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Magazine del Festival dell'Architettura

ricerche e progetti sull'architettura e la città

research and projects on architecture and the city

69/
70

Architec-*Tour.* Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment

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Riccardo Rapparini

This issue was laid out by:
Cesare Dallatomasina

Email: redazione@famagazine.it
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Scientific Committee

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We also recall that, similarly to what happens in all international scientific journals, the opinion of the experts is fundamental but is of a consultative nature only and the publisher obviously assumes no formal obligation to accept the conclusions.

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n.	Id Code	date	Type essay	Evaluation	Publication
1	1092	mag-23	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
2	1094	mag-23	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
3	1096	mag-23	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
4	1091	mag-23	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
5	1081	mag-23	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
6	1110	mag-23	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
7	1095	mag-23	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
8	1116	mag-23	Long	Peer (A)	Yes
9	1084	mag-23	Long	Peer (B)	Yes
10	1083	mag-23	Long	Peer (B)	Yes

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Architec-*Tour.* Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment

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Editorial 1

Enrico Prandi

Traveling for Ourselves, Traveling for Architecture

Abstract
The editorial essay explores the importance of travel as a formative tool for architects, arguing that direct experience of architecture, through physical presence, remains irreplaceable even in the digital age. Travel triggers a creative process where "memory" and "invention" merge: memory records subjective interpretations of reality, which then generate architectural invention: classic examples include Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Louis Kahn, who modified their poetics after important journeys. The multisensory experience of architecture – perceiving spaces, proportions, light, and sounds – cannot be visualised. Finally, the case of Luigi Vietti illustrates how formative travel led to the conviction that modern architecture derives from Mediterranean architecture, demonstrating how physical encounters with places and cultures provide raw material that architects creatively metabolise in their design approach.

Keywords
Educational journey — Architectural experience — Memory and invention — Grand Tour

[…] forming architecture presupposes the formation of men (Rogers 1961).

No work of architecture can be conveyed through words, nor do photographs barely capture the experience of those who have participated in the spaces by physically inhabiting them (Rogers 1955).

Two complementary quotations by E.N. Rogers provide the background for the editorial that introduces this issue: *Architectour. Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment* aims to open reflection, among other things but not exclusively, on the importance of travel as a formative act both at a general personal level and at a particular architectural level.
In conclusion of the first edition of the *Valserena Seminars*, a symposium held in Parma in October 2024, I argued that our training as architects, including theoretical aspects, reflects our experiences and our opportunities for encounter. And what is travel if not a continuous sequence of encounters with places, cultures and traditions even before people and their opinions?
We can therefore affirm that *we are (also) what we have encountered* and *we will become (also) what we will encounter*. In times of rampant virtuality, advocating for the necessity of travel as a formative act in architecture may sound anachronistic. Even more so because in the past, as *FAM*, we have committed ourselves to encouraging alternative and experimental forms of teaching.
But the current theme is *Travel*, and particularly formative travel. It is but a short step to recalling specific cultural experiences, the *Grand Tours*, which originated in seventeenth-century England as journeys reserved for

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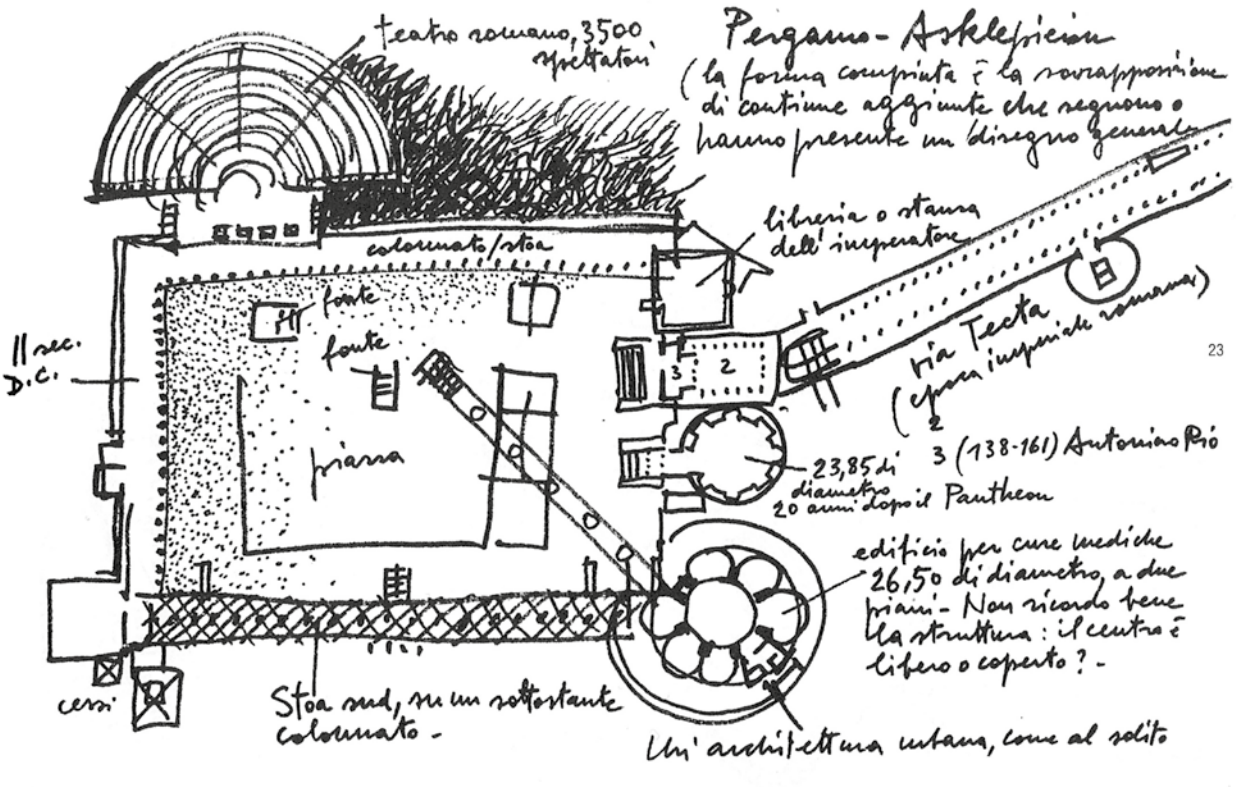

Fig. 1
Carlo Aymonino, Redrawing of the Asklepeion of Pergamon with notes. From: Carlo Aymonino, *Disegni 1972-1997*, Federico Motta.

young British aristocrats with the aim of completing their education through direct exposure to European art, history, and culture, mainly Italian. Following the model of the *Grand Tour*, the *Prix de Rome* was established and developed, as an award that European academies granted to the most deserving architecture students with the objective of analysing and studying Italian architecture. This tradition, more or less institutionalised, has remained inherent in the architect's education and has touched many authors, who have seen their poetics deviate, if not change completely (certainly enriched), upon returning from a journey.
This happened to Frank Lloyd Wright after his infatuation with Japan (which he visited repeatedly from 1905 to 1922), to Le Corbusier after his "Voyage d'Orient" into the Balkans, Turkey and Greece (1910-11), or again to Louis Kahn after his journey to the Mediterranean and particularly to Italy as a guest of the American Academy in Rome (1950-51). On this occasion, Kahn paid tribute to Italian architecture, writing to his studio:

> I am definitively realizing that the architecture of Italy will remain the source of inspiration for future works, those who do not see it this way should look at it once more. Our things seem small in comparison: here all pure forms have been experimented with in all variants of architecture. One must understand how the architecture of Italy relates to what we know about building and needs.

Travel also triggered theoretic inspiration, such as Bottoni's *Architectural Chromatisms*, which he experimented with in the Civic Center of Sesto San Giovanni, interpreting the characteristics of mosaic art discovered years earlier during his 1926 journey to Pompeii (Ferro-Iarossi), or Aymonino's (impracticable) idea of «architecture entirely sculpted from a block of marble» derived from his 1988 journey to Petra in Jordan.

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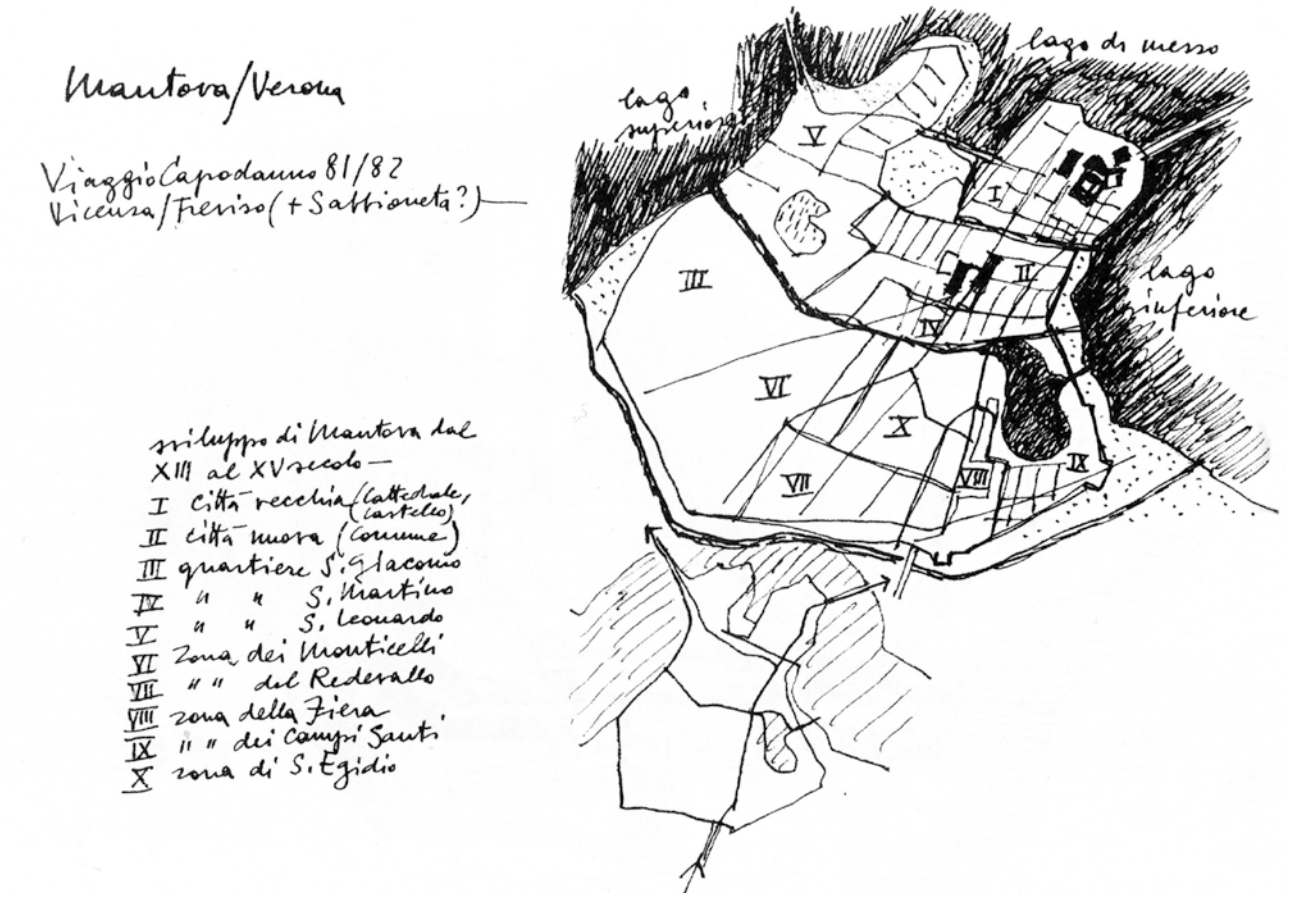

Fig. 2
Carlo Aymonino, Notes for a journey to Verona/Mantua, New Year 1981/82. From: Carlo Aymonino, *Disegni 1972-1997*, Federico Motta.

Those who have encountered masters, visited buildings, or lived different cultures carry this heritage – in part or in whole – into their own way of thinking and designing space. Equally important, however, is the manner in which these encounters were elaborated, filtered and reinterpreted through individual sensibility (and experience).

Thus the themes of "memory" and "invention" come into play, two terms that burst into the title, hybridising and specifying it. Operationally speaking, for architect these two aspects merge in the single moment of design. But let us proceed in order.

In travel, the first aspect to consider is that of recording (a place, an architecture, a sensation, etc.) which may occur through different techniques (from drawing to photography, to video, up to written diary, just to mention a few). While these techniques require a manual effort, memory activates automatically through the senses. Like a black box, memory records without our awareness in an articulated and often unfaithful process. Indeed, what we memorise is an interpretation influenced by lived experience (both current and past). Memory is an invention, understood as a reworking of what is remembered over time. Since memory is always biased (we remember what we have perceived even if this is not exactly real) we can speak of invention insofar as we bend memory to our inventive capacity that is enriched with experience from time to time.

To emphasise this idea, we could, in an improvised manner, attempt to draw a work by Le Corbusier, such as the Chapel at Ronchamp, and observe how it resembles the original «no more than a daughter resembles her mother» (the quotation is a paraphrase of a concept expressed by Luciano Semerani (2000)).

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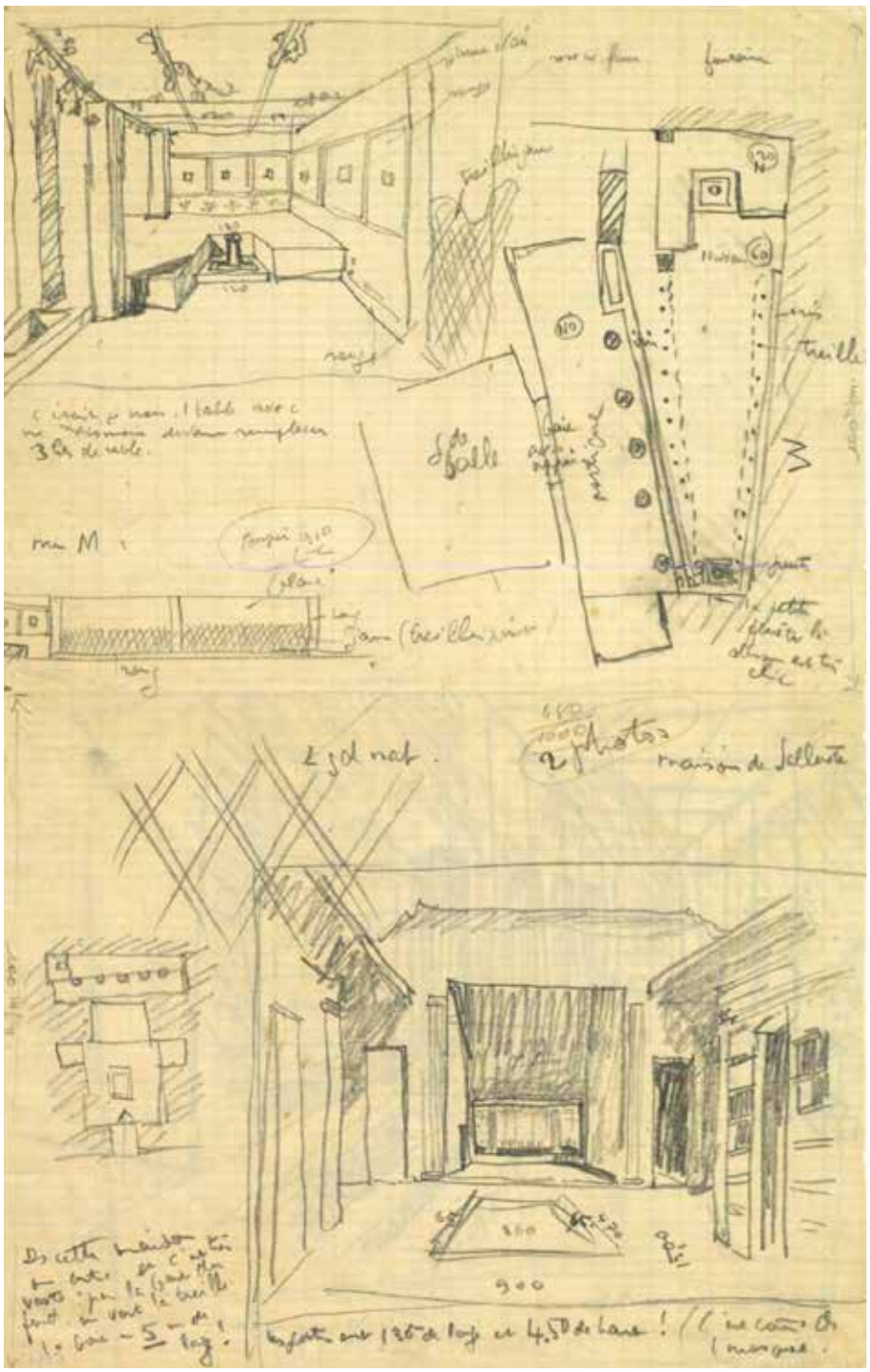

Fig. 3
Le Corbusier, Sketches of a house in Pompeii, 1911. From: Le Corbusier, *Voyage d'Orient*. Carnet IV. Fondation Le Corbusier.

We could suggest that memory insinuates between reality and its recollection, transforming into architectural invention. This is one of the few forms of architectural invention, for the peace of mind of those who are convinced that absolute invention exists in architecture[1].

The contemporary architect, inherently equipped with a strong critical capacity (whose development remains, now more than ever, the main focus for each school of architecture), must study and comprehend architecture by analysing it within the existing socio-cultural and contextual complexity. This is a difficult operation to perform at a distance because architecture can only be fully understood by living it, perceiving it with all the senses, including smell (Dewey *docet*). Such bodily experience does not translate well into modern dematerialisation and virtualisation. Walking through spaces, perceiving proportions, observing how light interacts with mate-

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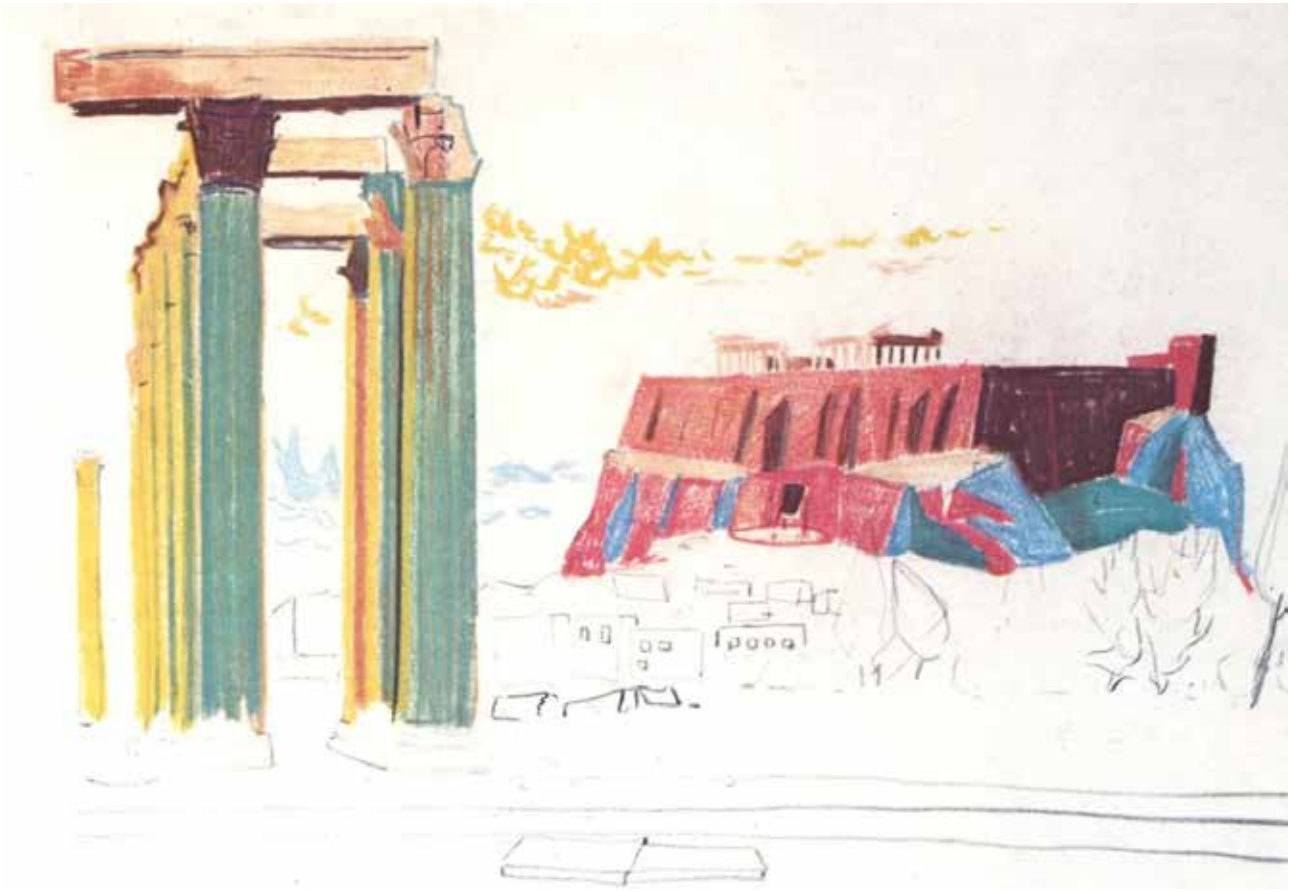

Fig. 4
Louis Kahn, Athens Acropolis from the Olympieion, 1951. From: Louis Kahn, *The Importance of a Drawing*.

rials and feeling the acoustics of an environment are characteristics that can only be understood through physical presence.
Similarly, presence guarantees a greater understanding of the context and the relationships that are established, since as we know a good architectural work is always in dialogue with its cultural, historical, geographical and social context. Traveling, therefore, allows for a better understanding of how a building relates to the surrounding urban fabric, to the landscape and to local traditions.
Travel is an experience (*of architecture* as Rogers would say) of study, analysis, and deepening accomplished personally with the most disparate techniques, including redrawing: it can also induce preliminary preparation, as Carlo Aymonino did for his numerous travels, starting from the essential information provided by the Touring Guides (the book too is an encounter), he then filled notebooks with drawings, noting the distinctive features of a city's structure and the distinctive characteristics of its monuments (even those remained unbuilt). An even more interesting aspect of this process is the fusion, along the thread of analogy, with current reflections on design problems. So that alongside the redrawing of the façade of the central Tempietto for the sanctuary of Caravaggio by Pellegrino Pellegrini, Aymonino writes «The city needs different squares» (14), while under the sketch of the plan of the Asklepeion of Pergamon «the completed form is the superimposition of continuous additions that follow or have present a general design», he writes «An urban architecture as usual» (Aymonino 2000).
So much so that one of the chapters of the collection of drawings is emblematically titled "Traveling as Studying". In the digital era, characterized by immediate access to images and information from around the world, it might seem that physical travel has lost importance.

Encounters supply the raw material, but the architect – like everyone else – is also the active process that transforms these inputs into something new and personal. Travel continues to be a moment of discovery and transformation, in which the architect can develop a deeper understanding not only of architecture, but especially of himself in relation to architecture and of his own approach to design.
As I emphasised at the beginning of this essay, if it is true that we are what we encounter, it is also true that we are not only what we have encountered. I would therefore say that we are the result of the interaction between what we encounter and our capacity to metabolise it creatively. Encounters supply the raw material, but the architect – like everyone else – is also the active process that transforms these inputs into something new and personal.
Some years ago, while studying the figure of Luigi Vietti (Dell'Aira et alii 2022), I came across an experience profoundly linked to formative travel in the rationalist era.
Luigi Vietti, fresh from graduation, departed in 1932 from Chiasso station, stopping in Zurich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Hannover, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo. He visited architectures, dialogued with their respective authors, confronted himself with Giedion, developing the conviction that modern architecture drew its origin from Mediterranean architecture.
A particularity that characterises Vietti's rationalist architecture (unlike other rationalists close to him and his contemporaries, such as Terragni for example) is his desire to experience closely the new architecture that permeated from magazines.
Following his journey into the north, Vietti undertook a trip to Southern Italy to explore the true roots of the new architecture. Gathering evidence, he argued with conviction that the real origin of modern architecture was Mediterranean architecture (traditional architecture, with or without architects, paraphrasing Rudofsky), which greatly influenced the great Masters of the twentieth century and remains an important lesson.

Notes

[1] On this aspect cf. Prandi 2004.

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Enrico Prandi (Mantova, 1969), architect, graduated with honours from the Faculty of Architecture in Milan with Guido Canella, with whom he carried out teaching and research activities. He holds a PhD in Architectural and Urban Composition from the IUAV in Venice, (2003): IUAV in Venice (2003). He is currently Associate Professor in Architectural and Urban Composition at the Department of Engineering and Architecture, University of Parma. He is director of the Parma Festival of Architecture and founder-director of «FAMagazine». Research and projects on architecture and the city'. Since 2024 he has been Dean of the Master's Degree Course in Architecture and city sustainability. He was the scientific responsible for the Parma unit of the project ArcheA. Architectural European Medium-Sized City Arrangement (published in Routledge, Aión and LetteraVentidue volumes. His publications include: *Il progetto del Polo per l'Infanzia. Sperimentazioni architettoniche tra didattica e ricerca* (Aión, Florence 2018); *L'architettura della città lineare* (FrancoAngeli, Milan 2016); *Il progetto di architettura nelle scuole europee* (in *European City Architecture*, FAEdizioni, Parma 2012); *Mantova. Saggio sull'architettura* (FAEdizioni, Parma 2005).

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Editorial 2

Cristina Pallini

In Itinere

Abstract
The *journey of initiation* has been and continues to be vital for architects. It is a process where an individual undergoes a period of intellectual growth and deeper understanding; it is not just about visiting buildings and understanding their contextual reasons, but also about experiencing them firsthand. In this way, they become part of a personal atlas of references and, consequently, project material, extending the influence of the journey beyond time.
This issue addresses several sub-themes, ranging from the cognitive processes associated with material interaction with the artefact, to the various ways in which it can be observed, from the journeys that have most influenced the trajectories of individual architects, to the analysis of some of their exemplary works. The last two contributions are based on interviews about the role of travel in architects' intellectual training.

Keywords
Grand Tour — Architectural training — Travelling architects

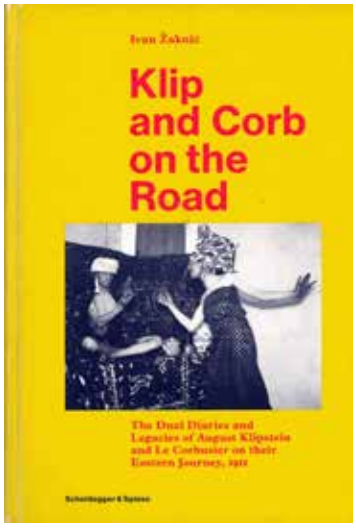

Fig. 1
Book cover of *Klip and Corb on the Road* (Žakniç 2019).

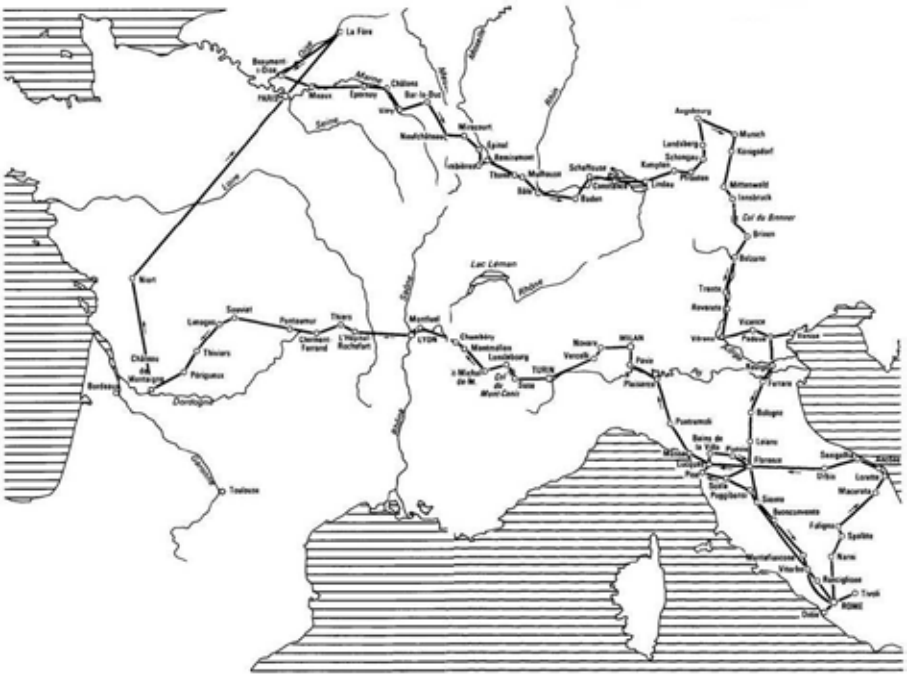

Fig. 2
Michel de Montaigne's journey through Italy in 1850-1851 (de Montaigne 1983).

> […] I deem travel to be a profitable exercise. The mind has therein continual exercise to mark things unknown and note new objects. And as I have often said, I know no better school, to shape a man's life, than unceasingly to propose to him the diversity of so many other men's lives, customs, humours, and fancies; and make him taste or apprehend the perpetual variety of our nature's shapes or forms (Montaigne 1580, 2012, book III, chapter IX) (TdA).

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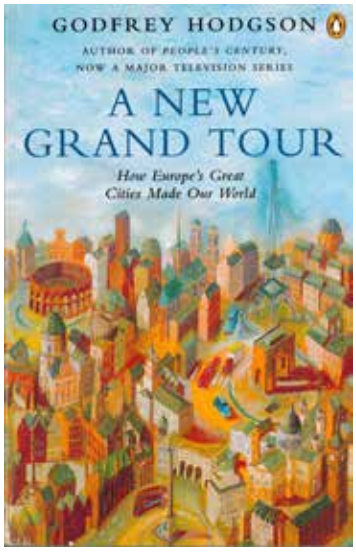

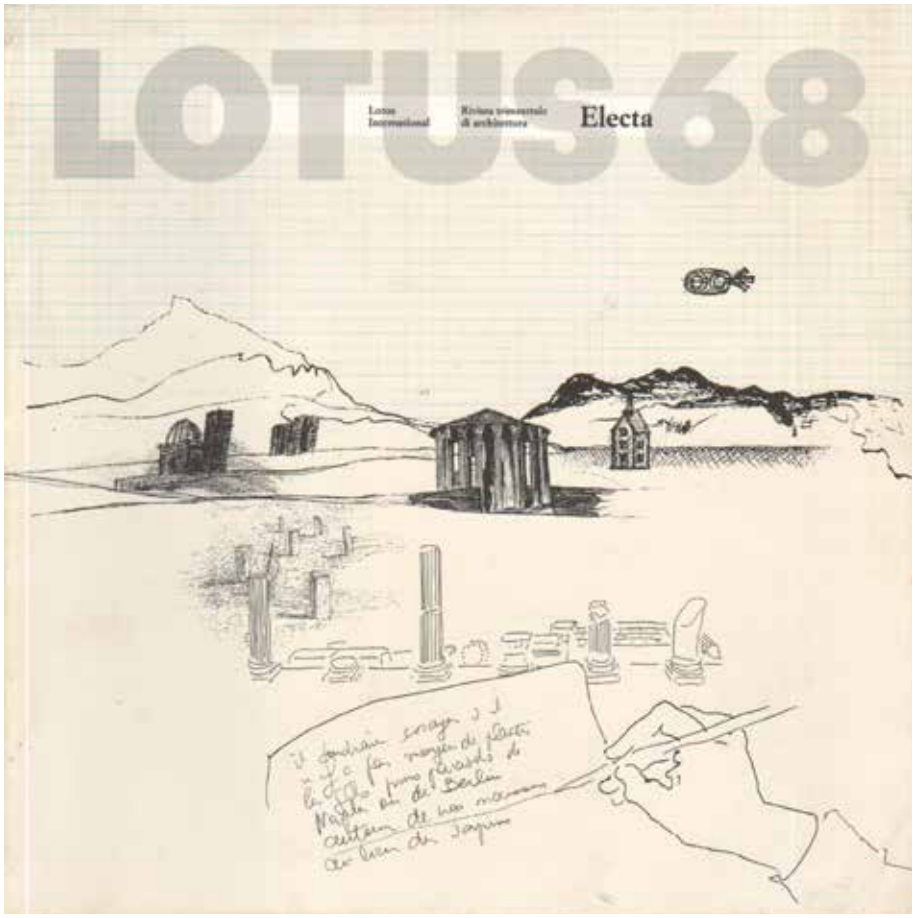

Fig. 3
Book cover of *A New Grand Tour. How Europe's Great Cities Made Our World* (Hodgson 1995).

Fig. 4
Cover of *The eye of the architect*, «Lotus International», n. 68 (1991).

On 22 June 1580, Michel de Montaigne embarked on a long journey to Italy with his brother and two friends. He needed spa treatment and was equally driven by his curiosity to learn about new things and cultures. In fact, he kept a diary describing places and the customs of the local inhabitants, adorned with personal reflections in French and Italian (Montaigne 1774, 2003).

It was precisely in that final part of the sixteenth century that the tradition of the Grand Tour began. For young aristocrats and gentry, it was the pinnacle of their education: they would set off, often accompanied by a tutor, to visit the cities, monuments, and artworks they had studied in books, with no clear distinction between the journey and leisure activities.

In 1615, Francis Bacon, in a short essay entitled *Of Travel*, listed the things to be seen and observed, recommending his readers to rely on a guide, learn the local language and, above all, keep a diary.

During the eighteenth century, the Grand Tour became an essential part of the education of the European elite, and Italy established itself as a key destination (Wilton and Bignamini 1996). No trip would be complete without a stay in Rome, where visitors could explore the remnants of classical antiquity and walk the cobblestones of the Appian Way in the footsteps of many illustrious predecessors (Brilli 1995, 2014, 2025, p. 14).

> It was not merely a personal need for thought, which, when disconnected from diversity, descends into a diabolical narcissism, but an authentic social requirement for cultural development [...] It is not surprising that a culture seeking to define itself through diverse and multifaceted experiences identified with travel, especially travel to Italy, its most significant literary and social moments (Viola 1987, p. 7).

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Fig. 5
Posters of Grand Tour #1, #2 and #3 organised within the *UpGranT* project (graphic design by Marta Ramos).

Fig. 6
Maps of GT#1 (12-15 January 2024), which began with an itinerary from Cesena to Urbino, alternating modern architecture and visits to historic centres, concluding with a "section" on the centre of Milan.

According to sociologist Luigi Zoja (2024, p. 144), these secular pilgrimages, a paradigm of itinerant education aimed at broadening horizons, were an invaluable gift, precisely because they fostered unprecedented cultural understanding. While modernity promoted nationalism, travellers exchanged knowledge, curiosity, and tolerance among various communities and countries, engaging with fellow travellers from different nationalities as well as with Italians (Bignamini 1996, p. 31). It was also thanks to their perspective, argued Cesare De Seta (1996, 2014, p. 35), that *Beautiful Italy* became aware of itself. Reflected in the mirror of paintings, stories, and travel diaries, it also helped weave the first threads of European identity.

Each city possessed its roster of *topoi* – viewpoints, famous monuments and favourite panoramas. Italy, no longer mythic or Arcadian, assumed its real shape in European consciousness, with strong lights and shadows, and sharp contradictions as well as splendours. […] 'Las Italias', wonderfully described by Cervantes in the sixteenth century, had by the end of the eighteenth been glimpsed as a single Italy, one mind and spirit, born of the creative imagination of the entire Continent (De Seta 1996, p. 17).

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Fig. 7
Map of GT#2 from Riga to Tallinn (8-12 June 2024), via a series of intermediate stops to visit buildings constructed during a period spanning from the interwar years to the post-independence era.

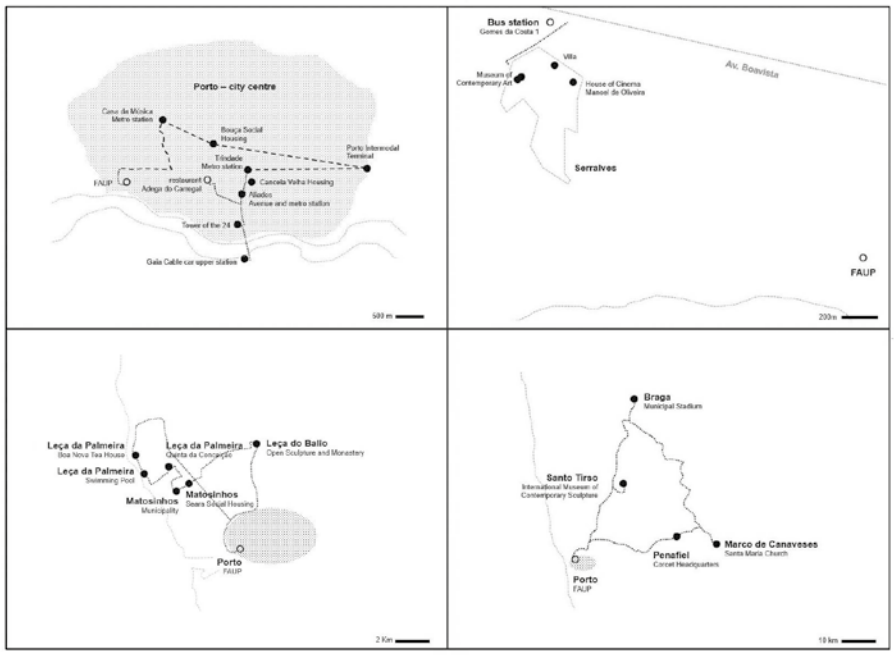

Fig. 8
Maps of the four GT#3 itineraries (June 5-14, 2025), in a counterclockwise direction: Porto and its urban centers, the Serralves Foundation area, the surrounding areas, and northern Portugal. GT#3 also involved students from partner institutions.

Studies on the historical and literary aspects of travel increasingly examine the traveller's personality, motivations, and methods of travel (Lucchesi 1995). Paradoxically, as the Tour became more institutionalised, its scope became narrower (Haskell 1996, p. 10). With the coming of the railway, the figure of the "tourist" appeared (D'Eramo 2017, 18). Unlike the traveller, the tourist generally hurried back home (Bowles 1949). Nowadays, this clear-cut distinction has given way to many intermediate figures, including the "city collector", attracted by historic towns off the beaten track (Langone 2006).

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Fig. 9
GT#1, Pesaro: Carlo Aymonino, High School Campus, 1970-1988. Photo UNIBO Team, 12 January 2024.

Fig. 10
GT#1, Urbino: visiting Palazzo Ducale. Photo L. Jākobsone (LMA), 12 January 2024.

In his recent *Survey on the age of tourism*, Marco D'Eramo (2017) examined the dichotomy between the increasingly frantic pursuit of authenticity and the growing alienation of many places transformed into tourist settings. In parallel, the phenomenon of "overtourism" is gaining increasing media and scholarly attention (Zezza 2023, De Majo 2025, De Mauro 2025, Masneri 2025). As Fernanda De Maio and Christian Toson (2022) point out, the peculiarity of the architect's journey, understood as a fundamental aspect of their ongoing training process, is a well-established and long-standing theme.

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Fig. 11
GT#1, Modena: Aldo Rossi, San Cataldo Cemetery, 1971-1985. Photo L. Jākobsone (LMA), 13 January 2024.

Fig. 12
GT#1, Milan: The Arch of Peace with the Sforza Castle and the Filarete Tower in the background. Photo EKA Team, 14 January 2024.

Yet, one wonders why, today, with the tools that enable us to access large amounts of images and information about the places and buildings we are interested in, travelling is still regarded as so important. In our modern world, indeed, travelling appears to have lost much of its adventurous element, of discovering otherness, of exploring the unknown (De Maio et alii 2022) (TdA).

One wonders how we can rediscover the "poetic-constructive" dimension of travel, understood as the ability to foster personal growth and new perspectives, especially for architects-in-the-making. This is the main question raised by *UpGranT* project, which considers the Grand Tour as a European cultural heritage.
Not only did it expose architects to diversity, but it also made them aware of the co-identity inherent in many European townscapes, itself a legacy of the plurality of forerunners who have been able to transpose the lessons of travel into their work. Furthermore, a greater "literacy" in architecture

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Fig. 13
GT#2, Riga: Latvian Riflemen Square. From left to right: the monument of the same name (1971), the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (G. Birkerts, 1993) and the Memorial to the Victims of Soviet Occupation (K. Gelzis e I. Mikelsone, 2021). Photo Porto Team, 8 June 2024.

Fig. 14
GT#2, Pärnu: Vilen Künnapu, extension of "Tervis" Sanatorium, 1976. Photo C. Pallini (Polimi) 10 June 2024.

– especially modern architecture in its diverse contextual forms – could have a significant influence extending beyond the discipline's boundaries, impacting not only those who travel in Europe for study, work, or leisure, but also ordinary people who interact with the built environment daily. The ability to "decode" the affinities between buildings, places, and urban contexts could promote self-driven learning, which has always complemented academic education, particularly in the field of architecture.

We may well ask whether "updating" the Grand Tour means, first and foremost, coming to terms with new geographies. In 1992, three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, reporter Godfrey Hodgson was commissioned to write a series of travel articles on the great capitals: Rome, Paris, London, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Prague, and Berlin. It was a portrait of both old and new Europe, with all its contradictions. In the chapter dedicated to Rome, his first stop, Hodgson juxtaposed ancient glories with recent tragedies, witnessed by a new, grim monument: the anonymous spot in Via Caetani where the body of Aldo Moro was found (1995, 18-19). Hodgson suggested Paris, the richest and largest city of the nineteenth century, as well as the natural capital of modernism, as the starting point for a new Grand Tour (1995, 67).

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Fig. 15
GT#2, Pärnu: Toomas Rein, "Kuldne Kodu" (Golden Home) residential complex, 1972-1987. Photo A. Vougia (AUTH), 10 June 2024.

Fig. 16
GT#2, Tallinn: Raine Karp, Riina Altmä, Linnahall (former "Lenin" Palace of Culture and Sports), 1975-1980. Photo LMA Team, 11 June 2014.

He described London, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Prague through a retrospective fresco, while entitling the chapter dedicated to Berlin *Memories of the Future*. Truly, during those years, Potsdamer Platz symbolised the challenging process of reconciliation with the past.

> For a start, you literally can't see that there ever was a square there at all. When you climb out of the U-Bahn today, you are in a sea of mud. Scraps of the infamous wall are still standing. Refugees are crammed into a ramshackle caravan park. A tatty anti-war exhibition offers a Cruise missile scrawled with tawdry hip-hop graffiti. A crassly commercial museum commemorates the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, and Russian deserters, the former conquerors, hawk fur hats and Soviet cap badges to German tourists for a few marks. The crowd will come back to the Potsdamer Platz. Daimler-Benz, Sony and other world corporations are committed to investing billions of D-marks in office and shopping projects. The Wall is down. […] Berlin is again the capital of a unified Germany. […] What is now called Berlin bears no resemblance to the old imperial city (Hodgson 1995, pp. 228-229).

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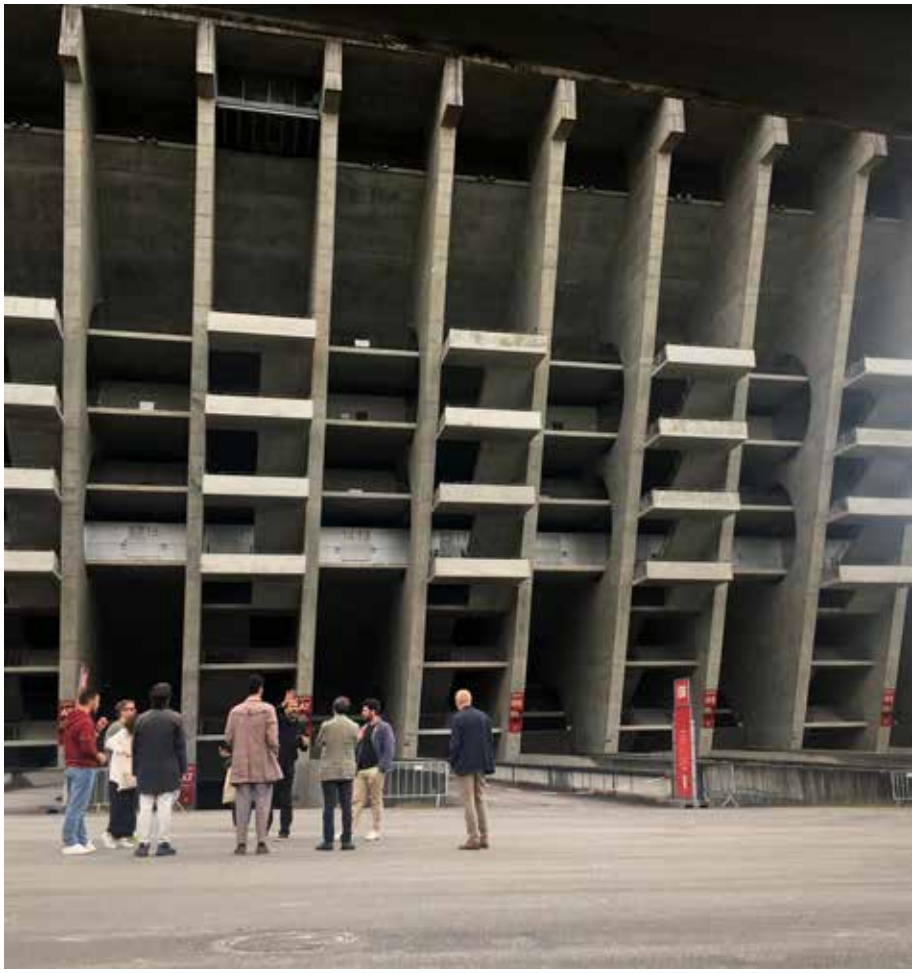

Fig. 17
GT#3, Penafiel: Nuno Melo Sousa, Corcet Company Headquarters, 2021-2024. Photo EKA Team, 6 June 2025.

Fig. 18
GT#3, Braga: Eduardo Souto de Moura, Municipal Stadium, 2000-2003. Photo EKA Team, 6 June 2025.

For architects, "updating" the Grand Tour involves, among other things, questioning history and compelling it to disclose the secrets of practice, craft, and form (Gresleri 1991, 10-11). *Itinera architectonica* is the title chosen by Giuliano Gresleri to introduce his monograph on Le Corbusier's *Journey into the Orient* (1984). Even before becoming a "global architect" (Colomina 2011), Le Corbusier can be considered a traveller, for whom travel was the main opportunity for learning. His trip to Italy in the autumn of 1907 was part of a pedagogical tradition established by L'Eplattenier: Florence, Siena, Ravenna and Venice (Tentori 1979; Gresleri 1988, pp. 537-540). The Orient, on the other hand, crowned a period of travel to Munich, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, and Berlin, where the young

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Fig. 19
GT#3, Porto: Álvaro Siza, Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, 1986-1996. Photo C. Pallini (Polimi), 5 June 2025.

Janneret visited the applied arts institutes on behalf of the School of La Chaux-de-Fonds. In Dresden, he embarked on a journey to Prague and Vienna in the company of August Klipstein, an art historian and collector whom he recognised as a valuable guide (Gresleri 1991, pp. 10-11). The two intended to continue to the Balkans, Turkey, and southern Italy, and travelled together to Athens following a meticulously planned itinerary designed to accommodate their respective interests (Gresleri 1987, p. 539).

> The East was still immersed in the pre-industrial age, coinciding with Janneret's exploration of the entire world of antiquity, according to a tradition typical of France and the École[1]. But within this world [...] Janneret's curiosity seemed to favour minority cultures: in addition to the exoticism of the mosque, which fascinated him like nothing else in the world, his attention was drawn, despite the context of the early industrial age, which was entirely devoted to "modernist fervour", to the anonymous world of peasant civilisation (in the Balkans, Turkey and Greece) or to the "forgotten" world of the Romanesque period (in Italy) (Gresleri 1984, p. 10) (TdA).

The publication of *Voyage d'Orient* in 1965, a few months after the master's death, revealed previously unknown aspects of his personal and intellectual journey, prompting experts to reevaluate his formative years. Adolf Max Vogt did just that, arguing that a school trip to the then recently discovered pile dwellings on Lake Geneva was as decisive as the journey into the Orient in shaping Charles-Edouard Janneret's aesthetic sensibility (Vogt 1998). In the Orient, however, his more mature age allowed him to experience and note down a series of solutions to concrete problems, that is, to "question history" (Gresleri 1991, pp. 10-11).
Confirmation of the direct relationship between those persistent observations and Le Corbusier's original design vocabulary seems to come from the sketches grouped by geographical areas, opening the first volume of his complete works. A more recent publication (Žaknič 2019) retraces the journey into the Orient by comparing the parallel diaries of "Klip & Corb", who enjoyed a temporary creative symbiosis. Le Corbusier also entrusted his reflections to letters addressed to William Ritter, an artist, writer and art critic he met in Munich in 1910 (Dumont 2015).

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Fig. 20
GT#3, Porto: Discussion with students during the IPL held in the semicircular space of the Museum. Photo E. Margione (Polimi).

However, it was only upon returning to Greece for the IV CIAM in 1933 that he formalised his conception of landscape as a determining factor in all human intervention (Simeoforidis 1997, 58). Two years later, in 1935, during his first visit to New York, he personally verified the profound discrepancy between reality and the knowledge he had previously acquired (Bacon 2001). Taking its cue from the *UpGranT* project, this issue focuses on architects who travelled, with reference to their different ways of taking notes, aimed at imprinting experiences in their memory and making them available for new spatial and formal ideas. A common denominator, in fact, is their aptitude for producing original materials: notes, sketches, surveys, photographs.

Thus far, *UpGranT* examined well-known and lesser-known figures active in the countries of the consortium: Italy and Greece, traditional destinations of the Grand Tour, Portugal, Europe's western frontier, and the Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia, a crucial but forgotten part of Europe where some of the leading figures of twentieth-century world culture were born (Brokken 2014, 2024). Each Partner Organisation (PO) selected ten Grand Tourists, documenting their main travel experiences in relation to their work and the evolution of their thinking.

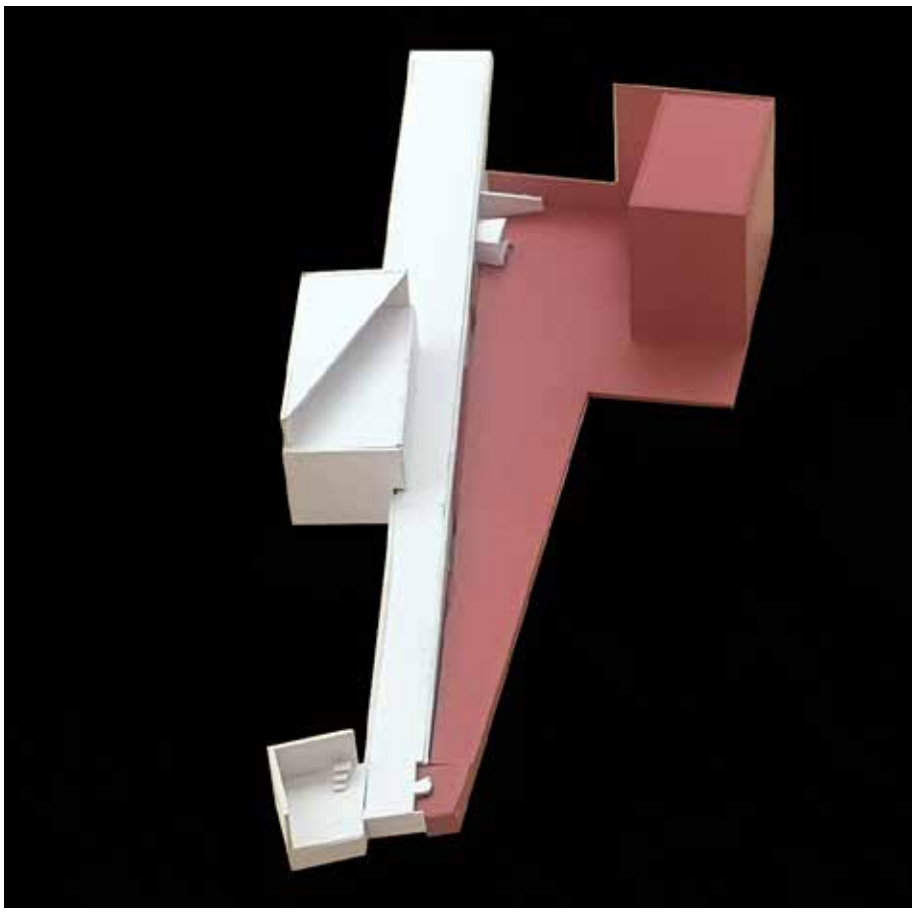

Fig. 21
GT#3-Porto, IPL: model to scale of the entrance area and cafeteria, FAUP (Group 1: Areti Dafnia, Tomás Martins, Davide Renzulli, Davide Santoro, Ulvi Tilt).

Fig. 22
GT#3 Porto, IPL: model to scale and framed views of the courtyard, FAUP (Group 2: Parisa Etemadi, Rebeka Kollo. Christina Maria Konstantinidou, Gina Celestini Radaelli, Erdal Giacomo Ripamonti, Kristīne Zane Čible).

The POs shared three Grand Tours: in Milan and Bologna (January 2024), in Riga and Tallinn (June 2024), and in Porto and northern Portugal (June 2025). The last trip, longer than the others, involved students from all locations in an Intensive Programme for Learners (IPL) at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto[2]. This exemplary work, designed and built by Álvaro Siza between 1986 and 1996, was taken as a case study to compare different approaches to the "manipulation" of travel materials for design purposes. The two opening articles discuss theoretical aspects of the research, such as the relationship between architectures separated in

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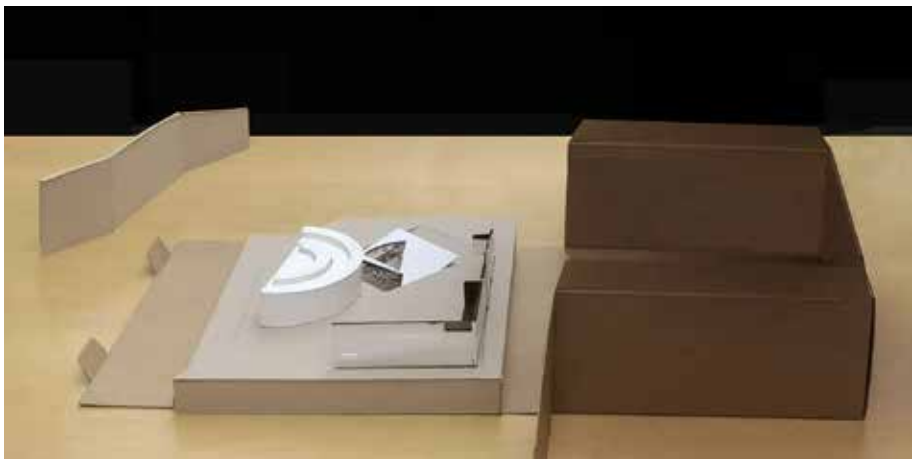

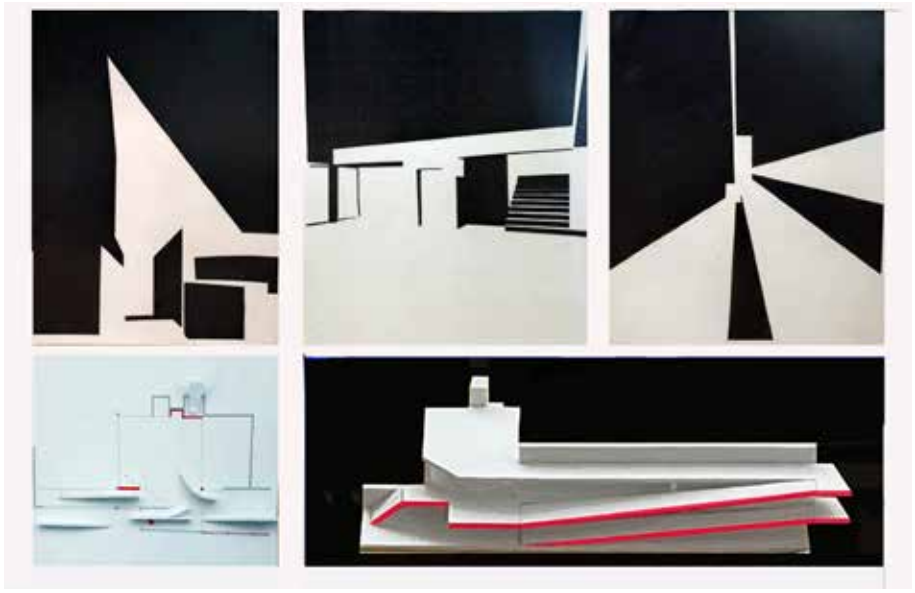

Fig. 23
GT#3-Porto, IPL: model to scale of the semicircular space of the Museum, FAUP (Group 3: Luciana Aloisio, Eirini Antonakaki, Giulio Crispino, Joana Gastalho, Loukia Kotsifou).

Fig. 24
GT#3-Porto, IPL: models to scale and visual sequences of the entrance area with the bookshop, FAUP (Group 4: Despoina Athanasiou, Giuseppe Buttazzo, Maria Gião, Emīlija Anete Ozoliņa, Liina Pärn, Francesco Ramella).

time and space, and the elusiveness of the germination period involving travel, imagination, and the creation of new forms. Lamberto Amistadi and Ildebrando Clemente focus not so much on the journeys undertaken to visit architectural works, but rather on the processes of hybridisation that constitute their foundation. Referring to Aldo Rossi's *Scientific Autobiography*, they suggest a possible interpretation of the Grand Tour as a mapping of affinities between buildings that are geographically and temporally distant but can be connected through their evocative power, whether experienced directly or indirectly. Aleksa Korolija and Emanuela Margione question the nature of so-called *souvenirs*, the objects chosen and produced by architects as mementoes. In this sense, the figures of John Soane, Le Corbusier and Gae Aulenti, distinctly separated by historical period, geographical context and biography, are united by a propensity to preserve their travel impressions through *poetic objects* that can be rearranged and consulted over time to fuel new ideas.

The second part features four articles about trips – more or less institutionalised – undertaken by architects or groups of architects. Luisa Ferro and Maria Pompeiana Iarossi reflect upon the 1926 cruise to Naples and Pompeii undertaken by a group of students and recent graduates from Politecnico di Milano, who established their reputation in the post-war period. The visit to the excavations, discovering an archetypal Mediterranean classicism, represented for them a fundamental step, also in reconsidering the lessons of their teachers.

