

© Einaudi Archive.
Perhaps due to all of these contentions, the architecture series experienced a halt. By the end of 1951 Einaudi had only published Ottavio Morisani’s *Michelozzo Architetto*, and Giulio Carlo Argan’s *Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus*. Roberto Pane’s *Napoli imprevista* (Unexpected Naples) had been published in 1951 but had a different format and had not been included in the architecture series. The plan of publishing foreign translations came also to a halt. Zevi had not completed his proposed volume on Terragni either. The following publication by Marcel Poète, *Introduction to Urban Design. The Ancient City* was only released in 1958, three years after Zevi started *L’architettura. Cronache e storia*, and two years later, in 1960, Zevi would finally conclude his *Biagio Rossetti architetto ferrarese* (Biagio Rossetti, an architect from Ferrara). The halt of the architecture series coincided, though, with an overall crisis of the publishing house, and a similar crisis in the art series.

In those same years, between 1951 and 1958 some of the books previously suggested for the architecture series ended up been published in the art series edited by Enrico Castelnuovo which included a series of translations of foreign texts, some of which were on architecture: this is the case for Emil Kaufmann’s, *Architecture in the Age of Reason* (about which Einaudi had previously consulted with Zevi) and Rudolf Wittkower’s *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, suggested by Zevi himself in 1958 as a “a book by a famous scholar, scientifically perfect (beside Palladio’s chapter

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34 Einaudi to Zevi, 2nd December 1949, AE Folder Zevi.
which is not updated) and it is of crucial interest also for architects.”

Thus an integration of the art and architecture series had already happened.

**Architecture and the Arts**

The art critic Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti was responsible for the Biblioteca d’arte (Art Library), but soon enough his relation with Einaudi cooled down. Einaudi tried to divert Ragghianti’s suggestions for the art series to more general series like I Saggi, inspite of Ragghianti’s objections. Einaudi was concerned about Ragghianti’s wish to publish books on minor topics, such as an extensive work about Flemish art in Italian collections, or a collection of essays by the art historian Roberto Longhi. Einaudi particularly feared that these kinds of books would “resemble too much art museum catalogues, with little invention in them!”

But the main contention concerned German art historians and their theoretical positions. For instance, on 1\textsuperscript{st} March 1949, Ragghianti confirmed that both Riegl’s *Die Spätrömische Kunstindustrie (Late Roman Art Industry)* as well as Julius von Schlosser’s *Die Kunst des Mittelalters (The Art of the Middle Ages)* could fit in the generalist *I Saggi*, instead of being published in the art series. To contradict Einaudi, Ragghianti preferred to place these books “in a collection with an easier access to the public (in the I Saggi for instance) rather than in a series known for specific monographic works.”

However if both volumes had Einaudi’s approval, and especially Riegl’s book, which he regarded as “one of the major products within the art debate [uno dei maggiori prodotti all’interno del

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37 Zevi to Einaudi, 1\textsuperscript{st} November 1958, AE Zevi Folder.
38 Einaudi to Ragghianti, 11\textsuperscript{th} March 1949, AE Einaudi Folder.
39 *I saggi*, essays, covered monographic topics but was targeted toward a more general public.
40 Einaudi to Ragghianti, 18\textsuperscript{th} Dec 1948, AE Ragghianti folder.
discorso artistico].” But dissenting editorial decisions also concerned other methodological as well as ideological issues, which were current at that point. When Einaudi asked Ragghianti’s opinion about Wilhelm Woringer’s book on Egyptian art, Ragghianti had replied that:


The volume is characteristic of positivistic German culture: it is heavy, charged with jargon, and highly impersonal. I do not think that such a volume will contribute anything to our current Italian art culture. Woringer was an academic follower of empathy theory (Einfühlung), a psychophysiological doctrine so coarse that only a brilliant scholar like Wöllflin could salvage it […] but the so-called Nazi ideology, was largely composed by this kind of culture.42

[Figure 33]

Contrary to Ragghianti, Giulio Carlo Argan would support the translation of Woringer’s text. [Figure 34-35] Such disagreements confirmed the diverse approaches of the two men, Einaudi and Ragghianti, vis-à-vis the present and future directions of the publishing house. They further explain why Einaudi asked Argan to replace Ragghianti as the editor of the art series. Argan’s approach had been evident since his first collaborations with Einaudi. In a letter written on 17th November 1952 he expressed interest in adopting a new historical approach focused on the late nineteenth century, and

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41 In a side note Ragghianti reminded Einaudi that Ragghianti’s wife had translated the book.
42 Ragghianti to Einaudi, 15th April 1949, AE Ragghianti Folder.
“as an organic revival” (riesumazione organica), he suggested publishing precisely Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy (Abstraktion und Einfühlung)* first published in 1908. Argan further recommended the translation of Riegl’s *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Collected Works), and Worringer’s *Formprobleme der Gotik* (Form in Gothic), along with more recent books such as Henriette Groenewegen-Frankfort’s [*Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Arts of the Near East*] and Pierre Francastel’s *Peinture et société* (both 1951). [Figure 34-35] Einaudi responded that “through these ‘revivals’ (as you [Argan] successfully name it), a noteworthy program of research and editorial value” could be built. Indeed, Einaudi regularly expressed his positive interest in Argan’s plans who seemed to fit the publishing house’s idea of meeting rigor with creativity, while these same books had been criticized as being “outdated / out of their time” [fuori dal loro tempo] by Ragghianti. On that same day, when the editorial board discussed the Biblioteca d’arte (the art library series), Einaudi asked Argan to get “a well-thought selection of several volumes that form an organic group.” This project was intended to combine old texts, so-called “rediscoveries,” with more contemporary works and records, strengthening Einaudi’s wish to integrate ancient past history with present production and future directions across all disciplines.

On his part, Argan had also suggested republishing Lionello Venturi’s *Il gusto dei primitivi* (The Taste of Primitive Men) within the art historical and theoretical books of this century, as Venturi was to Argan just as important as Wölfflin and Dvorák “and there

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43 Argan to Einaudi, 17th November, and Einaudi to Argan 21st November 1952.
44 Ragghianti had also previously suggested a book with historical texts about cinema, but the topic did not interest Einaudi.
45 “Una segnalazione ragionata di più volumi, che formino nell’insieme un complesso organico,” Einaudi to Argan 29th October 1952, AE Folder Argan.
46 “Testimonianze di artisti, presentate in forma critica,” Einaudi to Argan, 17th November 1952, AE Folder Argan.
Caro Einaudi,


Il mio parere quindi, come vedi, è completamente negativo circa la possibilità di tradurre un manuale come quello del Worringer.

E’ a mia conoscenza che un ottimo studioso 300 italiano, Eugenio Donadoni, il quale è fra i pochissimi in Italia che studia quest’argomento ed abbia anche buona apprezzamento all’estero, ha composto un volume comprensivo sull’arte egizia. Lo so esattamente qualche tempo fa alcune parti dattiloscritte. Vi sono indubbiamente dei limiti formalistici, ma è una trattazione non solo incomparabilmente più arcaica e fine, ma anche storicamente più articolata e fondata, di quella del Worringer. Se lo credi opportuno, visto l’interesse dell’argomento, posso interpellare il Donadoni. Non so se egli abbia già un editore per la sua opera, credo che potremo averlo a buone condizioni. In Italia un volume completo sull’arte egizia manca (ve ne sono di vecchi, inservibili): quelli stranieri o sono basate filologiche e criticamente empirici o sono esercitazioni di pompsaria mentale, come quello del Worringer. Il volume del Donadoni potrebbe essere una novità in questo campo, anche per gli studi esteri.

Spero di essere stato chiaro in proposito, e frattanto credimi con più cordiali saluti

Carlo L. Ragghianti
Figure 34 Giulio Carlo Argan to Giulio Einaudi, November 17th 1952. Argan suggests the translation of Woringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy* (*Abstraktion und Einfühlung*), Riegl’s *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (*Collected Works*), and Woringer’s *Formprobleme der Gotik* (*Form in the Gothic*), along with more recent books such as Henriette Groenewegen-Frankfort’s *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Arts of the Near East* and Pierre Francastel’s *Peinture et Societe*. © Einaudi Archive.
Figure 35 Giulio Carlo Argan to Giulio Einaudi, November 17th 1952, continued.
is no reason we should not publish our authors [meaning Italians] if we publish others.”

Linked to Venturi’s school of thought, Argan recommended the republication of Venturi’s book by stressing its role in historiographical debates, such as idealism, that were still current:

*Il gusto dei primitivi* ha appunto lo scopo di fondare, in senso morale, la “personalità” dell’artista. L’apparire di questo libro, nel 1926, segnò un evento memorabile, e tutt’altro che pacifico, nella storia della critica d’arte e della cultura italiana: era il primo tentativo, da parte di un autorevole esponente della critica idealistica, di superare alcune difficoltà dell’estetica crociana.

Such a book aimed to establish, in a moral sense, the ‘personality’ of the artist. The book was released in 1926, and was a memorable event, in the history of art criticism and Italian culture. It was the first time that a representative of idealism, such as Lionello Venturi, was to overcome the obstacles of Croce’s aesthetic.

Argan’s historiographical “revival” could be, once again, considered as an opportunity to outlive past stories and transform them into new histories. But the rediscovery could likewise be considered a sort of halt back to a past, either by considering ancient past, or by translating existing texts, in both cases signifying a crisis in the state of contemporary criticism. Zevi may have been right in lamenting the lack of both historians and critics of architecture.

Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, responsible for the art series in the forties, solicited Einaudi for a continuation of his series. He asked to keep going with “a series already...

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47 “Nella serie delle teorie artistiche di questo secolo non è certo meno importante dei libri di Wölfflin and Dvorák, e non c’è ragione che non ripubblichiamo i nostri quando pubblichiamo gli altri.” Argan to Einaudi, 3rd January 1953, AE Folder Argan.
well established within the scientific world.” Interestingly enough, Roberto Pane, a contributor suggested by Zevi, had already worked on a book on Palladio conceived for the art series that was about to be published in 1943. Several delays made both Pane and Ragghianti suspect that Einaudi wanted to cease this series. Yet, Einaudi reassured both of them about the intent to pursue the art series, and pressured for more suggestions for titles that could fill the need for “more general volumes that could be published in I Saggi series or in other series.” However, he also informed Ragghianti about the idea for a “small series [collezioncina] concerning architectural problems” something more “educational than critical.” To Einaudi this would not compete with the art series because these books would be “on a different cultural and aesthetic level.”

Ragghianti enthusiastically, yet ironically, answered that he was pleased Einaudi will publish the “educational small series of architecture edited by Bruno Zevi as he is among the most active and best fellows in architecture criticism.” Nevertheless, it became quite obvious that Einaudi was getting more and more involved with the architecture series, even if pretending to minimize its importance.

Besides, when Einaudi finally realized the art series, Ragghianti was not the head of it. Much later, in a 1963 letter, once Ragghianti received the new catalogue from Einaudi he bitterly noted that he had received:

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49 Ragghianti to Einaudi, 3rd May 1948, AE Folder Ragghianti.
50 Finally, and only after some lawsuit controversies, the book was published in April 1948. AE Folder Pane.
51 Einaudi to Ragghianti, 7th May 1948, AE Folder Ragghianti.
52 “Mi fa piacere che tu pubblichi la collezioncina divulgativa d’architettura diretta da Bruno Zevi, che è fra i migliori cultori di critica dell’architettura architettonica ed è attivissimo,” Ragghianti to Einaudi, 7th May 1948, AE Folder Ragghianti.
Ma ancor maggior meraviglia ho avuto leggendo la “notizia” veramente mitologica stampata a pagina 131. La ‘Biblioteca’ nasce, e sta bene, la Casa Einaudi ne è la madre, e sta bene; ma é figlia di padre ignoto…” Si riunisce intorno ad essa un gruppo di studiosi… eccetera, […] Manco male, dalla “biblioteca” si “si distacca” un figliolletto architettonico.

Some mythological news concerning the Biblioteca d’arte: the Biblioteca is finally born and is doing well. Casa Einaudi is its mother, and she is also doing well; but the Biblioteca is the son of an unknown father, some scholars gather around it, and so on […] luckily enough from the “Biblioteca” a little architectural son was born.”\textsuperscript{53} [Figure 37]

Ragghianti was right, the art series would eventually be edited and supervised by Argan, and Ragghianti, the unknown father, almost ceased his collaboration with the Turin based publishing house.

\textbf{Einaudi’s Encyclopedic Histories on Art and Architecture}

One last reflection concerns the idea of an encyclopedic history. Zevi’s reassuring – and didactic – \textit{Storia dell’architettura moderna} (1950) was not followed by other equally inclusive books, neither in the architecture series, nor in the art series.

