

The background of the cover is composed of large, expressive brushstrokes in various shades of teal and blue. A dark, textured square is positioned in the center-right area, overlapping the brushstrokes.

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

eug

The background is an abstract composition of swirling, layered brushstrokes in various shades of teal and dark blue. A prominent, dark, textured square, resembling a piece of fabric or a woven material, is positioned in the center-right area, overlapping the swirling patterns.

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

TOMO I

eug

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del origen de la modernidad
a la era digital

TOMO I

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(EDS.)

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

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For a Refoundation of Modern Architecture: *Metron* in the First Years (1945- 1948)

Por una refundación de la arquitectura moderna: *Metron* en los primeros años (1945-1948)

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Abstract

La inmediata posguerra italiana fue una época en la que todas las energías intelectuales se volcaron hacia el esfuerzo de la reconstrucción. *Metron*, la primera revista internacional de arquitectura fundada en 1945, presenta una variedad de contenidos históricos influidos por distintas contaminaciones culturales y abiertos a múltiples lecturas. Aunque numerosos investigadores la utilizan como fuente documental, *Metron* ha sido poco investigada en su papel de poliédrica herramienta ideológica. El presente artículo se centra en algunos de los temas de debate (urbanismo, vivienda y prefabricación, tendencia orgánica de la arquitectura) que configuraron de forma significativa el clima cultural de la revista en los años comprendidos entre 1945 y 1948, comparando las diferentes posturas de los autores y explorando la forma en la que la arquitectura moderna fue transmitida e influyó en su recepción al preparar el terreno para la crítica operativa.

The immediate postwar period in Italy was a time when all the intellectual energies were involved in the rebuilding effort. *Metron*, the first international architectural journal founded in 1945, represents a variety of historic contents susceptible to different cultural influences and open to multiple readings. Despite the numerous researchers that have used it as a documentary source, *Metron's* role as a multifaceted ideological tool has been investigated little. This paper focuses on the main subjects for debate (urbanism, housing and prefabrication, organic trend of architecture) that significantly shaped the cultural climate of the journal in the years between 1945 and 1948, comparing different positions of the authors and exploring the way to convey modern architecture and to influence its reception preparing the ground for operative criticism.

Keywords

Italia de la posguerra, revistas, reconstrucción, debate arquitectónico, arquitectura moderna

Postwar Italy, journals, reconstruction, architectural debate, modern architecture

The antecedent: Rome in turmoil

"Il giorno successivo al mio arrivo a Roma, ancora vestito con gli stracci superstiti delle mie peripezie ho contattato l'unico amico architetto che conoscessi in città: si trattava di Vittorio Morpurgo"¹. These words by Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi,² excerpted from his memoirs, best give an idea of the unexpected circumstances in which even important cultural initiatives could arise in post-war Italy. Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, who previously had taught at the Turin Polytechnic, remembered his former pupil and gave Gentili Tedeschi the opportunity to work as a voluntary teaching assistant at the University of Rome introducing him to the cultural environment of the city. One evening, at a dinner, the architect from Turin got to know that the Sicilian publisher Sandron wanted to start an architectural journal. Gentili Tedeschi seized the chance and, shortly afterwards, contacted Luigi Piccinato (1899-1983) who already was an influential figure in the field of urban planning; the latter in truth had already gathered some Roman colleagues for a similar initiative, but their intent was still embryonic: "Qualcuno aveva proposto di pubblicare la rivista" — wrote Gentili Tedeschi— "altri avevano risposto che si trattava di un'ottima iniziativa, e le cose stavano a questo punto. Io portavo loro un editore, cosa assai più concreta"³.

After a few meetings arranged with Bruno Zevi (1918-2000), who had come back from his American exile,⁴ and with the small group of his professional office that included

¹ [The day after I arrived in Rome, still dressed in the rags surviving my vicissitudes, I met the only architect I knew in the city: he was Vittorio Morpurgo] Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi, *Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi. Testimonianze*, ed. by Leonina Roversi Denti, Gianni Calzà (Florence: Altralinea Edizioni, 2018), 25.

² Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi (1916-2005) graduated from the Polytechnic of Turin. Because of the promulgation of racial laws he secretly worked in Milan for Gio Ponti and his magazine *Stile*. During the WWII he took part in the Resistance, in 1944 he was captured in France but managed to escape.

³ [Someone had proposed publishing the magazine, others had replied that it was a very good initiative, this was the way things were. I would bring them into contact with a publisher and this was much more concrete] Tedeschi, *Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi...*, 25.

⁴ In 1944, Bruno Zevi had already returned to Italy. In the same year he co-founded his own practice and promoted the School of Organic Architecture. Pierluigi Nervi (Structural design), Luigi Piccinato (Urban Planning), Mario Ridolfi (Technology and Architectural practice), Aldo Della Rocca (Building Economics) were called to give training courses for this organisation, created as an alternative to the University. See Roberto Dulio, *Introduzione a Bruno Zevi* (Bari: Laterza, 2008), 54. When *Metron* was founded, Zevi was working for the United States Information Service, for this reason, albeit his active role, he officially joined the editorial staff in 1946 (see issue 12) after leaving USIS and having declined the invitation of the publisher Mazzocchi to work for *Casabella*. See Dulio, *Introduzione...*, 64-65.

Enrico Tedeschi,⁵ Cino Calcaprina,⁶ Silvio Radiconcini⁷ —all architects under forty years old apart from the well known urbanist— the idea began to take shape.⁸ Luigi Piccinato, due to his high reputation,⁹ and Mario Ridolfi (1904-1984), who already seemed to be “l'artista più vicino alla tendenza organica”¹⁰, were entrusted as editors-in-chief respectively for the sectors of Urbanism and Architecture. The Roman-centric management of the periodical was evident and became substantial in the course of time: as Gentili Tedeschi recalled, the logistical organisation at all stages from the research of materials to the layout were largely carried out by the younger members who gravitated around Zevi.¹¹

Luigi Figini (1903-1984), Piero Bottoni (1903-1973), Enrico Peressutti (1908-1976) were added to the editorial board after the connections with Northern Italy had been re-established

⁵ Enrico Tedeschi (1910-1978) graduated in Rome. During the Thirties he took part in several important competitions, collaborating with Saverio Muratori and Franco Petrucci. He was also an up-to-date architect on the foreign scene and contributed to the journal *Architettura* with several articles published from 1935 to 1939. See Fabio Marino, “Enrico Tedeschi 1910-1971 dall'Italia all'Argentina” (MA Thesis, Politecnico di Milano, 2012- 2013), 64-76.

⁶ Cino Calcaprina (1911-1977) was born in Genoa and studied in Rome. Since he was young he also distinguished himself in editorial activities contributing to the local journal *Corriere Mercantile* and to the art magazine *Cabotaggio*, he worked as an architect alongside his father in the Ligurian town. After the WWII he moved to Rome. See Gaia Piccarolo, “Cino Calcaprina e il contributo italiano all'Institutio de Arquitectura y Urbanismo di Tucumán”, in *Italia-Argentina andata e ritorno. Migrazioni professionali, relazioni architettoniche, trasformazioni urbane*, ed. by Giovanna D'Amia (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2015), 260-261.

