Dietrich Erben, Carsten Ruhl (eds.)
Reference and Contemporaneity in Architecture

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Techniques for Designing the Present Needs

[transcript]

Table of Contents

Reference and Contemporaneity
Introduction
Dietrich Erben and Carsten Ruhl | 9

Production - Disruption

The Permanence of Pattern Books
On the Production of Architectural References
Dietrich Erben | 29

Space (without) Time and (eventually) Architecture
The Darmstadt Conversation of 1951
Carsten Ruhl | 51

Beginning - Ending

Classical Paradigms in Flux
Embellissement and Technological Shift in Nineteenth-Century Paris
Salvatore Pisani | 77

From "Beginnings" to Modernity
The Contemporary Relevance of Jerzy Sołtan's Cubist Theory
Szymon Ruszczewski | 101

Display - History

The Scope of Architectural Contemporaneity
Reference on Display at the First Architecture Biennale in Venice
Davor Ereš | 119

Leonardo Benevolo and the Storia
dell'architettura moderna
Reference and Contemporaneity in an Architectural History
Matteo Cassani Simonetti | 147

The Geopolitics of Baroque
UNESCO and the Invention of Latin American Architecture
as a Political and Aesthetic Project
Daniela Ortiz dos Santos | 167

Embodiment - Subjectification

History in a Glass House
Philip Johnson's "Stroke of Genius" Between Absolute
Contemporaneity and Historical Reference
Markus Dauss | 187

The Architect as Psychologist
Charles W. Moore's Professional Self-Conception and the
Conversion of 403 Elm Street
Achim Reese | 209

Non-Referential Architecture?
Tracing a Paradox of Contemporary Discourse
Ole W. Fischer | 225

Translation - Metaphor

Adapting a Reference to Different Narratives
The Garden City, Ankara, and Contemporaneity
Hande Tunç | 249

Contemporaneity as Creative Difference
On the Use of Philosophical Concepts in the Architectural Discourse of the 1990s
Frederike Lausch | 271

Architecture Caught in Metaphorical Reference
Sarah Borree | 293

Authors | 307
Colophon | 310

Reference and Contemporaneity

Introduction

Dietrich Erben and Carsten Ruhl

Contemporary Relevance and Historiological Framework

Contemporaneity is once again in high demand. Together with its dialectical counterpart—reference to the past—it has moved to the center of debates that concern both politics and society, as well as historiological theory. Since February 2022, the history of Russian expansion has become a prominent case study in how ideology shapes historical interpretation.[1] Following the occupation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia's expanded invasion of Ukraine in winter 2022, several prominent Eastern European historians and political scientists have called for a fundamental reassessment of Russian history. They trace today's imperialism back to the Moscow Tsarist Empire in the mid-sixteenth century and even further to the Mongol Empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This extensive historical framework, they claim, enables us to explain Russia's "special path" of development. The present thus serves as an impulse for reevaluating the past. In opposition to this historical reinterpretation is a perspective strictly focused on contemporary factors. Advocates of this view argue that when analyzing the Russian invasion, a historical timeframe of merely two to three decades—roughly one generation—is sufficient. They maintain that Putin's imperial practices are retroactively justified through historical rhetoric that ultimately has a fictional relationship to the past, while being entirely oriented toward present

1 On the debate see Gerd Koenen, "Anmerkungen zu Putin", in Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte 16, no. 4 (2022), 67–82.

concerns. They caution against rewriting history without new source materials to support such revisions.

The history of colonialism and the systems of slavery entwined with it is another area where debates about contemporaneity and historical reference have intensified in recent years. These discussions extend beyond how we understand the past to more complex questions: Do the descendants of those who were colonized and enslaved—people who have been or continue to be subjugated—have a privileged position in historical discourse today? Furthermore, can these individuals—as people who remain actively or structurally oppressed—access and articulate historical truths that uninvolved contemporaries cannot?

There are many examples of such discussions, which concern fundamental issues and can naturally be applied to architectural history as well.[2] The core question is twofold: On the one hand, should history primarily serve as a commemorative political force for identity formation among various social groups? Under this view, historical research and criticism should align the past with the normative expectations of the present. On the other hand, an alternative perspective insists that history, as an enlightening force, should primarily illuminate historical contingencies and discontinuities. In this case, history should emphasize strangeness and alterity as distinct from the present and thereby evade the imperative of relating the past to present-day identity politics.

Historian Lynn Hunt has articulated the fundamental question of the relationship between normativity rooted in contemporary standards and interpretation of the past based on historical distance in these terms: "[P]resentism besets us in two different ways: (1) the tendency to interpret the past in presentist terms; and (2) the shift of general historical interest toward the contemporary period and away from the more distant past."[3] Both approaches involve the opposition of "strangeness" and "sameness": Does his-

2 François Hartog, Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003); Martin Sabrow, Zeitenwenden in der Zeitgeschichte (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2023), especially 78–87.

3 Lynn Hunt, "Against Presentism," in Perspectives On History 1 (2002), https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/may-2002/against-presentism. See also the further discussion by James H. Sweet, "Is History History? Identity Politics and Teleologies of the Present," in Perspectives On History 17 (2022), https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-

torical analysis still attempt to identify what distinguishes the past from our present, allowing the past to retain its foreignness? Or do we appropriate the past by aligning it with current normative standards, not only considering present-day normative values and ways of thinking in our analysis, but actually making them the primary focus of historical understanding? To use the terminology developed in this volume: Are we engaged in an incessant critical delegitimization of present-day identity politics through history when dealing with systems of historical reference? Or are we conducting an equally critical examination of the past that is largely committed to contemporary norms, but which risks contributing to a presentist erasure of history? Put differently, is it possible to make distanced reference to history, or is the past only available in the form of a contemporary culture of remembrance?

The essays in this volume demonstrate that, while we cannot escape the opposition between reference and contemporaneity, we need not stop at merely identifying it. One productive approach lies in making referential relationships historically concrete and naming them precisely—or acknowledging the futility of avoiding them. This process always involves interpreting entanglements between different media. Film and photo historian Siegfried Kracauer, who was also an important critic of architecture, discusses an early and remarkably complex example in his final book, *History: The Last Things Before The Last*,[4] published posthumously in 1969. There, he explores the possible connections between the invention of photography in the 1830s and the simultaneous emergence of the ideal of objectivity in the historical sciences. The comparison between photography and historiography is only possible because both involve media. Moreover, Kracauer assigns historiography a decidedly "photographic" task: "The universe of the historian consists of the same stuff as our everyday world." History is about life in the sense of every-day experience: "the life that lies on the path of our everyday experience." Kracauer reports that many historians of the mid and late nineteenth century were aware of the parallels and differences between their work and

history/september-2022/is-history-history-identity-politics-and-teleologies-of-the-present.

4 Siegfried Kracauer, History: The Last Things Before The Last (1969; repr., Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995); the following quotations and paraphrases are from pages 45–48. On Kracauer as an architecture critic, see Carsten Ruhl, Kracauer's Architecture: The Ornamental Nature of the New Capitalist Order (Weimar: M Books, 2022).

that of photographers. Heinrich Heine already referred to his Paris reports, published in 1854 under the title *Lutezia*, as a "history book like a daguerreotype, in which each day captures its own image." It was a commonly expressed idea that both photography and historiography were concerned with capturing reality, be it contemporary reality or a distant past no longer directly observable but only imaginable through visual or written sources. Historians, however, saw differences between their methods of representation and those of photography. Johann Gustav Droysen dismissed the notion of turning historians into "cameramen"; rather, he saw them as narrators of the past. Lewis Namier saw the historian not as a photographer, but as a painter: it was important to compose and emphasize what was significant, not "to reproduce everything that the eye captures."

The comparison between historiography and photography—which has been familiar since the middle of the nineteenth century and to which Kracauer draws attention—once again poses the question of reference and contemporaneity. For one thing, the then-modern medium of photography became a media reference that reshaped the prevailing understanding of the tradition-laden discipline of historiography. Moreover, the objects of the past that were referenced were themselves modernized within that contemporary context by being subjected to new scientific standards of objectivity and reality.

Methodical Considerations Concerning Reference and Contemporaneity in Architecture

As we can see, the relationship between reference and contemporaneity is inherently challenging. This applies to history in general and consequently to the history of architecture as well. The concept for this volume and the conference on which it is based[5] thus begins with a working hypothesis: there exists a fundamental tension between these two concepts in the production of architecture.

5 "Referenz und Zeitgenossenschaft / Reference and Contemporaneity," conference in Frankfurt am Main, Goethe Universität, 11–13.05.2023. Organized by Dietrich Erben (TU München) und Carsten Ruhl (Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main).

Just as thinking in general relies on "varieties of reference,"[6] architectural reflection depends on a variety of referential constructions: references are, we might say, a cognitive inevitability in both domains. The concept of similarity, which has been discussed across various disciplines in recent years,[7] offers a particular way of understanding reference. Seen from a contemporary political perspective, this discussion stems partly from the search for a compromise-oriented path through today's intensifying identity politics. The concept of similarity responds to the relentless confrontational emphasis on differences, the mutual boundary-drawing between identity groups, and action within strictly binary frameworks by offering a "both-and" alternative: "The focus on similarity and its associated concepts of cohesion and contiguity attempts to account for instances of interconnection, overlap, and gradation in cultural contexts. Similarity is an intentionally imprecise concept, a relational concept."[8] Moreover, the references established through similarity are not necessarily historical, but can equally signal strong connections to the present and what is currently relevant.