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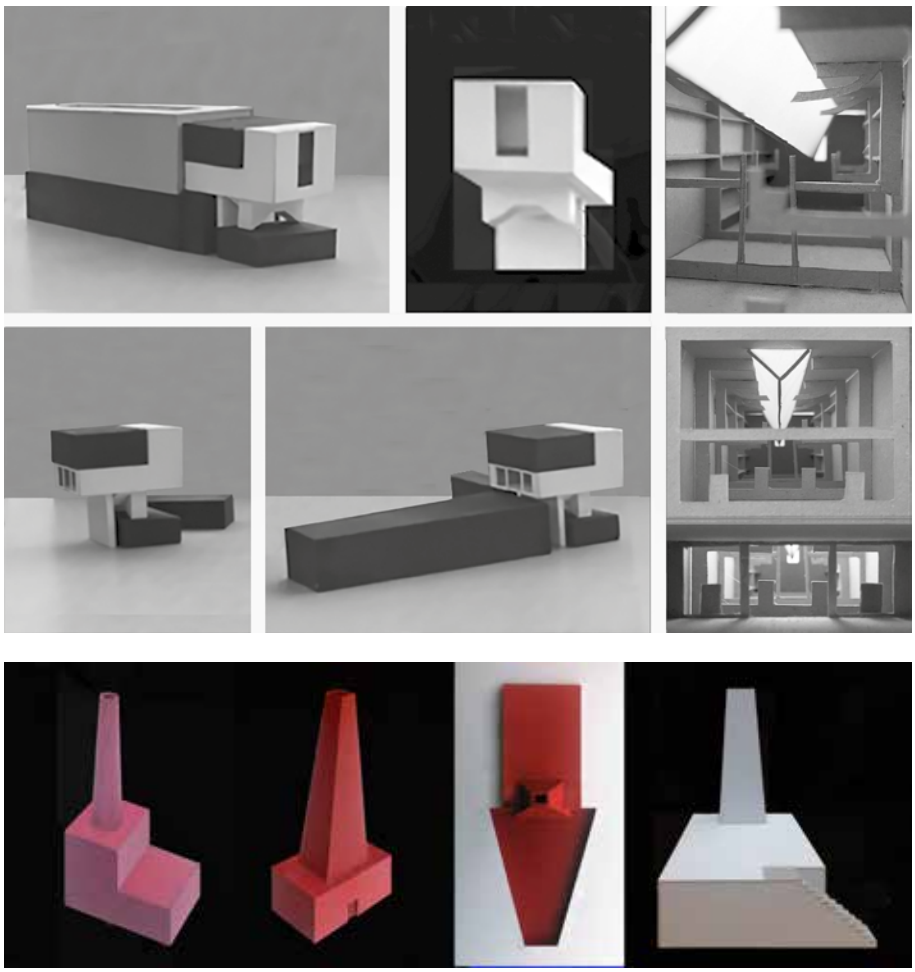

Fig. 25
GT#3-Porto, IPL: model to scale (in assembleable parts) of the library, FAUP (Group 5: Mattia Criscione, Eleni Madourou, Hugo Pereira, Jaan Repnikov, William Roat).

Fig. 26
GT#3-Porto, IPL: models to scale of the various solutions proposed by Álvaro Siza for the technical area, FAUP (Group 6: Gert Christjanson, Kristiina Teresa Kuusik, Anna Lopes, Quentin Pechinot, Ioannis Soufleris, Sofia Tagliatesta).

Francesca Bonfante and Tommaso Brighenti examine some figures from the Milan School, for whom the trip marked a process of personal growth and maturation, significantly influencing their theoretical thinking. Following in the footsteps of protagonists from different generations, from Giuseppe de Finetti to Gae Aulenti, via Guido Canella and Aldo Rossi, the authors outline a journey through half a century of European history, contextualising not only the places and cities visited, but also the intellectual encounters.

While tourism became more widespread in Western Europe, only a small elite travelled freely beyond the Iron Curtain. In the Baltic republics, which were historically well integrated into European circuits, the Soviet occupation marked a turning point. Liene Jākobsone describes the experience of Latvian architects, whose creative freedom was limited both in their education and in their professional development. Faced with a scarcity of up-to-date sources, they developed autonomous training strategies, such as systematically redrawing images from Western magazines, which they kept as reference books for professional use. Gregor Taul examines the case of Estonia through the figure of Mart Port. An architect, urban planner and senior administrator, as well as a lecturer at the Department of Architecture of the Estonian State Art Institute, Port made more than thirty trips abroad. In 1966, he wrote a travel book about England, the only one published by an architect in Soviet Estonia.

The third part focuses on a selection of representative buildings, mainly spaces for university communities. Domenico Chizzoniti reports a journey into Finland in search of Alvar Aalto's works. Highlighting the difference between the reality of the built work and its visual and literary representa-

tions, he accurately describes the physical features of the spaces and their interrelationships, seeking to interpret and explain the reasons behind the formal choices and the meaning of the expressive codes.
Helder Casal Ribeiro and Silvia Ramos focus their attention on Álvaro Siza's design for the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto to demonstrate how a single building can encapsulate a Grand Tour if it incorporates many design themes. Through the study of archival materials, they identify the main alternatives for intervention in relation to the topographical and landscape conditions, highlighting some generative principles that remained constant until the final realisation.
Cesare Dallatomasina analyses Gianugo Polesello's design for the university campus in Tafira, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Recurring elements of Polesello's composition are blended here with references to the classical world and Mesoamerican culture, while also capturing the evocative qualities of the context, that of the archipelago, the last port before the "great crossing".
The fourth and final part is dedicated to interviews. Silvia Ramos and Helder Casal Ribeiro discuss the architects' Grand Tour in an imaginary dialogue between Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura (interviewed separately), whose experiences highlight relevant aspects for reflecting on the meaning of "learning by travelling".
Merilin Tee and Gregor Taul interview architect Siiri Vallner (1972). Trained during the transition phase of the 1990s, Vallner seized the opportunity to travel and experiment with different teaching models. In Copenhagen, she met Jan Gehl, known for his research on public space. In Washington, she studied with Jaan Holt, an Estonian architect who was a student of Louis Kahn. In 2008, thanks to the Young Architect Award, she embarked on a Grand Tour of Italy, Greece, the Middle East and India.
At the risk of generalising, it can be argued that for an architect, a formative journey is not only an opportunity to appreciate famous monuments and lesser-known architecture, but also to explore the geographical and cultural contexts in which these works were created (Bonfante 2014).
In 1991, to inaugurate a new series of the architectural journal *Lotus*, Pierluigi Nicolin chose to dedicate a monographic issue to architects' travel drawings, a sort of ideal point of (re)departure.

> Reexamining and reflecting on the initial gestures of Le Corbusier, Kahn, Asplund, and Aalto is a good opportunity to observe different kinds of beginnings and see what kinds of things drew the eyes of the great architects.
> We, too, would like to issue an invitation to make the same journey, with the awareness of a fresh start, and with the hope that, as for Le Corbusier, "the notes, the sketches made, the measures taken" are not an ends in themselves, not just part of the culture of travel, but cease to be a diary jottings and "become design" (Nicolin 1991).

Editorial Note. This issue is based on the project *UpGranT, Updating the Grand Tour. Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment* (2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000158377), running from September 2023 to July 2026. The consortium includes the Politecnico di Milano (Project Leader), the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, the Riga Academy of Fine Arts (Latvijas Makslas Akademija), the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Aristotelio Panepistimio Thessalonikis) and the Tallinn Academy of Fine Arts (Eesti Kunstiakadeemia).

Notes

[1] Architects trained at the École des Beaux-Arts, such as Henri Prost and Ernest Hébrard, travelled to the East to study the transitional architecture between the Roman and Byzantine eras. On winning the Prix de Rome, Ernest Hébrard devoted himself to the reconstruction of Diocletian's palace in Split. Henri Prost, on the other hand, focused on the hypothetical reconstruction of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Both their studies gave rise to a new approach to urban planning (Bordogna 1983).

[2] The IPL was divided into two distinct but interconnected phases. In the first event, part of GT#3, the partner institutions collectively tested the research materials and hypotheses for the first time with a sufficient number of students. The aim was to assess the effectiveness of different methods related to reinterpretation and redesign tools. The participants were divided into six groups, combining students from different universities. Each group concentrated on analysing a specific section of the FAUP. Promoting educational exchange and sharing experiences, the workshop followed a three-stage pedagogical approach: recognise, propose, built. The aim was to develop an interpretative reading articulated through three distinct modes: interpretative drawings, kinetic synopses and scale models that could then be contained in a box. The teachers were distributed across all the groups, forming three teams, each composed of representatives from two partner institutions responsible for interpretative drawings, kinetic synopses and models-to-scale, respectively.

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Cristina Pallini (Milan, 1964), architect (Milan Polytechnic, 1990), Ph.D in Architectural Composition (IUAV 2001), Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering DABC, Milan Polytechnic. PL in UpGranT (2023-2026), PI in PUMAH (2012-2016) and MODSCAPES (2016-2019). Her research has been funded by Italian and international institutions, including AKPIA@MIT (2004), the Onassis Foundation (2006) and Newcastle University (SALP, 2016). She is the author of several scientific publications in books and journals, including C. Pallini, *Nella pianura pontina: luoghi e temi di architettura,* Casa dell'Architettura, Latina 2024.

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Lamberto Amistadi, Ildebrando Clemente

In Random Order. Hejduk, Albers, Rossi

Abstract
The Grand Tour is not so much about the journeys that architects take to visit architectural works, but rather the migrations, interminglings, and encounters involving those works that constitute the very substance of their material nature.
The device by which the artists of the eighteen century fed their works on so-called "picturesque journeys" is recognised and actualised in the work of John Hejduk, Josef Albers and Aldo Rossi.
The foundational relationship between travel, experience and knowledge through Walter Benjamin's concept of *Bildungsreise* (journey of formation) is also analysed.

Keywords
Architectural composition — Imagination — Analogical thought

The Grand Tour is not so much about the journeys that architects take to visit architectural works, but rather the migrations, interminglings, and encounters involving those works that constitute the very substance of their material nature. In other words, recognising the analogies which establish similarities and kinships between buildings, both directly and indirectly: Álvaro Siza's visit to the bookstore by Alvar Aalto in Helsinki's Kluuvi district transfigured into the library of the Faculty of Architecture in Porto; the "strange" atmosphere that John Hejduk perceived when visiting the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome, which would forever mark the character of his own architecture. In other words, this is a way of revisiting and bringing up to date the idea of the Grand Tour, the same approach that led the Adams brothers to traspose Diocletian's Palace into the Adelphi Terrace in London. Similarly, in the gardens and architecture of Postdam, we can trace Schinkel's travels to Syracuse and Capri.
The mechanism by which this transposition occurs is varied and complex. The transposed object must first be seen, but even more important is the memory of what has been seen; as this recollection produces a "fragment of thought", freed from the constraints of the specific reality of place and time, ready for the transfiguration process. In this way, through what Goethe called the "associative faculty of the mind", heterogeneous materials become re-composed and re-signified, giving rise to new categories which, in the long run, can be accepted and shared as conventions or rules. This was the case with the genre of the "picturesque journey". Painters and architects transferred impressions from their travels to the south, including literary and philosophical narratives, and a rich repertoire of "Italian" iconography, into painted landscapes – compositions of elements made newly

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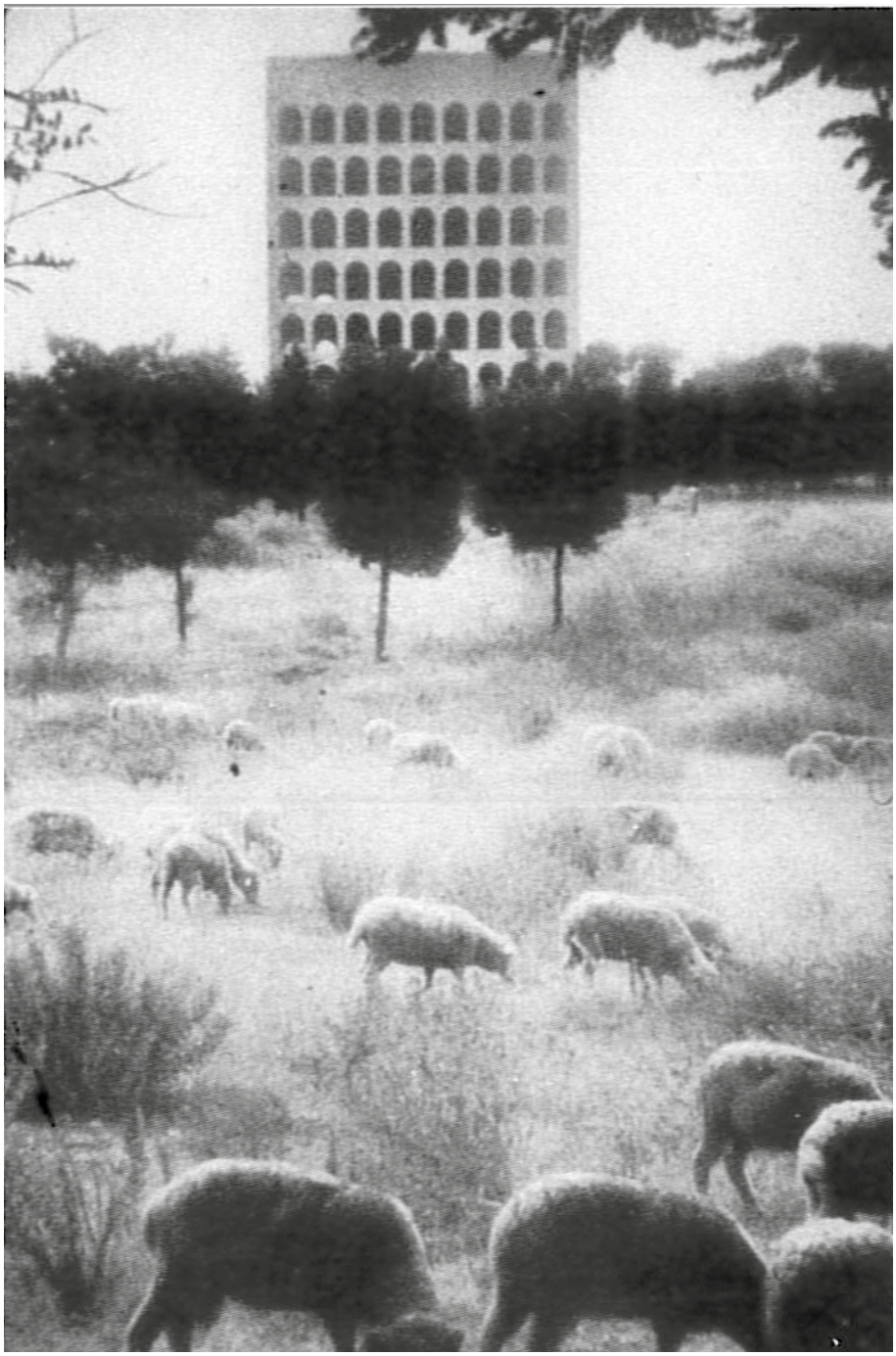

Fig. 1
"Terza Roma": Giovanni Guerrini, Ernesto La Padula, Mario Romano, Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, 1938-1942.

available to the emerging art of gardening, whose beginning was formally established by Horace Walpole in his *Essay on Modern Gardening* (1771). In this sense, the character became fixed and transmissible through a repertoire of images; a rhetoric to be understood precisely as a repository of figures, meaning above all "places", or "commonplaces", ensuring the shareability of a discourse and thus its degree of persuasion.

The mechanism grew even more complex and the interconnections more intricate in the case of John Hejduk, who recounted his encounter with Italian architecture through two images published in a New York newspaper in the late 1940s: a photograph of Libera's Palazzo dei Congressi and one of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana by Guerini, Lapadula, and Romano in Rome's EUR district. In the case of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, Hejduk was indebted primarily to the sense of estrangement evoked by the juxtaposition of the palazzo's arches with a rural and "seemingly bucolic" landscape.

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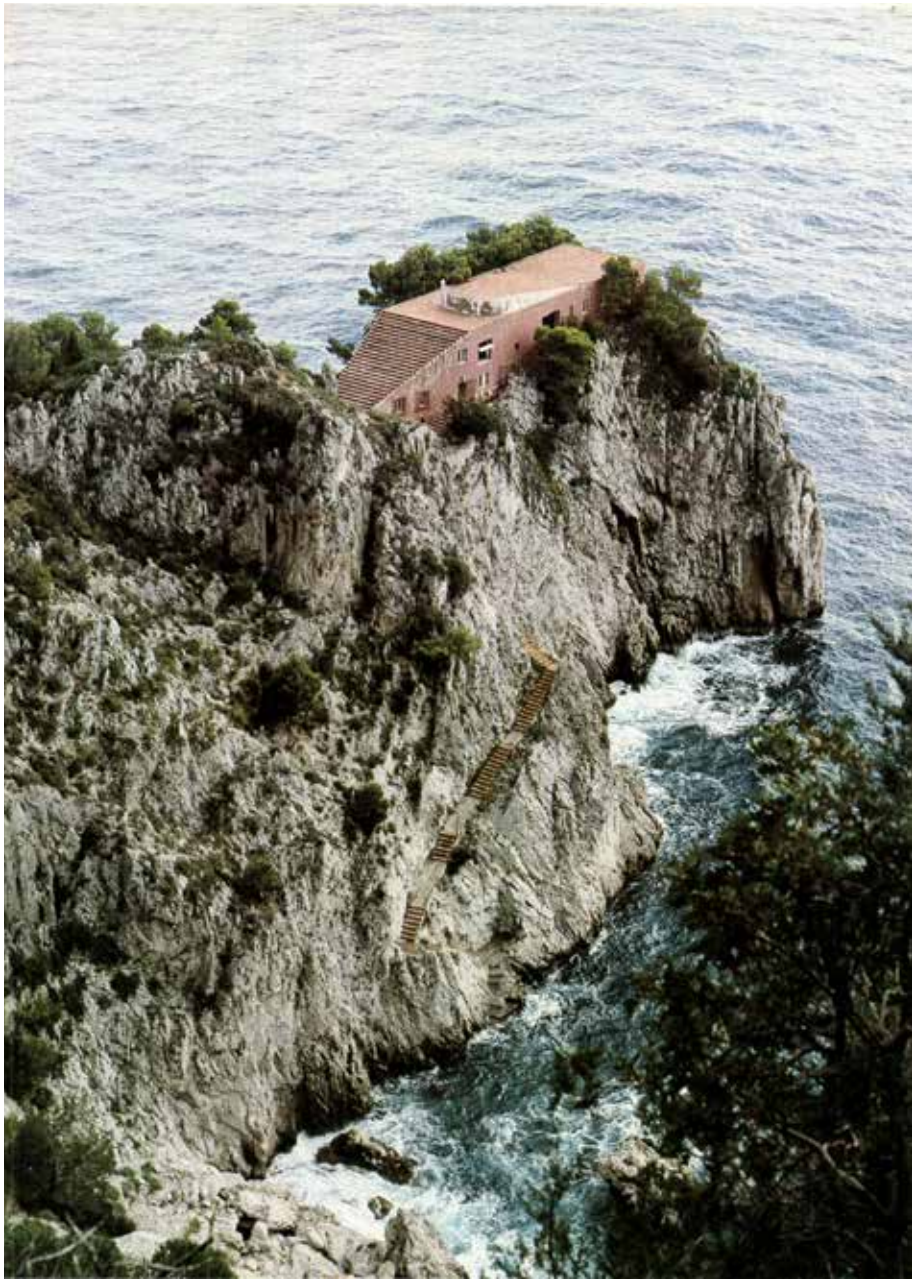

Fig. 2
Adalberto Libera, Curzio Malaparte, Casa Malaparte at Capri, 1937-1943.

The presence of grazing sheep in the overgrown meadow generated that surreal atmosphere described by Michael Hays in *Architecture's Desire* (2009) and the kind of strangeness which Harold Bloom (2010) considers a poetic category. The second photograph, taken from below, captures a rearing horse atop a pedestal: «Two photos expressing evacuation; an excavation; yet instead of earth being removed it was the air brushed away. […] Two photos expressing a past disaster and indicating a future warning. A place of theatre where the actors had long since disappeared; yet the stage lights had been left undimmed, undiminished; forgotten» (Hejduk 1980, p. 8).

In 1953, John Hejduk and his wife Gloria visited Rome, and the memory of the photographs drew them to the EUR district and Libera's Palazzo dei Congressi. The open-air theatre on the building's roof, with its rhythmic sequence of Carrara marble seats arranged along an inclined plane, were to mark the beginning of everything: many years later, when asked to write an article about another building by Libera, the Malaparte House in Capri, Hejduk associated the two staircase-theatres and, addressing one of his

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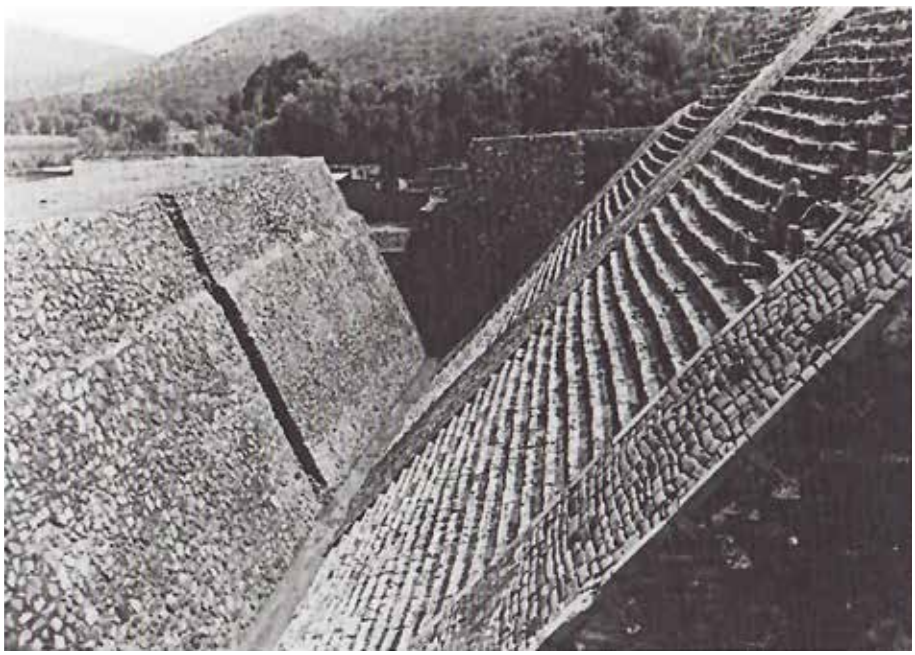

Fig. 3
Pyramid of Tenayuca, Mexico, 1937. Photograph by Josef Albers.

young students, declared: «Have you ever read the article on the Malaparte House? That has something to do with your question. [*shows drawings of stepped seating house*] This is the beginning of it all. It's a wall. From the horizontal to the vertical. Abstract» (1985, p. 34; Amistadi 2019). From that article onward, the staircase-theatres of Libera's buildings would recur in numerous Hejduk projects, from the small theatres of the *Berlin Masque,* such as the *Pantomime*, the *Public*, and the *Reader Theater*, to the *New England Masque*, and finally the *Wall House*, where the square wall, against which space and time are compressed, recalls the velarium on the roof of the Malaparte House:

> The roof-stair-theater-seats is of a funnel shape, narrow at the bottom expanding as we rise. The perspective is distorted, the lateral is emphasized, geometry has been warped. If we arrived upon the flat plane roof and if the roof did not contain as it does a curverlinear wall, our sense of uneasiness would not be so fearful. So the stair leads up to a sacrificial horizontal. We see that on that plane is an enclosure. What lies behind it? The most fearful, a nothingness, an enclosure that encompasses a void. We are in the midst of ancient rites. Libera has set the stage for an awesomeness (Hejduk 1980, p. 12).

We could associate other staircases with another journeys, such as Aldo Rossi's travels in the United States and to Mexico City, as reported in an issue of *Soundings* (Amistadi, Clemente 2017). However, we will instead present the example of Anni and Josef Albers, who, starting in 1935, visited Mexico fourteen times. The encounter between Albers and the architecture, textiles, and decorations of indigenous Mesoamerican culture, the meeting of Bauhaus Constructivist principles with pre-Columbian civilization, would generate one of the most evocative and authentic artistic experiences of the twentieth century: the *Homage to the Square* series of paintings. The catalog of the *Josef Albers in Mexico* exhibition, held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from November 2017 to April 2018 and curated by Lauren Hinkson, includes a map of the grand tours undertaken by the Albers in Mexico between 1935 and 1967. Hinkson writes (2020, p. 52):

ON JOURNEYS. The following plates feature six pre-Columbian archeological sites and one city that Josef and Anni Albers visited during their fourteen journeys to Mexico. The sites selected represent their most frequented or beloved destinations – evident from the great number of photographs that Josef took at these sites and the paintings that bear their names. […] Rather, the works reflect the diversity of form, composition, and experiments in color theory that Albers continued to develop over the decades he spent traveling through Mexico.
Touring by car, the Alberses often traveled with friends and family members, including Anni's parents, Toni and Siegfried Fleischmann; Theodore (Ted) and Barbara (Bobbie) Dreier; Swiss artist Max Bill; and psychoanalyst Fritz Moellenhof and his wife Anno, among others. Beyond their immediate impressions, recorded in correspondence over the years, the legacy of this "incredibly beautiful country" as taken in during their 'greatest vacation' appears throughout Josef's photocollages and paintings over subsequent decades.
The Alberses were guided to the pre-Columbian monuments by maps readily available at gas stations, including the map they used in 1965, produced by the national oil and gas company Pemex, and reproduced on this page. However, they also journeyed farther afield to areas rarely visited by other tourists. "We did not venture into areas inaccessible by car," Anni wrote, "but we visited pyramids, enormous ones and small ones, somewhat out of the way, which left us in awe of the great concepts of their architecture." […] What Josef loved about Mexico was that no matter how often he visited, he found the country "exciting and stimulating, over and over again".

The journeys to the archaeological sites of Monte Albán, Mitla, Teotihuacán, Tenayuca, Uxmal, Oaxaca, and Chichen Itza in Yucatán would forever change Albers' artistic universe. The conventional understanding of a painting on canvas as a dual relationship between figure and background is transcended, and in *Truthfulness in Art*, regarding the decorations on the walls of Mitla, Albers stated (Hinkson 2020, p. 39):

> We will have difficulties with its patterns in finding what is figure and what is background. As we see them here reproduced in black and white and when we follow the white form, we see a complete composition but soon the black left-overs tell us just as intensively "we are not background, we have the same right to tell you a composition", they have the same activity.

The evocative power of the architecture, the emotions, and the suggestions of the journey took on the value of a revelation for Albers.
The link between travel, experience, and architecture assumes further profound implications in the narrative of Aldo Rossi's *A Scientific Autobiography*. The latter is a contemporary and fundamental testimony to the role and importance of the Grand Tour and, more generally, of educational journeys in our present time. *A Scientific Autobiography* represents a real journey which gradually unfolds and interweaves a magnetic field of similarities, analogies, images, correspondences, and connections between works of architecture which are remote from each other in time and space. Indeed, in reading Rossi's account, we can perceive the vibration and power of these analogies, of these figures, which detach themselves from the flow of the narration to become something else. At which point, between the journey, its narration, and its figures, the invention of architectural forms, as shown in Rossi's projects, can happen in an instant or take years. In any event, the germination time that elapses between the journey, imagination, and the invention of architectural forms remains a mystery.
Among Aldo Rossi's projects, there is one in particular where childhood, travel, and experience were transfigured into images of a place meant to relive a memory of happy days and project it into the future.

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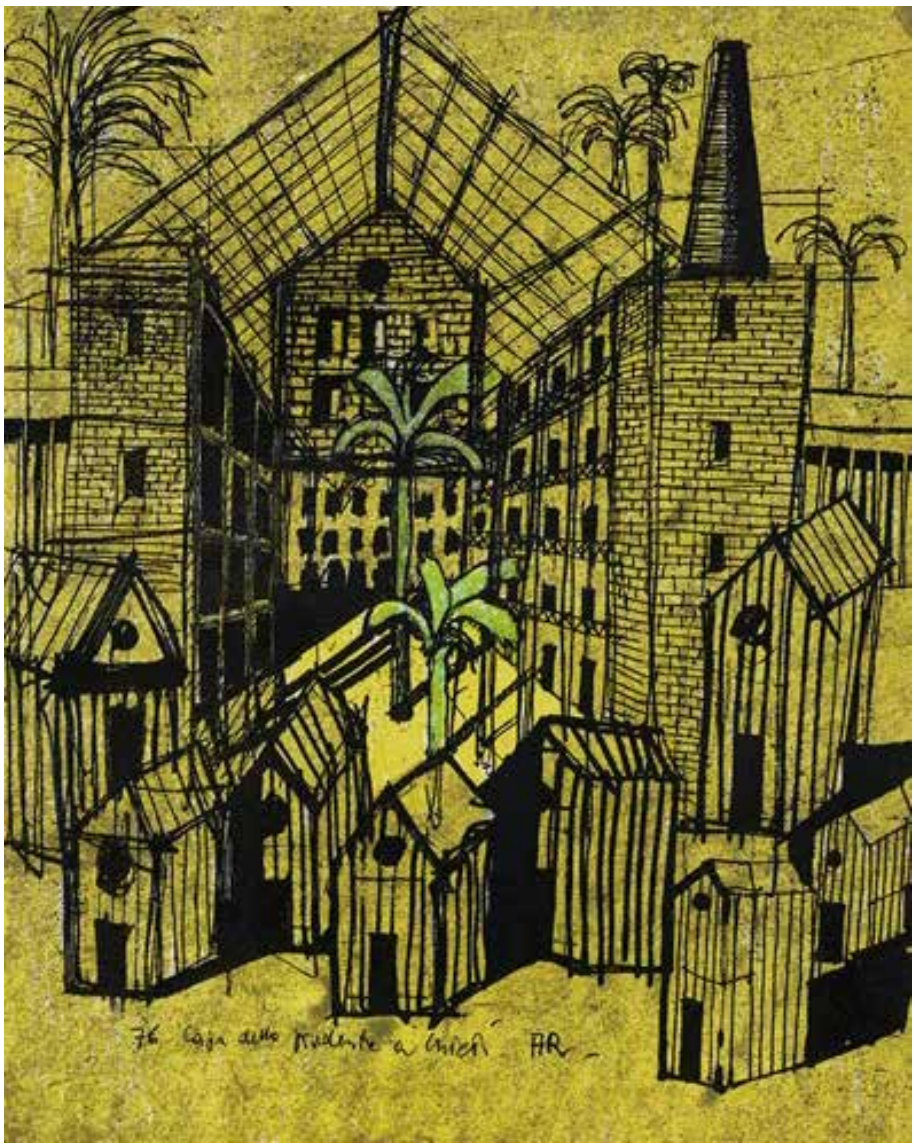

Fig. 4
Aldo Rossi, Student House at Chieti. Study drawing, 1976.

This was the student housing project for Chieti, designed in 1976. The image of this place, as stated in the project report, «is born from functional, logical, and economic unity and may or may not reflect, depending on personal projections, a fantastic world» (Rossi 1987, p. 112). Beyond the typological references and assemblages and the idea of an urban foundation for the site, what interests us at this point is the connections between the project's forms, the theme of travel, and the desire for happiness. It is quite evident that, the project's forms, both the student houses and the main collective building, clearly evoke the image of beach cabins.
Consequently, they awaken in us memories of summer, of vacation time, of a festive and joyful period: of encounters, of love, perhaps even of boredom. Going on vacation to the sea, spending time on the beach, this, too, in some way, is a small yet significant journey, especially during childhood. Vacation time is so intense that, when it ends, we are already longing for the next one. In this way, summer holidays condense a series of events, and then memories, linked to the experience of the sea, the body, and play, so vivid that, in the end, *beach cabins* end up crystallizing these experiences in their design, transfiguring into symbolic facts, into objects of affection.
In *Autobiografia scientifica*, Rossi (1999, pp. 55–57), speaking of *The Cabins of Elba*, the island where he spent his summer holidays, wrote:

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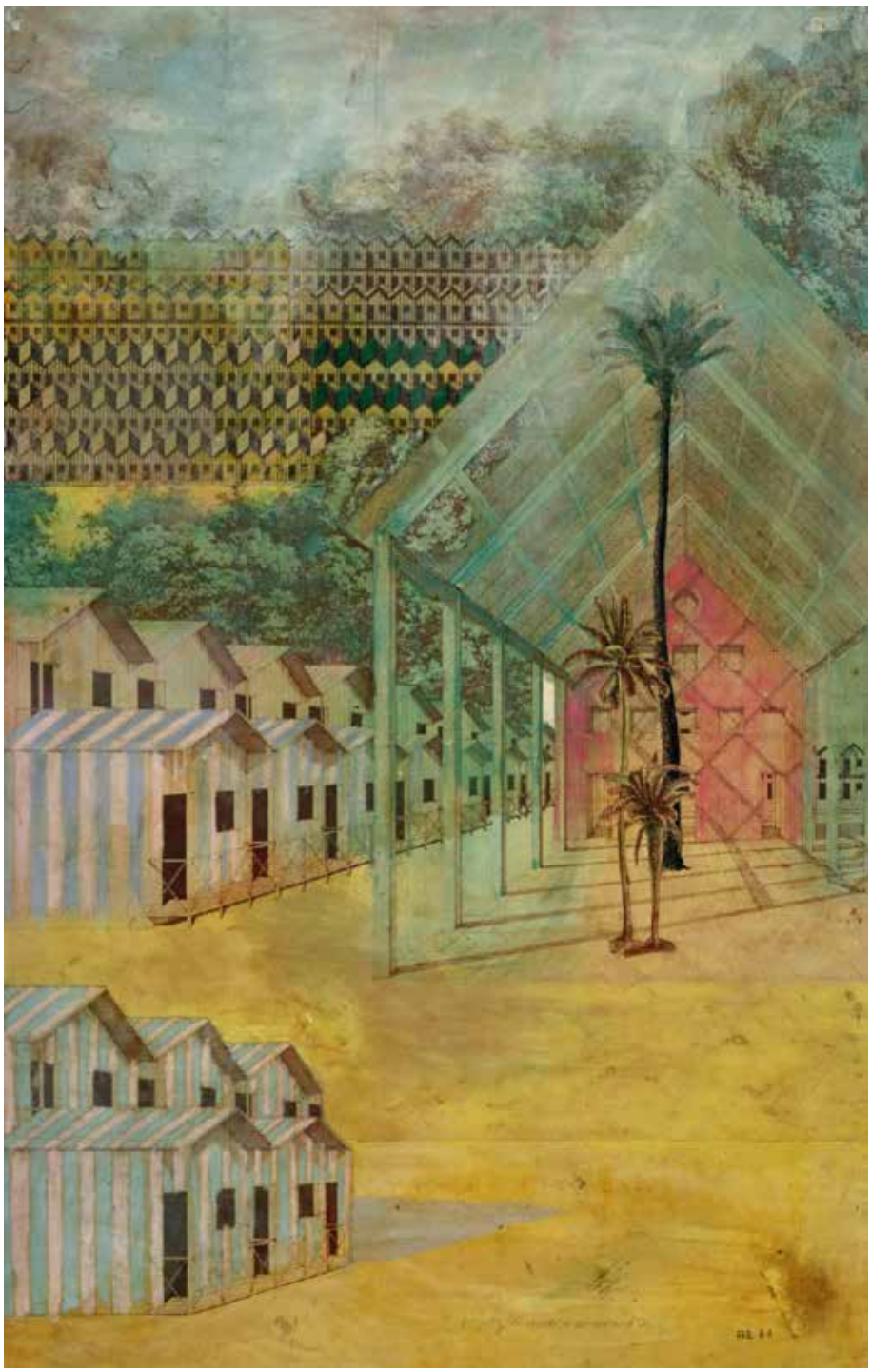

Fig. 5
Aldo Rossi, Student House at Chieti. Composition with the collective building and student housing, 1976.

Each place is remembered to the extent that it becomes a place of affection, or that we identify with it. I think of Antonioni's film *Professione: Reporter (The Passenger)* and of a place particularly dear to me on the island of Elba to which we gave the same name, although there is no apparent resemblance between the place and the film apart from the light and the sun. Yet the association is also appropriate because this place was connected with a loss of identity, as was Antonioni's film. [...] For example, I realize that in discussing Antonioni's film I was alluding to the drawing *The Cabins of Elba*, but this later became the project for student housing at Chieti, while in other drawings I have called it *Impressions d'Afrique* (and not only as an homage to Raymond Roussel). At the beginning of his novel Roussel tells us that the theater was surrounded by an imposing capital city formed of innumerable cabins […] In the 1976 project at Chieti, I associated this vision with student housing. [...] Now I envisioned a village, in which an unfinished public building with huge girders stood atop massive brick walls. A Mediterranean-African appearance was created by these cabins as well as by the large palms which I had thought about for years and which turn up

everywhere in my observation, not only in the broad streets of Seville (where the small houses similarly constitute a city which one identifies with vacation and hence summer), but also aligned along the lake in front of the houses, where I have always found them to be like a signal, a symbol, the very memory of a house.

In traveling, in the act of journeying, the relationship with experience and knowledge is essential. We often say that traveling is, first and foremost, having an experience, and at the same time, we affirm that this experience is, in some way, an opportunity for knowledge acquisition, an opportunity for growth. Perhaps for this very reason, as many have noted, travel is always a *Bildungsreise*, a tool for learning. And every form of learning is, in the same way, almost always a test of oneself, an *experiri*. *Ex-perire*, as we know, evokes a spatial crossing, a passing through, a traversing. Experience and travel, therefore, would seem to be bound by an ancient kinship (Tagliapietra 2017, pp. 73-84). In short, every journey secretly demands a small but necessary dose of courage. It is no coincidence that, as Walter Benjamin showed, *Erfahrung* ("experience" in German) contains the same root as *fahren*, meaning "to go". And this "going" is, above all, a crossing which gradually settles and accumulates in our soul, later resurfacing in our lived life, either in an entirely unexpected manner or precisely when necessary, in the forms of recollection and memory (Benjamin 1995, pp. 89-130).
For Benjamin, the experience of modern man was primarily tied to life in the city, in the great metropolis. The city as a true forge of experiences and, at the same time, a vast dream-making machine. The city, the urban reality, the architecture of the city, Benjamin told us, offer us the possibility of encountering what can genuinely surprise us or, conversely, what can deeply unsettle us. I would like to quote a beautiful reflection from Benjamin, found in *Images of the City*, which, as is well known, represents a sort of narrative account in which the experience of traveling through cities "withdraws" into written memory, with the hope of soon activating a new and more authentic *Erfahrung*[1]. Authentic also because, in these *images of cities*, the traveler never ceases to seek out ancient places which can allow us to glimpse the future. And above all, new, due to the blending of dream-like-imaginary elements with the reality of concrete life. Benjamin wrote:

More quickly than Moscow itself, one learns to see Berlin through Moscow. To someone returning home from Russia, the city seems freshly washed. There is not dirt, but no snow either. The streets seem in reality as desolately clean and swept as in the drawings of George Grosz. And how true-to-life his types are, has become more obvious. What is true of the image of the city and its people applies also to the intellectual situation: a new optics is the most undoubted gain from a stay in Russia. […] But, equally, this is why the stay is so exact a touchstone for foreigners. It obliges everyone to choose his stand-point. […] The question at issue is not which reality is better or which has greater potential. It is only: Which reality is inwardly convergent whit truth? Which truth is inwardly preparing itself to converge with the real? Only he who clearly answers these questions is "objective". Not toward his contemporaries (which is unimportant) but toward events (which is decisive). Only he who, by decision, has made his dialectical peace with the world can grasp the concrete. But someone who wishes to decide "on the basis of facts" will find no basis in the facts (Jennings et alii 1999, p. 22).

Ultimately, every journey is, above all, a reliving of the journey, remembering it through narration. A screen of consciousness through which we approach and *learn* to know something through something else, as Benjamin said.

Whether this knowledge comes from similarity, analogy, allegory, or contrast, is not what matters. What matters is transforming every experience into forms of retention and a transfiguration of temporality, before everything inevitably slips into oblivion. However, this narration needs to develop a particular intensity, an emotional intensity which, little by little, can condense and articulate itself into figures.

Among the most enigmatic and cherished figures for Benjamin was that of *childhood*. After all, every journey departs from and always returns to childhood. The first traveler *par excellence* is the child. The child, through his or her real childhood, testifies that the value of experience intimately resides in a mixture of imagination and expectation, and dwells in the time of waiting, which in childhood wavers, bound as it is to the desire for happiness. As in Rossi's story, we can easily associate the time of childhood, summer, celebration, and play with the time of education (Clemente 2008), an education and a time unfettered from material urgencies and specific interests. Despite minor jealousies and petty cruelties, isn't the experience of school and vacations, in general, an experience of a time in harmony with the states of mind of childhood? And thus, in harmony with the desire for happiness? A happiness that is authentic precisely because it is uninterested in mere possession?

And furthermore: isn't the time of university studies – or shouldn't it be – a time of education, full of expectation and the search for happiness? Here, an analogy is established. Just as with childhood and vacation time, also the student residence in Chieti evokes a happy place. A distant, playful place, generated by images of *seaside cabins*. Certainly, these houses-cabins, with their exotic tone, allow us to see the very essence of every journey, whether real or imaginary, before we can even understand it. They allow us to see the inexpressible. Every authentic Grand Tour takes shape and begins from the desire to discover something that matters to us. Something we consider important, even if outwardly futile. But that we fail to recognize around us. We can't even put it into words. The journey, then, is a journey of discovery that progressively brings to the surface that hidden latency, which is, if truth be told, the very essence of consciousness. The forward movement of consciousness is a deepening within itself, a drawing closer to the truth that is its own happiness.

Note

[1] As is well known, for Walter Benjamin the modern man lives in a time in which technological and commercial reality reduces, schematises and impoverishes every human experience in relation to things. In order to rescue things and thereby revitalise human experience, Benjamin sketches the figure – or type – of a human being who is more interested in the history and physiognomy of things than in their value as commodities or in their material usefulness (Benjamin 2012).

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Lamberto Amistadi is Associate Professor in Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture of the Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna. He is deputy director of «FAMagazine», and co-director of the series "TECA. Teorie della Composizione architettonica" (Clean). Along with Ildebrando Clemente, he founded and directs the series "SOUNDINGS: Theory and Architectural Openness" (Aión), which has included monographic volumes on John Hejduk and Aldo Rossi. He is author of numerous publications, including the books *Paesaggio come rappresentazione* (Clean, 2008), *La costruzione della città* (Il Poligrafo, 2012), *Architettura e Città* (with Enrico Prandi, FAEdizioni 2016). In 2018 he won a position as Coordinator and Chief Science Officer in the European-level call of Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education, entitled "ARCHEA Architectural European Medium-Sized City Arrangement" <https://site.unibo.it/archea/en> and from 2023 of the UpGranT project.

Ildebrando Clemente graduated in Architecture from the IUAV University of Venice – Department of Architectural Design. PhD – IUAV. He is Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture of the Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna; Disciplinary-scientific area: 08/D "Urban and Architectural Design". His research focuses on the relationship between theory and techniques of architectural composition in relation to the sphere of urban phenomena.

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Aleksa Korolija, Emanuela Margione

Souvenir. Shaping Architectural Memories

Abstract
Travel constitutes a pivotal experience in an architect's formation, particularly when the process of re-elaboration during the return phase fosters a synthesis between knowledge and invention. This contribution aims to carefully examine this phase, concentrating on the analysis of collected objects – which we dubbed *souvenirs* – that can trigger the creative process in design. By analysing three prominent figures – John Soane, Le Corbusier, and Gae Aulenti – alongside three corresponding types of souvenirs, this study investigates how such objects can function as diachronic tools within processes of knowledge acquisition, interpretation, and, ultimately, architectural design.

Keywords
Architects' journey — Object à réation poétique — Souvenir — Wunderkamer — Architectural composition

Travel Companions

Throughout their education and professional career, architects often find themselves «with their feet here and eyes elsewhere»[1] (Jankélévitch 1974, p. 346), suggesting an ongoing tension between physical presence and imaginative activity. The significance of travel – both in academic and professional development – has been extensively examined in literature, demonstrating how the act of travelling and the vividness of direct observation help develop a deeper understanding of the built environment, from broad contexts to specific design questions. Suppose travel is regarded as a vital moment in an architect's development. In that case, the objects collected during the journey – often called souvenirs[2] – can be seen as tangible expressions of a specific perspective, a deliberate choice, and ultimately, the realisation of an idea. In other words, collecting objects helps architects communicate and shape their ideas[3].

As evidence of a personal and informal way of learning, these objects raise an important question: are they genuinely part of the journey, and to what extent do they influence architects' built work? Sketches, photographs, books, prints, and models are a natural part of how architects document and fix in memory their travel experiences. They reflect a conscious effort to hold impressions formed within unfamiliar contexts over a limited period. More than simple records of a journey, souvenirs offer insight into how architects engage with objects diachronically, revealing how they perceive and interpret reality. In fact, such objects can function as tools for delayed and enduring reinterpretation. In some cases, souvenirs are fragments of travel impressions that have been reassembled, thereby revealing an internal reflection and imagination strictly adhering to the original.

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Fig. 1
Travel notebook of the architect John Soane, containing a sketch of the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli. © Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

As portable objects, souvenirs are sometimes reassembled or decontextualised; they reflect a deeper, less linear process – one where perception and intuition guide early acts of critical thought reflection.
For an architect, the transition from simple documentation to imaginative reinterpretation frames the souvenir as a mediating tool between memory and design. The term souvenir thus goes beyond its etymological meaning, endowing objects with the capacity to evoke a place or moment from the journey in an idealised form. It is exactly this personal intentional filter that shapes the creative vision informing the design process, which arises from the unfolding of references, both real and idealised. Supporting this view of a non-cumulative accumulation of impressions, Adriana Bernieri (2015) considers travel as a process that turns perception into elaboration, where memory and imagination transform lived experience into design intents.
Given the importance of self-engagement in both experiencing and processing travel, architects' collections demonstrate that souvenirs are not always selected through a straightforward, documentary logic. Instead, many choices follow an intuitive, emotionally driven route, revealing a deeper and more personal level of awareness. The sensory aspect of cognition that unconsciously attracts architects to some objects over others reveals a sensuous[4] response that extends beyond conscious intention, encompassing not only visual documentation but also emotional and intuitive aspects.
To elaborate these hypotheses with concrete examples, we consider three architects – John Soane, Le Corbusier, and Gae Aulenti – whose works, despite differences in time and context, show a common ability to turn the experience of travel into spatial and formal innovations. Their extensive journeys, and the creative tension between what they learn while travelling and how they reinterpret it over time within design practice, qualify them as architectural grand tourists in a focused sense. Travel served as a vital mode of self-education triggered by the unfamiliar and had a lasting impact on their design work.
As the Italian anthropologist Vito Teti suggests in *La Restanza* (2022), the act of returning is not the end of the journey but the start of its active interpretation. In this very phase, souvenirs play a key role: they become tools for reflection and triggers for transforming memory into design intention. Some souvenirs are used in the design to reconnect fragments to their original context as visual quotations; others, once displaced or reassembled, acquire new formal autonomy and catalyse unexpected meanings. The following examples illustrate these dynamics.

Transpositions: John Soane and the Tivoli Corner

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, cork reproductions of Greco-Roman ruins circulated almost as widely as the travellers themselves. As tangible records of architectural encounters, these models served as genuine souvenirs. They were collected not only for their aesthetic or educational value but also as personal tokens of the Grand Tour experience. Alongside travel journals, prints, and sketches, they became an essential part of this formative cultural tradition.
Tivoli, an ancient town east of Rome dramatically perched above the Aniene gorge, was among the most popular Grand Tour destinations. Known for the Temples of Hercules Victor and Vesta, perched on opposite sides of its rocky plateau, Tivoli provided travellers with stunning views over

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Fig. 2
Painted wooden model of the Tivoli Corner. © Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

the Roman countryside and cascading waterfalls, making it a popular destination for artists and architects alike. Starting in the early 1700s, this picturesque interplay between natural elements and ancient ruins attracted painters and architects from Northern Europe. Giovan Battista Piranesi, the renowned architect and engraver, depicted the temples of Vesta and the Sibyl, shaping a collective imaginary around these ruins (Darley 2008).
Piranesi's views – which also became souvenirs of the Grand Tour over time – were not limited to mere reliefs, but evolved into genuine inventions; they combined documentation and interpretation, intentionally modifying certain proportions, aiming towards an aesthetic of gigantism or, in some cases, ideally reconstructing the missing parts. Alongside Piranesi's engravings, travellers often collected three-dimensional models that replicated these ruins out of context: portable, aesthetic souvenirs of their encounters with antiquity. Unlike Piranesi's imaginative views, the cork models provided a more perceptual memory of the ancient buildings. These three-dimensional objects proved versatile for domestic display and private collections, blurring the boundary between memory, ornament, and personal impressions through their arrangement.
Both types of souvenirs became widely popular in England, where they were also appreciated by John Soane, who encountered them during his training and subsequently collected them during his travels. In particular, the cork models of ancient buildings – now an integral part of his renowned collection – fully embody the design, representative, and decorative intent that a souvenir can assume. It is notable how Soane arranged these models thematically, integrating the rooms and decorative elements of his collections, along with similar objects that served a narrative purpose rather than merely a philological one.
Back in London, Soane used cork models as design triggers, integrating them into his spatial reasoning and drawing from them in the development of new architectural solutions. One particularly revealing example is the model of the Temple of Vesta, which he mounted on a tall, rotating pedestal[5] beneath a dome. This arrangement enabled him to view the structure from different angles, rethinking its form with each turn. Far from just being a record of an ancient ruin, the model became the starting point of a creative process – an act of dislocation and imaginative reinvention. For Soane, therefore, the model, rather than merely representing a geographically distant ruin, is a synthesis of observations and the creative process of removing the artefact from its original context; through adjustments, modulations, alterations, and transpositions into a new context, he shapes new original design solutions. In other words, relocating fragments of ancient structures is a precise compositional choice, offering solutions to similar problems in different contexts.
This conceptual leap from dislocation to reinvention finds its clearest built example in the Tivoli Corner, an angled element on the northwest block of Soane's Bank of England (1788–1833). The name refers to both the Roman precedent and the compositional strategy Soane employed. In this perspective, the inclusion of antique fragments in Soane's projects was not about reproduction or imitation; much rather it was a diachronic transplantation to solve specific design challenges.
Soane shaped the corner of the Bank of England by abstracting a fragment and reinterpreting it through imaginative recontextualisation, to resolve the urban configuration of the block between Lothbury and Princes Street.

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Fig. 3
Giovanni Altieri, Photograph of the cork model of the Temple of Vesta. © Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

Fig. 4
Jean-Pierre and François Fouquet, Paris plaster model of the Temple of Vesta. © Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

The Tivoli Corner reframes the experience of approaching a ruin within a dense urban context by translating a specific spatial condition – the angled and elevated perspective of the Temple of Vesta – into a contemporary architectural solution. Drawing on his travel sketches and Piranesi's oblique views, Soane reinterpreted this perception in the articulation of the corner of a London block.

This architectural fragment has no clear function, yet it serves solely to define the building's edge through a theatrical gesture. The inhabitable space on the exterior of Tivoli Corner features a niche with a tympanum and a curved passage, while the outer structure directly reflects the circular form of the Temple of Vesta. The structure, enclosed by a convex entablature and colonnade, encourages movement and channels light through the space. Sunlight enters from above, casting deep shadows that evoke the ruined temple of Tivoli, just as Soane might have seen it during his visit to the site. Soane's approach to the reuse of fragments is evident by analysing his collection of models, which included both cork replicas and idealised plaster versions.

Displayed together, these models captured the duality of ruin and abstraction but also reflected the interplay of memory and invention central to Soane's design process[6]. The cork models retained the marks of decay – cracks, moss, and erosion – while the plaster models abstracted these into pure, white geometries[7]. Together, they formed a balanced yet distinct ensemble: the fragment as a ruin and the model as an idea, the reality and its imaginative recontextualisation placed in dialogue. This interplay between decay and idealisation is captured in the famous watercolour by Joseph Gandy[8], which depicts 107 elements – models, drawings, interiors – arranged in a museum-like setting within a single room.

The Bank of England dominates the composition, with the Tivoli Corner as a vertical counterpoint placed exactly as it appeared in Soane's travel sketch, highlighting its importance as both a memory and a design element (Moleon 2001). The painting suggests not only Soane's design process but also his method: combining experienced forms with imagined ones, using souvenirs as tools of projection and invention. Soane's cork models are more than just memorabilia: they are representations of interiorised experience. Their forms lend themselves to manipulation and transformation, no longer bound to archaeological accuracy but reactivated through what might be called *creative transpositions*: spatial ideas sparked by memory and recomposed in a new contexts. The return from travel, for Soane, was not about replication, but reconfiguration.

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Fig. 5
Interior passage of the Tivoli Corner between Lothbury and Princes Street. Sketch by Aleksa Korolija, July 2025.

Based on the symbolic and metaphorical appropriation of historic forms, Soane's transposition was the most creative manifestation of the Grand Tour tradition that began in the seventeenth century. This appropriation, which took place during travels and surveys in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, contributed to the development of a repertoire of models that could be rearranged in modern conditions, making travel destinations less remote and more familiar. Soane was part of a generation of architects who, motivated by the prospect of changing English communities, regarded antiquity as a model to be interpreted rather than merely replicated. James Stuart, a well-known figure from this time, encapsulated its most obvious features (1771, p. 36):

> Already many individuals, by their labours, their studies and researches abroad into the purest sources of the arts, had enriched our island with models of the most perfect kind. Italy was become, in a manner, our own; and even Greece, Syria, and Asia minor, hitherto unexplored, were made, for our use, to open their hidden treasures of the sublime and graceful Antique.

Poetic Reactions: Le Corbusier and the Problem of Deriving Form

Le Corbusier is widely recognised as a global architect (Colomina 2011, p. 20), a modern traveller whose journeys shaped not only his education but also his formal investigations throughout his career. The influence of travel is well-documented in his work. For instance, the vernacular houses he studied during his Journey into the Orient profoundly impacted the design of his white villas (Russo 2016, Lozanovska 2017) during the 1920s and 1930s. A later and more radical shift in his architectural language, exemplified by the chapel at Ronchamp, reveals a new trajectory, where the generative moment no longer stems from architecture itself – as in the case of Soane – but from the observation of natural objects and their tendency to suggest spatial and structural ideas. This approach resonates with a more intimate, sensory-driven design process, yet remains rooted in the travel experience.

This new trajectory clearly emerged in a 2018 exhibition[9] following the restoration of Le Corbusier's apartment at Porte Molitor. The display revealed boxes filled with shells, stones, bones, pinecones, and marine debris, all objects gathered from beaches which he described as «evocative companions» (Chironi 2021, p. 37; Le Corbusier 1999, p. 70) in the development of spatial and formal ideas. Le Corbusier's habit of collecting everyday and folkloric objects shows how travel acted as a heuristic device: one that reframed the ordinary and unseen through a perspective of formal potential. Isolated from their context and inferred from empirical experience, these forms are regarded by the architect as carriers of directly experienced plastic qualities.

What made them intriguing was their unfamiliarity – a key part of the travel experienxe, which combined perception and imagination to fuel a spatial language shaped by poetic meaning and sensory awareness. These objects, which Le Corbusier called *objets à réaction poétique*[10], can be considered souvenirs, even if not tied to a specific place or trip. He described them as (Le Corbusier 1999, p. 70):

> […] objects originating in any time and place whatsoever may aspire to this brotherly communion. Books are full of persuasive fairy tales, iconography, because of this. Artificially created by the agile fingers of man, these objects can be endowed with

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Fig. 6
Joseph Gandy's watercolor "A selection of parts of buildings, public and private, erected from the designs of J. Soane, Esq. R.A. in the metropolis, and in other places of the United Kingdom, between the years 1780 and 1815". © Sir John Soane's Museum, London.

meaning by nature in its turn. Objects which evoke a poetic reaction are those which by their shape, size, substance and durability are worthy of a place in our homes. A pebble polished by the ocean is one example, another might be a broken brick rounded smooth by lake or river waters, or bones, fossils, tree roots or algae, sometimes almost petrified, or whole shells smooth as porcelain or carved in Greek or Hindu fashion. Broken shells reveal their amazing spiral structure to us. All these seeds, flints, crystals, pieces of stone and wood form the vast panoply of spokesmen who speak the language of nature. They are caressed by our hands, your eyes gaze upon them, they are evocative companions […]

Unlike sketches or photographs that capture what or how we see a building, tactile souvenirs appeal to all our senses. Their compact size makes them naturally fit in the hand. At the same time, their textured surfaces (grooved, smooth, curved, or angular) invite the hand to engage, making their tactile qualities central to a more intimate, sensory appreciation. This haptic dimension is evident in Le Corbusier's sketches: while his architectural drawings are typically abstract and diagrammatic, the *objets à réaction poétique* are rendered with remarkable focus on texture, shadow, and contour. A similar sensitivity to material perception emerges in the description of his visit to the Parthenon, where the experience of touch, «the marble under his hands»[11] played a crucial role.
There, direct physical contact with material surfaces enabled an immersive form of understanding only attainable through firsthand experience. Architectural historian Niklas Maak (2011) identifies three key stages in Le Corbusier's creative process: annotation, association, and transformation, which closely correspond to his exploration of *poetic reactions among objects*. Annotation marks the initial, intuitive response: a spontaneous, sensory-driven attraction to an object. Association occurs as a process of mentally connecting the object's form to broader ideas or previously encountered forms. Finally, transformation pertains to reinterpreting that form into geometric, structural and ultimately poetic concepts, translating the raw impression of an ordinary object into architectural expression.

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Fig. 7
Selection of boxes containing sea debris, stones, and bones; they are *objets à réaction poétique* from the apartment on Rue Nungesser-et-Coli. © Fondation Le Corbusier.

Hence, an *objet à réaction poétique* might become an accidental souvenir, one whose purpose lies in its ability to spark different spatial and formal inventions. These natural artefacts mediate between abstraction and the imitation of nature, bridging the intuitive encounter with material forms and their conceptual reconfiguration into architectural ideas. Le Corbusier's creative work, then, was not limited to simply recombining Euclidean forms – namely sphere, cube, pyramid – but rather reveals a deeper attempt to extract architectural principles from the geometries found in nature. This transformation shifts the architect's focus from personal curiosity to the ability to transcend natural forms, creating spaces whose poetic value lies in being perceived not only through logic but also through artistic sensibility – as genuine, inhabitable sculptural compositions.

The most emblematic example of this process is the roof of the chapel at Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp. This formal and spatial invention breaks from the traditional church typology. Built between 1950 and 1955, the chapel features an inverted concrete shell resting on a steel frame, a structural concept developed with André Maissonier and inspired by the engineering of aircraft fuselages. This structural principle may have emerged from an embodied experience of discovery during a walk along the beaches of Long Island, when Le Corbusier stepped on a crab shell. Impressed by the strength of the natural form, he initiated a cascade of associative reasoning that converted a natural impression into a design concept. Viewed through this lens, the entire chapel might be interpreted as a built manifestation of the *objet à réaction poétique*.