Yet, alongside the book on Gropius, the second project Argan undertook for Einaudi, was the realization of an art encyclopedia. This project progressed very slowly, with a consequent minor success, and definitely less enthusiasm on Argan’s part. Einaudi had previously tried to gather information about another art series, the Pelican History of Art, edited by Nikolaus Pevsner. On 24\textsuperscript{th} April 1953, Argan wrote to Bollati, Einaudi’s editorial assistant:

\textsuperscript{53} Ragghianti to Einaudi, 11\textsuperscript{th} Oct 1963, AE Folder Ragghianti.
Prof. Carlo L. Ragghianti
Viale Margherita 17
Firenze

Caro Ragghianti,

ho ricevuto la tua lettera del 3 corrente e sono d’accordo con te sull’opportunità di continuare la Biblioteca d’Arte che indubbiamente ha segnato un progresso nel campo degli studi e della critica d’arte. Io non so attualmente quali siano i lavori di cui si è discorso in precedenza e che non siano poi passati ad altri editori o addirittura comparsi; comunque non ti sarà difficile fare un piano di lavoro che contempli la pubblicazione di un paio di volumi all’anno.

Mi chiedi lo stato delle edizioni precedenti dei volumi della Biblioteca d’Arte. Il Carli e il Grandi sono usciriti. Dal Bertinini invece avremo ancora alcune centinaia dell’edizione italiana e quasi tutte l’edizione tedesca di cui non sa che vendo te solo un po’ di selezioni attraverso la Svizzera. La tiratura del Pavo essendo stata modesta (600 esemplari numerati) ritengo che l’edizione mi possa collocare abbastanza rapidamente.

Come ti ho scritto agli autori penserei che si potrebbero corrispondere per ogni edizione 50.000 lire e riservare a parte le spese per le fotografie. A te, per la super-revisione di ogni opera, direi di corrispondere 10-15.000 lire una tantum per ogni volume. Naturalmente non avrei niente in contrario che ci fosse un riferimento oltre al tuo nome, anche allo Studio Italiano di Storia dell’Arte.

Nello spirito di questa collaborazione, però, io avrei caro che tu intanto mi propugnassi altri volumi di interesse più generale che potrebbero essere accolti nel “Saggi” o in altre collezioni. Ad esempio, ho visto il recente libro di Lionello Venturi con un titolo che suona press’a poco: Saper vedere la pittura, che mi pare sarebbe andato bene per i nostri “Saggi”. Una collaborazione di Venturi sarebbe possibile, e in che modo?

Torino, 7 maggio 1948

Giulio Einaudi

Carlo L. Ragghianti,

New York, 20 luglio 1948

Einaudi agrees with Ragghianti about the need to keep going with the art series. © Einaudi Archive.
Caro Einaudi, 
ricevo oggi il Catalogo generale delle tue edizioni, e vi noto alcune cose che devo farvi rilevare.

Annullato l’insorgere di volumi del Zeri e del Cervaco nella “Biblioteca d’arte”, volumi che non mi sarei mai sognato di portare, ma tanto meno di avvalere.

Ma ancor maggiore meraviglia ho avuto leggendo la “notizia” veramente mitologica stampata a pagina 111. La “Biblioteca” nasce, e sta bene, la Casa Einaudi ne è la madre, e sta bene; ma è figlia di padre ignoto... Si rinnaccio intorno ad essa un gruppo di studiosi, ecco, tornata coscienza e inserimento dei Saggi, infine capovolgeremo e morte per invidia. Non è, d’altra “Biblioteca” un distacco figliolino architettonico.

Sai benissimo che tutto questo non è vero, e che è vero quanto segue: nel 1940 ti ho proposto la collezione, con la responsabilità di rappresentarvi un indizio culturale che non era collettivo come i quadri del realismo socialista, ma era un’estensione e un completamento del lavoro organico che già dal 1935 avevi fatto con la rivista “Critica d’arte”, lavoro di rinnovamento storico e critico che portava inondato e frutto dell’opera che avevi iniziato; avevi detto ne e preferenze, e con difficoltà mi dette vento ad impegni già presi per il Pane e i Domani, dovendo lo far la scelta di restituire un libro di Pallucchini; infine ti rifiutasti di continuare una collezione che, per l’altro, era stata fortunata e di grande prestigio.

Non sarà certo una notizia come quella che hai stampato che potrà anche minimo per giudicare il posto che avrebbe allora e che ha nella storia della nostra cultura, e daranno non riconosco se il mio contributo da soglia senza dubbio te. Resta lo agire e il malagusto, più che il menoscagio di addirittura.

Per l’occasione, sarei lieto di avere da te un rendiconto della seconda edizione di “Cinema arte figurativa”, mi dica in giro che il libro non si trova più, ed io stesso difatti ho ricevuto alcune richieste che ho fatto girare alla casa. Nel caso che la seconda edizione sia assurda, sarei anche lieto di conoscere le tue intenzioni al riguardo, con cortese sollecitudine.

Abbini o’non tanto cordiali saluti

Carlo L. Ragghianti
I libri avranno il carattere di larghi manuali, a carattere prevalentemente informativo. Certamente è possibile fare ciò che Einaudi propone: prevenirli almeno su alcuni temi, per quanto concerne argomenti di maggiore interesse […] Ad ogni modo, per un più ampio programma bisognerebbe poterne parlare con Einaudi. [Their] books will be similar to large manuals, and be mainly informative. Certainly we could try to achieve what Einaudi strives for: beat them to it, at least as for some topics, regarding topics of larger interest […] In any event, for more extensive planning, we should speak with Einaudi.54

But Argan was skeptical about the realization of a similar comprehensive project for the art series.55 On the other hand, he did not dismiss the idea of an History of Art. In a later exchange between Einaudi and Argan, the latter suggested a Storia dell’arte Italiana (History of Italian Art). On 24th February 1954 Argan evaluated two different possibilities, which again stood for the gist of the time, one option would be translating an older History, and the other option would be a History written as a collection of shorter stories. Either way Argan obviously did not consider the possibility of writing an extensive broad narrative from scratch. First, he thought about publishing the original version of the History of Art by Adolfo Venturi; his second option included publishing a series of essays focusing on longer historical periods and on the relation between these periods while sketching a more general storia of the periods themselves.56 [Figure 38]
Caro Foà,

Comincio con la storia dell'arte. Negli ultimi incontri con Giulio Einaudi si riuscì a trovare una soluzione per l'opera che si proponga di realizzare: a) riprendere, come il tema che si giudica più opportuno, della storia di Adalberto Venturi; b) una serie di saggi di ampie proporzioni dedicati a grandi periodi e con lo scopo di esaminare i problemi artistici in rapporto alla storia generale del periodo. Mi pare che Einaudi tenga molto al punto A e quindi ne ho fatto oggetto di accurato esame di lunghi e ripetuti colloqui con Lionello Venturi. Ciò che si sperava è il frutto di questi, e quindi, su tutti i punti l'accordo tra Venture e me è completo. Si esclude la possibilità di una ristampa aggiornata di uno o più riferimenti sulla storia dell'opera di Venturi; ma si ritiene possibile impostare una nuova storia dell'arte italiana, essenzialmente informativa e organica, e condotta con unità di metodo critico. Il nome di Adalberto Venturi (che al momento è stato più giusto il solo nome di Venturi, essendo considerato padre e figlio) potrebbe rimanere come una specie di titolo dell'intera serie; rimando bene chiaro, però, che l'opera è nuova e ciascun volume dovrà portare il nome di colui o di coloro che l'hanno fatto. I volumi potrebbero essere dodici; almeno come "mediante".

E' categoricamente da escludersi la possibilità di assegnare ciascun volume a uno studioo e di assecondare il risultato: ne verrebbe fuori un caso, perché i tempi sono poco propizi alle storie d'insieme e quindi ciascuno farebbe, in sostanza, unaggio a suo modo. Intanto intere parti non verrebbero trattate o verrebbero trattate male: alludendo all'architettura e alle arti "minori" la cui importanza, soprattutto fuori d'Italia, si avverte ogni giorno di più. Aggiungo che queste parti richiedono per lo più una buona preparazione specifica e che è più facile trovare uno studioo disposto a trattare determinati periodi o storie dell'architettura che uno studioo disposto a trattare dello stesso periodo, pittura, scultura e architettura. Sarebbe quindi necessario costituire un gruppo di studiosi seri e di coordinare il loro lavoro in modo che ciascun volume nasca dal lavoro di più persone: infine, si tratterebbe di formare quella che una volta si chiama va una "società di studiosi", e che oggi si chiama un team: sarebbe appunto il team Venturi a redigere questa nuova storia dell'arte italiana. Evidentemente, per poter impegnare una dozzina di persone a dedicharsi per alcuni anni a un lavoro simile, bisogna essere sicuri che il progetto andrà in porto; io ho fatto dei conti sondaggi che è lì (con risultati non troppo incoraggianti, a dir vero), ma sempre tendendosi sulle generalità. Il giorno in cui mi dirai, li vi enverai ai vari colleghi dalle province, sono convinto che le adesioni saranno più frequenti: bisogna tener presente che, se chiedi a uno studioo "lo scriveresti un volume sul Seicento" quello ti risponderà sempre di no, ma se gli dici "Einaudi fa una storia così e così; se sei disposto a fare un Seicento, bene, se non chiederò a X e X risponderà" al risposto sarà certamente affermativa. Infatti è legge costante che ogni studioo non fa quel che vorrebbe fare, ma quel che non vuole che sia fatto da altri.

Prima di prepararti un progetto preciso, vorrei sapere da Einaudi una sola cosa: questa storia dove in qualche modo rivolgersi anche alle scuole, o non? Non alludo certo alla possibilità di fare un libro di testo: ma alla opportunità di tenere la pubblicazione entro limiti tali da consentirla.
If at first the idea of an encyclopedia seems to lean more toward the direction of a broad and comprehensive history, or maybe an extended chronicle, the result was quite the opposite. Normally, writing an encyclopedia is like writing a dictionary, with different entries, in which each entry is similar to a single story. Argan was convinced that a combination of the two possibilities would be the best option. He was convinced that realizing a “new History of Italian Art” that was simultaneously “substantively informative” but “organic” in structure would be the best choice.\textsuperscript{57} The name of Adolfo Venturi, to be associated with that of Lionello, would become a general reference. But Argan supported the work of a team, in which, each author would be recognized. Venturi’s work would be common reference, one to be “a sort of title for the series; it should be clear, still, that the opera is new, and each volume will bear the name of its author.”\textsuperscript{58}

Argan planned a twelve-volume series, which would not have to be realized by twelve different authors; rather, each volume should be the outcome of the collaboration among the twelve authors, but still holding their individual names. Executed in this way, Argan thought, the resulting work could be continuous and homogeneous:

\begin{quote}
Ne verrebbe fuori un caos, perché i tempi sono poco propizi alle storie di insieme e quindi ciascuno farebbe, in sostanza, un saggio a suo modo. Inoltre intere parti non verrebbero trattati o verrebbe trattate male: alludo all’architettura e alle arti.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} “Una nuova storia dell’arte italiana, essenzialmente informativa ma organica e condotta con unità di metodo critico,” Argan to Einaudi, 24\textsuperscript{th} February 1954, AE Folder Argan.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid.}
architecture and the minor arts; particularly outside of Italy, architecture and the minor arts are gaining more and more importance. [...] It was necessary to build what was once called a “society of scholars,” something we would now name a team. The so-called Venturi team would realize the New History of Italian Art.\textsuperscript{59}

[Figure 38]

The ambitious project would be realized thanks to a committee, a group of scholars whose coordinated work would produce the different volumes. During the 17\textsuperscript{th} of May 1954 editorial meeting, both Argan and Einaudi insisted on a high standard of work, but one that could still reach a wider public and be educational and informative.

Despite the fact that Argan and Einaudi worked on this project for almost four years, this “Nuova storia dell’arte italiana” (New History of Italian Art) was never published. Its failure reconﬁrmed, what Argan reiterated in a later letter to Foà, i.e. that “our era” the 1950s did “not support general histories”,\textsuperscript{60} but was rather an era for writing limited stories, perhaps like those written by Calvino in his literary texts” Calvino, would refer to the fifties as the “uncertain/dubious years.”\textsuperscript{61}

The idea of an architectural encyclopedia, was also in Zevi’s mind. When Einaudi tried to bring back the architecture series in 1958, he intended to publish books such as the volumes on Gropius by Argan or the book on Terragni by Zevi. He also suggested monographic works on Italian or foreign modern maestri such as Le Corbusier, Wright,

\textsuperscript{59} Argan to Foà, 24\textsuperscript{th} February 1954, AE Folder Argan.
\textsuperscript{60} Argan to Foà, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1954, AE Folder Argan. More in the next chapter.
Aalto, Nervi, Mies van der Rohe or specific typologies: bridges, roads, infrastructures, industrial constructions. But he would also open up architecture to the city. Zevi shivered at the idea. And his reaction was not different in 1956 than it was in 1951. He dismissed the option of a series about architectural typologies, and he observed:

It is easy to say: let’s make some volumes on modern architects, and urban planning. But who would write them? To publish such volumes in Italy we need to find historians, and we have very few of them […] Therefore volumes such as the Gropius by Argan or mine on Terragni have to be considered exceptional.”

