

Anonymous as a Theme of Discontinuity in the Culture of Italian Architecture between the First and Second Halves of the 20th Century¹

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The research about Anonymous in Italian Post-War Architecture (*Cosmopolitismo vs internazionalismo: la questione dello "stile" agli esordi di Gabetti e Isola*, conference proceedings, Roberto Gabetti, Politecnico di Torino, 25-27 November 2015; *L'Anonimo come tema di discontinuità nella cultura architettonica italiana tra Primo e Secondo Novecento*, in C. Togliani (ed.), *Un palazzo in forma di parole. Scritti in onore di Paolo Carpeggiani*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2016; *In memoria dell'altra resistenza: il Museo-Monumento dei BBPR a Carpi*, in VV. AA., *Il Museo-Monumento dei BBPR a Carpi*, Bologna, BUP, 2016) is related to other ongoing studies and specifically: the different figures of architectural creativity in John Ruskin's writings (*The Commandment Written within Things. John Ruskin and the Issue of Restoration*, in J. Ruskin, *St. Mark's Rest*, M. Pretelli (ed.), S. Arcangelo di Romagna, Politecnico di Milano, Maggioli Editore, Collana Politecnica, 2010); Anonymous in Post-War Portuguese Architecture (*Cosmopolitism vs Internationalism in Contemporary Portuguese Architecture: Távora, Siza and Souto Moura*, in F. Bethencourt (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism in the Portuguese-Speaking Countries*, Leiden, Brill, 2017).

ABSTRACT

The physical destruction of the architectural heritage as a result of the war and the experience of political and racial discrimination, then deportation, deeply marked the culture of Italian architecture during the transition between the first and second halves of the 20th century, changing its cultural sensitivity and paradigms. Among the themes that characterise the change there is the reflection on the Anonymous not as an appeal to popular architectural cultures instead of designer-based, but rather as a change in the structure of the creative personality of the designer in the relationship between individual conception of architectural form and the multipersonal dimension of architectural work.

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KEYWORDS

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The physical destruction of the architectural heritage as a result of the war and the experience of political and racial discrimination, then deportation, deeply marked the culture of Italian architecture during the transition between the first and second halves of the 20th century, changing its cultural sensitivity and paradigms. A study of discontinuity in Italian architectural culture in the late 20th century should start with a summary of the hypothesis of continuity. This would imply an extensive bibliographical essay and analysis of historiography – which we will undertake at another time – because the hypothesis of continuity between the first and second halves of the 20th century was, without a doubt, the prevailing one. The reasons are specific to the Italian architectural culture, but are part of a broader research into continuity between Modernism of the early 1900s and a second half of the century focused on the idea of a revision – or of a series of crises – of the Modern Movement rather than on the idea of an irreparable rift between the hypotheses that supported that project and the changed cultural conditions created by second World War. In particular, still today the theme of continuity stands on the repeated revisions of two key concepts of early 20th century architectural culture: internationalism and the designer's personality.

By internationalism I mean the hypothesis – that somehow supplants the search for “national styles” in the second half of the 1800s – that there are hegemonic centres that process cultural paradigms of international value, which thus define a periphery adhering more or less critically to this dominant culture, or refuses it or is refused, isolating themselves. It is impossible to summarise here, even briefly, the development of the internationalist perspective that infused the European architectural culture of the 1900s, from the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the artistic avant-garde of the early 20th century, which is its matrix, to the formulation of International Style refined by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in 1932,² from the regionalist revisions of the Modern Movement immediately after World War II to relaunching the issue in a Postmodernist key and in response to Critical Regionalism. Even today there remains an “international” aspect of cultured architecture, supported both by trade and general media, which journalists have coined «starchitect» or «archistar» but that is based on a very precise organisation of the educational, cultural and professional world in the field of architecture and that still awaits an accurate historical analysis, especially today when its crisis seems to be definitive and to portend the transition to other cultural and economic models, even in Europe.

By architect personalities I mean the different weight that two different models of architectural creativity had during the 1800s and 1900s. On the one hand, the model of architect-artist driven by a strong individual personality of an intuitive nature, oriented towards the processing of prevailing, recognisable forms linked to him, with respect to the system of constraints (social, economic, constructive) that architecture faces

1. The text presented here gives an overview of one of the themes that make up a larger ongoing research dedicated to the years immediately following World War II in Italy. The first part of the text that follows has already been published in Italian: G. Leoni, *L'Anonimo come tema di discontinuità nella cultura architettonica italiana tra Primo e Secondo Novecento*, in C. Togliani (ed.), *Un palazzo in forma di parole. Scritti in onore di Polo Carpeggiani*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2016, pp. 463-72. The second part was presented at the conference on Roberto Gabetti held at the Polytechnic of Turin on 25-27 November 2015, and is to be published under the title *Cosmopolitismo vs internazionalismo: la questione dello “stile” agli esordi di Gabetti & Isola*.

2. H.R. Hitchcock, P. Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1932.

in the process of becoming real. On the other hand, the model of an architect at the service of his project, whose job is to shape the process of realising the designed structure, subjecting conception to the constraints of geography, collective nature and material existence. In spite of a 20th century architectural historiography largely dominated by the cult of personality, a history of the models of creativity of 20th century architects paradoxically remains still to be written and, moreover, the subject is extraordinarily subtle inevitably implying for any architectural work the coexistence of personality and anonymity.

Focusing on the Italian situation, of particular interest are the years of the war and the immediate postwar period, a time of deep crisis followed by recovery in the transition between the fifties and sixties, where hypotheses of continuity marked both historiographical production regarding Italian architecture and its cultural identity.³

Among the themes that characterise the change there is the reflection on the Anonymous not as an appeal to popular architectural cultures instead of designer-based, but rather as a change in the structure of the creative personality of the designer in the relationship between individual conception of architectural form and the multipersonal dimension of architectural work.

Below we present three instances from a larger ongoing research on the topic of the Anonymous in Italian culture between World War II and the beginning of the sixties.