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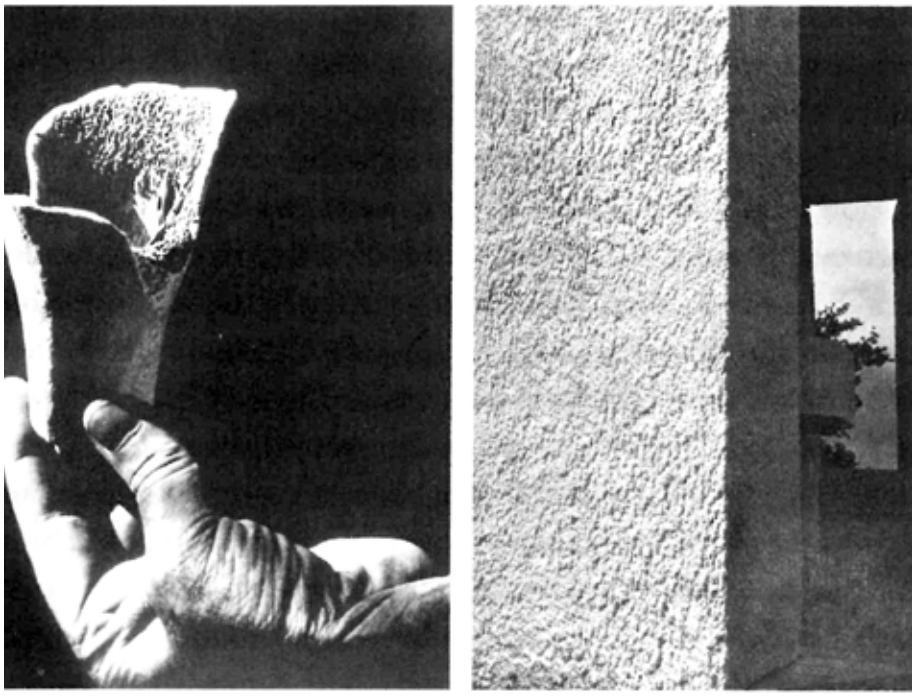

Fig. 8
The evident analogy between the rough surface of the inside of a bone and the material rendering of the external plaster of the church of Ronchamp (Maak 2011, p. 61).

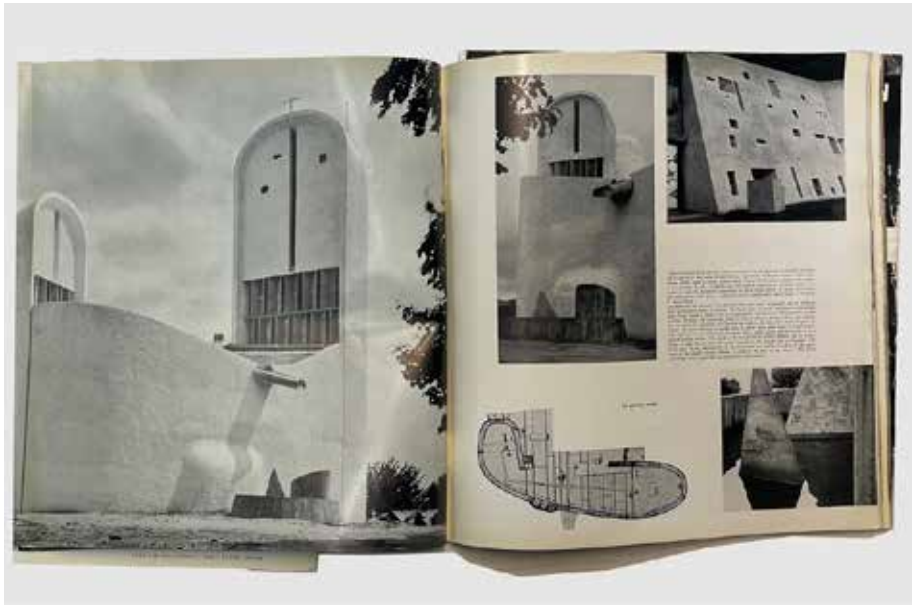

Fig. 9
Le Corbusier. The church of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, article published in «Casabella Continuità» n. 207, 1955. Text by Le Corbusier and layout by Gae Aulenti.

Its curved walls allow natural light to penetrate the sacred space, reminiscent of sunlight filtering through the cavities of a shell. This analogy, though speculative, highlights the importance of observing the sensory qualities of objects encountered during travel, which, over time, inspire architectural ideas. Even the contrast in surface texture, rough on the outside but smooth inside, seems to reflect the marine forms that may have inspired it. Instead of a literal translation of the crab shell, the final design derives a spatial concept from nature and reinterprets it into a proportional, buildable system.

A comparable, though more abstracted logic appears in the Cabanon, Le Corbusier's seaside retreat. In this case, the spiral growth pattern, like that of a shell, serves as a spatial framework for the compact one-room dwelling, proportioned according to the Modulor system. Here again, the shell functions as both metaphor and model, allowing Le Corbusier to realise his vision of a minimal living unit: «giving man his own shell» (Maak 2011, p. 39).

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Fig. 10
The interior of Le Corbusier's Cabanon at Plage du Buse, Roquebrune-Cap Martin, organised according to the principle of shell growth. Below, a diagram of its spatial organisation (Maak 2011).

Le Corbusier's example is valuable for emphasising the importance of human, embodied experiences, which may be the only way to translate observable natural forms into architectural design tools, as well as the value of preserving both visual and sensual awareness while moving.
Le Corbusier's souvenirs, selected for their form rather than function, shift focus away from specific itineraries and toward the reinterpretation of experience as a central design strategy. These souvenirs reveal the lasting effects of travel not as physical records, but as imaginative tools embedded in the built environment.

'Ritaglini' (Cutouts): Travel Notes by a 'Steam-Powered'[12] Architect
The 2023 publication *Gae Aulenti. Cina 1974* and a significant retrospective of Gae Aulenti (1927-2012)[13] have, in recent years, brought her work back into the spotlight, shedding new light on how travel may have served as a learning tool and a testing ground for her architectural imagination. What also emerged, almost incidentally, was a rich collection of travel souvenirs now housed in her former home-studio in Milan. These objects – once scattered throughout her personal and professional life – have become compelling clues to a way of seeing the world: an inquisitive and intuitive compositional approach.

Far from trivial mementoes, these souvenirs – encompassing books, textiles, folk crafts, and furniture – compose a fragmented, rich archive of her visual thinking. Among these, images are especially noteworthy, particularly the lesser-known "ritaglini", namely framed photographic pieces – as they are detached from identifiable locations – that reflect the critical, instinctive gaze of a young architect still in her formative years. By examining this photographic material, it becomes evident that travel was

not merely a backdrop to Aulenti's career; it was a fundamental principle shaping both her personal life and professional approach. Her souvenirs fall into two distinct yet overlapping categories: those collected whilst travelling, and those created as manipulations of pictures taken during travel. Aulenti approached travel with a systematic eye, documenting places and experiences through detailed photography and written notes.

On the other hand, she treated these records not as fixed memories, but as raw material to be creatively reworked – cut, rearranged, and reinterpreted – revealing a more imaginative layer in how she processed and internalised her experiences. Collecting images, objects, and cultural traces was never a passive activity. Each journey marked the start of a deliberate act of observation, where seeing was already infused with intention. Reinterpreting what had been observed was not an afterthought, but the core process through which memory was strenghtened, and ideas started to develop. Travel thus became a continuous space for practice, where attention, curiosity, and critical thought merged in crafting her built architecture. This sensitivity may be traced back to Aulenti's formative years, marked by a state of constant displacement. Though born in northern Italy, Aulenti bore a southern Italian background; she often described a childhood characterised by frequent back-and-forth movement: «north to south, north to south, north to south»[13], as she put it, accompanied by a repeated hand gesture[14]. Rather than viewing this mobility as dislocation, she saw it as a valuable lesson in multiplicity – learning early how to interpret contrasting environments, traditions, and spatial cues. «In my profession – she reflected – «it's essential to be trained to see, to recognise places and cultural differences. That's what enables me to work elsewhere. It gave me a way of reading the world»[15].

Although frequent travels within Italy shaped Aulenti's early life, it was during her time at the Polytechnic of Milan, under the mentorship of Ernesto Nathan Rogers, that she began to travel abroad extensively. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as Europe was being rebuilt after the war, she made several trips through Italy and northeastern Europe, and these journeys laid the foundation for a deeply personal photographic archive. For Aulenti, photography became a modern, agile way of capturing what the eye saw, and the mind might want to revisit later (Artioli 2023, p. 8).

What began as a means to record the world gradually evolved into a way of shaping memory, turning simple images into a rich base for new reflections. Although it was initially unintentional, reordering impressions became a way for her to reframe the outcomes of her journeys.

This process took shape through the creation of heterogeneous souvenirs: contact sheets assembled into albums, scattered cutouts, and small photographic blocks, often systematically arranged by destination or theme (Artioli 2023, p. 7).

In all cases, these materials document architecture, faces, and folkloric or everyday objects – carefully selected from a substantial body of images in search of a compositional and aesthetic balance between the human scale and that of the landscape, across its different registers.

One of the main methods of organising this material involved the sequencing contact sheets within albums, where the images – arranged according to chronological or geographical logic – were laid out in a way that echoes cinematic storytelling. A double-page spread in a 1954 album presents juxtaposed contact sheets taken in Reggio Emilia and Nowa Huta, Kraków[16].

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Fig. 11
Trip to Moscow by Milanese architects (1962). On the left, Gae Aulenti and Guido Canella in the Cathedral Square of the Kremlin. Gae Aulenti Archive.

Fig. 12
Travel images organized by destination and stored in the box titled "Gae's Travels". Some of these photographs are collected in small ring-bound albums, such as the Como album, visible at the top left. Note the enlarged reproduction of the photograph of the Casa del Popolo (formerly Casa del Fascio) dating back to 1948. The collections have been freely rearranged by the authors. Gae Aulenti Archive.

Two visual strategies unfold across the pages: in some shots, perspective views suggest a gradual movement toward architecture; in others, a shift between zoomed-in details and wide frames captures both the intimacy and scale of place. The focus seems to fall naturally on rhythm and seriality, as well as on the compositions of façades or the uneven texture of historic urban fabric. Rather than simply documenting what is in front of the lens, the sequence begins to act as a form of *visual writing*[17], shaped

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Fig. 13
Photo clippings preserved in the collection titled "Ritaglini". The clippings have been freely rearranged by the authors. Gae Aulenti Archive.

by a design sensibility that already anticipates abstraction, repetition, and spatial logic, all of which contribute to imbuing a narrative intent in reality. *Ritaglini* are pieces of larger photos and might indicate some design intentions. Gae Aulenti amalyses the precise compositional features of existing vernacular architecture by focusing on individual details, which, when taken out of context, allow the geometric forms of the built environment to be abstracted. This emphasis on geometric elements, reinforced by the cutout's shape itself, highlights the intention to interpret the actual architecture as a geometric abstraction. The pictures' attention to detail, including the window shutters and their shadows projected on the walls, highlights the connection between light and form, particularly how light reveals the wall's depth. The same might be said for arches or columns.

In general, the narrative intent that began with a souvenir self-construction evolved into a unique working method that Aulenti used for her editorial work. Between 1955 and 1965, Aulenti worked as an architect and layout designer at «Casabella Continuità» under the directorship of Ernesto Nathan Rogers. By overseeing the page designs, she cultivated a specific skill in photographic and image editing aimed at creating cohesive visual narratives. Post-production became Aulenti's distinctive ability, and the experience gained through the years is evident in the layouts of travel reports published in «Casabella Continuità».

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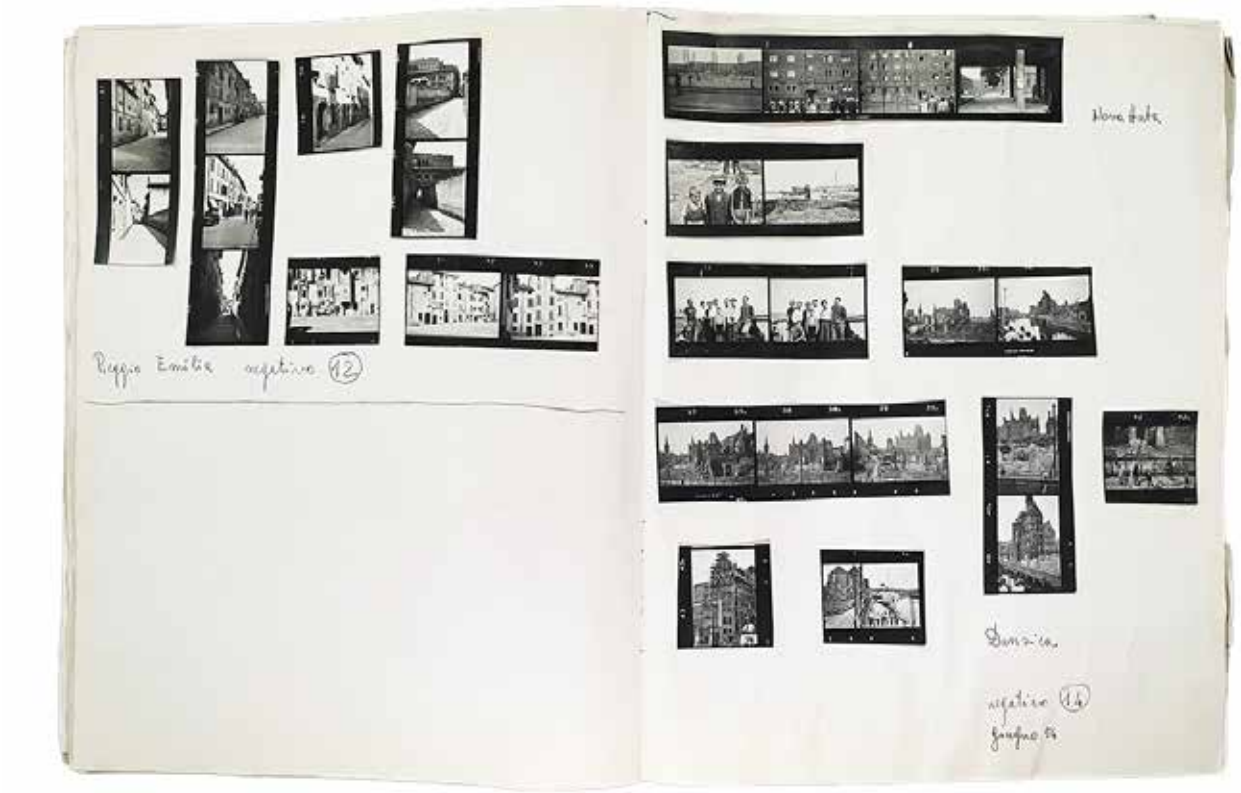

Fig. 14
Photos from Gae Aulenti's album containing contact sheets. On the double page, the contact sheets of Reggio Emilia (on the left) and Nowa Huta (on the right). Gae Aulenti Archive.

Fig. 15
Double spread from the magazine «Casabella Continuità» designed by Gae Aulenti. Left: article by Le Corbusier La chiesa di Notre Dame du Haut a Ronchamp, n. 207, 1955. Right: images from Sergio Asti's travel report Civilisation of Japan, n. 273, 1963.

Such a complex approach is exemplified in Sergio Asti's 1963 travel report, *Civiltà del Giappone* (Civilisation of Japan), where visual and textual materials intertwined. The images were organised over a double-page spread and contributed to building a narrative rhythm that moved from solely architectural form to understanding the interactions with the surrounding environment, people and the broader cultural context.
The visual storytelling Gae Aulenti crafted for «Casabella» did not rely solely on photography. In the 1955 article *Le Corbusier. La chiesa di Notre Dame du Haut a Ronchamp*, the main goal was to describe the building, so she included drawings and cut-outs of sketches along with photography. In general, images were laid out in a manner that allowed narrative intentions to prevail over the constraints of the usual page format, frequently developing evocative sequences that stood out for their originality. Through all these materials, one can trace a process of refinement that characterised Gae Aulenti's method of selection and montage of visual materials; a skill she developed through the manipulation of travel souvenirs as it hel-

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Fig. 16
Le Corbusier arranging the *objets à réaction poétique* inside a niche in his house-studio on Rue Nungesser-et-Coli in Paris. (Rüegg 2017, p. 81).

ped her build confidence in the way she «reads, corrects, cuts, and trims» (Agosti 2024).

Collections

A comparison between John Soane, Le Corbusier, and Gae Aulenti shows that, for architects, travel goes well beyond the mere collection of data, references, inspirations, or exemplary models. Instead, it develops as a process that gains significance through its reinterpretation upon return. This process involves reuses, manipulations, and reinterpretations that empower gathered materials into design tools. Travel functions not just as a collection of experiences but as a mechanism for critical selection and projective development. Therefore, the creative power of travel may be found in the moment of return, when the demands of a specific design challenge activate memory. Hence, souvenirs do not merely record a path once taken – they help architects who collect them to open up new directions, spark associations, and, when necessary, contribute to the development of design ideas.

This perspective echoes Vladimir Jankélévitch's concept of *nostalgie ouverte*, introduced in *L'Irreversible et la Nostalgie* (1974): a kind of nostalgia not tied to a specific object or place in the past, but open to what is yet to come – toward what has never existed, and for the architect, toward what can still be imagined and designed.

Within this framework, reflecting on the approaches of these three architects – shaped by different historical and cultural contexts – reveals how the souvenir operates not as a marginal by-product of travel, but as an active and recurring component in architectural practice. Whether collected, selected, or fabricated, these objects trigger a way of thinking that is not necessarily linear, but depends on a receptive and well-prepared mind (Mindrup 2011, p. 4).

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Fig. 17
Gae Aulenti's apartment, currently her Archive. Here many of the objects collected during her travels are preserved and arranged as she arranged them. Photo by the Authors.

In this view, the souvenir gains meaning only when it enters dialogue with a specific design context, becoming a prompt for invention rather than a reminder of what has been. What enables this potential is often the temporal and spatial distance from the original journey, which creates the conditions for the souvenir to reappear, no longer as a *memento*, but as a speculative tool within the design process.

This dynamic is reflected in the souvenirs retained by Soane, Le Corbusier, and Aulenti. The ruin of the Temple of Tivoli for Soane, the seashells for Le Corbusier, or the photographs for Aulenti are not merely remnants of lived experience. They may instead be read as active devices – bearers of latent potential – ready to be reactivated in architectural form. Ultimately, the temporal and spatial distance between the original experience of travel and its later re-contextualisation enables the souvenir to become a speculative tool within the design process. Souvenirs, whether explicitly touristic or, as in these cases, marked by a creative impulse, often held a central place in both the domestic and professional lives of these three architects. Their collections were not incidental but thoughtfully arranged within everyday spaces, following a compositional logic that blurred the lines between work and life, turning their homes into deeply personal environments.

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Fig. 18
Alexandre-Isidore Leroy de Barde, *Selection of shells arranged on shelves*, 1803–1810.

In Le Corbusier's apartment-studio on Rue Nungesser-et-Coli in Paris, for instance, niches were designed with precise proportions, forms, and colours to house his *collection particulière*, composed mainly of travel souvenirs and *objets à réaction poétique*.
Grouped by aesthetic affinity rather than chronology or type[19], these objects established subtle formal relationships and visual echoes, fostering a fertile ground for poetic and intuitive reflection. The Model Room in Soane's house features a distinct, yet equally intentional, arrangement of collected materials. Here, a dense assemblage of souvenirs – paintings of Italian cities and landscapes, casts, copies, and fragments of ancient architecture – produced a layered, spatial composition.
Rather than pursuing visual harmony, Soane embraced juxtaposition and the generated tension of this disorder to stimulate analogical reasoning. The encounter of fragments from disparate origins and scales generates a productive dislocation, encouraging unexpected associations and speculative architectural thinking.

These contrasting arrangements suggest how souvenirs, depending on how they are framed and activated, can support distinct modes of design exploration – from the poetic and associative to the analytical and compositional. Soane and Le Corbusier merged their collections into meticulously choreographed, museum-like settings, i.e., spaces where souvenirs contributed to a greater, public story of their architectural thought.
In contrast, Aulenti's approach was more contemplative. Her collection, now preserved in her archive, reflects a private practice in which the souvenir blends with the everyday and the self-designed. Rather than a structured display, her logic is one of proximity and resonance. This comparison illustrates how souvenirs can assume various roles in design, serving as instruments of spatial reflection and analogy for Soane and Le Corbusier, and as intimate, open-ended traces in Aulenti's evolving creative process.

Notes

[1] In the original quotation, Jankélévitch refers more broadly to humankind; «This ability to be absent while remaining in place, with one's feet here and one's eyes elsewhere, physically present but thousands of kilometers away thanks to the imagination – this ability is, more than any other, the human ability»[translation by the authors].

[2] Duccio Canestrini (2022, p. 35) describes the souvenir as an object that reflects the genius loci, the spirit, creativity, and characteristics of its place of origin. As part of the whole, it captures the natural and cultural attractions of the area. Etymologically, the word souvenir originates from the Latin *subvenire* and means to go to the aid, to come to mind. It then developed into the noun souvenir, derived from the verb *se souvenir de* meaning to remember something.

[3] According to Alcolea and Tarragó (2011, pp. 17-18) the materials documenting these journeys fascinate us so much because they are directly filtered by the architect-travellers, embodying the tangible aspect of a subjective vision through visual storytelling: «The media used for all of these journeys or travels, whether sketchbooks, texts, photographs, or movies, attract us precisely because they come directly from the hands and visions of architect-travelers, who bring us fragments of their own work. They are the tangible part of these filtered outlooks. We can recognize other places in them, places we no longer need to travel to because they now come to us».

[4] Referred to the senses.

[5] The collection in John Soane's house includes various types of pedestals and supports, differing in shape, height, and material. A notable example is a set of mahogany pieces made in 1834. These are characterised by square tops and bases, supported by four reed-like columns. The bases and tops feature plain collars. Bolt holes are visible on the upper surfaces of the bases, likely remnants of the fastening systems used to fix the models. Architectural drawings related to the models were often placed on chests of drawers holding these pedestals.
Another set of supports similar in shape but made from different materials is located near the fireplace in the Model Room. A third type consists of pedestals with three sets of four columns supporting the upper shelf. These columns are bundled reeds with upper and lower collars, with a modern replacement in the middle front pair. This support has a deeper base and a projection of approximately 12 cm. Each support is made of mahogany (Dorey 2008).

[6] For John Soane, the architectural model seems to be a tool for conveying the spatial qualities of a project not only to clients but also to his students. Over the years, the souvenir-models reinstalled in the Model Room became a teaching tool for his students, shifting the focus from personal experience to its transferability. Helen Dorey (2022) argues that this spread of the model is due to the growing ability of craftsmen and clients to read the technical drawings produced by architects.

[7] Richard Gillespie (2017) studied the popularity of cork models in Britain as souvenirs for the Grand Tour. John Soane's cork model of the Temple of Vesta was made

by Giovanni Altieri, a Neapolitan craftsman specialised in reproductions of ancient structures. The craft of producing cork models was generally Neapolitan and originated from the tradition of including models of classical ruins in nativity scenes. The plaster models owned by Soane were made by Jean-Pierre and François Fouquet, who worked in Paris in the early 18th century.

[8] The original title is *A selection of parts of buildings, public and private, erected from the designs of J. Soane, Esq. R.A. in the metropolis, and in other places of the United Kingdom, between the years 1780 and 1815.*

[9] The exhibition *Le Corbusier. Travels, objects and collections*, curated by Cristian Chironi in collaboration with Fondation Le Corbusier, was held at the Pinacoteca Agnelli in Turin from 27.04.2021 to 05.09.2021 (Chironi 2021).

[10] See Maak (2011). Le Corbusier draws a subtle yet evocative distinction; building on Paul Valéry's notion of *objets ambiguës*, between *objets trouvés* and *objets à réaction poétique*. The key difference lies in their origin: while the *objet trouvé* is crafted by human hands, the *objet à réaction poétique* is offered by nature itself, sparking an emotional or poetic response through its inherent form.

[11] Description in the documentary video *Le Corbusier par lui-même*, Video 1. Part of a trilogy composed and curated by Jacques Barsac in 1992.

[12] This paragraph relies on a series of interviews and documentary sources. The title quotes Gae Aulenti's words from a video interview: «Sometimes I feel like a locomotive, so full of steam I'm about to explode. And so I take off, alone — always on a journey somehow connected to architecture or its protagonists». She reiterated this idea twice: first in *Gae Aulenti 1981*, aired on the RAI programme *TAM TAM* (TG1, 6 March 1981), and then in *Gae Aulenti – Racconti Ravvicinati*, part of the RAI series *Donna e Architetto* (2011). Additionally, there are two posthumously released documentaries: *Gae Aulenti*, from the docuseries *Illuminate* (RAI3, 2020), and *Semplicemente, Gae* (Sky Arte, 2022). All these interviews are woven with reflections and anecdotes from collaborators, family members, and friends.

[13] Excerpt from the interview *Semplicemente Gae*, curated by Didi Gnocchi and Matteo Moneta for Sky Arte. Italy, 2022.

[14] *Ibidem.*

[15] *Ibidem.*

[16] Nowa Huta is a district of Krakow, designed and built starting in 1949 to house workers of the large steel complex Huta Lenin. The district was established by order of the communist government and was regarded as one of the most significant examples of socialist urban planning in Eastern Europe.

[16] The sketch for the Sakuraokacho Hotel-Office project in Tokyo (1992) is emblematic. This project can be read as an exercise in the analogical reduction of the skyscraper to the archetype of the column-monument. The result is a figurative choice based on tripartition, associating Gae Aulenti's design to the figure of a column rather than to a skyscraper.

[17] Grouping technique deployed is well described in the book by Max Bill, Le Corbusier and P.Janneret, *Oeuvre Complete*, 1934-1938.

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Aleksa Korolija graduated in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano, where in 2017 he obtained a PhD in Architecture, Urban Planning, and Conservation of Living and Landscape Places. Since 2017, he has been a Research Fellow at the DABC Department as part of the MODSCAPES Project. Since 2024, he has been a Fixed-Term Researcher at the ABC Department of the Politecnico di Milano. Alongside his research activities, he teaches Architectural Design both in Italy and abroad.

Emanuela Margione graduated in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano, where in 2021 she obtained a PhD in Architecture, Building Engineering and the Built Environment. Since 2024, she has been a Research Fellow within the Erasmus+ UpGranT project at the ABC Department. Alongside her research activities, she teaches Architectural Design in the Bachelor's Degree course in Architectural Design at the Politecnico di Milano.

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Luisa Ferro, Maria Pompeiana Iarossi

Meridian Polytechnicians. The *Scuola di Milano* at Pompeii

Abstract
The 1926 educational trip to Naples and its surroundings represented a significant shift from the original project outlined by Camillo Boito. This trip involved some students and recent graduates from Politecnico di Milano who, after the Second World War, became prominent figures of the Scuola di Milano. Boito's project focused on learning from historical examples, mainly Lombard Romanesque architecture, which was expected to naturally develop into a new architectural style that could embody the entrepreneurial spirit and values of the emerging Italian Nation.
The notebooks and photos from that journey, on the other hand, recount the stages of an exploratory process that led participants to discover an archetypal Mediterranean classicism as a tangible alternative to the nineteenth-century city and architecture.

Keywords
Educational trip — Politecnico di Milano — Pompeii — Italian Rationalism

Polytechnic culture and educational trips

Ever since the establishment of the Regio Politecnico di Milano in 1863, the educational trip has played a vital role in the teaching approach, motivated by the belief in the value and importance of direct contact with the most innovative examples in the field of infrastructures, industrial plants, and constructions for training student engineers (AA.VV. 1981; Buratti and Selvafolta 2013). Such teaching practice was also advertised, primarily in the institutional communication section "Effemeridi", included annually in the *Programma del Regio Politecnico*. It was also disseminated more widely through articles in popular newspapers and a comprehensive series of technical-scientific journals that flourished at the time, such as «Il Politecnico» or «Il Giornale dell'Ingegnere-Architetto ed Agronomo».
The aim was to demonstrate the practical influence of polytechnic training in promoting the new entrepreneurial spirit that was ready to revitalise Italy at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The focus "on the new", strongly aimed at action, resulted in favouring construction sites as destinations. Such propensity was also transferred to the trips organised for the course for student architects activated in 1865, where this practice was received and further enhanced in an institutional form, assigning it a properly pedagogical role, as «a true complement to the courses from 1911 to 1941» (Lori 1941, p. 81) «in the belief that only direct contact with the manifestations of nature could foster an active and responsible design culture» (Selvafolta 2008, p. 119).
In the context of Boito's historicist culture, the focus on an operational dimension led to prioritising sites where significant restoration efforts were actively ongoing. This began with the visits organised in 1867 by Boito

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Fig. 1
Photographs from the 1926 journey (APB, photographic collection) depict playful moments during the crossing on the *Biancamano*, as well as ancient sites and buildings that inspired the drive towards modernity. Included are also the first two female Polytechnic architects, who graduated in 1928.

himself to the restoration of the churches of Sant'Abbondio in Como and San Michele in Pavia, then extended to locations in Padua, Pomposa Ferrara. After Boito stopped teaching at the Politecnico, there were two visits (in 1908 and 1912) to the reconstruction works by Gaetano Moretti on the bell tower of San Marco in Venice and the sites in Ravenna directed by Corrado Ricci, visited in 1908 and 1914.

Even when the destination of the journey was Rome, the itineraries allocated limited time to classical remains, guiding student architects to explore the origins and development of Italian medieval art in the ancient Christian basilicas. Modernity, however, was not neglected, with visits to the new government and ministerial buildings then under construction, intended to exemplify the new national style.

The educational trip to Naples and its surroundings in July 1926 marked a radical shift in the selection of trip destinations. Regrettably, the Politecnico's historical archives lack any record of this journey[1], although its organisation – which involved a large group of students and teachers, sometimes accompanied by their wives – must have required considerable effort and financial resources, as testified by the extensive photographic documentation available at the APB-Archivio Piero Bottoni, Dastu-Politecnico di Milano[2]. The trip occurred in July 1926, on the Genoa-Naples segment of the Genoa-New York route, aboard the luxurious steamship *Conte Biancamano*, launched the previous November with interiors designed and decorated by Luigi Coppedè.

For the return journey from Naples to Genoa, the Politecnico delegation travelled on the equally comfortable *Duilio*, the first transatlantic liner built entirely in Italy, in service since 1923 on the same route.

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Fig. 2
Group photograph taken during the 1926 trip to Naples and its surroundings (APB, photographic collection), with the names of 22 students and lecturers listed among the 45 participants.

The lack of archival material prevents us from determining the overall duration of the trip; however, some handwritten annotations by Piero Bottoni on the back of his photographs (preserved in the APB photographic collection), however record *6-14 July 1926 Gita d'istruzione a Napoli e dintorni* (6-14 July 1926 Educational trip to Naples and surroundings).
Numerous photos were taken from the *Conte Biancamano* to capture the beauty of the coasts and seascapes, as well as of shared everyday life and playful moments. Even more numerous are the shots of the visited places: Naples, the Amalfi coast, the excavations of Pompeii, and the Royal Palace of Caserta. The abundance and content of the photographs taken on the steamer, as well as the number of places visited after disembarking, suggest that the dates noted by Bottoni correspond to disembarkation and re-embarkation at the port of Naples. Therefore, excluding navigation times, the actual tour began on 6 July 1926 and lasted nine days until re-embarkation on the *Duilio*.
Regarding the participants, by comparing the notes by Bottoni on the back of a photograph showing a group of forty-six people in the courtyard of *La Vesuviana* plant with information available at the ACL-Historical Archives and Museum Services, Politecnico di Milano, we were able to identify some teachers and sixteen of the thirty or so participating students.
Some of them, in the years following graduation, would establish themselves as leading figures in the culture of the project, which later became known as *Scuola di Milano* (Canella 2010).

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Fig. 3
In the two-year preparatory course, student architects trained by redrawing artefacts, plastic and ornamental elements from Egyptian, Greek, and Roman architecture: a) P. Bottoni, study sketches (APB, Notebook n.15, 1921-1922); L.L. Figini, A Dioscurus from the Capitoline Hill and two statues from Palazzo Barberini, (AAF Milano, Notebook, p. 4).

In addition to Bottoni, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Piero Gnecchi Ruscone, and Antonio Cassi Ramelli, portrayed alongside illustrious professors, are the first two women architects trained at the Regio Politecnico: Elvira Luigia (known as Gigetta) Morassi and Carla Maria Bassi, both graduated in 1928 (Bucchetti et alii 2021, pp. 68-69). Of particular interest is the comparative analysis between the photographs and travel notebooks of some participants, notably Piero Bottoni[3], Luigi Figini[4], and Gino Pollini[5].
Such comparison clearly shows that, considering the amount of graphic and photographic material, the visit to the excavations of Pompeii became the pivotal point of the journey, a more intensely evocative moment and genuine serendipity for these young architects-in-the-making. Direct contact with remnants from a much older past than the medieval remains (previously suggested as a model) clearly heightened participants' awareness of a kind of archetypal Mediterranean identity. For the journey's protagonists, this idea proved highly beneficial over time in shaping design, offering concrete alternatives to the language of Eclecticism and nineteenth-century ideas of living environment and urban development.

The toolbox of the Milanese polytechnic students

In examining the reasons and methods behind this radical paradigm shift, the question arises as to what fertile ground received the seeds of this new ancient modernity, and which knowledge and skills the "excursionists" already possessed.

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Fig. 4
During his visit to the excavations at Pompeii, P. Bottoni discovered the art of mosaic, noting (APB, Notebook n.9, p.13) its geometric composition, chromatic effects, and architectural relationships, which he would revisit many years later in the decorations of the Sesto San Giovanni civic centre.

The fertile ground consisted in the three-year programme at the *Scuola speciale architetti* of the Regio Politecnico di Milano, originating from the two-year preparatory school established by Camillo Boito. This was modelled after the polytechnic didactic approach, functioning as a training course where the design of the new would explore historical forms through drawing in its various expressions and variations. During the two-year period, the acquisition of the necessary graphic skills was ensured through attendance of the two-year courses in *Ornato e Figura* (ornate and figure) taught by painters such as Giuseppe Fei from Ferrara, a professor at the Regia Accademia di Brera, held concurrently with the preparatory courses in *Architetture*, which Ambrogio Annoni oversaw. The effectiveness of this initial phase of architectural apprenticeship in mastering graphic representation is evident in the notebooks produced between 1921 and 1923 by Piero Bottoni[6]. These clearly demonstrate that even a student with a traditional high school diploma – lacking specialised graphic skills – gradually learned how to train eyes and hand, improving stroke quality and developing sensitivity to understand the significant plastic and compositional relationships within reality.
During the three-year continuation of the *Scuola Speciale*, in the courses *Architecture* 1, 2, and 3, Ambrogio Annoni was replaced by Gaetano Moretti – also teaching at Brera and later, in 1933, the first dean of the newly established *Scuola di Architettura Politecnica* – while Annoni taught the courses on *Organismi e Forme* (organisms and shapes). Conversely, the drawing courses were divided into three-year programmes of *Decorazione e Figura* (decoration and figure) and *Prospettiva* (perspective) (Santacroce

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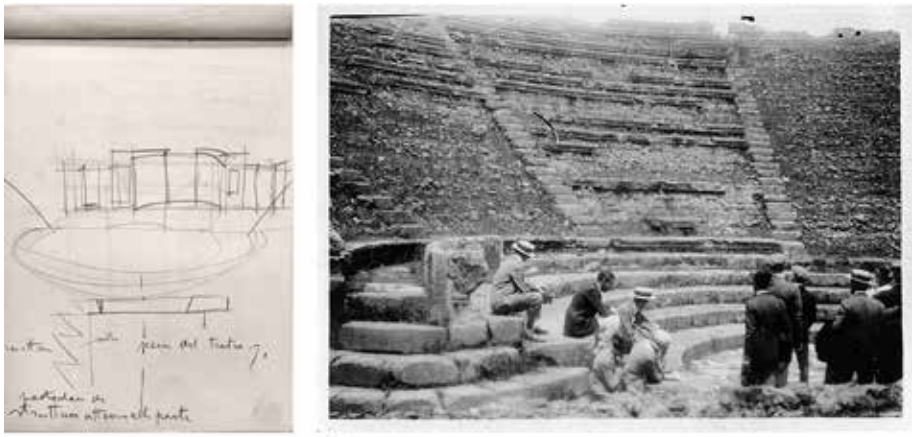

a b

Fig. 5
a) Sketch by P. Bottoni depicting the stage and doors of the theatre in Pompeii and the detail of the structure around the doors («la scena e le porte del teatro di Pompei e il particolare di struttura attorno alle porte»), APB, Notebook n.9, p. 9); b) Students sketching the theatre stage at Pompeii, under the gaze of Prof. C. Fratino (APB, photographic collection).

2024), initially taught by painters Giuseppe Fei and Giuseppe Mentessi (both associated with the poetics of the Lombard Scapigliatura movement) and later entrusted to Cesare Fratino, Mentessi's pupil at Accademia di Brera, though with a profile more distinctly focused on scenography and the representation of architectural space (Santacroce 2024).
Overall, this pedagogical approach was based on combining design and graphic teachings, activated through the collection of graphic descriptions of examples, regarded as paradigmatic tested solutions to specific compositional, expressive, and constructive problems. The path began with redrawing from books of classical antiquities, then continued the following year by integrating the redrawing of copies with a survey of Renaissance, Baroque, and Risorgimento examples. It reached its culmination in the final exercise of the fourth year, which consisted of a project drawn up *à la manière de*, as a demonstration of the mastery of composition and construction acquired by the student.
In the final year, significant emphasis was placed on the in-situ study of the Lombard Romanesque period, covered by both the drawing and design courses and further examined in the optional course of *Medieval Archaeology*, taught by Ugo Monneret de Villard. Boito's theoretical and didactic vision, in fact, highlighted the civic and spiritual values of fourteenth-century Lombardy as an exemplary model for future professionals and intellectuals of the young Italian nation. This type of architecture was exemplified in the knowledge and construction expertise of the Comacine Masters. Such values were to be instilled in student architects through a balanced approach, combining ex-cathedra lectures, bibliographic input, and direct physical engagement with artefacts.
The notebooks compiled by Piero Bottoni during his entire academic career (1921-1926) – as well as, though less systematically, those by Luigi Figini (who also graduated in 1926) and Gino Pollini, who received his qualification the following year – testify to the ongoing educational achievements of this pedagogical journey established since 1865. Bottoni's carnet, however, records a pivotal moment during the 1926 trip, his contained sketches clearly showing the shift from Boito's regionalist approach to Mediterranean classicism. The latter, with its multiple interpretations, became the point of contact and comparison with the most progressive voices of the international scene at the time and, simultaneously, one of the distinctive features of the *Scuola di Milano*.
In fact, the analysis of the travel drawings shows how, during that experience, each student began to reveal the architect he would later become

in his maturity, recognising, in the places and artefacts encountered during that youthful period, the same aspects and themes that would later define his distinctive traits and professional style.
For example, during the explorations of Pompeii, Bottoni abandoned the precise and almost "surgical" graphics that characterised his previous notebooks, gathering quick sketches of the Pompeian wall decorations. These sketches aimed at capturing the chromatic aspects that were to form the basis of his reflections on the use of colour as an element of urban identity, which he fully articulated in the first complete theoretical expression a year after the trip, in the article "Cromatismi architettonici" (Bottoni 1927-28; Rossi et alii 2015). Yet, Pompeii also encouraged Bottoni to explore the beauty of mosaic art, whose secrets he sought to uncover through the feverish annotations depicting floor and wall decorations. These included valuable suggestions for geometric compositions, decorative motifs, and colour effects. Many years later, Bottoni would extensively dwell on these notes in Sesto San Giovanni, both in decorating the mosaic tree on a wall of the office tower and in the town's flooring hall.
Bottoni showed the precocious sensitivity typical of an urban planner towards the crucial role played by collective spaces in shaping the urban fabric, the same trait he would show in the morphological design of the QT8 neighbourhood and, above all, in the plan for the Sesto San Giovanni Civic Centre. He paused both to describe graphically the Roman theatre of Pompeii and to photograph teachers and students engaged in surveying it on site, seated on the steps of the cavea. Bottoni's drew up a very concise and compelling sketch of the theatre, abandoning the meticulous graphic style of his previous notebooks, outlined the relationship between the cavea and the volumetric arrangement of the scene with just a few incisive lines. He chose to forgo detailed graphic work in favour of expressiveness, emphasising the importance of capturing those ancient deposit of collective values.

Pompeii. Towards the project

> When one travels and practices the figurative arts – architecture, painting, sculpture – one looks with the eyes and draws so that the things seen can be internalised. The things captured through the work of the pencil remain with us for life; they are written, inscribed (Le Corbusier 1961, p. 37) (TdA).

Observation is not a passive act; it is more than just recording; it is a form of active engagement judgment. In this context, the protagonists are the sketchbooks of a circle of friends and fellow students: Piero Bottoni, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, and their drawn (and photographed) record of the visit to the excavations of Pompeii. Their friend Giuseppe Terragni was not present on this occasion; he was in Rome, visiting the Forums, and the ruins of the capital (Ciucci 2005; Ferretti et alii 2018).
These *carnets de voyage* reveal the start of a journey towards the formalisation of Italian Architecture of Rationalism. These rapid sketches, interpret the ruins with their flaws and present a kind of original landscape, an extraordinary imaginative source. As already mentioned, it is July 1926, amidst a murky political history becoming more and more obscure. In the suitcase, Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*, as a gift to Gino Pollini from his artists friend Fortunato Depero, which came into the hands of the group of friends in 1925 (Panzeri vol. 84, 2015).

The lessons that the ruins teach are many and complex. They form a vital part of the architect's work, provided they are internalised through a tangible connection that appears in notebooks. Therefore, it is necessary to study them with the mind by drawing, reasoning through sketches, and understanding how walls merge into and modify the ground. For example, visualising what architectural forms can originate, in excavation or elevation, from walls, platforms, and columns. They train the eye and the intellect for a process of accumulation in the personal casket from which authentic inventions arise (Ferro 2007; Torricelli 2023).
Everyone perceives in the ruins what they already wished to discover. These powerful rediscoveries and derivations establish connections with distant architectures. Drawings are the actual space of discipline, an excellent synthetic moment, a necessary order of thought. They form a practice of "excavation" and amplification of the individual symbolic universe. The group of young architecture students from the Milanese school viewed the ancient differently from their masters, Gaetano Moretti, Ambrogio Annoni, Piero Portaluppi, also showing some impatience with certain impositions. They challenged traditional methods of exploring architecture, discovering a form of "originality" rooted in a substantial and timeless logical-formal reasoning. The study of the ancient acted as a projection towards modernity, providing these young individuals with a rational framework. Piero Bottoni wrote:

> Architecture was presented to us through studies of the Doric or Ionic capital abacus, reconstructions of ancient Roman temples based on the texts of Canina and d'Espouy, and generally through a series of purely formal, academic ideas that bore no relation to the forms of architecture being constructed at that time (Consonni et alii 1990) (TdA).

These were exercises on styles by assuming the elements of design in a predominantly allegorical-representative key. All this was tight for these young architects-in-the-making.

Coincidences

«Le Corbusier exerted on us the same lyrical fascination of his technical and axiomatic prose». With its straightforward slogans, yet sharp and commanding like the points of a programme designed to stir souls and motivate them to struggle, *Vers une Architecture* revealed to each graduating student the path he was looking for. In other words, the way to finally bridge the gap between the language of architecture and the forms of everyday life, became clearer since the nineteenth century and was heightened by the war (Consonni et alii 1990).
The itinerary (both real and designed) followed by Le Corbusier in Pompeii marked the main route, but in 1926, the state of the excavations was different, and the group benefited from an exceptional guide, Amedeo Maiuri, the new Superintendent and Director of the excavations. Certainly, Le Corbusier signifies a shift in direction. A new understanding of ruins emerged; old paradigms were discarded, along with any romantic, cheesy notions of the ruins.
Le Corbusier created a link between Pompeii and the wider world: the ruins of Pompeii were fragments of architecture and practical tools; they became a "warehouse", a living collection of examples and architectural devices, revealing the poetic essence of small, rational spaces. In a nutshell, Le

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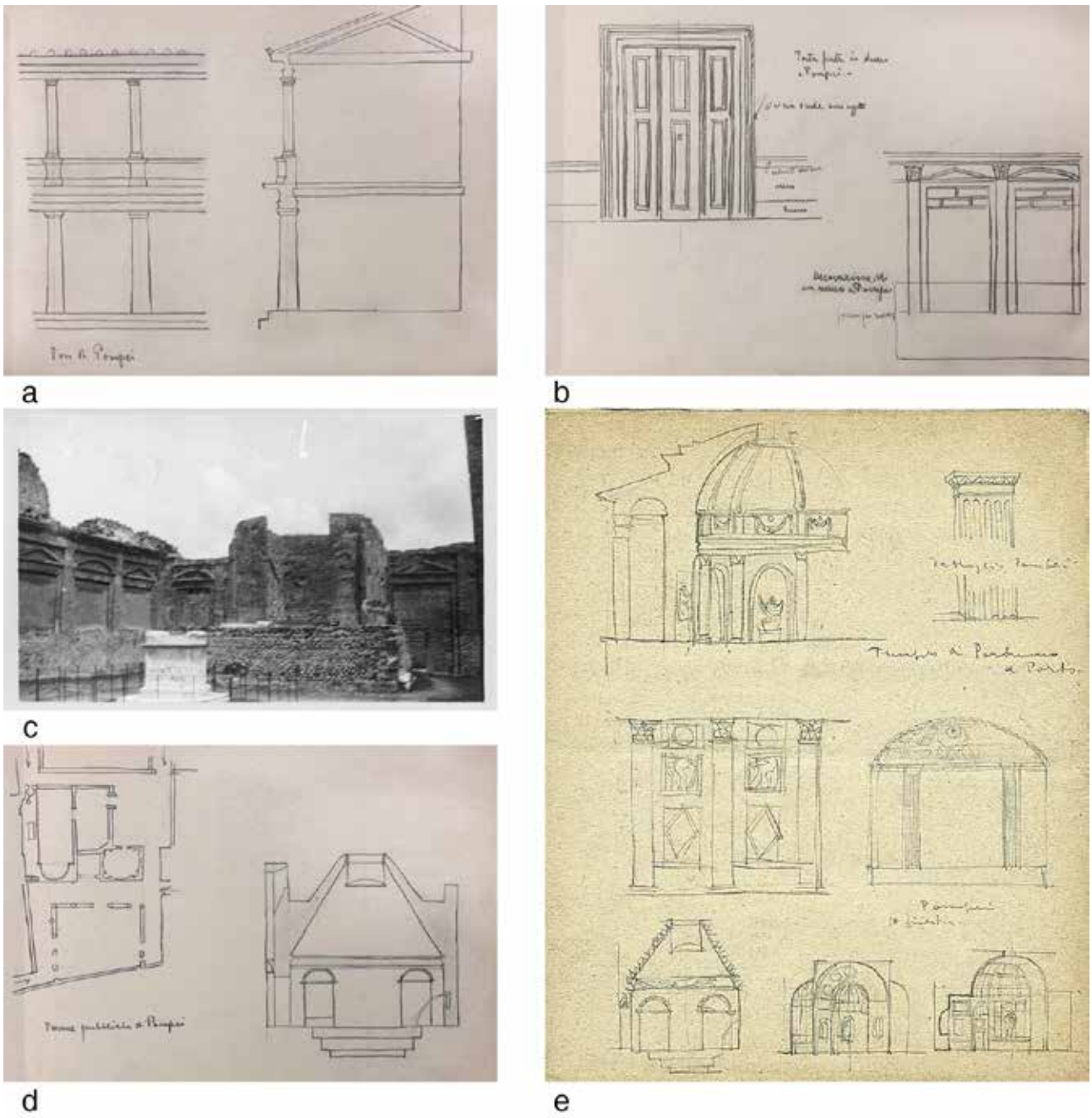

Fig. 6
Forum and Forum Baths. a), b), d) Sketches by G. Pollini (Fondo MART, Notebook 9), c) Temple of Vespasian in the Forum (APB, photographic collection); e) Sketches by L. Figini (AAF Milano).

Corbusier clearly stated what Goethe had already sensed. After the initial disappointment, the ruins of Pompeii became the centre of a new historical-cultural paradigm in the reception of the ancient (Goethe 1786-88). A paradigm focused on morphology, specifically the "mummified city", as Goethe described it, would be perceived differently, as a collection of "intelligent" and "pleasant" compositions no longer confined or diminutive. This marked the start of a modern reinterpretation of the ruins, going beyond Winkelmann's grand vision of their "great" and "noble" character. Moreover, by observing Mediterranean house architecture, Goethe and Le Corbusier alike recognised the continuity and correspondence between the ancient world and the modern, acknowledging both logical-formal and structural permanence.

In 1926, the polytechnic group had a special guide, Amedeo Maiuri, appointed Superintendent of Campania and Director of the excavations of Pompeii in 1924, just two years earlier. Maiuri, the archaeologist-poet, was a dedicated scholar but also a talented storyteller, describing things

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Fig. 7
The Polytechnic group at the Triangular Forum and the Theatre (APB, photographic collection). a) Triangular forum; b) sitting in the summa cavea of the Theatre. The phrase «Sull'ultimo gradone del teatro: Zanotta, Fratino, Sovraintendente scavi, Bottonpietro, Moretti, Bertini» is written on the back of the photograph. c) The wall of the Theatre from the Triangular Forum; d) photo taken from a distance of the group in photo b.

Fig. 8
From APB photographic collection, a) House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, b) (possibly) Domus of the Silver Wedding, on the back: «Interno di una casa in fondo Pacanowsky. Foto fatta nell'atrio verso il tablinum (dove è Pacanowsky) in fondo il peristilio»; c) House of Vettii.

with an artist's passion, the dedication of a historian, and the precision of a scientist. He blended the real and the imaginary. In short, he captivated them all, and this made the difference. These narratives would reveal new architectural scenarios and spark a fresh imaginary: the poetry of daily life, houses with peristyles, novel proportions, and innovative geometries became central (Osanna 2017; Pappalardo 2017).

The itinerary in the city

In the first part of the visit, a clear narrative emerges intertwining with Le Corbusier's work. As they ascend the slope with the large, slippery, black lava stone slabs, they reach the Forum. No one copies Le Corbusier's sketches, but they draw new elements, such as the textured walls of the enclosure of the Temple of Vespasian, the reconstructed section of the portico, and the section with a skylight of the Forum baths.

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a

b

Fig. 9
The Polytechnic group at the House of the Silver Wedding (APB, photographic collection). a) In the dim light of the tetrastyle atrium; b) In the Rhodian peristyle.

Le Corbusier's words (and sketches) resonate in front of the *House of the Tragic Poet*[7]:

These purposes include the wall (the full physical sensation) and the light, as well as the space (physical sensation). […] The refinements of a consummate art. Everything is built around the axis, but there could hardly be a trace of a straight line. The axis resides in the intentions, and the splendour it produces extends to humble elements that, with a skilful gesture (corridors, the main passage, etc.), are invested through the optical illusion. Here, the axis is not a symbol of theoretical aridity but connects load-bearing volumes that are clearly inscribed and differentiated from each other. When you visit the House of the Tragic Poet, you will find that everything is in harmony. However, the sensation is rich; skilled misalignments can be observed that add intensity to the volumes: the central motif of the flooring is recessed from the room's centre; the entrance well is on the side of the pool; the fountain at the bottom is in a corner of the garden (Le Corbusier 1924) (TdA).

The polytechnic group crossed the oldest nucleus of Pompeii and then followed along *Via dei Teatri*, reaching the Triangular Forum (the Greek Forum) with the propylaea. The landscape, especially the viewpoints on the theatre complex, impressed them: they lingered for a long time and

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Fig. 10
Plan of Pompeii archaeological area and new town in 1926. In green: embankments not yet excavated at present; in yellow: embankments still to be excavated (new excavations) in the year of the trip. Blue pins indicate documented sites of visit (L. Ferro, PoliMi).

documented the urban ensemble of Forum/Theatre/Gymnasium extensively, noting the height differences, the connections, the large staircase, and finally the Theatre. Walls, solids and voids, columns. They went up the *Via Stabiana* to reach the House of Marcus Lucretius[8]:

[...] Respect the walls. The Pompeian does not pierce the walls. He has a sacred devotion to walls; he loves light. Light is intense when it is between walls that reflect it. The ancients built walls that stretched and connected to make the wall even larger. In doing so, they created volumes, the foundation of the architectural and sensory experience. The light shines deliberately at one end to illuminate the walls. It projects its impression outward through the cylinders (I dislike calling them columns; it's a worn-out word), the peristyles, or pillars. The ground extends where possible, simple and equal. Sometimes, to create a particular feeling, the ground is raised a step. There are no other interior architectural elements: just the light, the reflecting walls in an ample space, and the ground, which acts as a horizontal wall. Creating illuminated walls involves designing interior architectural elements. The proportions are maintained (Le Corbusier 1924) (TdA).

Fig. 11
Excavations in progress from 1924 to 1926 (Archivio Storico PA-Pompei – Pompeiisites). a) Street of Abundance; b) Peristyle of the House of Paquius Proculus.

The group continued to visit the House of the Vettii[9], then crossed *Via del Vesuvio* and deviated into a small alley. Here, the most awaited Domus, immortalised by the famous drawings of Le Corbusier, the House of the Silver Wedding.

[...] Again, the small vestibule that leads you out of your thoughts. Here, you find yourself in the atrium, where four columns rise suddenly toward the shadowed roof – a testament to mighty means; yet, finally, the splendour of the garden seen through the peristyle unfolds this light with a broad gesture, dispersing and signalling it, stretching far to the right and left, creating a large space. Between these is the tablinum, which encloses this view like the eyepiece of an instrument. To the right and left are two small, shaded chambers. From every street and bustling with picturesque scenes, you have entered the house of a Roman [...] What might these rooms be used for? That is beside the point. After twenty centuries, without any historical references, one perceives the architecture, and all this is, in fact, a small house (Le Corbusier 1924) (TdA).

In the grand tetrastyle atrium, in dim light, the group photo captures the entire polytechnic group. A tribute to the master. At this point, the group departed from Le Corbusier's path and conventional itineraries, heading

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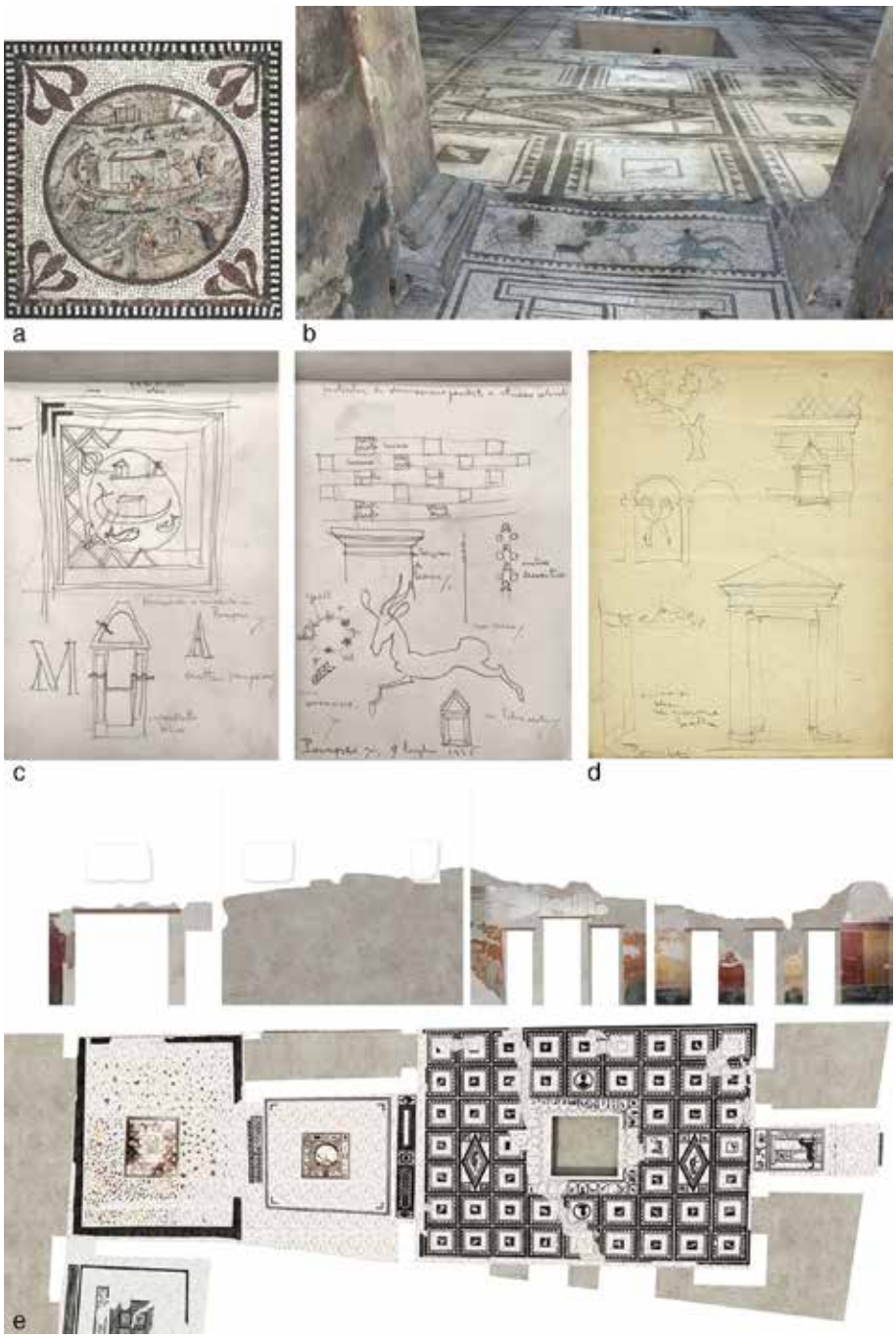

Fig. 12
House of *Paquius Proculus*, Regio I, ins. 7.1. a) Nilotic mosaic uncovered in the triclinium on the portico (photo by L. Ferro); b) Detail of the atrium (foto L. Ferro); c) Sketches from P. Bottoni notebook (APB, Politecnico di Milano); d) Sketches from L. Figini notebook (AAF Milano); e) Drawing of the atrium and tablinii (L. Ferro_PoliMi).

towards the new excavations. Here, the world of archaeology underwent a radical transformation: while old excavations had already uncovered and museumified everything, new excavations revealed a landscape of soil layers and the moment when the underground world was exposed, necessitating even more imagination to fill the uncertain spaces. *Via dell'Abbondanza* was still a deep furrow between the embankments, with houses and famous shops built in front, resembling scenes from a movie. Some renowned Domus were re-emerging here and there from the fragments of lava.
Maiuri, who turned forty in 1926, had recently settled and continued the work initiated by his predecessor, Vittorio Spinazzola. He resumed from *Via dell'Abbondanza*, emphasising the long street layout up to *Porta Sarno*, the eastern gate. Here Maiuri presented a view of Pompeii as a lively, noisy place – more so than the calmer, more "residential" Herculaneum – recreating it with expressive language, comparisons, and similes, utilising "gimmicks" and sometimes unscrupulous, sometimes playful combinations.