⁷ Silvio Radiconcini (1915-1985) came from an aristocratic family. He studied at the University of Rome and although he never graduated, he flanked his colleague Bruno Zevi in the professional activity as well as in editorial tasks. On this regard see Cesare Cova, “Bruno Zevi e Silvio Radiconcini”, in *Bruno Zevi e la didattica dell'architettura*, ed. by Piero Ostilio Rossi (Rome: Quodlibet, 2019), 107-115.

⁸ The first issue of the journal came out in August 1945. Saverio Muratori was supposed to be on the editorial board but, due to incompatibility with Zevi, had to leave the group after the first meeting. See the interview by Fabrizio Brunetti to Bruno Zevi: “Questionario”, n.d., Folder 16, Archivio Zevi, Rome. Tedeschi, *Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi...*, 26.

⁹ One of the first graduates of the Roman School, Luigi Piccinato had studied under Marcello Piacentini and Gustavo Giovannoni. In 1926, he founded the Gruppo di Urbanisti Romani with Gaetano Minnucci and from the late 1920s he realised numerous urban planning projects (including the GUR proposal for Rome in 1929, the Sabaudia plan, 1933-1934). Piccinato was the only one in the editorial staff with teaching experience. He had also attended further education courses at the Technische Universität of Munich; Zevi was attracted by his cosmopolitan culture. Cesare De Sessa, *Luigi Piccinato architetto* (Bari: Dedalo 1985), 21; Bruno Zevi, “Luigi Piccinato Uomo”, in Franco Malusardi, *Luigi Piccinato e l'Urbanistica moderna* (Rome: Officina Roma, 1993), 531.

¹⁰ [the artist closest to the organic trend] Brunetti, “Questionario”, n.d., Folder 16. Mario Ridolfi's organic phase had not yet manifested between 1944 and 1945. Probably, Zevi had already glimpsed in his architecture formal characteristics that went beyond the canons of rationalism and that had found a genuine expression in the sinuous, Mendelssohnian Piazza Bologna postal building designed in partnership with Wolfgang Frankl (1934). Moreover, Paolo Portoghesi in his recent monograph on the author recalls how, since the late 1930s, Ridolfi, together with Saverio Muratori and Francesco Fariello, had been a keen observer of the Swedish empirical approach through the journal *Bygghästen*, see Paolo Portoghesi, *Mario Ridolfi architetto 1904-1984* (Rome: Accademia nazionale di San Luca, 2021), 44.

¹¹ Tedeschi, *Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi...*, 26.

and Gentili Tedeschi could reach Milan. The ambition of the journal was to represent the whole Italian Modern Movement by converging North and South Italy into a single cultural perspective that also included the veterans of rationalism.¹² The title *Metron* was in fact chosen by the editors (in disagreement with Zevi who would have preferred the more personal *Architettura organica* or *Spazio*) to reinforce this purpose.¹³

Journal among journals, refounding an architectural culture

Some periodicals record a certain taste, while some others are the litmus test of a cultural atmosphere. Despite the numerous researchers who used it as a documentary source, such as Manfredo Tafuri for his *Storia dell'architettura Italiana*,¹⁴ *Metron*'s role as a multifaceted ideological tool to convey architecture has been investigated little.¹⁵

Metron was created in solitude. As the editorial board recalled in the article "La nostra cultura e *Metron*" just over a year into the periodical's life: "Fu la prima pubblicazione di architettura e urbanistica ad uscire in Italia. E si presentò come organo di rinnovamento basato sulla cultura cioè a dire su precisi criteri di pianificazione e su seri metodi di studi tecnici"¹⁶.

What was its position with respect to the publishing market? The aforementioned article marked the general disorder and instability of the editorial products in the critical years between 1945 and 1947. In fact, *Casabella-Costruzioni* had been interrupted because of the death of Giuseppe Pagano and had made a fleeting reappearance for just a few issues,¹⁷ *Urbanistica* was still at a standstill, Marco Zanuso had reactivated *Domus*, giving continuity to the content regarding houses, whereas *Stile* founded by Gio Ponti, which between 1942 and 1943 had changed its physiognomy shifting its editorial interests towards the politics of concrete gestures, had closed its doors for good. Besides these classic journals, the more avowedly professional ones had also disappeared, such as *Rassegna di Architettura* (already in 1940), *L'architettura italiana* (1943), and *Architettura* (1943). The latter, inextricably linked to the activities of the National Fascist Union of Architects and to Marcello Picentini (a figure who had contributed more than others to shaping the image of Italian cities), was too compromised to be restarted. Other journals arose on the wave of post-war enthusiasm

¹² Tedeschi, *Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi*,... 26.

¹³ Brunetti, "Questionario", n.d., Folder 16.

¹⁴ Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944-1985* (Turin: Einaudi 2002).

¹⁵ For the editorial vicissitudes of *Metron* see Maristella Casciato, "Gli esordi della rivista *Metron*: eventi e protagonisti", *Rassegna di Architettura e Urbanistica*, 39, n.º 117 (2005), 45-55 and Dulio, *Introduzione*..., 59-66. Regarding the role of the Journal in the postwar architectural debate see Fabrizio Brunetti, *L'architettura in Italia negli anni della ricostruzione* (Florence: Alinea, 1986) and Carlo Olmo, *Urbanistica e società civile. Esperienza e conoscenza 1945-1960* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992) where *Metron* is quoted in several pages.

¹⁶ [It was the first publication on architecture and town planning to come out in Italy. And it was presented as an organ of renewal based on culture, that is to say, on precise planning criteria and serious methods of technical studies] "La nostra cultura e *Metron*", *Metron*, n.º 13 (1947): 7.

¹⁷ *Costruzioni-Casabella*, n.º 193 (1946); *Costruzioni-Casabella*, n.º 194, (1946); *Costruzioni-Casabella*, n.º (195-198).

and had sold out in a few months, such as *Il Politecnico* by Elio Vittorini, the utopian *A - Cultura della vita*, directed by Lina Bo, Carlo Pagani, and Bruno Zevi himself and conceived as a rotogravure newspaper open to new and sometimes unprejudiced contents (from prefabrication to the birth's inquiry) or *La Nuova Città*, founded by Giovanni Michelucci with the ambition of building a point of reference for modern architects.¹⁸



Figure 1. *Metron*, covers 1945-1954. Photo by Guia Baratelli.