Ernesto Nathan Rogers: *Confessions of a 20th Century Anonymous*

Between the beginning of the forties and the mid-sixties, two positions, among others, followed from a single formulation: 20th Century Anonymous. This is how Ernesto Nathan Rogers defined himself in his «confessions» published in "Domus" between 1940 and 1941, and in 1965 it is the title that Leonardo Ricci gave to the Italian edition of his book summarising the theoretical positions resulting from experimental designs started in 1949 with the project for Monterinaldi, and completed together with the book in the Monte degli Ulivi village in Riesi.⁴

Rogers, outlining the characteristics of the Anonymous, even in the pain of a growing discriminatory climate, does not describe a defeat but rather portends a new cognitive and creative structure to be placed at architecture's foundation. [Figs. 1-9] The Anonymous is a designer who abandons the development of an individual artistic «personality» to become a means for conveying the expressions of others. However, it is not the disappearance of the personality that Rogers foresees, and in his pages lingers the figure of genius-architect, now with a dilated and «boundless» personality to the point of being suprapersonal. It is a mutation that entrusts to the Anonymous the new task of giving voice to

3. Regarding the historiography, consider that the first edition of the *History of Modern Architecture* by Leonardo Benevolo (Bari, Laterza) was published in 1960, while in 1964 Manfredo Tafuri once again took up Quaroni's considerations on the postwar destiny of «modern» Italian architecture (L. Quaroni, *La situazione dell'architettura moderna in Italia*, in "Metron", 1948, No. 25, pp. 5-8; M. Tafuri, *Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia*, in "Comunità", 1964, pp. 76-77), establishing a hypothesis of continuity that has dominated the subsequent historiography following the fortunes of the set of texts on Italian architecture (M. Tafuri, *Architettura italiana 1944-1981*, in F. Zeri (ed.), *Storia dell'arte italiana, Il Novecento*, Torino, Einaudi, 1982, pp. 425-550, also included in the volume published by Einaudi PBE in various editions to date, most recently in 2002).

4. The writings of Rogers on the Anonymous were published between 1940 and 1941 in the following issues of the magazine: 158 (p. 45); 159 (p. 67); 160 (p. 59); 161 (p. 69); 162 (p. 69); 164 (p. 31); 167 (p. 17); 170 (p. 94); 176 (p. 333). Ricci's text dedicated to the Anonymous was published in New York in 1962 under the title *Anonymous (20th Century)* by Braziller, translated into English by Elisabeth Mann Borgese, and three years later in the *La cultura series of Il Saggiatore* (Milan 1965) with the title *Anonimo del XX Secolo*.

«humanity» and that results from assuming as a field of action not the territories of a spirituality that is inaccessible to the common man, but the strange «place» in which Rogers declares to want to give «congress» to the reader, a place that lies «between mum» – the childhood memory of a caring gesture – «the cashier» – an erotic impulse that anyone can indulge – and «God» – taking design responsibility for common action, the only divine dimension remaining for architecture. A place where the simple act of common man encounters and blends into the simple act of the Anonymous designer, devoid of individual and subjective representation, intent on managing and bringing to form the common act as an act of design. It is the radical inversion of the functionalist principle and every associated legend, the abandonment of the task of interpreting classifiable human needs and offering them an architectural form that is viable for a community. There are only individual men, because: «In space, some higher, some lower, to the left or to the right of the large cross, we left an empty tomb with underneath written 'place for Giovanni' or 'for Maria' or 'for Pietro' or 'for Ernesto' or 'for Natalina' or mine for Anonymous».⁵ The Anonymous therefore still finds himself in a special place, and the crowd – the destroying force of the 19th century intellectual thrust into the city, the term of comparison upon which the vanguard built its poetics and a new prophet figure – still scares him, «pressing on every side; tearing clothes into tatters and risking the removal of limbs of life». But – and this is a tragic new development – the Anonymous finds a second solitude, even when thrust into the community and lost therein.⁶ Alone in the crowd, in the community, uncomfortable whenever «a function chains us to someone else performing or that has performed the same function», the Anonymous experiences a “dramatic conflict”: «I am myself, but I am also one of you».⁷ Condemned to perceiving his unique personality not as exceptional but as similar to the common being, the Anonymous comes to terms with the «holy terror of one's corporeal existence». «Every breath has a different cadence, yet you seek yours in others' breathless efforts; why not draw close to his for the suffering or joy he is interested in?».⁸ The role model, the guiding role of the artistic personality, is transformed into an effort to become part of the ordinary, requiring new extraordinary skills.

«We recognise that you shape a bit of my life, but I also do a bit of the same for yours. You change me, with your presence in my destiny, but I influence yours by giving back to you, in the arcane treasure trove of my works, your experiences that I have relived. Your solitude, my solitude that inhabit each other, because anonymous love, loving your neighbour means populating one's loneliness with that of others».⁹

It is still a dual figure, that cannot give up the modern condemnation of personalities but that understands the irrelevance of his personal, individual being. The Anonymous's design task is not to outline what still is not, but rather to change the existing, letting himself be changed by it. There is no salvation, Rogers writes, «neither in the ivory tower of egotism

5. E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 2° Le coordinate dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", March 1941, No. 159, p. 67.

6. E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 3° L'Anonimo e la folla*, in "Domus", April 1941, No. 160, p. 59.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

