

# Staging of the Costume Sector in the Italian Pavilion of Expo 67 in Montréal, Canada (1966-1967). From “Urschrei” to “Correalism”. Considerations on Some Motifs in Leonardo Ricci (1962-1967)

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*Leonardo Ricci, Expressionism, Montréal, Expo 67, Correalism, Endless House*

## /Abstract

The design of the Italian pavilion at Expo 67 in Montréal, Canada (1966-1967) was the result of a choral effort which involved Giulio Carlo Argan, Cosimo Carlucci, Umberto Eco, Leoncillo Leonardi, Bruno Munari, the Passarelli studio, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Leonardo Ricci, Carlo Scarpa, Emilio Vedova and Bruno Zevi.

Leonardo Ricci designed the Staging of the costume sector by creating cavernous concretions that housed an exhibition curated by Umberto Eco. The interpretation proposed here, focuses on the formal genealogies of the work, trying to contextualise its birth in the Florentine cultural context during the 1960s and within Ricci's research.

## /Author

Matteo Cassani Simonetti  
University of Bologna  
[matteo.cassani@unibo.it](mailto:matteo.cassani@unibo.it)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3355-1258>

Matteo Cassani Simonetti is Associate Professor in History of Architecture at the Department of Architecture, University of Bologna. His studies are devoted to architecture and historiography in the second half of the 20th century.

Leonardo Ricci himself and the critics – first – and historiography – later – outlined the poetics of the Roman architect as being mainly based on the conception of architecture as an existential expression aimed at anonymity rather than authorship. Historiographical construction has particularly insisted on this aspect of his architecture, seeking support in the exegesis of his prose, and through it justifying the heterogeneity of the forms, language and spaces employed. Less attention has been paid to the analysis of the genealogy and the occurrences of these within certain sides of his work. An inverse process has been attempted even less, daring to trace the rare, elusive words in his texts that he dedicated to the conception of the morphogenesis of his spaces.<sup>1</sup>

Starting from Giovanni Klaus Koenig's interpretation of the Casa teorica as a "conformazione spaziale dell'esistenza"<sup>2</sup> – an interpretation that could almost be described as a self-criticism given the close bond that the two authors shared in the 1950s – Ricci's architecture has been interpreted by underscoring the pre-eminence of space over form, prioritising a fascinating yet elusive existential and experiential dimension of the former rather than the centrality of the latter, for Ricci the outcome – and not the goal – of the project.

While a linguistic reading – as suggested by Koenig<sup>3</sup> – could reveal the pattern of reasons underlying the formal heterogeneity of Ricci's architecture – according to whom, on the other hand, "il problema della forma in sé non esiste"<sup>4</sup> – I would like to propose here an interpretation of a formal matrix, insisting on that "formalisme" that Giulia Veronesi recognised with regard to Monterinaldi's houses<sup>5</sup>: the extreme complexity of 'endless' form used in the staging of the costume sector of the Italian pavilion at Expo 67 in Montréal and the insistence with which Ricci used it in temporary or unrealised projects that can be circumscribed to a rather defined period of his work – the 1960s – makes it legitimate to attempt to reconstruct its hypothetical genesis within his work and within the Florentine context in which it found fertile ground to take root. The writer's interest in this type of interpretation was prompted by the complexity of the formal themes Ricci used in his projects – bordering on the geometric uncontrollability of the project: a question Ricci resolved by building models or constructing his architecture directly on site – and by their apparent

self-referentiality, only at first glance contrary to any ambition for anonymity.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, during the course of the research, I noted the authors involved used a prominence of certain forms and words: they were treated as occurrences, and on this basis an attempt was made to transpose them into *motifs*, in the hope that this operation would "valorizz[ ] la funzione, in apparenza ornamentale, ma in sostanza di sottolineatura, di potenziamento, anche di convinzione e di suggestione che ha il ripetersi di affermazioni, considerazioni, descrizioni, allusioni, ecc. nella tessitura verbale",<sup>7</sup> or in the architectural weave. A field has thus emerged in which the insistence on certain terms, on certain emphases, on certain interpretations, makes it possible to unite distant, even antithetical, architectural expressions.

The event studied, the Universal Exhibition in Montréal in 1967, by reputation among the major works commissioned from Ricci, the 'primordial' expressive impetus he manifested in the project in contrast with the technical magniloquence and ideology that permeated the event and most of the buildings of the Exhibition, and finally the comparison with the other sections of the Italian pavilion, allow us to highlight Ricci's posture in relation to some fundamental themes of architecture – expression, community and living – made space through an endless form. The reconstruction of the exhibition area, made memorable by Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67, by the roof of the German pavilion by Frei Otto and by the American pavilion with its geodesic 'spatial' dome by Richard Buckminster Fuller more than by the Italian pavilion, and the juxtaposition with the work of the Passarelli studio, of Carlo Scarpa, of Bruno Munari and of Emilio Vedova – co-authors of the pavilion – allow the alternative proposed by Ricci to emerge through his staging.<sup>8</sup> [fig. 1]

The archaic and natural appearance of these concavities and forms – obtained by means of a "morfogenesi organica naturale" dependent on a "utopia-concreta-organica"<sup>9</sup> as Ricci would define his creative process years later – and their extremely experimental nature question those who seek to decipher their reasons, and above all their antecedents and contemporary influences: it is therefore a question of recognising the utopian and expressive component at its foundation by retracing the process from which the form originated, following the conviction shared by Ricci and Koenig that "la creazione di una forma sia logica interpretazione del mondo e non 'giuoco'".<sup>10</sup>

1 For an exhaustive overview of Ricci's historiography to date, see Ilaria Cattabriga, "Leonardo Ricci in the United States (1952-1972). A Twenty-Year American Transfer as a Turning Experience in Teaching and Design," PhD diss., (University of Bologna, 2021); see also the recent text by Maria Clara Ghia, *La nostra città è tutta la terra. Leonardo Ricci architetto (1918-1994)* (Wuppertal: Steinhäuser Verlag, 2021). I would like to thank Ilaria Cattabriga for pointing out the documents she found during her PhD at Casa Studio Ricci in Monterinaldi (FI) and Loreno Arboritanzza for those he reorganised during his internship and then during the research for his thesis – Loreno Arboritanzza, "Leonardo Ricci. L'abitare (umano) 1950-1970," undergraduate thesis, (University of Bologna, 2017). I would like to thank Claudia Conforti for sharing with me some reflections on this matter and for suggesting that I explore further aspects – which turned out to be crucial – of this project. I dedicate this text to Giovanni Zanzi.

2 [spatial conformation of existence]. All translations of quotations are by the author. Giovanni Klaus Koenig, "Leonardo Ricci e la 'casa teorica' (alla ricerca di un nuovo spazio architettonico)," *Bollettino tecnico degli Architetti e Ingegneri della Toscana*, nos. 7-8 (July-August 1958): 5.

3 Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura in Toscana 1931-1968* (Turin: ERI, 1968), 142-52. This is not the place to attempt a reconstruction of this topic, which was the foundation of a significant section of the Florentine school along the lines of Gamberini-Eco-Koenig and which finds constant resonance in Ricci's texts. See for example Leonardo Ricci, "Progetto per il villaggio Monte degli Ulivi a Riesi, Sicilia," *Edilizia moderna*, nos. 82-83 (1963): 116-18.

4 [the problem of form in itself does not exist]. Leonardo Ricci, "La pittura come linguaggio (da una conferenza tenuta all'Università di Brooklyn NY, nel 1952 e a Numero nel Novembre 1953)," *Numero*, no. 6 (1953): 19.

5 Giulia Veronesi, "Du nouveau à Florence," *Zodiac*, no. 4 (1959): 10.

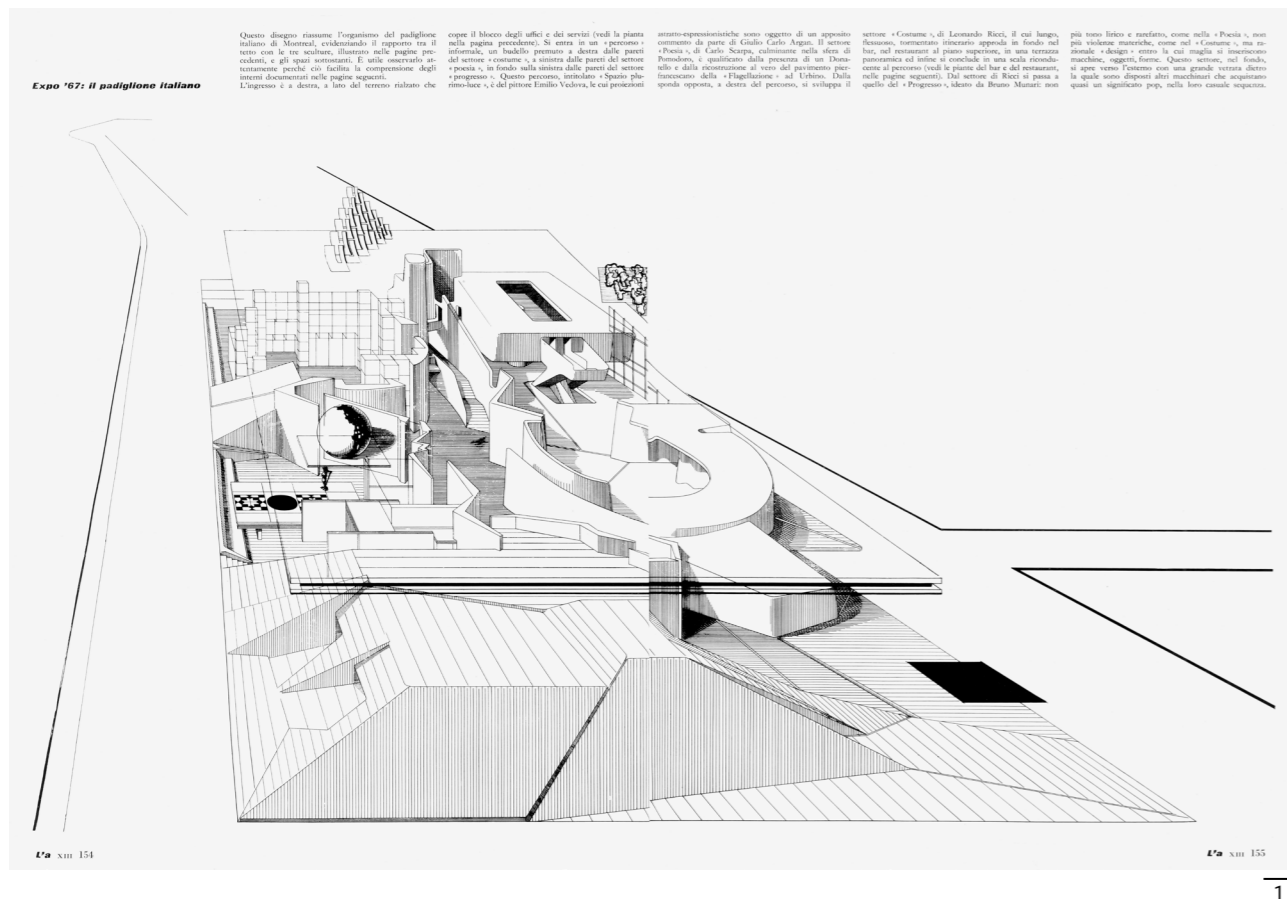
6 On this subject see Giovanni Leoni, "L'Anonimo come tema di discontinuità nella cultura architettonica italiana tra Primo e Secondo Novecento," in *Un palazzo in forma di parole. Scritti in onore di Paolo Carpeggiani*, ed. Carlo Togliani (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2016), 463-72.

7 [enhance the function, apparently ornamental but essentially underlining, reinforcing, even convincing and suggestive, of the repetition of statements, considerations, descriptions, allusions, etc. in the verbal weave]. Cesare Segre, "Tema/motivo," in *Enciclopedia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), vol. 14, 10.

8 Among the many texts on the presentation and study of the Montréal Expo: Abraham Rogatnick, "Expo 67, The Past Recaptured," *Lotus* 5, 1968, 13-33; "Panoramica dell'Expo '67," *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (3 July 1967): 166-75; Johanne Sloan, Rhona Richman Kenneally, eds., *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir* (Toronto; Buffalo: London University of Toronto Press, 2010).

9 [natural organic morphogenesis]; [concrete-organic utopia]. This and the previous rep. in Lara Vinca Masini, ed., *Topologia e morfogenesi. Utopia e crisi dell'antinatura. Momenti delle intenzioni architettoniche in Italia* (Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1978), 124. On Ricci's "creative process" see Koenig, "Leonardo Ricci e la 'casa teorica' (alla ricerca di un nuovo spazio architettonico)", 14.

10 [the creation of a form is a logical interpretation of the world and not a 'game']. Leonardo Ricci, Giovanni Koenig, *Sull'insegnamento della plastica nelle facoltà di architettura, memoria presentata al Preside della Facoltà di Architettura di Firenze*, 16 October 1959, typescript. Casa Studio Ricci – Monterinaldi (FI).



## 1. Terre des Hommes, Montréal 1967. On Different Expressive Intentions

Just one year separated the official establishment of the Italian government's commissariat for participation in the 1967 Universal Exhibition in Montréal – and the consequent allocation of funds for the construction of the pavilion, two billion lire in total – from the inauguration of the Canadian event, which took place on 25 April 1967.<sup>11</sup> The banner of the exhibition was the generic slogan *Terre des Hommes*, a transposition of the title of a novel by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Although less rhetorical than the one chosen for the 1958 Brussels exhibition – *Bilan du monde pour un monde plus humain*, a humanity that was intended to be recognised in André Waterkeyn's Atomium, the symbol of the exhibition – its general nature lent itself to welcoming all kinds of content and architectural expression for the more than 100 pavilions built. [figg. 2-4]

There was so little time to develop the project that the Italian commissariat decided, even before its formal institution, to establish a "Comitato di consulenza Tecnico-Artistica" formed "per ovvi motivi pratici" by "personalità residenti a Roma"<sup>12</sup> and not, as happened for Brussels, for the announcement of a design competition. In fact, for the 1958 exhibition the commission followed this process, contradicted however by the involvement of all the architects participating in the competition

11 Law of the Italian Republic no. 210 of April 5, 1966 (Published in Official Gazette no. 99 of April 23, 1966): Partecipazione dell'Italia all'Esposizione universale di Montréal del 1967.

12 [Technical-Artistic Advisory Committee]; [for obvious practical reasons], [personalities residing in Rome]. This and the previous taken from letters from Giovanni Luccioli on Ministry of Foreign Affairs letterhead to Carlo Scarpa, Rome, February 7, 1966. MAXXI Architecture Archive Centre – Rome, Carlo Scarpa Archive (hereinafter SA), b. 230 "Allestimento della sezione La Poesia, padiglione italiano, Expo '67, Montréal (1966-1968)," folder P1/18.