[Figure 39]62

Yet, Zevi was hiding a larger ambition, and in the same letter he mentions:

Yet, Zevi was hiding a larger ambition, and in the same letter he mentions:

Si tratta di quella famosa Enciclopedia dell’architettura moderna in Italia nella quale sarebbero comprese: I. Le monografie di tutti i miglior architetti italiani moderni. 2. Le monografie di tutti i migliori architetti dell’Ottocento italiano. 3. Tutti i tipi edilizi (ponti, strade, ospedali, scuole, ecc.) 4. La storia delle città italiane e dei loro recenti piani regolatori […] Impresa costosa, difficile, it is about that Encyclopedia of Italian modern architecture in which you will find: I. Monographic works about the best Italian modern architects. 2. Monographic works about the best Italian architects of the IXX Century. 3. All building typologies (bridges, roads, hospitals, schools, etc.) 4. The history of Italian Cities and their regulations […] A difficult and expensive program indeed:

tutto quello che vuoi: ma l’unica che veramente valga la pena di fare, perché indispensabile a tutti, utile per gli studenti, per gli architetti, per gli ingegneri, per i geometri; continuamente aggiornata, e perciò completa.

but the only one valid because it is essential to anyone, students, architects, engineers, and constantly updated.”

By which he meant a series of big monographic volumes. Indeed this suggestion reminds us of the structure of Zevi’s magazine *L’architettura. Cronache e Storia*, with its different rubrics. In 1958 Zevi continued his plans toward an Encyclopedia of modern architecture, on 20th July 1959 he went so far as to suggest an encyclopedia of History of Italian Architecture “from the prehistory to nowadays.”

Einaudi would not pick on the suggestion but would criticize Zevi for his pessimism concerning the current lack of qualified historians in Italy for writing such monographs and asked “would not an anthology of original texts be a good solution? We can publish original texts by great maestri with a critical forward and good images. Let’s just think about this possibility.” To which Zevi lapidary replied “my pessimism is not a priori, but it is based on previous past experience, on all books that should have been written and have not, due to several of the authors […] it is not, after all, new: architectural culture has few representatives. Many professional manuals, few essays of a decent cultural level.”

Zevi thought about an even wider version of the Encyclopedia to be published as a series over three years, starting in January 1960. He gradually extended the project and

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63 Zevi to Einaudi, 27th February 1956, p. 3, AE Folder Zevi.
64 Zevi to Foà, 20th July 1959, AE Folder Zevi.
65 Einaudi to Zevi, 21st March 1956, AE Folder Zevi.
66 Zevi to Einaudi, 1st April 1956, AE Folder Zevi.
5. Mi veggo. Sono pronti, ma non c'è fretta.

6. Atlante storico dell'architettura italiana. L'editore inglese ha scritto anche a me, premeendo. Ho risposto che aspettavo una tua decisione. E infatti: o si fa una cosa di primissimo ordine, grande formato, fotografie inedite, ecc. oppure la cosa ma di sciocchezze, e non vale la pena di farla. Perché la decisione sta a te, io sono pronte a "bruciare" gran parte del materiale raccolto per il "gran trattato" sull'architettura italiana e di dedicarla all'italiana, ma bisogna che abbia un po' di solidi a disposizione per l'acquisto delle fotografie che mancano, per i disegni, ecc., per un aiuto. C'è possibile far questo? In tal caso, basta stabilire il formato, le zincografie, e incominc... 

Vengo ora alla parte più descritta del problema, al futuro della collana. Tu proposti: 1) una serie di volumi su architetti moderni; 2) una serie di volumi su tipi edilizi (strade, ponti, stazioni, ecc.)
3) una serie di volumi di urbanistica e di architettura minori.

Ti dico subito: io credo nelle benta' ma non nelle fattibilità dei punti 1) e 3), e non credo nelle benta' del punto 2).

Si fa presto a dire: facciamo volumi su architetti moderni, e sull'urbanistica. Chi li scrive? Per pubblicare volumi del genere in Italia, bisogna trovare gli storici, e ce ne sono pochissimi. L'esperienza è che la dimentica. Quante a possibili traduzioni, peggio che peggio: guarda il "Gropius" di Giedion pubblicato dalle Edizioni di Comunità: io, come del resto ho detto precedentemente in una recensione, non avrei mai accettato di pubblicarlo, perché e' idiota. I libri che si pubblicano all'estero sono per lo più illustrativi, bellissimamente talere, ma criticamente così manchevole che una traduzione diviene culturalmente impossibile. Prendi un caso: il Whittmoyer, si tratta di un eccellente studioso del Rinascimento, ma il suo libro e' intraducibile perché alcuni dati filologici riguardanti l'Alberti e Palladio sono errati e non aggiornati. Per gli architetti moderni, le cose vanno anche peggio: molta propaganda, scarsa critica.

Sicché', volumi come quelli di Argan su Gropius e il mio futuro su Terragni vanno giudicati esclusivi. Si può invece pensare, come ti dissi più volte, ad una collana assai più illustrativa, a grande diffusione, a basso prezzo, agli architetti moderni stranieri e italiani: qualcosa che e' gia' stato fatto da IL BALCOINE e cominciato da altri editori, ma in modo poco serie, con brutte illustrazioni, con saggi ineguali, ecc. Credo che una collana del genere, compilata reda...
zionalmente da un gruppo di studiosi giovani, sarebbe fattibile e avrebbe successo. La stessa cosa potrebbe farsi per gli architetti del passato. Ma nulla di più'.

Quanto alla proposta 2), io la rifiuto perché una colla ha
tatti di tipi edilizi e' da Vallardi, e non da Einaudi, in quan
culturalmente equivoca. Io rifiuterai di dirigerla perché' sarei certo,
tra l'altro, del suo insuccesso anche commerciale. Sono cose che, depe
tre o tre anni, non hanno piu' utilita' nemmeno professionale.

E vengo alla conclusione: A parte i libri (da programmare uno per uno) vi e' la serie di architetti moderni, per la quale, se accettiamo i
maggiori (e ancora: cosa sarebbe un libro su Le Corbusier pubblicato
le scorse anno, senza la Chappelle de Ronchamp?), io vedo questa diffi
celta': gli architetti lavorano e i volumi invecehiamo presto.

Perche' terno, per la centesima volta, sulla mia antica proposta, che
ho illustrato tante volte, che tu hai accettata ma non tante convis
to da cominciare, che in non veglio attuare con altri editori
per la semplice ragione che sono un autore Einaudi, e mi dispiace perfi
mente di non fare la rivista con te, anche se vi benissimo e non ho affat
da lagarni della ENCI
davrò, tutt'altro. Si tratta di quella famosa ENCICLO
FEDIA DELLE ARCHITETTURE MODERNE IN ITALIA nella quale sarebbero compre
se: 2. Le monografie di tutti gli architetti italiani moderni
3. Tutti i tipi edilizi (ponti, strade, ospedali, scuole, ecc.)
4. La storia delle città italiane e dei loro recenti piani regola
tori.

Sarebbero cioè comprese tutte le esigenze, anche quella del punto 2),
ma culturalmente bene inquadrate.

Impresa coatta, difficile, tutto quello che vuoi ma l'unica che vera
mente valga la pena di fare, perché' indispensabile a tutti, utile per
gli studenti, per gli architetti, per gli ingegneri, per i geometri,
continuamente aggiornata, e perciò completa.

Per un'opera del genere, la qualità delle riproduzioni e della stampa
sono essenziali. E per questo mi domando se non converrebbe studiare l'attuazione a Roma dove la Zincostruzione Scientifico, che ha anche una
piazzola ma ottima tipografia, potesse eseguirla sotto la mia sorve
glienza. Attraverso la rivista, comincio a farmi un'esperienza in ma
teria di impaginazione, zinch, stampa, ecc. e me ti capisco di vedere il
M.5 della rivista, che ho curato tutto io, potrai accorgertene. Ha orga-
L’architettura

Luciano Foa,
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Carissimo Foa!

dopo il nostro incontro, ho visto varie altre persone autorevoli nel campo della storia dell’arte e dell’architettura, tra cui il prof. Roberto Pane. Questa "inchiesta" ha confermato i risultati precedentemente espressi: si possono veramente impegnare tutte le persone competenti per redigere una storia dell’architettura che abbia subito il carattere dell’ufficialità.

Per ciò che riguarda il contratto, la bozza che tu mi portasti deve essere rimasta nelle tue mani. Fercio’, per non perdere tempo, mi sono messo a studiare io il testo di un contratto, sulla base di quello che tu mi proposti per la "Enciclopedia dell’architettura moderna in Italia" di cui ti mando una copia.

Il nuovo contratto qui accluso vuole semplicemente servire come base di discussione. Ho messo giù, senza sistematicità, i punti che mi sembrava importanti precisare, senza preoccuparmi troppo della loro sequenza.

Vedrai che ho proposto l’aumento del compenso redazionale mensile: invece del milione concordato, un milione e mezzo. Cioè deriva proprio dalla nuova fisionomia che acquista la pubblicazione che abbiamo programmati. Inizialmente, ritenevo che dovesse essere redatta da poche persone, giovani e scarsamente conosciute, che avrebbero avuto interesse di lavorare anche con modesti compensi per farsi dei titoli. Ora invece una situazione inesigibila si presenta: la possibilità cioè di convogliare tutti i maggiore-ditori storici d’arte e di architettura italiani e stranieri per collaborare a una pubblicazione che, proprio per la presenza di questi nomi autorevoli, può entrare immediatamente nelle Università, in tutte le Biblioteche, negli Istituti di cultura, e può attrarre un pubblico assai più largo. Ma il prezzo di tale trasformazione (che ha un interesse maggiore per l’editore che per il direttore) va affrontato. Io riteno che non si possa pagare una scheda meno di 50.000 lire, se e scritta da uno studioso famoso. Dieci schede al mese già implicano un compenso redazionale...
planned a big *oeuvre* to be published over ten years and acquire a permanent character. He would ask professional writers to contribute to it. The first question that comes to mind would be: who are these professional writers that Zevi claimed Italy did not have? Zevi seemed to harbor the idea of remaining the head of the series.

However the plan for a comprehensive series on the history of different areas did not last long, and did not materialize. Between 1957 and 1958 the project of universal histories failed, but an integration of intentions and interests had succeeded through Zevi’s trilogy. What Zevi was trying to achieve through his architectural magazine *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* had been actually accomplished thanks to his collaboration with Einaudi and his capacity to mediate popular and academic set of problems, to strengthen Italian culture through specific disciplines. *La storia dell’architettura* and *Architettura e storiografia* by Zevi had set forth the end of Histories, after which mainly fragmented stories will be released. After the publication of la *La storia* authors favored stories and tales – but not myths – over general histories, as in fact Zevi’s *La storia* will be followed by monographic works on major figures such as Gropius (1951) Borromini (1952), Brunelleschi (1955), Nervi (1955), Botticelli (1957), Breuer (1957) all by Giulio Carlo Argan, Neutra (1954) and Rossetti (1960) both by Bruno Zevi, and finally Michelangelo (1964) by Argan, Zevi, and Portoghesi (1964). These publications further showed a preference, though not absolute, toward historical examples of a distant past - better if Renaissance! They also show the preference toward monographic works, as they mainly present history through individual authors and architects.
The ultimate attempt by Einaudi to revive the architecture series was by diving into the history of Urban Planning. When Einaudi finally expanded up his publications to urban problems, he released a few books related to the origin of ancient cities or introduction to urban studies. At this point Einaudi tried to direct contemporary topics towards history, to wind up Levi’s clock, so to speak “Many years have gone by, years of war and of what men call History” Carlo Levi wrote in 1945. Einaudi’s publications under the editorships of Zevi and Argan marked the proliferation of stories under the umbrella of past, present and future history and the collapse of the separation between theory and history, history and architecture. Einaudi’s “ostrich” was able, as we will further see in the next chapter to digest all these pairs and also give birth to a new one between science and fantasia. Indeed, this ostrich had been able to digest “the hardest things,” things that had previously appeared to be indigestible when served together.

67 Back in 1949 Zevi suggested to Einaudi “one of those ideas one thinks why did I not think about this earlier on?, [...] we should translate and publish in the series the two crucial texts of modern city – planning. The first small volume is Camillo Sitte: Der Städtebau published in Germany in 1896 [...] the other book is the well-known Ebenezer Howard Garden Cities whose actuality is underlined by his new edition both in Great Britain and in the United States three or four years ago [...] An even better idea would be to publish them together as the Genesis of Modern Urban Planning: Sitte and Howard and with a short introduction,” (“Una di quelle idee di cui uno dice: ma come mai non ci avevo pensato prima? [...] Si tratta di tradurre e di pubblicare nella collezione i due testi basilari dell’urbanistica moderna, anzi del suo nascimento. Il primo volumetto è quello di Camillo Sitte: Der Städtebau, pubblicato nel 1896 in Germania [...] L’altro volume è quello famoso di Ebenezer Howard Garden Cities, la cui attualità è dimostrata anche dal fatto che tre o quattro anni or sono ne è stata ripubblicata in America e in Inghilterra una nuova edizione [...] Un’idea anche migliore potrebbe essere quella di pubblicarli insieme col titolo: LA GENESI DELL’URBANISTICA MODERNA: SITTE E HOWARD e con una breve introduzione,”) Zevi to Einaudi, 10th August 1949, AE Folder Zevi. But these translations did not happen either as both Sitte and Howard will be published by Vallardi in 1953.