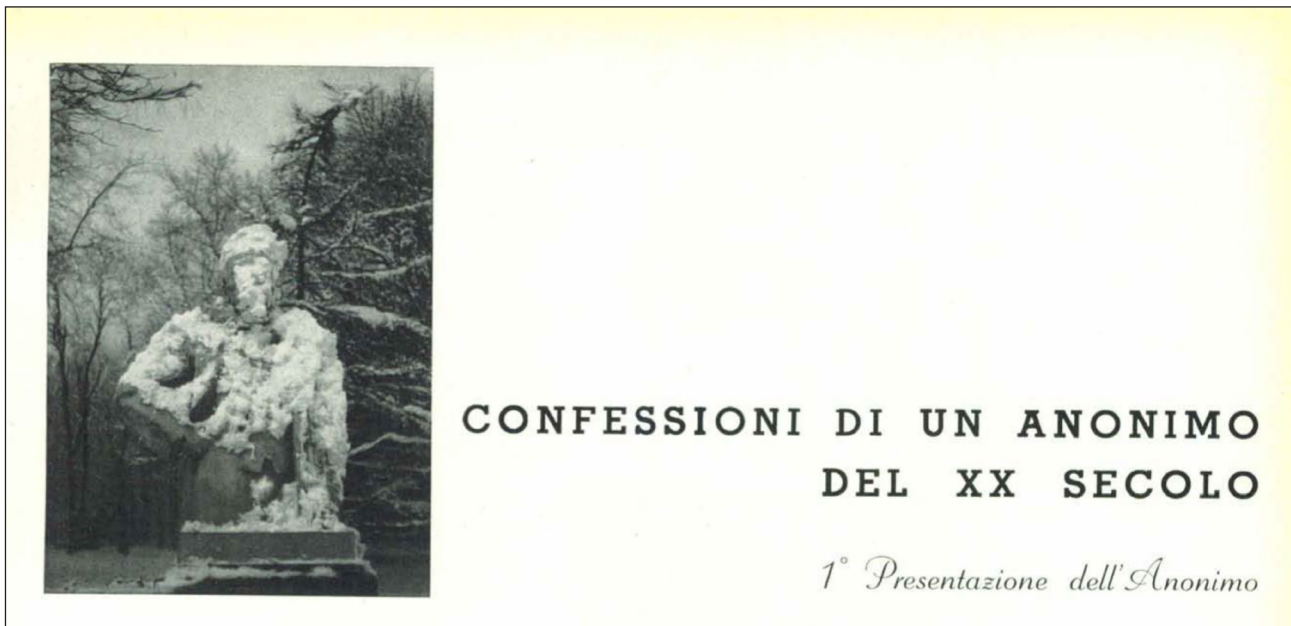


FIG. 1 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 1° Presentazione dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", February 1941, No. 158, p. 45.



FIG. 2 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 2° Le coordinate dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", March 1941, No. 159, p. 67.

CONFESSIONI DI UN ANONIMO DEL XX SECOLO

3° *L'Anonimo e la folla*

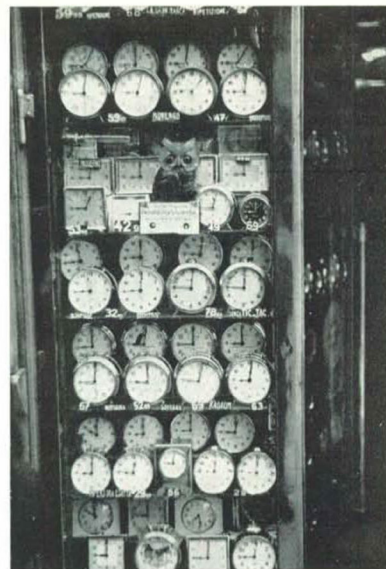
FIG. 3 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo*. 3° *L'Anonimo e la folla*, in "Domus", April 1941, No. 160, p. 59.

CONFESSIONI DI UN ANONIMO DEL XX SECOLO

4° *I Confini dell'Anonimo*

FIG. 4 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo*. 4° *I confini dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", May 1941, No. 161, p. 69.

CONFESSIONI DI UN ANONIMO DEL XX SECOLO



5.° L'Anonimo nel tempo

FIG. 5 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 5.° L'Anonimo nel tempo*, in "Domus", June 1941, No. 162, p. 69.

CONFESSIONI DI UN ANONIMO DEL XX SECOLO



6.° I Sogni dell'Anonimo

FIG. 6 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 6.° I sogni dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", August 1941, No. 164, p. 31.

CONFESSIONI DI UN ANONIMO DEL XX SECOLO



7° Responsabilità dell'Anonimo

FIG. 7 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 7° Responsabilità dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", November 1941, No. 167, p. 17.

CONFESSIONI DI UN ANONIMO DEL XX SECOLO



8° La personalità dell'Anonimo

FIG. 8 E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 8° La personalità dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", February 1942, No. 170, p. 94.

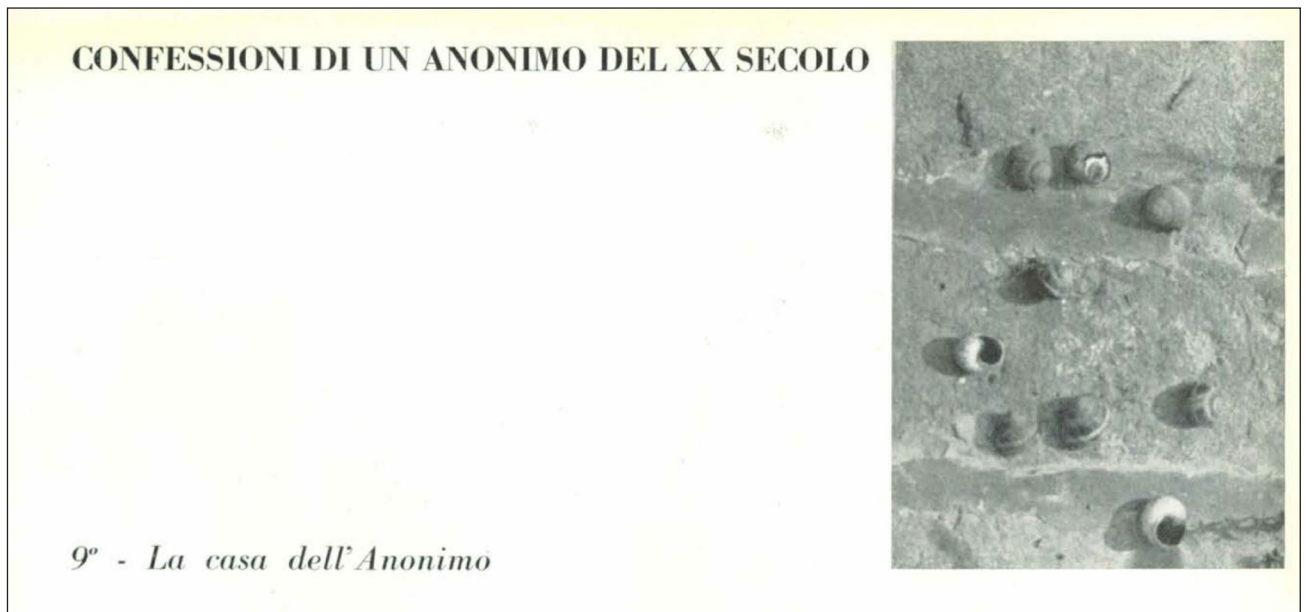


FIG. 9

E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo*. 9° *La casa dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", August 1942, No. 176, p. 333.

nor in the dissolution of oneself in a common liquid mixture», only in the «acceptance of the battle» between personality and its disappearance.¹⁰ The time of the Anonymous, in consequence of his destiny as a representative of the ordinary solitude of each, and the similarity with all, is a time that has nothing to do with the linear development from past to future that characterises the modern project. The Anonymous resists becoming part of a non-measurable time, one in which all «vision past and future» is dissolved, an instantaneous time, a constant present, the time of now, of the act, of living in the happening, «because I am my time and my time takes the appearance of my face».¹¹

