



ENGLISH TEXTS



TITLE OF THE ISSUE

Marcello Rebecchini. Theory and Projects

DEBATE

Marcello Rebecchini and the *Rassegna*

Umberto De Martino

The author retraces the forty-six year history of the *Rassegna di Architettura e Urbanistica*, beginning with its foundation in 1965, within what was then the *Istituto di Architettura e Urbanistica* at the Faculty of Engineering in Rome. In this passionate narrative the fortunate destiny of the journal, its birth, development and progressive academic affirmation, are strictly linked to Marcello Rebecchini's career as a university professor and cultural figure. «A lengthy and brilliant advance in which reciprocal educational processes, from their beginnings to their full maturation, are strongly intertwined. To the point that recalling Marcello's contribution to the *Rassegna* is equivalent to retracing the very history of the journal». The result is an interesting cross section – supported by autobiographical notations – of a less familiar story within the university, of a singular cenacle of engineers-intellectuals catalysed around the extraordinary personalities of Giuseppe Nicolosi and Federico Gorio; a «school» of expertise and patience, of modesty and rigour, able to transmit to its members – above all Marcello Rebecchini – not only a method of work and research, but an authentic lifestyle.

In Stendhal's Footsteps

Carlo Melograni

This text gathers together a selection of personal notations made by the author on the last book written by Marcello Rebecchini, *Stendhal e l'architettura*, «admittedly born from an overlapping of two passions, one for the great French author and one for the subject to which the author dedicated a life's work». Rebecchini's admiration for Stendhal – Melograni claims – reflects an affinity of ideas, a common sensation, constantly attentive toward reconciling passion and rationality, emotions and the rigour of intellect, the romantic aspiration toward beauty with the order and precision of the mathematical sciences. On the other hand, this irreducible dualism also represents the specific character of the art of design, in other words, architecture, the discipline to which Rebecchini dedicated commitment, competence and – precisely – passion, over the course of more than fifty years of academic and professional activity. This is thus the source of his curiosity in moving «in Stendhal's footsteps» to investigate «what his beloved author thought of architecture», a theme to date «yet to be examined despite the vast number of texts on the life and work of Henri Beyle».

An Integral Humanism

Franco Purini

The author suggests a number of interesting stimuli for a re-reading of the work of Marcello Rebecchini. The text

frames his conceptual position and figurative products along the horizon of his principal theoretical, practical and poetic references, which he himself identified in the figures of Giuseppe Nicolosi, Giancarlo De Carlo and Federico Gorio. The intimate reinterpretation of history, the «rediscovery» of the expressive and narrative qualities of building materials and solutions, typical of Nicolosi, are thus added on the one hand to the «civil» nature of De Carlo's research, focused on reaffirming the social aims of an architecture «able to construct a collective sense of appurtenance»; on the other hand the ethical pragmatism of Gorio, his «critical realism considered a primary condition of the design process». In the synthesis operated by Rebecchini, Purini observes a sort of ideal and intentional «formal anonymity», a «passive narrative» that, through «an admirable severity of tectonic patterns, of the conception of spaces and the treatment of surfaces», consistently expresses a sincerity of intentions, clarity of means and coherence of language.

The Lesson of Marcello Rebecchini

Maria Argenti

The teaching of architecture inherently possesses something impossible to measure: an ethic, an interpretation of the present and of history. Marcello Rebecchini sought «the correct distance» between himself and the object of his lessons. He moved almost with circumspection, in order not to avoid being overrun by momentary passions, aware of transmitting not only the rudiments of an art but also a vision of life. He employed only a few images to seek its essence and fix it in the mind of his students, while warning against the risk of a purely positivist or merely idealistic approach.

He considered poor teachers those who exchanged «intuition for fantasy, personality for egocentrism, individuality for a disinterest in social issues, [...] logic for aridness, objectivity for anonymity». Creative freedom – he believed – brought out its best when subjected to limitations. For this reason, he desired that his students confront the design of high-density dwellings: the family home, the economic dwelling, designed in each space, in each environment, according to the possible, diverse, best ways of inhabiting it.

His lesson was on the difficult search for quality as something shared, as a condition of belonging. His legacy is a means for proudly entering the modern or postmodern world, as an ethical exercise.

A Testimonial

Lucio Passarelli

The author presents an autobiographical remembrance of Marcello Rebecchini, tied essentially to an analogous common professional condition, that of «being engineers in a world of architects, or better yet of being engineers who

work in reality as architects». Passarelli indulges in a brief though engaging retelling of the social and cultural reality of Rome during the 1940s and 50s. A period – for both, though at different times – of university education and the beginnings of a career, as part of «families» of architects and engineers, founded on concreteness, a care for the aspects of building and a «strong ethical connotation linked to the profession of design».

A Brother's Considerations

Giuseppe Rebecchini

The author proposes a few reflections on the figure of Marcello Rebecchini, beginning with his personality, the hallmarks of his character – seriousness, commitment and moral rigour – that inspired every activity, from practice to theory, from teaching to research, in the academic and professional world. His sober and understated way were fully confirmed in profoundly considered convictions, in design proposals and solutions produced only after lengthy deliberations, always attentive to the union between formal research and functional, technical and economic aspects. His writings and projects are the result of a stringent and constant rational control, a logical coherence that offers a

measure of the ethical value he attributed to his profession, the weight and the responsibility of its institutional role in society.