Following this paradigm, architectural references can only be understood through relationships of similarity. References do not stand in a relationship of identity with their models, but one of resemblance. Unlike copies, quotations, and mimetic adaptations of source material, references are not true to detail; rather, they modernize their source material and adapt it to contemporary contexts. Sociologist Gabriel Tarde recognized this as early as 1890 in *Les lois de l'imitation*, identifying similarity relationships as a logical principle of cultural evolution. For Tarde, the reference frame of his era was,

6 Gareth Evans, The Varieties of Reference, ed. John McDowell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

7 On the approach see Gerald Funk, Gert Mattenklott, Michael Pauen, eds., Symbole und Signaturen. Charakteristik und Geschichte des Ähnlichkeitsdenkens, Ästhetik des Ähnlichen. Zur Poetik und Kunstphilosophie der Moderne (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), as well as the research report for a Konstanz project and the publications of the project participants: Anil Bhatti, Dorothee Kimmich, Albrecht Koschorke, Rudolf Schlögl, Jürgen Wertheimer, eds., "Ähnlichkeit. Ein kulturtheoretisches Paradigma," in Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur 36 (2011), 233–47, https://doi.org/10.1515/iasl.2011.018; Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich, eds., Ähnlichkeit. Ein theoretisches Paradigma (Konstanz, 2015); Dorothee Kimmich, Ins Ungefähre. Ähnlichkeit und Moderne (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2017).

8 Bhatti et al., "Ähnlichkeit," 245.

of course, historicism, which continuously invoked various historical styles. Yet even within historicism, he claimed, evolution occurred not through repetition but through variation: "We do not demand the expression of fleeting impressions from architecture or music, impressions that are borrowed from foreign or from dead and artificially restored civilisations; we demand from them a vivid expression and reproduction of the impressions that are wrought into our life."[9] Tarde distinguishes between "fashion" and "custom": while fashion displays little formal variation because it relies on established, proven functional solutions, custom exhibits continual variation and accelerates formal change. Even fashions, however, involve reference-making and create similarities. According to Tarde, the Renaissance was a special form of "re-birth": "Greek and Latin antiquity was strongly Italianised. Besides, this innovation was only a fashion following, like any other, in the tail of certain discoveries, namely, the archaeological discoveries resulting from the diggings in the sacred soil of antique Rome or in the libraries of the monasteries."[10]

The concept of reference—understood broadly as ways of invoking other things—proves robust and readily applicable. The contributions collected here examine a broad spectrum of intermedial, interdisciplinary, and intercultural references, confirming both the cognitive necessity of references and referencing's status as a ubiquitous cultural technique.[11] The reference system of language generally operates through a triad of word-object-meaning: a word refers to other words, establishes a relationship to an object it denotes, and ultimately points to a concept it represents. The word "house" denotes the physical reality of a house and conveys its meaning as a place of human habitation. Beyond this, references as cognitive phenomena can be categorized as temporal, spatial, object-based, or event-based. Possible ref-

9 Gabriel Tarde, Les lois de l'imitation. Etude sociologique (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1890); Gabriel Tarde, The Laws of Imitation (1903; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 354.

10 Tarde, The Laws, 363.

11 From the interdisciplinary (and therefore difficult to survey) literature, see, from a linguistic perspective, Mark Textor, ed., Neue Theorien der Referenz (Paderborn: Brill, 2004) and, more generally, Philipp Wolf, entry on "Referenz" in Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie: Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe (1998), ed. Ansgar Nünning, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), 642–43, which includes a further bibliography.

erence objects can also include mental models, conceptual images, or theories. These classifications require further specification in particular contexts. For instance, when discussing the "Gothic cathedral in France," time, place, object, and model are invoked in equal measure. Similarly, characterizing a building as "functional" often references scientific ideals such as objectivity, rationality, and progress. The linguistic reference system becomes particularly complex with metaphors. It is even possible for a specific meaning to be obscured or undermined by the linguistic term used to express it, as studies of metaphor have demonstrated.[12] At the same time, however, metaphors—like references in general—can serve to legitimize concepts and confer authority.

Unlike the concept of reference, the concept of contemporaneity, as far as we can see, has yet to be methodologically clarified. We will therefore outline some considerations regarding its theoretical scope based on individual examples. Firstly, contemporaneity should be distinguished from the concepts of modernity and actuality (*Aktualität*—which can be understood as relevance in the immediate present). According to its conceptual history, which reaches back to antiquity, modernity refers to the relationship between old and modern (antiquus/modernus). This distinction continued for centuries until "modern" itself finally became an attribute of the modern epoch.[13] Actuality, by contrast, refers to the relevance of a phenomenon primarily in its temporal dimension. In art history, the concept has been viewed ambivalently. From the perspective of the philosophy of art, George Kubler observes: "Yet the instant of actuality is all we ever can know directly. The rest of time emerges only in signals relayed to us at this instant by innumerable stages and by unexpected bearers."[14] Carl Einstein, on the other hand, commenting

12 Petra Gehring, "Erkenntnis durch Metaphern? Methodische Bemerkungen zur Metaphernforschung," in Metaphern in Wissenskulturen, ed. Matthias Junge (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2009), 203–20, and more generally Hans Blumenberg, Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie, commentary by Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013). See also: Ruhl 2022, chapter "Metaphors and Territories," 45–55, and Sarah Borree et al., Metaphorical Practices in Architecture (London: Routledge, 2023).

13 Cornelia Klinger, "Modern/Moderne/Modernismus," in Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Studienausgabe, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al., vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010), 121–67.

14 George Kubler, The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 17.

in the context of his materialistic and socially committed art historiography, views actuality as a problem of entangled interests: "It is understandable that the modernists do not represent actuality broadly; for such an undertaking would in itself have limited & refuted their unrestrained individualism. – *Actuality is collaboration*; for the present consists of manifold elements and forces."[15]

The question of positioning oneself within one's own present also relates to the concept of contemporaneity. The word initially refers to the simple fact that contemporaries, as members of a specific group, live at the same time. They share a common biographical horizon of years they experience together.[16] This biographical connection allows a contemporary to declare about certain historical events, "and you can say you were there"—as Goethe famously put it in the context of the Franco–German wars during the Cannonade of Valmy on September 20, 1792.[17] Like the concept of *Zeitgeist*, the German terms *Zeitgenosse/Zeitgenossenschaft* (contemporary/contemporaneity) also trace back to the transitional period of the Enlightenment and the historical acceleration following the revolutionary era after 1789. Heinrich Heine, for example, used the term "poetic contemporaneity" (*poetische Zeitgenossenschaft*) in the early nineteenth century to characterize the literary ambition of combining poetry with political commitment and an explicit address to a contemporary audience.[18]

By the mid-nineteenth century, critique of the present had established itself as the primary goal of art. This applied equally to realism and historicism. The phrase "il faut être de son temps" originated in French romanticism, but

15 Carl Einstein, Werke. Berliner Ausgabe, vol. 4: Texte aus dem Nachlass vol. 1, ed. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Berlin: Fannei und Walz, 1998), 243. See also the commentary by Olga Martynova, "Über die Dummheit der Stunde," in Über die Dummheit der Stunde. Essays (Berlin: Fischer, 2018), 108–14, and the discussion in Wolfgang Knöbl, "Beobachtungen zum Begriff der Moderne," in Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur 37 (2012): 63–77, https://doi.org/10.1515/iasl-2012-0004.

16 The catchy title of Peter Rühmkorf's autobiography captures this sense: "The years you know." See Die Jahre die Ihr kennt. Anfälle und Erinnerungen (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1972).

17 On this connection see Lucian Hölscher, In Zeitgärten. Zeitfiguren in der Geschichte der Neuzeit (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 224–29.

18 Renate Stauf, Poetische Zeitgenossenschaft. Heine-Studien (Heidelberg: Winter, 2015).

it was only during realism that it became a demand.[19] The graphic artist and caricaturist Honoré Daumier used the formula as his artistic motto. For the philosopher, historian, and art critic Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, the demand for contemporaneity was already tautological, as he considered it both inevitable and self-evident. In his *Philosophie de l'art*, published 1865–1869, he viewed the development of art through his milieu theory as determined by both historical and contemporary conditions. For Taine, a work of art becomes more meaningful the more fully it embodies the character of the era in which it was created.[20]

Within the history and theory of architecture, the *Revue générale d'architecture et des travaux publics*, published between 1840 and 1888 and edited by the architect César Daly, exemplifies this "realistic" agenda. The monthly journal's objectives are explained by its editor in the first issue.[21]At the very beginning of the introduction, architecture is defined as a "construction" that serves to accommodate people in dwellings, animals in stables, and plants in greenhouses; architects and engineers are further responsible for erecting factories and manufacturing buildings and planning infrastructure for cities and the countryside. For Daly, architecture is always situated in the tension between tradition and innovation; on the one hand, it is always based on the "expérience des choses faites," while on the other, its aim is the "possibilité d'applications nouvelles." In terms of the journal's content, its structure includes "Histoire" as well as "Théorie" and "Pratique," and it is aimed squarely at the country's administrative and property-owning elites:

> C'est donc une Revue que nous voulons fonder, une Revue générale de l'Architecture et des Travaux Publics, qui s'adressera, par son objet, à la

19 George Boas is still a bedrock of this conceptual history: see "Il faut être de son temps," in Journal of Aesthetics 1 (1941), 52–65. See also Linda Nochlin, Realism (1971; London: Penguin, 1990), especially 103–4, and for the broader context Michael Brix and Monika Steinhauser, eds., Geschichte allein ist zeitgemäß. Historismus in Deutschland (Gießen: Anabas, 1978), as well as Helmut Pfeiffer, Hans Robert Jauß, and Françoise Gaillard, eds., Art social und art industriel. Funktionen der Kunst im Zeitalter des Industrialismus (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1987).