Chapter 6 - Storia “quasi una fantasia:” Giulio Carlo Argan and the Role of Fiction in Historical Writing

While the previous chapter discusses the importance and awareness of a linear historical development in art and architectural publications, this final chapter traces an opposite direction than that of historicism, namely the acceptance of the fictive element in historical narratives that destabilizes any notion of progress. Thus, we need to introduce two rhetorical concepts: *fantasia* and interpretation. While in the previous chapters the historian became a translator, along with being a writer, in this chapter the historian becomes the *interpreter* of past events. Paul Ricoeur borrows from scientific disciplines to explain interpretation: “interpretation is part of comprehension […] On the other hand, comprehension always commits the interpreter. He is never like a physicist – he remains a man as well as a student. And he refuses to become a pure scholar because understanding, beyond knowledge, aims at the *appropriation* of the past.”¹ In other words, the historian may not be a doer, but he is still a man of action through his words. By interpreting, the historian will tell stories that make us understand events.

The relation between *fantasia* and historical narrative has its own long story. Reinhart Koselleck explains the old Ciceronian contrast of *res factae* and *res fictae*, passed on from generation to generation of historians to distinguish what is militarily probable—not actual—against what is improbable and hence “fantastic.”² In the article “Il midollo del leone” (The Lion’s Marrow,) written in 1955, Calvino mentioned, similar to Einaudi, Carlo Levi’s novel *The Clock* and stated that: “[during the period of

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neorealism] there had been some literary figures who never had nurtured an inferiority complex of sorts in front of history; quite the contrary, they had been certain to have fed and enriched history with their fantasy [fantasia] and culture.\(^3\) This is the case of Carlo Levi.\(^4\) Calvino described the Turin-based author as an intellectual who had been able to dive into reality by interpreting and symbolically transforming actual circumstances and events. Further, he wrote, “truth is on the side of the fictive, even if contradicted by real politics.”\(^5\) Calvino’s “The Lion’s Marrow” universally marked a radical transition in the course of or even the end of neorealism.\(^6\) As Asor Rosa wrote, “The Lion’s Marrow” by Calvino, along with Pratolini’s Il Metello, ended a literary era, as “the multifaceted Italian neorealism opened the way to new and diverse imaginative directions.”\(^7\) Here Rosa also implies a continuity between neorealism and the new fictional genre, as if the former opens up the way for the other. These new directions are exactly the premises of new fictional theories of history that took modernity apart.

If it is easy to accept the fictive dimension in literature, fiction’s place within history writing is a rather contentious even if ageless topic. This chapter considers fantasia both in literature and within historical criticism. By fantasia I mean the fictive component, the interpretive character inevitably embedded in history writing. I contend that the use of fantasia can be embedded in the Italian historicist tradition, and that fantasia and historicism are two sides of the same coin. Italo Calvino, Giulio Carlo Argan, and Frank Lloyd Wright, are apt examples of this fictive turn. As described,

\(^3\) The word fantasia can be misleading. From now on I will either use the Italian word fantasia or its English counterpart: the fictive.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Calvino delivered that talk, on 17\(^{th}\) February 1955, invited by Anna Banti, during the Florence session of the PEN club.
\(^7\) Conversation with the author, 12\(^{th}\) August 2013.
Italian historicist tradition has never ceased. Whereas Calvino’s fantastic literature and writing is ageless, and often covered the role of the fictive in the representation of historical facts, Argan worked his entire life to bridge fantasia and rationalism. Moreover, the element of fantasia ended up being crucial to the disciplinary relation between art and architecture, as well as to the intrasemiotic translation from one medium to the other.

As blurred and broad as the concept of fantasia may sound, its definition can be restricted. When asked about its meaning, Calvino wrote:

In contemporary French literary language the term fantastique is used chiefly of horror stories, which involve a somewhat nineteenth-century relationship with the reader. That is, if the reader wishes to take part in the game (at least with some part of himself) he has to believe in what he is reading, and be prepared to be seized by an almost physiological emotion (usually of terror or anguish), and seek an explanation of it as he would in real life. In Italian (as originally in French, I think) the words fantasia and fantastico by no means involve this leap on the part of the reader into the emotional flood of the text. On the contrary, they imply a detachment, a levitation, the acceptance of a different logic based on objects and connections other than those of everyday life or the dominant literary conventions. And the same, I think, is true of the equivalent words in English (though “fantastic” has been severely corrupted). So we may speak of twentieth-century fantasy, or of the fantasy of the Renaissance. Ariosto’s readers were never faced with the problem of believing or explaining. For them – as today for the readers of Gogol’s “The Nose,” of Alice in Wonderland, or of Kafka Metamorphoses – the pleasure of fantasy lies in the unraveling of a logic with rules or points of departure or solutions that keep some surprises up their sleeves.8

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8 I. Calvino, “Definitions of Territory: Fantasia,” Le Monde, August 15, 1970; now in I. Calvino, The Uses of
Calvino wrote this piece on fantasia for a French newspaper, thus introducing the topic in an everyday publication. Claiming that fantasia is the result of both emotions and logic—the emotional flood and the playful unraveling of a logic behind the plot—Calvino emphasizes that emotional flooding and rational logic coexist. The fantastic is thus placed at the same level as the philosophical speculation developed between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: its focus is the relation between the reality of the world we inhabit and the one that we know thanks to our perception, as well as the reality of the world of thoughts that inhabit us and control us. In his Introduction à la littérature fantastique, Tzvetan Todorov explains that what distinguishes the “fantastic” is precisely that perplexity one has facing an unbelievable fact, that hesitancy between a rational and a realistic explanation and the acceptance of the supernatural. Todorov writes: “The tales should leave room for a rational explanation of the incredible fact, even if it is a hallucination or a dream.”9 And later, he adds: “In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphs, or vampires, events occur which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world.”10

If we want to dive deeply into the nineteenth-century, we can see fantasia as a refined product of the romantic spirit. As such, it became part of popular literature as well as everyday newspaper chronicles. Indeed, the affinity with newspaper fiction is notable; one has only to think of Edgar Allan Poe who, besides writing fiction, was a usual

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10 Ibid., p. 25.
contributor to newspapers. During the twentieth century, a much more intellectual, and no longer emotional, type of 
*fantasia* became uppermost. Calvino emphasizes: “play, irony, the winking eye, and also a meditation on
the hidden desires and nightmares of contemporary men.”

Nevertheless, Calvino’s *fantasia* remains both intellectual and emotional.

Wonder, on the contrary, is different from the fantastic because it presupposes that the reader accepts the improbable and the inexplicable, as for example in a work such as the *Arabian Nights*. While with wonder the reader accepts the improbable, with the fantastic the reader has to accept the unknown of a fact that could or could not be happening. Crucial to this discourse is a different kind of *fantasia*, one based on a rational construction. Once again Calvino offers a distinction:

For me the fantastic is the opposite of the arbitrary: it is a way of going back to the universals of mythical representation. I have to construct things that exist for themselves, things like crystals, which answer to an impersonal rationality. And in order for the result to be “natural” I have to turn to extreme artifice.

Here Calvino describes the essence of a fantastic construction that will be the essence, from now on, of a kind of narrative and literary construction. Even if it is fictive, not based on true events, it is nevertheless based on a rational combination. There is little room for the irrational in Calvino’s work, which ranges from allegorical tales to mathematical fictions. His use of the fantastic is always based on a rational construction rather than an irrational creation. In thinking about the relation between romanticism and

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wonder, it is essential to emphasize that his fantasia is deeply rooted in rationality. Calvino left to the critics the task of placing his novels and stories within, or outside, any classification of the fantastic. While Calvino’s use of the fantastic reveals no surprises, a historical component is still present in his writing that resembles Aristotelian ideas of historical narrative. In 1980, when *The Cloven Viscount* was published in English, translated by Archibald Colquhoun, Calvino wrote in its foreword:

Il racconto nasce dall’immagine, non da una tesi che io voglia dimostrare; l’immagine si sviluppa in una storia secondo una sua logica interna; la storia prende dei significati, o meglio: intorno all’immagine s’estende una serie di “significati che restano sempre un po’ fluttuanti, senza imporsi in un’interpretazione unica e obbligatoria.

The story/narrative [*racconto*] comes from an image, not from a thesis that I want to prove; the image transforms itself within the story and according to its own internal logic; the story acquires meanings, or rather: a series of meanings proliferate around the image and remain a bit ‘floating,’ without imposing a unique and compulsory interpretation.\(^\text{13}\)

As Paul Ricoeur suggests: “Aristotle’s vocabulary is precise: he reserves the term *phantasma* for the inscription itself and that of *eikon* for the reference to the inscription’s other.”\(^\text{14}\) In other words, *eikon* presupposes the existence of a reality, while *phantasma* is just the product of our imagination, a made-up creation. Calvino’s novels are mainly about moral themes that a central image suggests or implies and that sequentially unfolds in the secondary stories: in the *Cloven Viscount*, the stories are incomplete, partial,

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lacking the realization of human fullness; in the *Baron in the Trees*, the stories are of isolation, distance, difficult relations with one’s neighbor; and in the *The Nonexistent Knight*, the stories are of empty formalism, of the concreteness of living, of the awareness of being in the world and constructing one’s own destiny, or of the lack of interest in anything. But the idea of a floating series of meanings, rather than one version, hints at multiple interpretations. This idea lies at the same time within and outside history, which does not need to take on a single, unique interpretation, a comprehensive history, but moves toward multiple possibilities and directions. Italo Calvino describes in detail this literary phase in *Hermit in Paris*: “From that point on, a particular direction was signposted for my literary work, namely what we could define as fantasia / fiction, which I would continue to alternate with stories written in other, more realistic, keys.”

**Argan: Between Enlightenment and Rationalism**

Like Calvino, Argan had roots in the Enlightenment tradition of Turin, where he was born in 1909. [Figure 2] As extensively described in the previous chapter, all of the characters involved in this story gravitated around the Turin-based Einaudi publishing house; and Turin was a city still very much rooted in the cultural tradition of Enlightenment. Indeed, this helps to understand the intricate and constant relation between Enlightenment and *fantasia*, as well as between romanticism and *fantasia*. These

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15 “In 1957 I published *The Baron in the Trees*, and just afterwards (or just before, I cannot remember) the *Italian Folktales* appeared, a huge work, which I had carried out after being commissioned to do so by my publisher. In 1958 I published my collected *Racconti* (Short Stories), a volume which contained all the shorter fiction I had written up until then; in short, by now I was able to afford to publish stories that were just called Short Stories,” I. Calvino, *Hermit in Paris: Autobiographical Writings*, New York: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 227.

16 Turin was also the seat of Italian studies in German languages as well described in D’Orsi, *Torino tra le due guerre: Gentile, De Sanctis, Momigliano, Neo-illuminismo, vocazione di Torino*, Turin: Einaudi 2000.
Figure 1 Giulio Carlo Argan, with Giulio Einaudi on his left. © Istituto Luce.
Figure 2 Giulio Carlo Argan, 1930s. © Fondazione Giulio Carlo Argan.
two connections are important. More generally, the opposition between Enlightenment and romanticism reverberated in the narratives of the forties and fifties, in terms of not only literary narrative but historical criticism as well. Argan’s work has been described by art historians Fabrizio Corrado and Paolo San Martino as “an exceptional combination of geometric rationalism and poetic sensibility toward artistic form, between esprit de finesse and esprit de géométrie,”17 thus stressing Argan’s place between rationalism and romanticism. Their biography of Argan explains the role of Turin’s milieu: “[Argan’s] favorite materials could all be found here in Turin: the enduring ancient world, the architecture of the capital cities, rationalist Enlightenment architecture with a modernist slant, the royal architects’ romantic fancies. And then there was the contemporary, including the international eclecticism of Rigotti, Ceresa, and Chevalier, the Fenoglio art nouveau, and rationalism by the young Pagano, who built two deco bridges and the Gualino Palace, so harshly criticized for its ‘recumbent,’ horizontal Windows.”18 Indeed, even the Art Nouveau of that period swings between rational and fantastic, representing a synthesis between a revivalist intention and an appeal to geometric form; in addition, the artisanal component matches historical progress rather than a regression to past

mannerisms. Argan studied in Turin with Lionello Venturi. These diverse influences and the Turin milieu are a constant and evident presence throughout all of Argan’s writings. Because he was immersed in a very eclectic environment, his writings ranged from neoclassicism to futurism, from neo liberty to modern architecture.

In considering Turin once again as the genius loci of these intellectual figures, one can question Calvino’s assumption that “the novel [romanzo] lives in history not in geography.” This statement does not appear to be true either for the novel or for the historical narrative, Argan’s writing are both immersed in their history and geography.