In this panorama, *Metron* aimed to co-ordinate dispersed intellectual energies outlining a fourth way among classic journals, more specific trade journals, and new contemporary periodicals. The sober and almost puritanical look of its monochrome cover in a small format (replaced by a striped pattern and selected images in the second series) made it an easily accessible journal. As Zevi stated in an interview, despite the low costs, the low circulation, and the initial absence of editorials, *Metron* addressed the world.¹⁹

Each issue was accompanied by summaries in English and French languages and had a targeted circulation in several countries. The topics covered a wide range of subjects: politics, legislation, urban planning, housing, prefabrication, conferences, professional and associative life, international meetings, CIAM proceedings, to which architectural education, criticism, stories, and reports were added in the following years. Each topic provided the opportunity to implicitly define a term of debate (which could be continued for several issues), showing different—even discordant—points of view.

Despite the lack of an editorial (which only appeared starting with the 12th issue) *Metron* involved and provoked the reactions of the readers who could take part in the journal with

¹⁸ About a general overview of the Italian architectural journals in the Forties, see Marco Mulazzani, "Le riviste di architettura. Costruire con le parole", *Storia dell'architettura italiana. Il secondo Novecento*, Francesco Dal Co, ed. (Milan: Electa, 1997), 430-434, Michela Maguolo, "Domus e le altre. Le riviste di architettura fra guerra e dopoguerra. Intorno a una lettera di Gio Ponti", *La Rivista di Engramma*, n.º 175 (2020): 259-286, doi: <https://doi.org/10.25432/1826-901X/2020.175.0008>.

¹⁹ *Metron* never exceeded more than 5000-6000 copies, see Brunetti, "Questionario", n.d., Folder 16.

opinions, proposals, and letters addressed to the editorial office. Articles were often introduced with abstracts and the "Cassaforma" (the only regular column) featured almost all the issues; this special section, probably conceived by Radiconcini, was open to news and polemics. "Col tempo" —Zevi explained— "la polemica prevalse, ed è logico che la finestra dello Zuccari ne costituisse il simbolo"²⁰.

Urbanism between utopia and reconstruction

The first issue opens the series with an introduction by Lewis Mumford, tracing the theoretical foundations of community urbanism back to Ebenezer Howard's seminal book *The Garden City of Tomorrow and to political*, philosophical, and literary contributions such as Thomas Spence and Pëtr Alekseevič Kropotkin.²¹

This kind of family tree²² takes us away from the centrality of squares, streets, urban blocks, and all those physical elements on which the European theories between the Two World Wars were based, oscillating between the German matrix of the *Städtebau* and the functional metropolis by Ludwig Hilbersheimer. Mumford's words, strategically placed at the beginning, probably sounded like an encouragement to change *language branch* by looking to social democratic countries and urban design-practice based on ethical and economic values.

Communities, neighborhood units, and human urbanism became privileged themes and objects of discussion, contributing to defining a shared semantic area until 1948 when they fell into the editorial lines of the renewed INU periodical *Urbanistica* and of the journal *Comunità* founded in Rome by Adriano Olivetti.²³

A semantic field to which different nuances corresponded: for example, Zevi directly reported data, statistics, and diagrams from the book *Rebuilding Britain*,²⁴ pursuing a technical and abstract approach also shared by the socio-psychologist Dennis Chapman who focused his contribution on social inquiries.²⁵ Instead, other authors treated the matters of urbanism in a more didactic and communicative way: in the sixth issue, Roberto Calandra, who like his friend Zevi had studied in the United States,²⁶ explained to the readers what the

²⁰ [Over the years, polemics prevailed and it is logical that Zuccari's window became the symbol of this attitude] Brunetti, "Questionario", n.d., Folder 16.

²¹ Lewis Mumford, "Una introduzione americana al 'garden city of tomorrow'", *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 2-12.

²² Olmo, *Urbanistica e società civile*,... 85.

²³ Olmo, *Urbanistica e società civile*,... 85-96. The author broadens the debate about urban models marking the interactions of *Metron* with other journals.

²⁴ Ernest Darwin Simon, *Rebuilding Britain: a twenty year plan*. (1879-1960) (London: V. Gollancz, 1945), mentioned in Bruno Zevi, "La ricostruzione in Inghilterra", *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 33-40.

²⁵ Dennis Chapman, "Tecnica dell'indagine sociale per la raccolta di informazioni", *Metron*, n.º 2 (1945): 30-43.

²⁶ Roberto Calandra (1915-2015), son of Enrico Calandra (the first professor of "Caratteri degli edifici" at the Sapienza University), graduated in Rome and received his Master of Science in Architecture from Columbia University in 1939. In the United States, he had the opportunity to study the modernist works of Wright, Shindler and Neutra. After the war, he set up his own studio in Messina, where he carried out projects of architecture and urban planning.

neighborhood unit is, why it came into being, and why it did not work on American soil.²⁷ Domenico Andriello, again in 1948, focused on the term ‘precinct’, even recalling its etymological origin.²⁸

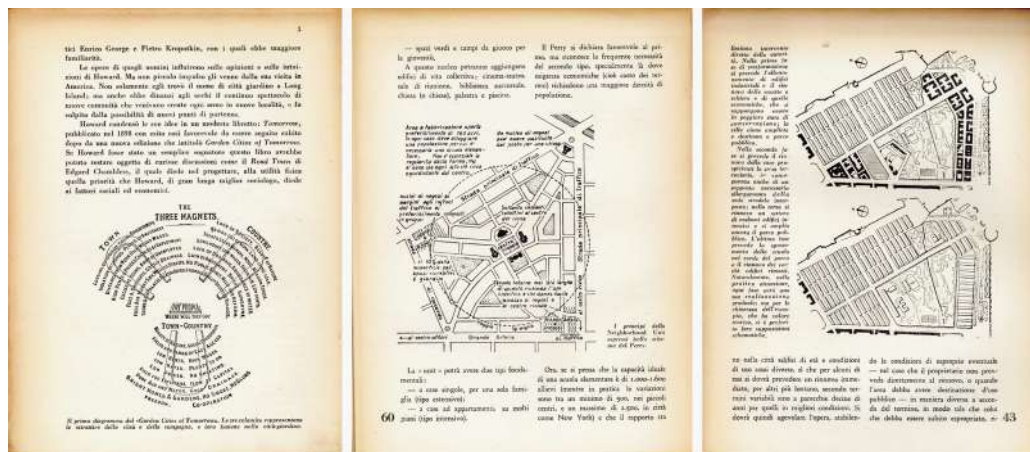


Figure 2. First concept of the *Garden City of tomorrow* by Ebenezer Howard, source: *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 3; Model of neighborhood unit from Clarence Arthur Perry, source: *Metron*, n.º 6 (1946): 60; Proposal of building replacements in a Roman peripheral area, Enrico Tedeschi, source: *Metron*, n.º 6 (1946): 43.