20 Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, Philosophie de l'art, 5 vols. (Paris, 1865–69), new ed.: Philosophie de l'Art, ed. Jean-François Revel (Paris: Hachette, 2009).

21 For what follows, see César Daly, "Introduction," in Revue générale d'architecture et des travaux publics 1 (1840), cols. 1–7.

> fois aux ARCHITECTES, aux INGÉNIEURS, aux ARCHÉOLOGUES, aux INDUSTRIELS, aux PROPRIÉTAIRES, et enfin aux GOUVERNEMENTS, dont l'intérêt et le devoir sont de veiller en même temps sur la prospérité, le bien-être et la gloire des pays qu'ils administrent.

The *Revue générale d'architecture et des travaux publics* is dedicated to the needs and interests of the present. If at the same time it remains linked to historical references, this is due to its instrumental relationship to history as a repository of experiences useful for the present. Here, at the early historical hour of the mid-nineteenth century, we see both a departure from idealistic aesthetics and a turning toward a "realistic" understanding of architecture. Both of these tendencies would later be further developed and radicalized in the modernist movements under the auspices of functionalism.

Looking back at what was likely the decisive formation of the idea of contemporaneity during the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that the term does not merely—and certainly not primarily—denote belonging to one's own time and observing it. Rather, it signifies active participation in the present and interest-driven involvement. Understood in this way, contemporaneity is not just a biographical state, but an agenda. This point is also explicitly addressed by the contributions presented here.

Architecture's Reference System: The Subject and Theses of this Volume

Following these methodological considerations, architecture can be described as a reference system based on allusions and similarities. This applies both to the fundamental concept of architecture itself and to its media (including the actual buildings constructed), as well as to the conception of the architectural subject in modernism.[22]

22 Here we take the liberty of referring to texts by the editors of this volume: Dietrich Erben and Tobias Zervosen, eds., Das eigene Leben als Ästhetische Fiktion. Autobiographie und Professionsgeschichte (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018); Carsten Ruhl, "The Art of the Deal. Architektur im Zeitalter neoliberaler Selbstentwürfe," in Selbstentwurf. Das Architektenhaus von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Julian Jachmann (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2018), 235–63; Ruhl, Kracauer's Architecture (2022), 11–19.

Architecture is generally conceived under conditions that are not its own and presupposes references to things outside itself.[23] These include basic external purposes like usability, construction, cost effectiveness, and aesthetics. More specifically, as discussed above, buildings double as references to places, objects, epochs, or events. These can be classes of structural elements (e.g. wall, roof, door, window), building typologies (e.g. office building, point tower), cultural topographies (e.g. Roman palace), architectural styles (e.g. the Gothic cathedral, New Objectivity). The symptoms of a conflict between style and form can be seen as early as the nineteenth century in the expression "stylistic shell and core" (Joseph Bayer, 1886), which, in distinguishing between formal appearance and construction, also identifies the difference between contemporary formal adaptations and physical building constraints.[24] Later, these symptoms manifested in the increasingly emphasized opposition between ornamental façades with relational qualities and the non-relational construction methods of mass production, as well as the functionalist programming of spaces.[25] Special buildings are almost always placed in a conscious relation to other buildings—for example, being particularly exposed in the competitive mechanism of "building and counter-building."[26] Furthermore, fundamental concepts of architectural theory (planning, function, design, order, etc.), which have gradually been imported into architectural terminology from other cultural techniques, have by no means lost their original meanings, and have in some cases been re-imported back into other disciplines as metaphors. This occurs in politics, for example, when people talk about the "European security architecture" or the "Com-

23 Umberto Eco, La struttura assente (Milan: La nave di Teseo editore, 1968) (German: Einführung in die Semiotik, 7th ed. [Munich: Hanser, 1991]). The work appears not to have been translated into English.

24 Werner Oechslin, Stilhülse und Kern. Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos und der evolutionäre Weg zur modernen Architektur (Zurich: gta Verlag, 1994).

25 Anna-Marie Sankovitch, "Structure/Ornament and the Modern Figuration of Architecture," in The Art Bulletin 80 (1998), 687–717; David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi, Surface Architecture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Antoine Picon, Ornament: The Politics of Architecture and Subjectivity, AD Primer (2013).

26 Martin Warnke, "Bau und Gegenbau," in Architektur als politische Kultur. Philosophia practica, ed. Hermann Hipp and Ernst Seidel (Berlin: Reimer, 1996), 11–18; on referential "counter-concepts" see also Reinhart Koselleck and Carl Schmitt, Der Briefwechsel 1953–1983 und weitere Materialien, ed. Jan Eike Dunkhase (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), 268–69.

mon European Home." Last but not least, buildings that have been destroyed or modified can continue to exist as references if the meaning offered by the earlier building is deliberately rejected through the "acts of negation accomplished by demolition or conversion."[27]

When we speak of the "production" of architecture, we don't mean merely the material construction of buildings, but also dominant historiographical, discursive, disciplinary, habitual, and institutional narratives. In a comprehensive sense, architectural production also encompasses the cultural post-production of architecture both in its use and criticism. It cannot exist without the two dimensions of reference and contemporaneity—and their dialectical relationship. How, then, do references—whether functioning as determinants or as opportunities for free choice—relate to contemporary demands for originality and innovation? Methodologically, reference and contemporaneity are introduced as two normative, contrasting concepts that can be related to each other from a critical distance: references only become problematic when they are orientated toward contemporary relevance, while contemporaneity comes into conflict with references that necessarily draw upon conventions and canonized knowledge. These concepts often evade a true dialectic in favor of radical opposition: while reference largely points to relationships with the past, contemporaneity primarily aims at the present and future values of originality, actuality, innovation, and problem-solving. Both concepts are embedded in justificatory frameworks with different rationales of narrative and legitimation. Referentiality, for example, offers the possibility of deriving design solutions from normative models, autobiographical references, or analysis of the genius loci. Contemporaneity, on the other hand, often serves to legitimize aesthetic preferences that themselves have no concrete function by appealing to non-referential, scientific, or purposefully rational objectivity. The French philosopher, literary theorist, and critic Roland Barthes explored this connection vividly in his essay on the Eiffel Tower. For Barthes, this spectacular building was the quintessential

27 Joachim Fischer, "Die Bedeutung der Philosophischen Anthropologie für die Architektursoziologie," in Soziale Ungleichheit, kulturelle Unterschiede: Verhandlungen des 32. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in München, ed. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2006), 3417–28, here 3425; cf. Dietrich Erben, "Architektur in Transformationsgesellschaften. Überlegungen zur Theorie des Umbaus," in arch+, special issue: "Umbau. Ansätze der Transformation," no. 254 (2024), 10–19.

example of a uselessness that had been rationally justified: "These uses are doubtless incontestable, but they seem quite ridiculous alongside the overwhelming myth of the Tower, of the human meaning which it has assumed throughout the world. This is because here the utilitarian excuses, however ennobled they may be by the myth of Science, are nothing in comparison to the great imaginary function which enables men to be strictly human. Yet, as always, the gratuitous meaning of the work is never avowed directly: it is rationalized under the rubric of use."[28]

When discussing this dialectic in the present volume, we must ask whether we recognize in it a fundamental theoretical paradox, an ultimately unavoidable tension, or even a desirable compromise in a conflict of norms. A central starting point in thinking about this problem is the question of how references are selected based on interest—and thus ideologically constructed—to meet contemporary social demands on architecture. In architectural theory, we might consider modernism's referential relationship between buildings and machines as an example. For architectural history, we should examine the role of canon formation, historiographical narratives, "regimes of truth,"[29] archives, museums, and exhibitions. For the history of architectural theory, it can be shown that every text refers to a specific typology of genres (treatise, manifesto, essay, exhibition catalog, etc.)—an institutionalized form of textual communication.[30]

The inevitability of reference, however, seems to be a blind spot in architectural discourse. To put it more precisely: although references are frequently mentioned in practice, their systematic significance in the design process has not yet been described in detail. While in other cultural practices the idea of authorship has long been questioned and ideologically scrutinized, with discourse around intertextuality now commonplace, both architects' self-perception and their public image, as well as the mode of architectural

28 Roland Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," in The Eiffel Tower, and Other Mythologies, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 3–17, here 6. The French original was first published in 1964 with photographs by André Martin: Roland Barthes, La Tour Eiffel (Paris, 1964).