Argan graduated in 1931 with a thesis on Sebastiano Serlio titled “La teoria di architettura di Sebastiano Serlio” (The Theory of Architecture in Sebastiano Serlio). His first published article was on “Andrea Palladio and Neo-classic Criticism” (Andrea Palladio e la critica neo-classica), which appeared in Venturi’s magazine L’arte when Argan was just twenty-one years old. [Figure 3-4] In this early essay, and as the title underlines, Argan already shows his preference for the “‘reasons beyond making’ rather than ‘the making per se,’” by which he meant his preference for the interpretation of architecture rather than for architecture itself. It also forewarns his theoretical and critical rather than historical approach; and indeed, Argan insisted on the parameters of Neo-classic criticism more than on the work by Andrea Palladio. Argan’s writing is from the very beginning more abstract and evocative, underlining the controversial aspect of “genius” with markedly anti-theoretical overtones, as when he writes that “a poet does not build on schemes; he understands that a genius does not have schemes”—a statement,

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Figure 3 G. C. Argan, “Andrea Palladio e la critica neo-classica,” in *L’Arte*, a. XXXIII, f. 4, July 1930, pages 327-346.
ANCORA oggi si guarda al Palladio come a un neo-classico, al quale è lecito rimproverare una certa freddezza di erudito, ma del quale è bello lodare la severa correttezza e la rigida serietà di studio. Ma, quando cerchiamo di controllare questo giudizio su quello di un critico neo-classico, ci accorgiamo che questi ha ben più chiara coscienza dei suoi limiti di gusto e che l’architettura Palladiana, lungi dal fare di questi limiti il proprio schema, sfugge verso qualcosa di non ben determinato, ma tuttavia estraneo al gusto neo-classico.

Nel 1768, Francesco Milizia pubblica le sue «Vite degli architetti» destinate a riflettere, nei riguardi dell’architettura, le nuovissime idee di Winckelmann e Mengs. Gli architetti greci e romani e, subordinatamente, quelli italiani del Rinascimento, erano le sue unità di misura: essi avevano raggiunto nell’arte, la ragione dell’arte, la pura bellezza, coerenza bella di parti belle, rappresentazione assoluta dello spazio attraverso il valore costruttivo del rilievo plastico. In confronto a questi «filosofi», Palladio stupisce per la sua «bizzarria».

Questi «filosofi» avevano fissato il loro canone negli ordini di architettura i quali piuttosto che ornamenti sono realmente l’ossatura della fabbrica, e parti essenziali di essa. Si possono perciò definire ornati necessari prodotti dalla natura stessa dell’edificio (1). La successione di questi ordini, dal più solido al più delicato, doveva, quindi, essere la rappresentazione sommaria di una coerenza spaziale e costruttiva, il rapporto tra la solidità monumentale dell’edificio e la linea d’orizzonte, intesa come limite tra finito ed infinito, tra determinato e non determinabile. Quando il Palladio sovrappone a un ordine rustico un ordine composito, incurante dei termini medi della serie, il Milizia ne stupisce come dell’affermazione di un assurdo.

Proprio con questo assurdo, con questa interpretazione arbitaria di un valore di spazio, con questa sua ribellione a una subordinazione prospettica del suo edificio, il Palladio si oppone nettamente al gusto classico antico e a quello del Rinascimento fiorentino e romano. Nel Palazzo Valmarana ognun vede che questa combinazione di pilastri maggiori e minori nascenti

(1) FR. MILZIA - Memorie degli architetti. Ediz. di Bassano, 1785, XXVII.

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which foregrounds the later reading of the genius of Wright by both Argan and Zevi. The young Argan understands that the only theory that would help understanding Palladio is “the theory of the stroke of a genius, therefore not a theory, rather the negation and freeing from any theory.” He seems to imply that there can be a theory underlining those who write (critics) but not underlining those who build (architects – artists). So the suspicion against theory does not undermine criticality here.

In this early article Argan already questioned the distinction among the arts, and stated that “if we still want to separate the “painterly” abstract, from the “architectural” abstract, as we could separate an emotion from reasoning, a lyric from a theorem, and since such dualisms are “equal to the duality of art and non-art, Palladio will always be very much a painter.” Namely, Argan criticized the separation of the arts, promoting a synthesis instead; similar to that promoted before and after the war by Le Corbusier.

A few months later, Aragn published in that same magazine *L’arte* “Il pensiero critico di Sant’Elia” (The Critical Thought of Sant’Elia), probably his most innovative article. [Figure 5-6] in which he seemed to claim the opposite argument but still insist on a synthesis among the arts. Here Argan insists that critical judgment is indispensable to any artist. Already in this text, Argan showed variety in his methods: an approach to history with an idealistic perspective permeated by Venturi’s concept of “taste.”

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21 “Il poeta non costruisce più schemi; capisce che il genio non ha schemi. Capisce anche che l’unica teoria adatta a comprendere in sé il Palladio è la teoria del colpo di genio, cioè una teoria, anzi la negazione e la liberazione da ogni teoria.” Ibid., 346.

22 “E finché si vorrà opporre l’astratto “piùtorico” all’astratto “architettonico”, come un’emozione a un ragionamento, una lirica a un teorema, il Palladio rimarrà sempre intimamente e profondamente pittore. E poiché questa opposizione vale l’altra, di arte e non arte, il Palladio rimarrà sempre e grandemente artista.” Ibid.

IL PENSIERO CRITICO DI ANTONIO DA SANT’ELIA

INNEGABILMENTE, nello svolgimento cronologico e in quello critico dell’architettura contemporanea, Antonio Sant’Elia ha avuto un posto d’avanguardia; e poiché questo sviluppo si compie fra tante polemiche e con tanto contenuto polemico, non ci si deve meravigliare che il maggior interesse di Sant’Elia sia nella sua polemica. Quando poi si voglia vedere in Sant’Elia un precursore delle attuali correnti architettoniche, a maggior ragione bisogna raccogliere l’attenzione piuttosto sulla sua teoria che sulle sue realizzazioni — se ve ne fossero — o sui suoi progetti (1); poiché il precursore — specialmente in arte — accenna e non svolge; ché, se svolgesse, più che un precursore sarebbe un maestro; e gli interpreti dei suoi atteggiamenti spirituali sarebbero, nel migliore dei casi, dei discepoli; nel quel caso attribuire al primo la qualifica di precursore sarebbe cosa ridicola, come sarebbe ridicolo dire Leonardo precursore di Boltraffio o Michelangelo di Daniele da Volterra. Il fatto, dunque, di aver precorso e previsto dei problemi che solo più tardi si affacciavano allo studio degli architetti e dei critici non avrebbe una grande importanza, anzi avrebbe soltanto importanza di precisione cronologica e di rivendicazione di diritti, se nella teoria architettonica di Sant’Elia non si potesse riscontrare un carattere di unità, che lo distingua e lo isoli dai suoi presunti seguaci e determini chiaramente i limiti e il valore della sua personalità, appunto perché dalla determinazione si possa valutare la sua posizione di fronte alle correnti dell’architettura contemporanea. Questo carattere di unità non si può certo riscontrare in una posizione di gusto, che si giustifica, in un artista, soltanto di fronte alla sua necessità di arte; ma si deve cercare in una più estesa capacità di teoria, la quale non deve giustificarsi che di fronte alla propria costruzione dialettica e, quindi, a se stessa.

L’architettura modernissima si è scelto l’attributo di “razionale”; ed è ben chiaro che questa determinazione di “razionale”, se intesa nel suo significato letterale, racchiude nella contraddizione dei termini, un’opposizione all’arte come tale.

(1) Sempre quando quei progetti si considerino come transizione pratica alla realizzazione.

Figure 6 G. C. Argan, “Il pensiero critico di Sant’Elia,” page 491.
Departing from Croce’s historicism, Venturi had introduced the concept of taste as the subjective element influencing the artist rather than the immanent character in a work of art (thus opposing Riegl’s *Kunstwollen*). Venturi also insisted on the importance of art criticism to advancing the comprehension of an artwork. By translating artworks into words, the historian becomes an interpreter facilitating and transmitting the comprehension of the work of art. Indeed, we can see how in Argan’s text, theory and history coincide in *storia*. Argan himself maintained:

La storia dell’arte è infatti la sola, fra tutte le storie speciali, che si faccia in presenza degli eventi e quindi non debba ne evocarli né ricostruirli né narrarli, ma soltanto interpretarli. E questa caratteristica è, nello stesso tempo, la maggiore aporia della storiografia dell’arte.

Art history is in fact the only one, among all the special stories, which is written in the presence of events and thus should neither evoke nor rebuild or narrate them, but only interpret them. And this feature is, at the same time, the main aporia of art historiography.24

Claudio Gamba and other historians considered Argan completely embedded in the Italian idealist and historicist tradition. But the presence of *fantasia*, which as I claim was consistent in his writing through the years, has not gone unnoticed. In the text on Sant’Elia, Argan defined *fantasia* by associating it with romanticism, as well as with modernity and art. He linked modern man to romantic man, and both of them to the use of *fantasia*:

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[…] quanta parte di romanticismo sia compresa in questo drammatizzare la figura dell’artista e in questo concepire l’arte come la espressione fantastica di un uomo compiutamente moderno e, perciò, compiutamente intelligente e sensibile, è evidente che ricordi le definizioni di romanticismo, modernità fantasia e arte del Baudelaire. Chi conosca ancora quanta parte abbia il Baudelaire nella critica moderna e nella vita artistica moderna, capirà tanto meglio la posizione ideale di Sant’Elia, che così profondamente e acutamente ha saputo assorbire e rilevare l’esperienza estetica e le possibilità attuali della critica romantica.

 […] how much of romance is included in this dramatizing of the artist’s figure, and in this conception of art as the fantastic expression of a great man, thoroughly modern and, therefore, thoroughly intelligent and sensitive, it is clear that it reminds us of the definition of romanticism, modernity, fantasia and art by Baudelaire.

Those who know Baudelaire’s role in modern criticism and artistic life can better understand the ideal position of Sant’Elia, who so deeply and keenly was able to absorb and detect the aesthetic experience and the current possibilities of romantic criticism.25

Modern and romantic are here combined. The fantasia that Argan recognized in Sant’Elia coincides more with the individual behavior of the artist, an almost nineteenth-century behavior compared to the rational and industrial serial production that was starting to characterize the contemporary moment. Argan defended the fantastic and individual creation but did not reject serial production. This same topic would be the reason behind his book on Gropius. Fifteen years later, in Towards an Organic Architecture Zevi had also recognized in Sant’Elia the reason of a “new drive [impulse], a new psychological shake for Italian architects” and characterized Sant’Elia for his

“architectural fantasies (fantasie architettoniche).” This is particularly important since the futurist architect never produced a single plan.26

To underline the coincidence between history and fantasia that one can recognize in art criticism and history, one can borrow once again Argan’s words: “What Sant’Elia fears as the worst danger and obstacle to the possibility of doing in art is not the absence of practical cohesion, but rather, the absence of historical coherence; therefore, from his point of view, the fantastic and psychological cohere.”27 Argan recognized in the futurist architect a forerunner in the realm of art and architecture as well as in the making of history. In the first place, Argan compares history to fantasia and psychology. He stresses the necessity of an integrity and congruence between the two. But is this not again what is happening in the word storia? Indeed, in the same text Argan both mentions the use of fantasia and also promotes the need for history “a general necessity for historicity” (una esigenza generale di storicità).28 Argan insists that an art stemming from practical reasons, has proved to have failed, instead art should be the result of its historical condition. Indeed “a rational theory of art,” Argan’s words, “has no possibility to become a theory of art.”29

But Argan suggests more than he explains, he suggests Sant’Elia as the forerunner of a critical method, even more than an historical one, one that “explains the ideal content of architecture trends, that, still now, are thought to be positivist.”30 Argan does not explain what he means but suggests the necessity of a “dramatic character” “emotional

27 “Ciò che Sant’Elia teme come massimo pericolo ed ostacolo alla possibilità di fare dell’arte non è – scrive l’Argan – l’assenza di aderenza pratica, ma l’assenza di coerenza storica e, quindi, dal suo punto di vista, di coerenza fantastica e psicologica,” Ibid. p. XX.
28 Ibid., p. 497.
29 Ibid., p. 493.
30 Ibid., p. 498.
potency” (*potenza emotiva*) in architectural expression. He also seems to combine a double influence: empathy theory and, it goes without saying, Croce’s idealism. Indeed Sant’Elia stands for the possibility of a new ideal architecture that is not idealistic. Opposed to a positivist and deterministic construction Argan uses Sant’Elia not to discuss Sant’Elia’s futurist works but as a device to evoke a critical model of architecture and art criticism. Argan ends with Sant’Elia’s words: “architecture is not an arid combination of practicality and utility, but remains art, in other words, synthesis, expression.”