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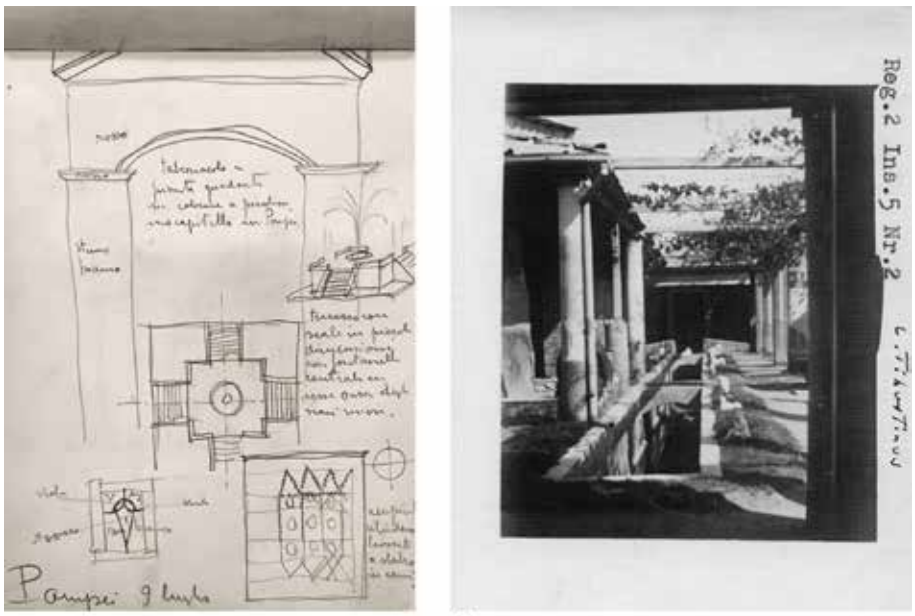

Fig. 13
House of *Loreius Tiburtinus*, Regio II, ins. 5.2. a) Sketches from P. Bottoni's notebook (APB, Politecnico di Milano); b) Photograph of the house in the 1920s (Archivio Storico PA-Pompei - Pompeiisites).

Human nature remains unchanged. Man stays as he is. (Osanna 2017; Pappalardo 2017). Nothing that could lead to nineteenth-century romantic interpretations[10].

The account of the ongoing excavations began with the House of Paquio Proculo[11], trapped in the frozen moment of the catastrophe during renovation work, forever unfinished. The voice of the graffiti scattered on the walls of the house echoed «that lively and vibrant outdoor life, which floods into the Fauces up to the front door. The traces of men and women, the trails of their passage, the shouting, the shops, the people, and the carts of the *Via dell'Abbondanza* remain recognisable» (Maiuri 1959) (TdA).

On the mosaic of the dog (Fauces), the floor gently sloped towards the atrium, transitioning from whole light into shadow. The small vestibule diverted the mind: the noise and hustle of the city, the voices of the people, fade away. On entering the Atrium, the *cava aedium*, you had to imagine the shadow of the roof (built by Maiuri twenty years later). In the background, the splendour of the garden was visible through the peristyle, unfolding the light with a wide gesture, distributing it, signalling it, extending far to the right and left, defining a large space. When the doors remained open during the day, thanks to the skilful arrangement of the visual axes, one could look deep inside from the entrance. The home was a centre of social interaction and self-presentation; therefore, the guest, passing through the house, received a full impression of its spaciousness and lavish decorative features (Maiuri 1958; Ferro 2016). The group designed the third-style mosaic floor with black and white geometric patterns and figurative elements. The last stop on the visit to the new excavations was the House of Loreio Tiburtino[12].

From the atrium, you pass into a small peristyle and from there into a long porticoed loggia covered with a pergola raised like a terrace above a large garden below, all enclosed by walls. Along the loggia runs a water channel, with statues of animals and herms arranged among the greenery on its edges. Between the columns, there are additional statuettes of the Muses, including a replica of Polyhynnia. In the centre, a tetrastyle temple stands among other water features; at the bottom of the canal, where waterfalls protrude, there is a biclinium with two paintings. These words will strike. [...] (Maiuri 1960) (TdA).

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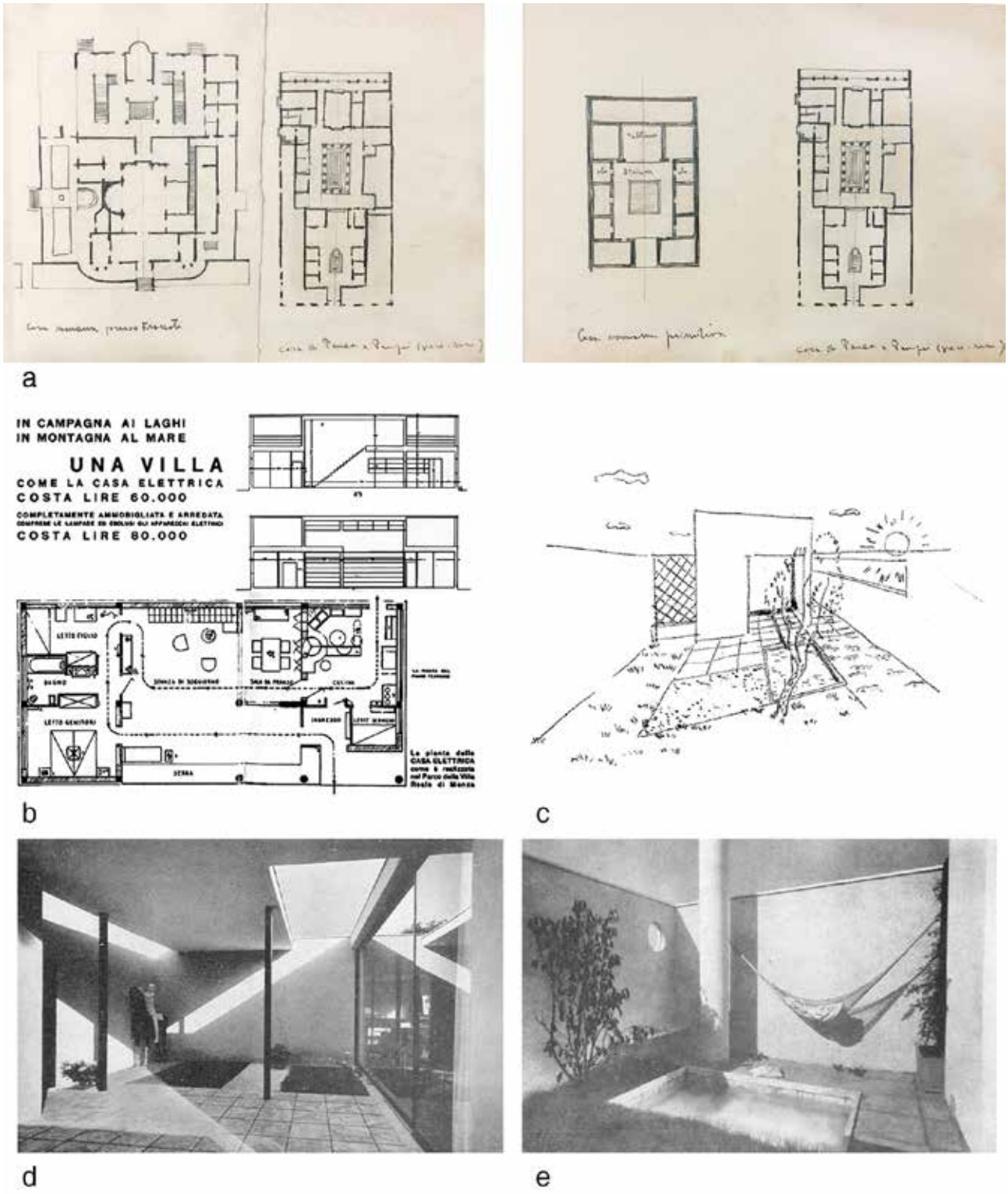

Fig. 14
a) G. Pollini, Comparative plans of the Domus, Notebook n. 7, 1925 (Fonte: MART); b) the Casa Elettrica, Manifesto, IV Triennale 1929-1930; c, d, e) L. Figini, House at the Journalists' Village, Milan, 1933, sketch of the terrace-garden (Protasoni 2010, p. 50 and Figini 1950).

But it was "the golden hour", at sunset, and the company left the excavations.

Reverbs

Thus, the excavated city appears as a grand work of architecture, almost a colossal abacus of building types and forms seen in their pure original essence, an excellent opportunity to imagine and initiate new transfigurations. The essence of architecture, freed from stylistic constraints, highlights the elaboration and composition of spaces, geometry, interior/exterior relationships, light and shadow, solids and voids, and visual sequences.

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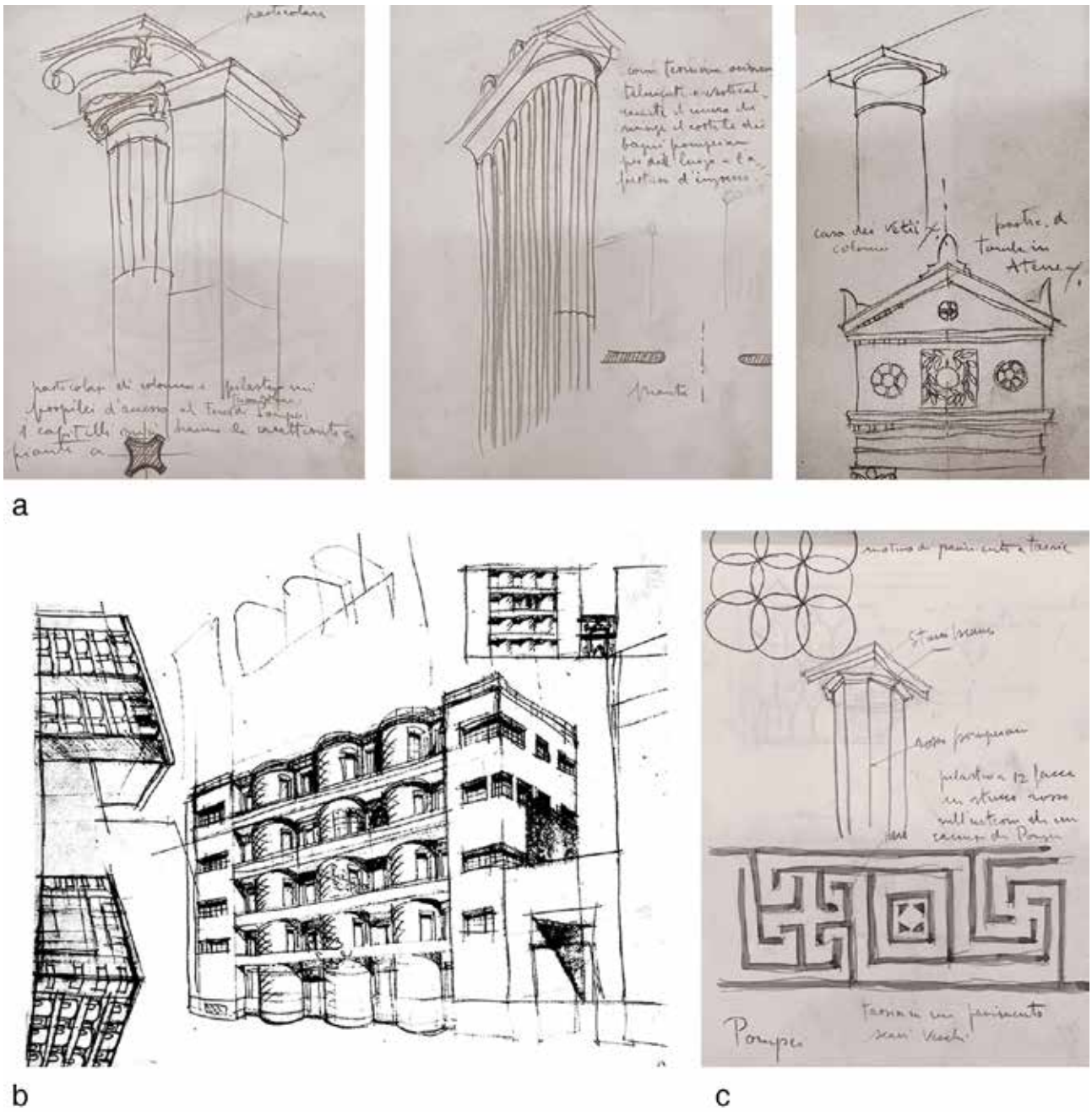

Fig. 15
a) P. Bottoni, Pompeii. Sketches on the composition of the column, Notebook n. 12, (APB, Politecnico di Milano); b) P. Bottoni, Studies for an Itacpm quarter in Viale Argonne, 1928 c.a. (APB, Politecnico di Milano); c) P. Bottoni, Design for the monumental entrance to the Fiera di Milano, Competition 1926 (APB, Politecnico di Milano).

A new way of interpreting the ancient is emerging. The path is opened for a new, synthetic, rational architecture. Much later, Figini wrote:

Herculaneum. Pompeii. In the central rectangles of grass, flowers, and trees, marble and water reflect blue strips of the vast Mediterranean sky. To the north, east, south, and west, surrounding you are the broad, horizontal bays – solid, squat, and fundamental – the columns of the Tuscan peristyle. On the shores of green lawns, fresh *eurips* flow into stone beds, white marble sculptures rise among the grass; and lazy waters, along with waterfalls, jets, and nymphaeums, create playful scenes. Long pergolas shade with vine shoots, sunny porches; flowerbeds suddenly appear from rectangular wall caissons, flourishing between pillars and columns, on the edge of small courtyards. Protected by the arcades' wings and solid walls, summer tricliniums and outdoor pools offer relief. High above the sea, terraces and sunlight stretch out, offering views of the horizon of two distant blues. Centuries of a deathly slumber have passed between lava and ashes in the town of Campania. With precise relationships of walls and greenery, air and sky, covered and open rooms, the houses of Herculaneum and Pompeii revive in the light of our sun, today more current and closer to us than ever (TdA).

The reverberation in the new projects is evident (Figini 1950). As an example among many, Figini's House at *Villaggio dei Giornalisti* (Journalists' Village) in Milan (1934-35). Sketches and reflections in everyone's notebooks indicate the beginning of a formative journey towards the project, towards new means of expression capable of breaking down traditionalist superstructures. In the ruins, they saw primordial aesthetic values, a logical and "simple" architecture. Sketches and annotations show a precise search for cognitive and operational references for the ascent towards new aesthetic values.

> But let's look back: all the architecture that has made the name of Rome glorious in the world is based on four or five types: the temple, the basilica, the circus, the round dome, and the thermal structure. And all its strength lies in having maintained these schemes, repeating them to the most distant provinces and refining them through selection (Group 7 1926, 1935) (TdA).

In Pollini's notebooks, the plants of the *Domus* are compared with each other: Atrium, patio, sequence of paths, proportions; all these elements are evoked and transformed in the Casa Elettrica (Group 7 with Piero Bottoni, IV Triennale 1929-30) and in the Villa-Studio for artists (Figini and Pollini, V Triennale, Milan 1934).
The notebooks include reflections on the composition of the wall, the architecture, and the meaning of the wall face with the contrast/wall-column juxtaposition, as well as the full/empty aspects of the plastic-wall system.

> Stone and brick have a centuries-old tradition of their own aesthetic, born from the possibilities of construction and now ingrained in us. The essence of ancient architecture lies in overcoming the heaviness of the material, which naturally tends to settle towards the ground. From this challenge, rhythm was born: the eye was satisfied by an element or a combination of elements when these, through form and placement, appeared to have achieved perfect static repose [...] Now, this scale of values, with reinforced concrete, loses all meaning and purpose: from its new possibilities [...] it necessarily develops a new aesthetic entirely different from the traditional, and the overall framework of the construction – the rhythmic interplay of solids and voids – takes on entirely new forms (Group 7 1926, 1935) (TdA).

And then:

> [...] On the formal side, the new reinforced concrete architecture finds an analogy in the slender, straight and thin elements, in the simplicity of the planes, in the calm rhythm of the voids and solids, in which the alternation of geometric shadows creates a composition of spaces and values, reminiscent of the periods of origin of Greek architecture (TdA).

The trilithic system, in its most basic, synthetic, and primitive form, is clearly visible in the votive altars (tabernacles) of the *Pompeian Domus*, designed in detail several times by Bottoni, Figini, and Pollini. Their sketches concentrate on the column's theme, exploring different variations and possibilities concerning the wall, the entablature, and the tympanum.
The casual use of columns in Pompeian houses, done in a simplified style with square capitals and round-section columns as pillars, along with their colours, is reflected in the red column of Figini's house in the journalists' village in Milan, or in the columns of Bottoni, which will soon form the atrium of a building in Corso Sempione (Milan). The light that creates reverberations on the walls and the uniqueness of the skylights at the baths

of the forum will later become a central feature in the renowned churches designed by Figini and Pollini.
Thus, the question of the primordial is reborn: the original matrix becomes the inspiring principle and unprecedented origin of "new fables" and new metamorphoses.

Credits

The essay results from a collaboration among the authors in the framework of the Erasmus+ KA220-HED research project *Updating the Grand Tour. Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment*. M.P. Iarossi wrote the initial part on the Polytechnic culture and educational trip, and L. Ferro wrote the parts on Pompei, on the Toolbox of the Milanese Polytechnic students, as well as Towards the Project (Coincidences, The itinerary in the city, Reverbs).
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Special thanks go to C. Santacroce for the graphic reworking of Fig. 2 and M.V. Carosi, C. Forte, M. Saldarini, and G. Tarasco for editing the remaining images.

Notes

[1] This gap might be due to the transfer of the university to its new Lambrate headquarters in 1927, as indicated by the fact that between 1921 and 1927, neither the "Annuario" nor the "Programma" with its "Effemeridi" were published, which regularly reported these initiatives.
[2] The records of the collection, which houses Piero Bottoni's personal photographic archive, are available at: https://www.archiviobottoni.polimi.it/apbdocs/altri-documenti/fotografie-temi-vari.
[3] The *Fondo Taccuini* at APB includes twenty notebooks created by Piero Bottoni between his enrolment at the Regio Politecnico in 1921 and 1933, the year he took part in the IV CIAM Congress.
[4] Archivio Architetto Luigi Figini – AAF Family Archive.
[5] *Taccuino 7*, held at the Archivio del '900, MART, Rovereto, *Fondo Taccuini Pollini* (1925-1926).
[6] During the two-year preparatory period, Bottoni compiled six notebooks (notebook n. 1 and notebook n. 15/19), while thirteen notebooks (n. 2/13) can be attributed to his three years at the *Scuola Speciale* (1923-1926). Notebook n. 14, on the other hand, is entirely dedicated to the postgraduate trip to Greece in 1933.
[7] House of the Tragic Poet Regio VI, ins. 8.3. Here, in the Fauces, is one of the famous mosaics (Cave canem).
[8] Domus of Marcus Lucretius Regio IX, ins. 3.5.
[9] *Domus dei Vettii*, Regio VI, ins. 15.1.
[10] The Figini Private Archive preserves the famous guides to Pompeii and Herculaneum (Maiuri 1960) purchased by Figini and annotated alongside some key elements of his future writings and projects.
Among other things, Maiuri also fascinated for his operational site practices (under his direction there is a significant presence of workers, blacksmiths, carpenters, mosaicists...).
[11] *Domus of Paquius Proculus*, also known as *Cuspius Pansa*, Regio I, ins. 7.1.
[12] *Domus of Loreius Tiburtinus,* also known as *Octavius Quartione* Regio II, ins. 5.2.

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Luisa Ferro. Associate Professor in Architectural and Urban Composition at Politecnico di Milano. PhD in Architectural Design (University of Palermo). Researcher at Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation. Teaching activities at the AUIC School of the Politecnico di Milano. Member of the Board of Lecturers DRACO PhD, Rome La Sapienza and PASAB PhD, University of Bari. Director of the Architecture, Archaeology and Landscape series *Trebisonda* and *Taglio netto* (Araba Fenice editore). Since 2001, she has been carrying out research activities mainly through topics concerning the Relationship between Architectural Design and Archaeology and the Design of Complex Architectures in Ancient Contexts. In particular in the case studies of Athens, Alexandria in Aria/Herat, Kabul, Villa Adriana, Milan, Mantua, Campi Flegrei, Archaeological Park of Pompeii.

Maria Pompeiana Iarossi. Architect and PhD in Composizione architettonica at IUAV of Venice, she is an Associate professor of Representation at the Politecnico di Milano, where is teaching since 1998, also in charge of the international relationships with universities of Valencia, Granada, Belgrano-Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Nacional de México. Her research activity is focused on the representation of the project and new representation systems for describing and communicating architecture, city and landscape. Her publications include: *La cultura dell'abitare a Buenos Aires alle soglie del XX secolo* (2019, with G. D'Amia), *L'architettura del museo. Disegno, modello, progetto* (2018, with M. Caja), *Laboratorio La Boca. Tracce d'Italia a Buenos Aires* (2017), *Ritratti di città in un interno* (2014).

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Francesca Bonfante, Tommaso Brighenti

What They Observe, What They Perceive. A Journey Through the Milan School*

Abstract
The text examines several protagonists of Italian architectural culture, particularly within the Milanese context, for whom the experience of travel – albeit with varying characteristics – has been an act of personal growth and maturation. This experience has profoundly influenced both their built works and, even more so, their theoretical conceptions, which are permeated by a vision of architecture as knowledge and representation of reality. The paper traces an "itinerary of itineraries" through the generations of the so-called School of Milan, from de Finetti, Muzio, and Pagano to Bottoni and Rogers, and culminating with the younger figures of Canella, Rossi, and Aulenti.

Keywords
School of Milan — Journey — Italian Architecture

> We were able to devote ourselves to our art and to our intellectual inclinations, and we were able to mold our private existence with more individual personality. We could live a more cosmopolitan life and the whole world stood open to us. We could travel without a passport and without a permit wherever we pleased. No one questioned us as to our beliefs, as to our origin, race, or religion. I do not deny that we had immeasurably more individual freedom and we not only cherished it but made use of it as well (Zweig 1942, 1943, p. 72).

Thus, Stefan Zweig, a cosmopolitan intellectual, recounts in *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* the Europe where he grew up, studied, traveled, and forged friendships with artists, intellectuals, and politicians. His journey explores Vienna, his hometown, Paris, Berlin, London, and Moscow, spanning half a century of history in a world that appeared stable and secure despite the emergence of nationalist claims. In this world, the mind could freely wander in search of knowledge, a world later disrupted by World War I and the rise of Nazism.

This was the Europe in which the generation of Giuseppe de Finetti (1892-1952), Giovanni Muzio (1893-1982), Giuseppe Pagano Pogatschnig (1896-1945), Piero Bottoni (1903-1973), and Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909-1969) was formed.

It was precisely in Stefan Zweig's Vienna that the young Giuseppe de Finetti, born in Milan to a high-bourgeois family of Friulian origin, undertook his apprenticeship. After two years of architectural studies at the Regio Istituto Tecnico Superiore di Milano and the Accademia di Brera, de Finetti spent time in Berlin and, from 1913 until the outbreak of the First World War, in Vienna, where he completed his education as the only Italian student with the group of young architects gathered around Adolf Loos's

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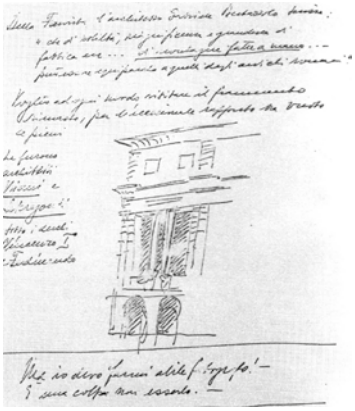

Fig. 1
Giuseppe de Finetti, Notes and sketches, travel drawings in Colorno, 1940. («Parametro», n. 126, May 1984, p. 53).

Fig. 2
Giuseppe de Finetti, Notes and travel sketches in Mantua, 1940. («Parametro», n. 126, May 1984, p. 53).

Fig. 3
Giuseppe de Finetti (on the right) with Adolf Loos and Thelma de Finetti in front of the Casa della Meridiana, 1932. («Parametro», n. 126, May 1984, p. 10).

Fig. 4
Adolf Loos among his students on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, de Finetti is standing behind the sofa. («Parametro», n. 126, May 1984, p. 13).

school.
Richard Neutra, one of the first to be «corrupted by the Viennese Socrates» recalls de Finetti as one of the most devoted students, passionate about nightlife (Neutra 1959, pp. 45-46). The school's curriculum included, every year, study trips to various destinations. In 1915, these included Frankfurt, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Brussels, Ostend, London, Rouen, Paris, Strasbourg, Stuttgart, and Munich[1]. This "journey" combined theory, practice, and direct engagement with architectural works, including those of the master, such as the house on Michaelerplatz and Villa Scheu, examples of Loos's Raumplan. Returning permanently to Milan in 1920, after the war and a brief return to Vienna, de Finetti would combine architectural momentum and theoretical reflection, studying the city and its potential transformations, followed by increasing political engagement.
Direct testimonies of de Finetti's Viennese experience are scarce, but it is certain that Loos and de Finetti met in Prague during the celebration of Loos's sixtieth birthday[2], and again in Milan, where Loos visited the Casa della Meridiana, one of de Finetti's early works[3]. The building, which was inten-

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Fig. 5
Giovanni Muzio in Bassano del Grappa, 1917. (AA.VV., *L'architettura di Giovanni Muzio*, Abitare Segesta, Milan 1994, p. 28).

Fig. 6
Giovanni Muzio portrayed by Mario Sironi on April 8, 1929, during a trip from Barcelona to Genoa. (L. Fiori, M.P. Belski (eds.), *Giovanni Muzio il Palazzo dell'Arte*, Abitare Segesta, Milan 1982, p. 9).

ded to be part of a larger residential complex called "Giardino d'Arcadia," fully expresses de Finetti's architectural exploration of the city, both in its overall design and in its figurative choices. Following Loos's prescription, the lower section, in direct contact with the street, "dominates" the upper section, which is relegated to "functional" purposes (Canella 1981). In a sharp article on Wright, de Finetti recalls Loos as «the last classical and the only classical figure of our age» (de Finetti 1938, p. 55), demonstrating how both the Mitteleuropean lesson and the Lombard neoclassical tradition, exemplified by Piermarini and the 1807 plan, influenced his work, imbued with realism and modernity.

A similar contamination between the Lombard-Venetian tradition and the European context can be found in the much more prolific works of his contemporary Giovanni Muzio, with whom de Finetti shared the experience of the Club degli Urbanisti. In a 1931 article, Muzio praised him for the Casa della Meridiana, describing it as an «extremely intelligent example of the study of the housing problem, developed in the form of overlapping villas» (Muzio, 1931, p. 1110).

Born in Milan and from 1902 a "native" of Bergamo, Muzio began his education at the Facoltà di Ingegneria in Pavia, where he laid the foundations of his interest in Lombard Romanesque architecture through the survey of the sacred monuments of the city, and at the Regio Istituto Tecnico Superiore di Milano, where Gaetano Moretti taught him civil architecture. Here, he forged friendships with artists such as Sironi, Funi, and Boccioni. Like de Finetti, Muzio was involved in the First World War; he was sent to Piedmont, Veneto, and finally to Paris, where he spent his final year as a military member of the Peace Conference. Before returning to Milan, he traveled across Europe. Muzio himself recounts:

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The periods spent in Vicenza, Verona, Bassano, and Friuli left a profound mark on me. The love for Palladio, which was born at that time, is still very much alive and close. My contact with Paris and from there with England and Germany [...] clarified the relationship between us and Europeans, from which I derived a jealous desire for autonomy and a search within the deepest roots of our Italian origins (Muzio, 1982, p. 38).

Between the 1920s and 1930s, Muzio encountered Dutch architecture[4], particularly appreciating Berlage as «the most renowned and the boldest in modernity»[5] as well as the Nordic architecture of Berlin, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Helsinki[6]. In the few theoretical contributions that Muzio wrote and those about his work, the role of Palladio's influence on him has been emphasized. However, it is also important to highlight, alongside the evident connection to Bramante at the Università Cattolica, that his constructivist-figurative exploration was influenced by the *Kunst des Bauens* of Nordic architecture. This influence is sometimes explicitly cited, not in a technical solution-driven manner, but through the mastery in the use of materials.

This is evident in the *Palazzo dell'Arte*, designed as an architecture with «temporary utility value, flexible internal adaptation, and, at the same time, durable constructive and figurative value» (Muzio 1980, p. 40)[7], where klinker brick replaces the traditional brick of Lombard Romanesque basilicas. Thus, the Lombard horizon becomes "contaminated" with the European technical-constructive culture, allowing the expressionist component to prevail over the classicist one. In his university teaching, Muzio avoided architecture journals and histories in favor of "self-teaching," encouraging students to travel and discover architecture to study and incorporate into their personal theoretical reference corpus. The power of direct experience, gained through his travels among Palladio, Paris, and Northern Europe, was repurposed in the spring seminar at the conclusion of the teaching cycle, as recalled by Leonardo Fiori (1988, p. 180), his long-time assistant at the Faculty of Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. A bus was rented, and all would board to visit a new city, after which Muzio, as the guide, would meticulously describe everything observed.

Figg. 7 a-b
Giuseppe Pagano during his trip to Scandinavia (1939) and in Greek costume (1941). («Casabella-Costruzioni», nos. 195–198, 1946, pp. 5–6).

A few years younger, Giuseppe Pagano Pogatschnig, from Parenzo in Istria, began his high school studies in Capodistria and Trieste, a city he «felt belonged to the Europe of renewal» (Apih 1988, p. 96), and whose pre-war cosmopolitan atmosphere exerted "inevitable influences" on the young Giuseppe, as Persico (1934) stated in *Punto ed a Capo per l'Architettura*, supporting the idea that the new Italian architecture had arisen as a suggestion from abroad. After the troubled years of war (Murello 2021; De Seta 1976), Pagano attended the Politecnico di Torino, another city deeply connected to European cultural events, where the artistic life was dominated by figures like Lionello Venturi, Edoardo Persico, and Felice Casorati. An expression of Dalmatian irredentism and with a Mitteleuropean background, Pagano befriended figures from the Triveneto region who had come to Turin after World War I: architects such as Ettore Sottsass Sr., Umberto Cuzzi, and Ottorino Aloisio, as well as artists like Arturo Martini and Luigi Spazzapan.

He moved to Milan in 1931, where he continued his professional activity and began his long tenure as the director of «Casabella». The most significant journey Pagano undertook was within Italy in 1935 to document rural architecture for an exhibition he organized with Guarniero Daniel at the 1936 VI Triennale in Milan.

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Figg. 8 a-b-c
Giuseppe Pagano, photographs of the Acropolis in Athens, 1941. (Cesare De Seta, *Giuseppe Pagano fotografo*, Electa, Milan 1979, pp. 58–61).

Figg. 9 a-b
Giuseppe Pagano, photographs of the outskirts of Hamburg and the port of Oslo. (Cesare De Seta, *Giuseppe Pagano fotografo*, Electa, Milan 1979, p. 83).

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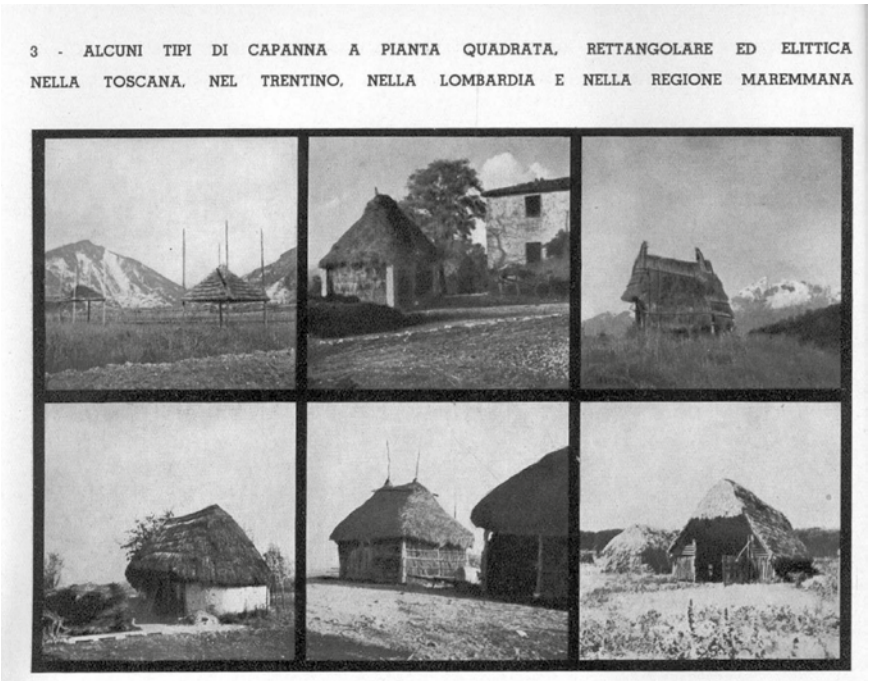
Fig. 10
Gallery of the Rural Architecture Exhibition at the 6th Triennale di Milano, 1936. (Giuseppe Pagano and Guarniero Daniel, *Architettura rurale italiana*, Quaderni delle Triennale, Hoepli, Milan, 1936, p. 5).

Figg. 11 a-b
Pages from the book Architettura rurale italiana, 1936. (Giuseppe Pagano and Guarniero Daniel, *Architettura rurale italiana*, Quaderni delle Triennale, Hoepli, Milan, 1936, pp. 9–10).

di una struttura in legno inizialmente logica e comprensibile. Conosciamo, più per intuizione che per esperienza, che una forma naturalmente estetica nella architettura rappresentativa è stata inizialmente suggerita dalla risoluzione di una necessità tecnica o funzionale. Ma i rapporti tra l'ultimo anello della catena e quello iniziale spesso ci sfuggono perchè crediamo morte e disperse nella preistoria quelle testimonianze edilizie intermedie che han servito da lievito alla rappresentazione aulica. Pur conoscendo che la sopravvivenza di una forma è più forte della sua stessa ragione pratica, e che una abitudine formale, originata da un bisogno ben circostanziato e ripetuto, diventa abitudine estetica o gergo de- 9



corativo o inerzia tradizionale quando è cessato lo stimolo di quel bisogno, la maggioranza si rifiuta di sottoporre l'architettura stilistica a questa indagine. Ma la reazione al formalismo accademico dell'ottocento e l'indagine obbiettiva e realistica che anima il mondo moderno come una imperativa opposizione della ragione contro la rettorica dei tabù decorativi; la stessa abitudine morale dell'architetto contemporaneo di sottoporre la propria fantasia artistica alle leggi della utilità, della tecnica, dell'economia senza tuttavia rinnegare il fine estetico della sua fatica; lo stesso desiderio di voler conoscere e dimostrare come i
10 rapporti tra utilità, tecnica, forma ed estetica non sieno invenzioni recenti, ma soltanto re-

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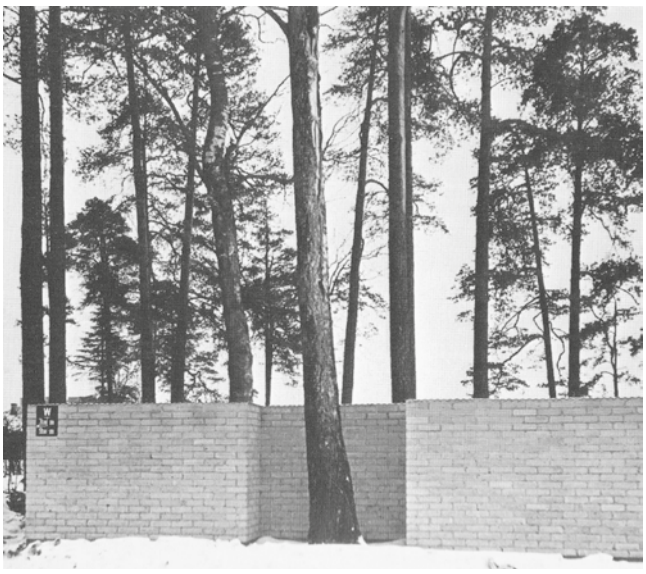

Figg. 12 a-b
Giuseppe Pagano, photographs of the Aalto House, Helsinki, 1939. (Cesare De Seta, *Giuseppe Pagano fotografo*, Electa, Milan 1979, p. 38).

> I take pleasure in roaming across Italy to uncover new photographic and cinematic documents to add to my archive; to discover new aspects of a city, a region, a countryside, a landscape, or a work of art. In this way, I have gradually built my own vocabulary of images that speak of Italy in my own way and for me. […] An Italy of few words, made of landscapes rich in inexhaustible plastic imagination: the provincial and rugged Italy, which nourishes my modern temperament far more than the academies and compromises of the big cities (Pagano 1938, pp. 401-402).

In 1931, Pagano, alongside Gino Levi Montalcini, in the Villa Colli in Rivara, Canavese, had already anticipated the "rural" elements marking a revival of local tradition, explored in their research on rural houses (Persico 1931). The interest in rural architecture runs parallel to his fascination with "civic" ancient architecture, in which he identifies early traces of modern architecture, characterized by clarity, simplicity, and geometry, features also found in the insulae dwellings of Pompeii, true "machines for living" (Pagano 1931). This journey marked the beginning of a passion, cultivated over the years, for understanding places through the photographic lens. The archive catalogued by Pagano (De Seta 1979) includes images, mainly focused on the Italian context, but also a series of photographs from a 1939 trip to the Nordic countries (Berlin, Helsinki, Oslo, and landscape photography). During this trip, Pagano had been invited to give a series of lectures and met Alvar Aalto; it was an opportunity to appreciate in person the places and architectures he had published in «Casabella» since the early days of his editorship, aimed to promote decisively and clearly modern Italian architecture and European artistic life (Pagano 1932). His archive also includes a photographic report from the war in Albania and Greece, where he served as the commander of the 17th Infantry Regiment. Beyond those displayed at the Triennale, only a few photographs were published in «Casabella», «Domus», «Natura», «Fotografia», «Tempo illustrato», and «Cinema».
The Nordic journey, which exposed him to the cities and architecture of countries where the Modern Movement had matured most widely, perhaps marks the beginning of his crisis and the self-critical process toward fascism. This is reflected in his observations directed at Piacentini concerning the progress of the urban planning for the Rome World's Fair, a project in which he had been involved since 1937 alongside Piacentini, Piccinato, Rossi, and Vietti (Pagano 1938, 1940). At the peak of the crisis, in March

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Fig. 13
Piero Bottoni, Detail of the Parthenon frieze, sketch from a study notebook, pencil on paper, 19.7x14 cm. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (eds.), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 20).

Fig. 14
Piero Bottoni, Details of the base of the dome of the church of San Michele in Pavia, sketches from a study notebook, pencil and watercolor on paper, 20x16 cm. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (eds.), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 33).

1943, he published in «Casabella» a report by Alvar Aalto on the reconstruction in Finland, expressing hope that Aalto's ideas could also keep alive the dream of a truly better future in Italy (Pagano 1943). This would lead to his resignation from the Fascist Party and his joining the Resistance.

Piero Bottoni, younger than de Finetti, Muzio, and Pagano, did not experience the First World War in the same military capacity as his older colleagues. However, as a very young student and boy scout, he assisted his mother, who was of Jewish descent, in her work as a Red Cross volunteer. In Milan, he attended the Scuola degli architetti civili del Politecnico in the same years as Figini, Pollini, Rava, and Terragni, with Albini, Palanti, and Pica joining in 1924. Regarding his education, Bottoni attributes the birth of modern architecture in Italy to Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*, which was introduced to him by Terragni at the school of architecture. «We knew Gropius and had become his great admirers and students; but the real "nurse" was Le Corbusier» he recalls. Similarly, he acknowledges the role of Pier Maria Bardi in guiding the entire debate on modern architecture in Italy between 1929 and 1931, the period of formation, preparation, and the explosion of the movement[8]. A central figure, like Pagano, in the Italian rationalist experience, Bottoni dedicated his life to affirming and spreading the principles of modern architecture, «understood not as a stylistic repertoire but as an intellectual discipline, a "tendency" that imposed precise behavioral norms on its adherents, a way of life even before it was an architectural style» (Portoghesi 1973, p. 6) (TdA).

Bottoni's travels were inextricably linked to his participation in the CIAM from the early years after graduation. Together with Terragni, representing the Milanese group of CIRPAC he participated in the Frankfurt Congress and between 1931 and 1932, stayed in Obersel am Taunus near Frankfurt and then in Paris. During his stay in Germany, he visited the German Architecture Exhibition, inaugurated with the International Exhibition of Urban Architecture and Housing Systems. The rationalisation of interior spaces, adopted on an industrial scale in Frankfurt in the famous kitchen designed by Grete Schütte Lihotzky, was one of the topics of his early writings, alongside issues concerning the neighborhood and social housing, themes Bottoni would address throughout his career. These issues would later converge between Bottoni and Pagano, such as in their shared idea of promoting the "Triennale Quarter" – a permanent experimental neighborhood outside Parco Sempione that was to be built for the 6th Triennale, the first in Muzio's new building, of which Pagano was the main instigator. At the 4th CIAM in Athens, Bottoni was tasked with presenting the urban analysis of the Italian group regarding Genoa, Verona, Littoria, and Rome. He provided an immediate report on it:

> A trip to Greece in 1933 is a pilgrimage of ritual and devotion for a rationalist architect. [...] Upon arrival at the port of Piraeus, already from the gulf, under the blinding sun, against the backdrop of these calcified lands, the Acropolis looms: still about twenty kilometers away, it already speaks with its precise language. [...] One arrives in Greece mostly ignorant of the life of its modern people. [...] On the contrary, it is necessary to consider in modern Greece the inexhaustible value of tradition and to observe at the root of even the most current expressions of the life of its people, particularly in its architectural forms, the essence of ancient thought that is renewed (Bottoni 1933, p. 374) [TdA].

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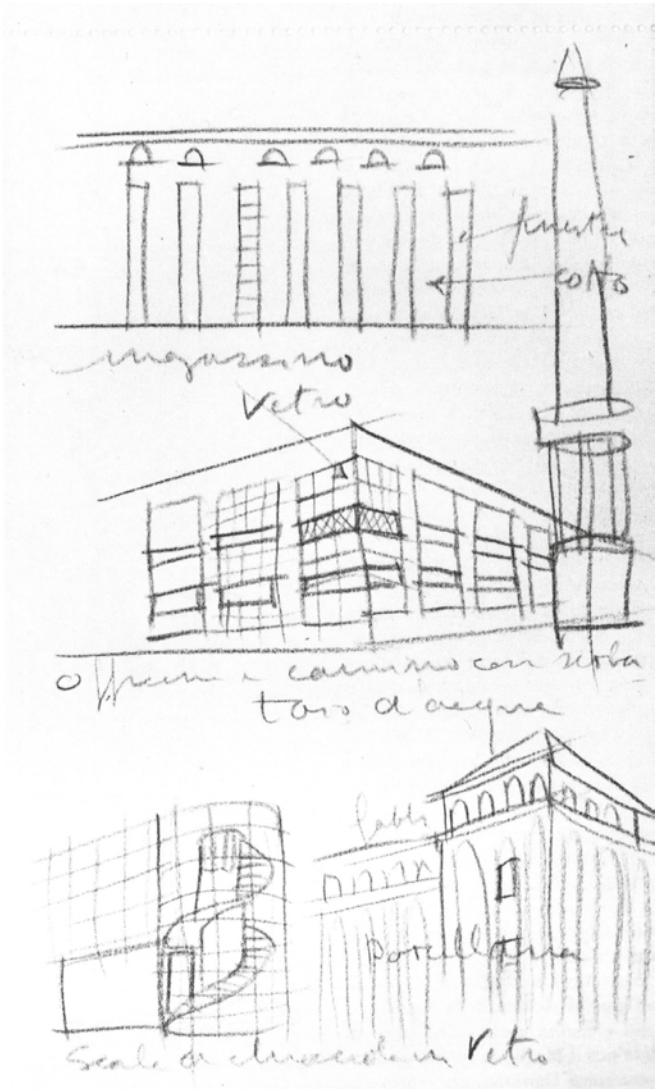

Figg. 15 a-b
Piero Bottoni, Sketches of modern architecture from a study notebook, pencil on paper, 16.8x8.7 cm. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (eds.), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 38).

Fig. 16
Piero Bottoni on the ship Patris II presenting his studies on Verona at the 4th CIAM, 1933. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (eds.), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 85).

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Fig. 17
Students and teachers of the School of Civil Architects of the Royal Polytechnic of Milan on a study trip to Naples, July 1926. Bottoni is second from the right in the second row, between L. Figini and G. Ulrich. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (eds.), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 23).

Fig. 18
Piero Bottoni (in the foreground) with Le Corbusier, Saporta, Terragni and Renata Pollini on the ship Patris II, 4th CIAM, 1933. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (eds.), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 50).

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Fig. 19
The meeting of the Italian CIAM Group on April 30, 1954, in a drawing by Piero Bottoni. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (eds.), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 415).

Years later, he would recall that the Athens Charter was the result of the work of the entire European avant-garde of modern architecture aboard the *Patris II*, so that «if it had sunk, it would have been a real disaster! Luckily, it floated and arrived in Greece» (Bottoni 1969, p. 10). During those same years, Bottoni taught a supplementary course on the Urban Problems of Milan as a volunteer assistant to Giovanni Muzio, who was in charge of Urban Planning at the Faculty of Architecture. The same would occur after the war when, as a free lecturer, Muzio called him to teach a series of lessons on "Inchiesta e critica sulla città di Milano" (Investigation and critique of the city of Milan)[9]. This highlights the esteem of the "Novecentista" (early 20th century Italian art movement) toward the "rationalist" approach.

As a delegate of CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architecture), Bottoni continued to collaborate with European architects and critics, many of whom had emigrated to America. He had hoped to travel to the United States in 1959 with other Italian architects, but his access was denied due to his membership in the Italian Communist Party, to which he had been enrolled since 1944. He addressed the architects departing for New York with some regret:

> In a few hours, the roar of the engines will mark the beginning of your much-anticipated journey, for which you have been preparing for days or, almost, months. The care for your spiritual luggage has not been less than for your physical luggage. […] Each of you, who still does not know America, will finally sit in the comfortable armchair of the plane and take stock of your knowledge, imagining, with your imagination, the phases of your journey and the country that awaits you. […] Your joy today is the prospect of tomorrow, knowing that tomorrow you will discover the truth about this fabulous country, now the mirage of centuries and generations. […] Greet my American friends for me, and greet the Statue of Liberty (Bottoni 1959, pp. 378-379, 382) [TdA].

Fig. 20
Piero Bottoni with Walter Gropius and Ernesto N. Rogers (back to the camera) at the 7th CIAM, Bergamo, July 1949. (G. Consonni, L. Meneghetti, G. Tonon (ed. by), *Piero Bottoni opera completa*, Fabbri Editori, Milan 1990, p. 439).

A few years younger, Ernesto Nathan Rogers was born in Trieste like Pagano, to an Italian mother and an English father, in a city imbued with a cosmopolitan spirit, open to dialogue with diverse cultural traditions and a crossroads of European cultures. Therefore, his experience as a traveler is intrinsically linked to his origin. Although Rogers traveled more than anyone, he never spoke directly about the role of travel: «Photographing

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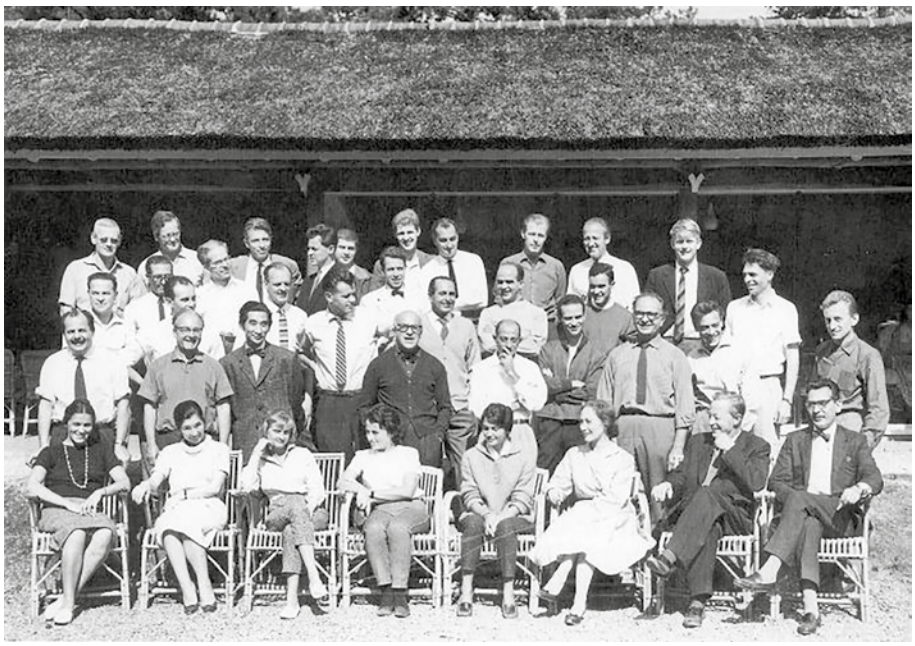

Fig. 21
Participants at the 1959 CIAM in Otterlo.

architecture is almost impossible», he wrote in an article for «Casabella-Continuità» in memory of Werner Bischof, adding, «The deep reasons for this difficulty can be found in the very essence of the architectural phenomenon, which, although realised in precise spatial determination, cannot be understood unless one experiences its events in the live succession of moments that continuously alter its relationship with us» (Rogers 1955, Tav. I). The idea of travel in Rogers' work is intrinsically linked to a dynamic of loss and return, much like Ulysses' journey, where the path is not linear, but one scattered with losses and discoveries. «...The relationship between space and time, as we experience it while traveling, still has something illusory about it, and it is also for this reason that every time we return from a journey, we never know with certainty if we have truly been away» wrote Sebald (2002, p. 19) in his famous novel *Austerlitz*. This tension between space and time in Rogers' work translates into a creative process capable of recomposing fragments of memory and meaning, an exercise of impression and interpretation that releases snapshots of memory. A journey, at times restless, of one who, exhausted, feels they have returned to the starting point:

> Here I am, but I don't even notice having made the journey, because you kept holding me back as if clinging to the starting bank. I have the impression, due to inexplicable fatigue, that I am living a borrowed life, in a rented body, one that others have already worn out and consumed who knows where (Rogers 1938, 2000, p. 66).

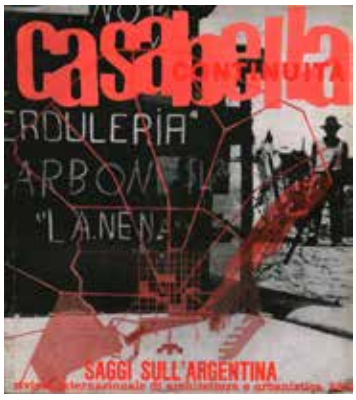

Fig. 22
Cover of the issue dedicated to Argentina of «Casabella-Continuità», no. 285, March 1964.

Rogers has been traveling since his youth, discovering the world around him:

> The Dalmatian landscape you pass through to go from Split to Trogir immediately reminds me of the Karst, with its barren rocks and dolines; but soon I see the gnarled, squat trunks of olive trees emerging from the stones, and the feeling of wild pride and suffering that emanates from this land penetrates me (Rogers 1930, 2010, p. 86).

Then there are the study trips across Europe he undertook right after graduating from the Politecnico di Milano, where he visited Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and encountered the works of the Modern Movement and the great masters. In 1935, he became a member of the CIAM, gradually taking on

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Fig. 23
Ernesto N. Rogers, Bus being pushed in Córdoba, 1948. (Marina Peressutti Archive).

more important roles that would lead him to travel the world, especially after the war[10]. In Rogers, who was of Jewish descent, there is also the tragedy of travel after the enactment of the fascist racial laws; forced to leave Italy, he sought refuge in Switzerland and then in England, where he lived until the end of the Second World War. The memory of Guido Canella is moving. He first met Rogers as a child in September 1943 at Cadegliano, on the Swiss border, at the home of family friends gathered to decide what to do after the armistice:

> Rogers arrived at sunset in an unusual outfit (if I remember correctly: a shoulder bag, military pants, knee socks instead of boots, a blue short-sleeved shirt, like Lacoste), with his innate and personal elegance; but I remember him especially for his very determined attitude, somewhat in contradiction with his person, who – as happens to all sensitive and intelligent intellectuals – seemed to be a few years older than he actually was (Canella 1988, p. 233).

After the war, upon returning to Italy, Rogers' travels continued to be a tool of work and inspiration. In addition to his participation in the CIAM, his commitment to the reconstruction of the country led him to visit many cities to study different intervention strategies; from Europe, important trips took him to the United States and Latin America. In the United States, he visited the works of architects like Frank Lloyd Wright:

> When I arrived at Taliesin in Arizona, I was caught up in the drama of things as if everything, the rocks, the diabolical desert plants, the volcanic stones of the construction, were there to stir my blood and make it new. Yet there was no coincidence: the rust, the purple, the pink, the indigo of the colossal boulders were placed and oriented on the rough surface, wisely by a mosaic artist; even nature, in relation to the work, could seem artfully crafted, so much so that the rocky mountains, rising up to eight hundred meters from the wild land, appeared like the background of a Japanese garden (Rogers 1959, p. 3).

In Latin America, he was struck by the cultural and creative vitality, by the sense of "grandeur" of the vast prairies, establishing relationships with painters, sculptors, poets, and especially architects like Amancio Williams,

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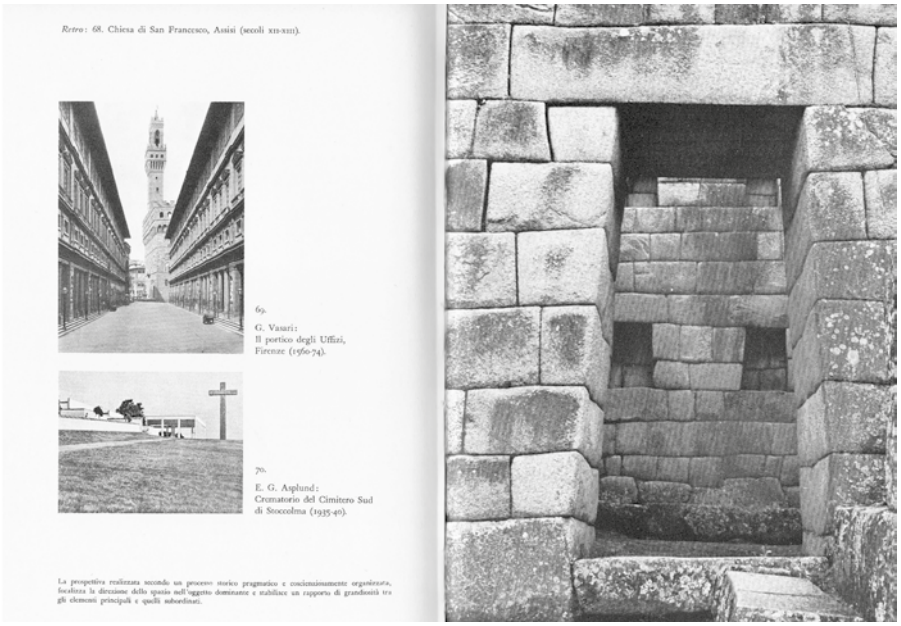

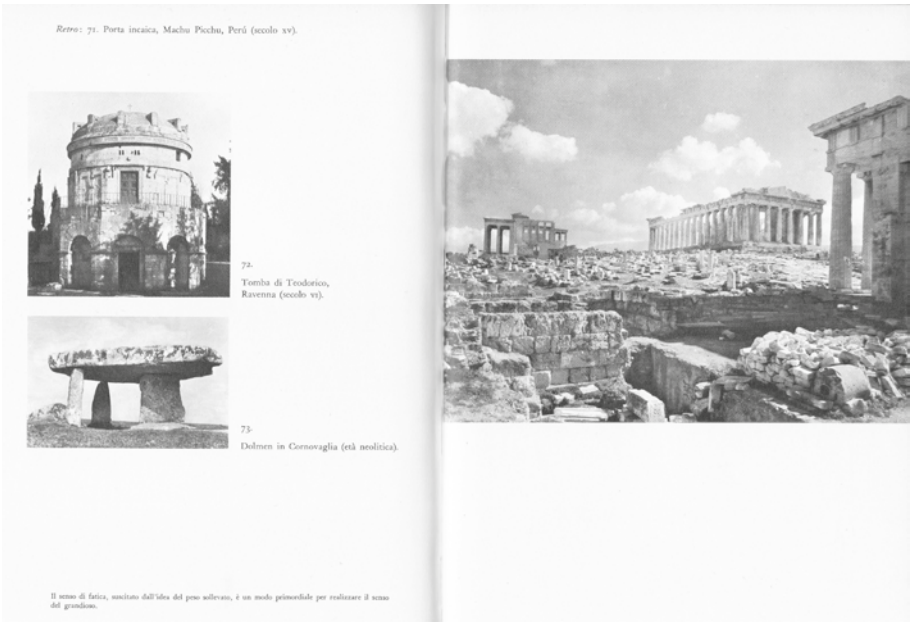

Figg. 24 a-b
Two pages from the book Ernesto N. Rogers, *Esperienza dell'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1958.

Valerio Peluffo, and many others:

I was in Argentina in 1948, called by the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Tucuman, which, at that time, was opposing the Peronist regime as much as it could. […] And there circulated, right on the slopes of the wonderfully violet and coral-colored mountains, an atmosphere full of hopes like that carried by the poor Italian emigrant (Rogers 1964, p. 3).

Trying to conclude this journey of itineraries, we are guided by Rogers himself through the direction of the magazine «Casabella», his «Casabella-Continuità», where he gathered around him a group of young architects representing the Italian architecture that was renewing itself after the war. They immediately adopted a sensitivity to travel, understood as a tool for knowledge and investigation of a constantly changing reality, a path of research and reflection aimed at investigating the "sense of history" and its meaning, as expressed so well in the «knowing how to read, to understand what is written»[11]. For this generation, travel becomes a means to question reality, a poetic act, a process of mediation between the past and

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Fig. 25
A photo from Revolution Square towards the famous "camelback" that leads to Red Square, published in the issue dedicated to the USSR of «Casabella-Continuità», no. 262, April 1962. The published photos, except those from bibliographic sources, are attributed to M. Achilli, S. Asti, G. Aulenti, G. Canella.

Fig. 26
Cover of the issue dedicated to the USSR of «Casabella-Continuità», no. 262, April 1962.

the present, between the personal and the collective, between reality and imagination, but also a political, ideological, and militant act.
The new generation of the Milanese school, born at the crossroads of the 1930s, did not produce travel drawings but observations made of words, beyond the appearance of the image, to bring everything back to an essential world and thus to the project. Among the many "pilgrimages", the first trip to Russia by Guido Canella is memorable, which he himself defined as a "contextual interpretation" journey; completed in 1961 with a delegation from the College of Milan Collegio degli Architetti di Milano led by Gio Ponti, with friends Achilli, Asti, Aulenti, and Cagna:

> The first stop was in Budapest, where I managed to buy a collection of the magazine «Das Neue Frankfurt». That unforgettable trip then continued to Kiev, Moscow, and Leningrad. In Moscow, when we requested […] to be relieved of our official duties so that we could visit the remaining architecture of Constructivism, Gio Ponti generously made one of his buses available, squeezing the other travelers into the other bus (Canella 2007, p. 7) [TdA].