29 Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," in Archival Science 2 (2002), 87–109.

30 Dietrich Erben, Architekturtheorie. Eine Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017); Erben, ed., Das Buch als Entwurf. Textgattungen in der Geschichte der Architekturtheorie. Ein Handbuch (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2019).

historiography, largely assume that a design is the achievement of an individual. The jargon term "design approach" (*Haltung*)—which appears on the homepages of numerous firms as a form of self-promotion—perhaps most clearly expresses this gesture of asserting the isolated, individual, or even ingenious achievement of architects.[31] Rehearsals for this role begin as early as an architect's student days.[32]

Current architectural discourse even plays with the possibility of "non-referential architecture."[33] However, it is possible that the alternative—the referential use of models—not only calls into question the idea of authorial design, but in fact reinforces it. This occurs when authorship is glorified through rhetorical references to canonized sources such as the ancient architectural theorist Vitruvius[34] or Andrea Palladio.

Throughout the history of architecture, different weightings and evaluations have been given to the dialectic of allusions to tradition and the outside world (reference) and innovative achievements supposedly unencumbered by such allusions (contemporaneity). Even Renaissance culture exhibited an imperative of innovation that, somewhat paradoxically and with considerable tension, derived from another imperative of continuity primarily oriented toward antiquity.[35] Explicit references to style carried this dialectic forward through the Renaissance, classicism, and historicism—and it apparently became questionable only when modernism asserted an equally explicit autonomy of style. Beginning with modernism, the relationship between continuity and innovation has been radicalized into a contradiction between past and present, with autonomy, self-referentiality, and contem-

31 Dietrich Erben, "'Haltung': Zu Karriere und Kritik eines Begriffs in der Architektursprache" (2014), in Humanität und gebaute Umwelt: Essays und Studien zur Architekturgeschichte (Bielefeld: transcript, 2023), 127–39.

32 See Christina Schumacher and Marie Antoinette Glaser, "Kreativität in der Architekturausbildung: Erkundungen zu einem disziplinären Mythos," in ZfK Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaft, no. 1 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 13–30.

33 Valerio Olgiati and Markus Breitschmid, Non-Referential Architecture (Zurich: Park Books, 2018). See also the contribution by Ole W. Fischer in the present volume.

34 André Tavares, Vitruvius Without Text: The Biography of a Book (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2022).

35 Odo Marquard, "Innovationskultur als Kontinuitätskultur. Überlegungen zur Renaissance" (1996), in Skepsis in der Moderne. Philosophische Studien (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 83–92.

poraneity being the key concepts. Since then, different modes of temporal consciousness have stood in conflict in architectural production: a historicist consciousness centered on reference, and a modern consciousness that understands itself as a logic of problem-solving and design that is active in the present.

For architecture, this relationship of conflict can be concretized on various levels. At the *theoretical* level, it concerns the understanding of "contemporary architecture" and of "contemporary" in contrast to other cultural techniques like the visual arts.[36] At the level of *ethics*, it involves the social responsibility of architects with regard to current problems and courses of action for the future.[37] At the level of *aesthetics*, the focus is on concepts of architecture that are decidedly non-historicizing and aesthetically autonomous.

Such a discussion of referentiality, developed from its conceptual antithesis of contemporaneity, should make it possible to examine architectural practices grounded in these two concepts more precisely than was previously feasible across the various fields of architectural theory, history, criticism, education, and design. In all these areas—and this is the basic idea of this volume—the dialectic of reference operates both as a system for creating models and as a claim to contemporaneity in the sense of engagement with the present. The aim of the volume is to discuss this issue by integrating aspects of theory, history, and architectural practice. First of all, the project takes a critical distance from existing texts on explicitly referential theories of design. These legitimize referencing as a design technique while simultaneously leaving the procedure entirely obscure in terms of its aesthetic design intentions, the mechanisms by which mostly canonical references are selected, and, in particular, the interests involved in positioning

36 Hal Foster, The Art-Architecture Complex (London: Verso, 2013); Frédéric Döhl et al., eds., Zitieren, appropriieren, sampeln. Referenzielle Verfahren in den Gegenwartskünsten (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013); Juliane Rebentisch, "The Contemporaneity of Contemporary Art," in New German Critique 42, no. 124 (February 2015), 223–37; Annika Haas et al., eds., How to relate. Wissen, Künste, Praktiken (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021).

37 Jens Balzer, Die Ethik der Appropriation (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2022).

architectural projects in the market.[38] While recent research has provided relatively general information about the concepts of contemporaneity[39] and imitation-based referentiality, a systematic and critically distanced engagement with these concepts is still lacking for architecture. Referentiality in architecture seems to have been discussed as a necessary preliminary in numerous studies on historicism, modernity, and, more recently, the basis of mimetic design processes[40]—primarily in a variety of individual observations regarding the question of "models" and "influences."[41] However, such a methodical emphasis on references to the past is opposed by the factual primacy of contemporaneity, which aims functionally at the relevance of the built environment, aesthetically at the self-referentiality of architecture, and socially at the habitus of architects. This manifests in a concept of autonomy that encompasses the design as well as the creativity of authorship, the claim to innovation in the built environment, and the idea of direct participation in the present.

Starting from the fundamental premise that references are essential for all cultural techniques, including architecture, this volume advances three key theses: First, architecture's distinctive character lies in the particularly ambivalent tension between reference and contemporaneity that emerges from its resource-intensive and innovation-driven mode of production. Second, this previously unexamined ambivalence plays a guiding role in both architectural production and discourse. Third, the issues surrounding contemporaneity do not pertain to a condition, but to an agenda—one where references are selected according to interests and adapted to present needs. This perspective enriches existing conceptions of references as tools of de-

38 For example, Astrid Staufer et al., eds., Ikonen. Methodische Experimente im Umgang mit architektonischen Referenzen (Zurich: Park Books, 2018); Andreas Hild and Barbara Brinkmann, Vom Suchen und Wiederfinden. Die Mechanik des Entwerfens. On Seeking and Rediscovering. The Mechanics of Architectural Design (Berlin: Reimer, 2021). See also the contribution by Dietrich Erben in the present volume.

39 Verena Krieger, ed., Kunstgeschichte und Gegenwartskunst. Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Zeitgenossenschaft (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), and the literature cited in note 36.

40 Eva von Engelberg-Dočkal et al., eds., Mimetische Praktiken in der neueren Architektur. Prozesse und Formen der Ähnlichkeitserzeugung (Cologne: arthistoricum.net, 2017).

41 For a recent critical view of the method, see Ulrich Pfisterer and Christine Tauber, eds., Einfluss, Strömung, Quelle. Aquatische Metaphern in der Kunstgeschichte (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018).

sign economy, imitation, and historicization by tying them far more explicitly to contemporary agendas than has been done before.

Finally, we should note several topics that could not be explicitly addressed, primarily owing to the scope of this volume and difficulties in finding suitable contributors. References to natural-material realities relevant to both past and present are a key issue for architecture, as recently explored within "geo-sociology" (encompassing earth territories, flora and fauna, atmospheric, geological, and hydrological systems, etc.).[42] Other important areas include references to general conceptions of space (universal space, systemic space, ecological space, lifeworld space, etc.)[43] and references to the currently resurgent category of the vernacular.[44]

42 Markus Schroer, Geosoziologie (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022).

43 Katrin Klingan and Christoph Rosol, eds., Technosphäre (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2019).

44 See Anita Aigner, ed., Vernakulare Moderne. Grenzüberschreitungen in der Architektur um 1900. Das Bauernhaus und seine Aneignung (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011).

Leonardo Benevolo and the Storia dell'architettura moderna

Reference and Contemporaneity in an Architectural History

Matteo Cassani Simonetti

Leonardo Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, published by Editori Laterza in 1960, stands as one of the best-known books on modern architectural history to appear in Italy before the 1970s— and likely the most popular both within the country and abroad, thanks to its numerous translations and reprints.[1] Benevolo (1923–2017) was simultaneously an architect, historian, and urban planner. Beyond the *Storia*'s content, it is precisely this multifaceted identity that makes this book distinctive. Unlike many architectural historians, who may have been trained as architects but were not directly engaged in design practice, Benevolo maintained an active design practice throughout his career, convinced that historical study was fundamental to design and, conversely, that design informed historical understanding. By contrast, the elder Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968) or the younger Bruno Zevi (1918–2000) were both historians directly involved in architecture but as cultural organisers; in the same way, Nikolaus Pevsner (1902–1983) and Reyner Banham (1922–1988) were primarily art and architecture historians. Put simply, their work was primarily oriented toward the realm of language—both oral and written—rather than toward drawing and architectural design. Benevolo's characteristics, on the other hand, enable us to examine the relationship

1 This text offers reflections on Leonardo Benevolo's Storia dell'architettura moderna that are explored in greater depth in Matteo Cassani Simonetti, La Storia di Leonardo Benevolo nella cultura architettonica italiana (1945-1960) (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2025), to which I also refer for principal bibliographical details. This text is dedicated to Mattia Ravaioli.

between architectural history and the design process, despite the sometimes condescending treatment of his historiographical work by other historians. This examination brings together two defining traits of the twentieth-century Italian architect as intellectual, at least according to some historians:[2] the use of language and the practice of architecture conceived as a political act (Fig. 41).