To legitimate the relevance of these models, the editors also added the authoritative opinions of leading European CIAM masters: with his contribution, Josep Lluís Sert brought the attention back to the problem of walking distances and the human scale of urban interventions,²⁹ Walter Gropius (formerly Zevi’s professor at Harvard) and Martin Wagner (the famous *Stadtbaurat* in the 1920s Berlin), now like Sert naturalised as Americans, attacked the *City Beautiful* model pointing out programmatic lines for the urban renewal,³⁰ Alvar Aalto decreed the end of the *machine à habiter* supporting the organic growth of domestic space.³¹

Hidden behind this attempt of subversion, there was a systematic updating operation carried out independently from the journal. Sert’s article, as well as other contributions related to foreign important figures, such as the programme of the Swiss cultural initiative *Civitas* by Alfred Roth and Wright’s lecture on democracy, find correspondences and partial overlap

²⁷ Roberto Calandra, “La teoria americana della neighborhood unit”, *Metron*, n.º 6 (1946): 58-68.

²⁸ Domenico Andriello, “Il ‘precinct’, unità urbanistica”, *Metron*, n.º 28 (1948): 5-8.

²⁹ Josep Lluís Sert, “La scala umana nell’urbanistica”, *Metron*, n.º 8 (1946): 5-19.

³⁰ Walter Gropius and Martin Wagner, “Un programma per la ricostruzione delle città”, *Metron*, n.º 12 (1946): 57-73.

³¹ Alvar Aalto, “Fine della Machine à habiter”, *Metron*, n.º 7 (1946): 2-5.

the short extracts published in *Bollettini Americani*³² of which Zevi had been appointed as an editor in chief.

But not everyone seemed to strictly adhere to the mainstream. As Carlo Olmo remarked in a significant essay on post-World War II urban planning debate in Italy, between 1945 and 1946 *Metron* offered "un ventaglio di soluzioni senza indicare esplicitamente una scelta"³³ and thus "l'assenso ad un dogma"³⁴ —even to the community dogma— a reason which justifies, for example, the publication of an article written by Le Corbusier on Saint Dié.³⁵ The editor in chief Luigi Piccinato, who had received a practical and never completely rejected training in Urbanism by Marcello Piacentini, without throwing traditional rules overboard,³⁶ brought the matter of urban density back to the foreground by comparing the urban town planning indexes of Italian regulations with Gropius' parameters verifying on a typical lot advantages and disadvantages of both closed and open urban blocks by means of drawings to test the efficiency of standards.³⁷ Using similar communicative tools, Enrico Tedeschi intended to demonstrate how to renovate the roman peripheral areas ruled by the 1931 plan with building replacements and proposing a sort of new Pagano-style Green Milan to be realised in different steps.³⁸



Figure 3. Le Corbusier, Saint Dié plan, source: *Metron*, n.º 6 (1946): 52; Alvar Aalto, Plan of Rovaniemi (aerial views and details of the cellular units), source: *Metron*, n.º 7 (1946): 17.

³² The article by Alfred Roth, "Civitas", *Metron*, n.º 10 (1946), 58-59 was summarised by Zevi in *Primo bollettino sulla ricostruzione dei problemi urbanistici degli Stati Uniti*, 7; the famous public lecture given by Wright for the New Herald Tribune Forum, "Frank Lloyd Wright definisce la democrazia", *Metron*, n.º 13 (1947), 2-6 echoes the title "Quando la democrazia costruisce", *Primo bollettino*, 7. For other references see Dulio, *Introduzione...*, 44 and Paolo Scrivano, *Building Transatlantic: Architectural dialogues with postwar America* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 83-94.

³³ [a range of solutions without explicitly indicating a choice]. Olmo, *Urbanistica e società civile*,... 93.

³⁴ [assenting to a dogma] Olmo, *Urbanistica e società civile*,... 93.

³⁵ Le Corbusier, "Piano Urbanistico di Saint Dié", *Metron*, n.º 6 (1946): 45-52.

³⁶ On Piccinato's controversial position, see Guido Zucconi, "Una figura di architetto urbanistica tra continuità e discontinuità", in *Luigi Piccinato (1899-1983)*, ed. by Gemma Belli and Andrea Maglio (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2015), 25-36.

³⁷ Luigi Piccinato, "In tema di economia urbanistica", *Metron*, n.º 2 (1945): 2-19.

³⁸ Enrico Tedeschi, "Evoluzione del piano regolatore", *Metron*, n.º 6 (1946): 35-44.

Alongside a few Italian projects worthy of mention (such as the Montecassino project,³⁹ proposals for the reconstruction of Florence,⁴⁰ the Piedmont Regional Plan⁴¹) the journal also reported on major construction and reconstruction projects abroad. The Warsaw and Budapest plans⁴² were included in *Metron* to document unitary examples of reconstruction, Sven Markelius's star-shaped pattern for Stockholm⁴³ was a stimulating variation on the theme of the neighborhood unit and its psychological assumptions, whereas the article on Rovaniemi plan (preceded by Alvar Aalto's essay and an investigation on urbanism in Finland)⁴⁴ introduced readers to the potential of organic growth through cellular structures adaptable to different topographical conditions. Focusing on methodological approaches alone, Piccinato's choice of case studies, justified in the introductory abstracts, disregarded the ideological-political filter and even extended to realities far removed from open economies.

Housing, technology, prefabrication

The interest of Italian architects in prefabrication was certainly not new. *Casabella*, in particular, had been a witness to a strand of experimental research on housing since the 1930s, more in general, there were several contributions in the press dealing with technological and domestic aspects.⁴⁵ But this subject had been largely confined to a theoretical field, whose results had been displayed as prototypes in public exhibitions—in this sense, the 1936 Milan Triennale had been emblematic.

It was necessary for *Metron* to pick up the thread again, to get to the heart of the process of building architecture, intended first and foremost as a metaphor for the social rebirth of the country. Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi (one of the most active editors in the first two series of the journal) had grasped that the reluctance towards new constructive methods was due to deep-seated cultural motivations. As a consequence, he took stock of the situation, broadening the matter into a series of three linked contributions.⁴⁶

³⁹ Enrico Tedeschi, "Un progetto per Montecassino", *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 44-53.

⁴⁰ Luigi Piccinato, "Ricostruire Firenze", *Metron*, n.º 16 (1947): 8-31.

⁴¹ *Metron*, n.º 14 (1947), monographic issue edited by Giovanni Astengo.

⁴² See Piotr Bieganski, "Costruire Varsavia", *Metron*, n.º 12 (1946): 21-56 and Pál Granasztói, "Budapest", *Metron*, n.º 25 (1948): 16-23.

⁴³ Björn Bardel, "Urbanistica a Stoccolma", *Metron*, n.º 22 (1947): 2-25.

⁴⁴ Aalto, "Fine della 'Machine à habiter'", 2-5; Luigi Piccinato, "La Finlandia ricostruisce", *Metron*, n.º 7 (1946): 11-14; Luigi Piccinato, "Rovaniemi", *Metron*, n.º 7 (1946): 15-21.