It is interesting to note how Rogers still uses the term "style" in his pages about the Anonymous, though placed in quotation marks and defined as «a result of our lives» because «we are making a 'style' every day, as the river running over pebbles; it is a result of our lives, my office colleague, my fellow bus rider, my lady on the mezzanine!».¹² The «style of the period» is therefore a result of the constant transcription in terms of the action of each person in his or her ordinary existence. The task, the «responsibility» of the Anonymous, far more onerous than the responsibility of recognising his isolated singularity outside of the crowd and outside of the community, is to give form to the simple act. «Your toothache disturbs me, and yes – it depends on you – it could become a beautiful chair. Why don't we help each other to live? Who knows what huge buildings with so much pain».¹³

Rogers defines his query of the Anonymous as an «open and cruel» confession because, without pretence, without taking refuge in specialised languages, using prose that is outrageously unscientific, he clearly anticipates the act of renouncing the structure of the architectural project based on artistic personality but also the abandonment of the idea of the project as work of a specialised nature intended to be studied

10. *Ibid.*

11. E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo*. 5° *L'Anonimo nel tempo*, in "Domus", June 1941, No. 162, p. 69.

12. E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo*. 1° *Presentazione dell'Anonimo*, in "Domus", February 1941, No. 158, p. 45.

13. *Ibid.*

in the laboratory, which would then produce an architecture in ordinary life. An argument against the specialism that had wide circulation in the Anonymous culture of the late 20th century, not only in Italy. The Anonymous does not deal with a special space, aesthetically founded and controlled, but rather «a point in human space: you are just over there. You yourselves are well-defined points in this universal humanity. Just a moment of distraction and we will lose each other».¹⁴ For the Anonymous, pushing oneself to the limit of possibly losing every principle of personality corresponds to the identification of a new field of action for the project, which means probing the design theme in the moment and in the dimension in which it is still owned by all people, it is still a problem of life shared with those who have no responsibility to subject it to design hypotheses. In other words, it means tackling the project from the paradoxical prospect of an absence of decision, of fully listening, of a balance between Name and Anonymous made even more onerous by comparison with absolute singularity, of the non-traceability of the individual choice, of the individual act with general parameters.

«The first law is to find the humanity in ourselves and ourselves in humanity. Even for Anonymous me, this is the first law. And so I can write it down like this: I have to be so deeply Anonymous that I arrive at a name, and if I had a name I would want it to be so vast that it became confused with the anonymous. Names and Anonymous derive from a common origin, like the axes of a Cartesian system forming a huge cross within whose infinite spaces are located all our points».¹⁵

But the identity of the Anonymous, which is formed upon the renunciation of the Name and not of its affirmation, finds substance in the Work. «Names drift through history, they are in the books, among the dates, on the streets signs, even far away from their works; the Anonymous, no, they cannot leave, and only when you get close to the remains of his work is life breathed into him on this side of dreams. Consider the importance of these facts, respect them: they are aspects of eternity».¹⁶

Leonardo Ricci: Anonymous 20th Century

In the early formulations of the Anonymous that accompany the presentation of Monterinaldi on the pages of "Domus" in 1957, Leonardo Ricci seems to have already surpassed the heroic vision and commitment to the Work – and to the city, but the subject would open issues that we cannot address here – of the balance between Name and Anonymous discussed by Rogers in the journal more than 15 years earlier.¹⁷ [Fig. 10] However, there remain many similarities. Ricci also disputes the figure of an architectural designer with an extraordinary personality – anticipating the overcoming of the «loved and admired» masters in the 1962 volume¹⁸ – in favour of a new figure of a designer focused on sharing, according to Ricci a prelude to the definitive disappearance of architecture as specialised

14. E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 2° Le coordinate dell'Anonimo*, cit.

15. *Ibid.*

16. E.N. Rogers, *Confessioni di un Anonimo del XX Secolo. 1° Presentazione dell'Anonimo*, cit.

17. Monterinaldi is presented in "Domus" No. 337 (December 1957, pp. 86-99) accompanied by the text by Ricci to which we refer.

18. L. Ricci, *Anonimo del XX Secolo*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1965, pp. 76-95.

activity, as an activity separate from the ordinary and from everyone's everyday life. The second point of close contact with Rogers is the overcoming of functionalism to leave space for the figure of an entirely unique «client» having «infinite desires». As for Rogers, also for Ricci at this date, the issue is not to passively surrender to the difference and diversity of the subjects, but rather retain the educational role of the designer who, for Rogers had to expand his personality by offering a common voice, the Work, to the many names, while for Ricci he should instead interact with the client and teach him to distinguish between desires that are «fundamental» and «discretionary and even vain». That's why, as Ricci writes in "Domus" that one must not be «existentialist» but rather «existential», or recognise as «fundamental» only «acts that arise from existential truths of man and not from futile reasons of taste». The aesthetic criterion as a guide to the architectural project disappears, returning the focus of reflection on the theme of a «language of existence» also discussed by Rogers. And, as for Rogers in his pages on the Anonymous, the idea of «modernity» formulated by Ricci is not a progression of the new projected into the future but rather an «eternal present», a permanent modernity based on suprahistorical constants and that sets aside the evolutionary idea of architectural languages processed on a formal basis. For Ricci, architectural forms are not «a priori inventions of architecture» but rather the a posteriori result of «life analysis» that generates «consequent spaces». In those same years Ricci performs experiments, designing and building works like Casa Mann Borgese, Casa Balmain and Casa Cardon – essentially contemporaneous – the practical results of the positions expressed in "Domus".¹⁹ [Figs. 11-13] An identical constructive grammar unites the three buildings: the stone for the substructural work that roots the building to the ground, the plasticity of concrete to shape the spatial fluidity that translates the vital movement. But no formal personality is recognisable as a point of continuity in the three works, and the internationalist hypothesis is perfectly overturned in a heteronymy that demonstrates, and not only theorises, the disappearance of the early 1900s architect-artist's identity. The overturning returns in the full theoretical formulation of the work on the Anonymous in which Ricci describes a form-act that builds a non-mythical world, not absurd but «logical», «not in a rational way, but in the sense of logos». Architecture, «those stupid and still wrong things that are called houses», as Ricci describes them, must be the result of a query and transcription of «naked existence», and Ricci is fully aware that in this condition