In 1936 Argan wrote *Architettura Protocristiana, Preromanica, e Romanica* (Early Christian, Pre-Romanesque and Romanic Architecture), the following year, in 1937, he wrote *L’architettura italiana del’200 e ’300* (XIII and XIV Italian Architecture) [Figure 7-8] a survey of Italian late medieval architecture. Both two small volumes were republished in 1978, showing a renewed interest toward a more distant past. This same series was edited by Zevi. In them, Argan tries to insert his narrative in a broader historical discourse dealing with questions such as the antithesis of ancient versus modern, or the evolution from Romanic to Gothic, reasoning and lingering over the organic continuity from one style to the other. Finally, Argan recognizes a synthesis between rationality and sentiment in Gothic Architecture in what he names “fantastic coherence (*coerenza fantastica*)”—an ambiguous term, which may imply the peculiar organizational qualities of fantasia. This synthesis between rationality and sentiment, between science and history, was sought after by Einaudi, with whom Argan started collaborating since the 1930s. But similar to the running ostrich drawn by Picasso

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31 Ibid.
Figure 7 G. C. Argan, *L’architettura Protocristiana, Preromanica e Romanica*, Florence: Nemi 1936.
Figure 8 G. C. Argan, *L’architettura italiana del ’200 e ’300*, Florence: Nemi 1937.
and later adopted by Einaudi, Argan seems to run away from this synthetic view of
history as a scientific discipline. [Figure 9]

More Stories than (His)stories

In a letter to Luciano Foà, written in March 1954 concerning the publishing of a book
series for “general histories” on art and architecture, Argan repeated emphatically what
he had mentioned in a previous letter to the same author (quoted in the fifth chapter), that
is “the time for general history is over, ours is an epoch of essayists, and essayists shy
away from general histories”34 [Figure 10] The historian Delio Cantimori underscored
this tendency of historians to depart from a general history “because a general history
demands an interpretation, and such interpretation implies a general conception of
judgment.”35 Interpretation, as a historical passage, is comprehension, and the historian
acts as the translator from a figurative discipline to the written page. And this is what
Argan did, he re-introduced interpretation. He also suggested multiple stories, along with
a Crocean and Venturian conception of interpretation, which sees history as something
changing according to its reinterpretation in a specific time and space. What’s more,
these interpretations happen thanks to the personal historian’s creativeness; we can agree
with Michel de Certeau that “fiction is the repressed other of historical discourse.”36 But
these interpretations also change according to the times in which they were written, thus
anchoring them to Croce’s historical narrative. Indeed Argan wrote about single

34 “La nostra è un’epoca di saggisti e la forma mentis del saggista rifugge dalle storie generali,” Giulio Carlo Argan to
Luciano Foà, 15th March 1954, Einaudi Archive Folder Argan.
35 “La trattazione della storia generale implica di necessità una “interpretazione”, e la “interpretazione implica a sua
volta una concezione generale a fondamento del giudizio,” D. Cantimori, Ancora sulla “storia generale” [1958], in
Studi di Storia, p. 819.
Figure 9 The ostrich given by Picasso to Einaudi in 1951. © Einaudi Archive.
Caro Foà,

poiché non ho ricevuto alcuna risposta alla mia lettera del 24 febbraio, ho messo giù, sulla questione della "Storia dell'Arte", una relazione che ti prego di presentare a Giulio Einaudi. Ella non è il frutto soltanto delle mie incursioni, ma anche di colloqui avuti con vari colleghi: ai quali, senza fare il nome di Einaudi, ho prospettato la possibilità di collaborare ad una grande Storia dell'Arte. Benché possa pareri strano, nulla fa tanto imbestialire gli storici dell'arte quanto proporre loro di scrivere una storia dell'arte. Si capisce: la nostra è un'epoca di saggisti e la forma mensil del saggista rifugge dalla storia generale.

In breve, sono persuaso che il progetto di una vera e propria storia dell'arte italiana, intesa come trattazione omogenea, praticamente irrealizzabile: se Einaudi mi dirà di tentare, tenterei anche perché a me l'idea di una storia dell'arte fatta secondo criteri moderni piace molto, sì al punto che, se fossi professore in un'università, con tutto il mio tempo libero per lavorare, con un gruppo di allievi da far lavorare con me, credo che deciderei di dedicare ad un'opera simile il resto dei miei giorni. Credo però mio dovere dichiarare molto apertamente che, data la condizione attuale degli studi, le difficoltà di una simile impresa collazionale mi sembrano enormi.

Proprio perché ho cercato delle soluzioni di compromesso e le ho esposte nella mia relazione: non ti nascondo che tutta la mia simpatia va alla tesi, che ho appena accennato, ma che potrò studiare nei particolari se mi direte di farlo. Una collana di opere già "classiche", ristampate con aggiornamenti o tradotte da altre lingue, e scelte in modo da coprire quanto più si può del tracciato della storia dell'arte italiana: e integrare con volumi che studiosi seri abbiano in preparazione, e, infine, con altre da assegnare ex-novo a persone adatte, in modo da colmare le lacune: ecco un programma che mi sento di proporre con la certezza che ne verra'be fuori qualcosa di molto serio e di molto utile. Quanto valga questa proposta, è cosa che non posso giudicare: dal punto di vista scientifico e anche più largamente culturale posso garantire la bellezza e l'utilità della proposta."
personalities to discuss more general methodological topics, such as Serlio, Palladio, and Sant’Elia. During the 1940s he wrote stories of artists: Tosi (1942), Henry Moore (1948), Manzu (1948). During the 1950s he went back to architecture and the book on Gropius (1951), Borromini (1952), Brunelleschi (1955), Pier Luigi Nervi (1955), Fra Angelico (1955), Georges Braque (1957), Botticelli (1957), Breuer (1957).  

The book on Gropius and the Bauhaus deserves attention. [Figure 11] While after the war Zevi kept promoting Wrightian individualism, Argan used Gropius’ personality to favor the social morality that the German architect represented, and whose architecture presupposes a sort of “ideal society.” To the young Zevi, Wright was, to a certain extent, still a mythical presence. As already mentioned, Zevi’s enthusiasm for Wright was partly due to the American architect’s “anti-rationalist” approach to design, the genial and fantastic ability to create always different and not replicable works. The idea of publishing a book about Gropius fits first into the idea of writing specific stories, not general ones, and then into the idea of opening up the Italian debate to a more European and international one – one detached and independent from fascist ideology.

Prior to the end of the Second World War, Argan rarely mentioned Gropius’s name, even if he showed sympathy toward the German architect during the war. Gropius and the Bauhaus ratified the combination not only of history and fantasia, but also of art and architecture. Neither of the two disciplines prevailed upon the other, but a certain tension was evident between the two. This tension also became a contentious debate between Zevi and Argan, both collaborators with the Einaudi publishing house.

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Figure 11 G. C. Argan, *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, Turin: Einaudi 1951.
Argan’s book on Gropius was finally released on 28th February 1951 as the second volume in the “Historical Architecture Series” edited by Bruno Zevi, rather than within the series on art. Although Zevi had not played a crucial role in Argan’s collaboration with Einaudi – Argan had been in contact with Einaudi since the thirties – Zevi still insisted upon inserting Argan’s book within his series and following his dictate: “to fulfill a scientific standard but also to respond to a rigorous cultural level in order to integrate architecture within the cultural world” – something that for Zevi “so few people are able to do both in Italy and outside of it.” This clearly fulfilled the requirements of having something that was simultaneously rigorous and accessible to a larger audience.

The title of the book has been widely discussed, particularly the use of the article preceding the word Bauhaus. While in German, the term Bauhaus maintains the singular and refers to a group, Argan originally used the feminine article [la] in front of it, thus insisting on the Bauhaus as a school, feminine in Italian, and the pedagogy beyond it. To Argan, “pedagogy is one of the possible exits from a political and moral crisis.” The historian Marco Biraghi recently highlighted Argan’s intention to identify the specificity of a Bauhaus school as opposed to a general Bauhaus movement, whereas I insist on the Gropius e la Bauhaus as Argan’s narrative — as a story opposed

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38 Even though Argan finished the book at the end of 1948 (or so he claimed), he didn’t send the final version to his publishing house until May of 1950.
39 The first volume, Michelozzo architetto by Ottavio Morisani, has the same printing date and was released at the same time as Argan’s Gropius. Napoli Imprevista by Roberto Pane belonged to the same series, but was not numbered in the series; it was published in 1949.
40 “Once again, I want to tell you how happy I am to collaborate with you. I can tell you that after so many years at the Ministry for Encyclopedia, I feel like I am reborn to the world of intelligent things,” Argan to Einaudi, 30th December 1953, AE Folder Argan.
41 “Rispondere a un requisito scientifico ma anche ad un livello culturale rigoroso al fine di inserire l’architettura nel mondo della cultura – pochissima gente è capace di far questo, e ciò è vero in Italia e anche fuori dall’Italia.” Marco Biraghi, “Valore di un libro,” in Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus, p. XV.
43 G.C. Argan, Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus, p. 85.
to the heroic persona of Wright, even if Wright too created a school yet always absorbed by Wright’s name and architectural idiom. Biraghi reads Argan’s intent as being to “build a veritable mythology” rather than to rewrite a story.\textsuperscript{44} Quite the opposite, I believe Zevi, unlike many other later critics and historians, kept using the masculine article in order to insist on the nature of the Bauhaus as a group more than a school.\textsuperscript{45} The publication of \textit{Gropius} also stirred debate within the publishing house, and the editors’ role in the planning of the art series. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, curator of the Frank Lloyd Wright exhibition in Florence in 1951, and, as we saw in the previous chapter, the first to conceive of the Einaudi art series, wrote a spiteful critique against Argan’s book. In May 1954, probably annoyed by having been overtaken by Argan in the art series, he published a long essay in \textit{Critica d’arte} that was ambiguously presented as a letter to “B.Z.” [Bruno Zevi] The essay’s title was an ambivalent yet clear reference to the old Sant’Elia text by Argan, “Parole in libertà?” (Words in freedom?).

According to Ragghianti, who did not mention either the author’s name or the title of the book, “in this heavy volume we smell existentialism, phenomenology, and elementary Marxism.”\textsuperscript{46} Argan’s reply was not immediate. In a letter to Zevi, who was responsible for the architecture series in which the Gropius book was published, he writes:

\textsuperscript{44} But mainly Argan’s \textit{Gropius} was his discovery of the German Bauhaus, the coincidence between artisanship and progress, Argan finds in the work of Gropius and his Bauhaus a compromise between creativity and craft and social progress, rather than a retreat to the past. Marco Biraghi, “Valore di un libro,” in \textit{Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus}, p. XVI.
\textsuperscript{45} Both Anna Maria Mazzucchelli and Giulia Veronesi used the feminine article in front of the Bauhaus name, while Zevi used the masculine.
In un primo momento avevo deciso di non rispondere all’ignobile scritto di Ragghianti, tanto mi ripugnava quell’averti tirato in ballo […] quell’espedito volgare di non citare il mio libro per non dover assumere la responsabilità della stroncatura, quel modo di storcere le citazioni e di spacciare per una mia estetica ciò che non era né voleva essere se non la ricostruzione storica delle condizioni di cultura nelle quali si situò il movimento di Gropius […] della mia lettera [a Ragghianti] ti mando una copia come direttore della collezione nella quale il libro è apparso. So perfettamente che le tue idee non collimano con quelle esposte nel mio libro; e ho molto apprezzato la tua liberalità di direttore della collezione. Ma so anche che il mio libro non ha screditato la collezione da te diretta, né ha nuociuto al suo successo.

At first, I had decided not to reply to the ignoble text by Ragghianti, as I hated having you involved in that situation […] that vulgar trick of not mentioning my book so as not to have to take responsibility for its harsh criticism, that way of distorting quotes and passing off as my own aesthetic something that was meant to be nothing but the historical reconstruction of cultural context, in which the Gropius movement arose […] As for my letter [to Ragghianti], I’ll send you a copy of it, since you are the editor of the series the book is part of. I am perfectly aware that your ideas are different from those disclosed in my book; and I deeply appreciated your generosity as the editor of the series. But I also know that my book has neither discredited the series you edit, nor was detrimental to its success.47

In his reply, Zevi made clear that the architecture series is open to publishing anything by Argan, “the most relevant art and architecture scholar in Italy nowadays,” and that he would trust him completely on anything Argan would suggest in the future but wanted to ensure he and Argan both shared the same vision.

47 Quoted in Marco Biraghi, “Valore di un libro,” in Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus, p. XX.
While they seem to converge on editorial decisions, there are still fundamental differences between Argan’s and Zevi’s own books. Argan’s Gropius did not want to reassure the public, as the Storia d’archittetura moderna by Zevi may have done, but aimed to show the complexity behind the Bauhaus project and its multiple references. Argan was not interested in a comprehensive and continuous history marked by personalities and heroes, but in a story that could be taken as an example. Indeed, in his book, Gropius did not become a hero, like Zevi’s Wright, but was presented as the representative of a school mixing personal creativity (fantasy) within a moral project.

To bring the discussion back to the role of fantasia in Argan’s book on Gropius, Giulia Veronesi wrote in Emporium that the “author’s discourse” is brought up to something “similar to a philosophical level”; as a result, she argues, the reader’s interest ends up shifting from Gropius’s architecture toward Argan’s criticism, “which is characterized by a Bergsonian tone and causes the reader to be lost in “spatial” visions as fantastical motives of Argan’s reasoning.” 48 Although Veronesi insists upon Argan’s “imaginative predisposition (predisposizione all’immaginazione)”, she remained critical of the author’s freedom to detach his narrative from a philological and more historically accurate account. Veronesi emphasized Argan’s capacity as a writer, and as a storyteller, over his historical recounting of the events his book was presenting.