Fig. 1

Axonometry of the Italian pavilion at Expo '67 in Montréal, Canada (1966-67). From *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (Jul. 1967).

in the drafting of the final design. This large design group, which included BBPR, Ignazio Gardella, Giuseppe Perugini and Ludovico Quaroni, but above all the outcome – "un finto villaggio italiano [...] inaccettabile, nel carattere 'né spontaneo' 'né colto' dei piccoli edifici" according to Giulia Veronesi<sup>13</sup> – and the management of the competition triggered a great deal of criticism in Italy, including that of Bruno Zevi, a central figure in the design of the subsequent pavilion for Montréal. He himself, together with Giulio Carlo Argan and the Passarelli studio, members of the advisory committee (later joined by Michele Guido Franci), had the intention of conducting the operation differently, both for contingent reasons and in order to break away from the process followed previously.<sup>14</sup>

This authoritative committee – Argan and Zevi were already leading figures in Italian culture and politics; the Passarelli studio was already one of Rome's leading studios and had a privileged relationship with Zevi himself, who appreciated its work and with whom he was the promoter of Studio Asse; Franci, general secretary of the Milan Fair, had already collaborated on the 1958 exhibition – orchestrated the operation in February 1966. In agreement with the General Commission being set up by Francesco Babuscio Rizzo, who was in turn appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they asked Umberto Eco, Bruno Munari, Leonardo Ricci, Carlo Scarpa and Emilio Vedova to design the pavilion's layout. Already before the end of January<sup>15</sup> the Committee had prepared and agreed on "l'impostazione generale del padiglione"<sup>16</sup> with the Compagnie Canadienne de l'Exposition Universelle de 1967, which was coordinating the event's organisation. The "progettazione generale"<sup>17</sup> was mainly followed by Lucio Passarelli, assisted by some colleagues.<sup>18</sup> The pavilion was to host four sections:

- a) la Poesia, in cui dovrebbero essere espressi i valori tradizionali dell'Italia (arte, etc.);
- b) il Costume;
- c) l'Industrializzazione (ovvero il progresso, l'Italia protesa verso l'avvenire, etc.);
- d) il Percorso, nel quale il pubblico, attraverso un adeguato allestimento scenotecnico, dovrebbe in un certo senso percepire lo stato d'animo del popolo italiano, su cui agiscono le tre forze espresse nei settori sopra indicati.<sup>19</sup>

The conception of the elements shaping the overall project, based on three

13 [a mock Italian village... unacceptable in the 'neither spontaneous' 'nor cultured' character of the small buildings]. Giulia Veronesi, "Visita all'Esposizione di Bruxelles," in *Emporium* 128, no. 766 (1958): 150, rep. in Lucia Masina, *Vedere l'Italia nelle esposizioni universali del XX secolo: 1900-1958* (Milan: EDUCatt, 2016), 402.

14 See Lucia Masina, *Vedere l'Italia nelle esposizioni universali del XX secolo: 1900-1958* (Milan: EDUCatt, 2016), 393-415.

15 Arch. Edouard Fiset – Compagnie Canadienne de l'exposition universelle de 1967 (Canada) Montréal [Promemoria], January 24, 1966, in MAXXI Architecture Archive Centre – Rome, Studio Passarelli Archive (hereinafter PA), b. "1R-47 Padiglione italiano all'Expo '67 a Montréal (3)," folder Designers general area.

16 [the general layout of the pavilion]. Letter from Luccioli to Scarpa, Rome February 7, 1966.

17 [general design]. "Per l'esposizione di Montréal," *Domus*, no. 441 (August 1966): 2.

18 Lucio Passarelli, [Relazione], 15 May 1966, in PA, b. "Montréal Expo 70 [sic]. Fotografie," folder "1968 Montréal. Relazioni – Pubblicazioni". The executive design was overseen by Antonio Antonelli, Manfredo Greco, Franco Piro and Sara Rossi. In Canada the project was supervised by the architects Papineau, Gérin-Lajoie and Le Blanc, the engineers Cartier, Coté, Piette, Boulva, Wermentinger, Monti Lefebvre, Lavoie and Nadon and the company Edilteco.

19 [a] Poetry, where the traditional values of Italy should be expressed (art, etc.); b) Costume; c) Industrialisation (i.e. progress, Italy leaning towards the future, etc.); d) the Path, where the public, through an adequate scenic staging, should in a certain sense be able to perceive the state of mind of the Italian people, influenced by the three forces expressed in the aforementioned sectors]. Letter from Luccioli to Scarpa, Rome February 7, 1966.

general components, was fixed from the very first hypotheses, as was the arrangement of the four sections, which only found its final form thanks to the contribution of Munari, Scarpa, Ricci and Vedova, who were to take on the *inscape* project. The pavilion in its entirety would be defined by

due elementi, fisici, bidimensionali. La copertura (chiara; astratta, tenda e nello stesso tempo supporto visivo di opere d'arte); Il terreno (scuro; modellato; unitario; emergente o incassato nell'asfalto che lo circonda). Un elemento ideale, il più importante (si chiami "percorso", "angoscia", "l'italiano oggi" o che so io non importa il termine) che anche nella sua inconsistenza fisica, deve poter dare una forza e completezza al tutto.

Having established the general coordinates of the project, Passarelli, Munari, Ricci, Scarpa and Vedova intervened employing a collaborative process based on "rapporti, che partecipano dell'indipendenza e della coordinazione, della flessibilità e della chiarezza", or rather on the juxtaposition of their expressions without pursuing any other homogeneity of method or, even less, of result:

I tre progetti di Munari, Ricci e Scarpa, saranno invece come i tre artisti; indipendenti, contrastanti, reali. Essi si incastrano o si appoggiano al terreno (ma non vi si confondono); vivono sotto la tenda (con un proprio spazio) e vi si collegano mediante le opere d'arte; hanno con il percorso, quei rapporti più sottili e possibilistici che nasceranno dalla coordinazione, e dagli stimoli reciproci.<sup>20</sup>

With this in mind, Scarpa was commissioned to design the Poetry section, Ricci the Costume section and Munari the Industrialisation section, while the path was interpreted by Vedova and "il discorso generale della mostra"<sup>21</sup> – the exhibition programme – was entrusted to Eco. Each section was linked to a symbolic sculpture placed on the curved roof, which would represent its pinnacle and emblem for visitors approaching the pavilion: an informal polychrome ceramic sculpture by Leoncillo Leonardi for the Costume section, a sparkling eroded sphere by Arnaldo Pomodoro for the Poetry section, a metal scaffold by Cosimo Carlucci for the Industrialisation section.<sup>22</sup> [fig. 5]

The richness and heterogeneity of such a group of authors gives us to pause before viewing the finished work to speculate on the reasons that led Argan, Passarelli and Zevi to converge on the names of designers and artists who were anything but secondary in the Italian context in the mid-1960s. While Vedova's

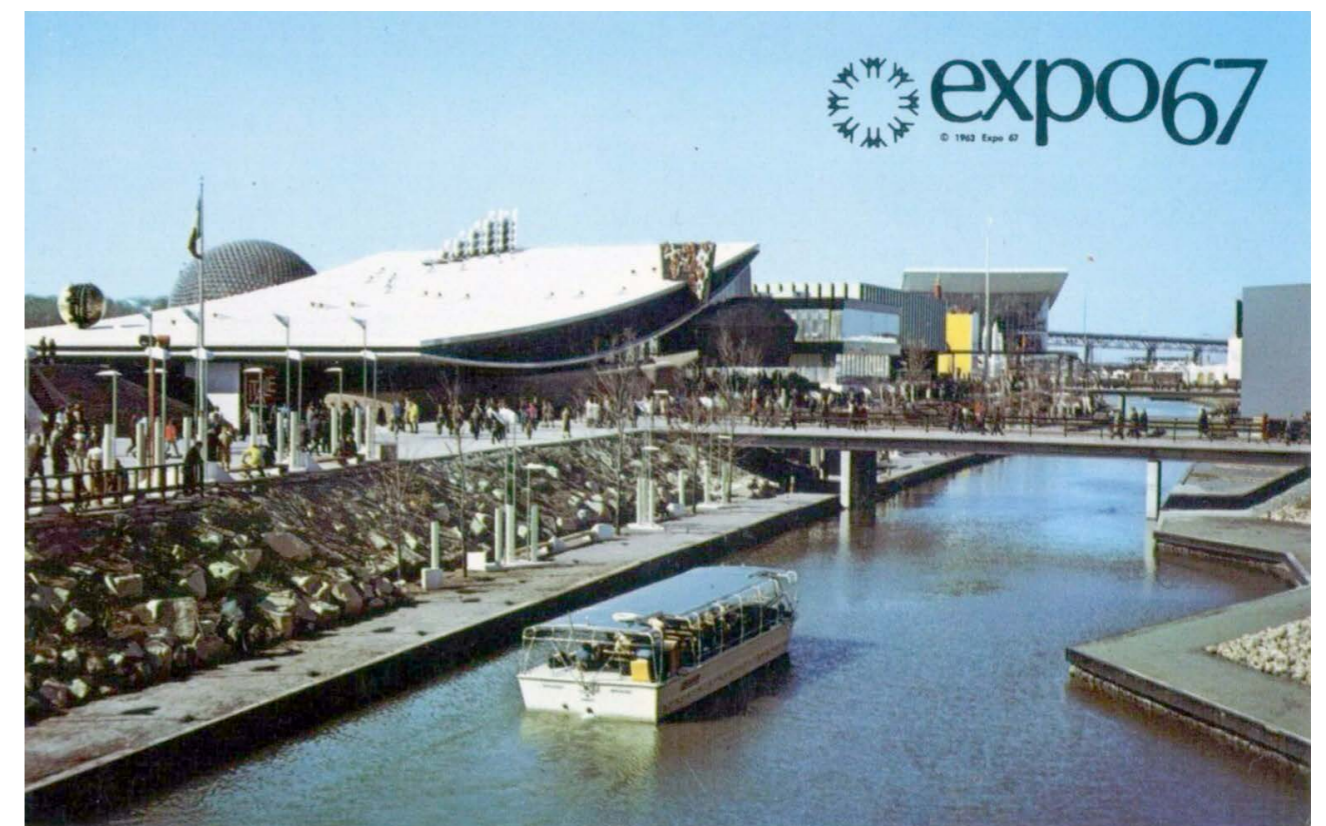
20 [two physical, two-dimensional elements. The roof (clear; abstract; tented and at the same time visual support of works of art); the ground (dark; shaped; unitary; emerging or embedded in the surrounding asphalt). An ideal element, the most important one (whether it is called "path", "anguish", "today's Italian" or whatever the term is, it does not matter) which even in its physical immateriality must be able to give strength and completeness to the whole]; [relationships that participate in independence and coordination, flexibility and clarity]; [Conversely, the three projects by Munari, Ricci and Scarpa were like the three artists; independent, contrasting, real. They dovetail or rest on the ground (but do not intermingle). They exist under the tent (with their own space) and connect to it through the artwork. With the path they have more subtle and possibilistic relationships that arise from coordination and mutual stimuli]. This and the previous ones from [Studio Passarelli], [Appunto], 26 February 1966, in SA, b. "230: Allestimento della sezione la Poesia, padiglione italiano, Expo '67, Montréal (1966-1968)," folder P1/18.

21 [the general message of the exhibit]. Letter from Luccioli to Scarpa, Rome February 7, 1966.

22 The pavilion was presented in numerous articles in Italian magazines, including: "La fiera di Montréal in costruzione," *Domus*, no. 446 (January 1967): 9-20; Bruno Zevi, "L'Italia all'Expo universale 1967 di Montréal," *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (July 1967): 142-65.



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Fig. 2

The Montreal Expo 1967 in an advertisement drawing of the time. The Italian pavilion (no. 42) is to the left of the United States pavilion (no. 81) and the Soviet Union pavilion (no. 79), located opposite each other but on two different islands.

Fig. 3

An advertising postcard of the Montreal Exhibition. The Italian pavilion is on the left.

work had been appreciated by both Argan and Zevi – both had already written about his *Plurimi*<sup>23</sup> – as had Scarpa's – an architect who was already an international master of museographic stagings with whom they had shared various projects – the choice of Munari could have been the result of Argan's interest in his work.<sup>24</sup> The involvement of Ricci and Eco may have been sought by Zevi, who had already had the opportunity to appreciate the architect's work, including the staging of the Florentine exhibition on Expressionism (1964), where he had also probably met Eco, whose *Opera aperta* (1962) Zevi had already commented on.<sup>25</sup> Finally, while Leoncillo's work had already been commented on by both Zevi and Argan before 1967, Carlucci and Pomodoro were probably indicated by the Turin critic, who had already had the opportunity to get to know the work of the former and to frequent the latter rather assiduously.<sup>26</sup>



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However, beyond the individual hypothetical relationships – which were also confirmed by the almost daily attendance at the same universities: Venice, Florence, Rome – the continuous commitment or passionate participation of many of the members of this grouping in occasions of shared reflection – such as the Gruppo 63 or the Convegni internazionali di artisti, critici e studiosi d'arte held in Rimini, Verucchio and San Marino, or those of the Gruppo 70 in Florence in the early 1960s, for example – remains the common denominator for understanding the complex cultural network and personal relationships that bound their lives and works.

23 Including: Bruno Zevi, "Plurimi e quadri da calpestare," *L'Espresso*, December 22, 1963; Giulio Carlo Argan, *Vedova* (Rome: Editalia, 1963).

24 Including Giulio Carlo Argan, Rosario Assunto, Bruno Munari, Filiberto Menna, "Design e mass media," *Op. cit.* 1, no. 2 (January 1965): 8-30.

25 Bruno Zevi, "La poetica dell'opera aperta in architettura," *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 8, no. 84 (October 1962): 362-63. On Eco, Ricci e Zevi see Ilaria Cattabriga, "Leonardo Ricci and Bruno Zevi. The Translation of 'Anonymous' and 'Organic' in the 'Open Work'," in *Bruno Zevi. History, Criticism and Architecture after World War II*, eds. Matteo Cassani Simonetti and Elena Dellapiana (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2021), 73-89. Note also that Eco was one of the members of the Steering Committee of *Marcatré*, a journal that gave ample space to the Florentine initiatives of 1964, which will be discussed in the third part of this text.

26 With regard to Leoncillo, by way of example, note also the matter of the Monumento alla partigiana (1957) in Venice, which he designed – together with Scarpa – at the invitation of a jury whose members included Zevi and Argan. Carlucci's work was exhibited at the group exhibition "Parabola 66. Mostra di pittura scultura architettura" held in Florence in 1966, the catalogue of which contains texts by Argan, Marcello Fagiolo and Lara Vinca Masini. Finally, Argan and Pomodoro's acquaintance is evidenced by the correspondence in the Arnaldo Pomodoro archive in Milan.

Fig. 4

The cover of *L'Espresso* of 30th April 1967.