⁴⁵ Among the most meaningful contributions: Giuseppe Pagano, "I materiali della nuova architettura", *La Casa bella*, n.º 41 (1931), 10-15; Giuseppe Pagano, "L'estetica delle costruzioni in acciaio", *Casabella*, n.º 8-9 (1933): 66-69; Enrico Griffini, "Studio preliminare dell'alloggio secondo la teoria di Alessandro Klein", *Rassegna di architettura*, n.º 3 (1933); The monographic issue edited by Irenio Diotallevi and Franco Marescotti, "Analisi e problemi della casa popolare", *Casabella*, n.º 162-164 (1941). It is also worth mentioning the technical columns on new building materials in the journals *L'Ingegneria* and *Rassegna di Architettura*.

⁴⁶ Eugenio Gentili, "Prefabbricazione in America", *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 24-38; Eugenio Gentili, "Prefabbricazione in Europa", *Metron*, n.º 2 (1945): 51-68; Eugenio Gentili, "La prefabbricazione, oggi", *Metron*, n.º 3 (1945): 44-52.

Starting with extensive prefabrication systems and the most advanced American construction techniques,⁴⁷ the articles outlined a varied excursus throughout the main stages of European emancipation from American supremacy. The wooden houses of Sweden,⁴⁸ the metal frame houses of Weissenhof in Stuttgart,⁴⁹ the vibrated concrete elements of the buildings by Eugène Beaudouin and Marcel Lods,⁵⁰ as well as some particularly remarkable Italian experiences, such as Irenio Diotallevi and Franco Marescotti's studies on modular elements,⁵¹ and many other examples were part of a material culture to recover. For Tedeschi, who drew the necessary conclusions with regard to the national situation and the modernisation of construction and industrial processes, the light house in steel represented the economical house of the future.⁵²



Figure 4. Prefabrication in Europe, schools and houses by Eugène Beaudouin and Marcel Lods, constructive systems in Sweden, source: *Metron*, n.º 2 (1945): 62-63; Prefabricated houses in the USA, wooden frames, source: *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 35.

The journal's internal debate was also fueled by important national initiatives: the First National Congress for Reconstruction in Milan⁵³ and, on the sidelines, the Competition for

⁴⁷ Gentili, "Prefabbricazione in America", 24-38. Among the various solutions, Gentili mentioned the packaged houses by Wachsmann and Gropius, Neutra's metal sheet houses and even special inflatable bubble formwork.

⁴⁸ Gentili, "Prefabbricazione in Europa"..., 52.

⁴⁹ Gentili, "Prefabbricazione in Europa"..., 54.

⁵⁰ Gentili, "Prefabbricazione in Europa"..., 59.

⁵¹ Gentili, "Prefabbricazione in Europa"..., 55.

⁵² Gentili, "La prefabbricazione, oggi"..., 55.

⁵³ The Congress was held at the Sala del Gonfalone of the Castello Sforzesco from 14 to 16 December 1945. Reported in detail by Irenio Diotallevi and by Ignazio Gardella in two articles published for the journal *A – Attualità, Architettura, Abitazione, Arte*, n.º 3 (1946), the event was briefly recalled by Enrico Peressutti who described it in *Metron* as a "big Babel" where divergent points of view – homeowners, professionals, impresarios– clashed. See Alberto Pireddu, "Architettura e cultura della vita. La rivista A di Lina Bo e Carlo Pagani", *La Rivista di Engramma*, n.º 188 (2022): 96-97, doi: <https://doi.org/10.25432/1826-901X/2022.188.0011>; Enrico Peressutti, "Sul convegno della ricostruzione", *Metron*, n.º 4-5 (1945): 2-4.

Prefabricated Houses, both organised by the C.N.R. in 1945. This competition in particular, was conceived by the the engineer Gustavo Colonnetti (director of C.N.R.), as an open challenge to show and publicize in two locations (Milan and Rome) prototypes of housing models to be built with innovative and completely dry methods.

Unfortunately, by favouring semi-prefabricated solutions, the jury penalized the most brilliant proposals —Pierluigi Nervi even was excluded!—, unexpectedly saving the project of a multi-storey prefabricated house with metal structure designed by Aldo Cassinelli, Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi, Enrico Tedeschi. In the double issue 4-5, the editorial team clearly stated *Metron's* firm position: “dovremmo parlare delle mostre” [...] “preferiamo presentare sette progetti”⁵⁴ —those considered significant— confirming an editorial line that strived to combine theory and practice. This selective spirit fully rejected the idea of prefabrication as a transitional phase or an economical emergency solution, a matter also tackled in *Casabella*, which, on the cover of issue 193⁵⁵, significantly reproduced the image of the structural steel node patented by Gentili's group.

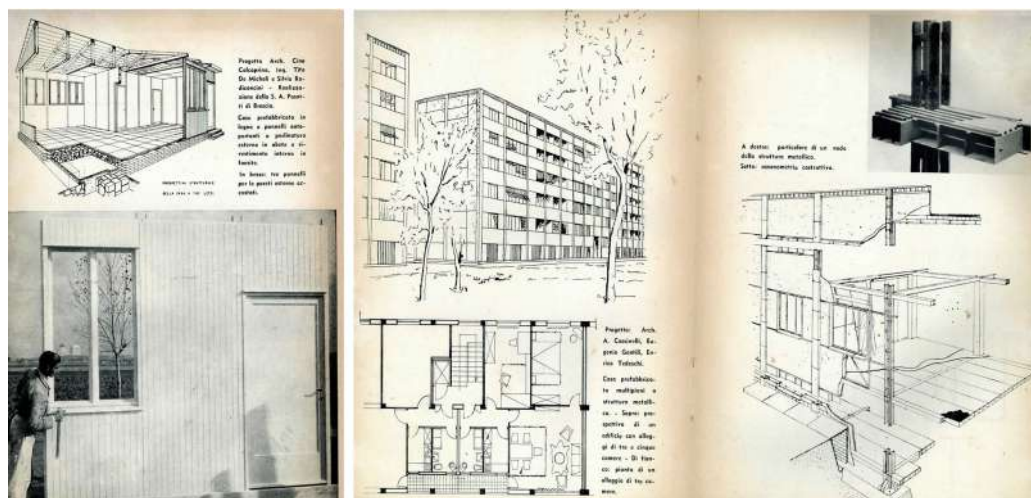


Figure 5. C.N.R. Competition (1945), wooden house with self-supporting panels by Cino Calcaprina, Tito De Micheli, Silvio Radiconcini, source: *Metron*, n.º 4-5 (1945): 70; prefabricated house and structural steel node by Aldo Cassinelli, Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi, Enrico Tedeschi, source: *Metron*, n.º 4-5 (1945): 69-70.