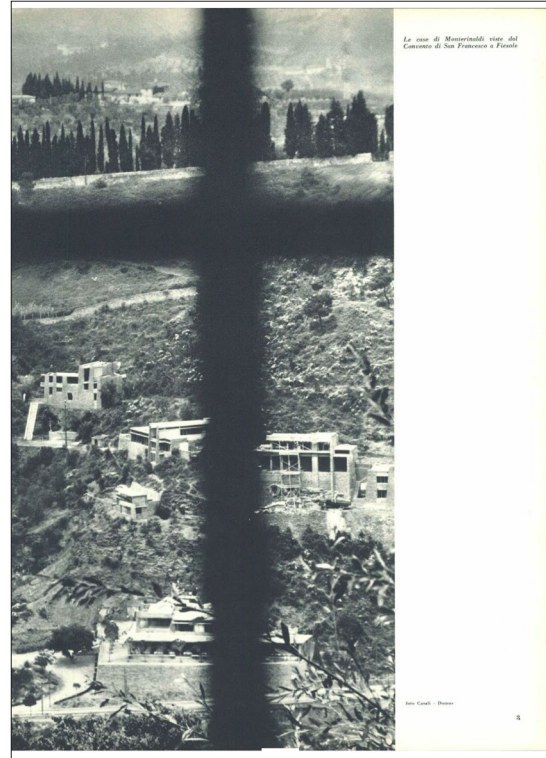


FIG. 10

L. Ricci, *A Monterinaldi, presso Firenze, un centro di quindici case*, in "Domus", December 1957, No. 337, pp. 86-99.

19. Cfr. A. Greco, M.C. Ghia, *Leonardo Ricci. Monterinaldi / Balmain / Mann Borgese*, Roma, Palombi Ed., 2012.



FIG. 11

L. Ricci, *Casa Mann Borgese*, Forte dei Marmi, 1957.



FIG. 12 L. Ricci, Casa Balmain, Marciana, 1958.



FIG. 13 L. Ricci, Casa Cardon, Castiglioncello, 1961.

architecture is confined by the experience of the Holocaust – to which various explicit references are made in his book on the Anonymous – an experience that has cancelled every possible expectation of happiness bound to the community because «the unhappiness of others affects our happiness and cancels it» at the moment in which suffering is given in such a form devoid of any possible sense and perspective of redemption. Even «happiness» offered by architecture, the «world of form» as a promise or action of redemption, as a guide-world for the transformation of the real, is but a «drug», a fascinating but dangerous illusion. Ricci's interest in the subject of community is therefore not surprising,²⁰ but his text on the Anonymous does not indulge in any illusion of a newfound original condition in which the relationship with material is released from representation. The task Ricci sets for himself is not to draw on naked existence but rather to free architecture's content of existence from the constraints of form, transforming architecture from a representation of existence to a place where it freely occurs. The focus thus shifts to hosted life rather than represented life, in a radical surpassing of the prefiguration: «There are no parameters in the logical world, because nothing is fixed and immutable. And the parameter is inherent in the act you engage in, not evident in such a way that it can be measured».²¹ The «logical construction of architecture» is derived from the maintenance of the decision and of the gesture in a constant current condition and a interpretive attitude consisting of «two instances: receiving and returning». The instance of receiving is the non-specialised dimension of architecture of which it was previously noted: «it is the phase in which the architect is just a man, not yet a specific operator. The more this man will be full of humanity, the more the architect will be complete and will not overlook anything of life. It is the phase during which the architect must not take the pencil in hand, nor clarify anything. It is the stage of conception».²² A conception that does not represent the world but arises from a dispersion of individual personality among the things and the single individualities of the «clients», to establish a planning action based

20. On the theme of community in Ricci see: M. Costanzo, *Leonardo Ricci e l'idea di spazio comunitario*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2010.

21. L. Ricci, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

on query and not statement, an unattainable condition in the era of personality, but also a chance to «work in error» and attempt a «new world», the world of the Anonymous. Evidently it is a project that leads to the disappearance of the discipline or, if you prefer, its radical overhaul, a change not in linguistic codices but rather in cognitive and productive structure. In the same years in which Ricci published his book on Anonymous, first in New York and then in Italy, projects such as “Living space for two people” or works such as the Monte degli Ulivi village bear witness of the design and plastic strength of the “new maîtrise” of the 20th Century Anonymous. [Fig. 14]

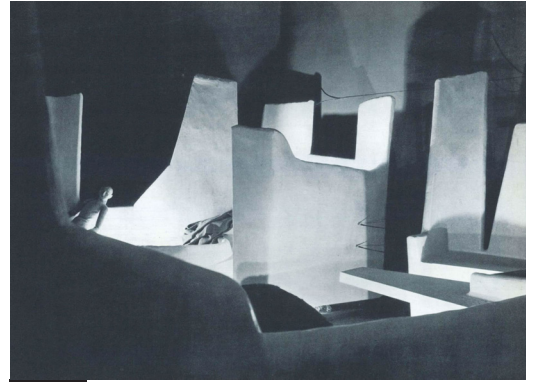


FIG. 14 L. Ricci, *Uno spazio vivibile per due persone*, in “Domus”, May 1965, No. 426, pp. 130-31.

Cosmopolitanism vs. Internationalism: the Question of «Style», at the Debut of Gabetti & Isola

The following text aims to analyse the media debut of Gabetti & Isola in the pages of “Casabella-Continuità” in the spring of 1957,²³ not with regard to the Neo-Liberty debate that would follow,²⁴ but in the perspective of a changed Italian sensitivity towards the discipline of the architectural project determined by the experience of World War II. [Figs. 15-18] The famous issue 215 with its editorial by Rogers devoted to a reflection on *Continuity and crisis* could in fact be situated in a series of events that, with the passage of the decade, closed a phase of experimentation dictated by disorientation and urgency, resolidifying disciplinary structures and cultural positions. Remaining on the subject of the relationship between history and project it would be sufficient to cite conferences such as Gubbio, Santiago de Compostela, Geneva or Varenna, all held within a decade, or the historiographical construction of the Modern Movement by Leonardo Benevolo, published for the first time in 1960.²⁵ Different hypotheses of «continuity» thus closed an objective – and vital – period of «crisis» for an architectural culture that had found itself facing unusual themes – the reconstruction and the urgency of the house, the reconstruction of the destroyed heritage, working in memory of the deaths caused by the war – having available only the tools developed before the war, which were found to be totally inadequate. The architecture intellectuals, like any other Italian, had fought, been deported or exiled, and once the conflict ended the survivors had returned to architecture with eyes focused on a changed reality and on an image of architecture, monumental and not, that was physically broken.