Manfredo Tafuri (1935–1994) offered a well-known and unflattering assessment of Benevolo's volume in his *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (1968).[3] Tafuri underlined the failure of Italian operative criticism, linking both Bruno Zevi and Leonardo Benevolo in this research endeavor—and in its failure. He wrote:

> Apparently more objective and without definitive judgments, Benevolo's 'history' inserts critical judgment into the exposition and 'montage' of the facts. Here the deformations are revealed by the 'forced' attitude with which the author chooses or ignores figures, movements and cycles of works. Also, compared to Zevi's work, Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna* is ideologically far more limited. In the end both bend history in order to demonstrate a priori choices for the future of architecture: what changes (and completely) is the quality of such choices.[4]

The word "quality" implies a veiled or explicitly negative judgement by Tafuri; however, even adopting a less trenchant interpretation, Tafuri appears to establish a hierarchy by finding Benevolo's *Storia* to be "ideologically far

2 See Jean-Louis Cohen, La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l'italophilie (1984; Brussels: Mardaga, 2015); Marco Biraghi, L'architetto come intellettuale (Turin: Einaudi, 2019).

3 About this assessment in Italian debate, see, for instance, Paolo Portoghesi, "Attualità della storia dell'architettura," in Comunità, no. 88, year 15 (March–April 1961), 72–9; Aldo Rossi, "Considerazioni sul concorso per la nuova sacca del Tronchetto," in Casabella-Continuità, no. 293 (November 1964), 2–4.

4 Manfredo Tafuri, Theories and History of Architecture, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 168.

more limited" than Zevi's book on modern architectural history, published a decade earlier in 1950.[5]

Beyond whatever value we might attribute to Benevolo's book, the *Storia*—even without counting its numerous translations—was the most widely circulated text on modern architectural history in Italy until the 1970s and, consequently, may have exerted the greatest influence on the education of generations of architects. It contributed to consolidating the myth of the Modern Movement during its crystallisation into the International Style and helped perpetuate this tradition until the end of the twentieth century. To understand the book's character—and both to refute and confirm some of the critiques leveled against it—it is necessary to trace its genesis and the context in which it was conceived.

History of the Storia

The opportunity that allowed Benevolo to write the *Storia* arose from editorial circumstances. Vito Laterza, head of Editori Laterza, sought in the second half of the 1950s to expand his publishing house's catalog by adding architecture and other topics to its traditional focus on the philosophical works of Benedetto Croce. This choice reflected an expansion of the publishing market driven by the economic boom and mass education—a demand that other publishers were attempting to meet by issuing works, or more rarely series, dedicated to architecture and other fields of study. Regarding architecture, for instance, Giulio Einaudi was pursuing the same strategy after the end of World War II with cultural support from Bruno Zevi for a series titled *Collana Storica di Architettura*.[6] It should also be noted that architectural publications in Italy during the *Ricostruzione* were sporadic and mainly ent-

5 Bruno Zevi, Storia dell'architettura moderna (Turin: Einaudi, 1950). See Panayotis Tournikiotis, The Historiography of Modern Architecture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 85–111; and Roberto Dulio, Introduzione a Bruno Zevi (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 82–94.

6 See Alessandro and Giuseppe Laterza, "Un secolo (e oltre) di libri," in Le edizioni Laterza: Catalogo storico 1901–2020 (Rome: Laterza, 2021), ix–xxxiv; and Elena Formia, "L'editoria in Italia nel Dopoguerra e la Collana storica di architettura di Einaudi," in Biagio Rossetti secondo Bruno Zevi, ed. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Francesco Ceccarelli, and Adachiara Zevi (Rome: Viella, 2021), 93–104.

rusted to minor publishers. While monographs on major contemporary architects were published, historical studies of the architecture of the previous two centuries were almost entirely absent. The 1956 request to Benevolo to write a *Storia dell'architettura moderna* emerged from this context through the intercession of the Roman architect Carlo Chiarini, a mutual friend of Laterza and Benevolo.[7] Chiarini and Benevolo immediately proposed themselves as editors for an architecture book series—never fully realized, though some titles were later published in the Biblioteca di Cultura Moderna[8]—and Benevolo began writing his volume. Meanwhile, before the *Storia*'s publication and demonstrating Vito Laterza's interest in architecture, Laterza published Giuseppe Samonà's *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città* and the Italian translation of Nikolaus Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture*, both appearing in 1959.[9]

The book that Benevolo and Laterza envisioned was intended not only for specialists but also a wide general public: they wanted to create a synthesis, a richly illustrated survey of modern architecture from the mid-eighteenth century onward that could fill a gap in Italian publications. The idea was for a book that would be concise yet sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to document the birth and development of modern architecture. The result was to be, above all, a well-illustrated volume with new photography. The program was ambitious for both the author—who would need to write the text and create the iconographic material—and for the publisher, who was not specialized in illustrated books. The outcome was a colossal work in two volumes totaling a thousand pages, with an equal number of figures.[10]

Benevolo's references for historiographical work on modern architecture were the books by Giedion—in 1953 the translation of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) had just been published in Italy by Hoepli—and those of Pevsner, whose *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936) had already been translated into Italian by the small publishing

7 See Leonardo Benevolo, La fine della città, interview by Francesco Erbani (Rome: Laterza, 2011), 46.

8 Letter from Vito Laterza to Leonardo Benevolo, October 28, 1959, Archivio Giuseppe Laterza Editore, Bari.

9 Nikolaus Pevsner, Storia dell'architettura europea (Rome: Laterza, 1959).

10 Letter from Vito Laterza to Leonardo Benevolo, December 15, 1956, Archivio Giuseppe Laterza Editore, Bari.

house Rosa e Ballo in 1945.[11] Benevolo gathered the bibliographic sources for his book through various means: Zevi's *Storia* provided him with an extremely extensive and useful bibliography for outlining the events of the most recent period; additionally, he made extensive use of magazines and synthetic works in history, economics, and sociology. As for the illustrations, he collected some from existing repertoires, but for those relating to European works, most of them came from several trips he made to major cities and centers with the explicit aim of creating the volume's iconographic apparatus through new photographs taken directly by him.[12]

However, the most relevant reference book for Benevolo (according to his statements) was *Die Neue Architektur* (1939) by Alfred Roth (1903–1998), a work that is far from a history book. It is composed with carefully selected documentation and based on the choice of a few *exempla*.[13] Perhaps the same expression that Stanislaus von Moos used for the title of his volume on Roth, *Architecture of Continuity*, could also describe Benevolo's work, underlining their shared approach in considering the Modern Movement as a continuous and vital experience and, consequently, its history as a part of the contemporary debate. The identification of Roth's book as Benevolo's main reference reveals one of the major qualities of the *Storia*: Although its title explicitly announces its historical interpretative perspective, its contents are more comparable to a book expressly addressed to the problems of contemporary design, such as Roth's or Samonà's. The *Storia* is a book conceived by an author who cannot simply be defined as an architectural historian, and whose genre is suspended between travelogue and encyclopaedia. It is written in the heartfelt, participatory tone of someone who, in writing about history, attempts to speak explicitly about the present from an *operative* perspective—understood not in a historiographical tradition but in the context of design culture. This different perspective was probably the outcome of his training and activities: on the one hand, his work as young professor of architectural history at the Università di Roma, where he dedicated his studies to architec-

11 Sigfried Giedion, Spazio, tempo ed architettura: Lo sviluppo di una nuova tradizione, trans. Enrica and Mario Labò (1941; Milan: Hoepli, 1953); Nikolaus Pevsner, I pionieri del movimento moderno da William Morris a Walter Gropius, trans. Giuliana Baracco (1936; Milan: Rosa e Ballo, 1945).

12 On Benevolo and photography, see Leonardo Benevolo, "Fotografie d'ambiente," in Centro Sociale, no. 5–6, year 2, (1955), 51–5.

13 Leonardo Benevolo, L'architettura nel nuovo millennio (Rome: Laterza, 2006), vi–vii.

ture from the Renaissance to the Baroque; and, on the other, his job as urban planner and architect.