The result of this heterogeneous *ensemble* was summarised by Lucio Passarelli as follows:

Ai tre poli corrispondono tre linguaggi architettonici e tre espressioni artistiche diverse. La poesia (progetto del Prof. Scarpa) ha un tono lirico o rarefatto con un'opera d'arte conclusa e astratta, forse uno sferoide, levitante sulla tenda. Il costume è di tono espressionistico, denso di materia reale. È progettato dall'arch. Ricci. L'opera d'arte sarà in carattere, una forma di ceramica, incastrata sul fianco della copertura. L'industrializzazione si avvale del suo linguaggio, della strumentazione espressiva delle macchine, di oggetti e forme. Progettata da Bruno Munari, potrà partecipare sia della pop che della op art. A prosecuzione della copertura e stagliantesi verso l'alto un "pezzo" in metallo. Il percorso è risultante dei tre linguaggi che si annullano o insieme il vuoto che essi formano aspirando lo spazio. Uno spazio luminoso, animato da proiezioni e immerso nelle composizioni astratto-espressionistiche del pittore Vedova.<sup>27</sup>

According to Zevi, this way of working based on the juxtaposition of individual expressions was one of the greatest peculiarities of this pavilion, whose creative process he praised as much as the final result. For Zevi, the method used – focused first on the direction of the project before its outcome – was an alternative to the rhetoric of the Modern Movement that praised the profoundly authorial act of design, or on the contrary to those that saw teamwork as the new dimension of design, and in the specific case of this project solved the problems arising from entrusting the task to heterogeneous groups of authors: a frequent solution for the design of national pavilions even before the Brussels pavilion, as demonstrated by the ambiguous outcome of the one for the Paris exhibition in 1937, the result of the equivocal blending of Pagano's architecture with that of Piacentini and Valle. "Chi ne è l'autore?", Zevi was asked, and he answered:

Nessun architetto, e nemmeno un team di architetti e designers che abbia lavorato in accordo, trovando un minimo denominatore comune. L'incontro si è effettuato al livello opposto, in un'escalation di empiti individuali. Come è stato possibile ottenere questo risultato? Vi era un'idea, un programma anticonformista e coraggioso, non freno e limite ma provocazione a creare, ciascuno secondo la propria ispirazione. Il successo del padiglione italiano a Montréal non dipende dal suo valore assoluto, ma dal fatto che suggerisce un metodo, un'ipotesi progettuale ancora da esplorare: consiste nel pensare a fondo i contenuti di un'op-

27 [The three poles correspond to three architectural languages and three different artistic expressions. Poetry (Professor Scarpa's project) has a lyrical or rarefied tone with a concluded and abstract work of art, perhaps a spheroid, levitating on the tent. Costume is expressionistic in tone, dense with real material. It is designed by the architect Ricci. The artwork will be in character, a ceramic form, set into the side of the roof. Industrialisation uses its language, the expressive instrumentation of machines, objects and forms. Designed by Bruno Munari, it can participate in both pop and op art. A metal "piece" continues the roof and stands out at the top. The path is the result of the three languages cancelling each other out or together the void they form by sucking in space. A luminous space, animated by projections and immersed in Vedova's abstract-expressionist compositions]. Passarelli, [*Relazione*], 15 May 1966.

era articolandoli nella loro diversa intenzionalità espressiva, e poi nello scegliere gli artisti capaci di realizzarne le immagini.<sup>28</sup>

For Zevi, this architecture was the best fruit of what he considered the best – subversive – Italian tradition. Within this reckless critical parabola Zevi wanted to hold together the greatest achievements of Italian architectural culture: the brilliant Borromini (the third centenary of his death fell in 1967); the ethics of the martyrs of modernity associated with that of the Resistance (Terragni, Pagano, Persico); the recent projects that broke out of the rigidity of rational models (from the Velasca tower to the Autostrada church; from the Marchiondi Institute to the building in Via Campania by the Passarelli studio; from Scarpa's and Albini's installations; from Cosenza's Olivetti to Gardella's Venetian house and Morandi's structures) for Zevi were the building blocks of the Italian pavilion, those that best testified to the absence of "retorica, niente propaganda, ma comunicazione di eventi antichi, di realtà e situazioni inquiete".<sup>29</sup>

With these building blocks in place, the rapid planning and equally effective development began: while the Passarelli studio, assisted by a number of associates, worked on the design of the metal lattice roof supported by only four pillars, in just one and a half months the other designers drew up plans for the singular sections, which, by juxtaposition, made up the overall design by the end of March 1966. It was completed by mid-May and construction began immediately afterwards, which lasted until the end of September, before the break imposed by the harsh Canadian winter, before resuming immediately afterwards to allow for the fitting out of the interior (in April) and finally the inauguration on 25 April 1967.<sup>30</sup>

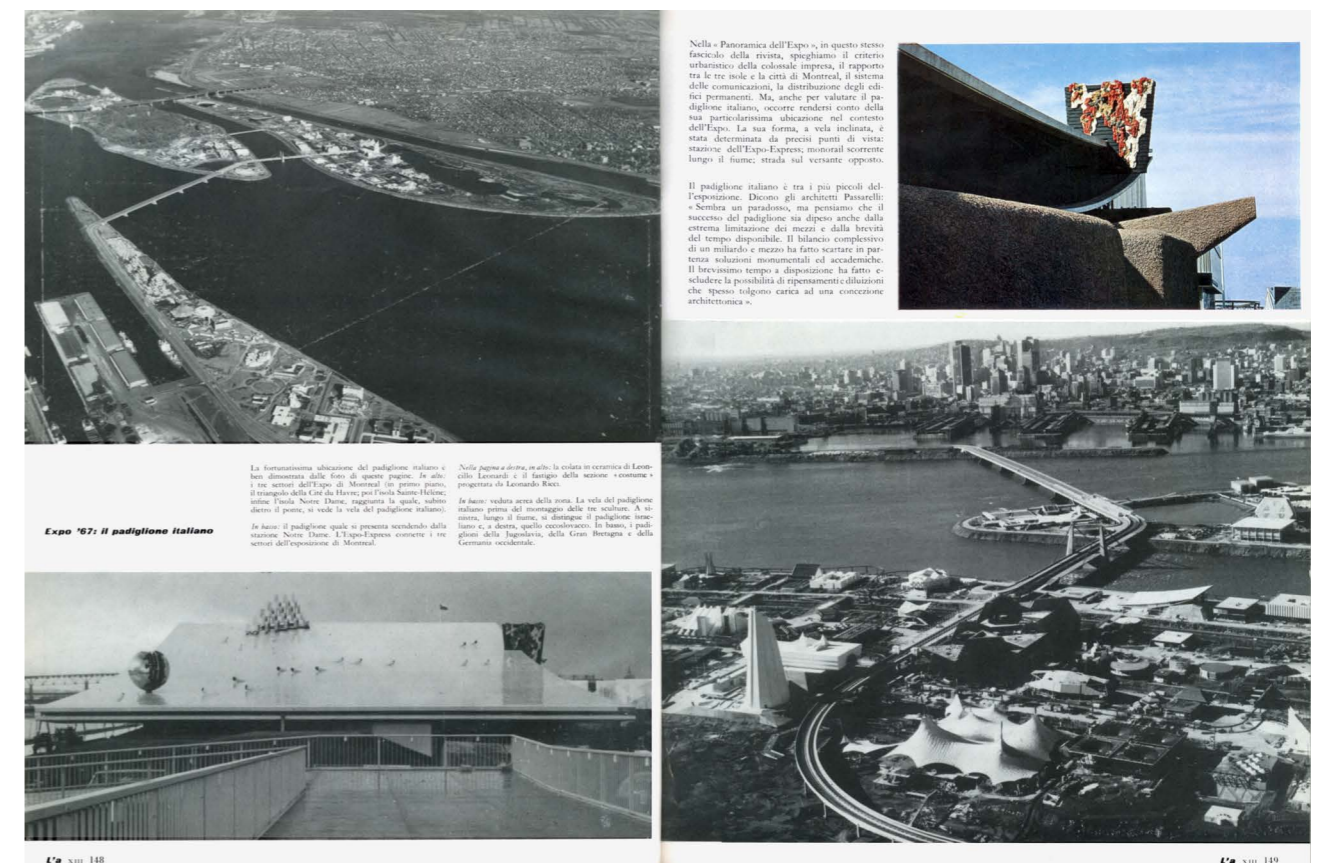
Thus the Italian pavilion took shape, located on the edge of Île Notre-Dame near what was to become turns 8 and 9 of the Gilles Villeneuve circuit, and on whose white sail-like roof, visible and accessible from the monorail that transported visitors from one end of the exhibition to the other, stood the three sculptures, and from whose limits emerged part of the shadowy spaces designed by Munari, Ricci and Scarpa. The entrance was situated between the rough, massive volumes the ground had been modelled into on the side of the building facing the square, next to the Italie-Italy emblem – attributable to Scarpa – which marked the pavilion's threshold.<sup>31</sup> Once descended into the penumbra of the interior space, which was one and a half metres below the surrounding space, visitors found themselves

28 [Who is the author?]; [No architect, not even a team of architects and designers working in concert, finding the lowest common denominator. The meeting took place at the opposite level, in an escalation of individual empathies. How was it possible to achieve this result? There was an idea, a non-conformist and courageous programme, not a brake and a limit but a provocation to create, each according to their own inspiration. The success of the Italian pavilion in Montréal does not depend on its absolute value, but on the fact that it suggests a method, a design hypothesis yet to be explored: it consists in thinking deeply about the contents of a work, articulating them in their different expressive intentions, and then choosing the artists capable of creating their images]. Zevi, "L'Italia all'Expo universale 1967 di Montréal," 143.

29 [rhetoric, no propaganda, but communication of ancient events, of restless realities and situations]. Bruno Zevi, "L'architettura italiana e l'esposizione di Montréal," in *Autoritratto dell'Italia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1967), 125.

30 For the chronology of the construction see the typescript on the letterhead of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, s.d, kept in PA, b. "1R-47 Padiglione italiano all'Expo '67 a Montréal (3)," folder Progettisti zona generale.

31 In presenting the Italian pavilion in *L'architettura. Cronache e storia*, it is noted that the design of the emblem is by Munari. Note that in the Scarpa Archive at MAXXI there is a drawing attributable to Scarpa. See "Il padiglione italiano all'Expo '67 di Montréal," *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (July 1967); in SA, b. "230: Allestimento della sezione la Poesia, padiglione italiano, Expo '67, Montréal (1966-1968)".



immediately in Vedova's Percorso/Plurimo/Luce, the beginning of a tortuous pathway through the various sections. The visit could start from the poetry section, and then, returning to Vedova's path, visitors could enter the costume section. Here the cavernous concretions designed by Ricci, i.e. the "scavo primordiale"<sup>32</sup> took the form of a continuous up and down that led to the staircase for the restaurant – located on the upper floor – and to a hall for the bar at 1.50 m. The visit continued by re-entering the Percorso/Plurimo/Luce that led to the industrialisation section, the itinerary then finally coming to an end below the spaces designed by Ricci, exiting from the pavilion's side. [fig. 6]

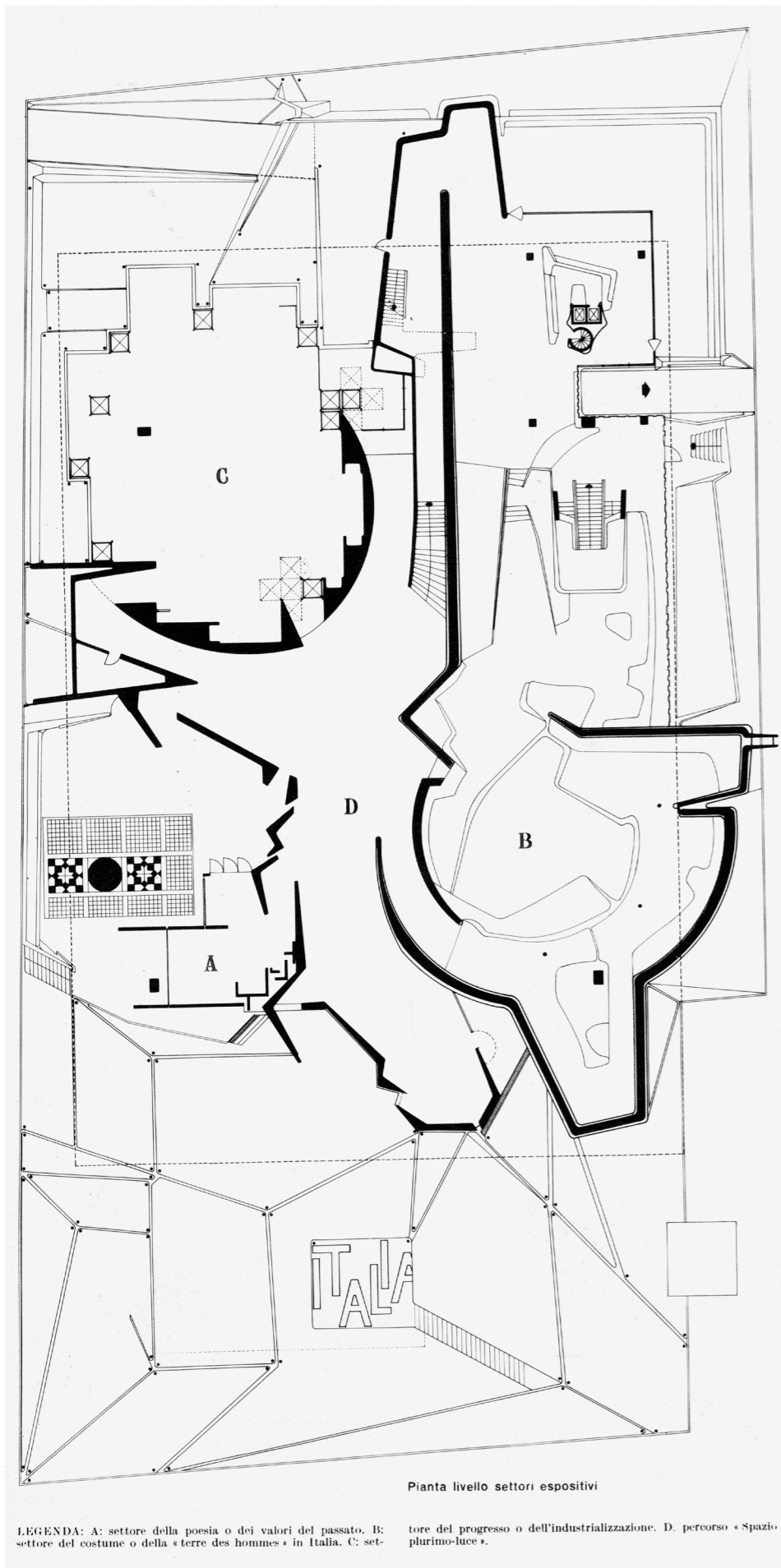
Central to this collective work, not only in terms of layout, was Vedova's Percorso/Plurimo/Luce, an "architettura/luce"<sup>33</sup> that, thanks to a complex system of thirteen projectors modified by a sequential projection of glass plates made by Venini, produced 'informal' light effects on the walls and ceiling of the space similar, in terms of figurative outcome, to the works Vedova produced in those years but with decidedly more earthy means. In addition to the light, the electronic music created by Marino Zuccheri of the Studio Internazionale di fonologie Radio Milano shaped the space. For Vedova himself it was a "spazio percorso dal pubblico in tutte le direzioni, per accedere alle altre Sezioni; spazio con "plurime" possibilità di visione; in relazione

32 [primordial excavation]. Zevi, "L'Italia all'Expo universale 1967 di Montréal," 164.

33 [architecture/light]. Letter from Emilio Vedova to Giulio Carlo Argan, January 2, 1966, transcribed in Germano Celant, ed., *Expo '67. Alexander Calder, Emilio Vedova* (Milan: Skira, 2016), 89.