The results of this experience were collected in the famous Issue of «Casabella-Continuità» dedicated to the USSR, published a year later (AA. VV. 1962), which contains the article "Attesa per l'architettura sovietica" (Canella 1962), where Canella's anticipation, as Jean-Louis Cohen wrote, corresponds to two absolutely defined positions:

> […] that of Kopp, essentially interested in the utopian dimension of Russian avant-garde, its project to transform daily life; and the opposite one, formulated by the «Casabella» colleague Aldo Rossi, who, with a polemical focus, consecrates the architecture of socialist realism, since 1954 flowed – China included – into the Soviet bloc (Cohen 2014, pp. 422-423).

Years earlier, Aldo Rossi, a friend of Canella, had also traveled to Russia[12]:

> The attention to socialist realism helped me free myself from all the petty bourgeois culture of modern architecture: I preferred the alternative of Moscow's great streets, the sweet and provocative architecture of the subway and the university on Lenin's hills. I saw sentiment mixed with the will to build a new world […]. I became aware of architecture together with the popular pride of those showing me schools and houses, Moscow students, the Don peasants (Rossi 1990, pp. 45-46).

For Canella, travel would become a means of questioning reality, a form of

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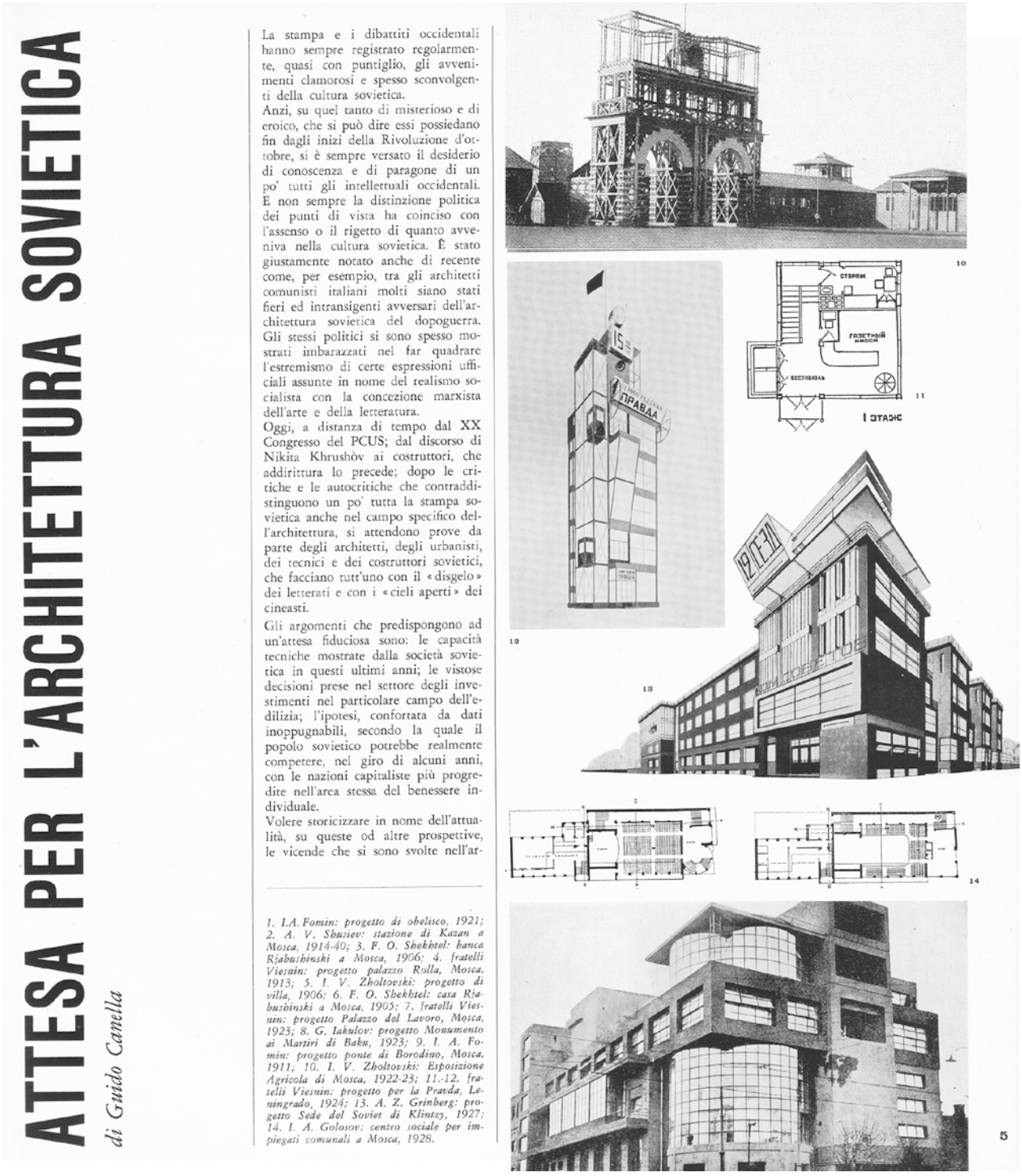

ATTESA PER L'ARCHITETTURA SOVIETICA

di Guido Canella

La stampa e i dibattiti occidentali hanno sempre registrato regolarmente, quasi con puntiglio, gli avvenimenti clamorosi e spesso sconvolgenti della cultura sovietica.
Anzi, su quel tanto di misterioso e di eroico, che si può dire essi possiedano fin dagli inizi della Rivoluzione d'ottobre, si è sempre versato il desiderio di conoscenza e di paragone di un po' tutti gli intellettuali occidentali. E non sempre la distinzione politica dei punti di vista ha coinciso con l'assenso o il rigetto di quanto avveniva nella cultura sovietica. È stato giustamente notato anche di recente come, per esempio, tra gli architetti comunisti italiani molti siano stati fieri ed intransigenti avversari dell'architettura sovietica del dopoguerra. Gli stessi politici si sono spesso mostrati imbarazzati nel far quadrare l'estremismo di certe espressioni ufficiali assunte in nome del realismo socialista con la concezione marxista dell'arte e della letteratura.
Oggi, a distanza di tempo dal XX Congresso del PCUS; dal discorso di Nikita Khrushòv ai costruttori, che addirittura lo precede; dopo le critiche e le autocritiche che contraddistinguono un po' tutta la stampa sovietica anche nel campo specifico dell'architettura, si attendono prove da parte degli architetti, degli urbanisti, dei tecnici e dei costruttori sovietici, che facciano tutt'uno con il «disgelo» dei letterati e con i «cieli aperti» dei cineasti.
Gli argomenti che predispongono ad un'attesa fiduciosa sono: le capacità tecniche mostrate dalla società sovietica in questi ultimi anni; le vistose decisioni prese nel settore degli investimenti nel particolare campo dell'edilizia; l'ipotesi, confortata da dati inoppugnabili, secondo la quale il popolo sovietico potrebbe realmente competere, nel giro di alcuni anni, con le nazioni capitaliste più progredite nell'area stessa del benessere individuale.
Volere storicizzare in nome dell'attualità, su queste od altre prospettive, le vicende che si sono svolte nell'ar-

1. I.A. Fomin: progetto di obelisco, 1921; 2. A. V. Shusiev: stazione di Kazan a Mosca, 1914-40; 3. F. O. Shekhtel: banca Riabushinski a Mosca, 1906; 4. fratelli Viesnin: progetto palazzo Rolla, Mosca, 1913; 5. I. V. Zholtovski: progetto di villa, 1906; 6. F. O. Shekhtel: casa Riabushinski a Mosca, 1905; 7. fratelli Viesnin: progetto Palazzo del Lavoro, Mosca, 1923; 8. G. Iakulov: progetto Monumento ai Martiri di Baku, 1923; 9. I. A. Fomin: progetto ponte di Borodino, Mosca, 1911; 10. I. V. Zholtovski: Esposizione Agricola di Mosca, 1922-23; 11.-12. fratelli Viesnin: progetto per la Pravda, Leningrado, 1924; 13. A. Z. Grinberg: progetto Sede del Soviet di Klintzy, 1927; 14. I. A. Golosov: centro sociale per impiegati comunali a Mosca, 1928.

Fig. 27
Guido Canella, "Awaiting Soviet Architecture". Page from «Casabella-Continuità», n. 262, April 1962, p. 5.

research and investigation into architectures that normally escape analytical rationality, where memory becomes a design tool capable of recomposing both structural and historical facts into a coherent and personal vision[13]. For Rossi, however, travel would become an intimate process of mediation, an opportunity for theoretical reflection to give shape to symbolic figures that would transcend the simple experience of physical movement; a way of probing the territories of individual and collective consciousness in a solipsistic, laconic, solitary, individual, autobiographical dimension. For Rossi, travel thus assumes a mnemonic, almost dreamlike dimension, a *déjà vu* (Gubler 2014, p. 156) that opens to the lesson of the type, a narrative device that:

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Figg. 28 a-b-c
Gae Aulenti, trip to China, 1974.
Gae Aulenti Archive.

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Fig. 29
Gae Aulenti, trip to China, 1974. Gae Aulenti Archive.

evades the space and time actually traveled in an attempt to find something that during the journey seems to have been lost or unfairly taken away. The territory is that of consciousness, both the individual consciousness of the artist and the collective consciousness of the public, while the work, through the reversal produced by rhetorical artifice, becomes the traveling subject suddenly estranged from the territory it traverses (Fera 1991, p. 113).

To this generation of architects, perhaps among the last "romantic travelers", undoubtedly belongs Gae Aulenti, part of the group associated with Rogers' «Casabella», an indefatigable traveler since the early postwar years, whose gaze observed the cities during the reconstruction years, bringing her, as she herself would say, to understand architecture as «a useful profession».

Aulenti traveled to satisfy her curiosity, to observe the world, not just to undertake a cultural pilgrimage, but a journey whose purpose was to fulfill a personal dream born from an intuition. Observation becomes a methodological act in which the observed object returns or reflects the culture and knowledge of the observer; not by chance, her most interesting trips were not strictly work-related, but those "special moments" she allowed herself to cultivate her interests and deepen new knowledge, «true study trips, observation, and analysis» (Artioli 2023, p. 8), for personal and formative growth.

As Nina Artioli recalls, Gae Aulenti, since the years when she was a young university assistant, traveled to Russia, Mexico, the United States, but also to Egypt, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Jordan, Latin America, and then to China in 1974, as recently documented in the publication that collects the photographs she took[14]. The images testify to her personal investigation aimed at exploring a country then far from Western culture, the years of

the Cultural Revolution observed by this generation with a wise curiosity, free from preconceptions:

The interior I describe is in the Kun Jian workers' district in Shanghai, which was built in 1952; the foreign visitor gradually realizes that it is presented as testimony of its political level, not as a technical exploration, which will instead be dedicated to newer or under-construction neighborhoods (Aulenti 1974, 2023, p. 13).

*Regarding the definition of the Milan School, reference is made to the lecture given by Guido Canella during the course *Teorie della Progettazione Architettonica* (Theories of Architectural Design), taught by Antonio Monestiroli with Ilario Boniello in the academic year 2006-2007 at the Politecnico di Milano. The lecture, revised by the author, was transcribed and published in *Canella G. (2010), A proposito della scuola di Milano*. I. Boniello and Ge. Canella (eds.), Hoepli, Milan.

Notes

[1] See Adolf Loos-Bauschule, Architektenlexikon Wien 1770-1945, Architekturzentrum Wien. [online] Available at: <https://past.azw.at/page.php?node_id=172> [Last access 10 February 2025].
[2] The party took place in Prague on 10 December 1930 (De Benedetti 2009).
[3] Loos visited de Finetti in 1931 on a trip from Pilsen to France. See Ibidem.
[4] Giuseppe de Finetti participated in the International Congress of Architects held in the Netherlands in August 1927, in Amsterdam and The Hague.
[5] See Letter from Giovanni Muzio to Ugo Ojetti, dated August 10, 1927, Ojetti Archive, Gnam, Rome.
[6] Which is mentioned in the letter sent to Ugo Ojetti on August 7, 1931, Ojetti Archive, Gnam, Rome.
[7] Text of the meeting held on May 3, 1979, at the Institute of Architectural Composition of the Faculty of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano, attended by, in addition to Muzio, Antonio Acuto, Guido Canella, Leonardo Fiori, and Gian Paolo Valenti.
[8] See Bottoni P. (1969) – "Intervento". L'architettura, 1, year XV, May, 9-10. The issue is dedicated to the proceedings of the conference *L'eredità di Terragni e l'architettura italiana 1943-1968*, Como, September 14-15, 1968.
[9] In the academic years 1936-37 and 1937-38, as a voluntary assistant to Giovanni Muzio, he taught the supplementary course *Problemi urbanistici di Milano*. In 1951, he obtained the habilitation in Urban Planning. From the academic year 1952-53 to 1955-56, as a free lecturer, he delivered the course titled *Inchiesta e critica sulla città di Milano*, invited by Muzio.
[10] Among his many activities, it is important to note that in 1947 Rogers assumed the role of vice president of the Permanent International Commission for the Reform of Architectural Education, chaired by Gropius. From 1952 to 1957, he directed the CIAM Summer Schools alongside Albini, De Carlo, Gardella, and Samonà.
[11] See Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *Il senso della storia*, Lecture given at the Course on the History of Modern Architecture. Politecnico di Milano, A.A. 1964/1965. Published posthumously in Id., *Il senso della storia*. Unicopli, Milan, 1999.
[12] In 1955, Rossi became a delegate at the UIS (International Union of Students) Congress in Rome. He then moved to Prague and later to the Soviet Union for a period of study and cultural exchanges.
[13] He particularly recalls the teaching and research experience, as well as the related trips with students and collaborators in Calabria, carried out during the two-year period between 1967 and 1969, working on the theme of the University of Calabria (Canella; D'Angiolini 1975).
[14] See the book that collects the photographs from Gae Aulenti's trip to China, posthumously published in Aulenti, G. (2023).

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Francesca Bonfante (Milan, 1957), PhD., is a Full Professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering (DABC) at Politecnico di Milano. She teaches architectural design and conducts research focusing on the relationship between architecture and the city, with particular attention to public buildings.

Tommaso Brighenti (Parma, 1985), PhD., is an architect and researcher in Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering (DABC) at Politecnico di Milano. He is involved in teaching and research at Politecnico di Milano, where he lectures in architectural design. He is Editor-in-Chief of FAMagazine – Research and Projects on Architecture and the City and author of several scientific publications in books and journals, notably: T. Brighenti, *Pedagogie architettoniche. Scuole, didattica, progetto*. Accademia University Press, Turin, 2018.

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Liene Jākobsone

Restricted Grand Tours. Architects' Experiences in the Soviet Periphery

Abstract
This paper reports on the experiences of architects in the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia. Drawing on archival documents from the local Union of Architects, as well as interviews with architects who were professionally active during the Soviet period in Latvia, it provides a comprehensive overview of the daily routines and travels of Latvian architects at the time. Although they were rivals, the Soviet Union and the Western world were eager to follow each other's developments in order to remain mutually competitive. However, the interests and perceptions of architects on both sides of the Iron Curtain were quite different. Such were also their professional lives and travel experiences. Communist ideology played a crucial role in how architecture was approached in the Soviet Union. Limited access to information was compensated for by other sources of inspiration, leading to the peculiar practice of tracing images from foreign architecture magazines to preserve valuable data for future reference.

Keywords
Soviet architecture — Communist ideology — Soviet periphery — Traveling

From the 1950s onwards, travel became increasingly accessible and popular in Western Europe, for both tourism and business reasons. Meanwhile, behind the Iron Curtain, there was an entirely different world, from which only a select few could travel abroad. This world – the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – was conceived as an economically, ideologically and geographically disconnected political entity. However, albeit extremely limited, there was exchange between the who worlds. To promote a better understanding about how this exchange took place, this paper discusses the experiences of architects in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, which existed in the territory of Latvia from 1940 to 1941 and from 1944 to 1990, after its annexation to the USSR. It aims to contribute to scholarly research on the Soviet period by focusing on its periphery – an area that is generally less studied. The paper challenges the assumption that the Soviet Union was a culturally homogeneous territory. It provides insights into the Baltic region, which was well connected to Western Europe and culturally and economically thriving until Second World War, when it was occupied by the USSR and fell into stagnation.

For this paper, original material from the Latvian State archive was consulted. This includes documentation of the congresses of the Architects' Union of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (Latvian SSR) throughout the Soviet period, namely, years 1948, 1951, 1955, 1959, 1962, 1965, 1969, 1974, 1979 and 1989. (Fig. 1) Furthermore, several interviews have been conducted in 2024 with architects who have been professionally active during the period of Latvian SSR and have had an influential role in the local architecture scene.

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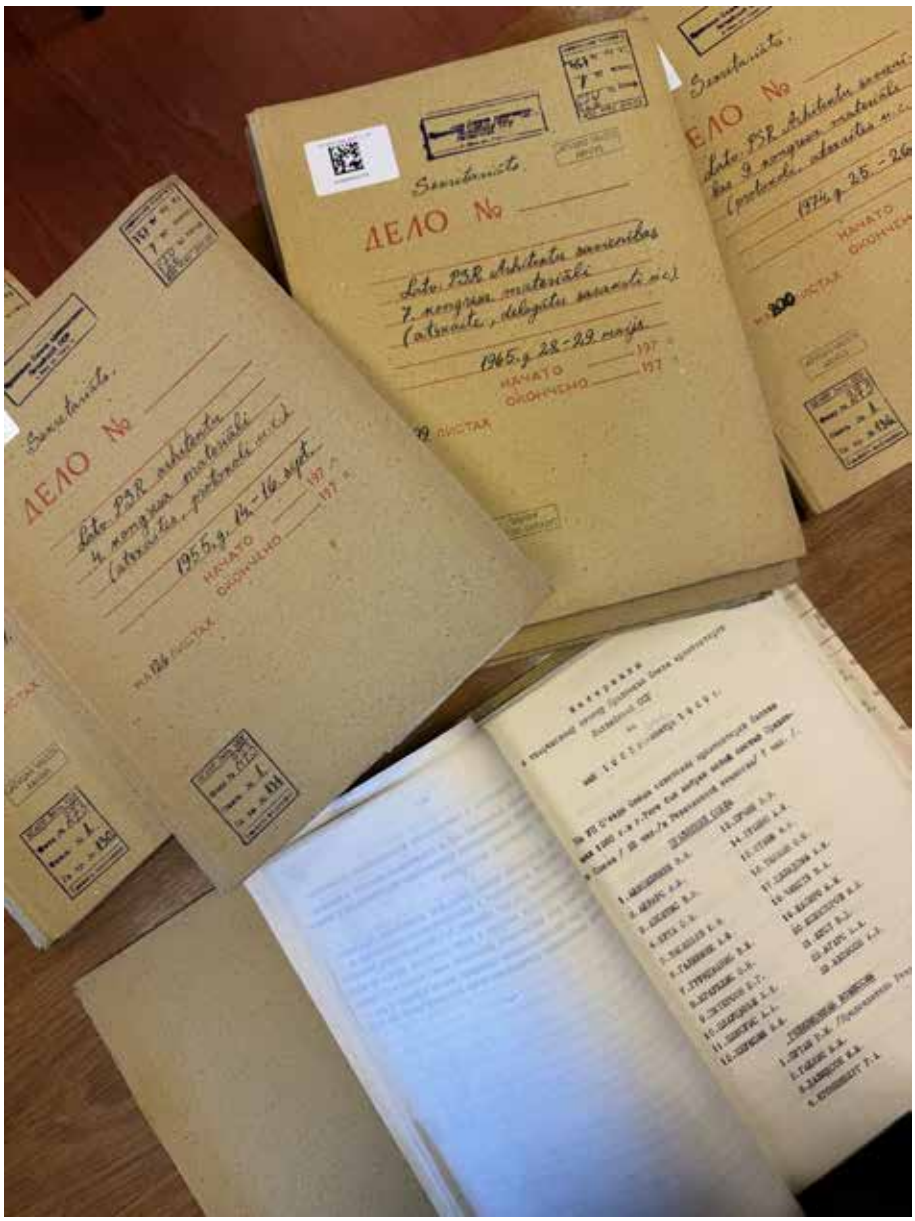

Fig. 1
Reports from the congresses of the Union of Architects of Latvian SSR. Photograph by the author.

Two sides of the Iron Curtain

Although ideologically extremely diverse from each other, the Soviet Union and the Western world were fierce rivals during the Cold War, both actively following each other's technological developments. In many disciplines, professionals even wanted to learn from each other, and architecture was no exception. In her study on connections between the Soviet and Western architecture, historian Olga Yakushenko observes that «the main aspiration of Soviet architects was to become as similar to their Western counterparts as they could» by «catching up [after delay in architectural development caused by the Stalinist neoclassical era and] reintroducing themselves to the international community» (Yakushenko 2020, p. 3). The main area of interest for Soviet architects was the aesthetics of Western Modernism. In contrast, Western architects were interested in how Soviet architects approached socially oriented architecture, such as mass social housing. At the same time, both sides interpreted the information they received differently, due to the lack of knowledge of each other's reasoning and motivations, as well as the extremely different contexts they represented. These differences in understanding persist, especially the narrow apprehension of the processes in the USSR. Hence, this paper aims to raise awareness of

how architecture was developed at the time: what where its objectives and what constituted the conditions that facilitated or impeded the achievement of these objectives.

Architects' professional routine

Although many impressive and architecturally outspoken buildings have been realised in the USSR, see for example the collection of Frédéric Chaubin (2011), these were the exception rather than the norm. Architects in the whole USSR worked in the so-called institutes for design, and each of these institutes was dedicated to developing projects for one specific program (such as residential buildings, industrial buildings, urban plans etc.). Furthermore, most of the standardised building projects were developed centrally in Moscow's institutes and these had to be used as much as possible everywhere in the union. This policy was rooted in the idea that designing site-specific, original projects would be a waste of time and human resource. As a result, Latvian architects were mostly dealing with the adaptation of the standardised projects to the local sites, or in other words: positioning them on the allocated plot, adapting the plans to the size of the plot, revising the materials used according to their availability.

The occasional opportunities for original designs opened when buildings of specific or significant program had to be realised. And even in such cases, as recounted by Jānis Lejnieks[1] (2024), it was usually because someone in a position of power had the ambition and took the effort to persuade the officials higher up in the hierarchy that such original designs were necessary. Then, open or invited architecture competitions were organised. In certain instances, as Lejnieks recalls, a specific architect was invited even without a competitive selection process having been undertaken.

There were also other occasions when limited architectural modifications to the standardised residential buildings were possible. For instance, this occurred when the building was intended to house «privileged members of society according to certain criteria», as recounted by Edgars Treimanis[2] (2024). In such cases, a higher ceiling could be designed, or the red brick, which was expensive and in short supply, could be used for façades instead of the prefabricated concrete plates as in the standard projects. In other cases, it was the architect's own initiative. It required a lot of effort from them, since all the deviations from standard had to be justified in terms of cost, material availability, and in any case, one was not permitted to exceed certain norms. Juris Poga[3] (2024) recalls an anecdotal episode from the approval process of a residential building project, on which he worked as a young and ambitious architect in his 30s. To his surprise, this project was rejected at a certain stage of design because the area of the apartments was larger than allowed. It later appeared that the error was due to the fact that the dimensions of the rooms were taken from one brick wall to another, without the thickness of the plaster that covers the walls being deducted.

Architecture and ideology

After Latvia's annexation to the Soviet Union, Latvian architects were faced with a new reality where suddenly other criteria were applied for defining architect's qualification and mission than the ones they were used to. The reports of the Latvian SSR Union of Architects' congresses testify to the considerable effort that was put into educating architects on these new values. For instance, the 1948 report (Latvijas PSR arhitektu savienība 1948, p. 41) concluded that it was necessary to establish a community of

architects that was ideologically appropriate to the socialist construction requirements. To achieve this, the document states, several conversations have been held with the managing board of the Faculty of Architecture, which has already positively affected the study processes. Furthermore, it reports that «ideologically educational work has been executed by the Architects Union by organising lectures on current political and ideological questions delivered by highly qualified speakers – both local and from the centre» (Latvijas PSR arhitektu savienība 1948, p. 41). The congress report of 1951(Latvijas PSR arhitektu savienība 1951, p. 65) contains a section titled *Ideologically political education of the members of the union*, which reports that «work has been done to involve the members of the Union into the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism» and as a result «out of the total number of 121 members 51 people have graduated the University of Marxism-Leninism» while many others are currently studying or have finished studies and only need to pass the exam.

The reports of the congresses also testify to the limited agency the local architects had following Latvia's occupation by the USSR. As with the architecture projects, which were designed in Moscow and then adapted to local conditions, the general policies and decision-making processes were also developed and executed there. Moscow in the congress documents is referred to as "the centre", as in the quote on ideological education cited before. Throughout the documents, "the centre" is repeatedly mentioned, along with the Union of Architects of USSR, which maintained a strong controlling function over the local architects' unions.

Traveling from Latvian SSR

For the citizens of the USSR, traveling both within the union and abroad, was strictly controlled by the state. Depending on the destination, various types of approval were required. Travel for architects was considered part of the so-called *qualification raising measures*, which also included lectures, exhibitions, film screenings, foreign language courses, painting and drawing workshops, etc. The organisation of trips to local destinations was the responsibility of the local unions of architects, whereas all travel abroad was exclusively managed from Moscow, with the local unions tasked with providing the allocated number of participants.

Initially only travels within USSR and to socialist block countries, such as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic or East Germany, were organised. The first travels by Latvian architects to the Western world are documented in the 1964. The congress documentation states that as part of the lectures and reports delivered at the Union of Architects, there has been the Report of the participants of excursion, architects Lūse, Savisko, Markova, Dmitrijeva, «On the tour of a group of architects to Austria. Demonstration of coloured diapositive slides» (Latvijas PSR arhitektu savienība 1965, p. 26). In this report of the 1965 Congress, which covers activities undertaken during the preceding three years, architects' international travel is mentioned only in this instance. The four individuals referenced provide an indication of the exceptionally limited number of travellers, particularly in light of the fact that the Union at that time comprised 257 members. There were other attempts to update local professionals on the processes in the Western architecture. For this purpose, events were organised by the Union of Architects, where also people from other disciplines, who apparently were more likely to travel, reported on their experiences.

For instance, in December 1964 a Report of the journalist-correspondent E. Mežavilks «Architecture of TOKYO through eyes of a Soviet Latvian journalist» had taken place (Latvijas PSR arhitektu savienība 1965, p. 26). One can only imagine a difference *the eyes of an architect* would have made, not to mention a physical presence. The numbers of travellers in the years to follow remains extremely small in comparison to the member of the union (only those were eligible to apply for the trips). To gain insight into practicalities regarding traveling, several architects who were practicing during the Soviet years were interviewed, born on 1950 and later. This means that the accounts refer to events from the late 1970s and 1980s. Lejnieks remembers that every year Union announced open application to several trips abroad (Lejnieks 2024). However, the number of available positions was limited to a couple of places per trip, which may have deterred many architects from applying.

There were no clear selection criteria either, and the interviewees could only speculate on the reasons they were chosen, such as, for instance, being active in the union's youth section. When asked why according to him such trips were organised at all, Andris Kronbergs[4] pondered that it could be an attempt to uphold a narrative that such thing as an Iron Curtain would not exist, that there is a movement of people (Kronbergs 2024). He also thinks that the travel opportunities provided architects with invaluable professional knowledge, thereby enhancing their overall satisfaction with working conditions and the Soviet system in general. Lejnieks confirms this, stating that when Soviet architects were tasked with designing a hotel for foreign guests, they lacked the necessary knowledge to meet Western standards. Consequently, visiting such places abroad was essential to be able to deal with these design tasks. Ināra Kārkliņa[5] shares how her trip to the USA in 1989 provided her with valuable knowledge on hospital design, while she was herself involved in designing an extension to the Institute of Traumatology in Riga (Kārkliņa, 2024). This travel opportunity, however, was not obtained through the Union of Architects but instead, thanks to her active participation in the Society for Latvian and Foreign Cultural Relations[6].

In the USA, the visit of the hospital was made possible thanks to the professional and personal relationship between the director of the Institute of Traumatology Viktors Kalnbērzs, and Kristaps Keggi, a senior medical professional who had emigrated from Latvia with his family during the Second World War. At the time of Kārkliņa's visit, Keggi was working as a researcher at Yale University and practicing surgery at a local hospital. Kārkliņa recalls how excited she was about this opportunity, noting that, in general, travels organised by the Society for Cultural Relations did not specifically focus on architecture. The groups of travellers consisted of professionals from a variety of cultural sectors, and members of the groups were not permitted to wander around on their own when abroad. This account highlights the challenges and unpredictability of travel for Soviet Latvian architects. Regarding the travels of architects, the Soviet Union of Architects in Moscow allocated a small number of places to other countries of the USSR, who's local Architects' Unions had to announce the call and select participants. Lejnieks remembers that there was an unwritten rule that the same person was not granted the right to travel more often than once in three years (Lejnieks 2024). He himself entered the Union of Architects as a young and active architect in 1978, and already in 1980, he was offered the opportunity to join a trip to Japan.

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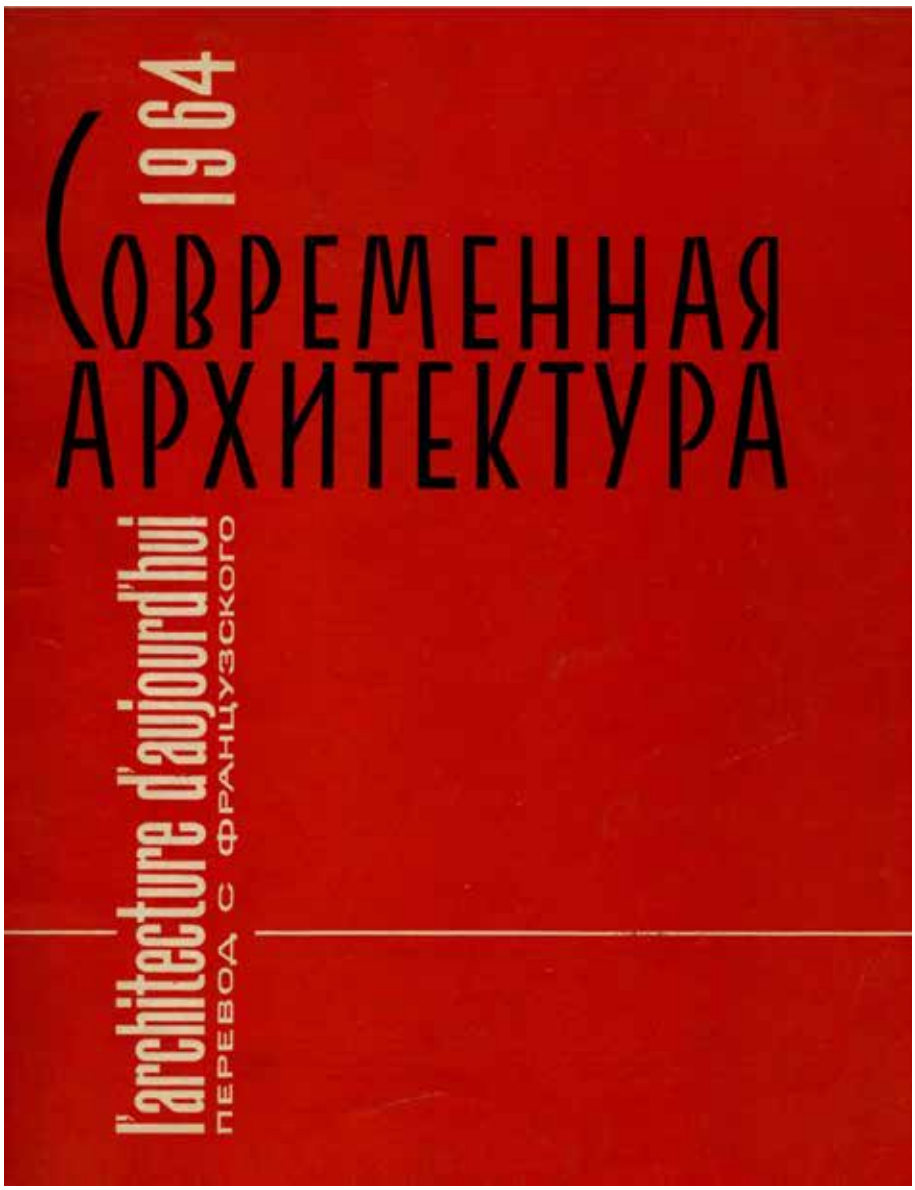

Fig. 2
Cover of the first Soviet issue of «L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui» translated in Russian.

A day before his scheduled flight to Moscow, followed by onward travel to Tokyo, he was requested to present himself at *Cheka*[7]. He was interrogated on his personal relationship with an individual who had contacts abroad and, according to the Soviet secret services, was a dissident. Although Lejnieks reportedly was not privy to the details of the situation and had not engaged in any dissident activities himself, he was denied travel abroad on the basis of this accusation. Lejnieks was asked by his colleagues at the Union of Architects to refrain from applying for further travels in the following years, as they were concerned that the permit would be rejected by the *Cheka* anyway. In such case the place allocated by Moscow would get lost, and some other architect would be deprived from the opportunity to travel. In this regard, the following remark included in the 1974 Congress documents raises questions:

> Regardless of the fact that the number of applications to specialised touristic tours exceeds the number of places, there have been cases when the allocated places have not been filled. For instance, in 1974 the [evaluation] commission has been forced to renounce of the places in tours to Bulgaria, Rumania and partly also German Democratic Republic due to the lack of interest (Latvijas PSR arhitektu savienība 1974, p. 54) (TdA).

It is surprising that, despite the limited travel opportunities and significant interest from architects, the places are not being used. The reasons for this, however, are unclear. Applicants may have been denied travel by the *Cheka*, after being approved by the Union of Architects, like Lejnieks was for his trip. But it is equally possible that the announcement of the travel opportunity or the selection process for candidates may not have been handled in a timely manner by the Union of Architects or other institutions. In any case, this is clear evidence of the paradoxical nature of the Soviet system and the ineffectiveness of its administration.

Other sources of knowledge and inspiration

Given the limited opportunities for architects to travel abroad, those interested in architecture had to rely on second-hand sources. One such opportunity to discover Western architecture was to attend the slideshow events that took place at the Union of Architects after the trips abroad. All architects who had travelled were obliged to provide a report for their colleagues back home. These reports were illustrated with an extended slide show, providing insight into architectural details as well as life in general. Other sources where the few monographs by Russian authors on the key figures of Western architecture, such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Kenzo Tange, as Lejnieks recalls (Lejnieks 2024).

Furthermore, many Latvian architects have fond memories of Western architecture magazines, such as «Architectural Review», «Domus», «Abitare», «L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui», «Deutsche Bauzeitschrift», as well as one on the Japanese architecture. According to Māris Kārkliņš,[8] the latter two have been particularly valuable for their architectural details and technical drawings (Kārkliņš 2024). Architects in the Soviet Union lacked personal experience with luxury architecture, and sometimes even relatively simple design tasks formed a challenge for them. Kārkliņš reflects on a project he worked on together with his wife, Ināra Kārkliņa – a hunting lodge for the local leaders of the communist party, for which they had to design a fireplace. There were no technical specification sources for such an element, nor for other features required in hotels for foreigners, for instance. Soviet architects did not have access to a reference book like *Neufert Architects' Data*, which has been an invaluable source of technical details for Western architects since the 1930s.

The State Library had a subscription to the aforementioned magazines; however, according to the architects' recounts, they could not be borrowed privately. Therefore, the design institutes placed a monthly order, and someone would go and collect the magazines, which would then be available for the architects' collective to consult for a week or two at their workplace. Regarding «L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui», an agreement was established with the publisher for the magazine to be translated into Russian and republished in Moscow with the title «Современная архитектура»[9]. (Fig. 2) Lejnieks recalls that the images were in black and white and of very low resolution (Lejnieks 2024). All pages originally containing advertisements were omitted, and the text content was possibly slightly edited, although he has never compared the two versions. Probably because it was locally published, «L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui» was the most accessible and popular magazine of foreign architecture. Many architects born after 1950 who are still active professionally mention it when asked about their sources of insight and inspiration during the Soviet era. However, probably due to fading memories, accounts of its shape and content vary.

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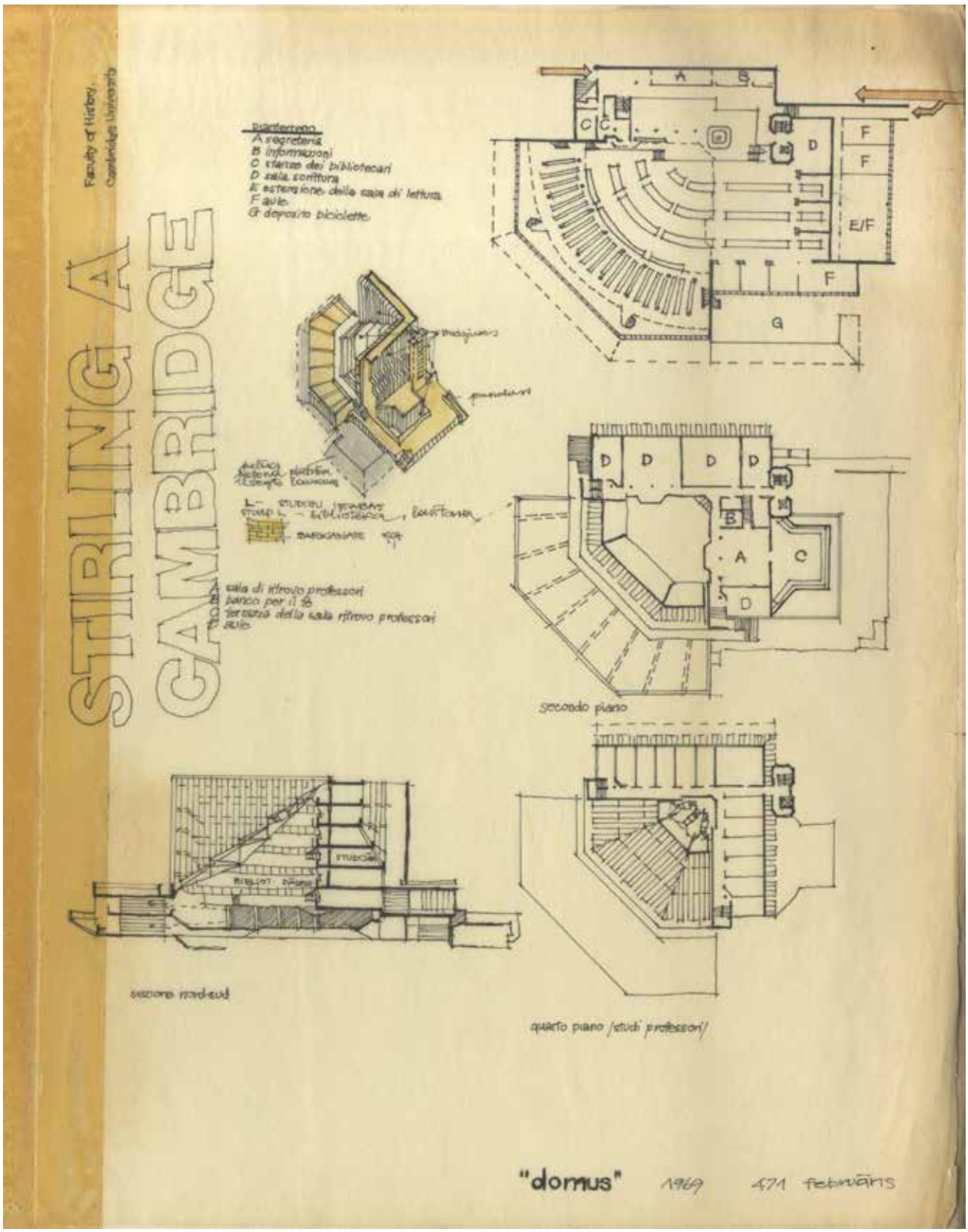

Fig. 3
Page of the magazine «Domus» traced on a tracing paper. Some of the texts are reported as in the original, some are notes added by the architect. Source: private archive of Māris Kārkliņš and Ināra Kārkliņa.

Some remember it as loose pages photographically copied – this may have been a way to keep the magazine in one's own library. Others recall the text being in French, although only the page of the contents page was doubled in French. This suggests that the architects were not really reading the texts but rather focusing on the images and drawings. Other sources also confirm that «the main practice of working was not reading, but rather looking at pictures and drawings» (Yakushenko 2020 p. 28) because «the texts a

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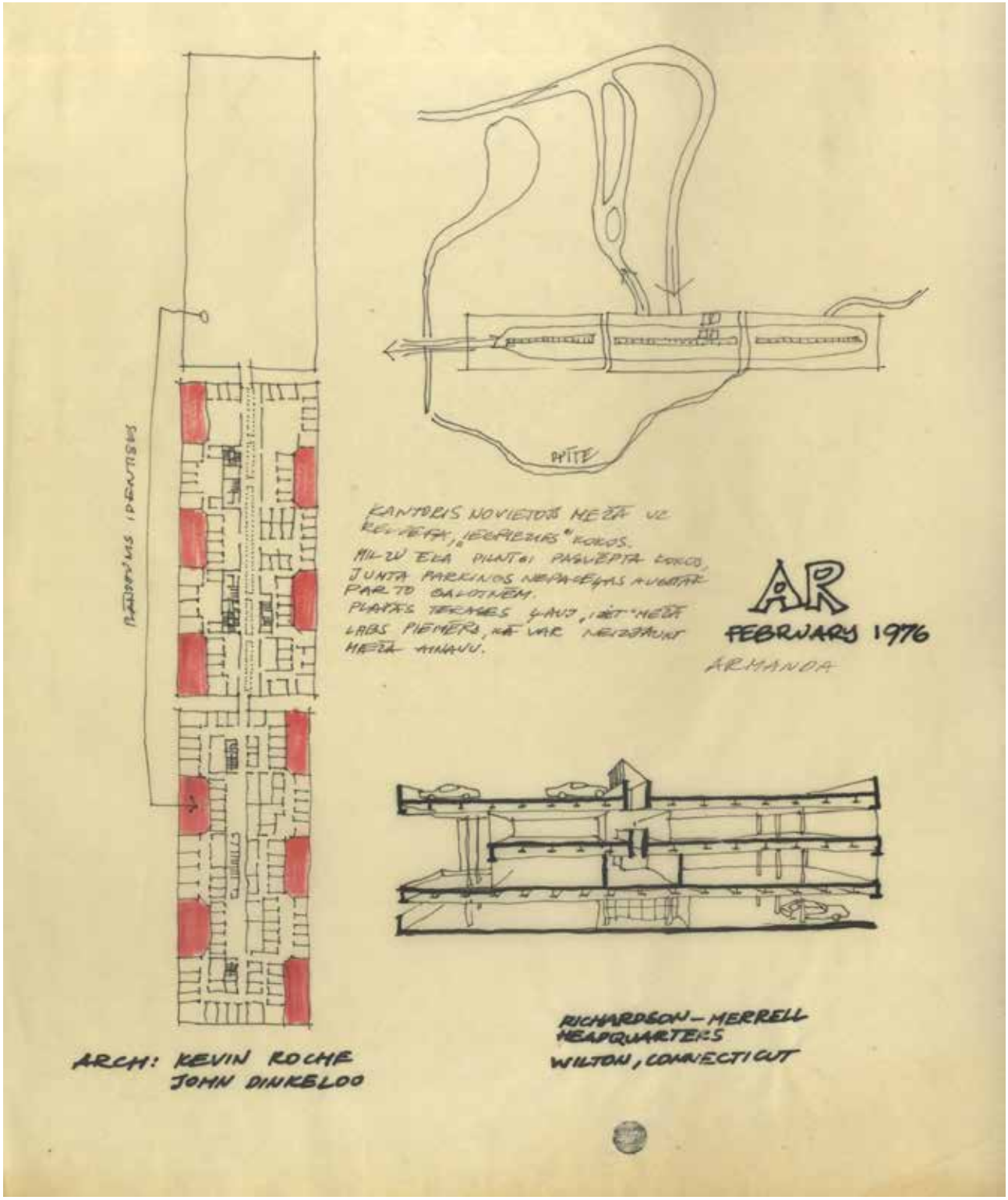

Fig. 4
Images from «Architectural Review» traced on a tracing paper. Drawing features notes and explanatory comments by the architect. Source: private archive of Māris Kārkliņš and Ināra Kārkliņa.

priori contained criticism of capitalist countries' experience» (Kudriatsev 2007, p. 8). Due to limited access to information – even architecture magazines were only available for short consultations – architects developed unusual practices for conserving valuable graphic data. They traced the pages of the magazines onto tracing paper, thus both copying and studying the subject of interest. These drawings sometimes depict specific technical details, floor plans or sections, or pieces of furniture. In other cases, they reproduce entire magazine pages, including their original graphic layouts. A short bibliographic note is often added, including the title of the magazine, the issue number and the year (Fig. 3 and 4).

Delights and challenges of Soviet travellers

Travelling abroad, especially to Western countries, was a unique experience at the time, even more so given the extreme differences in everyday life on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Although the official reason for the trips was to see Western architecture, it could be argued that the most emotionally overwhelming aspect of the travels was related to everyday occurrences. One thing that struck Soviet citizens was the abundance of shopping opportunities provided by huge department stores full of consumer goods and equipped with escalators. This was in stark contrast to the permanent scarcity of everyday commodities in the USSR. However, the travellers could barely purchase anything due to the extremely low value of the rouble compared to foreign currencies. To deal with this situation, they sometimes resorted to some rather unusual business practices. One of the architects recalls selling Soviet vodka to locals during their trip to Finland. They had taken the permitted number of bottles with them and managed to trade them at the hotel for a considerably higher price, which was still a bargain for the Finns. The money they made allowed them to cover some of their daily expenses.

Poga tells a funny story about his trip to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. He and a couple of colleagues had won second place in an architectural competition and had to travel there to collect the prize money (Poga 2024). The prize money was huge – 7000 Bulgarian leva – more than a car would have cost at the time. After receiving it, they realised that they would not be permitted to take this amount of cash out of the country. So, they split the money and decided to buy something with it instead. It was only then that they realised that the shops had the same empty shelves as in their home country. Reflecting on their travels from their current position as citizens of a democratic capitalist country, architects remember being surprised by some of the experiences shared by their Western counterparts. Kārkliņa recalls visiting the studio of Latvian expatriate architect Andrejs Legzdiņš in Stockholm.

Among many positive things, Legzdiņš had pointed out the difficulties related to running one's own architecture practice. Kārkliņa only fully understood these difficulties after the fall of the USSR, when the state design institutes were dissolved, and she established her own architecture office. Treimanis remembers a similar confrontation when he visited the German Democratic Republic for an awards ceremony following an architecture competition (Treimanis 2024). They had been celebrating their success with representatives of the other teams, who were from a variety of countries, including Western ones. At some point, someone mentions the Finnish team who had not been able to attend the event due to urgent professional commitments. Treimanis awkwardly jokes about having pity for those unable to join such a joyful party because of work. He then realises that not everyone finds the joke equally funny. Having urgent duties also means having commissions, which is something a Soviet architect would not have had to worry about. These stories reveal the stark differences in professional and personal life experiences between the Soviet and Western worlds. Professionally, architects in the Latvian SSR lacked opportunities for self-expression, as well as information and enriching experiences.

In their personal lives, they were forced to live with constant material scarcity and under strong ideological control. They had to be cautious not only about what they said in public and in private, but also about what they owned and who they socialised with.

At the same time, life moved at a much slower pace. They did not have to worry about their jobs or salaries, however low they were. They sought joy elsewhere, hoping to break free from Soviet occupation soon.

Notes

[1] Jānis Lejnieks (1951) was a practicing architect and art historian during the Soviet period, currently editor-in-chief of the Latvian architecture review «Latvijas Architektūra».
[2] Edgars Treimanis (1954) was a practicing architect during the Soviet period.
[3] Juris Poga (1957) was a practicing architect during the Soviet period.
[4] Andris Kronbergs (1951) was a practicing architect during the Soviet period, currently runs the architecture office "Arhis arhitekti".
[5] Ināra Kārkliņa (1950) was a practicing architect during the Soviet period.
[6] Society was founded in 1956 as part of the Soviet Union's Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and its goal was to promote mutual rapprochement in the fields of science and art, literature, school, tourism, sports, everyday life and the economy between Soviet citizens and foreign peoples. One of its tasks was also to monitor the counter-propaganda spread by the people who had emigrated or flead the Soviet Union and lived abroad (Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs 2025).
[7] All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия), *Cheka* is the pronounciation of the initials in Russian title - ЧК.
[8] Māris Kārkliņš (1950) was a practicing architect during the Soviet period.
[9] «Современная архитектура» (Sovremennaya arkhitektura) was published since 1964. Not to be confused with the magazine of the same title in Russian, published between 1926 and 1930 by the Constructivists.

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Liene Jākobsone (Riga, 1980) is Director and Senior Researcher at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture at the Latvian Academy of Arts. Her research focuses on issues of design and architecture, particularly the ideological conditions that shape design practice and its outcomes. She explores the potential applications of non-traditional forms of enquiry and ways to encourage criticality in design. She is also a founding partner of the Belgian-Latvian architecture practice Sampling. Its projects have been internationally recognised with awards, publications and a nomination for the Mies van der Rohe Award. Jākobsone is the co-curator of the Latvian pavilion at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia.

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Gregor Taul

Soviet Estonian Architects' Travels During the USSR. The Case of Mart Port

Abstract
During the Soviet period, most Estonians couldn't travel abroad, but some professions, like architects, had better opportunities. Such architects were Dmitri Bruns and Mart Port. Port is known to have made more than thirty trips abroad. Alongside his work as an architect, urban planner and high-ranking administrator, he was also a university teacher at the architecture department of the State Art Institute of the Estonian SSR. Port was also one of the most active writers on architecture in his time. In 1966 he had published a travel book about England in which he shared his impressions of the Sixth Congress of the International Union of Architects held in London in 1961. It is the only architect's travel book published in Soviet Estonia. In this article I give an overview of Port's travels abroad and discuss how he represented them in his writings, and to what extent might they have influenced his work.

Keywords
Mart Port — Soviet Estonia — Architecture — Travel — Association of Architects — USSR

Introduction

While most Estonians were never able to travel abroad during the Soviet period, there were some professions that were somewhat better placed to travel. One such profession was that of the architect (Gorsuch 2006). Most architects made up to three trips during three decades (Jagodin 2014). Estonian historian Oliver Pagel (2016) has pointed out that the Soviet Union rarely allowed blue-collar workers or country-dwellers to go on tourist trips. Communication with the outside world was entrusted to people with higher incomes from the city, who belonged to a higher social class or represented a prominent sphere of life (such as architects, engineers, educators, doctors and senior officials). Soviet tourists had to promote the international image of the USSR and be able to develop a conversation with educated Westerners.

This privileged status was in keeping with the historical mobility of the architectural profession. Getting to know important buildings on site has traditionally been part of the quest for architectural excellence. This was also the case during the Cold War, both in the East and in the West. From the point of view of socialist modernisation, architecture was seen as a central ideological cultural phenomenon (Belogolovsky 2014). This meant that Moscow was highly interested in both learning from others and promoting its own building activities elsewhere. As a result, around two hundred Estonian architects managed to make at least one or two trips outside the Soviet Union between the 1960s and the late 1980s (Jagodin 2014).

While trips within the Soviet Union (and sometimes in other socialist countries) were organised by the Soviet Estonian Association of Architects (SEAA), trips outside of the Soviet Union were arranged by the cen-

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Fig. 1
Researching Mart Port's slide collection at the Estonian Museum of Architecture, 2024. Courtesy of Merilin Tee.

tral Union of Architects of the USSR where the groups were formed from members of all Soviet countries (Jagodin 2014). For each trip, Moscow allocated a few places to each of the Soviet republic, which were then distributed by lottery or other means. One can assume that these opportunities were more or less democratically distributed. But alongside them were some 'more equal' architects who travelled a lot more than others. They were the administrative and ideological leaders of the architectural world, who when travelling or attending various conventions, seminars and congresses had a representative role on behalf of the entire Soviet Union. From Estonia, such men were Dmitri Bruns, the long-time chief architect of Tallinn, and Mart Port (1922-2012), the long-serving head of the SEAA. Port is known to have made more than 30 trips abroad. In this article I give an overview of Port's travels abroad and discuss how he represented them in his writings, and to what extent might they have influenced his work.

For over two decades Port had a monopoly on power in the Estonian architectural field. He headed the SEAA from 1955 to 1979 and between 1961 and 1989 he was the leading architect at Eesti Projekt – the central state design institute where all grand urban development plans were created and all major public buildings designed (Ojari 2012). Alongside his work as an architect, urban planner and high-ranking administrator, he was also a university teacher serving as a part-time associate professor and later as a professor at the architecture department of the State Art Institute of the Estonian SSR. Port was also one of the most active writers on architecture in his time. He published around a hundred articles in Estonian newspapers and specialist journals, as well as dozens in major Russian-language Union-wide publications. Interviews with him often appeared in the press. He was also a respected speaker on television and radio: the Estonian Public Broadcasting digital archive contains sixty-seven broadcasts with his participation, although the number of undigitised broadcasts is probably larger. Port also published two books. In 1983 his overview of Soviet Estonian architecture was published separately in Estonian, German, Russian and English language (Port 1983). Seventeen years earlier he had published a travel book about England (Port 1966) in which he shared his impressions of the Sixth Congress of the International Union of Architects (UIA) held in London in 1961. Besides the architectural theme, the book introduced all fields of life in Britain in a popular format to a wider audience. It is the only architect's travel book published in Soviet Estonia.

I begin this article with a discussion of Mart Port's life and work and then analyse his travels within the Soviet Union, the Eastern bloc and capitalist Western Europe. As a bibliographical note, it should be pointed out that this is a scarcely researched topic and much of the discussion here evolves from Karen Jagodin's (2014) master's thesis and the subsequent exhibition *Architect's Gaze. Bringing the West Home* at the Estonian Museum of Architecture (14.02-06.04.2025). As primary resources more than 100 articles by Port and interviews or reportages involving him were consulted. Additionally I made use of Port's personal files kept in the archive of the Estonian Academy of Arts and the Estonian Museum of Architecture.

Biographical overview

Mart Port was born on the 4th of January 1922 in Pärnu, in the family of a secondary school teacher. Shortly after his birth, his parents moved to Tartu, where his father Jaan Port found a job at the Institute of Botany, University of Tartu, first as a laboratory assistant, later as an assistant. Alongside the daily work as a gardener at the Tartu Botanical Garden his father studied at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences where he defended his doctoral dissertation in botany in 1932. Two aspects of his father's professional influences on Mart Port's career have been highlighted. Firstly, the ever-present flora in his youth might have directed him to bear in mind the importance of greenery in large-scale urban projects (Metspalu 2019). Secondly, it has been suggested that his father's affinity to power may have stayed with Port – his father was one of the central ideologues of the nationwide home improvement campaign initiated by the Estonian president in the 1930s (Kalm 2012).

In 1929 Port entered elementary school and graduated from Tartu Boys High School in 1940. During high school summer breaks he worked as a railwayman, as a technician and on a ship as a machinist's assistant. Port has said that by the age of fifteen he had already been to Scotland (Veenre 2012). One could assume that this kind of early insight into the world fostered a passion for travel and a sense that the world was open to him throughout his life.

Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union in June 1940. A few months later Port started his studies at Tallinn Polytechnic Institute. His studies were interrupted by Germany's attack on the Soviet Union – in June 1941 he joined the Red Army as a conscript. While his homeland went into the hands of Germany he was receiving combat training near the town of Kazan and for a short time worked as an engineer in the Chelyabinsk Tank Factory as part of the labour battalion. Port's view of life and architecture was pragmatic and calculated – his engineering practice and technical studies played a role in this.

After the foundation of national military formations, Port served in the Red Army and from 1942 he took part in the battles of the Second World War on the Kalinin, 2nd Baltic and Leningrad Fronts. He finished the war as an lieutenant and was awarded a medal for his involvement in the Battle of Velikiye Luki and the liberation of the Estonian SSR. Port's impeccable wartime CV ensured him a certain immunity in the Soviet system. Since a career in the Soviet Union could be hampered by an unsuitable family background his rise to prominence was not so obvious. Perhaps the fact that Jaan Port was disabled at home from the beginning of the war and died in 1950 helped to wash away this potential ideological taint.

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Fig. 2
Architect Mart Port. Photo from 1982. Courtesy of Estonian History Museum.

After demobilisation in 1945 he continued his studies at Tallinn Polytechnic Institute. Simultaneously with his studies, he worked for a publishing house illustrating books and producing diagrams and mechanical drawings. Port became an accomplished illustrator – he used twenty-one of his own caricatures and architectural drawings to complement his book on England. Caricature had a special position in the Soviet system – on the one hand it was there to ridicule the negative aspects of capitalism, but on the other, such drawings could also be provocative against the Soviet way of life. From the point of view of the architect's profession, his caricature talent lay in his ability to quickly capture the essence of the situation, the most important structural element either at the level of the city, buildings or human relations.

He graduated with honours in 1950 and started working at Eesti Projekt, first as an architect, then as a senior architect, then as the chief architect of projects, and from the early 1960s as the chief architect of the institute. His early career is marred by the fact that during the Stalinist hunt for scapegoats to blame for bourgeois nationalism, he fiercely attacked one of the most important Estonian architects of the early 20th century, Edgar Johan Kuusik. Kuusik, who had already been subject to persecution – his wife had been deported to Siberia in 1945 – was now expelled from the Association

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Fig. 3
Mart Port's slide from Greece, 1970s Photo of a slide from the Estonian Museum of Architecture.

of Architects. It was an act that was particularly difficult to forgive for the young architects of the 1970s and one that is still not forgotten today – for example, architectural historian Mart Kalm mentioned it in his obituary for Port (Kalm 2012).

In 1953 Port was elected vice-chairman of the Board of the SEAA and in 1955 Chairman of the Board, a position which he held until 1979 when he was famously overthrown by younger colleagues who held him responsible for the bureaucratisation of architecture and the stagnation of public space. Port was elected as a member of the Board of the Union of Architects of the USSR in 1955, and as a member of the Presidium of the Board in 1961. That year he also started working as an assistant professor in the Department of Architecture at the Tallinn State Art Institute. Furthermore, he was a long-time member of the editorial board of the magazine «Ehitus ja arhitektuur» (Construction and Architecture) and the cultural newspaper «Sirp ja Vasar» (Hammer and Sicle). In addition to Estonian-language architectural criticism, he actively published "architectural propaganda" – this is how the popularisation of architecture was called at that time – in major Russian-language newspapers. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the newspaper «Pravda» in 1962, he was awarded the Order of Honour of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for his active contribution to the development of Soviet journalism[1].