⁵⁴ [we should talk about the exhibitions] [...] [we prefer to present seven projects] Red. [editorial staff] “Prefabbricazione al convegno di Milano”, *Metron*, n.º 4-5 (1945): 49. Projects published: Multi-storey and small monolithic houses by Franco Minissi and Ugo Antoni; Houses with precast concrete elements by Pierluigi Nervi; Prefabricated houses with tubular elements frameworks by Attilio Arcangeli; Sheet metal houses by Aldo Cassinelli, Giovanni Astengo, Mario Bianco; Multi-storey prefabricated houses with metal structure by Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi, Enrico Tedeschi; prefabricated wooden houses with self-supporting wooden panels by Cino Calcaprina, Tito De Micheli, Silvio Radiconcini; houses with special hollow bricks by Giorgio Milani and Franco Minissi.

⁵⁵ *Casabella*, n.º 193 (1946): cover.

Almost simultaneously, facing with the serious problem of building seven million new dwellings, the same periodical supported the practice of perfecting and systematising constructive elements already in use thus pursuing the realist path of low tech. Mario Ridolfi, who was never seen in the editorial office,⁵⁶ in his only contribution, introduced the new *Manuale dell'Architetto* of which he was co-author.⁵⁷ Not a theoretical book in the manner of Breimann, Chiodi or Neufert, but a practical American-style volume very similar to the 1936 *Architectural graphic standard*—as Roberto Dulio observes—.⁵⁸

It was presented as a design guide, open to a wide audience of architects, engineers, technicians, but also to builders; a book structured according to an innovative system of notations made up of numerical codes, diagrams, dimensioned details, graphs, tables, even though the building materials had been adapted to the Italian industrial background.⁵⁹ This "abaco della piccola tecnica"⁶⁰ funded by the USIS—as Tafuri defined it with a touch of irony—had been created in cooperation with Gustavo Colonnetti and Biagio Bongioannini (engineers for the C.N.R), Bruno Zevi and Pierluigi Nervi, but it was also the result of previous experiences, notably personal research carried out by Ridolfi with his colleague Wolfgang Frankl (partly alone during the war) about the fixtures' standards⁶¹ and the likely outcome of studies on American prefabrication that Zevi had collected on behalf of the USIS and the Italian Government.⁶²

With the adoption of the Fanfani Plan for housing, the manual became the main tool of the INA Casa, whereas the QT8 Plan, celebrated in 1948 as a perfect synthesis of modern planning and technical innovation and fully documented in a special issue of *Metron* edited by Piero Bottoni,⁶³ represented an isolated case and put an end to the debate in the journal.

By 1947, Eugenio Gentili had returned to Milan, he had joined the MSA group and started collaborating with *Domus* directed by Ernesto Nathan Rogers. "È stato proprio allora che ho anche avvertito la differenza tra l'atmosfera architettonica di Torino e Milano rispetto a

⁵⁶ Brunetti, "Questionario", n.d., Folder 16.

⁵⁷ Mario Ridolfi, "Il Manuale dell'Architetto", *Metron*, n.º 8 (1946): 35-42.

⁵⁸ Charles George Ramsey, Harold Reeve Sleeper, *Architectural graphic standard for architects, engineers, decorators, builders, and draftsmen* (New York: John Wiley and Sons; London: Chapman and Hall, 1936), quoted in Roberto Dulio, "Mario Ridolfi e Bruno Zevi. LAPAO, *Metron* e il *Manuale dell'architetto*", in *Mario Ridolfi architetto, 1904-2004*, ed. by Renato Nicolini (Milan: Electa, 2005), 28-33.

⁵⁹ Ridolfi, "Il Manuale dell'Architetto"..., 35.

⁶⁰ [abacus of the small technique] Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura*, 17.

⁶¹ About the matter of constructive elements and the pursuit of architectural rigour in Ridolfi's work, see Valerio Palmieri, "Mario Ridolfi e gli anni della guerra", in *Mario Ridolfi architetto 1904-2004*, ed. by Renato Nicolini (Milan: Electa, 2005), 122-127.

⁶² As a researcher for the USIS, Zevi might have provided informations about the graphic layout of American manuals and materials on housing prefabrication techniques, Dulio, *Introduzione...*, 45. USIS, see also the photos of balloon frame buildings and American workplaces preserved in the Archive: USIS, Folder 5, Archivio Zevi, Rome.

⁶³ *Metron*, n.º 26-27 (1948).

quella di Roma”⁶⁴, he stated later, “perché diverso era il retroterra industriale che intuivo fosse inseparabile dai principi di una autentica modernità”⁶⁵. The geographical distance revealed two different visions of modern architecture in Italy: “A parte Gentili, che seguiva il nostro lavoro”, Zevi observed years later, “e Bottoni, che manteneva i contatti con noi” [...] “i milanesi furono completamente assenti”⁶⁶.

Organic assumptions and architectures in nuce

Notwithstanding chronicles, studies, and debates that also involved education, great works of architecture in Italy seemed to be absent. Two important competitions in Rome were exceptions: the Fosse Ardeatine project, strongly wanted to commemorate the victims of the Nazi massacre, and the Passenger Building for Termini Railway Station that was still incomplete and raised the problem of the direct and physical relationship with the difficult Fascist legacy. Both first significant public works of the immediate post-war period with a high symbolic value, these occasions were not only relevant in themselves, but acquired a special significance for *Metron* since some members of the editorial board were involved in the design process and their projects were an opportunity to verify the assumptions of the modern organic trend on which the magazine had been founded. *Architettura organica* (alternatively *Spazio*) was the title that, as already mentioned, Bruno Zevi would have chosen instead of *Metron*, a concept that, although not appearing on the covers, is often directly or indirectly evoked.

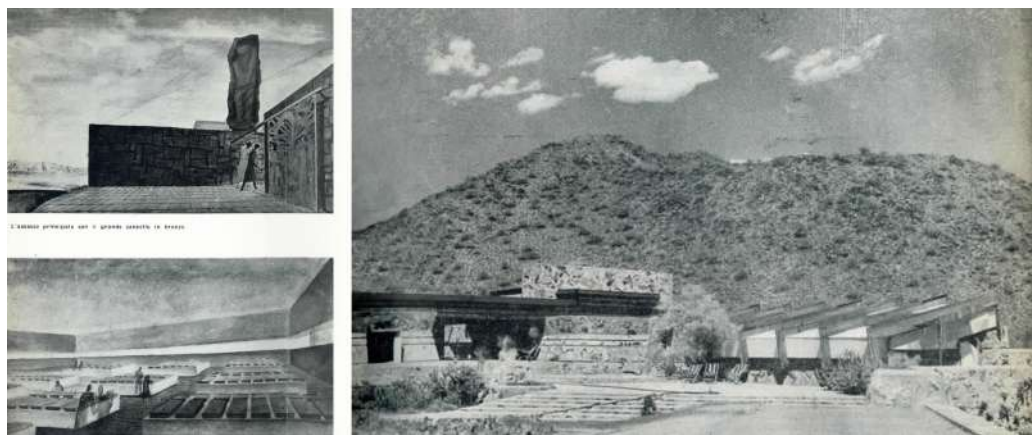


Figure 6. The Fosse Ardeatine Memorial by Nello Aprile, Cino Calcaprina, Aldo Cardelli, Mario Fiorentino, Giuseppe Perugini, Mirko Basaldella and Francesco Coccia (artists), source: *Metron*, n.º18 (1947): 13, in comparison with Frank Lloyd Wright, Taliesin West, source: *Metron*, n.º 18 (1947): 37.