Fig. 5

Some views of the Italian pavilion. From *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (July 1967).



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Fig. 6  
Plan of the exhibition areas of the Italian pavilion (1966-67). From *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (Jul. 1967).

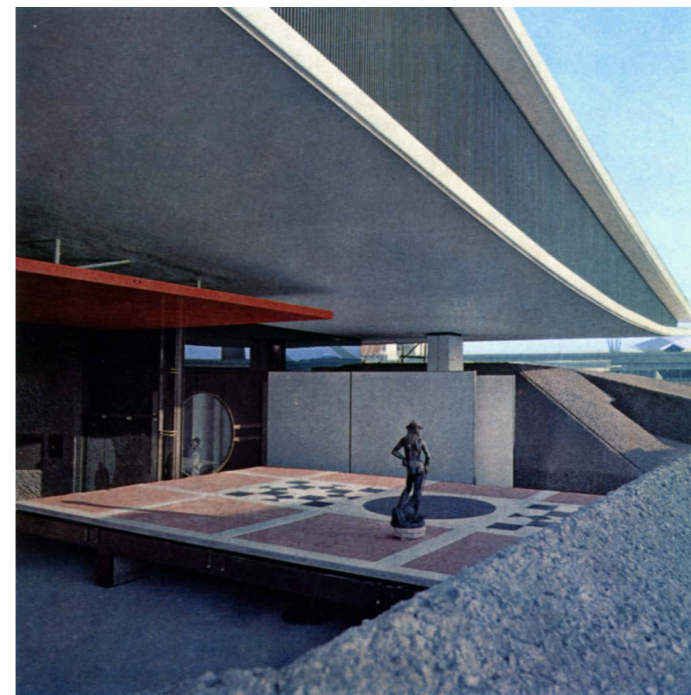
Fig. 7  
Emilio Vedova's Percorso-Plurimo-Luce in the Italian pavilion, 1967. From *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (Jul. 1967).

Fig. 8  
The Poetry section designed by Carlo Scarpa, 1967. From *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (Jul. 1967).

Fig. 9  
The Industrialisation sector designed by Bruno Munari, 1967. From *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (Jul. 1967).



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alla luce, al ritmo delle immagini, allo spazio asimmetrico”,<sup>34</sup> articulated around the “fulcro cosciente dell’uomo italiano contemporaneo”, that is, the experience of “resistenza”.<sup>35</sup> [fig. 7]

The fragmentary and rarefied interior space of the Poetry section, the smallest of the three, designed by Scarpa, hosted some autographs by Petrarca, Leopardi, Monteverdi, Galilei and Machiavelli, as well as reproductions of two drawings by Michelangelo and Raffaello housed in cases supported by colossal blocks of marble. The spaces designed by Scarpa also displayed antique musical instruments and, above all, Donatello’s Athys placed in front of a Venini glass window designed by Mario De Luigi.<sup>36</sup> Leaving the small room, visitors found themselves below the large roof of the pavilion, in a space that was partially underground but external and visible from above from the public spaces, where a marble reconstruction of the floor of Piero della Francesca’s Flagellation hovered in mid-air, with a bronze copy of Donatello’s David on top, in a highly articulated spatial representation of Italian art: “Carlo Scarpa”, Zevi stated, had achieved his

34 [dataspace traversed by the public in all directions, to access the other Sections; a space with ‘multiple’ possibilities of vision; in relation to the light, the rhythm of the images, the asymmetrical space given]. Padiglione italiano - Sezione “D” - Pittore Emilio Vedova. Tema: “L’italiano oggi” - “Percorso-plurimo- Luce,” hall sheet reproduced in Celant, *Expo ’67. Alexander Calder, Emilio Vedova*, 128.

35 [conscious fulcrum of the contemporary Italian man], [resistance]. This and the previous one from Emilio Vedova’s letter to Umberto Eco, s.d., transcribed in Celant, *Expo ’67. Alexander Calder, Emilio Vedova*, 98.

36 C. Monini, *Rapporto sull’incontro avvenuto a Venezia il 15 dicembre 1966 tra il prof. Scarpa, l’arch. Loss, il sig. Calabrese e ing. Monini*, in SA, b. “230: Allestimento della sezione la Poesia, padiglione italiano, Expo ’67, Montréal (1966-1968),” folder P1/18.

Fig. 10

The Costume sector designed by Leonardo Ricci, 1967. From *L’architettura. Cronache e storia* 13, no. 141 (Jul. 1967).

objective, and “per il settore della ‘Poesia’, ha sfruttato la liricità del suo linguaggio in ogni elemento”.<sup>37</sup> [fig. 8]

Scarpa’s refinement was contrasted by the modular space designed by Munari for the industrialisation pavilion. Here, the most modern technical and electronic devices blended with the architecture of the pavilion itself, which obeyed the same compositional logic and an industrial style: inside cars were displayed – but not the Montréal, “symbol of creative genius, of courage, of faith in the future” according to an advertisement of the time, which Alfa Romeo had specially designed for the exhibition and which had the honour of being placed in the *Men the Producer* themed pavilion – vehicles, instruments and equipment of various kinds placed on every floor within the kaleidoscopic space designed by Munari. [fig. 9]

Without further describing the sectors, the context in which Ricci conceived his work is already quite evident: it is possible to recognise how some of the recurring themes in the projects housed under the roof of this pavilion were already akin to Ricci’s poetics both at an ‘existential’ level and in the interpretation of the figure of the anonymous in relation to the attitude that governed the direction of the project. It is also possible to recognise similarities on a formal level, as in the design of the ground, which saw a correspondence between what Passarelli had initially thought of and what Ricci had proposed elsewhere, or in the concept, similar to Vedova’s, of space in relation to the path.<sup>38</sup> Having acknowledged these correspondences, it is perhaps appropriate to describe in more detail what Ricci designed as a counterpoint to the exhibition programme developed by Umberto Eco in order to attempt, finally, to trace the possible motives and traits of the formal genealogy of this work of his.

## 2. Content and Architecture of the Costume Section

The costume section was organised by Umberto Eco, who described its contents in *Autoritratto dell’Italia* (1967), published by Bompiani. In this book, which also contains texts by Bruno Zevi, Giulio Carlo Argan, Guido Piovene, Luigi Chiarini, Vittorio Gregotti, Vincenzo Caglioti, Gino Bozza, Francesco Masera and Francesco Rosso aimed at illustrating contemporary Italian culture and technology, in a section entitled “La vita italiana”, illustrated and with comments by himself, Eco recounts “per sommi capi, per esempi significativi, come gli italiani hanno concepito la maternità, l’amore, la tavola, la preghiera, i contatti con gli altri popoli, la vita in comune o la morte”.<sup>39</sup> the viaducts of the new Autostrada del Sole appear next to the Tabula Peutingeriana, Leonardo’s

37 [for the ‘Poetry’ sector he exploited the lyricism of his language in every element]. Zevi, “L’Italia all’Expo universale 1967 di Montréal,” 160.

38 See [Studio Passarelli], [Appunto], February 26, 1966.

39 [briefly, with significant examples, how Italians have conceived motherhood, love, food, prayer, contact with other peoples, life in common and death]. “Prefazione,” in *Autoritratto dell’Italia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1967), 5.



Aerial Screw next to an Agusta helicopter, Rudolph Valentino and Gloria Swanson next to a 15th-century gallant scene while a photograph of Ricci's building in the Sorgane district of Florence (juxtaposed with Villa Barbaro in Maser, a synthesis of the ancient building) was included to illustrate the contemporary home. This sort of *atti fondamentali* of a community – in the same years identified by Ricci as the foundation of his formal expression<sup>40</sup> – were displayed along five stations: Life and death, Life in common, Religion, Contacts with the world, Science, Technology and Citizens and the State. [fig. 10] “Una corrente aggressiva, inquieta neorealistica o meglio neo espressionistica, fondata sullo scavo manuale e brutalistico, remota da ogni geometria elementare, memore di una tradizione artigiana”,<sup>41</sup> according to Zevi, permeated the spaces designed by Ricci to stage this exhibition programme in which all the costumes of Italy, from the most remote to the most recent times, were made contemporary and even elected as an indication to follow for “come dovrebbe essere la Terra degli Uomini”.<sup>42</sup> They appeared to be carved out of a rough,



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continuous material that twisted into cavernous masses and stretched out into multi-coloured stalagmites from which the rock concretions or metal prostheses supporting the objects on display developed. Sculptures or reproductions of works of art, ceramics, city outlines, mannequins, decorative elements were imprisoned on these supports; or more regularly shaped cases emerged from the bare rock to protect the most precious items. Everything was only artificially lit, and the brightness of the light on the exhibits contrasted with the darkness of the pathway, where space vanished into shadow. Ricci's staging probably had more in common with Vedova's Percorso/Plurimo/Luce than with the installations in the other sections. Certainly not in the material that configured the space – serious and rough for the former, completely immaterial, light and music, for the latter – but in the formation of a labyrinthine space perceptible only thanks to the movement of the visitor and defined by a non-Euclidean geometry. [figg. 11-12]

Ricci neither described this project nor proposed a symbolic interpretation of it. This interior landscape could be read as yet another variation on the theme of the myth of the cave in the staging of a cosmographic exhibition programme on Italy. Within this ancestral space, figures seem to hurl themselves at the visitor like simulacra of a pre-industrial, primordial culture. On semblance and shadow, according to

40 See Leonardo Ricci, “Form, the tangible expression of a reality,” in György Kepes, ed., *The Man-Made Object* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 108-19.

41 [An aggressive, restless neo-realistic or rather neo-expressionistic current, founded on manual and brutalistic excavation, remote from any elementary geometry, mindful of an artisanal tradition]. Zevi, “L'Italia all'Expo universale 1967 di Montréal,” 143.

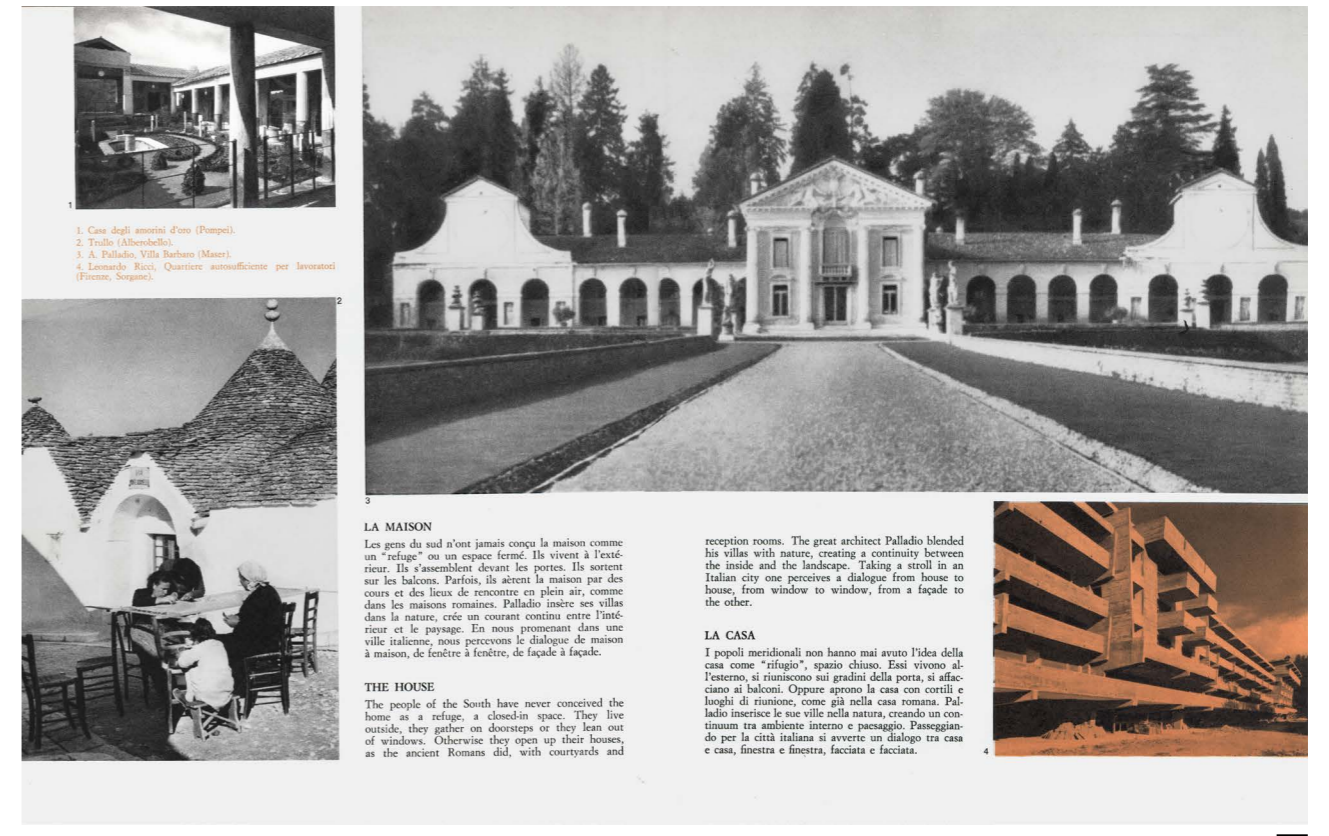
42 [how the Land of Men should be]. “Prefazione,” in *Autoritratto dell'Italia*, 5.

Fig. 11

*Autoritratto dell'Italia*, 1967. Front plate.

Fig. 12

Two pages, illustrated and commented by Umberto Eco, from *La vita Italiana*. From *Autoritratto dell'Italia*, 1967.



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what we read in the pages dedicated to painting in Anonymous (20th Century), Ricci seems to resort to a sort of eulogy of shadows derived from the myth of Butade. He writes that like architecture, painting is made of “atti integrati”<sup>43</sup> into life and so the caverns of Montréal need to be crossed through to be experienced, but at the same time they sink into mystery – “unica possibilità di esistenza”<sup>44</sup> – and into the atavistic tradition of myth without becoming a “simbolo” or a way of “giudizio”.<sup>45</sup> It is on these same principles that we seem to find the communitarian and experiential measure that characterises the endless forms of the ecclesia designed a few years earlier for the Waldensian community of Riesi by Tullio Vinay. [figg. 13-15]

The Montréal caverns, with their artisanal, gestural, strongly empirical form, were probably perceived by visitors as a polemical and violent response to the precision and determinism of the technique that permeated the 1967 exhibition. In contrast with the infinite applications of the cupling designed by Buckminster Fuller, with a technique that had become technocracy, the space designed by Ricci sought to be strongly emotional, linked to human expression and certainly not aimed at supporting the realisation of “the largest world fair ever”.<sup>46</sup>

In terms of authorial poetics, it is possible to recognise a formal genealogy in the research that Ricci had been carrying out for some years. In order to understand the

43 [acts integrated]. Leonardo Ricci, *Anonymous (20th Century)* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), ed. it., *Anonimo del XX secolo* (Milan: Il saggiatore, 1965), 127.

44 [the only possibility of existence]. Ricci, *Anonimo del XX secolo*, 21.

