



ENGLISH TEXTS



## TITLE OF THE ISSUE

### On the identities of Italian Architecture

## RESEARCH

### The search for an identity in Italian architecture. 1861-1961

*Giorgio Ciucci*

The contribution synthetically re-traces the search for an identity in Italian architecture beginning with the decade 1861-1871, the period of the Risorgimento and the formation of the Italian nation, a convergence of Piedmont under the House of Savoy, the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia dominated by the Austrians, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Papal State and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies of the Bourbons. By 1871 Rome was the capital of the new Kingdom of Italy. The search for an identity that would represent the entire nation was a dominant theme in the decades that followed, articulated in diverse geographic areas and a multiplicity of cultural references. For architecture it was a confrontation between neo-medievalism (above all in the north, but not only) that drew inspiration from the Romanic or the gothic, the neo-renaissance that re-proposed a continuity between the ancient and the modern, expressed in the capital in reference to the sixteenth century, and the neo-baroque that looked to the seventeenth century as the expression of the sole great language of tradition, the only *koinè* capable of officially representing the unified State. Following the First World War, Fascism moved between modernity as an expression of a supposed «revolution» and the imperial image pursued by Mussolini as an identity for all of Italy. The essay concludes with the reconstruction, post-1945, of a popular identity rooted in genuine and specific local traditions.

### A School for Design: The role of the Milan Polytechnic in the construction of post-unification Italy

*Ornella Selvafolta*

The essay «A School for Design: The role of the Milan Polytechnic in the construction of post-unification Italy», examines the birth, in the wake of the Casati Law on Public Education from 1859, of the two polytechnic schools in Milan and Turin. These institutions were created to correct and overcome the excessive abstraction of university studies. Regarding the Milanese school, opened in 1863 to educate civil and mechanical engineers and, in 1865, extended to architects, the text examines the methods, teachings and final objectives based on a programme of open adhesion to the needs of modernising Italy. The article reflects on the role of the school in relation to design culture and the professionalism of its students in a number of characteristic fields, for example territorial infrastructures, industrial facilities, construction and architecture, in reference to significant examples in post-unification Milan and Lombardy. In the field of architecture, in particular, of fundamental importance is the educational approach based on the strategies pursued by the

school's directors and the cultural ideas of Camillo Boito that gave rise to a sort of polytechnic structure where the studies of «design, decoration and figure», a knowledge of styles and history, intense exercises in the «art of composition» were associated with indispensable scientific knowledge and a marked interest in the technological dimension of buildings and the modern elements of construction.

### The History of Italian Architecture as a History of its Schools of Architecture

*Elvio Manganaro*

In «The History of Italian Architecture as a History of its Schools of Architecture», Elvio Manganaro examines the theme of architectural schools in Italy, with a particular focus on the faculties of Rome and Milan. The text begins with their two “founders”, Gustavo Giovannoni and Camillo Boito, the one opposed to the other, even temporally: Giovannoni with his model of the national school, intended to capture the foundational principle of the study of architecture in the moment of spatial construction; Boito with his idea of the school structured around the historical-linguistic declensions dominant in a specific geographic area. Giovannoni, through the notion of the architectural organism, can be traced all the way to Saverio Muratori; from Boito, passing through the relationship between tradition and language, a connection can be made to Edoardo Persico and Ernesto Nathan Rogers, and thus to the youthful “realist” vindications made by the young Aldo Rossi and Guido Canella. The essay concludes with an invitation to examine the histories of other Italian faculties: Venice, Turin, Florence, Naples and Palermo, from which to extrapolate original threads and reconstruct the contributions, resistances or deformations with regards to what was taking place in Rome and Milan.

### Monuments and Identity: The case of the cities of the Veneto

*Guido Zucconi*

The text «Monuments and Identity: The case of the cities of the Veneto», opens up towards the question of what role public interventions were expected to play, often as the buildings-symbols of a unified Italy tied to its new institutions. The general theme is here linked to the specific context of the Veneto region, annexed to the Kingdom of Italy only in 1866. Zucconi reveals how initially the linguistic references of identity found in the façades of public and religious buildings – as well as banks – were tied to local traditions, in particular the medieval era. In parallel with the return to the *genius loci*, there was also a «toponomastic revolution»: squares and streets were dedicated to figures from civilian life, in particular the

national Risorgimento, from King Victor Emmanuel II to Camillo Benso Cavour, from Giuseppe Garibaldi to Giuseppe Mazzini. These figures were also dedicated busts and monuments in public spaces, alongside those of Marco Polo, Ugo Foscolo or Giuseppe Verdi. The Prato delle Valle in Padua, a sort of outdoor Pantheon, and the monument to Daniele Manin in Venice, the fulcrum of the new axes between Rialto, St. Mark's Square and Santo Stefano, are two examples of the recapturing of a collective identity, simultaneously local and national.