Mart Port was the only architect in Soviet Estonia to be awarded the title of People's Architect of the Soviet Union (Kurg 2009)[2]. When he was awarded the title an anonymous young colleague praised him by saying that «Mart Port has long since become synonymous with Estonian architecture» (Noor Kolleeg 1978). By then, Port had achieved all that could be achieved in the institutional field. Yet, for the more subversive intelligentsia, the term "honorary" signified an anecdotal prefix or even a swear word, and for many radically-minded architects Mart Port represented everything unpleasant about embracing the Soviet occupation. Port co-authored two hundred and fourteen architectural projects. Most of them were realised and nearly half of them were "type" projects which were repeated in different places.

As a member of collective he designed important high-rise buildings of Tallinn: the headquarters of the Communist Party (now the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs), the Viru Hotel and the House of Designers (Ojari 2012). The fact that one man directed both architectural education and urban planning for almost forty years, and was the chairman of the Architects Association for twenty-five years, shows how personality-centred and stubborn was the power apparatus of the time. In this context the fact that Mart Port was not a member of the Communist Party was an exception that proved the rule – the Soviet state was not run by law, but men (Lewin 2005).
A few months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, architect and artist Leonhard Lapin published an article in which he bluntly summarised the 1970s in Estonian architects as young Estonian architects vs. Mart Port: «The official architectural life of Soviet Estonia was dictatorially ruled by the gold-mouthed Mart Port, who, both in his words and cartoons, created beautiful visions of the triumph of communism in ideal cities of the future with rushing people and cars» (Trapeež 1991). Opponents would call him a non-partisan party member. But the image of Port as a power-hungry leader during the Soviet era did not last long. Over the years, emotions dissipated, and as generations changed, his legacy has been reconsidered from different perspectives. Already in 1999, architectural historian Triin Ojari interpreted his oeuvre outside of the trauma narrative and called for an analysis of Soviet-era urban planning in the broader context of the 20th century modernisation processes (Ojari 1999). The media also continued to be interested in him because his opinions were expressed explicitly and he looked at everyday life from a distinctive perspective (Paulus 2004). If he once criticised the inflexibility of the Soviet construction system, now he condemned the narrow-mindedness of planning based on private capital and the lack of a central authority protecting the interests of the people (Ojari 2012).

Mart Port's travels

In 1958 Port became a member of the Estonian Society for the Development of Friendship and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries. This association was subordinate to a All-Soviet organisation in Moscow, which had been in operation for some twenty years. The association had its subordinate USSR-Finland Friendship Society, which in turn had an Estonian SSR-Finland branch, of which Port was also a member. This gives one explanation why or how Port travelled so often.
Together with the Society for the Development of Cultural Ties with Estonians Abroad the aforementioned society published its own weekly newspaper «Kodumaa» (Homeland) from 1958 to 1991. The newspaper disseminated Soviet propaganda among Estonians living abroad, bringing weekly news of how one or other expat had decided to move back to Estonia or how the residents of the Estonian SSR were able to travel freely around the world. Mart Port's articles or stories related to him appeared regularly in the newspaper (Port 1963, 1968, 1975, 1985; Raudsepp 1972). Estonian communities in exile were openly critical about the society and its newspaper. One emigre newspapers put it bluntly: «The society has been operating in the Soviet Union for a few decades and it has long been known that it performs intelligence and surveillance functions abroad and monitors foreigners entering the Soviet Union» ("Demobiliseeritud punasõdurid jäävad Eestisse" 1960).
Since the KGB managed to either destroy or transfer to Russia the Soviet secret police archives concerning Estonia, it is exceedingly difficult or impossible to say how closely Port was involved with foreign intelligence

and the secret police and to what extent he had to report on his Estonian colleagues or Estonians abroad (Leivat 2016). Since we have no documentary basis for such a suspicion, it must be set aside. In chronological order Mart Port's files show that he made the following trips outside of the Soviet Union:

1957 Finland (tourism), Sweden (tourism) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (tourism)
1958 Belgium (work trip), Czechoslovakia (tourism)
1959 Czechoslovakia
1961 United Kingdom (delegate), Italy (work trip), Yugoslavia
1963 Poland (tourism), Czechoslovakia (work trip), Hungary (tourism)
1964 Finland (tourism)
1966 GDR (delegate), Sweden (work trip)
1967 Finland (work trip)
1968 GDR (delegate), Finland (work trip)
1969 GDR
1970 GDR (delegate)
1972 Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) (work trip), Finland (tourism)
1973 GDR (three different occasions) (delegate), Hungary (work trip)
1974 GDR
1975 Hungary, Yugoslavia, Spain (delegate)
1987 FRG (delegate), GDR (delegate)
1988 Hungary (work trip)

A trip marked "tourism" typically meant a group holiday organised by the Soviet Association of Architects (SAA) for which every Soviet republic was allocated one or two spots. Moscow would send the information to each republic where the local architects' association would choose the names who were sent to Moscow for acceptance. The itinerary of these trips, the sights to be visited, visits to architectural offices, hotels and places to eat were organised by SAA, but all the costs were covered by the travellers themselves. It was a rather expensive pleasure that few could afford. As can be seen, Port only went on tourist trips to the socialist countries and to Finland and Sweden which were cheaper because of their proximity. As a comparison, architect Raine Karp remembers his three-week trip to the United States in 1974 costing one thousand roubles, while his own salary was 90 roubles a month. Thus the journey cost him a full year's salary (Karp 2025). According to Karp he could afford such an expenditure only because he lived with his parents and had kept all his expenses to a minimum.

Port visited most actively East Germany (ten trips reported), followed by Finland (five). There is no information on Port's foreign travel between 1976 and 1986 (except for a reference to a conference paper presented in Athens between 1975 and 1980). This does not mean that he did not travel in those years, but for some reason either Port himself did not record the trips or the administrator lost interest in entering such data. According to Karen Jagodin (2025), many architects have incomplete records of their foreign travel. In 1979 Port lost his position as head of the SEAA which meant a reduction in the number of representative trips abroad which were paid by the government. But that must have not been a reason enough for no travel at all, as he was still high on the list in Moscow and continued to head the most important design institute in the Estonian SSR. The travels

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Fig. 4
Architects Mart Port, Roman Urb, Ülo Ellandi. Type project 1-317 designed in 1957. Photo from the 1980s. Courtesy of Estonian Museum of Architecture.

labelled as "delegate" meant that he went abroad as a representative of Soviet Estonia or Soviet Union to, for example, attend a congress.

Travels within the Soviet Union

Although the Soviet Union with its sixteen republics was one country, a permit was required to travel within the Soviet Union. Obtaining one was usually not difficult (Jagodin 2014). Researching and understanding Estonian architects' travels and exchange of ideas within the Soviet Union is more challenging than the topic of foreign travels. Similar to visual art, history of Estonian architecture is directed towards the West and local developments have been viewed against the backdrop of trans-Atlantic tendencies. On the one hand, this is understandable, because despite of its metropolitan status, the cultural role model of Moscow was minimal for Estonian art and architecture. Also in the memoirs by architects who lived during the Soviet period, Moscow is commonly presented as a negative place of no interest.

For example, Raine Karp has manifested that everything related to Russia made him so disgusted that he had no desire to visit Moscow or Leningrad voluntarily: he only did so in connection with foreign trips (flights started from Moscow) or on a couple of occasions to get signatures for design projects (Karp 2025). If we exclude the impact of Russian constructivism for the young architects of the 1970s, it is challenging to point out (voluntary) influences from Russia on Estonian architecture. On the other hand, such a derogatory and selective view on Moscow and Russian culture conceals how active was the actual relationship of the Estonian cultural field with other Soviet republics and especially its political and ideological centre, Moscow. In 1970, seven million people lived in the capital of the Soviet Union, and this number grew steadily by about a million inhabitants over a ten-year period during the Soviet period (Vodarsky 1993).

Moscow represented academic and technological might and was the epicentre of international communication which no doubt attracted and drew thousands of technocrats to its opportunities. Work meetings, national and international congresses also sent Mart Port to Moscow. Since no records were kept of intra-Soviet travels this in the personal files of the Association of Architects, it is unclear how many times he did so exactly. Port was elected a member of the Board of the Union of Soviet Architects in 1955 and a member of the Presidium of the Board in 1961, which meant very close contact with colleagues in Moscow. It also brought obligatory participation in the architectural life of other Soviet republics like attending congresses or participating in the jury work of competitions. For example, it is known that Port attended work-related events in Georgia in 1962 and 1972, Uzbekistan in 1971, Lithuania 1974 and Azerbaijan in 1984 ("Kes? Kus? Mis?" 1962b; "Oli ja on" 1971a; "Oli ja on" 1974b; "Arhitektide Liidus" 1972; "Arhitektide Liidus" 1984).

In 1958, the 5th Congress of UIA was held in Moscow. Port attended and later published an article about it in the Soviet Estonian cultural weekly (Port 1958). Attending this congress and getting a taste of international networking gave him a direction for the following decades. Port noted in his article, delegates from forty-four countries attended the meeting with eight hundred of them from capitalist countries and three hundred from the socialist bloc. The leitmotif of the conference was the statistical verdict that if the population of the world continues to grow by one billion in every twenty-five years, then it will be necessary to build 5,000 new cities for 200,000 inhabitants every quarter a century. Such a sociological perspective and urban planning imperative became Port's main theme both as an architect and architecture writer.

It was customary for local newspapers ("Kes? Kus? Mis?" 1962a; "Arhitektide Liidus" 1965; "Arhitektide Liidus" 1972) to report about Union-wide gatherings of architects in Moscow (Port 1965b). Sometimes Port represented Estonia alone, but occasionally the Estonian delegation was larger. For example, at the Sixth Congress of Architects of the USSR, held in the Kremlin's Grand Palace in November 1975, Port was joined by the chief architect of Tallinn, Dmitri Bruns, the head of the architecture department of the Estonian State Institute of Art, Prof. Helmut Oruvee, the Chief Architect of the State Design Institute Eesti Maaehitusprojekt (Estonian Rural Construction Project) Boris Mirov and architects Valve Pormeister, Raal Kivi, Paul Madalik, Toomas Rein, Irina Raud and Valentin Zilbert. ("Oli ja on" 1975b) The content and form of these meetings varied. Some were more formal, others more substantive and academic.

For example, while preparing for the 1975 UIA Congress in Madrid, Moscow held an All-Union "creative discussion" to set forth the talking points agreed by the architects from the Soviet Union ("Oli ja on" 1974b). A few months later, Port and the Vice-Chairman of the Union of Estonian Soviet Architects, Voldemar Herkel, were back in Moscow for the IX Joint Plenum of the State Committee for Civil Engineering and Architecture and the Board of the Union of Soviet Architects, where the construction of public buildings according to standard designs was discussed ("Oli ja on" 1975a). Architect Ülo Stöör has recalled that when he was in Moscow in 1970 for the Congress of the Union of Architects of the USSR, one of the opening speeches was given by Mart Port, who earned a rapturous applause from the entire hall after his very first sentence.

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Fig. 5
Architects Hotell Viru. Drawing by Mart Port from the early 1970s.Courtesy of Estonian Museum of Architecture.

He had manifested that «if the question of war and peace were not the most important point of discussion in the world, it would be the question of architecture» (Stöör 2025). In the Soviet Union, where people were used to Leonid Brezhnev's four-hour speeches and the subsequent fifteen minutes long applauses, the meaning of such speeches and the reactions that followed were a ritualised practice (Yurchak 2005). Such public utterances repeated well-known truths, while at the same time it was a spectacle involving the entire society.

It formed a performance against the backdrop of which actual decisions were taken. It is an inescapable fact that whatever Port and other Estonian architects took part in Moscow, their participation confirmed the supremacy of Moscow's political rule. On the other hand, Estonian architects tried to resist Moscow's colonising, sovietising and Russifying practices through individual and collective strategies by using a wide variety of methods. The general opinion is that Port, too, tried to play cat-and-mouse with Moscow (Kalm 2012), but fared much worse than, for example, his counterparts in Lithuania, where architects retained moral and actual power over construction (Drėmaitė and Maciuika 2020). Reading Port's articles and speeches, it is challenging to conclude what his exact political agenda was. On the one hand, Port was incessantly and sharply critical of the monotony of Soviet cities (Port 1958), of the sloppiness of construction (Port 1961) and of the poor quality of materials ("Vanad linnad uuenevad" 1968).

On the other hand, until the end of his life, he seemed to believe in the humanist project of socialism (not to be confused with Soviet rule), believing that private property was not beneficial to urban planning and that building and real estate management should be a state monopoly (Port 1961). He was by no means a die-hard communist, but as a technocrat[3] seemed to genuinely believe in socialist modernisation and architecture's leading role in making the world a better place (Port 1964). Even as late as 1985 he did not hesitate to quote several lines from Leonid Brezhnev, which must have made colleagues scratch their heads. Port concluded this very article with the demanding words:

«In the Soviet Union and other socialist countries the ultimate goal of architectural design and construction is to solve major social problems. And this in the interests of all segments of the population on an equal basis (Port 1985)».

Learning from the Eastern bloc

In 1957, Mart Port received the first prize at the All-Union Young Architects Competition in Moscow, the prize of which was a fifteen-day trip to the German Democratic Republic (Estonian Academy of Arts Archive). He made at least eight more trips there. Thus, contact with German colleagues and learning from them was an important influence for Port. In addition to his excellent command of Russian and English, Port also spoke German. It can be assumed that in the case of East Germany, Port sympathised with the historical connection between the two cultures and the similar problems of Estonian cities in terms of preserving historical old towns.

For example, in 1968 Mart Port and urban planners Malle Meelak and Hain Karu participated in a two-week-long study trip in GDR with a focus on renovation of historic town centres. They also attended a conference on urban planning with participants from all the countries sharing the Baltic coast – the Soviet Union was represented by the Estonian SSR. As Tallinn was the only Soviet capital with a medieval Gothic town core it was vital to learn from Germany where – to use Port's own phrase – there were such towns on every footstep ("Vanad linnad uuenevad" 1968). During this trip, Estonian architects visited Bautzen, Berlin, Gera, Jena, Leipzig, Stolpen and Weimar where local urban planners advised them about the preservation of medieval town cores, the removal of vehicles and transport from the old town, keeping larger new houses away from the centre, respecting the historical nets of streets, and also the emerging issue of mass tourism. Two years later in 1970 Port participated in a colloquium in another former Hansa town Rostock.

At that time Tallinn was preparing to renew its master plan and for Port the key take-aways from these trips were that every town has to evolve around its historic core – the denser the centre, the better it is. He also pointed out that any town which has access to water (sea, river etc.) should design its centre accordingly ("Vanad linnad uuenevad" 1968). It is interesting here Port's argumentation is similar to that of the critical urbanists of the time, such as Jane Jacobs in the US. However, in the same interview Port still claims that in order to accommodate future car traffic, it is nevertheless necessary to demolish old buildings in the centre to make room for high-rise buildings and more intensive urban life. Mart Port emphasised the good practice of the German Democratic Republic to organise architectural competitions for major public buildings and urban planning commissions. Port complained that in Estonia, at that time, there was at best one competition per year and this was causing stagnation. Here again, Port's habit of criticising – or even whining about – the Soviet context is problematic, because he himself was in the position to potentially improve the situation. It seems that Port had adversely accepted the status quo in which the price per square metre of construction was the supreme aspect of Soviet architecture. For example, he would ironically compare a Soviet architect to a writer who is commissioned to write a multi-volume novel, even though it is known that the printing house lacks two-thirds of the alphabet and that the letters a, c, and k can only be used 154 times, because more is simply not provided for – but the work must nevertheless be grandiose, up-to-

date, progressive, and positive (Summatavet 2015). On the other hand, he worryingly lamented that if the cost of buildings in the Soviet Union were to increase by even one percent, each year a city with a population of 100,000 would not be built (Stöör 2025). One gets the impression that he used the rationalisation principle both as a positive or negative argument according to his needs.

Drawing on his experience in East Germany, he fought vigorously, at least in words, for the preservation and reconstruction of Tallinn's old town and argued that it was a value that could not be put into money (Port 1967). In the same way, he berated the officials for having raised the idea of building prefabricated houses in the wooden district of Kadriorg (Nääriintervjuud. Mart Port 1971) On the other hand, it is hypocritical to stand up for two districts of Tallinn, while at the same time he orchestrated the design of all major standardised residential districts in Tallinn, in addition to Annelinn in Tartu, Männimäe and Paalalinn in Viljandi and was also one of the creators of the 1-317 series of standard apartments which engulfed the whole country and became the symbol of Soviet rule.

Apparently, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Port was heard praising the environment of the pre-fabricated districts at one of the summer events of the Union of Estonian Architects, saying something like:

> There is a lot of light in these apartments, not like in the old town, where the living spaces are dark. The houses are quite far from each other, not sitting on top of each other like in today's new housing estates. You can get to the city from home by bus or tram, you don't have to have a car, there are shops nearby, you won't go hungry if your car tire is flat [...] (Mutso 2011).

As the author concluded, everything sounds correct, but for some reason Port himself preferred to live in the bourgeois Nõmme and Pirita suburbs of privates houses.

Returning to the GDR's practice of organising open architectural competitions praised by Port, in 1973 Estonian architects Kalju Luts (head of the authors' collective), Mart Port, Lembit Aljaste and Vello Erman took part in an international competition to design the Grosser Dreesch community and shopping centre in Schwerin's new residential district ("Eesti arhitektide rahvusvaheline edu" 1973). Although the Estonian authors shared the first and second place with their colleagues from the German Democratic Republic, their project did not go ahead. The Grosser Dreesch is considered Northern Germany's largest prefabricated housing estate. Starting in 1971, apartments for a total of around 60,000 people were built on the empty field on the outskirts of the city. The competition called for the design of a district centre, including a department store, hotel, hospital, restaurants, cafés, beer halls, library and swimming pool. In order to do this in two months, the authors divided the work between them: Kalju Luts designed the commercial part, Vello Erman the hotel and youth club, Lembit Aljaste the cultural centre, and Mart Port put it all into an urban ensemble.

Port's close interaction with East German counterparts and learning from their accomplishments and mistakes is a good illustration of what was generally lacking in the architecture of the countries under Soviet rule during this period. It took years for best practices to find a way into Estonian architecture. For local architects, international success was an important sign that the right thing was being done. It boosted their self-confidence and sense of mission.

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Fig. 6
Tallinn Technological Institute Faculty of Civil Engineering students on their internship, student Mart Port in the center, 1949. Courtesy of Tallinn University of Technology Museumtif.

It also helped in disputes with local authorities and builders. One direct example was the construction of the Õismäe housing estate. Mart Port and Malle Meelak planned a pond in the middle of the new town, which the city's executive committee did not agree with – a park would do. Port collected all the views of ponds and fountains from his slides archive and made a powerful defence speech, which allegedly helped to realise the fundamental idea of the project (Mürk 1986). However, Port was unable to convince the city administration that the houses in Õismäe should be raised on see-through pilotis as popularised by Le Corbusier.

Besides GDR, Port made several trips to Yugoslavia (1961, 1975), Czechoslovakia (1958, 1963), Poland (1963) and Hungary (1963, 1975, 1988). The Soviet Estonia's intelligentsia's trips to the Eastern bloc countries must have been so frequent that it also happened that acquaintances from Tallinn unexpectedly met each other in another country. Thus, in one of his articles, the Estonian writer Egon Rannet tells the story of how he bumped into Mart Port during an interval in the Hungarian State Opera in Budapest (Rannet 1965).

As with Port's other journeys, he exemplified his aesthetic and technical experiences from the Eastern bloc in his writings. For example, in his 1973 essay "Man and City", he argued that one of the main reasons why Soviet Estonian housing architecture is so monotonous is that it is built only from precast concrete slabs, rather than monolithic concrete cast on site (Port 1973). He then gave several examples from his travels around the Soviet Union and the socialist countries (Armenia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Soviet Russia) arguing that new solutions could also be used in Estonia: «All these methods deserve to be studied and adopted in the building practice of our republic, otherwise we will fall further and further behind our neighbours every year». A few years later, the construction of the monolithic concrete Kuldne Kodu (Golden Home) terraced house designed by Toomas Rein began in Pärnu, which became one of the landmark apartment buildings of the Soviet period (Kalm 2008).

Although the project was not directly connected with Mart Port nor the Eesti Projekt design institute, it was still inspired by the different types of contemporary housing seen elsewhere in Europe, and especially in Finland.

Finland – a special friendship

As in the case of many other Estonian architects, Port's very first trip abroad during the Soviet period was to Finland in 1957[4]. In two weeks Estonian architects experienced Helsinki's historic and new buildings, as well as the town of Hämeenlinna, Tampere (including its Lenin House Museum) and Turku. Port also visited Finland in 1964, 1967, 1968 and 1972 – in many cases as the tour leader of a group of Estonian architects. These trips to Finland initiated a widespread Finnish-inspired architectural language in Soviet Estonia. It was significant to get acquainted with the new residential areas and the building quality of Finnish public and private architecture. The examples of the Tapiola and Pihlajamäki housing estates played a substantial role in shaping the nature-oriented design of the new estates in Estonia (Metspalu 2019). In this sense, trips to Finland were not only inspirational, but had an actual effect on the built environment. On the other hand, visiting Finland could also have a depressing effect as the quality of building materials and workmanship in the Soviet Union was hopelessly poor and took away the desire of the architects to work. For example, Raine Karp has described the confrontation between the two worlds as a deeply revolting experience (Karp 2025). Writing on the same subject in 1968, Mart Port was more diplomatic in his choice of words: «It is very instructive for us to become acquainted with the high culture of workmanship and the enviable precision of the Finnish builders, manufacturers of building materials and furnishings, which enables the most demanding intentions of architects to be realised without distraction» (Port 1968). Truth is probably somewhere in the middle. For example, architect Riina Raig, who besides Finland managed to travel to Bulgaria and India during the Soviet period, has said that "Finnish wisdom" (functionality, minimalism, clarity) was the easiest to apply (Raig 2025).

Architectural historian Karin Hallas-Murula, who has researched Estonian-Finnish architectural relations, has pointed out that during the late-Soviet period learning and borrowing from elsewhere was a positively valued aspect of the architectural field. In this context, copying or mirroring was not something to be ashamed of, but quite the contrary: to do what was done abroad was seen in itself as a guarantee of quality (Hallas-Murula 2005). Incidentally, such a collective view on architecture also meant that Mart Port and his generation (who dominated until the mid-1970s) adopted the attitude that architecture was an anonymous phenomenon – or at least that it was an inevitable aspect of the coming to terms with modernisation in the Soviet Union. During the trips to Finland several Estonian architects made life-long friendships with Finnish colleagues who would later become their vital physical link and spiritual beacon for the remaining decades. It was customary that when Estonian architects had the option to travel to Finland, their Estonian colleagues who had previously been there would help to arrange meetings with local architects or cultural people. In this way, many Finnish architects started to visit Estonia regularly. As Port was a member of the Estonian SSR-Finland Friendship Society, he was also able to plan study trips for Estonian and Finnish architecture students to their neighbouring countries (Port 1968).

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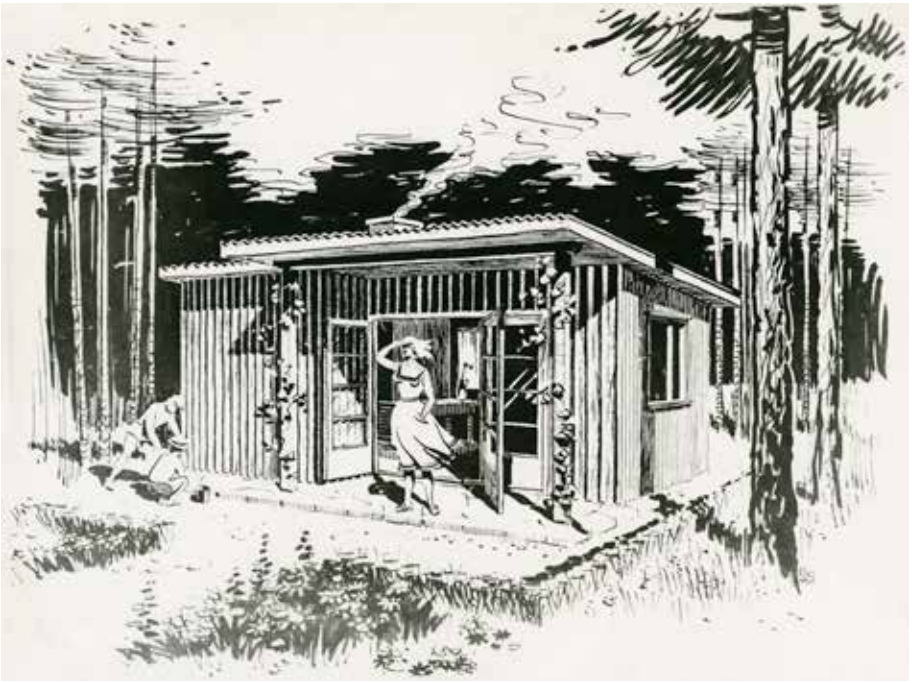

Fig. 7
A project for a standard summer house made of prefabricated wooden panels. Perspective view. Architects Mart Port and Ülo Ellandi. Estonprojekt, 1958. Courtesy of Estonian Museum of Architecture.

Within the framework of this cooperation, an exhibition of Finnish postwar architecture was held in Tallinn in 1968, accompanied by a small catalogue (*Soome arhitektuur* 1968). On a Moscow-organised trip to Finland in 1972, Estonian architects visited Alvar Aalto's studio together with colleagues from other Soviet republics. Although Aalto was at work, architect Ülo Stöör, who was also on the tour, said that the great Finn made it clear that he would only receive old friends. As Stöör watched twenty or more architects working in the open studio, translating Aalto's visionary sketches into architectural drawings, he was reminded of Mart Port's earlier words: «Our young architects just don't know how many opportunities they have to excel in competitions and as project authors, but in a foreign office you are a nameless collaborator» (Stöör 2015).
This is yet another example of Port's double-speak, because at the same time he would accuse the Soviet Estonian architectural scene for organising only a few competitions a year. Port's criticism of the anonymity of the twenty people working in the Aalto office is surprising, since his own design institute employed 600 people and ultimately all the active Estonian architects were divided between five large design offices. When Port lost his position as the head of SEAA in 1979, he was precisely accused of having undermined the identity of the architect as an intellectual profession. On the other hand, there was some truth in Port's reasoning, as internal design competitions were common in Estonian design institutes and, as a director, Port participated on an equal footing with his colleagues (Stöör 2025). Architects who worked at Eesti Projekt have said that Port would often propose his own solution for each new project, but if a subordinate architect came up with an even better idea, he supported it. Not all the architects at Eesti Projekt were as talented as he was, so it is likely that Port indeed co-authored more than a hundred projects (Kalm 2012).

Elsewhere in Europe

In 1958 Mart Port spent fifteen days in Belgium as a USSR delegate to the Brussels World's Fair. Somewhat surprisingly, Mart Port did not write about the experience in the Estonian press. Given the political and cultural context of the extravagant event, it was bound to leave an unforget-

table and mixed impression on visitors from Soviet Estonia. It was the first major world's fair after the Second World War and the occasion attracted some 41.5 million visitors, making it the second largest World's Fair after the 1900 *Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Paris*. It was also the first opportunity for the politically divided Europe to learn about the technological and cultural developments in the socialist camp. At the time, Europe's old imperial powers were struggling with the independence aspirations of their colonies. Decolonisation was also supported by vocal home-grown critics. The ideological stakes of EXPO'58 couldn't be higher. Looking at the articles published in the Estonian press about the World Exhibition, the wealth experienced in Belgium truly disturbed the authors, who saw behind it the slave labour of millions of Africans and the illegal appropriation of natural resources (Peterson 1958). Port fiercely criticised such wealth built on injustice when writing about the United Kingdom.

Understandably Port could not write at the time that Russia and Estonia were in a similar colonial relationship. EXPO'58 also had the added significance that the expat Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanian who had fled the Soviet occupation, made themselves visible to the Belgian public through protests and public appearances, to show the free world «what a crime the Soviet Union committed when it strangled a small country» ("Eestlased tuhamägede all" 1958). During the Second World War 70 000 people emigrated from Estonia, many of them from the technical and cultural elite. As the Stalinist years had a devastating effect on the country, it has been pointed out that even in the 1960s Estonian cultural life was more active in exile than at home. For example, in 1965 more Estonian-language literature was published abroad than in Soviet Estonia (Hasselblatt 2016). However, the expat cultural life was almost entirely separate from that of the homeland and, moreover, fragmented all over the world. Against this backdrop, the Soviet authorities naturally tried to prevent and play down cultural encounters between Estonia and "non-Estonia".

At the same time, however, expat Estonians made a very big thing of foreign trips by "home" Estonians. For example, when Port was in Sweden for two weeks in 1959, the local Estonian-language newspaper manifested: «After a long break, a group of tourists from occupied Estonia is now in Sweden, about 5 people, including architects Edgar Velbri and Mart Port (born 1921). They stayed at the Kristineberg Hotel, are currently touring Sweden and will return to Stockholm at the end of this week» ("Turiste Eestist Stockholmis" 1959). The newspaper's rather aggressive and accusatory form of expression suggests a division within the émigré Estonian community. There were those who were in favour of cutting off all communication with occupied Estonia and those who were in favour of a more moderate attitude. When Port was back in Sweden seven years later, another Estonian newspaper reported, «One of the best-known architects of the younger generation from occupied Estonia is in Sweden, and he came to see Swedish hotels in order to get acquainted with the architecture of modern hotels».

In Tallinn, a new hotel of Western standards is to be built ("Arhitekt tuli hotelle vaatama" 1966). The hotel is question is the Viru hotel in Tallinn, designed by Mart Port and Henno Sepmann which opened in 1972 (Nupponen 2007). Architectural history to date has not identified any direct references to Swedish architecture in the Viru Hotel. It is clear that the building spoke a similar modernist architectural language to that of the city centres if Brasilia, Rotterdam or, as a closer example, Arne Jacobsen's

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Fig. 8
Mart Port's photo from Greece, 1970s Courtesy of Estonian Museum of Architecture.

SAS Royal Hotel in Copenhagen (1960). On the other hand, there can be no doubt that Port was affected by the demolition of historic Swedish town centres, which had escaped the war entirely, and their replacement by new high-rise buildings. Such action may have had the short-term and ostensible effect of densifying and activating city centres, and it is interesting to wonder whether Port saw this process as a genuinely socialist clever urban planning or as a trap set by the capitalists. As historians have later shown, this devastating process, driven by consumerist ideology, was covertly and secretly supported by Swedish banks and corporations (Johansson 2011). Whatever was Port's view, both he and Tallinn's chief architect Dmitri Bruns must have found it useful to place a gigantic building with a strict geometry right next to Tallinn's Old Town. This decision set the future direction of the city.

From this perspectove, it is rather paradoxical that when Port visited Italy in 1961, he criticised the 1958 Pirelli Tower in Milan, designed by Giò Ponti and Pier Luigi Nervi (Port 1963). Without a bad word to say about the building's architecture or the quality of its construction, he found that «towering above the surrounding old houses, it is one of the outstanding rocks on which modern Western architecture rests». In his article, Port used the metaphor that while in the middle of the ocean, a few cliff tops (the most prominent representatives of the culture) rise up, deep beneath the water at the bottom of the ocean, the underclass and the poor are hidden. Using Pirelli Tower as a parable for the whole Western world, he concluded that capitalist architecture relies on individual phenomena, such as new skyscrapers, large corporate administrative and industrial buildings, luxury hotels, bank houses, single-family homes and housing complexes for the wealthier classes.

Port boasted that in the Soviet Union things were the other way round: «In our view, the first priority must be to build a large number of the most necessary, economical buildings of a satisfactory standard for the broadest sections of the population. Throughout the year, day and night, every twenty minutes, a giant Soviet construction machine churns out a new 80-apartment, five-storey building». By the end of the 1960s, the "ocean" in Tallinn must have been taken care of enough to start building a spectacular hotel exclusively for tourists and 'socialist consumerism'. As this article was published in a propaganda newspaper for Estonians abroad, it is understandable why Port, like other Soviet authors writing about Italy, used such figurative language in his article, trying to construct a reductive image of the capitalist West and its societal fundamentals, and contrasting it with a positive Soviet society (Kõvamees, 2011). It is known that Mart Port shared his Italian travel impressions with students and lecturers of the Civil Engineering Department of Tallinn Polytechnic Institute (Sellik 1961). He illustrated his presentation of contemporary Italian architecture with a wealth of photographic material. Such slideshow presentations to family members, friends and colleagues were common during the Soviet period and it can be assumed that the content of the presentation varied according to the audience.

In England through the eyes of an Architect

Literary scholars have found that travel books ranked second only to novels among the literary genres read during the Soviet period (Kõvamees 2011). Travel books were read as a pastime and also for self-improvement, as the information they provided was very graphic and emotional.

In 1961, when Mart Port spent fifteen days in England with a Soviet delegation at the UIA Congress, he used his impressions of the trip to publish a small-format but densely text-filled 218-page travel book with a print-run of 12 000 (Port 1966). In the Estonian context, this is an exceptional book, as no architect before or since has published a book on a single journey.

From an architectural point of view, the book is of particular interest for the first-hand experience Port shares of England's post-war new towns like Coventry and Stevenage. He wrote with particular enthusiasm about Coventry and the way it had created a pedestrian-friendly and car-avoiding environment in the city centre. It was in England that Port first encountered the explosion of private car ownership sweeping the western world, and he devoted a whole chapter of his book to the subject. Port's attitude to cars was critical, but as with many other issues he took it as inevitable and rejoiced in the fact that while in capitalist countries cities had to be retrofitted to accommodate car traffic, in the Soviet Union they knew how to plan for such things twenty-five and fifty years in advance.

Port took the view that linking historic city centres and new towns with wide highways was unavoidable, but that ideally cars and people should be separated – as he later did in Lasnamäe. The theme of car congestion was echoed in his later articles, which painted the western cities in even darker tones (Port 1965a). He claimed, for example, that in West Germany, about 40,000 people were killed in traffic every year. Although the actual number of fatalities was not much better at 16,494 (Road traffic accidents 2025), such an exaggeration in speaking of the evils of the West seemed to be his habit. When Port gave a presentation at the 12th Congress of the International Union of Architects in Madrid in 1975, he focused on the then still unbuilt Lasnamäe housing estate project, «where special attention is given to the protection of the environment and the isolation of motor traffic from residential areas and the main pedestrian routes» (Port 1975).

However, leaving aside the issue of new towns, it is a highly opinionated piece of writing, typical of the era, and it requires a lot of patience from the reader to get through the ideologically dense text. In his fleeting touristic glimpse, he draws fundamental conclusions about English society and capitalism more generally. Throughout, the book depicts the bottlenecks of capitalist society, the struggle of working people (the "real English people") to cope with low wages and high prices. Against all this, the reader is given a sense of how good life is for the working man in the Soviet Union. Added to this is the separate theme of the morally stunted West (film industry, pornography) and the view that capitalist culture is interested in the sick psyche and makes everything for money. In keeping with the genre, he is negatively condescending towards religion, expressing the Soviet view that religion stifled clear thinking (Kõvamees 2011).

Conclusion

If so far in Estonian architectural history it has been common knowledge that Port was a rationalist and a pragmatist, a good architect and an excellent writer, but a cynic who grew bitter when he could no longer do better, then analysing his trips abroad and the writings based on them adds another aspect. The Iron Curtain was by no means as impenetrable as it is sometimes presented. Port, like hundreds of other Estonian architects and engineers, travelled the world and brought that knowledge back to Estonia. Port was particularly active in doing so, holding positions of power in several institutions.

In addition, he strove to make his views known to the wider public. We can assume that many good things happened in Estonian architecture thanks to Port's foreign travels, but on the other hand, it must also be admitted that Port developed a rather inflexible image of both Western life and the Soviet system at an early age, which he tended to repeat in his architectural writings for the rest of his life. The problem is that, writing from such a high position, his opinions also tended to construct reality.

Notes

[1] «Pravda» was the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and was one of the most influential papers in the country with a circulation of 11 million.

[2] People's Architect of the USSR was an honorary title granted to architects of the Soviet Union. The title was bestowed upon architects who had achieved significant results in Soviet architecture's development either applying their expertise and creativity to the urban planning or to the design of important building compounds for civil, industrial or rural use (Johnson 2011). Altogether forty-five people were awarded the title. The Soviet Union singled out four honoured professions: artists (including performing arts and literature), teachers, doctors and architects. As these titles were granted by the government, honorees were afforded certain privileges (e.g., possibility to travel or acquire a car). Members of the creative intelligentsia were conferred upon four tides: Honored Artist, Honored Figure of the Arts, People's Artist of the Republic and the People's Artist of the Soviet Union. On republican level there were dozens of other honorary titles such as Honorary Social Care Worker or Honorary Forestry Worker. Yet, the most prestigious award was People's Artist, Teacher, Doctor or Architect of the Soviet Union, which could be conferred only by the all-union government. A total of 1006 people were awarded the title of People's Artist of the USSR – including nineteen from Estonian SSR.

[3] His faith in numbers is well expressed in an article on the synthesis of the arts, where he justifies the necessity of monumental art through the effectiveness of art's visibility. Based on the number of members of the Artists' Union, adding to this the amount of amateur artists, and making assumptions about the annual productivity of artists, Port suggested that in twenty years in Soviet Estonia, 40,000 to 50,000 original artworks were created, 12,000 of which were seen about 15% of the population in public exhibitions, with each viewer looking at one work for 30 seconds. Port called for more effective engagement that only publicly visible monumental art could offer (Port 1964).

[4] Architect Voldemar Tippel was able to to film the trip. Tippel's family has made the film available on Youtube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUlNi4wU_ww]. (last accessed 31 March 2025).

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Gregor Taul is a critic and curator based in Tallinn working as a lecturer in the Department of Interior Architecture at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Taul studied semiotics at Tartu University (BA in 2009) and art history in the Estonian Academy of Arts (MA in 2012; exchange studies in St Petersburg's Institute of Technology of Design in 2011). Taul was a PhD candidate in the Lisbon Consortium between 2016–2020 and defended his thesis in 2024 on late Soviet monumental-decorative art in the doctoral school of the Estonian Academy of Arts. Since 2010 Taul has been active as a critic writing on visual art and architecture. In 2012 he co-authored a book on Estonian murals published by Lugemik. In 2016 Estonian National Museum published his book on the architecture of the museum's new building by DGT / Architects. He has been teaching in various secondary and higher education institutions in Estonia and presented conference papers across Europe.

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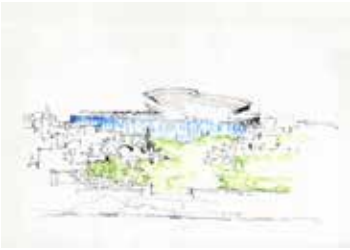
Domenico Chizzoniti

The Baltic Grand Tour. On Alvar Aalto's Traces

Abstract
Alvar Aalto and his works form the ideal framework for this journey – a hidden map of discovery that every designer, artist, and architecture enthusiast should aspire to follow. Climbing the canary-yellow stairs of the Paimio Sanatorium, sitting on the monumental steps of the Helsinki Polytechnic, admiring the lake from his Experimental House in Muuratsalo or the adjacent Säynätsalo Acropolis, and visiting Villa Mairea – these are not merely architectural experiences, but encounters with a profound cultural legacy.
The impact of Aalto's work transcends the conventional historiographic image of an isolated figure confined to the context of Nordic architecture. His oeuvre remains open to semantic reinterpretation for those who wish to reclaim it. From his early works in the 1920s and across more than fifty years of prolific design and construction, Aalto established an extraordinary dialogue between architecture, nature, and landscape.

Keywords
Form and Nature — Nordic Landscape — Architectural Space



Introduction

A group of colleagues travels to Finland to explore, firsthand, the narrative dimension of architecture through direct engagement with places, spaces, forms, colors, memories, light, and even scents. This "Grand Tour" through lakes and forests (Frampton 1998) reveals a landscape where the overwhelming presence of nature allows only a few architectural interventions to emerge – distinct episodes that stand out in the dense Nordic environment as authentic expressions of figurative intent, refined craftsmanship, and linguistic experimentation, rarely achieved in architecture (Colin St John 1979).
This landscape has long inspired narratives in which nature assumes a mythical and magical role. Forests, for instance, are often portrayed as the dwelling places of spirits and mystical beings – such as the Tapio, guardians of the trees, or the Hiisi, malevolent entities inhabiting remote areas. In Finnish mythology, natural elements are not merely physical phenomena but living entities endowed with their agency.
The journey becomes a retrospective rediscovery of "Nordic poetics," shaped by the assimilation of key traits of Mediterranean plasticity and immersed in the *wild vague* of the Finnish landscape. This profound connection remains perceptible in a culture where nature continues to be revered, generating unexpected and unique outcomes. These influences are evident in the creative evolution of Alvar Aalto, who began to intertwine Nordic sensibilities – particularly in artisanal construction techniques – with a deep-rooted Mediterranean ethos. His mastery in balancing material contrasts, chromatic harmonies, and technical precision transforms ideas into form – concepts shaped and ordered by the mind – while matter

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Fig. 1
A.Aalto Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1928-33), view of the solarium.

Fig. 2
A.Aalto Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1928-33), external view of the entrance.

suggests mass: a tangible, plastic thought that inhabits space, giving rise to figures with their own physical consistency and autonomous presence (Norberg-Schulz 1998).

Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1928–33)

The tour begins with the Paimio Sanatorium, a clear and composed structure set atop a broad expanse of glacial hills, densely covered with birch, pine, and spruce forests. Works such as this are striking redefining the conventional functional and behavioural relationship between users and architectural space (Woodman 2016). This is particularly evident using "pure chromaticism," articulated compositions, emblematic forms, and the patient ordering of elements that elevate form toward ideal ambitions –

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Fig. 3
A.Aalto Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1928-33), external view of the patient rooms.

condensing space and matter in pursuit of a representational character that aspires to monumentality and compositional balance. These are hallmarks of many of Aalto's works.

Aalto's cultural background – shaped by formative experiences such as his time in Arvid Bjerke's studio in Sweden (1921–22), his exposure to the Wagner School in Vienna, his honeymoon travels through Italy and Greece in 1924, and his 1928 visit to the Netherlands, particularly to Johannes Duiker's Zonnestraal Sanatorium in Hilversum (Vanden Heuvel 1978) – fueled his evolving engagement with the emerging poetics of modern European architecture. These journeys, these cultural explorations – these "tours" – were instrumental in shaping his architectural language (Tentori 2002).

The building consists of a main body articulated into three distinct volumes, each rotated at different angles. Auxiliary structures, added in 1933 – including housing for medical and paramedical staff and garages – are set apart from the main complex. The principal wing, a slender six-story linear block, houses patient rooms for approximately 300 individuals. The central volume accommodates communal spaces, while the smaller, lower wing contains general services such as the kitchen, dining hall, and technical facilities. The design is governed by the orientation of the main wing, which prioritised isolation, solar exposure, and natural ventilation. Patient rooms face southeast, toward the forest, while service areas are located on the inner side. The ends of the main wing feature terraces and solariums on all six levels, supported by a refined structural system of tapered columns. The central volume, located at the entrance and flanked by the patient and service wings, opens into a lobby with vertical circulation elements – a staircase and elevator block.

Here, Aalto's approach reveals a profound empathy for the patient, manifesting in both technical and artistic solutions: an advanced heating and ventilation system, careful attention to natural and artificial lighting, and

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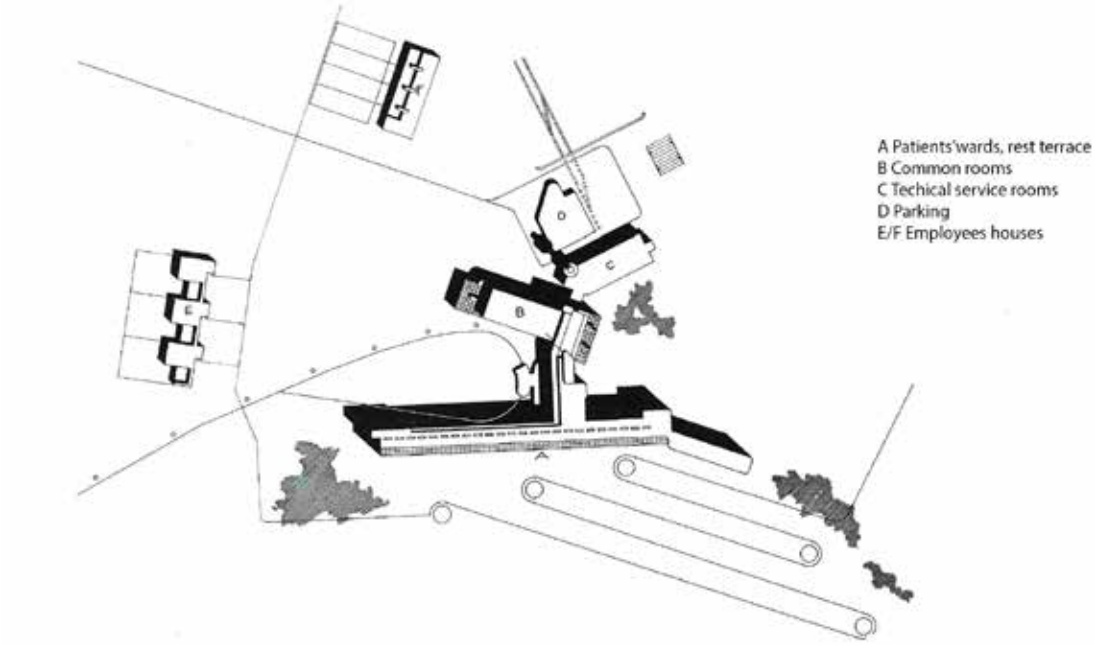

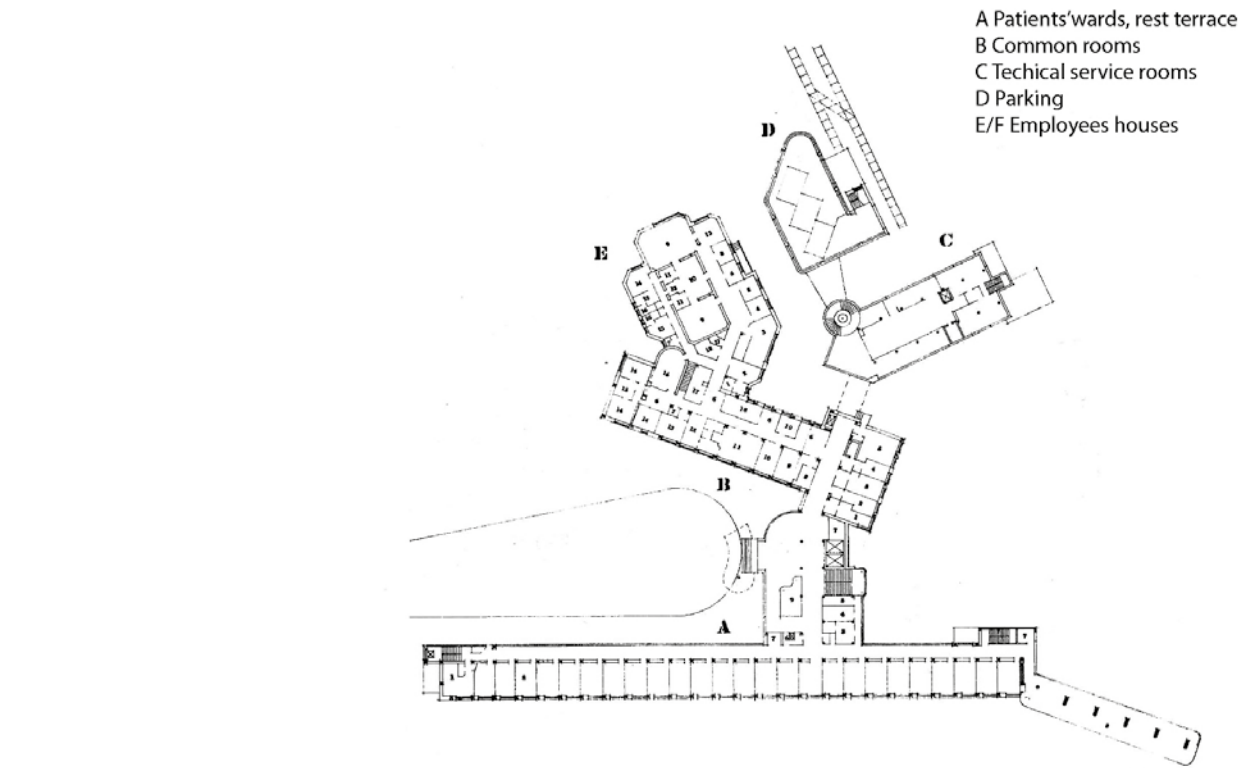

Fig. 4
A.Aalto Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1928-33), general plan.

Fig. 5
A.Aalto Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1928-33), ground floor plan.

custom-designed furnishings (beds, lamps, chairs, wardrobes). Artistically, the interior colour scheme, formal clarity, and figurative sensibility reflect a synthesis of classical solemnity and rationalist economy – an architectural poetics emerging organically from the Finnish forest landscape (AA. VV. 1935).

All patient rooms and rest areas are located away from zones of activity and oriented toward the forest and gardens. Walkways, reserved for patient use, are visible from the upper floors. Restrooms, situated at the eastern end of the complex, are directly connected to patient rooms, while the terraces allow for rotational use by different patient groups.

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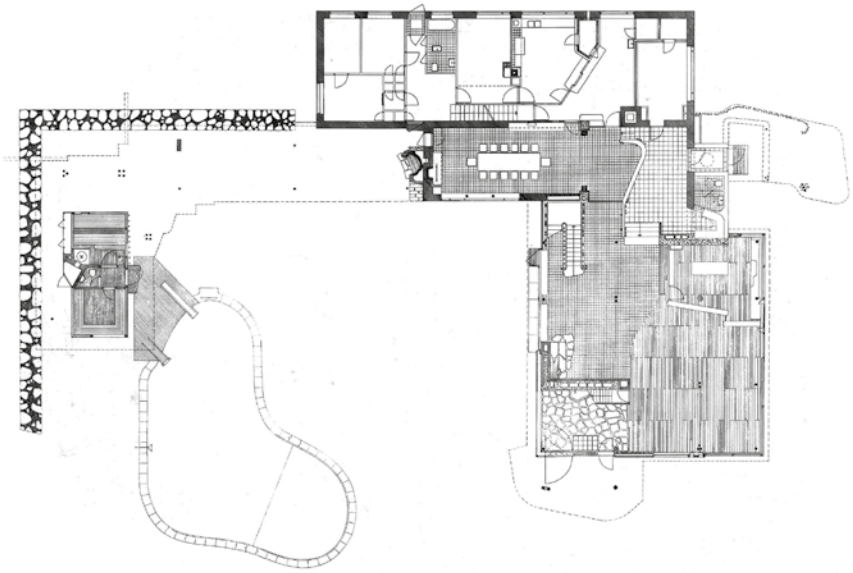

Fig. 6
A.Aalto Villa Mairea (1938-39), heneral plan.

Fig. 7
A.Aalto Villa Mairea (1938-39), ground floor plan.

The basic unit is the patient room. The ceilings are painted in darker tones than the walls. Heating is provided by a radiant surface embedded in the ceiling, designed to direct warmth toward the patient's lower limbs while minimizing exposure to the head. The rest of the room receives only indirect, gentle radiation. Incoming air is naturally preheated and flows diagonally through a specially designed window openings, avoiding direct drafts toward the patient.

Villa Mairea (1938–39)

The second stop on our tour is Villa Mairea, a pivotal project in Aalto's career following major works such as the Viipuri Library (1931–35), the Reval Museum project (1934), the Finnish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition, and the Sunila Pulp Mill (1936–39). Commissioned by the young industrialist Harry Gullichsen and his wife Maire – after whom the villa is named – this residence stands as one of the clearest examples of Aalto's ability to reconcile modernism with Nordic tradition at the domestic scale. The spatial organization of the house reflects the artistic and cultural vision of the Gullichsen family, while also embodying their desire for a dwelling that transcends mere functionality to become a place of beauty and aesthetic experience[1]. What remains striking is the conceptual integration between architectural artifice and the natural environment – an iconic element that itself becomes a work of art (Greco 2000).

The villa is structured across three levels: the basement houses technical systems and storage; the ground floor, open to the inner garden, contains the living areas; and the upper floor is reserved for private quarters, including the master suite, children's rooms, and a separate guest area. The layout is defined by the intersection of two linear volumes forming a right angle, enclosing a courtyard that establishes a strong relationship with the surrounding natural elements – particularly the adjacent forest, mediated by the garden, which serves as the privileged outlook for the main rooms. The plan extends at the rear through an open colonnade leading to the sauna, with a lawn and swimming pool at its centre. Functions are clearly distributed: the ground floor is dedicated to communal and public spaces, while the upper floor remains strictly private.

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Fig. 8
A.Aalto Villa Mairea (1938-39), exterior view of the ntrance side.

Fig. 9
A.Aalto Villa Mairea (1938-39), view of the staircase towards the entrance.

The entrance, marked by a curved wooden canopy supported by braces and a pillar clad in vertical wooden slats, opens into a small hall set at a lower level than the main rooms. From here, two short staircases of four steps each lead to the dining room and living area. The dining room is aligned axially with the table, though this axis is softened by an asymmetrical wooden screen resting against a curved wall, subtly defining the hall as an informal antechamber between the gallery-like living room and the dining space. The focal point of the living room is a white-plastered fireplace set in a corner, around which the entire space is organised.
The living area also includes a library and opens onto the curvilinear outdoor pool, accessible via a portico constructed partly in wood and partly in steel, with a green roof covered in turf. The emphasis on shared spaces creates a fluid transition between the interior and exterior, reinforcing the perception of the house as a threshold between built form and natural landscape.

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Fig. 10
A.Aalto Villa Mairea (1938-39), view of the living room.

Villa Mairea exemplifies a unique synthesis of modernist lines with references to Finnish tradition and organic architecture. While wood – a quintessential Finnish material – is prominently featured, the structure also incorporates modern materials such as concrete and glass. The design is characterized by open, flowing spaces that reflect Aalto's functionalist approach while celebrating the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape. This is not merely a poetic gesture, but a reaffirmation of the deep connection between architecture and nature.
One notable innovation is the use of ribbon windows, which maintain a continuous visual connection between interior and exterior. Aalto's treatment of light and shadow, as well as his use of colour, underscores his intent to create a harmonious and stimulating environment. The villa is set within a large garden designed by Aalto himself, which serves not only as an outdoor space but as an extension of the villa's architectural philosophy. Villa Mairea thus represents a perfect synthesis of modernism and nature – an example of how architecture can respond to human needs while honouring environmental and cultural traditions (Mosso 1976).

Muuratsalo Experimental House

The third stop on our tour is the Muuratsalo Summer House, where more than anywhere else, Aalto sought to reconnect his spirit with the legends of the forest, lakes, and icy islands – the archetypal Finnish landscape that has long inspired national folklore. For Aalto, this setting was not only a backdrop for fairy tales but the natural location for his own dwelling. Finnish mythology imbues the landscape with a sense of enchantment, mystery, and symbolic resonance, where spirits and legends are reinterpreted

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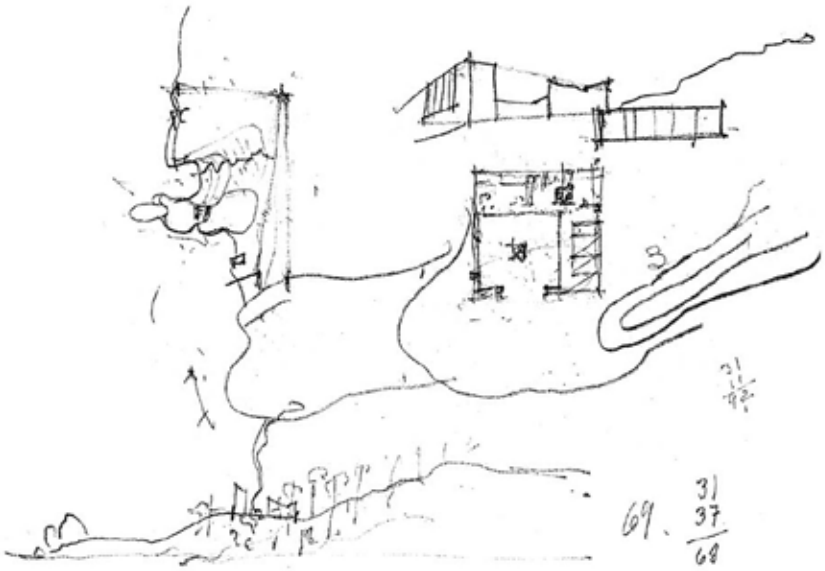

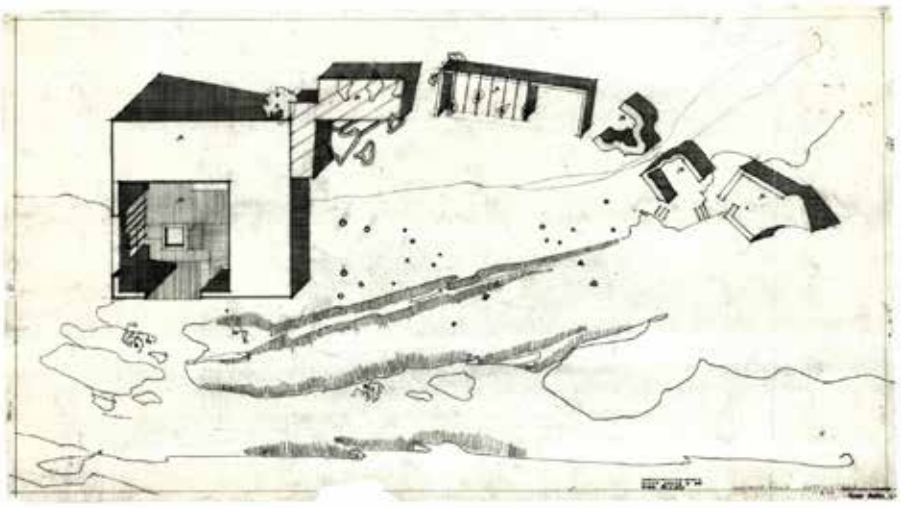

Fig. 11
A.Aalto House in Muuratsalo (1952-53), preparatory drawings.

Fig. 12
A.Aalto House in Muuratsalo (1952-53), general plan.

through a figurative language that merges local folklore with international modernism.

The complex comprises the main residential block, an adjoining guest wing, a woodshed, and a separate smoke sauna located near the lakeshore. The primary structure, L-shaped and inscribed within a square footprint, is divided into two zones: one for bedrooms, and the other for living, dining, and working spaces. Aalto employed a variety of forms and proportions throughout the buildings. The main block is nestled against a rocky outcrop, offering expansive views of the lake. Its topographical positioning and relationship with the surrounding landscape were carefully considered. Approaching from the lake – the traditional point of arrival – the house appears as a slender white volume atop the rock. From the forest side, however, it reads as a cluster of small, white-painted wooden blocks.

The architectural and functional centrepiece is the courtyard, located along the diagonal axis between the bedroom and living wings, forming a rigorously geometric enclosure. Aalto experimented with various brick types and ceramic tile combinations on the courtyard façades and patio surfaces, creating a richly textured and visually dynamic environment.