45 [symbol]; [judgement]. Ricci, *Anonimo del XX secolo*, 16.

46 Documentary “Expo ‘67 Doc: World’s Fair in Montréal, Canada (1967)”, British Pathé, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEly-bm5eU0&t=0s> (last viewed: 25 May 2021).

project for Montréal it is necessary to go back over these experiences, developed in Florence some years before and which saw a moment of synthesis in the Maggio musicale fiorentino of 1964, dedicated to expressionism, within which Ricci had for the first time the concrete opportunity to realise an *endless form*.

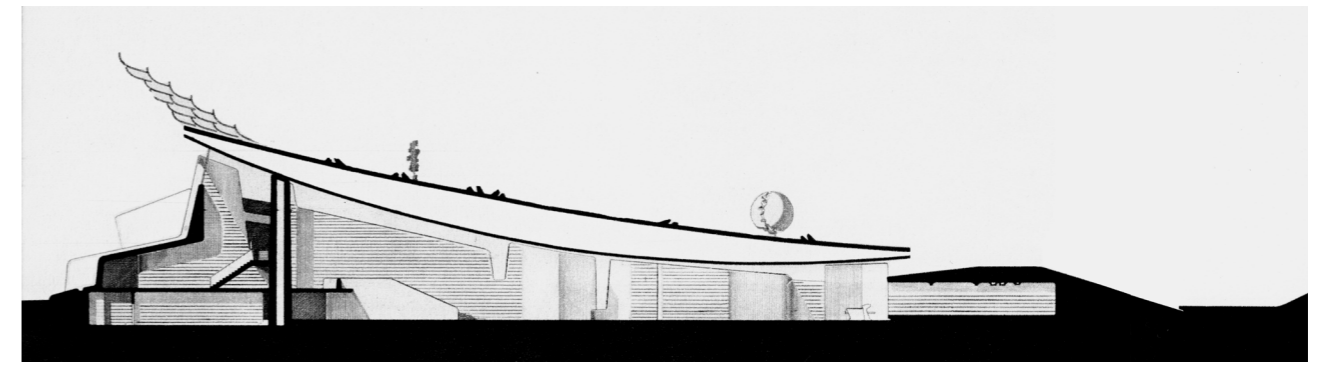
However, leaving aside for a moment the expressive artistic or architectural issues that such an exhibition programme brought into play, its political significance certainly did not appear revolutionary. If an exhibition is, for a nation, an opportunity to self-represent its political and economic vision and to position itself within the international chessboard, then the declarations of President Saragat appear significant. Against the backdrop of the military escalation desired by Lyndon Johnson's United States in the Vietnam War and on the occasion of his visit to the Expo, he reiterated the importance of the "consolidamento e [del]lo sviluppo dell'alleanza atlantica".<sup>47</sup> Conceived during the third Moro government while Amintore Fanfani was Minister for Foreign Affairs and Giuseppe Lupi (PSDI), Giorgio Oliva (DC) and Mario Zagari (PSI) were undersecretaries, the exhibition programme appeared to follow many clichés of Italian culture and history by avoiding taking polemical positions on international or domestic policies - suffice it to recall, for example, the occupation of university and the death of Paolo Rossi, which occurred during the design of the pavilion, episodes that would lead to the protests of 1968 and in which many of these authors were personally involved – limiting the themes exhibited to a certain disengagement and the formal outcomes to eminently authorial poetics such as, precisely, the *endless form*.

### 3. Endless form as an Expression of Existence. Florence, 1962-1964

It was precisely this form that Ricci began to conceive in the early 1960s, years in which Florence was a crossroads of those experiences eventually defined by critics as *informal*, *expressionist* or *brutalist* and that were added to those he had developed during his travels to Paris and the United States: it was the sum of these that, according to Koenig, had led him "verso un esistenzialismo mistico ed anarcoide".<sup>48</sup> It was in Florence that his conception developed and grew, nourished by the expressionist temperament that characterised the Florentine milieu in the years 1962-1964. On the one hand, the expressionist vein was already evident in the work of Giovanni Michelucci, founder of what is usually referred to as the Florentine school, whose definition is as elusive as it is fascinating. Adolfo Natalini sardonically saw its typical traits as "riassumibili in una idea di misura, ma affiancati da una robusta vena di follia [...]. Senza dubbio, dal dopoguerra in poi, ha

47 [consolidation and [the] development of the Atlantic alliance]. On Saragat's trip to Montréal, see: "Saragat porta in Canada la voce di un'Europa che vuol rafforzare la cooperazione con l'America", *Corriere della sera*, 12 set. 1967; "Patto Atlantico Vietnam Medio Oriente temi dei colloqui di Saragat con Pearson", *Corriere della sera*, September 13, 1967

48 [towards a mystical and anarchic existentialism]. Koenig, *Architettura in Toscana*, 142.



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Fig. 13

Longitudinal section of the Italian pavilion, 1967. From *Autoritratto dell'Italia*, 1967.

Fig. 14-15

The raw volumes of the Costume section, [1966-67]. Fotografie. Ricci Studio House - Monterinaldi (FI).

preso il sopravvento la linea irrazionale”.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, it found a moment of consolidation and sharing in the Mostra sull'espressionismo designed by Ricci himself at Palazzo Strozzi in the spring of 1964. This very event, the birth of which was part of a broader project on expressionism that involved the entire city and developed as the programme of the Maggio musicale fiorentino, was a moment of construction and recognition of a contemporary artistic and architectural identity not only for the Florentine school. The exhibition, which was intended to build a bridge between the present day and the 1910s, concluded with the presentation of Mendelsohn's solar tower, which until then had been thought to be destroyed, and above all with Hans Scharoun's Philharmonie, which had just been inaugurated. The parabola of expressionism, not based on a linguistic unity, produced a mode of expression nourished by strong social connotations that Luigi Chiarini effectively summarised: it “promosse nuove espressioni, che senza [...l'espressionismo] non si sarebbero prodotte; fu come il lievito che è necessario per fare il pane, ma che non si avverte più nel pane”.<sup>50</sup>

The idea of dedicating the 27th Maggio musicale fiorentino in 1964 to Expressionism came from Raffaello Ramat, councillor for fine arts and culture of the municipality of Florence, who in mid-1962 asked Romanian-born, naturalised Italian musician Roman Vlad to take charge of the artistic direction. With the idea that the programme should be divided into different events, a steering committee was appointed consisting of Luciano Anceschi, Giulio Carlo Argan, Fedele D'Amico, Luigi Chiarini, Paolo Chiarini, Luigi Rognoni, Vlad himself and, finally, Bruno Zevi.<sup>51</sup> Without dwelling on the detailed programme of the event – which included exhibitions, conferences, lectures and, of course, shows and the participation of some of the leading intellectuals, directors and set designers of the time – worthy of note, in addition to the exhibition that will be discussed below, is the Convegno internazionale di studi sull'Espressionismo, which was attended by Argan, Koenig, Ungers and Zevi among others. It was a particularly important occasion for Italian culture in the 1960s for the historical and critical elaboration of the Expressionist movement in the various arts, and a central moment for the definition of architecture in light of the most recent experiences. Koenig, who was also the curator of the architecture section of the exhibition, aimed to establish continuity between the Expressionism of the 1910s and 1920s and the actuality of Expressionism in the years following the Second World War. At the time, he described the current phenomena as

49 [summed up in an idea of measure, but flanked by a strong vein of madness [...]. Undoubtedly, from the post-war period onwards, the irrational line has prevailed]. “Interni fiorentini e altre divagazioni. Un pomeriggio con Adolfo Natalini, intervista di Fabio Fabbrizzi e Francesca Mugnai,” *Firenze Architettura* 16, no. 1 (2012): 72. On the Florentine school and “the irrational line” see Elvio Manganaro's booklet, *Warum Florenz? O delle ragioni dell'espressionismo di Michelucci, Ricci, Savioli e Dezzi Bardeschi* (Melfi: Libria, 2016).

50 [promoted new expressions that would not have been produced without [...expressionism]; it was like the yeast that is necessary to make bread, but which is no longer perceived in the bread]. This is Luigi Chiarini's thesis on expressionist cinema: cited in Ladislao Mittner, “L'espressionismo a Palazzo Vecchio,” *Belfagor* (July 1964) published in Id., *Saggi, divagazioni, polemiche* (Naples: Morano, 1964), 283. For the programme of the 1964 event, see *XXVII Maggio musicale fiorentino 1964. L'Espressionismo* (Florence: AGAF, 1964).

51 Antonella Gargano, “L'espressionismo a Firenze: Documenti e testimoni,” in *Expressionismus. Una enciclopedia interdisciplinare*, eds. Paolo Chiarini, Antonella Gargano, Roman Vlad, (Rome: Bulzoni, 1986), XIV-XXIII.

“espressionismo organico”<sup>52</sup> with strong political and ethical overtones – its aversion to Nazism and Fascism – and saw it as a formal alternative to the modern movement crystallised in the International Style.<sup>53</sup> Koenig's reflections were based on those of Oswald Mathias Ungers, who in the previous year had curated an exhibition in Cologne on the collection of drawings and letters on Expressionism entitled “Die gläserne Kette”, a body of documents that he had collected over time and which would make up most of the section on architecture in the Florence exhibition.<sup>54</sup> For Ungers, what characterised expressionism was not language or formal research but the *Erscheinungsformen* (outward form) of “expressionistischen kunstvollens”. It was based on three qualities:

Abkehr von der Wirklichkeit. In der radikalsten Auswirkung bis zur völligen Auflösung [...]. Besinnung auf Ursprünglichkeit und elementare Ausdrucksweise [...]. Verwandlung und Überwindung der Welt und der Materie durch den schöpferischen Geist.<sup>55</sup>

The same research into the expression of spiritual and primordial needs that Ungers read in architecture was synthesised in literary experimentation by Ladislao Mittner in the dualism between *scream* and *geometry*, or, according to Luigi Chiarini, in the antagonism between *chaos* and *geometry*.<sup>56</sup> If individual expression grew out of the *Urschrei*, the primordial scream, as Mittner argues, at the same time expressionism expressed a moral sentiment and theosophical visions that were politically grounded “attraverso l'idea di una società senza classi, felicemente pacificata”.<sup>57</sup>

Mittner also recalls how, while during the conference the discussions oscillated between interpretative poles understood as “indirizzo stilistico” or as “contenutistico sociologico”, it was Zevi who proposed a “mozione”, approved by the conference, which placed “decisamente l'accento sullo ‘stimolo provocatorio e vitalizzante’ che l'espressionismo conserva tuttora e sulla ‘carica morale’ insita nella sua

52 [organic expressionism]. Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Introduzione alla mostra di architettura espressionista, Comunicazione al Convegno Internazionale di Studi sull'Espressionismo*, Firenze, 18-23 mag. 1964, typescript. A copy is kept at the Municipal Library of the Archiginnasio of Bologna in the Luciano Anceschi collection. The text was later republished in Chiarini, Gargano, Vlad, *Expressionismus. Una enciclopedia interdisciplinare*.

53 On Koenig and the historiography of expressionism see Ezio Godoli, “Il ruolo di Koenig nella storiografia dell'architettura dell'espressionismo,” in *Giovanni Klaus Koenig. Un fiorentino nel dibattito nazionale su architettura e design (1924-1989)*, ed. Maria Cristina Tonelli (Florence: FUP, 2020), 213-23.

54 Adolfo Natalini writes in his reminiscences on Koenig that Ungers hosted “a young professor with a German surname for research in his library in Belvederestrasse in Cologne”: “the Florentine exhibition on Expressionism began with this research”. See Adolfo Natalini, “Note per un ritratto a memoria di Giovanni Klaus Koenig,” in *Giovanni Klaus Koenig. Un fiorentino nel dibattito nazionale su architettura e design (1924-1989)*, ed. Maria Cristina Tonelli (Florence: FUP, 2020), 103.

55 [1] Turn away from objective reality. In its most radical effects and until its complete dissolution... 2) Reflection on originality and elementary means of expression... 3) Transformation and overcoming of the world and matter through a creative spirit]. This and the previous ones from Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Die Erscheinungsformen des Expressionismus in der Architektur, 1964, Comunicazione al Convegno Internazionale di Studi sull'Espressionismo*, Firenze, 18-23 mag. 1964, typescript. A copy is kept at the Municipal Library of the Archiginnasio of Bologna in the Luciano Anceschi collection. The text was later republished in Chiarini, Gargano, Vlad, *Expressionismus. Una enciclopedia interdisciplinare*.

56 See Ladislao Mittner, *L'espressionismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1965), 49-73; Paolo Chiarini, *Caos e geometria. Per un regesto delle poetiche espressioniste* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1964).

57 [through the idea of a classless, happily pacified society]. Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Introduzione alla mostra di architettura espressionista, Comunicazione al Convegno Internazionale di Studi sull'Espressionismo*, Firenze, 18-23 mag. 1964, typescript.

testimonianza".<sup>58</sup> Zevi, who at the time had already published a number of studies on Mendelsohn and was probably already imagining the *Opera completa* dedicated to him that was to be published in 1970,<sup>59</sup> saw the path of expressionism as an 'ethical' choice – and even an identifying choice if incorporated in his interpretation of Judaism<sup>60</sup> – alternative to the "ideologie del lavoro di gruppo, della presunta obiettività razionalista, della funzionalità 'pura' e anonima",<sup>61</sup> i.e. by turning his critique against that season of the Modern, which, in his opinion, had exhausted its parabola: practices that he proposed to methodologically dismantle precisely by directing the Montréal project. "Chi è avverso agli eroi detesta l'espressionismo", he said, and expressionism, "se non si limita ad essere un'arte di consolazione, o di protesta, solitaria, ha gli strumenti per aggredire i problemi contemporanei. Si tratta di coraggio, di ottimismo ribelle"<sup>62</sup> and, finally, for Zevi, what had mainly been confined to drawings and principles between the two wars could, with these prerequisites, be realised.

If part of Zevi's considerations corresponded to Ricci's attitude, the same could be said about those expressed by Argan. The latter insisted on the Expressionists' "concezione dello spazio [...] non più come ambiente naturale costante, ma come dimensione dell'esistenza umana" capable of "porsi come rivelazione concreta della realtà attraverso la vicenda esistenziale umana".<sup>63</sup> The Expressionists "opened the way to an aesthetic no longer based on the concept of form or representation, but on signs: semantic aesthetics",<sup>64</sup> statements that echoed the positions of Ricci, Zevi himself, Koenig and Eco.

58 [stylistic orientation]; [sociological content]; [motion]; [decisive emphasis on the 'provocative and vitalising stimulus' that expressionism still retains today and on the 'moral charge' inherent in its testimony]. This and the previous ones from Mittner, "L'espressionismo a Palazzo Vecchio," 279-84.

59 Ita Heinze-Greenberg, "Heroic Narratives. Bruno Zevi and Eric Mendelsohn", in *Bruno Zevi. History, Criticism and Architecture after World War II*, eds. Matteo Cassani Simonetti and Elena Dellapiana, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2021), 129-49.