## Rural Homes

### *Maria Teresa Feraboli*

«Rural Homes» by Maria Teresa Feraboli is an essay that, within the general framework of the transformation of the agrarian landscape between the late 1800s and the 1930s, captures both the social value of the term «workers of the fields» (salaried farmers) present in various manuals published between the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the passage from the farmstead (*casa colonica*) to the rational dwelling. Throughout these years the entire rural apparatus was reconsidered beginning with its technical aspects and layout, similar to what was taking place in the city. There was thus an abandonment of any vernacular temptation, intended as a false and superficial representation of the identity of rural architecture, in order to highlight the «rationality» of agricultural dwellings whose «naturally aesthetic form – Giuseppe Pagano wrote in the publication accompanying the 1936 exhibition *Architettura rurale italiana* – was initially suggested by the resolution of a technical or functional necessity». The renewal thus began with those forms and in response to new hygienic and functional necessities.

## War and Monuments Representations of Italian cultural heritage

### *Michela Rosso*

The essay «War and Monuments Representations of Italian cultural heritage», examines the theme of defending national memory during and after the two World Wars, with a brief premise related to post-Revolution France and England during the two most significant periods for the identity of its national historic heritage: the Victorian period up to the indications made in 1908 by the Royal Commission on Historic English Monuments and the years of the Second World War, beginning with the bombing of Coventry on 18 November 1940, followed by the drafting of a national catalogue of buildings of historical importance. In Italy, Ugo Ojetti published his *Monumenti italiani e la guerra* (back in 1917) in memory of damaged monuments elevated to evidence of the «Italian-ness» of the *terre irredente*. The essay then analyses the 1920s and 30s, arriving at the Second World War, when the protection of Italian architectural heritage against wartime damage became one of the military objectives raised by Allied troops as they moved from Sicily up through the entire Italian Peninsula: a heritage whose importance was considered not only national, but universal.

## Themes and Figures of the Milanese Apartment Block

### *Graziella Leyla Ciagà*

In its traversing of various themes and periods, the text by Graziella Leyla Ciagà examines the «Themes and Figures of the Milanese Apartment Block», highlighting the role of the Milanese bourgeoisie that, taking advantage of the contributions offered by architects, artists, intellectuals, presented itself as a dynamic and modern class. During the 1920s and 30s this bourgeoisie was the protagonist of the renewal of the urban image and the interpreter of a diverse conception of dwelling: no longer the *villino* (single family dwelling) but the condominium, in which the aggregation of flats in “overlapping villas” developed into a recurring solution, to the point of being interpreted by Giò Ponti as an authentic expression of the «Italian home». During the second post-war period the condominium remained a building model, though on the one hand it was combined with tertiary structures to form large architectural complexes and, on the other, tempered in its identity using façades comprised of materials held to be more colloquial with their context than those in stone utilised previously. After the 1970s, with Milano 2, a sort of «super condominium» and, later with Milano 3, a truly autonomous city, it was possible to observe the arrival of new financial and real estate groups proposing suburban living as an exclusive product for a new upper-class of consumers.

## A Country of Historic Centres: Urbanism and local identities during the 1950s and 60s

### *Filippo De Pieri*

The essay dedicated by Filippo De Pieri to «A Country of Historic Centres: Urbanism and local identities during the 1950s and 60s», looks at the general themes of the question of «historic centres» as it developed during the second post-war period. With an interesting notation: the expression «historic centre» begins to circulate only at the end of the 1950s, becoming more widespread during the successive decades. The expression induces a reflection on the inheritance and historical identity of the entire national network of cities and establishes, at the same time, a comparison between the central parts of cities and the increasingly more rapid metropolitan growth that swept across Italy during these years. The objective pursued by urban planners was the insertion of territorial protection within the field of its planning. The experience of Giovanni Astengo in Assisi and the drafting, in 1958, of a plan for a “historic centre” that aspired to becoming a lesson in method, such as the Charter of Gubbio, drawn up in conclusion to the conference *Salvaguardia e risanamento dei centri storico-artistici* (1960) and placing its hopes in plans of conservative restoration, are the significant, even if not unique moments along a path that would evolve and lead, during the 1970s, to a reconsideration of local identities and their role in Italy's economic and social development.



## Testing Identity

### *Aimaro Isola*

In «Testing Identity», Aimaro Isola begins with a reflection on the project for the Bottega di Erasmo in Turin, developed by Roberto Gabetti in 1953: a debut marked by the search for an identity of the vocation of the architect before a historic identity. A search that these two architects continued during the successive years, in each project,

though not towards a formally recognisable identity, but as part of an approach, as Isola writes in his text, driven «by the specificity of times, places, clients and technologies»: a metamorphosis of identity, for which «any construction is a reconstruction that follows a work of deconstruction, which is an act of recognition and naming, an identity of things». The drawings of Aimaro Isola are a visual comment to this reconstruction, which he pursued with a group of very young architects following Roberto Gabetti's death in 2000.