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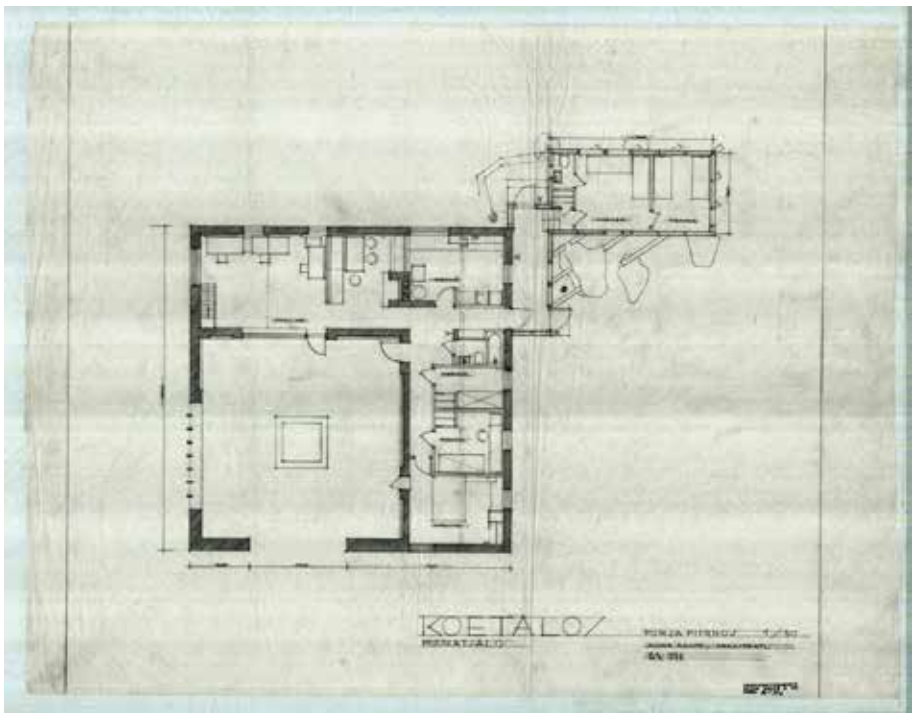

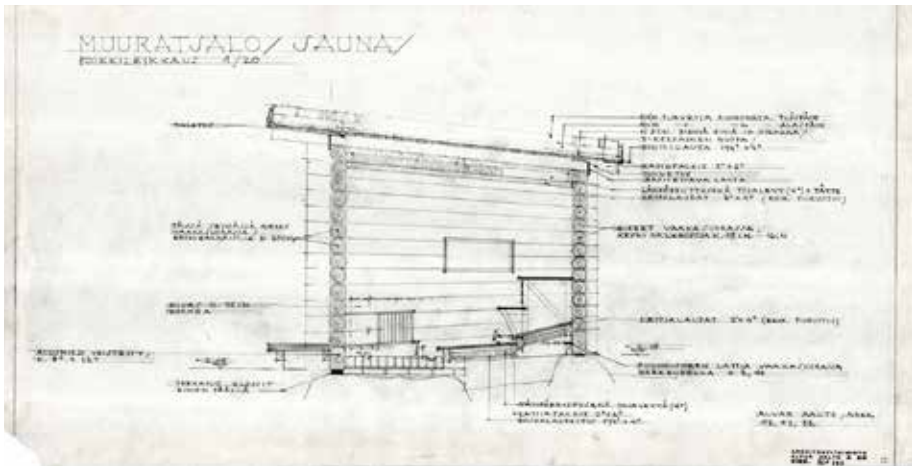

Fig. 13
A.Aalto House in Muuratsalo (1952-53), plan of the main building.

Fig. 14
A.Aalto House in Muuratsalo (1952-53), detail of the sauna.

In the 1953 issue (n. 9-10) of «Arkkitehti» (Finnish Architectural Review), Aalto described the house as both a protected architectural studio and a site for material experimentation, where proximity to nature could inspire both form and construction (Aalto 1953).
The house thus served as a laboratory for testing shapes, textures, structural properties, dimensions, and assembly techniques – open joints, staggered surfaces, contiguous planes, and more.
What stands out is the natural arrangement of a wide range of materials into a heterogeneous collage across the vertical surfaces – approximately fifty distinct brick or tile fields – resulting in a material multiplicity unified by a coherent architectural figure. The chromatic variations generate virtual spatial figures within the courtyard, expanding its perceived dimensions and animating the vertical surfaces with richness and depth. A further distinctive feature of this abstract display of constructed forms is their relationship with both the enclosing space and the spatial effects generated by geometrically framed, cantilevered, grooved, or perforated fields. This creates a dual spatiality: one defined by the dynamic interplay between the stark, white, blind surfaces and the surrounding natural environment; the other, more intimate and mysterious, emerges from the internal relation-

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Fig. 15
A.Aalto House in Muuratsalo (1952-53), view of the patio.

Fig. 16
A.Aalto House in Muuratsalo (1952-53), view of the living area.

ships among masses, warm tones, and harmonious proportions – figures seemingly conceived in sincere dialogue with the spirit of the place[2]. At the heart of the house is the open fireplace in the centre of the courtyard. The spatial and visual sequence extends from the living room, through the courtyard, and out toward the lake. Aalto's experimentation also extended to the precise detailing of the suspended and ventilated foundations – resting on logs to adapt to the rocky terrain – used for both the guest wing and the woodshed. In designing the smoke sauna along the lakeshore, Aalto employed the natural curvature of timber logs to shape the sloping roof. Muuratsalo was a place of personal significance for Aalto – a retreat where he could relax, paint, and host friends in a setting deeply immersed in nature.

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Fig. 17
A.Aalto Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52), view of the council chamber wing.

Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949–52)

Located not far from Jyväskylä, the fourth stop of the tour is the Säynätsalo Town Hall, built between 1949 and 1952. The site is a small island in the inland sea of Lake Päijänne. The town itself is relatively recent – planned in 1945 and home to just over 3,000 inhabitants. It originated from a project initiated in 1942, when Aalto was invited by Hilmer Brommels, the local director of the Enso-Gutzeit company, to design a settlement for factory workers. The new development was planned in 1945, followed shortly by the central market square, the town hall, and commercial buildings.

In 1950, Aalto envisioned a cultural centre for the settlement, which was never realized. Only the village centre was built according to his design, following a competition he won in 1949 (AA.VV. 1954). The architectural layout is organized around a nearly square courtyard – a settlement motif similar to that of the nearby Muuratsalo house. This choice reflects an idealization of pure geometric form, which, as Peter Eisenman noted, is eroded at the edges by the site's natural contours, revealing the formal essence at the core of Aalto's proposal (Eisenman 2009)[3].

At the heart of this exemplary composition lies a central theme of Aalto's poetics: the conceptualization of architecture as an expression of elemental relationships between form, colour, and material (Menin 2001). The spatial condition is defined by elementary structures – stereometric masses that expand into the Nordic landscape, assuming an "acropolitan" disposition through the central void that celebrates spatial introversion[4].

The program includes municipal offices, a large council chamber, a public library, and several apartments. The ground floor houses commercial spaces, designed to accommodate future expansions of public and civic functions. The elevated courtyard was formed using soil excavated during foundation work, and placed at the centre to define the building's representative character and to separate public functions from the commercial spa-

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Fig. 18
A.Aalto Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52), study drawing.

Fig. 19
A.Aalto Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52), view of the staircase leading to the council chamber.

Fig. 20
A.Aalto Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52), view of the support system of the roof of the council chamber.

ces below, along the street level. The council chamber is the architectural and symbolic core of the composition – a nearly cubic volume, with equal dimensions in plan and height.
A sophisticated system of triangular supports sustains both the primary and secondary structures. Beyond its technical achievements, the building encapsulates many of the themes Aalto explored throughout his career. A key aspect is the free arrangement of functions within a typologically defined structure. Although the competition brief suggested a single three-story block, Aalto distributed the functions across a composition of architectural masses organized around the central courtyard, assigning each part a specific role: a separate block to the north (later modified) for a sauna and housing; municipal offices to the north and east; apartments to the west; and the library to the south, above the ground-floor shops. A second aspect concerns the building's representational character. As early as 1926, Aalto wrote:

> The city on the hill […] is the purest, most characteristic, and natural form of urban design. Its beauty is above all natural, as it reveals its qualities when viewed from the human eye level, that is, from the ground (Schildt 1986, p. 13).

This idea is evident in the raised courtyard and in the varied spatial perceptions: from the centre, the buildings appear almost domestic in scale, with the low-pitched roofs emphasizing the inward slope and maximizing sunlight penetration.
A third aspect relates to the symbolic and tectonic dimension of this modest building, elevated to represent the entire community. The architectural narrative is constructed through figurative devices and constructional strategies cantered on the council chamber. Its projecting volume not only exceeds the sectional limits of the courtyard enclosure but also extends eastward to accommodate a staircase that ascends counterclockwise, with staggered landings offering moments of pause and culminating in a panoramic gallery at the rear. This gallery wraps around the chamber in a subsidiary space lit by a continuous window. After the first turn, one enters the chamber through a wide sliding door.

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Fig. 21
A.Aalto Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52), view of the access to the inner courtyard.

Three steps lead to another level, where a second sliding door opens onto a small gallery for observers, forming the third side of the chamber's enclosure, oriented westward toward the courtyard.

Jyväskylä University Campus

Not so far from Muuratsalo, and following his commission for the Otaniemi campus, Aalto won the competition for the Pedagogical Institute – now the University of Jyväskylä. This project emerged from a strong local commitment to educational sciences, a field well-known to Aalto, who was born in Jyväskylä. The city had also hosted the first Finnish-language school, and Aalto affectionately referred to it as the potential "Athens of Finland" (Paavilainen 1979).

The motto Aalto chose for the competition, Urbs, clearly reflected his urban design approach. Central to the campus is the "Festival Hall", a true civic theatre conceived as a space open both to the city and to the university's ceremonial functions (Holma 2016).

As in Otaniemi and other urban-scale projects, Aalto drew inspiration from the organization of the Greek polis – guided by principles of functionality, yet responsive to contextual stimuli such as topography. The layout adapts to the terrain while asserting a strong figurative identity, with each function – from "temple" to "agora," from "theatre" to "private house" – symbolically reinforcing the values and identity of the community (Hipeli 2009).

The campus includes residences for faculty and students, a restaurant, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, a pedagogical institute with classrooms and offices, a large library, and a main building with an auditorium. The auditorium – comprising two large halls separated by a movable soundproof wall – can be combined into a single space for up to 950 people. It serves both as a venue for university ceremonies and as a concert hall for the city. The fan-shaped seating rises above a shared cloakroom and a spacious

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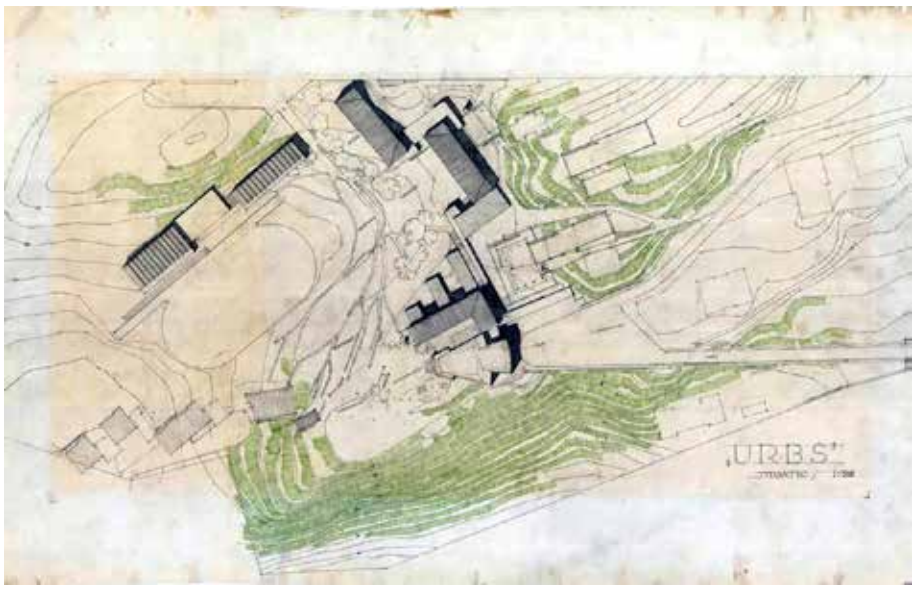

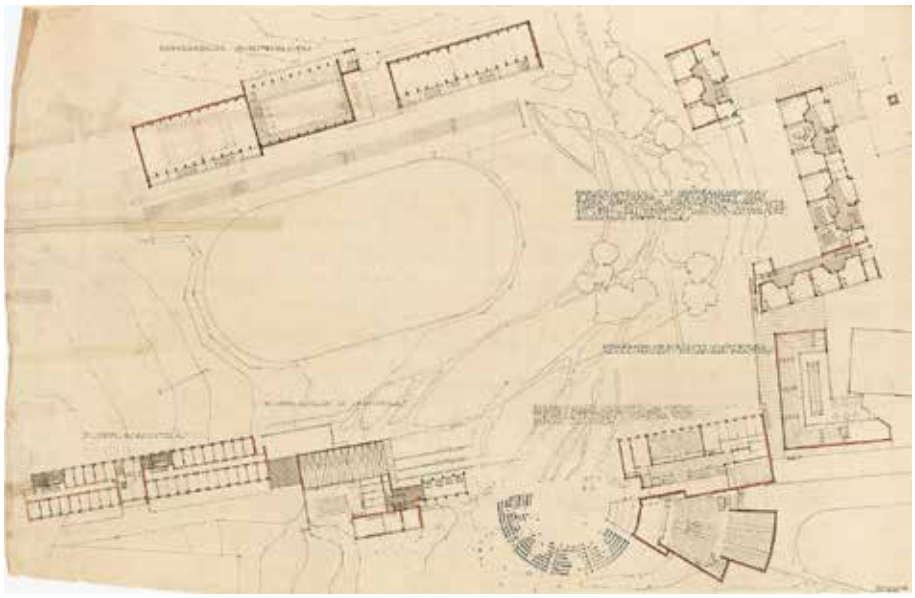

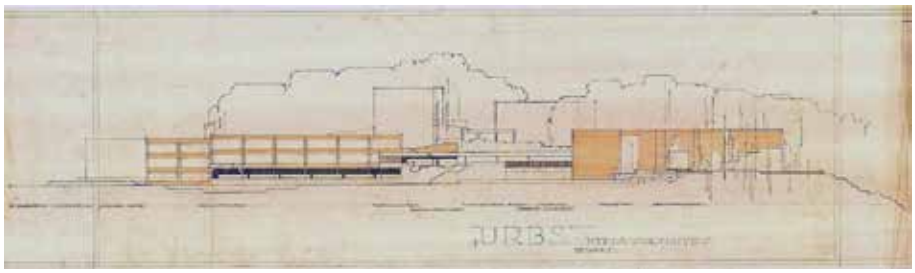

Fig. 22
A.Aalto Jyväskylä Campus (1951-71), general plan.

Fig. 23
A.Aalto Jyväskylä Campus (1951-71), competition plan of the ground floor.

Fig. 24
A.Aalto Jyväskylä Campus Jväskylä (1951-71), competition elevation of the longitudinal front.

foyer, which opens to the city and adjacent forest through a continuous glass façade. Once again, Aalto explores the theme of expanded space, using large transparent spans and a freely arranged colonnade to merge interior and exterior environments (Purini 2002, pp. 33-36).
Despite the variety of architectural solutions tailored to the campus's diverse functions, the significance of Jyväskylä within Aalto's body of work lies in the design of the main building. Here, he refined themes that would become central to his architectural poetics, supported by new construction techniques. For instance, the building is divided into two distinct sections: to the north, a rectilinear block housing classrooms, seminar rooms, and laboratories; to the south, the main auditorium.

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Fig. 25
A.Aalto Campus of Jyväskylä (1951-71), internal staircase of the classroom building.

Fig. 26
A.Aalto Campus of Jyväskylä (1951-71), teaching room.

These converge along an internal street, forming a kind of modern stoa. This composition constructs a metaphorical urban landscape within the building itself – a sequence of panoramic views, foyer spaces, a covered public square, and a "street" with an oversized ceremonial stairway rising behind a dramatic brick cliff. The project's evocative power lies in its ability to fulfil the representational aspirations of space through elemental architectural gestures.

Although the campus was conceived as a unified master plan, each component is treated independently, with its own architectural logic and poetic rationale. Materials and forms vary: exposed or plastered brickwork; columns ranging from organic, plant-like struts to white pilotis or clad structu-

ral elements; openings treated as rectangular voids, continuous screens, or ribbon windows; roofs designed in modernist fashion – flat, single-pitched with skylights, or clad in copper, evoking romantic Nordic traditions.
Aalto appears to simulate a settlement layered over time, with material and geometric variations – sometimes even stylistic ones – adapted to the site's topography. These subtle shifts and adjustments create a series of perspectives and spatial nuances that recall both medieval urban fabric and a carefully orchestrated ensemble responsive to contextual cues.

Otaniemi University Campus

The final stop of the tour is in Helsinki: the Otaniemi University campus. The origins of this project, date back to the years following the Second World War, when the Finnish government decided to relocate the Technical University of Helsinki to a peninsula west of the city, near the newly planned "forest city" of Tapiola. The 1949 competition was won by Alvar Aalto – one of the last projects he undertook with his wife Aino – while he was still affiliated with MIT, a commitment that ultimately prevented his return to teaching in the United States. In a heartfelt letter to Dean William Wurster, Aalto expressed his deep attachment to the commission and its civic importance:

> The plan comprises approximately seventy buildings, different departments, laboratories, dormitories, etc. on a -free site of hundreds of acres, the most beautiful sport near Helsinki. You know by yourself this means work, work and work [...] I could of course for MIT give up one or two of my bigger works but I can of course in no case abstain from building the new Technical University of my own country, which happens once in a millennium. Things like that are *labor sacrum*[5].

The project underwent several transformations between the competition phase and its realization. The original architectural layout was based on a hierarchical arrangement of volumetric blocks organized around a central space – the highest point of the site – where a large agora was presided over by an auditorium, conceived as a classical theater opening onto the open space. This scheme, reminiscent of Aalto's earlier projects in Imatra and Säynätsalo, evoked an acropolis-like composition, once intended to include a "ruined" colonnade – an estranging presence that was ultimately omitted due to the difficulty of sourcing authentic columns from Italy.
The final version, built in phases starting in 1952, introduced modifications such as the reduction of the central plaza and the stepped contraction of the lateral wings, which softened the acropolis effect. Nevertheless, the project retained allusions to classical urban devices: the sequential pediments of the gymnasium, the adoption of the cavea-type auditorium, the patio as a distributive device for the classroom blocks, the use of topographic variation to enhance the architectural masses, and the stereometric articulation of volumes – all referencing Mediterranean architectural culture.
The design of the campus belongs to a figurative repertoire that Aalto had patiently developed throughout his career. Any perceived redundancies are, in fact, the result of a persistent and coherent inquiry into the nature of space for academic communities. Here, collective space is shaped by a civic sense of monumentality – one that avoids rhetorical excess or linguistic verbosity. This project reveals a kind of sensory multiplication of masses and forms across the built ensemble.

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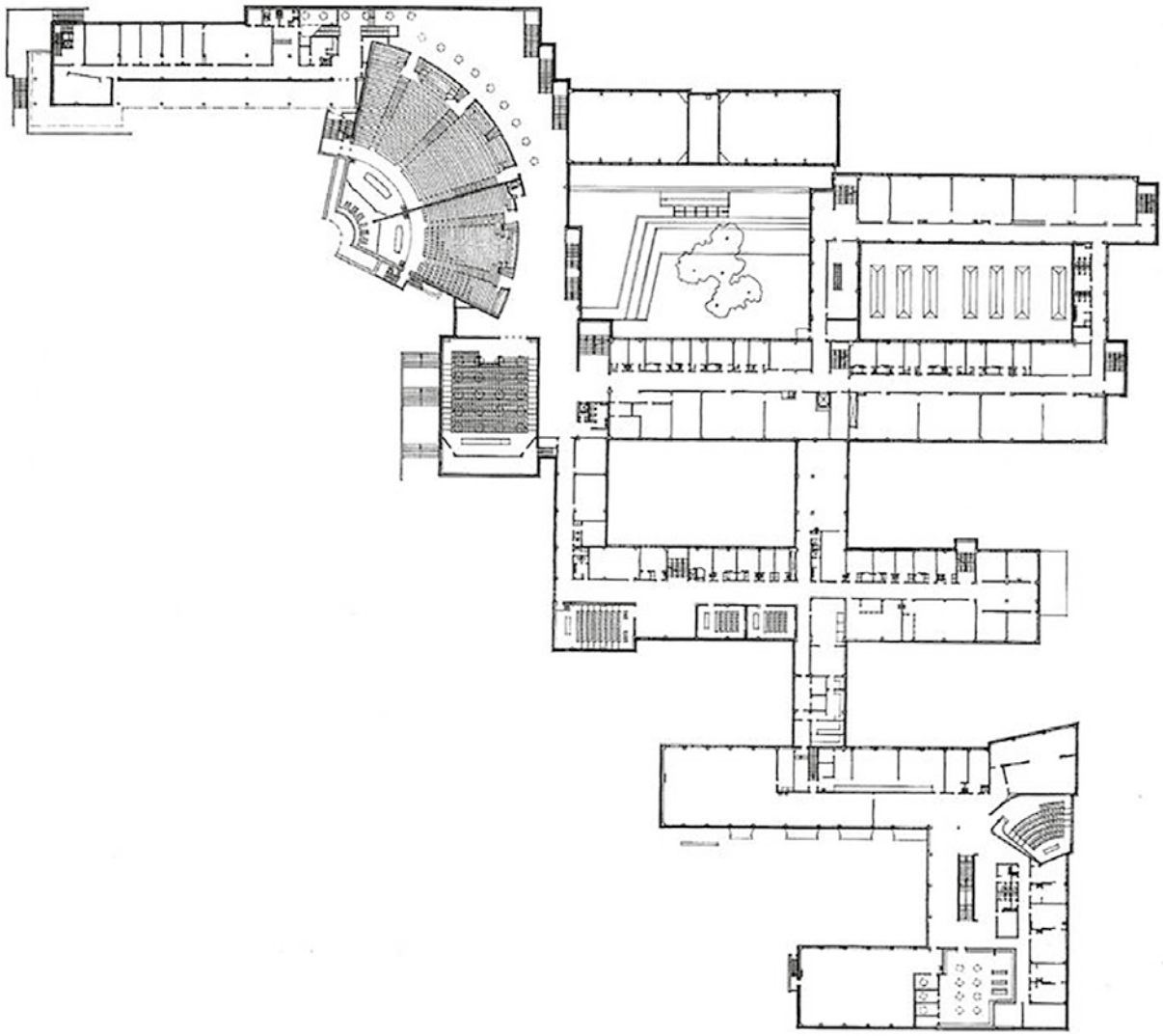

Fig. 27
A.Aalto Campus of Otaniemi (1949-70), general plan.

It is a remarkable achievement, the outcome of a symbolic, plastic, material, and even alchemical pursuit – a dialogue between nature and the architect, who transforms and historicised it through the magical secret of architecture.

Aalto's deep roots in Mediterranean Europeanism – shaped by his formative travels to Italy in 1924 – are evident[6]. From these experiences, he developed a dual sensitivity: on one hand, a classical rigour, exemplified by recurring themes such as the cavea; on the other, an attentiveness to vernacular dwelling, to the site as a natural foundation for architecture, and to architecture as topography. This project thus becomes a kind of inverted Grand Tour – one in which the Mediterranean tradition is rediscovered and reinterpreted in the Baltic landscape.

Notes

[1] One of the artists exhibited at Villa Mairea is Akseli Gallen-Kallela, a Finnish painter known for his works inspired by Finnish mythology and the epic poem Kalevala. Gallen-Kallela is considesed one of the greatest Finnish artists and played a key role in the Finnish nationalist movement. His works are characterized by a strong sense of narrative and a vibrant use of color. Among his most famous works are *The Swan of*

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Fig. 28
A.Aalto Campus of Otaniemi (1949-70), external view.

Fig. 29
A.Aalto Campus of Otaniemi (1949-70), general view of the period.

Tuonela and *The Defender of the Sampo*, both inspired by the Kalevala. His art reflects a deep connection with nature and Finnish culture, making him a perfect artist to be exhibited in a place like Villa Mairea, which celebrates Nordic art and culture.

[2] See also AA.VV. 1938, pp. 20-21.

[3] The book is Peter Eisenman's 1963 PhD thesis at Trinity College, Cambridge under the guidance of Sir Leslie Martin, which aims to demonstrate that form is the basis of all modern architecture, regardless of style. The author builds on and interprets Le Corbusier's discussion of the concept of form in *Quatre Compositions* and empirically tests the new theory on works by Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto and Giuseppe Terragni. The aim is to have provide a basis for clarification of modern architectural conceptual thought.

[4] «[...] I used the enclosed courtyard as the main motif because, in some mysterious way, it awakens the social instinct. In government and municipal buildings, the courtyard has preserved its original meaning, which, from the times of ancient Crete, Gre-

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Fig. 30
A.Aalto Campus of Otaniemi (1949-70), internal view of the auditorium.

Fig. 31
A.Aalto Campus of Otaniemi (1949-70), external view of the auditorium.

ece and Rome, through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, has come down to us. Buildings with central courtyards also have shorter corridors in relation to the size of the halls. In administrative buildings, central corridors or dark passageways cannot, and should not, be used» (Schildt 2000, p. 81).

[5] Aalto, 1949. Letter to the MIT Board of Directors (Schildt 1991, p. 128).

[6] See in this regard Mangone et alii 1993; see also the well-known thesis by Bruno Zevi on Aalto's four seasons on the occasion of the centenary of his birth (Zevi 1998, pp. 254-55).

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Domenico Chizzoniti graduated from Politecnico di Milano. He obtained a PhD in Architectural Composition in 2001 from IUAV of Venice. He was an Assistant Professor at the Department of Architectural Design of the Politecnico di Milano since 1996. Between 2002 and 2005 he worked as a Lecturer at the School of Architecture of the Università degli Studi Parma and the School of Civil Architecture of the Politecnico di Milano. In 2008 he became an Assistant Professor in Architectural Composition at Politecnico di Milano, in 2015 Associate Professor and, then Full Professor. He is a coordinator of the books of TECA "Teorie della Composizione Architettonica". He has published more than 150 scientific papers in Architectural Design. He took part as an author in several books, and his work has been published in catalogues and magazines. As a visiting professor, he was invited to several international Universities.

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Helder Casal Ribeiro, Sílvia Ramos

Porto's Faculty of Architecture: Points Toward a Grand Tour

Abstract
The present article is based on the hypothesis that the specificity of architectural journeys resides mainly in the predisposition of those who travel to nourish an in-depth insight into examples embedded in a broad cultural landscape, converting it into sensitive material capable of informing the creative process. This means the journey´s didactic productiveness depends directly on the density of the visited works, the layered themes they convey and how one may be able to decode them.
In this sense, the article rehearses the possibility of applying the idea of a Grand Tour to a journey concentrated on a single building, which is dense and layered due to the number of readings and themes into which it can be broken down. "Points toward a Grand Tour" develops a set of arguments aimed to demonstrate that the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, designed by Álvaro Siza, is relevant as a unique object of a Grand Tour.

Keywords
Architecture travels — Design themes — Design references

When we read the word "I", without knowing who wrote it, it is perhaps not meaningless, but it is at least estranged from its normal meaning (Husserl 1900).

"Porto's Faculty of Architecture: points toward[1] a Grand Tour", aims to contribute and expand a critical spirit associated with travel and, in particular, with Architectural Travel. The article is based on the conviction that Architecture travel is a specific journey and on the hypothesis that this specificity resides mainly in the predisposition of the traveller to choose and pursue a set of architectural artefacts, natural or artificial, in an in-depth manner. This hypothesis leads us to consider that the visited works or environments embedded in a given cultural heritage should be thematically dense, incorporating an authorial approach with charged design levels. The density of an architectural artefact depends less on its size or programme and more on the quality and diversity of the informed design themes into which it can be broken down or from which it can be developed.
The aim is to engage an open sensorial and comprehensive in-situ reading in order to go beyond available digital dissemination or published information and identify the whole, the composition, feel the scale, the proportions, inhabit the space, the context, etc. The possibility of identifying the clues and decoding these themes depends on the traveller´s appetite and cultural background, which can be cultivated and enhanced through prior study or education. In this sense, the possibility of applying the idea of a Grand Tour to the architectural journey concentrated in a single dense architectural work is admitted, and we propose a set of points that could support and justify its selection. Firstly, the complexity of its relationship with the place that receives it – broad context comprehension and insertion.

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Fig. 1
Álvaro Siza, FAUP proposal (In: Archive Álvaro Siza, Col. Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto. Donation 2015. PT-FS-A-SV-19-1-1-0069).

Secondly, the number and variety of design problems faced versus the number and variety of design solutions tried out. Thirdly, the potential for the building to function as a reference within the author's oeuvre and the quantity and variety of architectural references that it calls upon. To this end, the article attempts to demonstrate that the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto (PT), by architect Álvaro Siza (1933-…), will be relevant as the *seul motif* of a Grand Tour. At the University of Porto, the Faculty of Architecture (FAUP) was established in 1979[2], separating the Architecture course from the disciplines of Painting and Sculpture. The creation of a new Faculty exclusive to architecture brought with it the need to move away from the Fine Arts School, set in downtown Porto, and create its own facilities. As part of the ongoing programme to renovate and expand the University of Porto, the new Faculty would be installed in the Campo Alegre area to the west of the traditional city centre and on the way to the Atlantic Ocean. The university acquired two estates, Quinta do Gólgota and Quinta da Esperança, on the slopes of the Douro River, overlooking the river mouth.

The Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, as we know it today, is the result of a design and construction process, which included four moments: (1) "Renovation of the Quinta da Póvoa House", also known as Quinta do Gólgota (1983-1985); (2) Renovation of the former Stables (1984-1986); (3) the Carlos Ramos Pavilion (1985-1986); the new building in the former Quinta da Esperança ([1979] 1985-1997). Although spread in time and with a rich evolutive design process, the ensemble was conceived as a cohesive whole, where the distinctive parts reinforce the whole's textured character and general intent.

Since FAUP has already been extensively debated by different authors, in this article, only those episodes pertinent to the genesis of a Grand Tour will be argued. To the present study, there are archival materials[3] of different types and nature, such as drawings (sketches, rigorous renderings, models of the different project phases, solutions and variants), written records (descriptive memories, interviews, etc.), but also, and above all, the building itself which is *par excellence* the main architectural document to be carefully inhabited and analysed.

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Longue durée

In FAUP´s design, Álvaro Siza invokes the history of urban transformation as an operational design tool. The project is determined by an in-depth understanding of the long-term nature of the city and, specifically, the site of the new ensemble. This acknowledgement will inform Siza's reading on the relation between project and place. The faculty constitutes an example of respect and exaltation of the place´s singular architectural elements, but also, and simultaneously, as a case of interpretative and expressive autonomy founded on the recognition of the architecture´s principle of unity and continuity over time. Álvaro Siza reduces the condition of the pre-existing place to its essentials and endows it with a new spatiality, undoubtedly urban and human. In other words, Siza rehabilitates, builds new in continuity and builds new within a future intent, reinterpreting place within contemporaneity demands.

Siza recognises the faculty´s site, on the slope of Massarelos overlooking the Douro River and the Arrábida Bridge, as an exceptional location in Porto´s landscape due to its character and atmosphere. Contradicting these conditions would go against previous urban options and compromise the coherence of Porto´s urban structure. Consequently, the project faces an integration design problem within the landscape/atmosphere in continuity with the river embankment. One of the main conceptual strategies developed to preserve the atmospheric qualities that characterise the place is, on the one hand, the preservation of the buildings, green areas and relevant heritage quality elements and, on the other, the preservation of the place´s global image seen from the opposite embankment, which is that of a large luxurious platform garden.

FAUP´s site is one of the last in the city where the atmosphere, portrayed in 18th-century engravings, persists: an atmosphere of contrasting values, where the hustle and bustle of the river are recorded alongside rough topography, fertile agricultural platforms and well-designed houses amidst luxurious gardens composed of exotic trees and plant species. An atmosphere indexed to when this piece of hillside constituted an alternative to the traditional city, with large and fertile farms. This hillside was chosen as the preferred place to live by the foreign colony related to the Porto wine trade, who found pure air, clean water, mild climate and wide views, alongside a similar social neighbourhood environment, safe for establishing a family.Quinta da Esperança is part of one of these rural properties, whose surface is organised along the slope in platforms exposed to the south towards the river. While the Quinta do Gólgota on an elevated platform, with a two-storey family house, stables, a ludic luxurious garden and remarkable granite elements consisting of tanks and boundary walls, occasionally broken to overlook the river, was probably built by one of those families, combining local construction tradition with English living standards: hygiene, comfort and atmosphere.

By the end of the 1970s, Quinta da Esperança is no longer a relevant, productive farm, for supplying Porto. At the same time, Quinta do Gólgota´s architectural value remained well-kept and recognised within the city's heritage. Consequently, Siza decides to preserve the Quinta do Gólgota's romantic character and explore a contemporary meaning for the lost terraced garden image of Quinta da Esperança within three clear design options. Firstly, the decision to value existing structures in Quinta do Gólgota by rehabilitating the family house, stables and ludic garden set within the high granite boundary walls and site only one new volume, Carlos Ramos Pa-

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Fig. 2
FAUP site from the opposite Douro riverbank (In: Archive Álvaro Siza, Col. Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto. Donation 2015. PT-FS-ASV-19-3-1-03-001).

vilion, on the opposite side of the garden, concurred with maintaining the scale and proportions between the different elements or features, enhancing the existing atmosphere. Secondly, the option to continue the exceptional tree cover that characterises Quinta do Gólgota and to modulate Quinta da Esperança´s surface into platforms, in many cases green, articulated with the preservation of significant century-old trees. Thirdly, the decision to review the layout of the plot's southern boundary running along the slope to the river, by redesigning the panoramic road structure and allowing the integration of embedded granite structures, containment walls, gates and a series of tanks into the ensemble's global layout, grafting the composition into the broader rural context.

A *longue durée* urban study of the hillside reveals a constant desire for transformation since the end of the 19th century and, particularly, since the intention to build a second bridge over the Douro River – Arrábida Bridge. This decision transforms this territory into a "bridgehead" and, potentially, into Porto´s "modern gateway". This problem has been studied for over three decades through five municipal urban plans developed by national and international architects. Almost without exception, these proposals share Siza's understanding and choice to preserve the atmosphere of Quinta do Gólgota and reinterpret Quinta da Esperança´s transformation in light of the contemporary circumstances. In this sense, all urban plans are developed between the 1940s and 1970s and aim to consolidate the green landscape of this part of the hillside and introduce a new urban scale design based on collective land policy implementation. The different proposals imagine Quinta do Gólgota and Quinta da Esperança as part of a public green belt, green surface or a mixed urban park, integrating the most significant built and natural heritage, including the topographical locations with the most extraordinary river and ocean views. They are, therefore, intended for the pleasure and general enrichment of the whole city.

Specifically, at the end of the 1940s, Fernando Távora proposed, on a free and continuous green surface, entirely in the public domain, a civic centre with a neighbourhood unit for three thousand inhabitants. Távora studies the best placement strategy for a series of *unité d'habitation de grandeur conforme,* on *pilotis* (stilts) and with *toits-terrasses* (roof-terraces). These housing ensembles are placed according to the cardinal points and perpen-

dicular to the riverbank, offering an image of compact and abstract vertical masses to those crossing the Arrábida Bridge. This silhouette of elegant contemporary towers at the city entrance associated with the new bridge was to be read in counterposition to the city´s silhouette of towers consolidated in the 18th century, seen from the downtown Luiz I Bridge viewpoint. Although Fernando Távora´s urban plan was quickly abandoned, the idea that a silhouette of towers could characterise this part of Porto´s riverbank will persist in time.
Fernando Távora repeats the concept in a project for a surrounding area in the middle of the following decade, but again without any built consequences. Finally, Armenio Losa and Cassiano Barbosa return to the concept at the end of the same decade, managing to leave a built trace, facing the mixed urban park proposed by Januário Godinho. The proposal organises a set of 7-storey blocks perpendicular to the river, arranged on a continuous double-height base, giving the landscape a unique character. This plan was carried out by different architects in the following years, and its meaning seems to have been taken up again by Siza in the Quinta da Esperança. In FAUP´s proposal, Siza summons the notion of "tower" as an undoubtedly urban image to characterise a public space that aspires to be urban even though the bridge, the motorway and the heavy traffic compromise common urban activities. The tower, as a narrow, tall façade of a long volume located perpendicular to the river, constitutes a tradition on this stretch of the Douro slope, whose origins date back to the 18th century. Houses like Gólgota are, in reality, built in this way. They correspond to buildings of three, four or five storeys, located at prominent points of the topography, which turn their narrower and higher front towards the Douro, with unique balconies and terraces. When studying FAUP´s site conditions from the opposite embankment, Siza certainly notices how these autonomous, abstract volumes, developed in perspective depth, inhabit the topography and calibrate the in-between open and green spaces. On the one hand, this traditional footprint/layout contrasts with the long warehouses built on the lower riverbank as commercial and industrial facilities and, on the other, integrates the overall urban front while giving an updated urban spatiality for which the human scale is the first reference.

Repository of design problems

One may state that FAUP constitutes a repository of design solutions for universal and timeless architectural problems. Despite FAUP's close ties to the city, its project is not simply determined by a specific culture, occasion or particular place. On the contrary, programme and place seem to be pretexts for elaborating a symphony of forms, spaces, and light set within a spatial narrative characterised by its own architectural language. In other words, FAUP reveals a more ambitious objective than the response to a programme, a time or a place, as if Siza entrusted his project with the duty of critically inquiring or formally defining different solutions to a set of problems to which architecture has always had, and will always have to respond. These solutions arise from the response to a practical purpose and quickly become expressive opportunities, also certainly animated by the problem of culture and architectural references indexed to the notion of a faculty of architecture as an experimental place, possible learning tool or a manifest of a way of thinking.
A close observation of FAUP´s design process reveals Álvaro Siza seeking multiple solutions to problems that arise in different design phases and on

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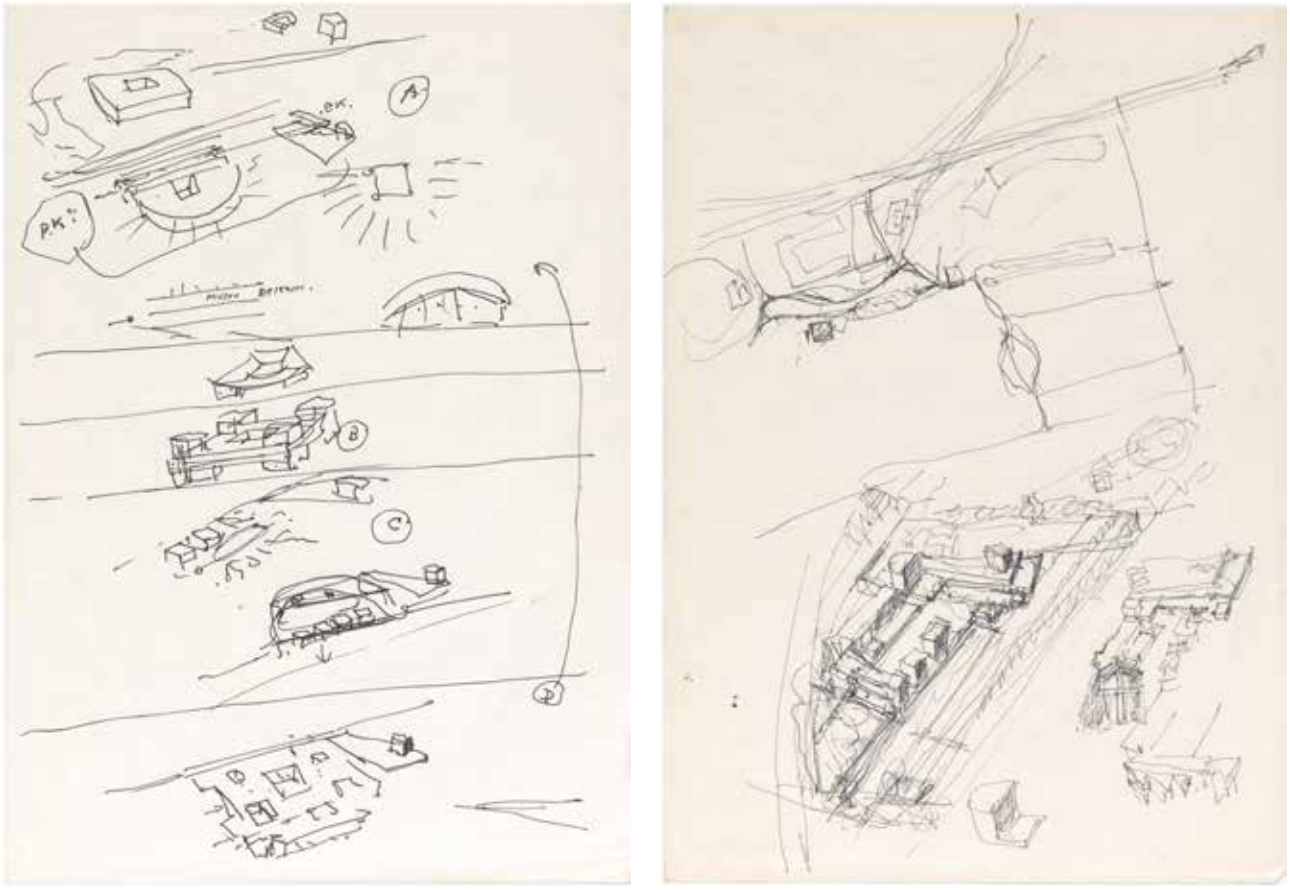

Figg. 3-4
Álvaro Siza, FAUP siting proposals. (In: Archive Álvaro Siza, Col. Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto. Donation 2015. PT-FS-ASV-19-1-1-0015; PT-FS-A-SV-19-1-1-0017).

different scales. Of these, the following stand out: the problem relative to the typology of the plan associated with the siting principles, the theme of exceptional spaces and repetitive spaces, the problem of articulating levels, the theme of openings or the question of stereotomy(s). When placed in an initial design phase, the different solutions developed for these problems correspond to the study of different design versions for the same problem. When placed in an advanced phase, Siza disassembles the posed problems through the pursuit of variants within a family of solutions (with more than one variant being built.

The design process reveals different exploratory hypotheses for FAUP´s overall layout in Quinta da Esperança, both in terms of the plan form and volume. The design oscillates between a single volume marking a point, freeing the slope and a group of several volumes spread across the surface, transforming it completely. At Quinta da Esperança, Siza begins by proposing a compact mass of large dimensions in an easily graspable geometric shape perforated by a central void, taking advantage of the topography. In this design option, Siza evokes, in terms of scale, Nicolau Nasoni´s Episcopal Palace[4] seen from the Luiz I Bridge and, in terms of type, Louis Kahn's Exeter library.

The development of the work leads, over a series of design alternatives, to the transformation of this clear single volume, through its fragmentation, into a compositional chessboard of mass and voids and later into an articulated system of volumes that inhabit the terrain, recognise its limits and profoundly alter them. Transversal to this exploratory process is the continuous focus on the courtyard or patio as the core compositional space in any of the design variants or options. Within the family of FAUP´s versions that focus on volumetric fragmentation, this courtyard varies in shape and size but is invariably characterised, on one of its sides, by Quinta do Gólgota´s ensemble.

This option calls for a sensitive and sensorial dialogue between the new courtyard and the collection of singular species – cultivated, romantic, luxuriant – in the garden of Quinta do Gólgota, within its high boundary granite walls.

In numerous explorations, Siza organises the successive volumes and qualifies the spaces according to the same compositional principle: just like the architecture of a city, the faculty is composed of exceptional and repetitive volumes/architectures, and neither of them can be annulled without compromising the overall composition. For Siza, the classrooms correspond to the architectures of repetition in the invariant "tower" form, always with the same footprint but with individual configurations and heights complying with the overall urban narrative. He consistently repeats the "tower" as often as the programme requires but does not give up on personalising the interior layouts, exploring interior-exterior dialogues (framing the Douro landscape), and drafting unique and playful elevations. In turn, each social, administrative and representative programs correspond to exceptional architecture, namely the cafeteria, the main vertical lobby (with secretary, bookshop and administration), the main auditorium, the museum spaces, and the library. Each of these programmes is set within a continuous promenade and associated with a specific and unrepeatable volumetric relationship within the general composition. To determine the shape of each volume, the design process reveals different footprints, configurations, and spatial interactions hinged on a latent geometric order as possible alternatives.

The footprint of all these volumes enhances the courtyard in the centre and reinterprets the significance of the plot´s limits. To the south, the successive individual "towers" take the alignment of the existing Gólgota House and open the courtyard to the riverfront, giving an insight into the Arrábida Bridge (in this case, by suppressing a "tower"). To the north, a continuous string of shapes sustains a heterogeneous volumetric flow (inhabited by the exceptional programme), protects the courtyard and buffers the highway traffic density. This volumetrically diverse composition is brought together through a homogeneous material characterisation, dominated by continuous plaster surfaces mediated or tempered by natural stone expressions – marble and granite in different textures and stereotomy(s). To contrast with this material homogeneity, Siza drafts, in the transition with the highway, a set of volumes in apparent brick masonry indexed to the heating system, topped by a pyramidal chimney. FAUP´s original archival organisation structure complies with the sequential portrayal of these volumetric depictions that can be traced to the project´s principles. On another level, documents are organised according to architectural element types, such as stairs, ramps, windows or skylights.

At FAUP, these architectural elements are never devices for simply articulating levels or allowing for natural light, i.e. only complying with the functional or technical requirements or needs. Each staircase, ramp, opening (window, door) or skylight responds to its own design ethos set inside the bigger whole, which is translated into a specific form, spatial sequencing or promenade. This means it is challenging to recognise two identical staircases, ramps or two identical windows because each element is portrayed and characterised through a unique poetic rendering.

Consequently, FAUP establishes itself as a repository of architectural elements and artefacts. As an example, in relation to the staircase as a singular architectural element and the various ways it is embodied in the faculty,

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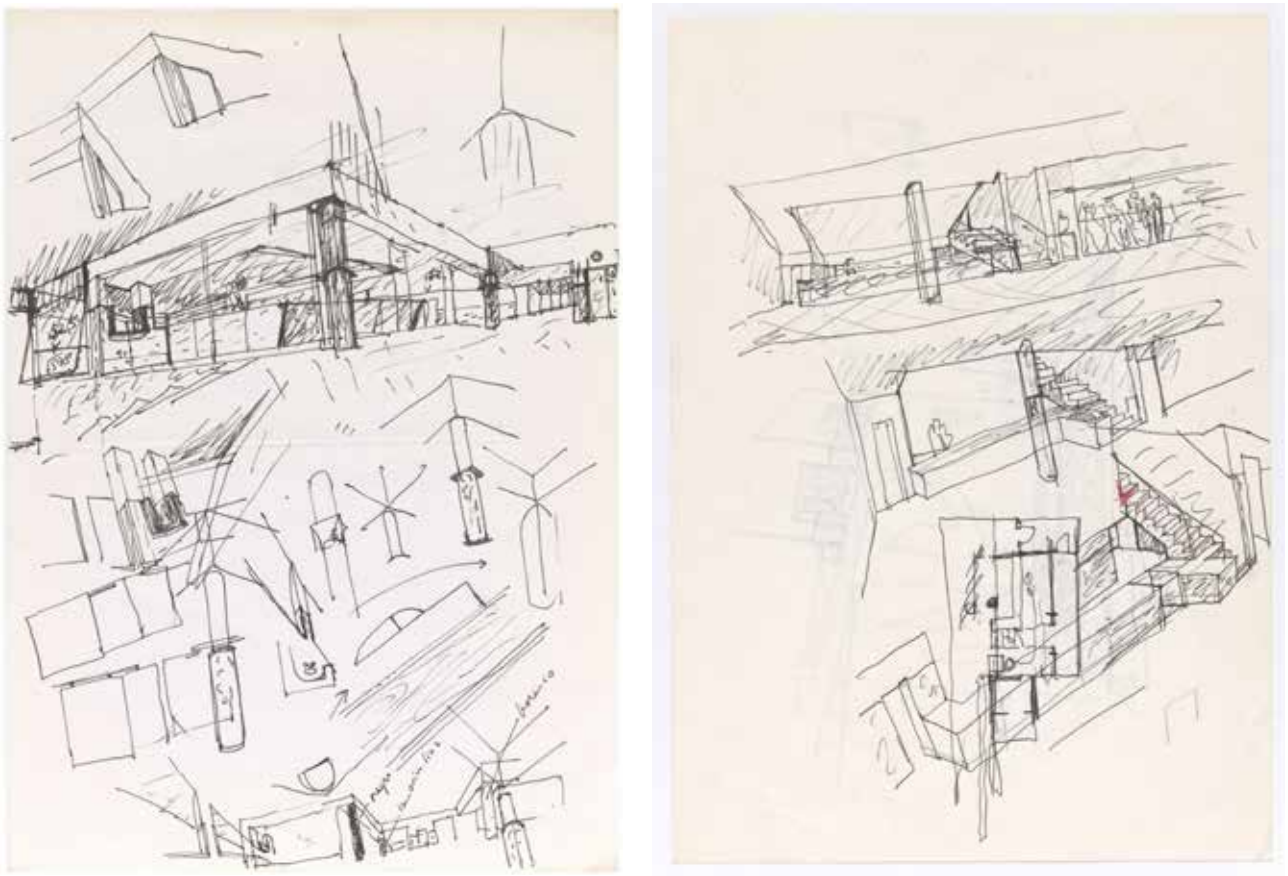

Figg. 5-6
Álvaro Siza, FAUP main lobby and cafetaria proposals. (In: Archive Álvaro Siza, Col. Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto. Donation 2015. PT-FS-ASV-19-1-1-0025; PT-FS-ASV-19-1-1-0005).

there are: staircases that reach one or more floors, single or multi-flight stairs with parallel flights or mirrored flights and stairs with opaque or transparent railings, in multiple variants. In terms of poetic meaning, some stairs complement the space, giving it continuity, and others are the main protagonists and dominate the space, as in Michelangelo's Medicea Laurenziana library or other Siza works, like the Serralves situation or Quinta do Portal Winery main staircases.

Even in the faculty's repetitive programmes (towers), the stairs may resemble each other in form and dimension, but the fact that they occupy different positions within each volume alters and particularises their reading: sometimes they follow a typical movement, and sometimes they are inverted; sometimes they are enclosed, sometimes they are punctuated by strategic openings; sometimes they end a contained space (corridor), sometimes they top a wide space (atrium), etc. Continuing to understand that the design of FAUP goes beyond the simple affirmation of a grand gesture, governed by vectors of force and geometric tracing lines[5], Siza also decisively calls upon the study of finishings, skirtings, light devices and furniture pieces to create the atmosphere (interior and exterior) of the faculty. There are countless sketches in which the architect addresses the problem of materials, their transition, and their stereotomies, as well as several details that underline how to place, cut, and align in each situation. To understand the meaning and criteria of the applied materials, we just have to inquire how different the main courtyard would be without the blue granite pavement, without the cladding walkway that folds onto the "towers" base, without the platforms that contain the courtyard in heavy yellow granite with a green covering on the approach to Quinta do Gólgota.

Thus, Álvaro Siza´s proposal translates, through a necessary humanist condition, an informed but sensitive and sensorial approach which por-

trays: the manifesto condition, the ability to transcend place and programme through its interpretation; the latent geometric order as a design tool, regulating the elevations in continuity with openings capturing the exterior landscape into the interior and the condition of going beyond a geometry based design, evoking the sense of *genius loci*.

Symphony of voices

In regard to architecture education, we will not encounter resistance in stating that FAUP is a dense object, capable of being studied and broken down into various design themes and notions. This reading may be reinforced by FAUP's potential to stand as a paradigmatic example of Siza´s body of work, to allow for a better understanding of subsequent designs through open thematic readings and to give voice to a wide range of authors, buildings and places as operative references.

There are many projects in the wake of FAUP in which Siza uses self-quotation as a creative mechanism. The design solutions become basic prototype ideas for developing these projects, establishing themselves as invariants of Siza's design practice and as a memory of his work. Consequently, the faculty's in-depth study allows for a more precise interpretation of a set of Siza's works in Portugal and abroad, which share with FAUP spaces of the same nature, meaning and atmosphere, such as the Galician Centre for Contemporary Art (Santiago de Compostela, 1989-1993) or the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art (Porto, 1991-1999).

Additionally, FAUP is an example of a multi-referential body of work in which Siza places a broad and organised set of anonymous and erudite references in dialogue, many of which have been analysed or are to be studied in-situ. The tested design solutions allow us to identify echoes of the architect's travels to Spain, Sicily, North Africa or Finland, namely, valorising the essence of form as a strategy for the natural integration of the whole. They also invite us to recognise the premises, conditions and quotes from works by architects like Le Corbusier, Adolf Loos or Alvar Aalto that Siza explored by his endless sketching in A4 black notebooks during his Grand Tours.

All these travel sketches reveal Siza's though process. They are expression of a whole way of interpreting reality and working on it, be it a depiction of Rome or an unravelling the encounter of a new context or place. In either cases, there is not an intention of turn the visited circumstance into a quick-information reference, based on photogenic imagery or frozen notion or concepts. The places visited frequently appear as a battleground in Siza's sketches, upon which various architectural realities reveal their conflicting constituency.

Siza's travel drawings are recordings of an expressive intentional character rather than any kind of precise projection, they consist of fluid magma that has yet to solidify into a final new form. The challenge is that the same will happen when an architect or student visits Porto's Faculty of Architecture.

Notes

[1] "Toward" as in direction of something, referenced to *Towards an Architecture* by Le Corbusier, translated by John Goodman and introduced by Jean-Louis Cohen.

[2] The Faculty of Architecture was created by Decree-Law 498-F/79, of 21 December 1979.

[3] Archive Álvaro Siza: Collection Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary

Fig. 7
Travel souvenir with Casa del Sol in Cáceres-Spain. (In: Archive Álvaro Siza, Col. Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto. Donation 2015. PT FS ASV 19 3 6 ASV 305).

Art, Porto. Donation 2015.

[4] Notion shared namely with Dubois 2023.

[5] Namely, on FAUP's geometric tracing lines, cf. Fonseca 1996.

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Helder Casal Ribeiro (b. Espinho, 1964). Architect, PhD in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto. Develops professional practice since 1992 and founder of Fpoetics® studio. Auxiliary Professor in FAUP's PhD and Master degree, where he lectures Design Studio since 1999. Visiting Professor in Politecnico di Milano at Polo Territoriale di Mantova, 2014-2016, and since 2017, in DABC - PhD programme. In 2024, Visiting Researcher in NEST Project, entitled *Porto-Milan Exchange*, in DABC, Politécnico di Milano. Co-founder of curatorial collective MATTER. the white conferences. Researcher at the Study Centre of Architecture and Urbanism (CEAU-FAUP). Associated to funded projects: "Siza baroque" (SIZA/CPT/0021/2019) and currently PI in "UpGranT" (2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000158377).

Sílvia Ramos (b. Porto, 1983). Architect, PhD in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto (FAUP). Invited Auxiliary Professor at FAUP since 2019 and Researcher at Study Centre of Architecture and Urbanism (CEAU-FAUP), since 2013, associated to the funded projects "Siza baroque" (SIZA/CPT/0021/2019) and "UpGranT" (2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000158377). Since graduation, she has pursued a professional practice with other architects, namely with Helder Casal Ribeiro, currently an associate of Fpoetics® Studio. In 2011/12, joined the PhD in Architecture (PDA-FAUP). From 2013 to 2017, was a research fellow of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). Between 2013 and 2015, she was an Assistant Professor in FAUP's Master degree in architecture (MIARQ-FAUP).

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Cesare Dallatomasina

Grand Tour, Gran Canaria. Gianugo Polesello and the University Complex in Tafira, Las Palmas

Abstract
The article explores Gianugo Polesello's project for the Tafira University Campus in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain. The complex, commissioned in 1987, was only partially realised and now houses the faculties of Marine Sciences, Mathematics, and Computer Science. The text examines the precedents employed by Polesello, with a focus on references to distant contexts in time and space. Spanning from the classical world to Mesoamerican culture and the Canarian setting, such references triggered an architectural synthesis that goes beyond simple geometry. Through squares, triangles, and circles, Polesello undertakes an intellectual and design Grand Tour, demonstrating that his work engages with its environment and exhibits a rich cultural complexity, offering layered and nuanced interpretations.

Keywords
Gianugo Polesello — Architectural composition — Project references — University campus — Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Introduction

Polesello encountered the Canary Islands in the early 1980s. In February 1983, he served as a visiting professor at the first International Seminar on Architectural Design held at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura of the Universidad Politécnica de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Other prominent international figures, such as Josef Paul Kleihues, Manuel de Solá-Morales, and Fabio Reinhart, attended the same event. Four years later, in 1987, Polesello was called upon to design a university complex with Juan Manuel Palerm Salazar, Juan Ramírez Guedes, Manuel Bote Delgado, and Benito García Maciá. The complex now hosts the faculties of Marine Sciences, Mathematics, and Computer Science.

This contribution begins with a general description of the project, only partly implemented, and concentrates on the references that influenced Polesello's composition. The objective is to identify most of these relationships and connections, analysing them while also emphasising the links between the project and its context, clarifying the reasons behind such choices. A unifying theme across all these references is the physical and cultural journey the architect undertakes to reach his synthesis, one that enables the integration and dialogue of elements from distant worlds, seemingly unrelated. As Ildebrando Clemente states, «two compositional tools govern the inventions in Polesello's projects: the geometric grid and the axes of rotation» (2016, p. 148). Delving deeper into Polesello's references, identifying their origins and reflecting upon them, is almost like navigating through his memories, inspirations, and intuitions, revealing the rationale behind his compositional choices.

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Fig. 1
Plan Parcial of 1984 by Alfredo Bescós Olaizola and Jesús Álvarez García.