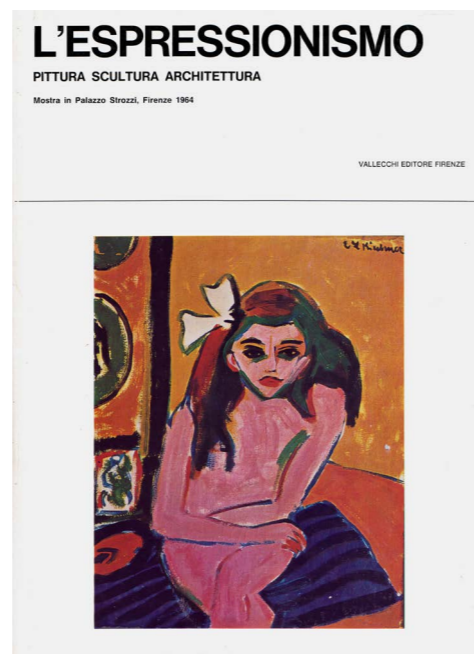
60 See Matteo Cassani Simonetti, "Assimilation' or 'Diversity' of Jewish Architects and Jewish Architecture in Italy during the 20th Century. Notes on the Debate and the Reflection of Bruno Zevi", in *Bruno Zevi. History, Criticism and Architecture after World War II*, eds. Matteo Cassani Simonetti and Elena Dellapiana, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2021), 37-57.

61 [ideologies of group work, of supposed rationalist objectivity, of 'pure' and anonymous functionality]. Bruno Zevi, *L'eredità dell'espressionismo in architettura, Comunicazione al Convegno Internazionale di Studi sull'Espressionismo*, Firenze, 18-23 mag. 1964, typescript. A copy is kept at the Municipal Library of the Archiginnasio of Bologna in the Luciano Anceschi collection. The text is partially published in Marcatré 8-9-10 (1964) and then, modified, in Chiarini, Gargano, Vlad, *Expressionismus. Una enciclopedia interdisciplinare*.

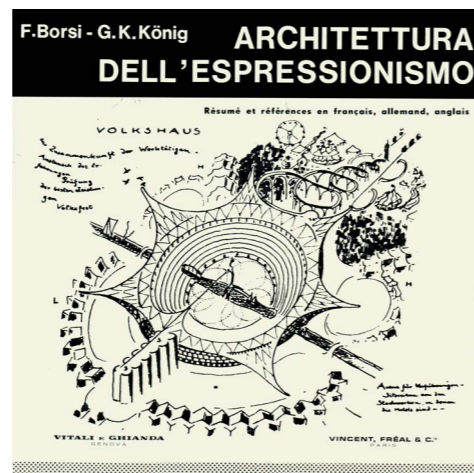
62 [Those who are averse to heroes detest expressionism]; [if it is not limited to being a solitary art of consolation or protest, has the tools to attack contemporary problems. It is about courage, about rebellious optimism]. This and the previous ones from Zevi, *L'eredità dell'espressionismo in architettura, Comunicazione al Convegno Internazionale di Studi sull'Espressionismo*, Firenze, 18-23 mag. 1964.

63 [conception of space [...] no longer as a constant natural environment, but as a dimension of human existence]; [presenting itself as a concrete revelation of reality through human existential events]. This and the previous ones from Giulio Carlo Argan, "L'architettura dell'espressionismo", in *Bilancio dell'espressionismo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1965), 95-108. The volume gathers the texts of the series of conferences "Incontro con l'espressionismo" held in April 1964 in Florence.

64 Argan's statement is cited by Zevi in "Caos e geometria contro il nazismo. Riscattata l'attualità dell'espressionismo," *L'Espresso*, June 7, 1964, reprinted in Id., *Cronache di architettura*, vol. V (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1971).



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Fig. 16

The catalogue of the exhibition on Expressionism held at Palazzo Strozzi in 1964. Front plate.

Fig. 17

Franco Borsi and Giovanni Klaus Koenig's volume on the architecture of Expressionism, 1967. Front plate.

If the conference was an opportunity to reinterpret the qualities of expressionism, the exhibition made it possible to see its figurative expression. It was accompanied by a catalogue – which devoted very little space to architecture – to which Franco Borsi and Koenig's book *Architettura dell'espressionismo*, published in 1967, constitutes an important addition. It consists of a first, more philological part by Franco Borsi – *Per un archivio dell'espressionismo in architettura* – and a more militant part – *L'eredità dell'espressionismo* – written by Koenig.<sup>65</sup> [figg. 16-17]

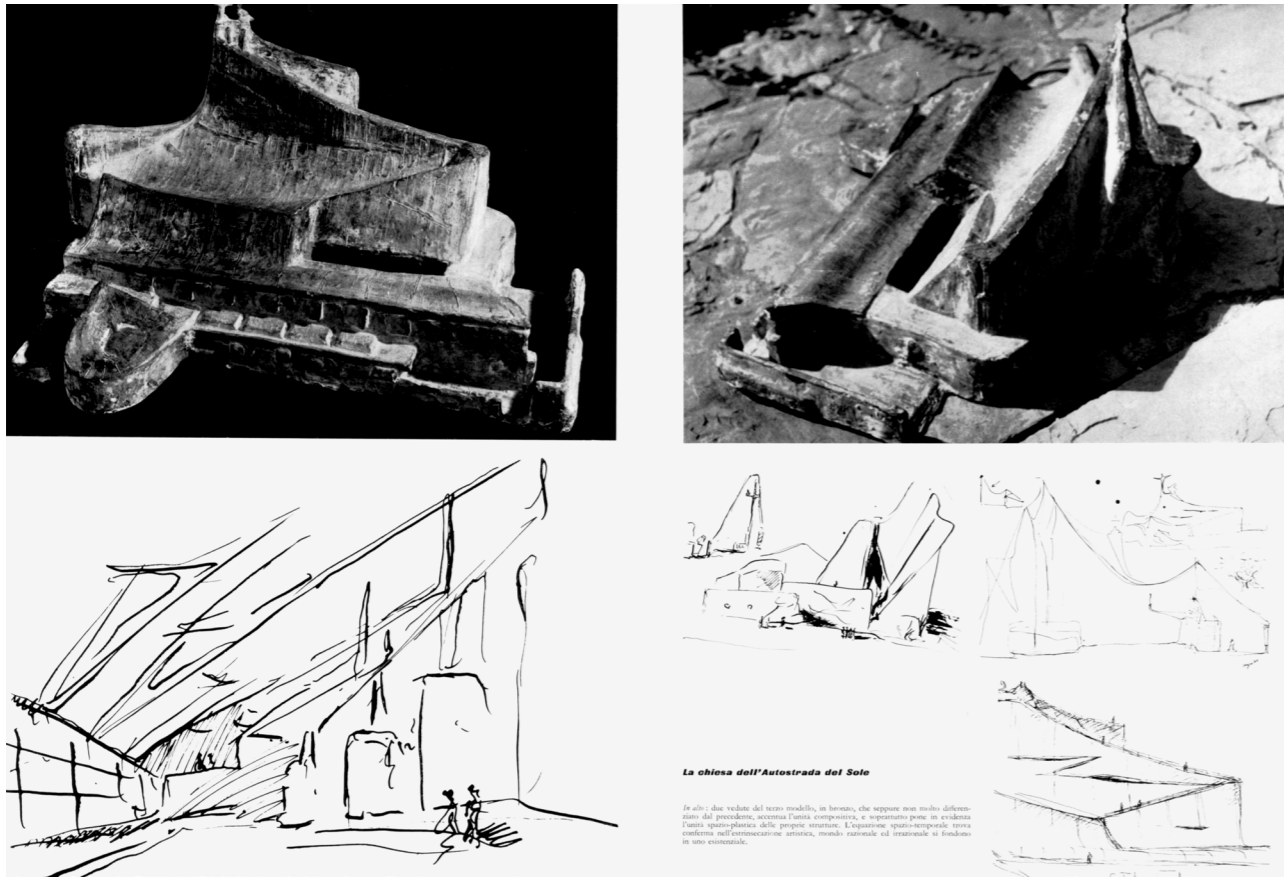
Organised by Palma Bucarelli for the painting, sculpture and graphics sections and by Koenig for the architecture section, the exhibition presented the public with a wide selection of works from all over Europe.<sup>66</sup> Compared to the 532 works exhibited in the sections curated by Bucarelli, the architecture section featured more than 130 works including drawings, models and photographs – the most-represented author was Hermann Finsterlin with 42 works and four models while only one drawing by Mendelsohn was on display – and concluded with a colour slide show of Scharoun's Philharmonie and Mendelsohn's Solar Tower. The three years that separate the 1964 exhibition from the book by Borsi and Koenig seem to shift the interest of the authors, after an initial phase of necessary recognition of the expressionist event, to a reinterpretation of this in a key more of vital experience: "la ormai riconosciuta conclamata crisi del razionalismo architettonico", write the authors, "porta la necessità di vedere se alle origini – alle origini specifiche e non pionieristiche – del movimento moderno, ci stanno altre vene, altri filoni ideali, altre ipotesi di lavoro"<sup>67</sup> through which to interpret their present, and so it is not surprising, with these assumptions and thanks to Finsterlin's legacy, if the volume makes mention of many authors who in the post-war period followed paths diametrically opposed to those beaten by International Style, after Hugo Haring and Hans Scharoun.

una vasta corrente "informale" che recuperava un vecchio membro del gruppo De Stijl come Kiesler o il giovane Italo americano Paolo Soleri; o l'esperienza della scultura che si abita di André Bloc; o in Italia il Michelucci della Chiesa dell'autostrada (il cui disegni hanno entusiasmato Finsterlin quando glieli abbiamo fatti vedere), e dell'ancor più sciolta chiesa di San Marino; fino ai giovanissimi che a Firenze alla scuola di Ricci, come in California (Goldman) e un po' dappertutto vanno sbrigando la loro architettura-scultura fuori dal cilizio dei tre assi

65 *L'espressionismo. Pittura, scultura, architettura. Mostra in Palazzo Strozzi, Firenze, maggio-giugno 1964* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1964); Franco Borsi, Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura dell'espressionismo* (Genoa: Vitali e Ghianda; Paris: Vincent, Fréal e C.ie, 1967).

66 The exhibition committee consisted of Giulio Carlo Argan, Cesare Brandi, Palma Bucarelli, Giovanni Klaus Koenig and Bruno Zevi.

67 [the now acknowledged crisis of architectural rationalism]; [brings the need to see if at the origins – at the specific, non-pioneering origins – of the modern movement, there are other veins, other ideal strands, other working hypotheses]. This and the previous one from Franco Borsi, Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura dell'espressionismo*, 8.



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cartesiani: tutti possono riconoscere in Finsterlin un po' il loro padre.<sup>68</sup>

It is thanks to this genealogy – which is reflected in another acute observation by Borsi in which he drew a bridge between the city-land argued by Bruno Taut and the one imagined by Ricci<sup>69</sup> – which unites direct masters, putative masters and students that we can begin to relate Ricci's work to some of the themes that resounded in the early 1960s in the streets of Florence, and that Ricci both heard and helped to spread: the primordial expression spawning an existential interpretation of architecture; the dimension of social utopia that architecture can contribute to achieve; the insistence on the fundamental acts of human life. These are in an area in which at least three of the authors mentioned by Borsi played a decisive role for Ricci: Frederick Kiesler, André Bloc and, of course, Giovanni Michelucci whose works and influence appear inextricably intertwined in the Florence of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

68 [A vast "informal" current that recovered an old member of the De Stijl group such as Kiesler or the young Italo-American Paolo Soleri; or the experience of sculpture that recalls André Bloc; or in Italy the Michelucci of the Church of the Motorway (whose drawings enthused Finsterlin when we showed them to him), and of the even more dispersed church of San Marino; up to the very young people who in Florence at the school of Ricci, as in California (Goldman) and a little bit everywhere are developing their architecture-sculpture outside the circle of the three Cartesian axes: they can all consider Finsterlin as a bit of their father]. Franco Borsi, "Per un archivio dell'espressionismo in architettura," in Franco Borsi, Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura dell'espressionismo*, 109.

69 Franco Borsi, "Per un archivio dell'espressionismo in architettura," in Franco Borsi, Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura dell'espressionismo*, 76. Particularly important for this genealogy is the series *L'occhio e le seste* conceived by Koenig and Borsi, consisting of just two volumes for the publisher LEF, whose combination appears very significant: *Giovanni Michelucci* (1966) and *Hermann Finsterlin. Idea dell'architettura* (1968), both edited by Franco Borsi.

Fig. 18

Leonardo Ricci's presentation of Giovanni Michelucci's work. From *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 7, no. 76 (Feb. 1962).

#### 4. Towards an Existential Form. Three Masters Faced with the Problem of Expression: Giovanni Michelucci, Frederick Kiesler and André Bloc

While it is useless to argue about Michelucci's relationship with Ricci – it is sufficient to reread the largely autobiographical text Ricci dedicated to his master in 1962<sup>70</sup> – the relationship with Bloc can be traced back at least to 1955, when he exhibited some of his sculptures at Ricci's home in Monterinaldi as part of the exhibition organised by Ricci together with Fiamma Vigo, "La Cava. Mostra internazionale all'aperto di arti plastiche" [fig. 18].<sup>71</sup> The relationship between Ricci and Kiesler, on the other hand, while there does not seem to be any documented evidence of them meeting, probably dates back to 1952, the year when Ricci became acquainted with his work.<sup>72</sup> However, it is not certain that Ricci visited the exhibitions "15 Americans" – in whose catalogue Kiesler published *Note on the Correalism*<sup>73</sup> – and "Two Houses: New Ways to Build" – curated by Arthur Drexler and which compared the Endless House and Buckminster Fuller's Geodesic Dome House – both at MoMA in New York in the summer of 1952 when his presence was documented at nearby Brooklyn College.<sup>74</sup> Nor is it certain that in the autumn of 1960, when Ricci was at MIT, he had the opportunity to visit the MoMA exhibition "Visionary architecture", again curated by Drexler, which brought together many works of the 20th century under the common theme of visionary architecture, from that of the expressionists – Hermann Finsterlin, Hans Poelzig and Bruno Taut – to more recent experiments, such as that of Kiesler. On the other hand, it is certain that he presented the latter exhibition with a lecture in Florence three years later as part of the cultural exchanges between Palazzo Strozzi and the United States.<sup>75</sup> For Drexler, the theme that guided the exhibition was vision expressed through certain social and architectural utopias, issues that were also crucial for Ricci in the same years: "Social usage", wrote Drexler, "determines what is visionary and what is not. Visionary projects cast their shadows over into the real world of experience, expense and frustration. If we could learn what they have to teach, we might exchange irrelevant rationalizations for more useful critical standards. Vision and reality might then coincide".<sup>76</sup> What remains of Ricci's Florentine presentation is a testimony by Lara Vinca Masini published in *L'Avanti* in which she relates the Endless House to the village of Rieti and to Vittorio Giorgini's research. In addition to commenting on the projects, Vinca Masini also reports on Ricci's vision of architecture in relation to Kiesler's work: [fig. 19]

Questa mostra, al di là della contraddittorietà dell'impostazione, oltre a di-

70 Leonardo Ricci, "L'uomo Michelucci, dalla casa Valiani alla Chiesa dell'Autostrada del Sole," *L'architettura. Cronache e Storia* 7, no. 76 (February 1962): 664-89.