Among the “myths” that support the architecture of the early 20th century and that do not survive the passage into the second half, certainly the figure of the architect-artist and genius solver on the one hand, and, on the other hand, internationalism, the trust in a shared language, in a “grammar” of the modern, a new unitary architectural language able to move from reputable processing centres to be applied in each specific

23. “Casabella-Continuità”, April-May 1957, No. 215, pp. 62-75.

24. The bibliography regarding the discussion on Neo-Liberty is extensive. For a complete study of the historical context and bibliographical wealth, see the essay by Manuela Morresi: *Storia e architettura: neoliberal, revival, moderno (1954-68)*, in A. Guerra, M. Morresi, *Gabetti e Isola. Opere di architettura*, intr. F. Dal Co, Milano, Electa, 1996, pp. 283-314.

25. L. Benevolo, *op cit.* The conferences referred to and that lead somehow to the fruition of a reflection on the relationship between design and history centred on the “occasions of architectural composition” in historical environments and the result of post-war experimentation are: the MSA conference in Varenna in the spring of 1960; the convention on the *Protection and Restoration of Historic Centres* held in Gubbio in September 1960 (at which was drafted the Charter of Gubbio); the conference of the *Fédération Internationale pour l’Habitation, l’Urbanisme et l’Aménagement des Territoires* in Santiago de Compostela, held exactly one year later; the seminar on urban renewal organised in Geneva in June 1961 by the *Comité de l’Habitat* of the European Economic Commission. In 1964 the Charter of Venice was drafted.

global context. The *Guida al codice anticlassico* by Zevi²⁶ would make the model clear – that is, the classical codex – while at the same time denouncing its impossibility because, as he writes, summing up his positions drawn from the years that interest us here, the “masters” of early 20th century architecture did not leave any “grammars”. This did not prevent a part of the architectural culture of the late 20th century from focusing on the reworking of the «anti-classical codex», more or less critically, and to continue to cultivate the internationalist idea of a language, though not unique, traceable to a small number leading figures who were able to influence a cultural elitist global landscape thanks to a bloated media presence in the discipline.

Remaining in Italy at the passage of the mid-century, radically different hypotheses loomed that would certainly not emerge victorious from the disciplinary consolidation between the fifties and sixties, and even less so during the “policy” turning point between the sixties and seventies. It is to this “losing” line – today, with the fading of other hypotheses, it has returned to the forefront – that we would like to include the disconcerting appearance of the works of Gabetti & Isola in the pages of “Casabella”, attempting to associate them with a revision of the relationship between history and project within the tradition of the early 1900s – which is, according to the magazine, also a moment of generational change – and their rather obvious irrelevance to this debate, which even Roberto Gabetti participated in as an intellectual protagonist.

The reversal of relevance between individual identity of the architect artist and specificity of the individual work, outlined by Rogers in his aforementioned writings on the Anonymous, could have been meeting ground with the «young people of Turin» at the time of their appearance in “Casabella-Continuità”, but this did not happen and the difference in vision on the topic is more relevant than the unconvincing explicit dissociation of Director in the editorial and continuation in issue 228 in the response to the attacks of Banham, «guardian of the frigidaire».²⁷ In the editorial on the subject *Continuity or crisis* the question of «style» is picked up by Rogers in terms of the Anonymous because a «big misunderstanding arises when one continues to consider the ‘style’ of the Modern Movement from its visual appearances and not according to the expressions of a method that has attempted to establish new and

26. B. Zevi, *Il linguaggio moderno dell'architettura. Guida al codice anticlassico*, Torino, Einaudi, 1973 (Eng. trans. B. Zevi, *The Modern Language of Architecture*, Washington, University of Washington Press, 1978).

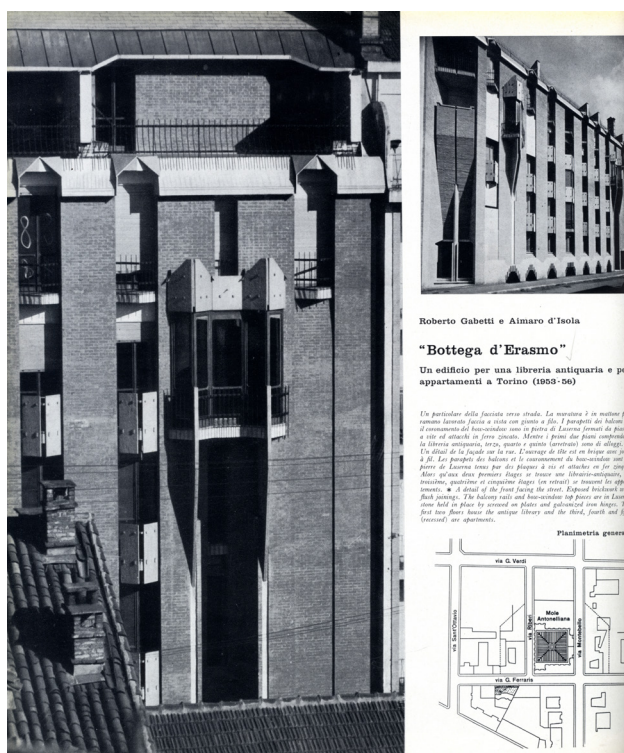


FIG. 15 Roberto Gabetti, Aimaro d'Isola, “Bottega d’Erasmus”, in “Casabella-Continuità”, April-May 1957, No. 215, p. 62.

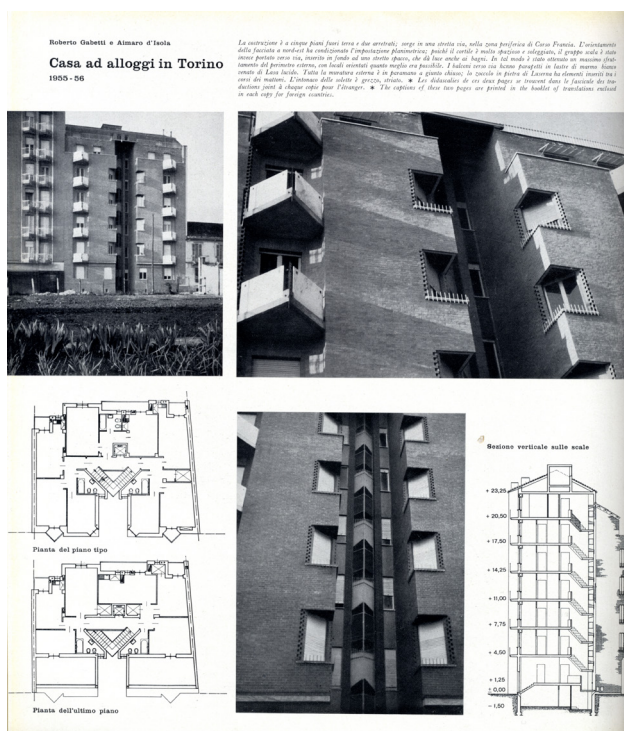


FIG. 16 Roberto Gabetti, Aimaro d'Isola, *Casa ad alloggi in Torino*, in “Casabella-Continuità”, April-May 1957, No. 215, p. 70.