Benevolo before the *Storia*

In 1946 Benevolo graduated in Architecture at the Università di Roma. He lived through the war and Fascism, as he recalls, without forming a precise opinion on these events.[14] He did not support Fascism, but neither did he participate in the *Resistenza*, and during the war he retreated with his mother to the Alps, waiting for the conflict to end while continuing his university studies. His situation at the end of the war was therefore, in a certain sense, one of transition: too young to have had time to participate in Fascism, then repudiate it, and too inexperienced to assume a leading position during the *Ricostruzione*.[15] This was the trajectoryof many architects in those years, and this difficult legacy can be understood by reading texts by Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Giulia Veronesi, for instance.[16] During the first postwar years, Benevolo pursued many parallel paths toward professional practice, academic activity, and professional associations. He participated in the main architecture associations established in Rome: the Associazione per l'Architettura Organica (APAO), organized by Bruno Zevi in 1944; the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (INU), re-founded by Adriano Olivetti after the war; the Istituto Nazionale di Architettura (IN/ARCH), again organized by Bruno Zevi in 1959; and the Società di Architettura e Urbanistica (SAU), founded in the late 1950s. All these associations were characterized by a strong anti-fascist spirit. Simultaneously, he maintained his presence at the Faculty of Architecture in Rome, where some of the leading figures of Fascism, like Marcello Piacentini, continued to teach. Finally, Benevolo also worked at the notorious Società Generale Immobiliare, which was engaged in massive reconstruction and

14 Benevolo, La fine della città, 30.

15 On the Ricostruzione, see Manfredo Tafuri, Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944–1985 (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 5–46.

16 See Ernesto Nathan Rogers, "Catarsi," in Costruzioni-Casabella, nos. 185–98 (1946), 40–2; and Giulia Veronesi, Difficoltà politiche dell'architettura in Italia, 1920–1940 (Milan: Libreria editrice Politecnica Tamburini, 1953).

speculative operations, and where he was in charge of executive and technological design at the Ufficio Progetti.[17]

This overview of the cultural spheres frequented by Benevolo, and their clear ideological contradictions, reflects the position of a young architect eager to engage in the major debates surrounding the Ricostruzione. Urban planning, however, became Benevolo's primary focus. As a member of the INU, he worked on regional planning in Abruzzo from 1952 and participated in numerous conferences on regional urban planning that emphasized comprehensive territorial studies incorporating the sociological and economic dimensions of communities.[18] His sensitivity to architecture's social dimension likely developed through his work in Abruzzo at the Centro Educazione Professionale per Assistenti Sociali (CEPAS) with Angela Zucconi (1914–2000); Ludovico Quaroni had introduced him to this organization, where he taught statistics rather than architecture or planning. His Abruzzo experience also involved highly technical urban planning work, but this approach to technique was grounded in social needs and aimed at improving community development and coordination among social workers. This philosophy is evident in *Centro Sociale*, a journal crucial for understanding the connections between architecture, social activities, and practical experience that formed the foundation of Benevolo's work[19] (Fig. 42, Fig. 43).

Another area where Benevolo articulated his passion for urban planning and his interpretation of architecture as serving social needs was in debates and projects concerning the preservation of historic centers.[20] He interpreted the ancient city as a place to be safeguarded not so much from a conservation perspective, seeking to preserve its architecture and monuments, but in order to maintain the social and artistic unity that it had achieved over

17 For an overview of Benevolo's life, see Benevolo, La fine della città.

18 On Benevolo and urban planning, see Leonardo Benevolo, Le origini dell'architettura moderna (Rome: Laterza, 1963).

19 See Alice Belotti, La comunità democratica: Partecipazione, educazione e potere nel lavoro di comunità di Saul Alinsky e Angela Zucconi (Rome: Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 2011); on Centro Sociale, see Michela Maguolo, "La comunità e il suo centro: Una rivista, un tema, un dibattito," in Engramma, no. 166 (June 2019), https://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=3638 (accessed April 15, 2024).

20 For a summary of Benevolo's approach, see Leonardo Benevolo, "La conservazione dei centri antichi e del paesaggio come problema urbanistico," in Ulisse, vol. 5, no. 27, year 11 (Autumn–Winter 1957), 1445–53.

time. For him, the historic center was a district of the modern city—a district with specific needs related to its history, but still a district serving its inhabitants. This position, setting aside its polemical aspects, was similar to those of the journalist Antonio Cederna (1921–1966), Benevolo's friend and colleague, and of the Italia Nostra association, where he held leading positions.

For Benevolo, the ethical dimension of conserving historic city centers was grounded in personal beliefs that involved his faith. More generally, his deep knowledge of the doctrine of St. Thomas and his studies of neoscholastic philosophy during the war led him to interpret architecture as a profoundly moral activity—a morality he recognized as foundational in the work of Nikolaus Pevsner, a historiographer whose work strongly influenced Benevolo, and which he also found in the work by William Morris (1834–1896).[21] A well-known definition of architecture by Morris served as a key phrase for interpreting the *Storia* and another book that Benevolo published in 1960, *Una introduzione all'architettura*—and, more broadly, for understanding his entire body of work (Fig. 44):

A great subject truly, for it embraces the consideration of the whole external surroundings of the life of man; we cannot escape from it if we would so long as we are part of civilisation, for it means the moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself, except in the outermost desert. Neither can we hand over our interests in it to a little band of learned men, and bid them seek and discover, and fashion, that we may at last stand by and wonder at the work, and learn a little of how 'twas all done: 'tis we ourselves, each one of us, who must keep watch and ward over the fairness of the earth, and each with his own soul and hand do his due share therein, lest we deliver to our sons a lesser treasure than our fathers left to us.[22]

Benevolo combined the topic of morality—the foundation of his activities—with the dominant presence of technology in the modern world and structured his interpretation of the Modern Movement, its history, and its legacies within this dialectic. For instance, in 1946, while developing one of his earliest theoretical texts, he wrote:

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21 On this topic, from a critical perspective, see David Watkin, Morality and Architecture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

22 William Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," lecture at the London Institution, Finsbury Circus, March 10, 1881, in Hopes and Fears for Art (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1882), 181.

> The problem [of technology], then, becomes particularly important today. This is both because technology has achieved a truly extraordinary development on its own, and because architecture for the last thirty years has relied precisely on technology to achieve its artistic results . . . . Technology could be interpreted as the continuation that man is called upon to give to God's creation—and man, through technology, becomes in a certain sense God's collaborator in continuing the work of creation.[23]

This interpretation of the sacred nature of architecture and the design process was not explicitly developed in the *Storia*, but some of these ideas were expressed through a more secular framework that emphasized strong social and moral foundations as decisive for the Modern Movement.

The *Storia* as a Collective Project

As I suggested above, the *Storia* is distinctive in that it exists somewhere between historiography and design. Its second distinctive feature concerns the context in which it was developed—a context that involves not only Benevolo but also a significant portion of Rome's architectural culture, allowing us to interpret the book as a collective project. During the second half of the 1950s, a group of architects founded the SAU to establish a common architectural approach rooted in the Modern Movement and focused on architecture and planning.[24]

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23 My translation. "Il problema [della tecnica], poi, diventa particolarmente importante oggi. Sia perché la tecnica ha raggiunto, per conto suo, uno sviluppo veramente straordinario, sia perché l'architettura da trent'anni in qua si fonda proprio sulla tecnica per raggiungere i suoi risultati artistici . . . . La tecnica si potrebbe chiamare il proseguimento che l'uomo è chiamato a dare alla creazione di Dio—e l'uomo, attraverso la tecnica, diventa in un certo senso il collaboratore di Dio per continuare l'opera della creazione." Leonardo Benevolo, "Teoria dell'arte, scritti del 1946," manuscript, Archivio Leonardo Benevolo, Cellatica, Italy, "Schedario" series, folder "Teoria dell'arte."

24 SAU members included Renato Amaturo, Luisa Anversa, Carlo Aymonino, Maurizio Aymonino, Pietro Barucci, Gabriele Belardelli, Leonardo Benevolo, Massimo Boschetti, Arnaldo Bruschi, Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Carlo Chiarini, Fabrizio Cocchia, Adolfo DeCarlo, Baldo de' Rossi, Nico Di Cagno, Beata di Gaddo, Luciano Giovannini, Marcello Girelli, Italo Insolera, Aldo Livadiotti, Mario Manieri Elia, Nino Manzone, Giuseppina

Benevolo's *Storia* was conceived and developed within the SAU. For the association's members, the book served as something of a manifesto—the foundation of a shared tradition based not on formal values but idealistic principles: trust in humanistic technology, collaborative work, and commitment to the Modern Movement, which was undergoing a crisis during these years (as seen, for example, with CIAM).[25] The SAU proposed an alternative to the formal research that dominated Italian architectural culture—research, for istance, that had prompted Rayner Banham to declare that Italy had withdrawn from the Modern Movement.[26] Benevolo's *Storia* thus emerged from a context where historical reference and contemporary relevance converged, creating a truly operative history for design practice, not one merely operative in its theoretical declarations, like Zevi's perspective.

A brief comparison between Zevi's *Storia* and Benevolo's reveals these differences: both addressed primarily architects and students, and both sought to define history's role in design practice. In essence, Zevi reinterpreted past masters and inserted them into contemporary discourse to extract formal principles for developing contemporary architectural expression.[27] Benevolo, by contrast, found in social and collective history the the essential spirit of the Modern Movement—a movement that necessarily had heroes of *method* rather than heroes of *architectural language*. Zevi's is a history of masterpieces, Benevolo's a collective history—admittedly dogmatic and at times moralistic, grounded in a faith that architecture and planning, understood as collaborative efforts toward social improvement (and, for Benevolo, toward the glorification of God), can transform society. This philosophical difference is evident in their books' visual approaches. Benevolo's *Storia* combines old and contemporary photographs to create a complex representation of architec-

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Marcialis, Carlo Melograni, Cleto Morelli, Piero Moroni, Ugo Sacco, Alberto Samonà, Michele Valori, Eduardo Vittoria, and Marcello Vittorini.