Only a few reviews of Argan’s book on Gropius were published. Besides Veronesi’s, a few others appeared in foreign magazines such as William Holford’s piece in The Architectural Review, which underlined the psychological and interpretative study of

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Walter Gropius, “the man, the teacher, the architect,” thus also insisting on Argan’s multidisciplinary take. Argan’s book went almost unnoticed in other Italian architecture magazines. Overall, a complete silence ruled in Ponti’s *Domus* and Zevi’s *Metron*. Neither of the two magazines even mentioned it, thus creating what was more like an embarrassed silence than a critical reaction. This silence might signal the complexity in finding a place for Argan’s book within architectural publications. It comes as no surprise that magazines of more general interest, and mainly philosophical journals, like *Aut Aut* and *Letteratura e arte contemporanea*, reviewed the book while architecture magazines ignored it. In November 1951, *Aut Aut* published a brief review by Gillo Dorfles, in which the author gives credit to Argan for having written:


A rich volume in which [Argan] illustrates the pedagogic milieu of the Bauhaus […] and precisely analyzes the evolution of Gropius’s thought, in his passage from Europe to England, and finally to the United States. Argan offers to architectural culture the only valuable antidote against the allurement of a renewed provincialism that made so sterile and contemplative so much of architectural production after World War I.

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In spite of its mixed reception by critics, Argan’s *Gropius e la Bauhaus*, served as evidence of the success of Zevi’s series and made a mark on the education of young architects and art historians.\(^{51}\) The book was later hailed for its innovative approach on architecture, and the Bauhaus.

As Biraghi reiterates the importance of Argan’s use of the term *fantasia* and its relation to the reconciliation proposed by Hegelian synthesis: “Argan’s ancient distinction between the utilitarian sphere and the fantastic, collocated at a different level, [is] capable of producing a new synthesis.”\(^{52}\) I would agree that Argan had the ability to swivel between rationalism and the fantastic, and I would dare to think that this synthesis brings him back to Hegel, or rather more to Croce’s synthesis between history and historiography. Indeed, Argan’s approach is closer to a philosophy of history than history itself. He rarely gives detailed explanations of works of art, rather, insists on abstract characters and formalisms.

Despite the success of the book, the initial attempt of an English version of Argan’s *Gropius* failed. In April 1953, Argan had written to Einaudi and tried to anticipate Giedion’s book *Walter Gropius: Work and Teamwork*. Argan wrote:

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\(^{51}\) The book was totally sold out in 1955.

\(^{52}\) Marco Biraghi, “Valore di un libro,” in *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, p. XXIV.
Vengo a sapere in questo momento che il Giedion ha in preparazione un libro su Gropius: 64 pagine di testo; 125 illustrazioni; formato 9 X 25 cm; testo in cinque lingue. Il libro dovrebbe essere pubblicato verso la fine di quest’anno. Credo che Gropius non sia ancora al corrente della cosa, comunque finora il materiale nuovo l’ho io. So che Giedion è in viaggio per gli S.U. proprio per fare questo libro.

Ciò mi fa pensare che convenga affrettare la 2a edizione del mio, in modo da arrivare prima del libro di Giedion. Il libro di Giedion comprometterà forse la traduzione inglese del mio […] ma, se usciamo prima, non comprometterà la riuscita in Italia e, in parte, all’estero.

I have just heard that Giedion is working on a book on Gropius: 64 pages of text; 125 images; 9 X 25 centimeter format; text in five languages. The book should be released by the end of the year. I do not believe that Gropius is aware of this, either way, so far only I have the new material. I know that Giedion is on his way to the US to write this book. This makes me think we should hurry up with the second edition of my book, so as to anticipate Giedion’s book. His book could jeopardize the English translation of mine […] but if we publish before him, it will not compromise its success in Italy, nor, to an extent, in the foreign market.”

On the bottom right of the letter, in pencil, someone’s note reads: what to answer?

And finally Einaudi replied to Argan and agreed in speeding up a second edition of the book, with an enlarged illustrative apparatus. [Figure 12-13-14-15] The book by Giedion implied a fierce competition. Published in 1954, it had been simultaneously translated in four different languages. Giulia Veronesi, who was critical of Argan’s book, translated the book in Italian and published it with Adriano Olivetti’s Edizioni di

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53 Argan to Einaudi, 14th April 1953, AE Argan Folder.
54 Einaudi to Argan, 17th April 1953, AE Argan Folder.
Figure 13 S. Giedion, Walter Gropius. L’uomo e l’opera, Milan: Edizioni di comunità 1954. Translated by Giulia Veronesi.
Caro Einaudi,

vengo a segre in questo momento che il Giedion ha
in preparazione un libro su Gropius: 64 pagine di
testo, 125 x 21; formato 9 x 25 cm.; testo in lingua inglese.
Il libro dovrebbe essere pubblicato verso la fine di
guest’anno. Credo che Gropius non sia ancora al
convento della cosa, ma può essere il materiale
nuovo e lo è. Se che il Giedion stia vaggio per
gli U.S. proprio per fare questo libro.
Cio’ mi fa pensare che convenga affrettare la 2a
edizione del mio, in modo che arrivi prima il
libro di Giedion e comprenderà forse la traduzione
inglese del mio (che non ho scritto solo con l’aiuto
dell’Humphreys), ma, se siamo prima, non
comprometterà la versione in Italia e, in parte,
all’estero.

Non intendo modificare il testo, ma non farò
alcune stampe aggiunte a più scrivere, nelle
ultime pagine, il commento delle opere più recenti.
Anche sulle illustrazioni maneggerò con l’aiuto
gratuito in fondo a un quarto o due con
le cose recenti. Quando poi sarò alla fine della
cosa di fare, ti pregherò - se concordi nella tua
permissione che ascolta procedere Giedion - di far
aggiungere al testo il bene nel manuale di
convenienza. Perciò le aggiunte nelle bozze: ciò che
non possiamo conseguire, dato che tutto si avvien
e arriva due o tre pagine nuova verso il fondo.
Ho già dato la traduzione del Friedlander: l’hai bene.
Ti prego di m’inviarvi il manoscritto: il materiale
e con (circa 20 notte) e non alla Enciclopedia.
Tant’è corto, saluto del tuo

Argan

14.10.53
Figure 15 Giulio Einaudi to Giulio Carlo Argan, April 17th 1953. Einaudi agrees with Argan and tries to speed up a second edition of Argan’s Gropius e la Bauhaus. © Einaudi Archive.
The rivalry between the Swiss architecture historian and the Einaudi publishing house was intense. In fact, Argan’s book, as many of Argan’s writing remained un-translated. A second revision and edition of the book did not happen either until more than three decades later in 1988.

**Progetto e Destino: A Historical Synthesis of Fantasia, Destiny, and Predetermined History**

In the 1950s, Argan kept writing stories over general histories. So it comes as no surprise that Argan was responsible for the art series with Einaudi, a collaboration that, as we saw in the previous chapter, created some controversies. His rather personal *History of Italian Art* would only be published in 1968. The stories for the “yet to come” Einaudi Encyclopedia of Art, along with the *storia* of the book on Gropius seem to distance Argan from the process of *fantasia*; the historian opted to reevaluate the impact of social pedagogy over personal creation. However, his text “Progetto e destino,” initially an article published in 1964 (also included in a collection of essays published the following year with the same title), appears as a manifesto that returns to the use of *fantasia*.56

[Figure 16]

In this article, Argan reiterates the possibility of a compromise between a project – in other words, men’s ideals and active struggle for freedom, achieved through one’s *fantasia*, imagination and interpretation--, and destiny, or the idea of fate and a predetermined history. Argan argues that man is not free to decide what has already

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Figure 16  G. C. Argan, *Progetto e destino*, Milan: Il saggiatore 1965.
happened, the events that are, but the critic is free to interpret these events. Both Hegel’s and Croce’s legacies are evident here, as well as the influence of Husserl and Heidegger’s existentialism. In fact, for Argan, the work of the art critic and historian is removed from a positivistic conception of history, in which history is like a science, in that it deals with norms and set codifications. The work of the critic is not neutral, but rather is a matter of choice; therefore, art criticism is not “dead” but “alive,” and constantly changing. Additionally, the art critic is not a translator from a figurative language to a written language, as the critic would then have no freedom of expression, but could only imitate or show devotion. This latter could, at its very best, just produce a literary interpretation.

Within the Einaudi publishing house and the cultural milieu considered here, the history of art coincided with the history of art criticism. Consequentially, if the history of art criticism is a matter of choice, then the history of art is also a matter of choice, and this implies the use of fantasia. The critic’s choice implies a creative choice, and as we have earlier discussed the critic is an interpreter and interpretation, as suggested by Ricouer, is a stage of historical explanation. The critic, a creative writer, is also an historian. Moreover, the imaginative and creative choice fits in Croce’s contemporaneity of history. Every history is a contemporary history, in that the interpreter retells his / her story partially influenced by the time he or she is living in and writing. It also anticipates

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58 About the closeness of Argan to theories such as existentialism or historicism see F. Corrado, P. San Martino, “Giulio Carlo Argan: Arte/Esistenza.” “Per questo il suo rimane studio neutrale, scientifico, che si ferma a un’analitica semiologica, tecnica, della forma. Per lui la critica non è neutra: è anzi il suo contrario, scelta. Al di là dei percorsi teorici e delle dichiarazioni ecco la prova vissuta dello storicismo di Argan: l’arte e la critica dell’arte legati come condizione alla forma. E questa è la ragione per la quale egli sempre riuscì l’appellativo di filosofo, benché fosse uno storico dell’arte molto filosofico, più di Lionello Venturi ed Erwin Panofsky, [...]. Argan non si riconosceva filosofo, sia pure filosofo dell’arte, ma critico d’arte.”
the coincidence between history and theory. Argan epitomized this coincidence by embracing and anticipating different theories in his writings. Stories of architects, and artists, of their work are his device to explain theoretical and meta-historical concepts. We are in the realm of a philosophy of history rather than history, roughly narrated through stories.

Some scholars doubt that the historiographical debates going on at that time could still hold a place for imagination. In their study “Giulio Carlo Argan: arte / esistenza” Corrado and San Martino write:

L’immaginazione dalla quale dovrebbe generarsi quel progetto sia ormai una semplice illusione, e se, come temeva Argan, la storia essendo conclusa, alla fine del suo ciclo non resti che constare con Pindaro come contro il destino non c’è fuoco o muraglia di ferro che tenga.

The imagination that would have given rise to that project is by now a mere illusion. And if history is over, as Argan feared, then at the end of the cycle of history we can only agree with Pindar that here is no fire or iron curtain that can resist destiny.59

With Progetto e destino Argan goes even further, as he explains what history, as res gestae (la storia) and historia rerum gestarum (storiografia), is: “Every new invention stems from a criticism of the past; to this one we can add a project for the future. To this implicit correlation between past and future the inventive act is, in any field, the historical act par excellence; and its field of action is the entire society.”60

In *storia* the idea of a project – in other words, individual freedom of action and expression – enters in a dialectic structure where it has to face fate. As Argan wrote, “it has to find its place against fate, its opposite force.”61 A plan, a project, a program is not the project for a future action, but an action in the present according to a future project. For Argan, city planning could offer this opportunity to realize a project / plan / program. Argan became the first communist mayor of Rome in 1977 till 1979. Though, Argan does not omit the question of architectural history’s relation with the past, i.e. architecture’s historicity, history, for him, is precisely the connection between past (history) and future (fantasia). Only with such a connection in mind can the historian and critic write a history of the present and fit that into a social moral act.

Argan suggested that even if one hopes to operate according to one’s personal plans, one might only be able to act within an already set and determined general planned history. This last approach to *storia* – or, better, (their)stories – further introduced the forthcoming post-modern tendency of adopting multiple versions and historical perspectives. It introduced a non-univocal version of history such as the fantastic creations by Calvino, or Gadda’s 1957 *Quer Pasticciaccio Brutto di Vie Merulana* (*That Awful Mess in via Merulana*).

In Calvino’s later and very well-known novel *Invisible Cities*, [Figure 17] an imaginary dialogue between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan focuses on the memory as a means between past and present. The discussion overlaps with a discourse about questions; rather than offering answers about the possibilities of narrative, it leaves open the many possibilities of a project within one’s destiny. To a certain extent, project and

destiny also correspond to past and future; but in the relative time of history, which we can oppose to the concept of eternity, the present is an imperceptible moment between past and future, between project and destiny.