27. E.N. Rogers, *L'evoluzione dell'architettura. Risposta al custode dei frigidaire*, in “Casabella-Continuità”, June 1959, No. 228, pp. 2-4.

clear relationships between content and form». The intellectual meeting with the two young architects from Turin – whose collective professional structure could arouse some sympathy if not in the Director then in the BBPR partner – didn't happen because the surpassing of the artistic personality proposed by Rogers favours a broader and suprapersonal personality as mentioned above, while overcoming the expressive personalities proposed by Gabetti & Isola takes place in the direction of heteronymy and is completely devoid of the heroic dimension that we still find in the Rogerian Anonymous. In the perspective of the young architects from Turin, the subject raised by the issue of the magazine hosting them appears absent in favour of a contiguity rather than a continuity, with the history free of any distinction of ages and without any concession to the "modern" early 1900s as an unavoidable touchstone. Each language is acceptable, not as the choice of the designer for a "style" – he has his own predilections – but for the benefits it offers to the single work, and, above all, its constructability. Their cosmopolitan²⁸ and cynically alien language to find a home in a period, in a single reference, is considered «formalism» by Rogers because it does not care «to understand the forms in terms that were justified at the time in which they were made» and does not take into account «that our age, moved by other content, naturally inspires other figurative motifs».

But Gabetti & Isola, in the letter to Gregotti in those same pages, clearly express their distance from the desire to compose new forms, and with regard to the Turin mould they objected: «You spoke of Turin (remembering Persico) as a point of European convergence: we would like to say that it is more a centre of reception than a driving force, ready to sense, to foresee, distant influences». The task that they are taking upon themselves is not to proclaim a new «gospel», they say, but the practice of a project in which «every act» is «concluded in itself» and in which the architect is no longer the dominant personality – individual or suprapersonal, with name or anonymous – in the process, but one actor among the many actors of a «comedy of art» that includes owners and builders, suppliers and workers, all working on the «material» as much as on the «idea», all free to intervene «as main actors» on the designer. With regard to language, to the "style" – if we remain with the definition «Neo-Liberty» which will then catalyse the discussion – the attitude of Gabetti & Isola is radically innovative compared to any discussion on the return to history or its rejection and offers no guarantees of either continuity or innovation. The language does not determine the body of the architecture, but enters into the process of its construction, becoming a component like any other: money, client requirements, conception and construction. The architect's goal is not to lead the confluence or conflict of the different components to formal synthesis but rather to bring the work to constructed reality. Gregotti seeks to transform the receptive and productive attitude of the young people of Turin into militancy, noting that in his opinion they would

28. P. Levi, *The drowned and the saved*, London, Abacus, 1989; G. Agamben, *Homo sacer*, Torino, Einaudi, 1995 (Eng. trans. G. Agamben, *Homo sacer*, Stanford, Sovereign Power and Bare Life, Stanford Univ. Press, 1998). The passage from internationalism, understood as the processing of a single language that conforms and unites, to a new cosmopolitanism, understood as knowledge and inclusion of the other focused not on the homogenisation but rather based on the principle of receiving and maintaining the differences is at the root of the cultural rift caused by the war. In the chapter *Comunicare of I sommersi e i salvati* (Torino, Einaudi, 1986), Primo Levi reflects on the consequences of the concentration camp experience with regard to the impossibility of finding a common language, a prelude, you might say, of the "impossibility of the narrative" after the liberation, of which the book is a tragic and final witness. Levi describes the camp as a cosmopolitan environment using a jargon influenced by the many languages spoken by the prisoners, in which German is the language of the jailers, for many "the difference between life and death", and where the rubber whip was called *der Dolmetscher*, the interpreter understood by all. The true meaning, or meaninglessness, of the concentration camp experience is in the deed, not in the word, the «bare life», as Agamben defined it (Cfr. G. Agamben, *Homo sacer*, Torino, Einaudi, 1995, founding text of a wider reflection on the theme developed by the philosopher). That basis of the non-speakable has innervated philosophical, literary and artistic reflection in the late 1900s, in architecture remaining confined to the broader theme of memorial architecture dedicated to deportation, without going to the heart of the disciplinary discussion. Moreover, Ricci's aforementioned reflections on the Anonymous are explicitly linked to the subject of the Holocaust in several parts of the volume written in 1962, and, for present purposes, describe a condition in which «the unhappiness of others affects our happiness and cancels it», erasing any possible saving component of the architecture. Architecture can only be an act of constant and repeated interpretation of circumstances and language – the languages – or a heteronymic game to eliminate them, or the result of interpretative action, a language of the existence and the constructive fact that is at the centre of Ricci's research. The subject will be repeatedly touched on by the BBPR studio and is also central to the definition of discontinuity between the first and second halves of the Italian 20th century, therefore fully relevant to the research presented herein (cfr. G. Leoni, *In memoria dell'altra Resistenza: il Museo Monumento dei BBPR a Carpi*, in VV. AA., *Il Museo-Monumento dei BBPR a Carpi*, Bologna, BUP, 2016, pp. 25-48).

have «fought some battles» and «looked to history, and in history ... chosen». But looking at the works published in *Casabella* it would be difficult to point out what the choice was, this would be borne out over time by the infinite and always unresolved historical-critical game based on the “references” of the Gabetti & Isola studio. A capacity to deceive historiography and criticism that perhaps points out, in both, different tasks.