⁶⁴ [It was right then that I also felt the difference between the architectural atmosphere in Turin and Milan compared to that of Rome] Tedeschi, *Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi...*, 26.

⁶⁵ [because the industrial background was different, which I felt it was inseparable from the principles of an authentic modernity] Tedeschi, *Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi...*, 26.

⁶⁶ [Apart from Gentili, who was following our work and Bottoni, who maintained contacts with us] [...] [the Milanese architects were completely absent] Brunetti, “Questionario”, n.d., Folder 16.

In the review of Zevi's book *Verso una architettura organica*⁶⁷ published in the first issue, Enrico Tedeschi touched on some key aspects: the social instance, the attention to the psychological and spiritual dimension, the rejection of the equation between functional and utilitarian, the compositional principle of empirical growth, sharing with Zevi the idea of a ferment or common feeling that, independently of the figure of Wright, characterises different geographical contexts recurring "in tutti i criticismi"⁶⁸.

To give an idea of the morpho-structural implications of this approach, in issue 4-5, the Norwegian-born engineer and scholar of biological analogies Fred Severud⁶⁹ illustrated the principles of organic architecture comparing natural forms (shells, flowers, turtles, nutshells...) with the logic of ribbed structures and accompanying the text with drawings, diagrams, and photographs.⁷⁰ Again in support of the rising organic thesis, some projects achieved around the world were also published. The small houses by Wright and other American architects on display at MOMA⁷¹ suggested the compositional principles of modular growth and flexibility, whereas the contribution about three famous New York houses (particularly the Fairchild House by William Hamby and George Nelson)⁷² was intended to demonstrate that the organic potential of a building was related to the way to arrange or even break up inner space notwithstanding the limits of the urban lot.

Not even planning is spared from organic accents⁷³ —the project of Haifa Bay, published in a 1946 double issue entirely devoted to urban development in Palestine,⁷⁴ is particularly indicative of the new trend—. The author Alexander Klein, pointing out the steps of the plan, marked how the typical problems of the functionalist city could find a renewed balance in harmony with the environmental features and the behavioural psychology of people.

Going back to the theoretical speculations of *Metron*, the "Introduzione a Wright" by Giulio Carlo Argan further structured this vision.⁷⁵ In this critical essay we already find those

⁶⁷ Enrico Tedeschi, "Bruno Zevi. Verso una architettura organica. Einaudi Editore.Torino 1945", *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 59-64.

⁶⁸ [in all the criticisms] Tedeschi, "Bruno Zevi...", 64. Quote from Zevi's book.

⁶⁹ Fred Severud (1899-1990), studied at the Norwegian Institute of Technology, then emigrated to Ellis Island becoming one of the most important structural engineers in the USA particularly renowned for his ability to solve complex problems with great intuition. His firm, founded in Manhattan, collaborated on a large number of grand projects (notably on the construction of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis by Eero Saarinen). In 1945, he published the book *Turtles and Walnuts Morning Glories and grass disseminating* his researches on the principles of natural forms applied in design., see Philip Steadmann, *The Evolution of Designs. Biological analogy in architecture and the applied arts* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 261.

⁷⁰ Fred Severud, "La natura è una fonte di ispirazioni strutturali", *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 21-28.

⁷¹ "Piccole case di domani", *Metron*, n.º 1 (1945): 46-47.

⁷² Bruno Zevi, "Una casa organica nel centro urbano", *Metron*, n.º 9 (1946): 32-45.

⁷³ Among these, the Rovaniemi plan mentioned before.

⁷⁴ Alexander Klein, "Una nuova città nella baia di Haifa", *Metron*, n.º 11 (1946): 64-75. In the same issue we find also articles by Julius Posener and Richard Kaufmann. The engineer Guido Zevi (Bruno's father), who had moved to Palestine due to the racial laws, provided the contributions on Jewish colonies for the issue, see "Sviluppo edilizio e urbanistico in Palestina", *Metron*, n.º 11 (1946): 2.

⁷⁵ Giulio Carlo Argan, "Introduzione a Wright", n.º 18 (1947): 9-24.

ingredients that made the American master particularly attractive to the public of Italian critics and architects —the ethical rejection of authoritarianism (in both the formal and ideological sense), the Ruskinian idea of life in close relationship with nature and environment, the rediscovery of labor as a collective work and the “espressione di un ethos religioso”⁷⁶— principles that fitted well with the revaluation of medieval architecture and the rediscovery of William Morris.⁷⁷ Argan then recalled Wright’s personal poetics, whose geometries, rooted in nature, arose and emanated from the earth, finding explanation and convergences in the theories of German *Einfühlung*.⁷⁸ It was precisely Argan’s thinking that could be considered a first *summa* of the organic conception, as Zevi confirmed in the first public conference of APAO.⁷⁹ The brief, unsigned abstract to the “Introduzione a Wright”, revealed the intentions of the editors (and of Zevi himself): “accompagniamo questo scritto di Argan con la illustrazione del più strano, del più difficile, del più obiettabile edificio di Frank Lloyd Wright: il campo estivo di Taliesin in Arizona” [...] “a tutti gli architetti intelligenti, Taliesin pone un problema di indagine spaziale”⁸⁰. And perhaps it is not by chance that this work establishes an implicit relationship with the Ardeatine Quarries that appear in the same issue.⁸¹

The article about the Fosse Ardeatine Memorial designed by Nello Aprile, Cino Calcaprina, Aldo Cardelli and others⁸², was no more than a simple report of the project but every step of

⁷⁶ [expression of a religious ethos] Argan, “Introduzione a Wright”..., 16.

⁷⁷ An interest that Bruno Zevi shared with Giuseppe Samonà and Giancarlo De Carlo who wrote the first Italian monography about William Morris: Giancarlo De Carlo, *William Morris* (Milan: Il balcone, 1947).

⁷⁸ Argan, “Introduzione a Wright”, 16. Theories at the basis of Bruno Zevi and Luigi Moretti’s methods of spatial investigation and already known in the Roman school thanks to the teaching of Vincenzo Fasolo. See Bruno Reichlin, “Figure della spazialità. Strutture e sequenze di spazi” versus “Lettura integrale dell’opera”, in *Luigi Moretti. Razionalismo e trasgressività tra barocco e informale*, ed. by Bruno Reichlin and Letizia Tedeschi (Milan: Electa, 2010), 29, 33, 47; Roberto Dulio, “Le affinità elettive. Moretti e Zevi”, in *Luigi Moretti*, 437-439. It was probably from Einrich Wöfflin’s studies that Zevi retrieved the formal concept of “organic” and “inorganic” as well as the way to verify what the observer perceives respect to his position in space thus integrating Wrightian assumptions. See Dulio, *Introduzione...*, 8; During the 1950s, both the journal *Metron* and the rival *Spazio* contributed to disseminating a kind of historical analysis based on the *Einfühlung*’s approach.