In *Progetto e destino* Argan finally showed his faith in History with a capital H, *res gestae*. He associated history with *fantasia*, so that if one prevails, the other succeeds as well. In conclusion, neither of the two can be separated. *Storia*, as a synthesis of story, history, and even historiography, is essentially untranslatable and undistinguishable. In other words, the fictive and the historical are necessary and coexisting components of architectural writing and contribute to its legitimacy.
Figure 17 Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, Turin: Einaudi 1972.
Conclusion/Epilogue: Meta-History and the New Historiographical Babel

In 1958 Einaudi ended the series I gettoni (Tokens) edited by Elio Vittorini in which the publishing house translated foreign narratives into Italian, and increased the publication of Italian authors. In that same year Adriano Olivetti founded the architecture magazine Zodiac, in which most of the articles were kept in the original language by their authors. Both events seemed to make the role of the translator almost obsolete. Sigfried Giedion, Giulio Carlo Argan, Reyner Banham, and Gillo Dorfles were among its well-known contributors, along with some new ones like the fiction writer turned critic Esther McCoy.¹

A year later, Vittorini and Italo Calvino started the magazine Il Menabò di letteratura (Dummy Sheets of Literature), [Figure 1] which became the most authoritative publication in conceiving a literary renewal, as well as in language experimentation while still addressing a larger public. As the name of the magazine implies, Il Menabò insists on offering a quasi-final version (dummy) of texts, as if texts could not be univocal and ready to be printed, but had to exist waiting for a definite approval. This magazine started a new era, with literature and writing modes opening up to neo-avantgarde trends such as Capriccio Italiano (Italian Caprice) by Edoardo Sanguineti or Umberto Eco Opera Aperta (Open Work), that sealed the definite decline in Croce’s predominance.²

¹ For example: in 1957, Giedion published the text on “History and the Architect” [Zodiac 1, 1957, p. 53]; in 1961 Zodiac edited a special issue entitled “America”; and in 1964 Maria Bottero wrote about the theory beyond architects’ works and their task as practitioners [M. Bottero, “L’architetto fra ideologia e specificità operativa,” Zodiac 20, 1964].
Figure 1 Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino, *Il menabo di letteratura*, first issue, Turin: Einaudi 1959.
By the end of the fifties, the new way of writing about architecture was even more informed by the literary element, which had been present in Bruno Zevi’s *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* since the first editorial, where he referred to Camus. As an example, in November 1959, Zevi opened an editorial by mentioning the aforementioned brand-new literary magazine *Il Menabò* by Calvino and Vittorini, and quoted the two authors’ opinions on the current state of literature in Italy:

La crisi della letteratura in Italia sembra essere più che altro, oggi, di deficienza critica tanto da comportare il compiacimento di “non dar scandalo” persino in coloro che pur professano di darlo (ma come Arlecchini della nuova commedia sociale di questo nostro nuovo secolo); e il compiacimento della mancanza di tensione; il compiacimento della mancanza di rigore (salvo che del teorico, dell’astratto, del massimalistico).

The crisis of literature in Italy seems to be, more than anything else today, one of critical deficiency to the point of taking satisfaction in ‘not causing scandal’ even by those who profess to do so (like Harlequins in the new social comedy of our new century); and satisfaction with the lack of tension, satisfaction with the lack of rigor (except that which is predictable, abstract, vague).³

For Zevi, what Calvino and Vittorini argue about literature had already happened in architecture. And the state of literary criticism did not seem to be – or “sound like it was” – in a better place than that of architecture. In this quote, the word “literature” could easily be replaced by the word “architecture.” At this point in time, Vittorini and Calvino lamented a crisis in literature, and considered mass media and pop culture as threats to

higher culture. They lamented that society was becoming complacent with conformism, “a complacency that there is something good also in conformism (from which the risk is that something good stems only from conformism).”4 The greater risk was adapting to this conformism, which might imply a general flattening of culture and language caused by mass media. But only a few years later would media theorists, from Umberto Eco to Marshall McLuhan, objectively identify the pros and cons of popular media culture and accept it as part of higher culture.

Indeed, and soon enough, the integration among the disciplines that Zevi was putting forward in his magazine coincided with this change of tones in language. A trend that became established and very common during the fifties was that writers (or publishing houses) produced fiction for the masses. This is what Manfredo Tafuri meant when he wrote, “It is almost too easy to go from Rome, Open City to Bread, Love and Fantasy.”5 [Figure 2-3] The titles said it all—the passage from Rossellini’s 1945 neorealist masterpiece to a 1953 blockbuster movie that was thought of as one of a series of mass-produced movies is immediate. Architecture became to building construction what Roma, città aperta (Rome, Open City) had been to Pane, amore e fantasia, (Bread, Love and Fantasy), what poetry is to prose.

In his 1959 editorial Zevi picked up on this idea and emphasized that the aforementioned crisis was partly due to the mixing of high and low culture that had leveled the

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Figure 2 Movie poster for *Roma, Città Aperta*, directed by Roberto Rossellini, 1945. The poster is one in a series realized by the painter and cartoonist Anselmo Ballester for the masterpiece about the Italian *resistenza* against the fascist regime.
Figure 3 Movie poster for *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* (Bread, Love and Fantasia), directed by Luigi Comencini, 1953. A love comedy featuring the popular comedians Vittorio De Sica and Gina Lollobrigida.
humanities. Zevi mentioned cinema, radio, television, as well as gravure, illustrated journalism, and “sanremismo,” the festival of popular music in San Remo that started back in 1951. Take as an example the singer Domenico Modugno’s success when he won the 1958 edition of the festival with the song *Nel blu dipinto di blu*, better known as *Volare* (to fly / to dream), symbolizing the new hope of the Italian middle class to fly away and avoid real life. The song had a parallel success in the United States where Modugno sold thousands of copies and appeared on the popular *Ed Sullivan Show*. The August 1958 issue of *L’espresso*, in which Zevi published his rubric on architecture, carried a front-page article dedicated to Modugno, as an example of Italy conquering America through popular culture. [Figure 4-5]

But in his idea of an integrated architectural historiography, Zevi was convinced that history itself could offer a new toolkit toward a new language able to mediate these different social levels. While Benedetto Croce characterized the forties as a type of “building prose,” the fifties welcomed poetry and literature as new forms of architecture.

If the contamination with literature had always been present in Zevi’s magazine, linguistics appeared as a new epistemological faculty informing the discipline of architectural criticism, and consequently Zevi’s publication, in the late fifties. In another 1959 editorial titled “Language and Dialects in Architecture,” Zevi had discussed the use of different linguistic tones:

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Figure 4 Domenico Modugno sings *Nel blu dipinto di blu* also known as *Volare* on *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1958.
Figure 5 Domenico Modugno wins the 1958 edition of the festival of popular music in Sanremo with the song *Nel blu dipinto di blu.*
E ben noto che nel dopoguerra si è manifestata in ogni paese una crescente curiosità per l’edilizia indigena, rurale, anonima, [...] Ogni qualvolta si verifica una crisi della “lingua pura” o scritta, i letterati ricorrono ai dialetti, alla “lingua parlata”, nella speranza di rinsanguare un lessico e una sintassi divenuti accademici mediante gli apporti di un “subcosciente linguistico” provinciale. [...] I tentativi di riassorbimento dialettale non conducono perciò ad un genuino movimento realistico, ma solo ad evasioni neo-romantiche, al gusto impressionistico dell’informe. Urge che gli architetti tengano conto di questi accertamenti letterari [...] Ma non si illudano di superarla attraverso neo-regionalismi superficiali e decadentistici quanto sofisticati. Alimenti [...] per tema di cadere nel meccanicismo, scivoleranno in una malattia più grave e anacronistica: nel provincialismo artigianale.

In the postwar period there has been an increasing interest in native, rural, “spontaneous,” anonymous architecture. [...] Whenever an official language is going through a crisis, writers turn to dialects, in the hope of revitalizing an academic lexicon and syntax with a dynamic vernacular, which seems to convey passions and a sense of reality. Under these conditions, dialects do not constitute a “sound linguistic subconscious”: they just offer an opportunity for neo-romantic evasion, away from reality. Architects should meditate this literary experience: [...] let them not be deluded that the crisis can be overcome by borrowing vernacular forms. Otherwise, out of fear of falling into mechanicism, they will contract a more serious and anachronistic disease: artisan provincialism.^[7]

This editorial reflects the postwar interest in rural architecture, which had in fact started much earlier.^[8] The English version of the editorial stressed the lack of critical

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^[8] E ben noto che nel dopoguerra si è manifestata in ogni paese una crescente curiosità per l’edilizia indigena, rurale, anonima, [...] Ogni qualvolta si verifica una crisi della “lingua pura” o scritta, i letterati ricorrono ai dialetti, alla
production, but it stressed even more the retreat to a vernacular architecture, one in which
the author played a minimal role and is almost forgotten. Indeed, if there was no author,
if there was instead a rural, mythical architecture reminiscent of a pre-historical time, it
would now be time for multiple or collective authors and the passage from pre-history to
history.

In this editorial, Zevi blamed the risk of a retreat on a multitude of dialects, i.e.,
local and multiple expressions that lack the proper grammar of a language has. He further
suggested that like other languages the proliferation of dialects or revivals may only fail
when facing a crisis. The editorial reads as Zevi’s last modern attempt to preach for one
single language inherent to its disciplinary character, even if one is able to mediate
among different tones and styles. Quite the opposite from what Zevi hoped for, it seemed
that architecture had found quasi-languages in which to express itself. This discussion
runs parallel to the infamous harsh debate stirred by the Torre Velasca (1958) by BBPR
and “la casa alle zattere” (house to the raft 1953-1958) and the “Bottega di Erasmo
(Erasmus atelier 1953-1956) by Ignazio Gardella through the pages of The Architectural
Review and Casabella Continuità and between Reyner Banham and Ernesto Nathan
Rogers.⁹ It is a salient example of the back-and-forth discussion on history and how it

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⁹ Banham accused Italian architects of provincialism and of having retreated to the past. He also accused them of
revivalism for their Torre Velasca project in Milan. Banham also referred to Gardella’s project “casa alle zattere” and
its neo-liberty, nonfunctional decoration that was not serving the purpose of a modern architecture. Ernesto Nathan
Rogers, Ernesto, (ed), “Continuità o crisi?,” in Casabella Continuità, no. 215, April/May 1957, pp. 3-6; Banham,
applies to built architecture, and its effects outside Italy. The same debate marks 1959 as a seminal year for Italian historicity, i.e., history’s contemporary relation with the past. In his polemical article “Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture,” published in *Architectural Review*, Banham accused the Italian architects of retreating to history precisely in their recovering elements from Medieval architecture.\(^{10}\) Zevi took part in the debate with the editorial “L’andropausa degli architetti moderni italiani” (The andropause of modern Italian architects), sharing some of Banham’s opinions. Precisely, he agreed that it is not possible to bridge the “aristocrat” with the “domestic”; when the two were married, the result had been the Brussels pavilion by BBPR, Giancarlo De Carlo, Gardella, Giuseppe Perugini, and Ludovico Quaroni, hailed as an example of the crisis in modern language, and a regression to a “premature andropause of these architects in their 30s.”\(^{11}\)

If dialects proliferate and if there is no unique language whatsoever, what could historians turn into, after having been translators, mediators, and interpreters?

Like their colleagues in the other arts, historians started reflecting on their discipline: history, historical methods, and historiography. Like comedians who joked around with other comedians’ jokes, novelists who loved to write on the art of writing novels, and artists who thought that the surface of a canvas and the colors in the painting were the argument of their painting – in the same way, historians and intellectuals started to reflect on their own discipline. Zevi was still modern when he tried to search for

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\(^{10}\) Banham, Reyner, “Neoliberty. The Italian retreat from Modern Architecture,” *ibid*.

conclusions, but he himself had to admit that his modern project of combining *storia* and chronicles had failed to produce a singular or unified historical language. But only through the reflection on history we can arrive to build a theory of history. Only the attempted integration leads to the passage from history to theory. Even more, in *Teoria e storia della storiografia* (*History its Theory and Practice*) Croce had claimed the impossibility of writing an universal history and one that could compete with the objective science, though as the title has it, he supported a unique version of theory of history. The historian had only one theory to build upon many subjective stories.

Instead, the attempted integration led to a proliferation not only of stories but of theories. The historian turned into a theorist by learning from history and overcoming it. Argan was an example, followed by Manfredo Tafuri, whose 1968 *Teorie e Storia dell’architettura* (*Theories and History of Architecture*)\(^\text{12}\) is an undisputed contemporary classic in the theoretical view of architectural history. Tafuri defined his own critical take as *progetto storico*, as a performative, and self-reflexive, questioning of the history of architecture. This became a theoretical view of history in architecture that defined the genre that became known as “the history and theory of architecture,” like a new creature stemming from Einaudi’s running ostrich.

At times historians, incapable of dealing with theory, methods, and meta-history, also turned into surgeons, and kept writing stories, preferring to dive into narrower and narrower stories, sometimes risking becoming “partial intellectuals.” But mainly historians, along with publishers, fiction writers, politicians, scientists, and architects, turned into chameleons borrowing from each other’s theories of anthropology, semiotics,

or psychology. Like the biblical Tower of Babel, the historical edifice remains an unfinished project, but unlike the biblical example, we can still hear and understand each other while we are telling stories.