Historiographically, Paolo Portoghesi’s attempt a year later to bring «Neo-Liberty» back into the scope of a frail but – in his view – well identified Italian “modernist” tradition was more refined.²⁹ However, Portoghesi’s criticism of «Neo-Liberty», clearly referring if not explicitly to Gabetti & Isola given the proximity of the controversy regarding the Bottega of Erasmus, is that «it is obviously not enough that a building be liked by an enlightened client or by a restricted group of educated persons, which can be exchanged for Italian society». Neorealism – another historical outcome outlined in the article – invented a client, admits Portoghesi, and faked isolation from the now inescapable metropolitan condition while maintaining a community dimension established by artisanal construction skill. Portoghesi refers mainly to Ridolfi, still an “anonymous” architect plunging into artisanal construction uses, who does not seek to invent new forms (if anything working on type), yet interpreter of a «community» and a «city» as a place in which the community takes shape and shows itself. The Construction site, in the prose of Portoghesi still fully immersed in the myths of the early 1900s, thus provides a «sense of community» and «objective reasons of craft that determine the architect’s desire for form beyond any intellectualist trends». We are far from the understanding of the new structure of the project as the guide of circumstantiality and the different link between formal expression and construction of the work that springs from it, outlined by Gabetti & Isola.

To understand this new structure, moreover, it was necessary to depart from any process of legitimation of the “modern” early 1900s – taken alone or in post-war revisions – as the sole refounding moment of architectural languages. The road is clearly indicated by different aspects of the path of Roberto Gabetti as a architecture intellectual and historian and, in particular, by his interest in eclecticism. In a text published again in “*Casabella*” exactly 10 years after the 215 issue,³⁰ discussing «revivals and historicism in contemporary Italian architecture», Gabetti offers a “militant” version: «history as the only system suited to investigating recent or ancient phenomena» – the distinction seems unimportant, the “ancient” is as valuable as the “modern” and vice versa – in order to «find a strong

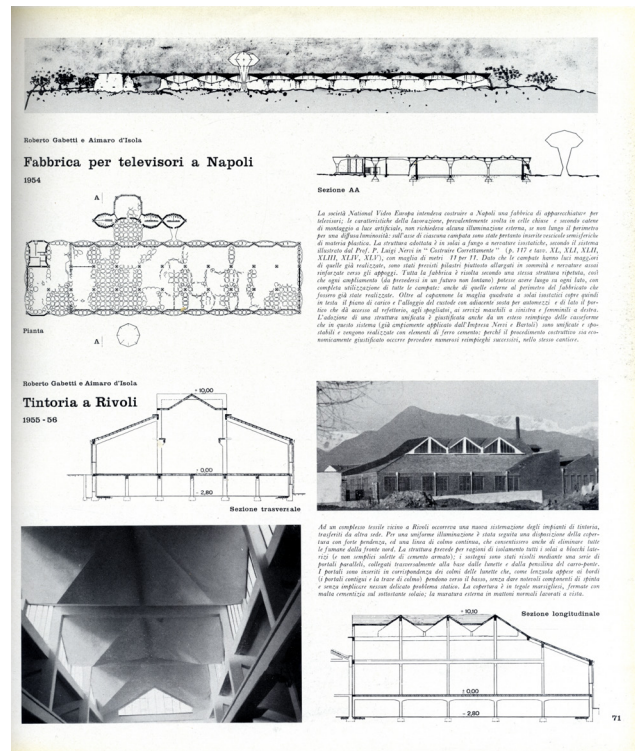


FIG. 17 Roberto Gabetti, Aimaro d'Isola, *Fabbrica per televisori a Napoli*, in “*Casabella-Continuità*”, April-May 1957, No. 215, p. 71.

29. P. Portoghesi, *Dal neorealismo al neoliberty*, in “*Comunità*”, December 1958, pp. 69-79.

30. The work, published in “*Casabella*” No. 318 in October 1967 was republished in the double issue of “*Controspazio*” dedicated to the Turin studio (October-November 1977, pp. 88-89).

support to our work», a «critical» and «disillusioned» inquiry open to «free and meaningful combinations», against the «positivist [method] of direct derivation, demonstrated in a series of cause and effect», away from «direct connections» and engaged in a game of «decomposition and recomposition of memories» – in the plural – «thick, intense and brutal». Under the entry for «Eclecticism» prepared contemporaneously for the *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Architettura*, edited by Portoghesi,³¹ Gabetti had occasion to articulate militant positions now recalled in a historiographical essay that is exemplary but no less oriented. At the centre of his understanding of Eclecticism, specifying that the term does not define a «category» but rather a specific historical event dating between 1815 and 1890, Gabetti places the process of «disassembly and reassembly» to «achieve a freer and wider availability of language» and to allow the «first application of the experimental method to architecture». A form, then, that does not determine in advance the design process but rather accompanies it to uncertain outcomes. A historical form that, incorporated in the project, does not lose its «archaeological» nature entering a «theoretical» dimension, which does not lead to derivative forms but is preserved as such and associated with other components of the project. But above all a form that is known «in some scientific way» – the appeal to archaeology – and used in a low-key fashion, does not come into conflict with the rationality and scientific nature of the building. «It certainly would have benefited architecture to draw its own principles more directly from the scientific world and not to behave as an independent field in the enlightened system of the arts, of the sciences of techniques», wrote Gabetti in his text on Eclecticism, inviting the reader to follow the tradition of rationalism of the 1700s and 1800s. Thus appeared the other term of reference in Gabetti & Isola's research, already quite evident in the works of the media debut in “Casabella” but that on that occasion did not trigger a passionate debate too focused on “stylistic” matters: rationality and science of construction techniques, another principle of architectural depersonalization, of distancing the figure of the architect artist that had been brought back to the centre of the discipline by the culture of the early 20th century.

The difficult position and critical historiography that afflicted (or saved) the work of Gabetti & Isola stems from its estrangement from an interpretation that sees the late 20th century only as a revision of the early 20th century – continuity or crisis of the “modernist” canons – where there is also a critical action, developed especially through built architecture and not theoretically, that archives the structure of the early



FIG. 18 Roberto Gabetti, Aimaro d'Isola, *Palazzo della Borsa Valori in Torino*, in “Casabella-Continuità”, April-May 1957, No. 215, p. 72.

31. R. Gabetti, *Eclettismo*, in P. Portoghesi (ed.), *Dizionario enciclopedico di architettura urbanistica*, Roma, Istituto Editoriale Romano, 1968-69.

20th century project and its fascinations restarting from the results of 1800s eclecticism and the decomposition (and inevitable, constant recomposition) of the dual nature of architecture, on the one hand a work of art that is not exempt from the changes and the circumstantiality derived from its being inhabited, and on the other hand technique amenable to science answering to the imprecise and variable metric of the human body and its actions.