25 Eric Mumford, The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 238–66.

26 See Reyner Banham, "Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture," in Architectural Review, no. 747 (1959), 285. On the debate, see Francesco Cellini, "La polemica sul Neoliberty," in Controspazio, nos. 4–5 (1977): 52–3.

27 On this topic, see Matteo Cassani Simonetti, "Biagio Rossetti come pretesto," in Biagio Rossetti secondo Bruno Zevi, ed. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Francesco Ceccarelli, and Adachiara Zevi (Rome: Viella, 2021), 61–91.

ture and its transformations while Zevi's book uses photographs of recently completed works to emphasize formal innovation (Fig. 45).

In general, as already noted, Benevolo's *Storia* is essentially a narrative without heroes. If we must identify a central figure, it is not Frank Lloyd Wright (as in Zevi's account) but Walter Gropius, who represents Benevolo's ideal of the Modern Movement master. For Benevolo, Gropius embodied the socially engaged architect, rather than the creator of formal or spatial masterpieces. When writing about Gropius, Benevolo seemed to be drawing a self-portrait—one that also reflected the SAU's position:

> Gropius's lesson was validated precisely by what happened outside the school; with his eye on method, not on style, he discreetly but irresistibly invited the best architects from the various countries to look deeper into the rationale behind their experiments, their heritage. . . . [F]ormal tendencies were manifold—even if certain less distinguished members of the younger generation were beginning to talk of an international style—but with a common character that laid them open to comparison, to integration and to a shared belief in certain principles: respect for the human scale, strict technical propriety, continuity between the various scales of planning . . . . [T]he masters of the modern movement worked and spoke with a completely different tone: reasonable, modulated and concerned with a long-term task.[28]

Benevolo even began the conclusion of his *Storia* with Gropius's words, quoting a 1952 speech to the Association of American architects. For Benevolo, Gropius's emphasis on teamwork offered a methodological model for contemporary practice.[29] Benevolo and his colleagues attempted to implement this approach through the SAU. Even if we consider the *Storia* apart from its historiographical framework, we can sense Benevolo's determination to transform the architectural culture of his time by connecting historical reference with contemporary practice—and by removing history from dusty library shelves to place it directly at the center of the design process.

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28 Leonardo Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, vol. 2, The Modern Movement, trans. H. J. Landry (1960; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 471.

29 Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, vol. 2, 783–6.

For Benevolo, the Modern Movement was an inevitable development that remained vital in the 1950s, and architecture had to be grounded in human equality and freedom. This is how his *Storia* concludes: "[I]f the modern movement was to be outgrown, this must be an 'outgrowing' far more radical than any that had hitherto taken place: things would have to begin again from the beginning, with completely different aims. The realization of the gravity of this dilemma certainly does not help modern architects to find peace of mind, but it does project duty and hope on to a specific target."[30]

Some projects around the *Storia*

It is possible to draw parallels between projects that Benevolo developed in the 1950s and 1960s and the *Storia* to show how the book was explicitly oriented toward contemporary design practice and, conversely, how his design work from those same years reflected the same theoretical principles that shaped his historical interpretation.

This relationship appears, for instance, in the competition project for the Torre Spagnola suburb in Matera, designed by Benevolo with Giampaolo Rotondi in 1955 (Fig. 46). The competition was part of the broader redevelopment of Matera's Sassi districts, which had produced one of neorealist culture's best-known achievements: the La Martella settlement sponsored by Olivetti and realized by Ludovico Quaroni. Quaroni had served on the Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia e sui mezzi per combatterla (1951–53; the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Poverty in Italy) and had studied the community of the small village of Grassano. Through CEPAS, he introduced Benevolo to issues concerning the "southern question" (*questione meridionale*) and poverty.[31]

In the Torre Spagnola project, Benevolo and Rotondi sought to represent a community by establishing a civic center as a heart of the village. Their focus on creating a focal point for the new rural neighborhood—a place of identity where a single building would house all public spaces (church, school, social centre, etc.)—proved particularly significant. The project was develo-

30 Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, vol. 2, 837.

31 See Gianluca Fiocco, L'Italia prima del miracolo economico: L'inchiesta parlamentare sulla miseria, 1951–1954 (Manduria: Lacaita Editore, 2004).

ped more for its planning logic, program, and urban structure than for its architectural language: the façades employed a fairly conventional neorealist vocabulary aligned with contemporary debates on ruralism.[32]

Other positions developed in the *Storia* appear in Benevolo's Bologna projects. The competition project for Bologna's new trade fair—won in 1960 and realized by the firm Benevolo, Tomaso Giura Longo, and Carlo Melograni—explicitly followed International Style principles and the tradition of major exhibitions, such as the 1957 *Interbau – Internationale Bauausstellung* in Berlin, which Benevolo had visited during his European travels to take photographs for his *Storia* (Fig. 47). While the Bologna trade fair project represented this modern architectural tradition, the urban planning studies for the city's historic center—seemingly distant from typical Modern Movement concerns—reflected the same interpretation of the city. Commissioned by Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Bologna's town planning councillor, in 1962, the study was guided by the principle that, despite the differences distinguishing each part of the city, it nevertheless formed a unified whole at the regional scale.[33] Technically, Benevolo categorized buildings and established conservation guidelines based on a simple concept: everything predating the industrial revolution should be preserved; everything built later could be replaced. This reflected both Benevolo's observation of poor-quality nineteenth-century construction and, more importantly, his interpretation of the historic city not as a problem of pure preservation but as an urban planning challenge based on the social structure of the city and its historic center (Fig. 48).

The Cavedone district in Bologna represents a project that combined lessons from the historic city with modern architectural experience. Working within a team coordinated by Federico Gorio (1915–2007), Benevolo participated in a project that employed courtyard forms for both settlement and social organization while carefully studying every construction detail to achieve maximum economic efficiency and operational quality (Fig. 49).

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32 See Michelangelo Sabatino, Pride in Modesty: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

33 See Matteo Cassani Simonetti, "The Conservative Restoration of the Historic City as Social Practice: The Study for the Historic Centre of Bologna by Leonardo Benevolo (1962–65)," in The Historical City: A Critical Reference and Role Model for Innovative Urban and Metropolitan Development, ed. Ilaria Cattabriga et al. (Cham: Springer, 2024), 195–205.

In the Matera and Bologna projects, we can see how Benevolo understood design as grounded in architecture's social dimension and extending beyond any specific disciplinary field. While this approach was strongly linked to the tradition of the Modern Movement, it also expressed the theoretical position elaborated in the *Storia*—serving simultaneously as historical reference and catalyst for contemporary design practice.

Unlike the majority of historiography devoted to modern architecture, Benevolo's *Storia* is based on the tension between the expression of what appears to be a conventional historical approach—as its title would suggest—and methodological directives that punctuate its pages. The relationship between *references* and *contemporaneity* centers on the problem of connecting history and design practice, avoiding rigid separations between the two while constructing an approach that treats the Modern Movement tradition as a living element of design—and understanding recent projects as the last link in a genealogy rooted in the recent past.

Benevolo's continuous updating of his volume, even through the early 2000s, allowed the work to cover an ever-expanding chronology, enabling the *Storia* to document developments through to the end of the twentieth century—up to the chronological boundary established by his subsequent volume, *L'architettura nel nuovo millennio* (2006), written to continue his interpretation of contemporary architecture. However, architecture's changing framework during the twentieth century weakened the close connection between history and design that Benevolo had established as the foundation of his book in 1960. The latest editions of the volume might be interpreted not primarily as architectural history, but as a testimony to a method and to the figure of the architect as intellectual—a role that defined the profession during the twentieth century.

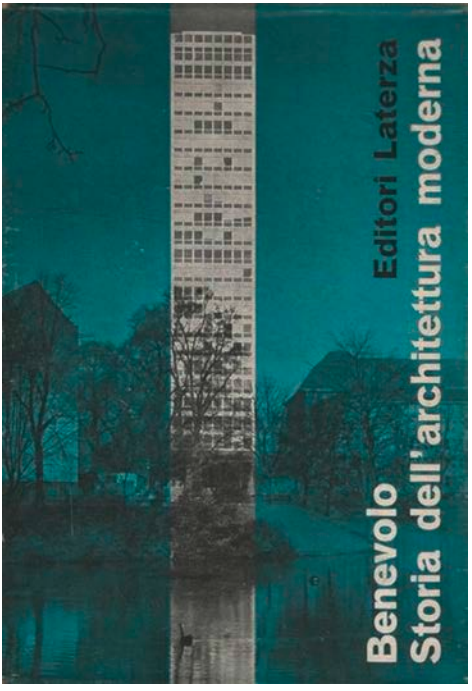

Fig. 41.
The slipcase of Leonardo Benevolo's Storia dell'architettura moderna, 1960.