71 Gillo Dorfles, "Una mostra all'aperto di arti plastiche", *Domus*, no. 313 (1955): 61-64.

72 Before his death, Kiesler's work was not particularly well illustrated in Italian publications. See Maria Bottero, *Frederick Kiesler. Arte, architettura, ambiente* (Milan: Electa, 1996).

73 Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *15 Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1952), 8.

74 On the exhibition see: *Two Houses: New Ways to Build, Exhibition's press release*, MoMA Archives, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2420> (last viewed: 25 May 2021).

75 Silvia Massa and Elena Pontelli, eds., *Mostre permanenti. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti in un secolo di esposizioni* (Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Ragghianti Studi sull'Arte, 2018), p. 243-44 (article by Francesca Giusti).

76 *Visionary architecture, Exhibition's press release*, MoMA Archives, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2554> (last viewed: 25 May 2021).

mostrare (citiamo ancora Ricci) “che la spinta della civiltà meccanica si è esaurita” e a manifestare la necessità, per l’uomo attuale “di entrare in una nuova avventura umana”, in un processo culturale “interdisciplinare, più aperto a nuovi orizzonti di cui non conosciamo ancora la portata” ci sembra prospettare una nuova concezione dell’architettura, orientata verso una dinamica dell’immaginazione intesa come articolazione di un nuovo spazio, uno spazio, appunto, continuo, interpretato emozionalmente, per la vita dell’uomo del nostro tempo (ne abbiamo una trascrizione esemplare nella nuova chiesa dell’autostrada del sole di Giovanni Michelucci). Questa concezione di uno spazio “naturalistico” si contrappone, succedendole, a quella dello spazio “organico” di impostazione intellettualistica e razionale, con un processo inverso a quello delle altre arti figurative, in cui la posizione neo-concretista e gestaltica è, semmai, di un grado più attuale (o attualizzata) rispetto a quella postinformale di recupero dell’immagine.<sup>77</sup>

If, as Marco Dezzi Bardeschi argued years later, Ricci “riprendeva quasi alla lettera il modello della Endless House senza timore di sfiorarne il plagio per realizzare l’archetipico villaggio valdese del Monte degli ulivi a Riesi”,<sup>78</sup> emphasising the centrality of Kiesler in the Florentine context – the first Florentine variation on the Endless House was probably Giorgini’s “Quadrante” art gallery, dated 1959, a gallery that would host a solo exhibition of Bloc<sup>79</sup> in 1962 – does not only mean that Ricci assimilated only the forms conceived by Kiesler. In fact, in the latter’s texts there are many analogies with Ricci’s both in terms of content and form. A heartfelt prose, in which a spiritual dimension recognised in all the circumstances of life permeates the narrative, testifies to how the theme of the endless form was existentially central before being so architecturally:

It is endless like the human body – there is no beginning and no end to it. The “Endless” is rather sensuous, more like the female body in contrast to sharp-angled male architecture. All ends meet in the “Endless” as they meet in life. Life’s rhythms are cyclical. All ends of living meet during twenty-four hours, during a week, a lifetime. They touch one another with the kiss of Time. They shake hands, stay, say goodbye, return through the same or other doors, come and go through multi-links, secretive or obvious, or through the whims of memory [...]. Nature creates bodies, but art creates life. Thus living in the “Endless House” means to live an exuberant life, not only the

77 [This exhibition, apart from the contradictory nature of its approach, not only demonstrates (quoting Ricci again) “that the thrust of mechanical civilisation has come to an end” and demonstrates the need for modern man “to enter a new human adventure”, in a cultural process that is “interdisciplinary, more open to new horizons whose scope we do not yet know”, seems to us to envisage a new conception of architecture oriented towards a dynamic of the imagination understood as the articulation of a new space, a continuous space, emotionally interpreted, for the life of man in our time (we have an exemplary transcription of this in Giovanni Michelucci’s new church of the Autostrada del Sole). This conception of a “naturalistic” space is contrasted and succeeds that of the “organic” space of an intellectual and rational approach, with an inverse process to that of the other figurative arts, where the neo-Concretist and Gestaltist position is, if anything, one degree more current (or actualised) than the post-informal one of recovery of the image]. Lara Vinca Masini, “L’architettura dell’impossibile,” in *L’avanti*, February 1, 1964.

78 [took up the model of the Endless House almost to the letter without fear of being plagiarised in order to create the archetypal Waldensian village of Monte degli ulivi in Riesi]. Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, “Kiesler, la scuola fiorentina e la curvatura del mondo,” in *ANAKH*, no. 14 (June 1996): 72.

79 See *André Bloc* (Florence: Quadrante, 1962).



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Fig. 19

Photograph of the interior of Frederick Kiesler’s Endless House. The photograph, kept in Casa Studio Ricci, bears a MoMA stamp and the words “Visionary Architecture” on the back. Casa Studio Ricci - Monterinaldi (FI).

Fig. 20

Photograph of André Bloc’s Habitable II, Meudon, 1964. From Bloc. *Le monolithe fracture*, 1996.

life of a digesting body, of routine social duties, or the wind-up of functions of the four seasons, the automatism of day and night, of high noon and the midnight moon. The “Endless House” is much more than that and much less than the average dwelling of the rich of pseudo rich. It is less because it reverts to fundamental needs of the human in his relationship to man, to industry, to nature (that is, to eating, sleeping and sex) [...]. While it is being built, the “Endless House” will grow its colors, in vast areas of condensed into compositions (fresco-like or paintings), into high or low reliefs, into the plasticity of full sculptures. Like vegetation, it grows its form and color at the same time. And so let us avoid the museum term “art” in connection

with architecture, because, as we understand it today, architecture has been degraded to old-fashioned or modern-fashioned make-up and décor. Art as a ritual cannot be an after-thought. It must again become the usual link between the known and the unknown.<sup>80</sup>

However, it is likely that Ricci was not familiar with this text by Kiesler but rather with the better known *Manifeste du Corréalisme* published in 1949 with *L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, still directed by Bloc. It allows us to better interpret the analogies between formal expression and spiritual relationship: thanks to the continuity – for Kiesler *The New Principle of Architecture* – that “il devenait possible de recourir a des solutions simples aux problèmes primoridiaux sans négliger les besoins essentiels de l'existence humaine”. This continuity, not expressed in an individualistic vision but, to the contrary, aimed at a social one – “Nous voulons”, Kiesler continues, “la création de nouvelles possibilités d'existence qui aiguilleront l'évolution de la société sur une voie nouvelle”<sup>81</sup> – becomes a generative method of architectural space obtained, for Kiesler, from the continuous movement of man in space, or from what he defined as “action living”.<sup>82</sup> This spatial research – in some respects close to his own work – makes it possible to elaborate further observations on Ricci's conception of form in architecture, this time in relation to a similar study that was headed by Bloc himself and *L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui*: while for Bloc and *Groupe Espace* the crux of the problem mainly concerned the plastic arts in relation to architecture and sculpture itself – the approach can be understood in continuity with the problem of the decorative arts already set out on the occasion of the 1925 Exhibition and with the positions on the synthesis of the arts, in this regard, of Le Corbusier and Fernand Léger – and only consequently the architectural conception, Ricci's research is instead expressly architectural. In fact, Bloc's *Habitacle* is a sculpture on a non-habitable architectural scale made by an author who in the *Groupe Espace* Manifesto defined himself as a sculptor.<sup>83</sup> Consistent with this analysis is the presentation of Ricci's work in 1966 in the issue of *Au Jour d'hui* dedicated to “Espaces sculptés - Espaces architecturés”, in which, around the church of San Giovanni Battista and the church of San Marino by Michelucci, recognised as exemplary projects, the works of Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, Vittorio Giorgini and Leonardo Savioli were read out together with those – unrealised and presented thanks to models – by Ricci: a model for the ecclesia – defined as *Maquette pour un “espace habitable”*<sup>84</sup> and seemingly reminiscent of an Etruscan sculpture – and three projects by his students in Florence for a new megastructural

80 Frederick Kiesler, *The “Endless House”: a Man-Built Cosmos* (1962), reprinted in Frederick J. Kiesler, *Selected Writings*, Siegfried Gohr and Gunda Luyken, eds. (Stuttgart: G. Hatje, 1996), 126-29.

81 This and the previous one from Frederick Kiesler, *Manifeste du Corréalisme*, 1949.

82 See Bottero, *Frederick Kiesler. Arte, architettura, ambiente*, 29.

83 *André Bloc* (Boulogne: *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 1967), 55, 133. The following quote of Ricci regarding inhabiting and living in a space expresses the opposite meaning of Bloc's *Habitacle*: “l'architecture c'est une sculpture à vivre”. See Ricci, “Luomo Michelucci, dalla casa Valiani alla Chiesa dell'Autostrada del Sole”, 675.

84 Thus defined in Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, “Les architectes de Florence,” *Aujourd'hui*, no. 53 (1966): 76. The issue featured works by Finsterlin, Kiesler, Paolo Soleri, Hans Hollein and Walter Pichler. Two years earlier, in 1964, the village of Riesi was presented in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* as an “architecture sculpture”. See Leonardo Ricci, “Village pour una communauté nouvelle, Riesi, Sicilia,” *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 34, no. 115 (June-July 1964): 86-89.

urban settlement.<sup>85</sup> In order to understand the difference in approach to architecture-sculpture that distinguishes Bloc's work from Ricci's existential interpretation, it is perhaps useful to take up what the latter wrote about the church of San Giovanni Battista: [fig. 20]

Ma interessante è domandarci: “questa forma a che categoria, tra le classificate, appartiene?” È cioè essa di ordine cubista od espressionista o neoplasticistica od organica? E la risposta è semplice: “non è classificabile o per lo meno dovremmo inventare una categoria nuova”. Perché se è vero che fra quelle elencate certo la più vicina è la forma organica, è anche vero che la chiesa di Michelucci da esse si differenzia per l'intervento di alcuni coefficienti non presenti in essa. Prima di tutto il coefficiente latino della volontà dell'uomo di costruire e di misurarsi con la natura anziché divenirne soltanto partecipe. In secondo luogo una volontà di pensiero più precisa rispetto all'esistenza. In conclusione, una forma a contatto dell'uomo più che della natura soltanto. E poiché a me sta a cuore la parola esistenziale, in quanto essa permette una significazione più completa e relazionata all'uomo, mentre la parola organica potrebbe attribuirsi a qualsiasi architettura, fatta magari non dall'uomo e su un altro pianeta, poiché questa architettura di Michelucci partecipa proprio di questo moderno valore di relazione tra l'uomo e le cose, io definirei questa architettura e questa forma “esistenziali” e, secondo il mio modo di vedere le cose, è il massimo tributo che posso dare a Michelucci per questa opera.<sup>86</sup>

This “categoria nuova”, for a form that is by nature unclassifiable, is the existential form that seems to unite Ricci's work with that of Kiesler and Michelucci. This denomination, which for Ricci seems to find reference also in the philosophy of Enzo Paci in his *Dall'esistenzialismo al relazionismo* (1957) and in *Diario fenomenologico* (1961) published just before Ricci's *Anonymous*, shuns every historiographic label and every further attempt at singular clarification and definition: it is the fruit of a personal approach that aspires to hold together the legacy of these masters and that of Expressionism – and of Finsterlin in particular – and that coagulates in three works that are precursors to the Montréal exhibition: the unrealised project for the Ecclesia di Riesi (1962), the installation for the exhibition on Expressionism (1964) and the Living Space for Two staged for the exhibition *La casa abitata* (1965), both held at Palazzo Strozzi.

85 On this subject see Kepes, *The Man-Made Object*.

86 [But it is interesting to ask ourselves: “which of the classified categories does this form belong to?”, is it cubist or expressionist, neo-plastic or organic? And the answer is simple: “it is not classifiable, or at least we would have to invent a new category”. Because while it is true that among those listed the closest is certainly the organic form, it is also true that Michelucci's church differs from them by the intervention of certain coefficients that are not present in it. First of all, the Latin coefficient of man's willingness to build and measure himself against nature rather than merely becoming part of it. Second, a more precise will to think with respect to existence. In conclusion, a form in contact with man rather than nature alone. And since I care about the word existential, because it allows a meaning that is more complete and related to man, while the word organic could be attributed to any architecture, perhaps not made by man and on another planet, since this architecture of Michelucci participates precisely in this modern value of relationship between man and things, I would define this architecture and this form as “existential”, and according to my way of seeing things this is the highest tribute I can give to Michelucci for this work]. Ricci, “Luomo Michelucci, dalla casa Valiani alla Chiesa dell'Autostrada del Sole”, 676-77. The rejection of an “organic” label for his architecture was also expressed by Michelucci himself, see Franco Borsi, ed., *Giovanni Michelucci* (Florence: LEF, 1966), 127-30.



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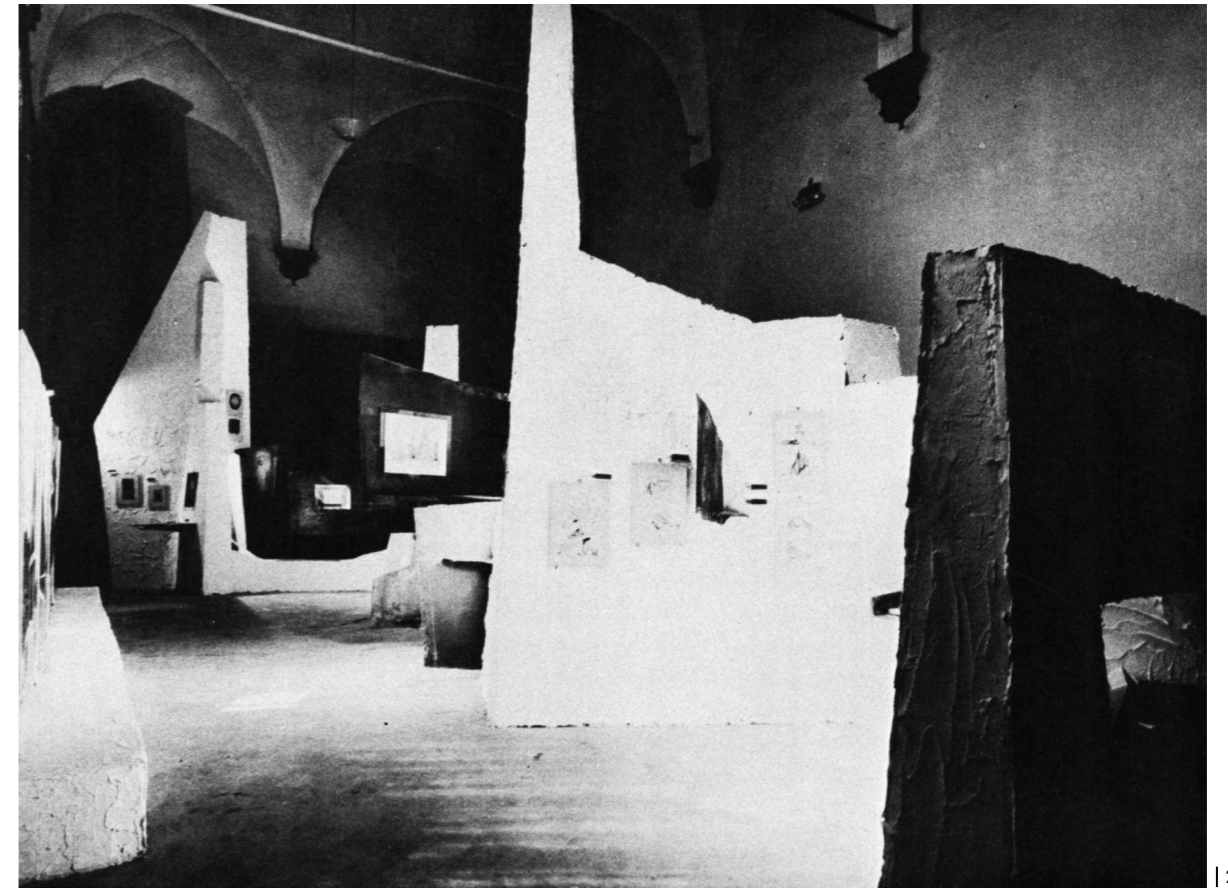
## 5. Against the Form of Mechanical Civilisation

In a presentation of the Riesi project published in 1963 in *Domus Ricci* illustrated the process that led him to model these “forme ancora insolite”.<sup>87</sup> The author’s main concern was to reject any critical label and to conceive a free, modifiable, imprecise living space alternative to those produced by the mechanisation of the construction process: in this utopian dimension alternative to the determinism of the society of the economic miracle, Ricci found the identity of modern man. “Riguardo alla ‘forma’ architettonica”, he wrote, “nessun problema speciale. Ho cercato di fare come sempre, un’architettura che stia su quella terra, non drogata ma essenziale, anche se spinta al massimo dell’avventura moderna dell’uomo”.<sup>88</sup> “desideriamo”, he continued, “che questa gente dimenticata dalla civiltà si incammini verso un altro tipo di civiltà, non quella attuale, meccanica, che sta distruggendo la nostra vita”.<sup>89</sup> The utopian tension – together with the theme of the organic nature of crystal – seems to recall that of the expressionist projects that he must have had during those months while designing the layout of the Florentine exhibition. While this

87 [still unusual forms]. Leonardo Ricci, “Nascita di un villaggio per una nuova comunità in Sicilia,” in *Domus*, no. 409 (December 1963): 5.