⁷⁹ The first National Congress of Organic Architecture was held on 6 December 1947. The Association for Organic Architecture was founded in Rome in 1945 by forty initiators beside the homonymous school. In two years it had been expanding to the national context including other groups of different orientations (Catholic group 15 A, MSA, regional APAO etc.). See Brunetti, “Questionnaire”, n.d., Folder 16, Dulio, *Introduzione...*, 57. Zevi spoke at the conference taking stock of the meaning and purpose of the trend, his contribution was later published in *Metron*.

⁸⁰ [We are accompanying this writing by Argan with an illustration of the strangest, most difficult, most objectionable building by Frank Lloyd Wright: Taliesin Summer Camp in Arizona] [...] [Taliesin poses a problem of spatial investigation for all intelligent architects] [unsigned abstract] Argan, “Introduzione a Wright”..., 9.

⁸¹ Red. [Editorial staff] “Sistemazione delle cave ardeatine. Un concorso con la coda”, *Metron*, n.º 18 (1947): 35-47.

⁸² The authors involved were: Nello Aprile, Cino Calcaprina, Aldo Cardelli, Mario Fiorentino, Giuseppe Perugini (architects), Mirko Basaldella and Francesco Coccia (artists).

the described spatial sequence —from the roughly hewn stone ashlar to the metaphorical tombstone located in the harsh landscape— contributed, according to the editor's view, to the organic solution by reinforcing the link between the architecture and the emotional state of the visitor, although a keen eye could detect a kind of monumental essentiality typical of some unrealised projects for the E42 exhibition.

Much more aligned in its critical slant, the commentary by Giuseppe Samonà on the Competition for the Passenger Building at Termini Station⁸³ did not mention the winner nor the multiplicity of other proposals, but in outlining of the present crisis of architecture, attacked both the monumental and the box-like approach, making appreciative remarks instead on the third-classified project by Mario Ridolfi's group.⁸⁴ The fork structure modulating the entire building and the metaphorical images of tendons and vertebrae represented for the author the clearest tangible manifestation of the new organic language of architecture in Italy.

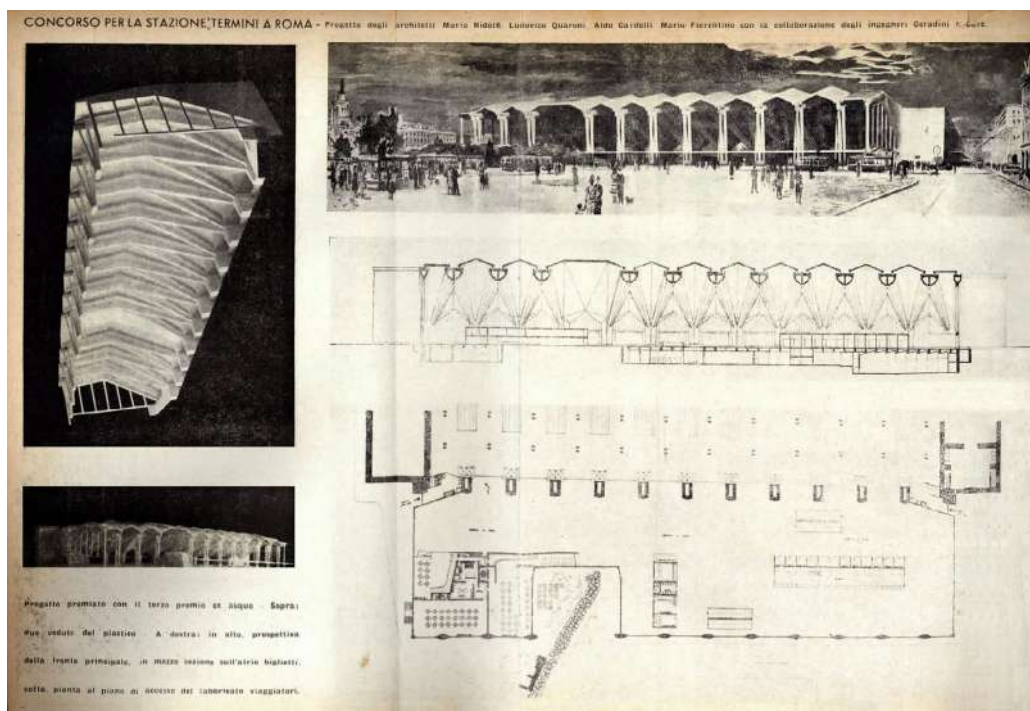


Figure 7. Passenger Building for Termini Railway Station (third prize) by Mario Ridolfi, Ludovico Quaroni, Aldo Cardelli, Mario Fiorentino, Giulio Ceradini and Arrigo Caré (engineers), source: *Metron*, n.º 21 (1947): 16.

⁸³ Giuseppe Samonà, "I progetti per il completamento formale della Stazione Termini", *Metron*, n.º 21 (1947): 8-22.

⁸⁴ The design group was made up of: Mario Ridolfi, Ludovico Quaroni, Aldo Cardelli, Mario Fiorentino, Giulio Ceradini and Arrigo Caré (engineers). See Samonà, "I progetti per il completamento...", 19-22.

In this spasmodic search for real confirmations of theoretical assumptions, we can already read the signs of *Metron*'s turning point. In 1948, Enrico Tedeschi permanently moved to Argentina together with Cino Calcaprina and his wife Margherita Roesler Franz, while Luigi Piccinato was often engaged in foreign assignments.⁸⁵ With the publication of the 25th issue, Zevi became co-editor-in-chief and started a second season of the journal (1948-1954).⁸⁶ Alongside the emerging themes of debate, and even thanks to the more appealing large format, *Metron* contributed to the construction of operative criticism within an overall historical revision of modern architecture.

⁸⁵ Zevi remarked that there was a gap in the editorial staff. Brunetti, "Questionario", n.d., Folder 16; Enrico Tedeschi and Cino Calcaprina were called to teach at the Universidad de Tucumán, Piccinato was called several times in Tucumán to give lectures. The group contributed to the assimilation of organic architectural culture in Argentina. See Federico De Ambrosis, *Una rotta transatlantica. Sulle tracce della presenza italiana nell'architettura argentina degli anni Cinquanta* (Turin: Accademia University Press, 2023), 52-61.

⁸⁶ About the complete periodisation of the Journal, see Casciato, "Gli esordi della rivista *Metron*...", 50-52.



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