ORGANIZZATO DAL CENTRO EDUCAZIONE PROFESSIONALE

Concluso con successo a Pescocostanzo il "seminario„ per assistenti sociali

CASTEL DI SANGRO, 8

Si è tenuto a Pescocostanzo dal 28 maggio al 4 giugno un seminario residenziale organizzato dal Centro educazione professionale per assistenti sociali di Roma (CEPAS), presieduto dall'on. Maria Jervolino.

I 31 partecipanti erano tutti diplomandi del CEPAS, tranne quattro che appartenevano ad altre scuole di servizio sociale. Il seminario che ha avuto lo scopo di preparare assistenti sociali per il lavoro nelle zone di economia agricola del Mezzogiorno, rientra nel normale programma triennale del CEPAS, scuola che insieme all'UNRRA Casas ha promosso il progetto abruzzese, operante sotto gli auspici dell'UNESCO.

Il seminario ha dedicato tre giornate ai principi generali dello sviluppo di comunità; la quarta giornata al tema «Poteri locali e sviluppo di comunità», la quinta è stata dedicata allo studio dell'ambiente. Il tema è stato trattato dall'architetto professor Leonardo Benevolo noto urbanista, che insieme al prof. Rossi Doria segue in qualità di esperto il lavoro che svolge il progetto. Nella sesta giornata si è trattato il tema «Sviluppo economico e sviluppo di comunità»; docente il prof. Benedetto de Cesaris che è stato fondatore e direttore della scuola per sindacalisti della CISL e che attualmente ricopre la carica di segretario generale dell'Associazione sindacale dell'ENI.

Il tema della settima giornata «La assistenza tecnica agricola», è stato trattato dal dott. Piero Sergi dirigente del nucleo di Assistenza tecnica che la Cassa per il Mezzogiorno ha recentemente assegnato al Consorzio di bonifica Alto Sangro. Nucleo che collabora strettamente col progetto.

L'ultima giornata è stata dedicata alla illustrazione del lavoro nei 14 Comuni che compongono il comprensorio del progetto, e alle conclusioni.

Questa parte teorica è stata accompagnata ogni giorno da lezioni sulla metodologia del lavoro sociale di comunità (queste lezioni sono state tenute dagli assistenti sociali che compongono l'«équipe» del progetto) nonché da una serie di illustrazioni dei vari progetti di sviluppo di comunità in Italia e all'estero: hanno svolto questa parte il professor R. Lamworthy della Università di Minnesota; la prof.ssa Ada Sereni, segretaria generale dell'Associazione Italia-Israele; il dott. Strobia per il Movimento Comunità.

Il seminario è stato allietato dalla presenza di vari visitatori illustri tra i quali ricordiamo il prof. Guido Calogero dell'Università di Roma e fondatore del CEPAS, il prof. Felice Balbo

Il prof. Benevolo, autore del piano Territoriale di coordinamento per l'Abruzzo, illustra a un gruppo di diplomandi del CEPAS i problemi della Valle dell'Aventino

"IL TEMPO"
9/6/1961

Fig. 42.
An article about CEPAS work in Abruzzo. The man standing is probably Leonardo Benevolo. From Il Tempo, June 9, 1961.

Fig. 43.
A poster edited by Leonardo Benevolo, with layout by Albe Steiner, dedicated to urban plans and included in the magazine Centro Sociale, 1955.

Fig. 44.
The cover of Leonardo Benevolo's Una introduzione all'architettura, 1960.

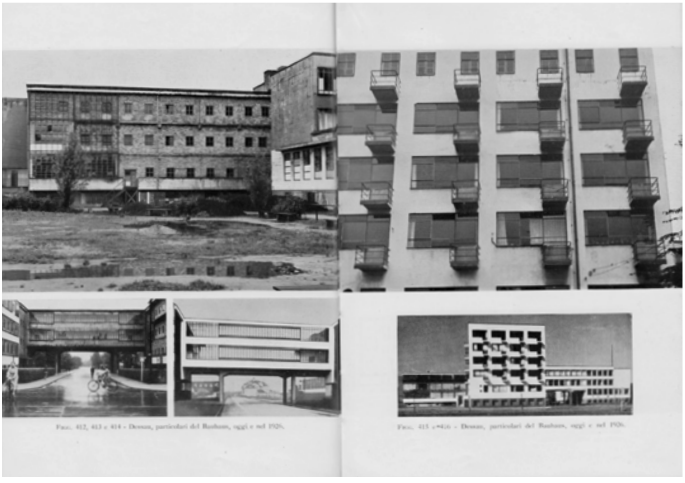

Fig. 45.
Two pages of Storia dell'architettura moderna about the Bauhaus building in Dessau, comparing Benevolo's photographs with others of the newly completed building. From Leonardo Benevolo, Storia dell'architettura moderna (Rome: Laterza, 1960).

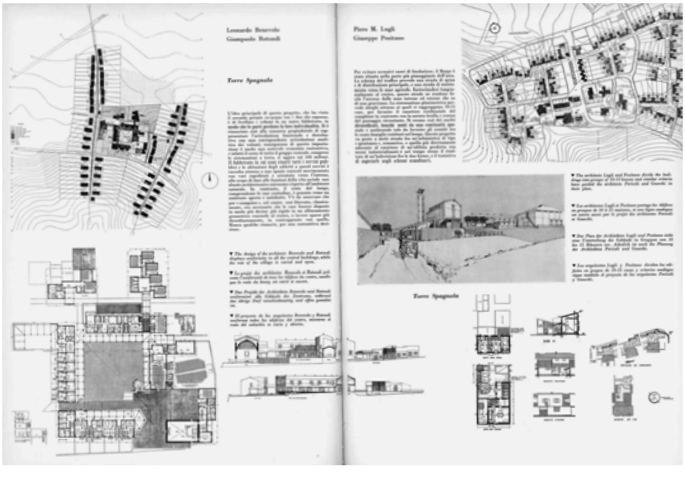

Fig. 46.
The presentation of the competition project for the Torre Spagnola suburb by Leonardo Benevolo and Giampaolo Rotondi. From L'architettura: Cronache e storia, year 1, no. 2 (June–July 1955).

Fig. 47.
An article by Bruno Zevi about the competition project for the new trade fair in Bologna by Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo and Carlo Melograni, 1960. From L'Espresso, June 4, 1961.

La nuova fiera di Bologna

L'ARCHITETTURA VALORIZZA L'ECONOMIA

di BRUNO ZEVI

Una veduta prospettica d'un padiglione della nuova Fiera di Bologna. Il progetto degli architetti Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo e Carlo Melograni, ha vinto il primo premio. Sopra: schizzo prospettico del secondo premio, degli architetti Alfredo Freda, Franco Mezzetti e Ernesto Rampelli. Nella foto sopra il titolo: plastico del progetto vincitore.

Fig. 48.
The cover of the book about studies on the historic center of Bologna (1965).

Bologna: quartiere di via Cavedone

capogruppo: **Federico Gorio**

progettazione urbanistica:
L. Benevolo, V. Calzolari, S. Danielli, M. Vittorini

progettazione edilizia:
L. Benevolo, V. Calzolari, S. Danielli, A. Esposito, M. Vittorini

direzione lavori: **M. Carini**

stazione appaltante: **Consorzio Emiliano-Romagnolo**

Il lavoro di impostazione della unità residenziale di Via Cavedone in Bologna è stato svolto seguendo queste linee:
a) lo studio della continuità della struttura organizzativa dalla casa al quartiere;
b) la definizione del carattere urbano del quartiere attraverso la sua continuità edilizia;
c) il controllo del suolo non edificato, interno ed esterno e sua precisa classificazione funzionale e destinazione;
d) l'articolazione dei servizi connessa con lo schema di piano particolareggiato per la intera zona.
Lo svolgimento di questi concetti ha condotto ad impostare l'intero quartiere su una edilizia chiamata «corte attrezzata».
Lo schema tipico della corte, è il seguente: la corte è definita volumetricamente da quattro fabbricati lineari, a tre piani, contenenti gli appartamenti d'abitazione; i quattro fabbricati non si toccano sugli angoli, ma sono opportunamente scostati in modo da realizzare passaggi (pedonali o carrabili). Per alcune corti del quartiere l'elemento di

Fig. 49.
The presentation of the Cavedone district in Bologna under the guidance of Federico Gorio. From Architettura cantiere, no. 15 (1957).

Authors

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Markus Dauss is Professor of Architectural History and Theory at the University of Bonn. He previously held visiting and substitute professorships in Heidelberg, Augsburg, Berlin, and Frankfurt. He earned his PhD from the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris and the Technical University of Dresden with a dissertation on public buildings in Paris and Berlin. His habilitation at Goethe University Frankfurt examined the metaphor of architecture as writing. His research interests include comparative historicism, the history of monuments, the history of infrastructure and mobility, 19th-century painting, and—more recently—the aesthetics, critique, and mediality of ruins.

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Szymon Ruszczewski, architect and researcher, graduated from the University of Florence and received a Ph.D. from the University of Sheffield. His work concentrates on modern architecture history and heritage, and its conservation, with publications on Alvar Aalto, Team 10, and Jerzy Sołtan. He has taught design studios and humanities courses at the universities of Florence, Pisa, and Sheffield and at the Polytechnic of Milan, and he works as a registered architect in Florence.

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