88 [Regarding the architectural ‘form’]; [no particular problem. I tried to do as I always do, an architecture that stands on that ground, not enhanced but essential, even if pushed to the limit of man’s modern adventure]. Leonardo Ricci, “Nascita di un villaggio per una nuova comunità”: 6.

89 [We would like]; [for these people who have been forgotten by civilisation to move towards another type of civilisation, not the current, mechanical one, which is destroying our lives]. Leonardo Ricci, “Nascita di un villaggio per una nuova comunità”: 10. Ricci will argue the same points about the Montréal pavilion. See: Wanda Lattes, “Il padiglione italiano alla expo di Montréal,” *La Nazione*, April 26, 1967.



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Fig. 21

The model of the Chiesa di Monte degli Ulivi photographed against the backdrop of the Fiesole hills. From *Edilizia moderna*, nos. 82-83 (1963).

Fig. 22

The layout of the exhibition on Expressionism held at Palazzo Strozzi, 1964. From *Marcatré* 8-9-10 (1964).

Fig. 23

The living space for two people created for the exhibition “La casa abitata” held at palazzo Strozzi, 1965. From *La casa abitata*, exhibition catalogue, 1965.



tension was related to the specific context of Riesi, it became a distinctive feature of much of his architecture. [fig. 21]

With regard to questions of spatial modelling, Ricci's impatience with any definition is always recognisable. For example, in the text there are references to – which on closer reading seem more like a distancing from – Bloc's work, the definition of which Ricci finds unsatisfying: "Nella sommarietà e bellezze degli schizzi-idee, queste forme ancora insolite – che appaiono quasi 'sculture da abitare', e come tali risolte solo come un problema formale (anzi informale, come oggi si usa definire queste espressioni per non cercar di comprenderle)". The rejection of any definition of his, or other's architecture, except as "fatto d'arte spontaneo, libera da schemi prestabiliti, volta a suggerire un nuovo modo di vita" makes any form of classification of his works almost impossible:

Già molti anni fa, da alcuni critici io fui catalogato come "brutalista". Oggi l'unico architetto italiano "informale". Poiché considero le correnti del brutalismo e dell'informale non solo conseguenti fra loro, ma anche le più vitali del nostro tempo, in fondo dovrei sentirmi soddisfatto. Ma non è così. È vero che brutalismo ed informale hanno rotto gli schemi accademici del razionalismo e dell'astrattismo geometrico, riportando l'artista sul piano del mistero, della libertà creativa, della fantasia, aprendo nuove possibilità espressive e linguistiche. Ma io avverto che la mia posizione umana, il mio impegno intellettuale sono diversi. Io non sono in posizione anarchica, talvolta confinante con l'arbitrario e gratuito ed antistorico di certi movimenti neo-dadaisti. Al contrario mi sento al servizio dell'uomo tanto da dare all'uomo possibilità di esistenza. La mia forma non si sviluppa al di fuori di un contenuto agendo in se stessa e di per se stessa, come ad esempio nella pittura di azione, di gesto. Ho distrutto, certo, e cerco di distruggere gli schemi, i moduli accademici, artificiali, non coerenti né con la materia né con il pensiero antiidealista dell'uomo d'oggi, che sono alla base di quasi tutta la architettura cosiddetta moderna. Ma questo solo per amore di verità e realtà. Non è certo il desiderio di ritorno a forme arcaiche, preistoriche, "incivili" come dice lo Zevi, che spinge, ma proprio il contrario. Sento che lo spazio in cui io e gli altri possiamo muoverci a nostro agio non è quello morto, statico, incapsulato dentro gli schemi formalistici dei moduli. Quello spazio è veramente antico. Appartiene ancora ad una terra bidimensionale che tenta la terza dimensione sempre con la bidimensione. Ma allora un tempio greco dovrebbe essere ancora il nostro ideale e la nostra aspirazione. [...] Una struttura nasce dalla terra ed assume la sua forma precisa in funzione della vita che noi vogliamo svolgere, dello spazio che permette quella vita, della materia che adoperiamo. Allora cosa è la forma? Non certo quella a priori, di facciate contenenti spazi non qualificati e non qualificabili, ancora concezione ottocentesca dell'oggetto visto come "taglio", quadretto di paesaggio o facciata in prospettiva non fa differenza. La forma in architettura non può essere che la conseguenza naturale, logica, di un pensiero che si fa spazio, plasmato da una struttura coerente nel materiale. Non è una visione

a priori, non una scelta volontaria, ma solo realtà diventata atto. Le forme che così nascono, certo sembrano naturali, quasi non fatte dall'uomo ma prodotte da se stesse. Ma tali forme non sono per niente casuali o gratuite. Tutto il contrario.<sup>90</sup>

The ambition to create a form that springs from nature and reality – and not to follow a somewhat superficial and *à la page* operation as Zevi would say a few years later about the French experiences promoted by *L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui*<sup>91</sup> – define the spaces of the village of Riesi planimetrically developed around nuclei delimited by curved walls, which three-dimensionally develop in space in other endless forms. The ambition to generate a natural form is evident in the photographs of the model published in the *Domus* article, where the brown volumes of the imagined architecture, almost as if they had sprung from the rocky surface of the top of a stone wall, blend in with those of the green hills of Fiesole, in counterpoint with the profile of the convent of San Francesco.

If the Riesi experience is the initiator of this research, at least from a formal and spatial point of view, the almost simultaneous work for the exhibition on Expressionism was a first opportunity for its partial development. [fig. 22] The exhibition offered Ricci and his collaborators the opportunity to "divert[irsi]" non nel senso del 'gusto',



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Fig. 24

The model of the "Spazio vivibile per due persone" created for the exhibition "La casa abitata" held at palazzo Strozzi, 1965. From *La casa abitata*, exhibition catalogue, 1965.

90 [In the roughness and beauty of the sketch-ideas, these still unusual forms – which appear almost a 'sculpture to be inhabited' and as such resolved only as a formal problem (or rather informal, as we nowadays use to define these expressions so as not to try to understand them)]; [spontaneous art, free from pre-established schemes, aimed at suggesting a new way of life]; [Many years ago, some critics categorised me as a "brutalist". Today the only "informal" Italian architect. Since I consider the currents of brutalism and informalism to be not only consequential but also the most vital of our time, I should feel satisfied. But this is not the case. It is true that brutalism and informalism broke the academic mould of rationalism and geometric abstractionism, bringing the artist back to the plane of mystery, creative freedom and imagination, opening up new expressive and linguistic possibilities. But I feel that my human position, my intellectual commitment are different. I am not in an anarchic position, sometimes bordering on the arbitrary and gratuitous and anti-historical of certain neo-dadaist movements. To the contrary, I feel I am at the service of mankind to the extent of giving mankind the possibility of existence. My form does not develop outside of a content acting in and of itself, as for example in action painting, gesture painting. I have certainly shattered and try to continue to shatter moulds, academic, artificial modules that are not consistent either with the subject matter or with the anti-idealist thinking of today's man, which are the basis of almost all so-called modern architecture. But this is only for the sake of truth and reality. It is certainly not a desire to return to archaic, prehistoric, "uncivilised" forms, as Zevi says, that drives us, but precisely the opposite. I feel that the space in which I and others can move at ease is not the dead, static space encapsulated within the formalistic schemes of modules. That space is truly ancient. It still belongs to a two-dimensional earth that pursues a third dimension using just two. But then a Greek temple should still be our ideal and our aspiration... A structure is born from the earth and takes on its precise form according to the life we want to lead, the space that allows that life, the material we use. So what is form? Certainly not the a priori concept of facades containing unqualified and unqualifiable spaces, a 19th-century concept of the object seen as a "cut", a picture of a landscape or a facade in perspective makes no difference. Form in architecture can only be the natural, logical consequence of a thought that becomes space, shaped by a coherent structure in the material. It is not an a priori vision, not a voluntary choice, but only reality that has become action. The forms thus created certainly seem natural, almost not man-made but self-produced. But such forms are by no means random or gratuitous. Quite the opposite]. This and the previous one from Leonardo Ricci, "Nascita di un villaggio per una nuova comunità": 6-8.

91 Bruno Zevi, "Sculpture à habiter. In Francia si torna alle caverne," *L'espresso* (August 28, 1966), reprinted in Id., *Cronache di architettura*, vol. VI (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1970).



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ma divertiti a vivere questa avventura espressionista come se fosse nostra, come se fossimo noi gli artisti che hanno fatto le opere e desiderano uno spazio adatto ad esse". This identification, the result of the desire to "vivere a contatto con l'opera" in an everyday life where the work of art was demythologised and made domestic and understood as "opera dell'uomo e non di semidei" is reflected in the choice of forms and spaces for the staging: "una specie di scultura continua dentro le stanze del palazzo, con spazio a sé stante ed autonomo, che possa veramente contenere il mondo espressionista. Una scultura che permette un viaggio attraverso l'espressionismo dove i singoli artisti possono raccontare la loro 'storia' personale e la loro storia collettiva",<sup>92</sup> that is, a single expressionist sculpture made up of works on display and staging – a "scultura plurima"<sup>93</sup> according to Zevi – capable of making the experience of visiting alive and current. Apart from the



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92 [‘have fun’ not in the sense of ‘taste’, but have fun living this expressionist adventure as if it were ours, as if we were the artists who made the works and want a space that is suitable for them]; [live in contact with the work]; [the work of man and not of demigods]; [a kind of continuous sculpture within the rooms of the building, with its own autonomous space that could truly contain the expressionist world. A sculpture that allows a journey through expressionism where individual artists can tell their own ‘story’ and their collective history]. This and previous ones from "Risponde Leonardo Ricci," *Marcatré* 2, nos. 8-9-10 (1964): 55-56.

93 [multiple sculpture]. Bruno Zevi, "Mostra dell'espressionismo. Temporalità antiletticale e sdegno materico," *L'Espresso* (May 31, 1964), reprinted in Id., *Cronache di architettura*, vol. V (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1971).

Fig. 25-26

The layout of the Costume section designed by Ricci in the Italian pavilion, 1967. Federal Photos. Ricci Studio House - Monterinaldi (FI).

ways in which museum layouts were conceived in those years and the criticism of the one in Florence<sup>94</sup> – in 1964, for example, a critical Exhibition of Michelangelo's works was held in Rome, which was very different from the Florentine exhibition in terms of its formal outcome, but not so different from the cultural climate that provoked it – it is important to note that for Ricci this identification with expressionism corresponded on the one hand to his authorial research, and on the other with his desire to understand otherness and community in the perspective of a new society founded on "partecipazione universale".<sup>95</sup>

The rough, zigzagging rocky spur that ran through the Renaissance rooms of Palazzo Strozzi is a prelude to the Living Space for Two created for the "La casa abitata" exhibition also held at Palazzo Strozzi, in 1965. [figg. 23-24] Once again, in the perspective of a "architettura 'continua' che si doveva svolgere alla scala dell'intera 'città terra' grazie a una 'formatività aperta'" which was not to "provocare nessuna separazione fra gli atti delle nostre giornate",<sup>96</sup> and on the contrary was to support a new nomadic society – here, as in many other texts by Ricci of those years, there are very strong similarities with those that the radical Florentine architects would begin to write a few months later – a domestic space was created whose characteristics were rooted in the genealogy we have just described. [figg. 25-26] By means of "uno spazio naturalistico-espressionista"<sup>97</sup> that proposed an "alternativa"<sup>98</sup> to the technical interpretation of architecture then current and based on standards and calculations, Ricci seemed to elaborate a concrete spatiality capable of holding together the *mondo della vita* and architecture on a mega scale with that of the most minute staging: an expression of motifs, made even more strident by the occasion of its realisation compared to current practice, which would take form on the other side of the world a few years later, precisely in the "esistenziale relazionale" space<sup>99</sup> in Montréal, the maximum outcome of this formativity as expression of imagination and utopia.

94 Nello Ponente, "L'allestimento della mostra sull'espressionismo," *Marcatré* 2, nos. 8-9-10 (1964): 53-55.

95 [universal participation]. Leonardo Ricci, "Confessione," *Architetti*, no. 3 (1950).

96 [‘continuous’ architecture] that was to take place on the scale of the whole ‘city-land’ thanks to an ‘open formativity’; [provoke any separation between the actions of our days]. This and the previous one are from "La casa abitata. Arredamenti di quindici architetti italiani, in mostra a Firenze, Palazzo Strozzi, dal 6 marzo al 2 maggio," *Domus*, no. 426 (May 1965).

97 [a naturalistic-expressionist space]. Lara Vinca Masini, "Mostra della casa abitata a Firenze," *Marcatré* 3, nos. 16-17-18 (1965): 215.

98 [alternative]. Thus defined by Zevi in "Monte degli Ulivi a Riesi. Il kibbutz nei feudi della mafia," *L'Espresso* (July 14, 1963), reprinted in Id., *Cronache di architettura*, vol. V (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1971).

99 [existential-relational]. Ricci, "Progetto per il villaggio Monte degli Ulivi a Riesi, Sicilia," 118.

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