Working in the Studio Rebecchini

Antonello Di Stefano

The author recounts Marcello Rebecchini's didactic and professional activity from the unusual point of view of a pupil who – after 1997 – became his closest collaborator in the office in Via dei Banchi Nuovi. What emerges are the human, as well as the intellectual and methodological qualities, of a professional and a professor. For Marcello Rebecchini «design and teaching» constituted two aspects of the same field of investigation, of a unique cultural progression explored «with constant tenacity», discipline and competence, concluding with the difficult though unavoidable verifications made on the building site. Di Stefano offers a particular examination of the office's later commissions: two concerning the delicate interventions to rehabilitate and renovate buildings designed by Marcello Piacentini in central Rome; the other regarding the project – never completed – for a new nucleus for the University of L'Aquila.

RESEARCH

Marcello Rebecchini: Modernity as a Normal Science

Alessandra Muntoni

The author captures the substance and significance of Marcello Rebecchini's work as part of an operative approach intent on passing the new, revolutionary paradigms imposed by modernity as a «normal science». The essay thus offers an ample and acute critical analysis of his work, identifying its principal thematic nodes «in a few easy to identify coordinates that regard the load bearing structure, the plan, the insertion of the building within a site. The criteria linking these themes – Alessandra Muntoni emphasises – lie in the clear exhibition of the elements of construction, in the precision of relations and the characteristics of circulation, in the capacity for architecture to settle within its context in order to avoid entering into conflict with urban typology and morphology». Rebecchini renounced the ostentatious affirmation of a personal style, preferring instead to adopt a «daemonic and technically proven vocabulary», extraneous to any arbitrary, useless and wasteful formal, functional or technological complication; an attitude rooted in the extraordinary mastery displayed by Nicolosi or Gorio, in that «school» of rigour, modesty and coherence that constitutes the great tradition of the Faculty of Engineering in Rome.

Marcello Rebecchini and the Heart of Rome. Architectural Renovation and Urban Rehabilitation in Via Giulia

Sergio Rotondi

This essay meticulously reconstructs the complex process

behind the design and realisation of one of the most singular and problematic projects of Marcello Rebecchini's entire career. Complicated – in general – by the theoretical and technical implications associated with the renovation of an existing building and – specifically – by the delicate insertion within a context of particular historical and architectural value: one of the most central areas of Rome, dense with traces, memories, and meanings. The commission, which stretched over a decade beginning in 1990, included works of restoration and partial reconstruction, aimed at re-stitching a lot – situated between Via Giulia and Via dei Banchi Vecchi – subjected to significant demolitions at the end of the 1930s: «an extensive, corrupted urban lesion, inflicted during the era of Fascism and never healed». In the interpretation of the author, for Rebecchini this project assumed the sense of a verification of his personal positions on the discipline, founded principally on the concept of «typological restoral», through which «the problem of restoration managed to escape the weaknesses of contemporary design».

Conceiving, Designing, Building Architecture. The Origins: Variations on the «Type» of the *Palazzina*

Fabio Cutroni

The author investigates the cultural matrixes of Marcello Rebecchini's ideas with the intention of retracing the more intimate reasons behind his theoretical and design research. A research that existed in a constant state of tension between the idealism of Benedetto Croce – «filtered through the teachings of Giuseppe Nicolosi» – and the positivist dimension linked on the one hand to his education as an engineer and, on the other hand, to his

personal explorations of post-Crocian aesthetics. «Through his continual personal interrogation on the sense and nature of making architecture, [...] Rebecchini fought strongly for an unavoidable *utilitas* of architecture, its specific *practical raison d'être* that imposes "a respect for determinant needs extraneous to the pure world of forms, [...] connected with technology and human life"». This serves as the framework of reference within which to coherently inscribe the palazzine (apartment blocks) constructed during the early 1960s within the Poggio Ameno compound in Rome. It offers evidence of a «depth of thinking reflected in the total awareness of a few, well considered compositional choices, immune to the persuasive fascination of trends and founded instead on a severe and consistent rigour».

University Projects and Scientific Research

Ruggero Lenci

The author analyses the vast professional activities and research undertaken by Marcello Rebecchini in relation to the theme of the University and Scientific Research. The focused reading of a lengthy series of projects, many built, identifies «the sign of Marcello» in the coherence and rigour of composition identifiable «as much at the scale of the site plan as at the resolution of the architectural details». From the initial projects for the development plans for the CNR Laboratories to the *Mostra d'Oltremare* in Naples (1962) or the Centocelle business park in Rome (1966); to his first built work, even if partial, for the research area in Padua (1969); from interventions at the territorial scale for the new University of Cagliari or the development of Rome's Second «Tor Vergata» University (1986), to projects forced to confront consolidated urban fabrics such as the enlargement of the CNR Headquarters in Rome (1986) or

the multifunctional centre for the University of Bologna (1986-90); to his final work, the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Messina (1990), the author reconstructs the steps of a «sedimentation of experiences» that testify to the search «for a possible contemporary *concinntas*».

«...Hopefully I was successful». The Reasons Behind the Design of the Faculty of Engineering in Messina

Maura Percoco

This text takes its cues from the talk given by Marcello Rebecchini in occasion of the inauguration of the Faculty of Engineering in Messina. It investigates the reasons, ideas and expectations that nurtured this project, the last to be realised, and the comprehensive expression of a «lifetime's» passionate typological research into the design of spaces for the university.

The proposed key to this text identifies the desire to institute a shared sense of dwelling as the strong idea that supports the university complex in Messina and numerous other precedents in which the iteration of the typological model is recognised as a lesson in method.

From place to place, the distinct blocks for teaching and research, the private and common spaces, the interiors and exteriors, are articulated and integrated in a dynamic and communicative sequence of widenings and squares, patios and gardens, ramps, bridges and streets on various levels that reproduce the typical elements of an urban organism. The design of the void is used to realise the social potential to which the architect aspired. Rebecchini delegated the vitality of open space, conceived for community living, with ensuring the validity of the project, his personal success in achieving an objective assumed as a service to a scientific community.