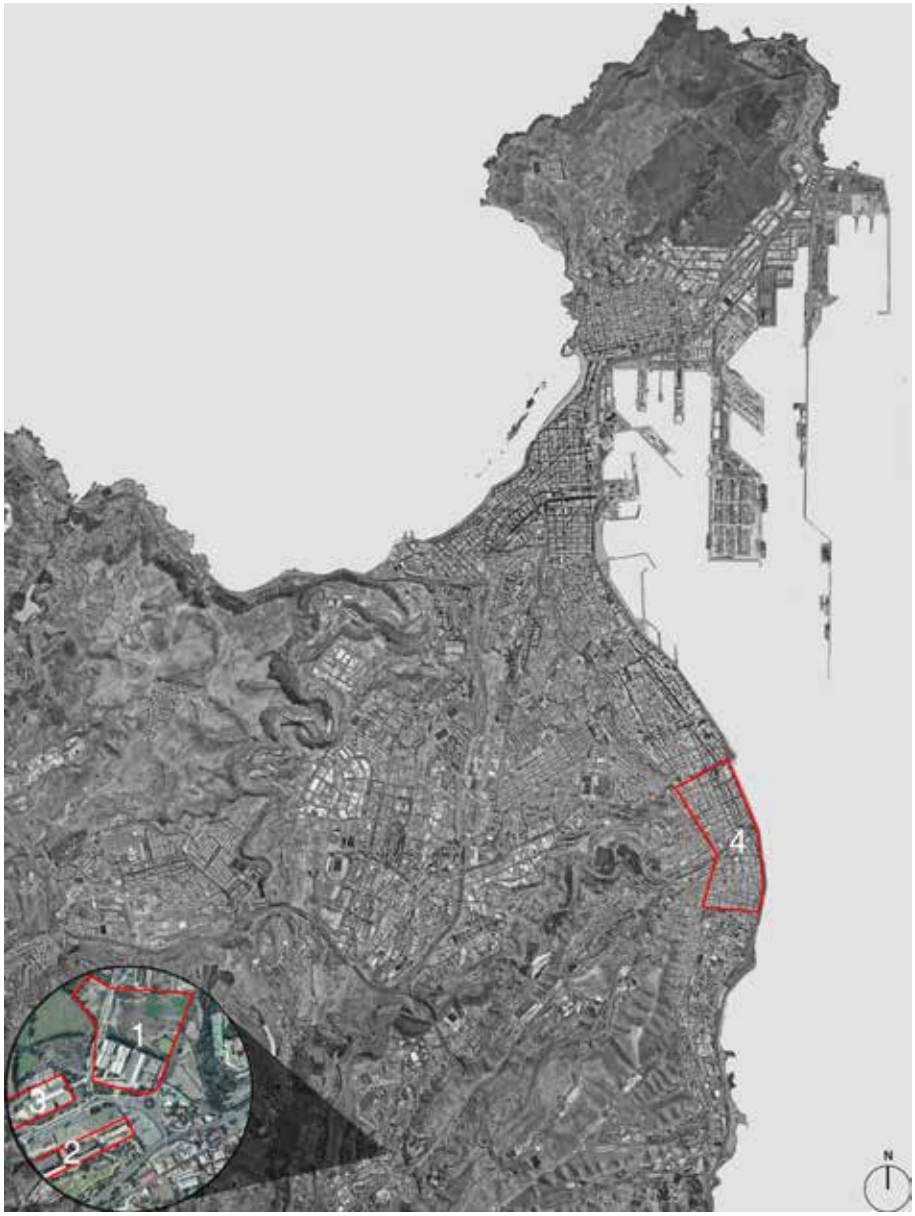

Fig. 2
Northeastern end of the island of Gran Canaria with a zoom on the Tafira campus.
1 Project site assigned to Gianugo Polesello; 2 Diocesan Seminary; 3 Faculty of Architecture; 4 Historic centre of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Project Description

The project site is situated within the Tafira Campus, between Lomo Blanco Street, the former Diocesan Seminary, and the Faculty of Architecture of the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. The programme consists of three units, which (with some modifications) respect the guidelines of the *Plan Parcial*, namely a regular grid composed of 30 x 30 m modules spaced 7.5 m apart. The relationship with the site is mediated by a large podium (150 x 150 m) emerging from the terrain and sloping down from south to north, with access from the south. Polesello divides the podium, forming the project's first section, into four large quadrants[1], of which only the two southern ones were ultimately built. These latter are structured into eight sub-modules, which house the faculties of Marine Sciences, Mathematics, and Computer Science. The two northern quadrants instead form two paved plazas at different levels, faced by the central library and commercial spaces. The northernmost part of the area features a second unit: a sloping triangular plaza bordered by a linear building along the site boundary. This structure consists of three adjacent modules and two separate ones (also measuring 30 x 30 m), with one of the individual modules slightly rotated.

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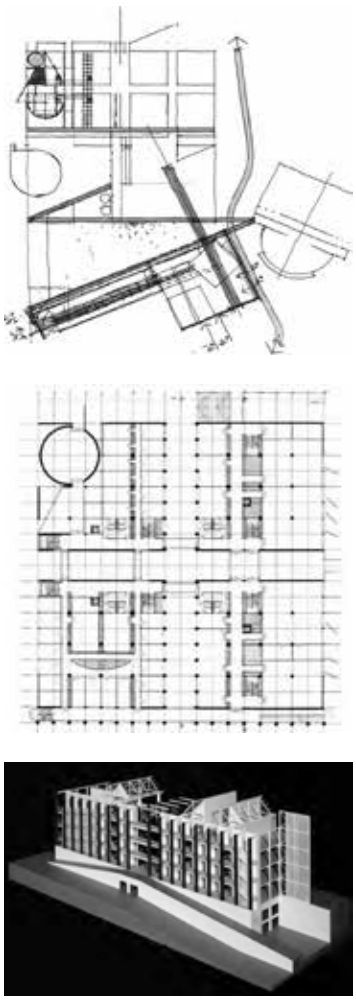

Figg. 3-6
Gianugo Polesello, project for the Tafira University Campus in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Neri 2015, pp. 36-40); © S. Topuntoli.

The third sector, located to the west, includes an open-air theatre and an auditorium. A road separates the theatre/auditorium from the rest of the complex, connecting Lomo Blanco Street to the northern part of the campus. The natural slope of the terrain allows for the placement of several parking areas beneath the buildings (one occupies part of the lower levels of the southern and northwestern quadrants, another is located beneath the linear structure, and the remaining one is near the auditorium). The overall layout is conceived as a system of vantage points overlooking Las Palmas and the sea, blending the surrounding natural landmarks into the broader landscape context. Polesello also incorporates green pergolas and rows of palm trees that extend through and shape the large central triangular area, the patios, and the edges of the buildings. To sum up, the project comprises three units arranged according to a specific geometric pattern and interconnected by pedestrian pathways and open spaces, in a dialogue with the surrounding environment.

First Unit

The first unit, situated in the southern part of the area, can be encompassed by a large square measuring 150 meters by 150 meters, located roughly 300 metres above sea level. It is further divided into four square platforms, each measuring 67.50 m, separated by 15-m-wide walkways. The platforms are positioned at different levels according to topography: the southeast platform is at ground level, while the southwest and northeast platforms are located at -3.75 m and -7.5 m, respectively. The southeast and southwest platforms accommodate eight 30 x 30 m modules. Both platforms are 11.25 m high, divided by secondary north-south streets, and feature a single façade facing north. A colonnade overlooks the two lower plazas;

each column is equipped with a structure for setting up canvas tents for sun protection. The colonnade is crossed by bridges connecting the modules at levels 3.75 m and 7.50 m; at these same levels, it accommodates two balconies with a width of 3.75 m overlooking the rest of the Campus. Stairs and elevators offer indoor vertical access, while ramps and walkways also provide outdoor connections (Polesello et alii 1989, p. 120).
The southeast platform houses the departments of Computer Science and Mathematics, while the southwest one accommodates the Department of Marine Sciences and other university facilities.
The northeast platform features the double-height central library, while the northwest platform includes a parking area, a commercial zone, and various services. A cylindrical building houses the stepped Lecture Hall (*Aula Magna*), directly accessible from the outside via stairs located on the southeast façade. The project is based on a regular grid with a 3.75 m module, which corresponds to the distance between the axes of the exterior structure. All dimensional units, including floor heights, refer to these axes. The structural system consists of reinforced concrete columns with a diameter of 0,75 m, spaced 3,75 m apart, positioned both inside and outside the modules. Steel beams, typically resting on columns, support ribbed slabs and solid walls, particularly on the north and south sides. The ribbed slabs rest on IPE steel beams spanning 7.50 m or C-beams spanning 3.75 m (Polesello et alii 1989, p. 123).
In some areas, the mechanical systems are left exposed, while in others, they are hidden behind painted and sound-absorbing aluminium panels. Initially, the first unit featured *brise-soleil* on the east and west façades, designed as vertical elements rotated at 45°, which have since been removed. Concerning materials, brightness and flexibility are key characteristics of the project. The floors are continuous, while the interior partitions, designed to allow natural light into teaching and workspaces, are made of prefabricated panels assembled dry onto metal structures. The perimeter walls consist of glass block modules for thermal insulation, complemented by window strips for ventilation and exterior views (Polesello et alii 1989, pp. 126-127). Polesello decided to preserve a circular water reservoir used for irrigation (*estanque*), which was integrated into the northwest platform.

Second Unit
The second unit develops along its length, bordered by the artificial platforms supporting the university buildings, and opens towards a triangular sector that features a sloping public area with extensive green spaces (Polesello et alii 1989, p. 120). Downhill, a linear building parallels the northern boundary of the site; it consists of three modules measuring 30 x 30 m (totalling 90 m in length), with two additional modules arranged differently. One module is positioned slightly away from the linear building, while the other is rotated around an axis that originates from the southwest corner of the southeast platform. This axis intersects at a right angle with the diagonal of the rectangle formed by the two northern platforms, which together form the multi-level plazas. All modules house university facilities, which were yet to be defined during the design phase. The buildings are three stories high, with their height corresponding to the ground level of the southeast platform.

Third Unit

The third unit, situated west of the road that crosses the site, comprises an open-air theatre, an auditorium, and several service buildings. This sector is connected to the others through a system of pergola-like galleries, which extend at an elevated level around the large triangular plaza, resting on the two northern quadrants of the first unit and on the linear building of the second unit. These pathways, crossing over the underlying road, converge at a node featuring stairs and elevators that provide access to the area dedicated to entertainment and leisure. The open-air theatre is reminiscent of the *Teatro Grande* in Pompeii, while the *paraninfo* is a large *polistilo* hall designed to accommodate various performances (Polesello et alii 1989, p. 120). The service core meets the functional needs of both the theatre and the auditorium.

Project References

Polesello's project draws on references from various places, eras, and cultures that relate to the existing structures of the Tafira campus: Mesoamerican architecture, the ancient Roman and Greek worlds, the Canarian context (both urban and rural), and the maritime and naval environment. Further references derive from Euclidean geometry, as well as from the works of Paul Klee and Le Corbusier. In Polesello's architecture, Aztec pyramids, the Roman foundation system, and the representative nature of Greek acropolises mingle with myths, local history, and pure geometric forms. In the Las Palmas project, however, they emerge and take a unique shape. Analysing these influences is interesting in itself; however, it also helps understand how the architect arranges and transforms his references into new architectural themes. Polesello develops a complex design framework in which these references, although not always immediately apparent, frequently emerge and overlap.

Diocesan Seminary and Plan Parcial

Until 1987, the Diocesan Seminary, designed by Secundino Zuazo in the 1940s, dominated the hill of Tafira: a linear building with a 160-m-long façade and a church at its centre. Polesello states that the «terrain is 'equipped', levelled, and built as a platform on which buildings, porticoes, and gardens are arranged and composed». He implicitly admits that his first reference for the Tafira project was «the treatment of the terrain and the frontal dimension of the architecture» as well as «the geographical scale and architectural unity»[2].

Another key constraint in the preliminary design phase was the *Plan Parcial* of 1984, which also emphasised the prominence of the Diocesan Seminary and proposed the construction of 30x30 m block buildings with a maximum height of 15 m in the valley to the north, facing Las Palmas. It was a high-density plan that aimed to preserve the existing vegetation, primarily composed of palm trees and prickly pear cacti (*tuneras*). Polesello's design follows these guidelines, consisting of eight blocks, each 30 x 30 m, arranged in two rows of four, separated by two 7.5-m gaps and a central 15-m space, for a total length of 150 meters. These factors led to the creation of the first square unit, 150x150 m, as a platform supporting the eight university buildings, arranged in a regular grid that organises their arrangement.

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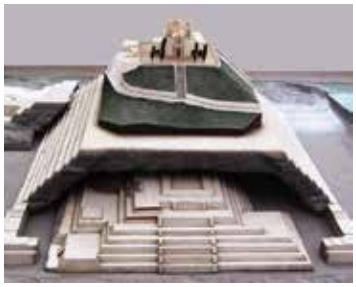

Fig. 7
Model of Tlachihualtépetl with the Santuario de la Virgen de los Remedios at its summit.

The Mesoamerican World

I do not believe that the classical can be reduced, for example, to the use of Latin or Greek as languages; I do not believe that the classical can be reduced to a sort of dispute between Greek and Roman (Polesello 2000, p. 75).

Ever since their discovery, a close relationship has existed between the Canary Islands and the Americas, particularly with countries such as Cuba and Venezuela. The archipelago serves as the last stop before the great crossing, which is why most settlers passed through it. Cristoforo Colombo, for example, stopped several times in the Canary Islands[3]. Polesello identifies these links between Las Palmas and the New World, which grew stronger over the following centuries and were not only economic and social but also, and above all, cultural and artistic (Gutiérrez Viñuelas et alii 2018). He states that «from above, the city actually looks like a South American city» (Polesello 2000, p. 76). On the other hand, the history of Las Palmas leads Polesello to associate his project with the Mesoamerican world[4].
In Teotihuacan culture, terraced structures were entirely artificial[5], with a temple at their summit; all parts were connected, functioning as a unified building. A notable example is Tlachihualtépetl in Mexico, where the Jesuits repurposed the enormous pre-Columbian plaza to build the *Santuario de la Virgen de los Remedios*. Polesello proposes a similar concept: an upper section comprising eight university complexes, along with other buildings, arranged in the valley below, all part of the same complex interconnected by staircases and walkways. The pedestrian connections begin at the southern entrance of the site, cross the large square podium, and then branch into ramps that descend towards the triangular plaza and the linear structure, or take the pergola leading to the theatre and auditorium. This is a type of *promenade architecturale*, a ritual path akin to the stairways leading to the top of the *teocalli*, where human sacrifices to the gods were made. These rituals, after the conquest, were adopted by Christians in processions.
Polesello's decision to include Mesoamerican monuments among the references can be explained by three reasons: technical (due to their being constructed on slopes), ritual, and foundational. Regarding the latter, the buildings positioned above the podium recall how pre-Columbian settlements, and later Jesuits', were built on the summits of *teocalli*. It is as if Polesello wanted to emphasise the stratigraphy of these structures, where there is not just a single foundational act but multiple re-foundations, each involving different cultures: «A sort of eternal return to the refounding action» (Amistadi 2019, p. 280).

Fig. 8
Teatro Grande of Pompeii.

Roman World

In the arrangement of the volumes on the podium at the top of the "pyramid," there is an apparent reference to Roman foundation layouts[6], namely a *cardo* and *decumanus* system, with additional secondary pathways. As in the Roman *modus operandi*, the roads shape the building footprints, connecting the green spaces and squares facing Las Palmas and the sea.
References to the Romans also appear in the third unit, for which Polesello states, «The open-air theatre, now that is indeed a copy of the *Teatro Grande* at Pompeii» (Polesello 2000, p. 76). Although the Friulian architect often employs similar layouts and solutions (each time with a different re-

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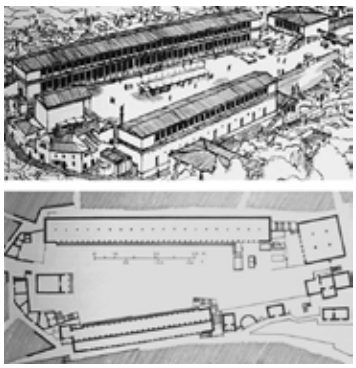

Fig. 9
Agora of Assos (Michelucci 1963, p. 51).

ason), here the rationale also stems from the history of the Canary Islands. The Romans were familiar with this archipelago and its agricultural, fishing, geographical, and climatic potential; accordingly, they named it the *Islas Afortunadas* (Fortunate Islands)[7]. It is also believed that they were the ones who either encouraged or brought the Canarians from North Africa, thereby initiating human life in this territory[8].

Greek World and Classical Mythology

Descending northward, on the northern side of the large sloping triangular plaza, one encounters the second unit, which features a linear structure and two separate volumes that diverge from the grid of the *Plan Parcial*. This rotation is based on new geometric directions, as if expanding the view and providing the complex with an additional vantage point, while simultaneously defining the space and connecting it with the surrounding context (Clemente 2016, p. 164). Polesello describes it as «an elongated agora in the shape of a triangle, with cubic elements placed below. It is a copy, rather than an imitation, of the agora of Assos» (2000, p. 76). Accordingly, Polesello proposes a longitudinal building for university services, comprising a linear structure with two additional square-plan volumes that overlook a kind of stoa, i.e., a green pergola marking the northern edge of the artificial platforms.

Observing the ancient city of Assos (and Hellenistic urban layouts in general) further parallels with the Tafira project come to the fore. In both cases, the most prestigious buildings – at Assos, the temple of Athena, at Tafira, the university pavilions – occupy prominent positions. At the same time, the agora and the square mark the centre of the settlement, with the theatre at a lower level, directly overlooking the port and the urban core below. It can be argued that Polesello deliberately links these two places because of their similarities, later highlighting them through his project.

> I am unsure if this project evokes Mediterranean memories. Certainly, in this part of the Atlantic, and at this latitude, the memories of Greek columns, which mainly serve to define a boundary, become the Pillars of Hercules. I have looked many times to see the Pillars of Hercules (and I believe I have seen them) (Polesello 2000, p. 78).

With this statement, Polesello establishes yet another link between the project's context and the classical world. He does so through mythology, referencing the Pillars of Hercules and later Sophocles' Antigone (Polesello 2000, p. 78). This is reflected in his work, where he introduces the concept of limits, both physical and mental, and their transcendence to reach new horizons, just as the Greeks, Romans, and Spaniards kept pushing their own boundaries – both geographical and cultural – to propagate their civilisations. The columns Polesello refers to are also physically present; on the Tafira campus, they appear at various points and form the elevation overlooking the city and the sea. The role of the column, therefore, is not only structural but, above all, symbolic (Clemente 2016, p. 198). The main feature of a colonnade is the repetition of the same element, or seriality. This concept brings architecture closer to music, as evident in the famous *Portico of Echo*, located at the Sanctuary of Olympia, where the sound of a scream could be heard repeated seven times or more (Ramírez Domec 2022). It is no coincidence that the myths of the nymph Echo and Narcissus are linked: both feature the theme of repetition, multiplication, sound and images reflected in water.

Fig. 10
John William Waterhouse, *Echo and Narcissus*, 1903.

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Fig. 11
Paul Klee, *Highway and Byways*, 1929.

From this perspective, the inclusion of the water basin (*estanque*) on the University Campus and its juxtaposition with the colonnade take on a certain meaning. After all, «a symbol, a myth, a rational or entirely irrational logical premise is essential to act within reality, to project» (Clemente 2016, p. 199).

Paul Klee, Le Corbusier, and the Sea

Secondary axes in the same orientation integrate the *cardo* and *decumanus* layout. Polesello emphasises this hierarchy by referencing Paul Klee's famous painting *Highway and Byways* (2000, p. 77), while defining the land levelling process as a "clear-out", comparable to Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin* (1990, p. 207). Besides, many parallels can be identified between the Swiss master's sketches of the Acropolis of Athens and the Tafira project[9]. Among the most notable features are the elevated podium on which the entire complex is situated, the colonnades that mark the boundaries, and the views overlooking the city and the sea. Other intentional references can be found in the *brise-soleil*, now removed, installed on the east and west façades of the university buildings, which Polesello explicitly described as «inspired by Le Corbusier».

These were vertical surfaces tilted at 45° in relation to the supporting walls, decorated with colourful climbing plants. They possessed an industrial character, reminiscent of port infrastructure and large ships, which particularly fascinated Polesello[10], especially for their presence within the urban fabric (2000, p. 78). References to the maritime world are very evident in the Tafira project: «The sea is present everywhere, physically, as the backdrop and setting for every space and pathway, and metaphorically, as a reference to the architecture that inhabits it, to steamships and large vessels» (Neri 2015, p. 38). The sea and its associated activities are ever-present, even within the chosen colour palette. It is as if the building itself, extending towards the ocean, were a mighty ship, a steamship anchored to the land yet prepared to set sail.

Analysing these aspects reveals a connection between the circular forms and the maritime setting. The *estanque*, the blue-coloured columns, the amphitheatre, and the cylindrical building (which opens towards, or stands out against, the coastline) all share the same planimetric shape and relate to the same theme. Similarly, squares define the buildings[11]. The triangle, represented by the large sloping green plaza, embeds a natural space into the complex. Rectangles, in turn, shape pathways and connections. It can therefore be said that the circle evokes the maritime world, the triangle represents the landscape, and the rectangles and squares signify the built environment.

Fig. 12
Casa de Colón of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Polesello 1990, p. 205).

Anthropic Elements of the Canary Context

The anthropic aspect of the Canary context encompasses both rural and urban elements. Agriculture, along with port, commercial, and tourism activities, forms an essential part of the archipelago's economy. This has led to the transformation of the landscape, with the terracing of steep slopes (*bancales*)[12] and the introduction of *estanques* for irrigation[13]. The two large platforms forming the southern part of the lot, along with the linear structure that was never constructed, are essentially terraces – an ancient method of managing elevation changes in this area. This approach was also employed by the engineer Leonardo Torriani (Cremona 1559 – Coimbra 1628), a significant figure in the history of the Canary Islands, as he

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Figg. 13-15
Sketches by Le Corbusier for the Acropolis of Athens (Le Corbusier 1966).

Figg. 16-18
Photos of the Faculties of Marine Sciences, Mathematics, and Computer Science in Tafira. © C. Dallatomasina.

designed their fortification system. Polesello also follows his method, «By working with terraces, balancing excavation and fill, and establishing the foundations of the built environment in the form of horizontal platforms» (Polesello 2000, p. 77). Regarding references from the urban context, it is essential to highlight that Polesello was interested in Canarian architecture, particularly the traditional houses of the Vegueta district[14].

He was particularly drawn to their stratigraphy and their ability to let air and light pass through[15]. Doors and windows, in fact, were not mere voids in a façade but actual devices designed for ventilation and sunlight filtering. Even when closed, thanks to a system of lattices and partially open sections, they allow air and light to reach the interior and the patio, which is typically located at the central or opposite end of the street-facing side. Polesello incorporates these aspects with the goal of moving beyond the conventional window and creating a permeable façade.
«Bringing light 15 meters into a space naturally requires some design solutions: either everything is made artificial, electrically lit in the innermost parts, or all obscuring or opaque elements are largely eliminated» (Polesello 2000, p. 77). It can be said that he applies the concept of the Canarian window to the entire wall, creating partitions that do not enclose the building but instead allow air and light to pass through, as if aiming to make the perimeter walls disappear[16].

Conclusions

This study has identified the references used by Polesello in his work at the Tafira Campus in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and linked them to the figurative and formal aspects of the project. The aim was to provide interpretations of Polesello's design choices and demonstrate how they are always motivated, sometimes explicitly, sometimes more subtly. It is precisely these subtle reasons that have been examined in detail, drawing on interviews with collaborators who worked with the architect in the Canary Islands, as well as personal interpretations derived from the analysis of documentary materials related to the project and its context.
Another aim of this study is to examine these references, connections, and allusions through the lens of travel, a sort of Grand Tour of Polesello's worlds, visions, and creations. It is not the souvenir itself that matters, but, as Luciano Semerani observes, it is «the internal idea that corresponds to it». He further states that for an architect, travel is an experience that lies «at the foundation of their intellectual construction» (Semerani 2000, p. 44-45).
In Polesello's work, one characteristic of the classical within the modern, in his personal quest for the classical, is «repetition/invention as a pair of antagonistic terms, as a poetic technique related to urban and architectural motivations» (Polesello 2000, p. 80). It is precisely within this relationship between repetition and invention that the concept of travel is situated. His architectural choices reveal a continuous process of losing oneself, searching, finding, and rediscovering within these two expansive fields. In this regard, it can be said that for Polesello, architecture results from a Grand Tour that oscillates between past actions and new fantasies – both emerging from the same dynamic of repeating and inventing.
In this creative process called invention, drawing on an excerpt from Filarete, Polesello argues that «an architect should receive an annual salary for 'investigating and creating new fantasies'» (Polesello 2000, p. 80). This idea captures the core of his architectural vision: a continuous dialogue between past and future, memory and innovation, repetition and invention.

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Figg. 19-21
Interior views of the Faculty of Marine Sciences in Tafira. © C. Dallatomasina.

Notes

[1] Polesello defines these as "artificial platforms" (Polesello et alii 1989).
[2] Quotes from Polesello 1990, p. 204.
[3] On Cristoforo Colombo's routes in the Canary Islands cf. Santiago Rodríguez 1955, pp. 337-396.
[4] Interviewed in August 2024, Juan Manuel Palerm Salazar (Full Professor of Architectural Composition at the Department of Architecture of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), who collaborated at the Tafira project as partner of Palerm & Tabares de Nava Arquitectos since 1986, said that Polesello was particularly attracted by the Mesoamerican context, particularly concerning the pre-Columbian period.
[5] Through the *talud-tablero* technique, which in the teocalli allows for the insertion of horizontal planes interrupting the sloping ones, cf. Cash 2005.
[6] On this point, Polesello states: «Architecture, the project, is the design of a citadel rather than a single architecture, as an isolated object» (2000, p. 77).
[7] Cf. Santos Yanguas 1988.
[8] Cf. Mederos et alii 1998.
[9] Raffaella Neri defined Polesello's project for the Tafira Campus as «a modern acropolis» (2015, pp. 36-40).
[10] Interview with Juan Manuel Palerm Salazar.

[11] Developing longitudinally and belonging to the second unit, the complex also comprises three square modules measuring 30x30 m.
[12] These structures are gradually disappearing with the depopulation of rural areas. The *ITLA - International Terraced Landscapes Alliance* is trying to preserve them, also in the Canary Islands, cf. Palerm Salazar 2019.
[13] For a proposal for the requalification of these anthropic elements of the Canarian landscape, see Dallatomasina et alii 2018, pp. 287-298.
[14] On the architecture of historic centres in the Canary Islands cf. López García 2010.
[15] Interview with Juan Manuel Palerm Salazar.
[16] Polesello also states: «In the overall project, the interior and exterior of the architecture are primarily characterised by glass (particularly glass blocks) and the total absence of windows, replaced by openings through which corridor-bridges connect the four modules on different levels» (Zardini 1992, p. 103).

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Cesare Dallatomasina (Parma, 1990), PhD, earned his doctorate with honours and international mention at the Escuela de Doctorado of the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, in the Department of Arte, Ciudad y Territorio, with a research focused on the rehabilitation of archaeological, architectural, and urban heritage. He graduated in Architecture from the University of Parma, presenting a design thesis on the musealization of the Castle of Fuengirola, Spain. Currently, he is a research fellow at the Department of Architecture of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, Cesena campus. He serves as Teaching Assistant for the disciplines of SSD ICAR/14 - Architectural and Urban Composition at the University of Parma and as a tutor in the Master's Degree program in Architecture and Sustainable Cities at the Department of Engineering and Architecture of the same university.

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Sílvia Ramos, Helder Casal Ribeiro

Perfect Day(s). Revisiting Grand Tour Experiences

Abstract
The constant image bombardment within travel banalisation and the loss of critical review makes it urgent to inquire about "learning by travelling" in the context of architecture. The embedded notions of the "Grand Tour" are convoked as the *leitmotiv* to reflect on the future of Architectural Travels from the perspective of those who embrace Architecture as a way of being.
This essay is set on the premise of the Grand Tour as it has been experienced by the two Portuguese Pritzker Prize Laureates, Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura, hinged on two recent conversations. A critical and deepened reflection on these architects´ travel preferences and heightened experiences illuminates relevant themes to clarify the role of "learning by travelling" in today's architecture education and practice.

Keywords
Architecture — Learning by travelling — Álvaro Siza — Eduardo Souto de Moura

In 2024, during the same week, at approximately the same time, just before lunch, and in the same place, the Aleixo Studio Office building, the Up-GranT Porto team from the Faculty of Architecture - University of Porto had a conversation about the idea of "Grand Tour" in Architecture with each of Porto's Pritzker Prize laureates – Álvaro Siza (born in 1933, distinguished in 1992) and Eduardo Souto de Moura (born in 1952, distinguished in 2011). The conversations were based on a common script. They were structured around three main themes: foundational travels, relevant travels not taken or to be taken, and the proposition of an updated Grand Tour within today´s architecture culture. Enthusiastic about these topics, each conversation was more than just a moment to collect or verify travel data. Instead, it was a moment of direct and face-to-face reflection about the personal experience of each shared or unforgotten moment.
The abundant references to each architect's personal life and professional trajectory allowed us to understand the different contexts in which they moved and travelled, as well as their positioning in relation to the discipline of architecture, society and culture as a whole. It is well known the significance Siza and Souto de Moura attribute to travel within their design practice as a fundamental opportunity to learn and their long and extensive travel practice, which is widely documented. It is also known that Siza and Souto de Moura are close friends who share projects and travels. They both work in a building designed by Siza and live in a building designed by Souto de Moura. They graduated and taught at the same School (Porto Fine Arts School), even though they are from different generations and have distinctive positions in relation to a universal culture and architectural affinities, which find expression in their spatial narratives.

While Siza is initially considered the architect of the housing problem, with a special interest in Alvar Aalto or Adolf Loos, Souto de Moura is the architect who pursues the public demand, with a special interest in Mies van der Rohe. This suggests that, by comparing the two conversations, it is possible to identify relationships of coincidence but also distance between the perspectives of the two architects and obtain relevant notions for clarifying an updated perspective of the concept of "learning by travelling" in Architecture. This article focuses on reading the conversation with Siza in counterposition to Souto de Moura´s dialogue, sometimes overlapping and other times side-by-side in the attempt to illuminate a set of particular characteristics of the travels that they distinguish as being fundamental lessons for an Architect.

A specific journey that can simultaneously be characterised in multiple aspects, admitting the singularity of each architect within their architectural discourse. The construction of this hypothesis of counterposition is based on the transcription of the two recorded conversations and on an initial stage of editing – in which the necessary passages are clarified by using published writings – and translation – focused on establishing the meaning and intention of the arguments, highlighted by the gestures and facial expressions that marked the moments of the conversations. This article, however, attempts to go beyond the annotated publication of the two conversations. It aims to place itself at the limit of editing and construct a reflection on what an architecture journey can be today, informed by the personal experiences of the two protagonists. We can recognise a set of echoes and material evidence capable of supporting a formulation of an initial perspective, which the article reinterprets in the form of notes and selected conversation sequences.

Siza and Souto de Moura unanimously state that they travel because *in-situ* experience is irreplaceable, be it for the construction of a deepened architectural culture or an informed design practice. Both sustain that other sources of information, such as books, visual representations, travel reports by other architects, or social media accounts, can anticipate, incite or be a source of inspiration for new travels, however, they do not have the ability to replace the direct experience of an architectural artefact. The information these mediums offer is conditioned by the author/curator´s particular perspectives and does not allow the architect-traveller a personal, open vision. Siza refers to the architectural journey as a precious learning tool, which Souto de Moura entirely agrees with, linking it to a state of mind. Consequently, we understand that what distinguishes Architecture travel from other trips is not only the set destination, theme or duration. It is mainly the predisposition of the traveller to observe, record and decipher *in-situ* enigmas, with the ultimate aim of a heightened memory construct as available material within the complex creative process. Souto de Moura confesses that the exotic, in the sense of the unknown, does not particularly motivate or interest him.

He admits the relevance of experiencing through travel what one already believes in or has prior knowledge of, informed mainly through readings or research, and travels as an opportunity for confirmation. At the same time, he recognises the possibility of disappointment while travelling when reality turns out to be different from what he had formulated through the study of indirect sources. Also interesting is the hypothesis he raises about refusing to directly experience a tainted place or building, which, although it does not allow him to confirm his reading, protects him against

disappointment - this is the case of 860-880 Lake Shore Drive apartments. Siza and Souto de Moura rarely refer to journeys other than architecture-related ones. Souto de Moura only remembers two or three trips he took without an architectural dimension, with family or childhood friends, mainly to Italy but also to the Balkans, namely Montenegro. Siza, in turn, refers to family trips to the different Spanish provinces (Galicia, Andalusia, Catalunya, etc.) prior to his entry into the Fine Arts School, although many of the aspects he recalls already refer to architecture – namely the well-known recollection of how Gaudi's work in Barcelona awakened his interest to architecture within sculpture.

The two architects reaffirm that, apart from the mentioned travels, all others are architecture-related, whether they occur in a work-related environment or leisure-related circumstance. In the context of work travels, Souto de Moura explains that whenever his architectural practice involves travelling, he takes the opportunity to study *in-situ* selected architectures or themes, be it buildings or landscapes, for example, through a commission in Bordeaux and a conference in Caen, he visits Second World War structures along the north-western French coast, Brittany, exploring the theme of "Architecture without narrative", previously encountered through the philosopher Paul Virilio´s Bunker Archaeology. Regarding leisure trips, both Siza and Souto de Moura recall the different groups of friends, architects and professors with whom they travelled, namely Fernando Távora and Alcino Soutinho. These were annual journeys of medium duration, organised according to a theme with a complex itinerary, whether due to the distances or number of places visited. In Souto de Moura´s case, he highlights the importance of in-depth preparation and good contacts in the places to which one travels. Siza adds the importance of having a leading member, who introduces the trip with drawings, suggests preparatory readings and studies enough to frame and explain the places to be visited. As a group premise, Siza highlights the common view on Architecture and, consequently, shared interests in architectural culture, although with distinctive elective affinities. Regarding the group's dynamics, Souto de Moura reports that these trips allow for occasional group dispersion and individual readings, enhancing unique experiences, like when with Fernando Távora, he shared a unique sunrise in the sanctuary of Machu-Picchu in complete silence among the guides´ arrival through the Inca paths.

Souto de Moura adds to these travels what he denominates as routine trips. These are recurring, short travels to relatively close and empathetic places, such as Paris and Madrid, always carried out within a specific routine and an identical schedule – same hotel, restaurants, bookshops, galleries, walks, etc. While travelling, both Siza and Souto de Moura have their own strategies for observing, studying or recording the *in-situ* reality. It is well known that Siza´s drawings are his constant companion. Souto Moura acknowledges that he draws very little, especially with Siza, with rare exceptions, but takes photographs. He tries to memorise through informal gestures and spontaneous photography what catches his eye, which is often not portrayed in technical publications, be it construction details or transitions, like in the case of the Farnsworth House. Siza also recognises that he acquired the taste and habit for travel with the Porto Fine Art School. He highlights three travels – Paris, Venice and Helsinki – financed by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

These scholarships allowed interdisciplinary groups of students and professors of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting to travel for several days.

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Fig. 1
Álvaro Siza and Fernando Távora in Oscar Niemeyer's Memorial de América Latina, São Paulo – Brasil (In: Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, Fernando Távora Archive, PT_FIMS_FT_Foto4055).

Siza describes these trips as an opportunity to observe (draw and photograph) paintings, sculptures, architecture and see cinema (banned/censored films), but also as a possibility to establish new contacts and enhance local connections, namely schools and architects.

Siza and Souto de Moura share the notion that architectural travel may not be available over time. In his youth, travelling was closed to Siza due to the country's political situation and not all trips were accessible at all times in Siza's life. Professional responsibilities prevented Siza and Souto de Moura from travelling, and today, for personal reasons, health, and others, Siza and Souto de Moura travel much less frequently. Throughout the conversations, Siza and Souto de Moura reference multiple travels they did not complete for different reasons. However, when specifically asked about the relevant travels that were not taken, the response is diverse, with Siza looking into the past while Souto de Moura looks to the present or near future. Siza recalls two planned group travels that he missed but heard echoes with a mixture of interest and regret – the journey to Constantinople and the road trip crossing the United States until Los Angeles.

Souto de Moura, in turn, imagines two travel destinations to the Orient, which he will not be able to carry out. These are travels that have their origin in publications from disciplines other than architecture and intend to explore themes on the rustic construction of the house with natural materials, the city as a large house and the house as an elementary unit of the city – wooden villages in the mountains in Japan and brick villages in China, which Souto de Moura sees as reminiscent of Pompeii in the East. When asked about the selection of an essential journey and the preposition of an updated Architecture Grand Tour, Siza and Souto de Moura's proposals again differ in purpose, destination and theme. Souto de Moura proposes a specific travel where young architects can learn about Architecture within the discipline. He underlines a journey to Germany aimed at studying the before and after of the Modern Movement, with the aim to show the permanent capacity of Modernity to renew itself, whether through the Bauhaus experimentation or the work of Schinkel and Mies van der Rohe, so that they understand that the Modern Movement is more than just about form.

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Fig. 2
Eduardo Souto de Moura and Fernando Távora in St. Petersburg – Russia (In: Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, Fernando Távora Archive, PT_FIMS_FT_0007.01-dps0001).

In contrast, Siza avoids setting a destination, theme or time frame and evokes the necessary freedom of choice for each young student. He places the entire world as a destination hypothesis. He calls upon the Vitruvian man, self-aware with humanist culture, who selects his travels based on personal interests and stimuli, on the matters that have impressed him and whom he inspires to be. Siza opens the door for us with a smile, gathers coffee, water, and tobacco and notes the topics we are interested in discussing. Souto de Moura awaits our arrival on a coffee break at the main entrance. On the meeting table are two printed maps to be explored, one of Europe and the other of the World, and his black notebook, where he prepared our conversation and kept the script that we previously shared.

Throughout the conversations, it is impressive the pleasure and the enthusiasm Siza and Souto de Moura shared in reminiscing on their travels, how much they have travelled and the current disappointment in their limitations and restraints to travelling. With these conversations, we can verify how Siza and Souto de Moura are distinct architect-travellers who nevertheless share a common point of view or review themselves in the same meaningful idea of "learning by travelling".

An example of this shared empathy is the journey to Rome on the return trip from Sicily in the early 1980s, evoked by both architects in these conversations. For Souto de Moura, this is the best journey he took with Siza. For Siza, this is the occasion for the most precise image of Souto de Moura. After a month of working in Sicily, sitting in Piazza Navona, Siza and Souto de Moura simply decided to stay for three more days. They eat, drink, talk and draw (the ruins in the Forum, Trajan's Market, etc), nothing more. Both remember perfectly the Grand Tour feeling during those perfect days. Hence, we may conclude that Siza and Souto Moura's Architecture travels are a living and active idea that admits different ways of being.

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Fig. 3
Group travels with Álvaro Siza, Alcino Soutinho and Fernando Távora in Athens – Greece (In: Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, Alcino Soutinho Archive, PT_FIMS_AS-0001-06-foto0243).

The travels permit possible alternatives and remain continually open to new contributions and inscriptions. They are undoubtedly made possible by the impossibility to separate the person from the architect. Architecture and life, in symbiosis, are part of Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura's way of being in relation to layered universal culture and are reflected in their Grand Tour(s). They constitute perfect days, just as the days of these conversations were perfect.

The authors would like to thank Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura for their willingness to schedule the conversations (on August 3 and July 30, 2024) and for the generosity with which they carried them out.

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Sílvia Ramos (b. Porto, 1983). Architect, PhD in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto (FAUP). Invited Auxiliary Professor at FAUP since 2019 and Researcher at Study Centre of Architecture and Urbanism (CEAU-FAUP), since 2013, associated to the funded projects "Siza baroque" (SIZA/CPT/0021/2019) and "UpGranT" (2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000158377). Since graduation, she has pursued a professional practice with other architects, namely with Helder Casal Ribeiro, currently an associate of Fpoetics® Studio. In 2011/12, joined the PhD in Architecture (PDA-FAUP). From 2013 to 2017, was a research fellow of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). Between 2013 and 2015, she was an Assistant Professor in FAUP's Master degree in architecture (MIARQ-FAUP).

Helder Casal Ribeiro (b. Espinho, 1964). Architect, PhD in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto. Develops professional practice since 1992 and founder of Fpoetics® studio. Auxiliary Professor in FAUP's PhD and Master degree, where he lectures Design Studio since 1999. Visiting Professor in Politecnico di Milano at Polo Territoriale di Mantova, 2014-2016, and since 2017, in DABC - PhD programme. In 2024, Visiting Researcher in NEST Project, entitled *Porto-Milan Exchange*, in DABC, Politécnico di Milano. Co-founder of curatorial collective MATTER. the white conferences. Researcher at the Study Centre of Architecture and Urbanism (CEAU-FAUP). Associated to funded projects: "Siza baroque" (SIZA/CPT/0021/2019) and currently PI in "UpGranT" (2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000158377).

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Merilin Tee, Gregor Taul

"You need to see the space where you can feel infinitely comfortable to know what an architect can do at all". Interview with Estonian Architect Siiri Vallner

Abstract
Siiri Vallner is an architect who started her studies at the Estonian Academy of Arts in the early 1990s. She was among the first to embark on exchange studies to Copenhagen and later continued her studies at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. After her studies, Vallner spent a year working as an architect in New York. In 2002 she and her colleagues founded the architecture office *KavaKava*. In 2008 she received the Young Architect Award and the accompanying travel scholarship which she used to undertake a Grand Tour to Italy, Greece, the Middle East and India. This interview took place in spring 2024 as part of the Erasmus+ funded research project *Updating the Grand Tour. Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment* and focused on how travel affects architectural studies and meaning-making.

Keywords
Estonian architecture — Grand Tour — Siiri Vallner

Siiri Vallner (b. 1972 in Tallinn) is an architect whose projects have left a strong mark on the image of contemporary Estonian architecture (Lige 2015). Vallner started her studies at the Estonian Academy of Arts in the early 1990s. It was a time of transition in Estonian architecture[1]. If during the Soviet era architecture was centralised and nearly entirely at the service of the state, now the country moved to the other extreme. Virtually anything that could be privatised was privatised, and for the first 10-15 years, construction was largely directed by the private sector looking for quick income. It was a time of turmoil for the government sector and the underfunded arts and architecture education. In this anxious situation, Vallner was one of the first to embark on exchange studies to Copenhagen, where the Danish government had a special study program for foreigners, where teachers (among others Jan Gehl – the world-famous urbanist and an advocate of good public space) preached about the architecture and urban planning of the welfare state through in-depth tours.

A few years later, Vallner set off to Washington DC to study at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Jaan Holt, an Estonian expat, served as a professor of architecture there and helped to organize scholarships for Estonian students. Holt himself had been a student of Louis Kahn and Kahn's long-time 'personal' engineer August Komendant[2]. While Kahn had left Estonia as an infant, Komendant left Estonia as an adult during the Second World War.

This Holt-Komendant-Kahn "bloodline" has been an important narrative in Estonian architecture, as on the one hand it has helped to bridge the discontinuity between the current period and the independence preceding Second World War, while on the other hand, it has sought to reinstate the

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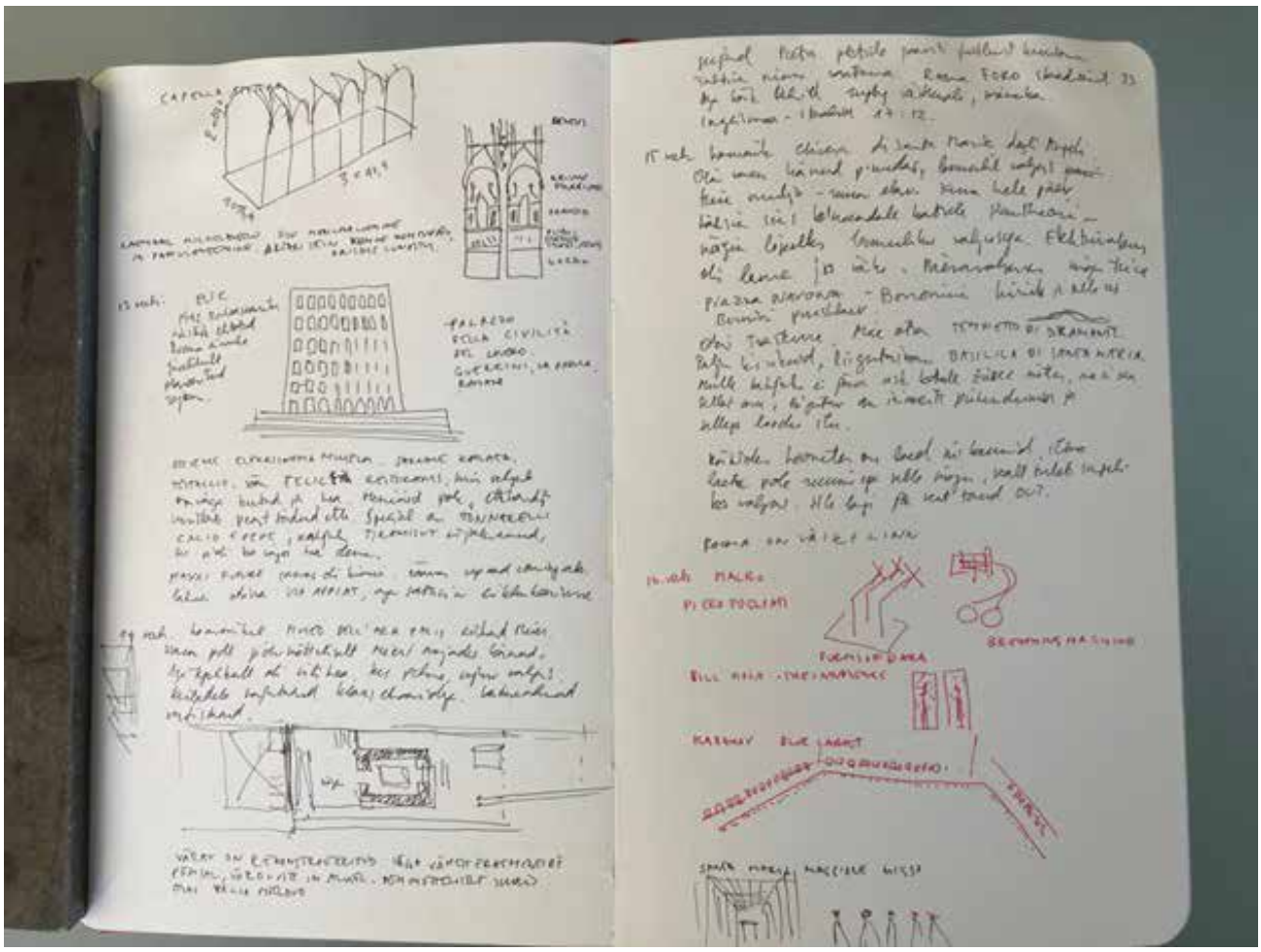

Fig. 1
Siiri Vallner, Sketchbook drawings from Greece.

country with the mainstream of modern architecture from which it was forcibly separated for half a century.

After her studies, Vallner spent a year living in New York, working in an architecture office. When she came back to Estonia, she founded the architecture office *KavaKava* together with her colleagues. In 2004 Estonia joined the European Union, which initiated the construction of many public buildings and infrastructure projects through various support programmes. The appearance of Estonian architecture in the last twenty years is largely the result of high-level architectural competitions for EU-co-funded public building, where Vallner has picked up many prize-winning places[3]. In 2008, when she received the Young Architect Award and the accompanying travel scholarship, she undertook a classic grand tour through Italy, Greece and the Middle East to India.

This interview was conducted in May 2024 as part of the research project *Updating the Grand Tour. Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment.* The interview took place in *KavaKava*'s office, in one of the early-20th century wooden houses of the Kalamaja district of Tallinn. On a more general level the interview focused on how travel affects architectural studies and meaning-making. Considering the Estonian specificity of the interview, it is important to mention the name of Jaan Holt, who was mentioned several times in the interview, and the contribution of the Virginia Tech School of Architecture to the development of Estonian architecture in the decades following the restoration of independence.

Gregor Taul: *The aim of our conversation is to talk about the Grand Tour and travelling in Europe and beyond. Yet, one does not have to go abroad*

to experience architecture. In order to have a deep spatial experience, it can sometimes be enough to leave the classroom and see a building on site. Perhaps we could start with your architectural studies and move chronologically from there. Would you talk about your studies at the Estonian Academy of Arts (EKA) and about your first study trips abroad?[4]

Siiri Vallner: I started my studies in the 1990s and I think that travelling was really different compared to the way it is today. Society itself was very, very different[5].

If one managed to go somewhere, the effect was much more influential. On the other hand, there wasn't, and couldn't have been, any planning or forethought - you just had to take your chances.

The first place I went to study abroad was Copenhagen. I studied there for one semester and it was so radically unlike the way we were studying at the time, that I couldn't even put the two experiences together. In fact, I didn't dare to talk about it with others – I thought they would laugh at me. Now it seems so obvious, but back then I didn't have the tools to fully comprehend it or relate it to the Estonian context. Their approach was very people-centred and social, whereas in the 1990s, in Tallinn, people would jokingly refer to this kind of thinking as "hedgehog architecture" – where one supposedly grasps the world from below, rather than above.

In any case, I got a good taste of this perspective, because what I learnt in the lectures was confirmed in the urban space. The Danes had a special programme for international students, with a clear intent on spreading their culture and architectural ideology. In addition to the lectures, we had a lot of study tours, where we went to see the same objects we had discussed in the classroom. Thus, we learnt through concrete examples how Danes, who were supposed to be even more introverted people than Estonians, have created an open and friendly society through architecture. It was through these visits to architectural works that I genuinely realised for the first time that actual understanding comes from experience not theory. I can study something for a hundred hours in the classroom, but when I see and experience it for an hour on the spot, the impact is so much greater.

GT: *Although the Erasmus mobility programme was established in 1987, Estonia joined in 1998 and the first students participated only in 1999*[6]*. Student mobility also took place during the Soviet era when the partner universities were from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. The 1990s were an intermediate period in that previous links had been broken and new ones had not yet been established. Did students seek out exchange studies opportunities themselves, or were they helped to do so by, for example, the then dean Veljo Kaasik?*[7]

SV: Back then, there were no Erasmus or other programmes. I can't remember where this Danish opportunity came from[8]. I think it may have been thanks to Veljo Kaasik. Two students from our course went to Denmark, and later Oliver Alver also went on the same programme[9].

GT: *Did you have the opportunity to practice as an architect and was there perhaps even a danger that Copenhagen would take you in and you wouldn't come back?*

SV: I was only in my third year at the time and the idea hadn't occurred to me. But when I went to study in the US in 1998, they did have this American practical approach of attracting foreign students and then giving them short-term work permits. It is good for them to have a lot of energe-

tic highly skilled young people that they can use, but who will soon leave and not retire there. I took advantage of this opportunity by working both during and after my studies.

GT: *Am I right that you were in Copenhagen during your third year, then came back to Tallinn, did your fourth year and then headed to the US?*
SV: Yes, I finished the fourth year at EKA. The funny thing about our course was that just when we were finishing, there was a reform in higher education from a four-year programme to a 3+2 Bologna system. Our course got caught in the middle of the process. I think it's not common knowledge, but we finished in four years without doing a master's thesis. Later on, our diplomas were equated with a Master's degree. So we have about 15 architects who write MA after their name but who in a way don't have a master's degree. It was so vague at the time because some of us actually started the fifth year, but then the school did not know what to do with us. So, at the beginning of that fifth year, I had the chance to go to study in the US.

GT: *You mentioned how radically different Estonia's economic situation was compared to Denmark. How did you manage? I can imagine that it was easier to get by in the left-wing, bohemian Copenhagen than in the elegant capital of the United States?*
SV: Actually, everything in Copenhagen was neatly organised for us by the programme. I was living with a host family and had a scholarship and other privileges. I did well there. In the US, on the other hand, it was easier because I could work. But to be honest, in those days, it wasn't like you went somewhere and your mum or dad gave you the money. You had to manage on your own.
Although, of course, Jaan Holt's support was solid. At that time, the architecture department was away from Virginia Tech's main campus in a small space in Washington DC. It was a tiny school where – you might say – Jaan Holt's ideology reigned. It was important for him to invite students and visiting faculty from all over the world, who would spend a year or two there and then move on.

GT: *Who else from the EKA students went there?*
SV: Before me, Toomas Tammis had been there as a student and Andres Alver as a lecturer. Hanno Grossschmidt was there at the same time as me. Tomomi Hayashi, who came to Estonia also studied there. I don't remember at the moment, but there must have been more[10]. As there were few options before the Erasmus period, it was a definite and very good choice.

GT: *On the one hand, Jaan Holt's contribution was clear and practical – through him, a whole generation had the opportunity to study and work in the United States and develop professionally in very different circumstances. On the other hand, something poetic and mythological goes hand in hand with his name.*
SV: It is very mythological!

GT: *Yes, the fact that he was a student of Louis Kahn and August Komendant. How did you perceive that at the time, and how do you explain this connection to yourself in retrospect?*

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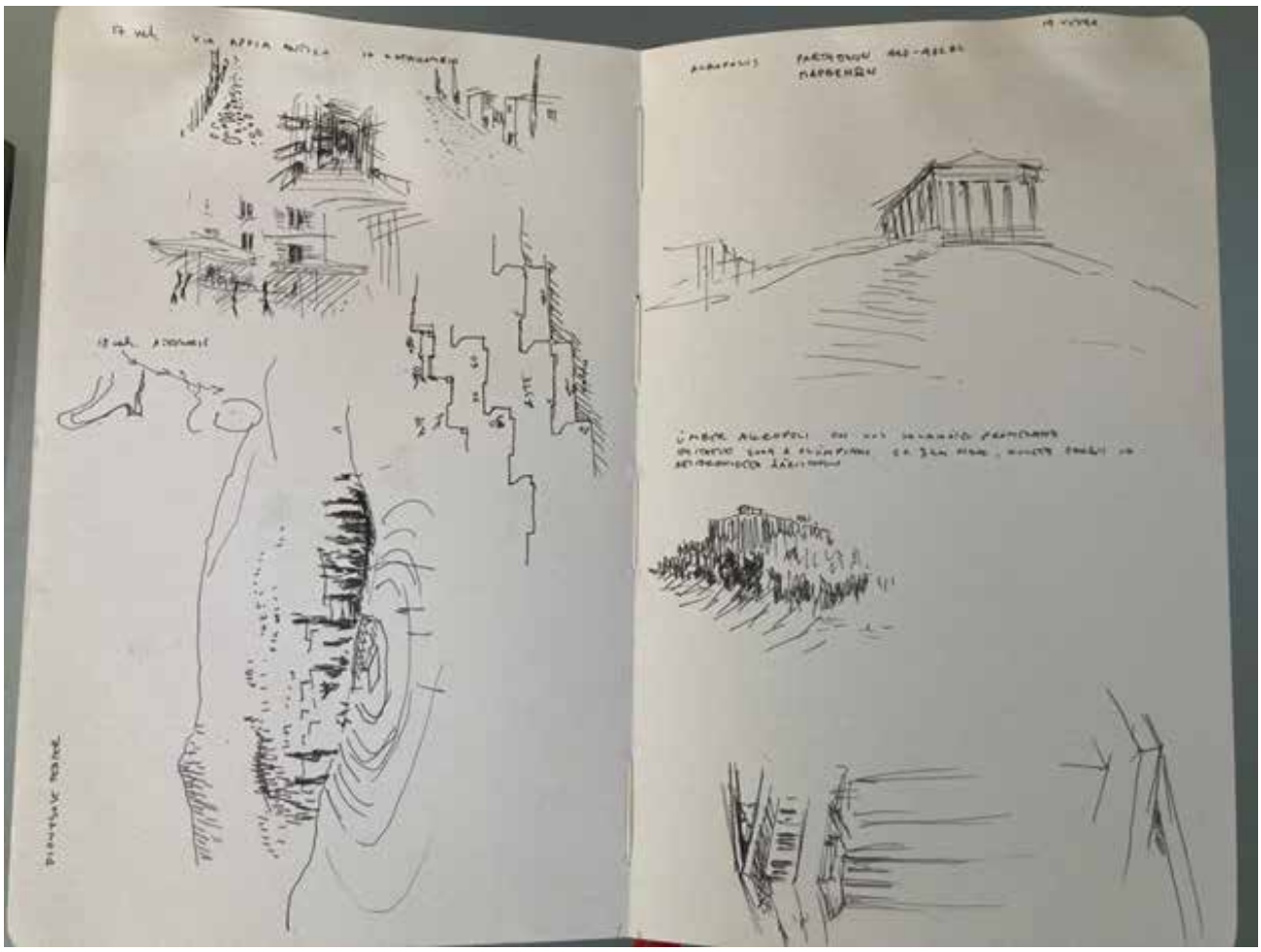

Fig. 2
Siiri Vallner, Sketchbook drawings from Greece.

SV: I admit that there's a clear "bloodline" theme. But if I now think about it from the Grand Tour perspective then I would actually connect this connection to the more medieval tradition of journeyman years of craftsmen rather than the travels of 18th century aristocrats. In this sense studying under Holt was more like a relationship between the master and the apprentice. If I need to categorise architecture, I see it as craft. Even though we do it with computers, it's a discipline where nothing happens without mind and hands. It's also person-centred as much is done and learnt individually. When I think about medieval times, it was the case that the apprentice had to go far away during his years of wandering – one couldn't go to the next village, but had to enter different cultures, had to practice with previously unknown masters. One local master was not enough.

GT: *In medieval Tallinn, masters seldom handed down their workshops to their sons. As the saying goes: «blood is thicker than water». If your own son messed things up, it was hard to throw him out of the house because of the family bonds. It was more useful to take on a travelling apprentice, with whom you could develop a respectful relationship based on professional merit.*
SV: Well, for example, one of the things that Holt thought was very important was drawing and sketching with your own hand. Because computers had already arrived and many people thought it was cool to model on screens, the analogue direction was not the most popular thing at that time. Although we were critical of Holt's obsession at the time, I still have a very strong attachment to sketching[11]. Of course, Holt worshiped Kahn, but Carlo Scarpa was also very important to him. That's why one of our

important teachers was Marco Frascari, who came from Scarpa's class[12]. Kahn's and Scarpa's sensibility is a bit similar, and that certainly came through in the teaching. If you would put it in the Estonian context, then... Well, I think we are a small country and such a focus on one or two greats would not work here as it would hijack the whole teaching. But if you have a country as big as the US, then it can work, because each school of architecture has its own identity and they can educate their students as followers of a specific school.
Yet, from a personal point of view it's of course a very special feeling when you know that the knowledge comes directly from the original source.

GT: *I imagine that studying in the US involved visiting Kahn's buildings around the country?*
SV: Yes, but it wasn't really organised by the school. Because I was such a decent student, I just did it all on my own. This was a big difference from my studies in Denmark, where experiencing architecture on the spot was a crucial part of the programme. In the US, we did it ourselves.

GT: *Did that mean driving the car criss-crossing the United States?*
SV: Basically yes – by train and by car. Actually I didn't get to see the west coast that much, but I still saw most of the important buildings by Kahn and it really had a big impact on me. Although I have to say that, just as I didn't dare to tell anyone about my experience when I had come back from Copenhagen, my experience in the US was again so difficult to comprehend that I didn't start talking about it with a big mouth back home. It was only 10-15 years later that the Danish architectural trend took off in a huge wave. Now, of course, I can pompously say that I have studied with Jan Gehl and that my understanding of public space was shaped directly by his words, but the truth is that immediately after Denmark, I did not consider it a matter of pride. I find it interesting.

GT: *Would you like to point out any other noteworthy lecturers or major differences in teaching methodology that you took with you from Denmark and the US?*
SV: I think that in the US the biggest influence on me was the fact that I stayed there for a year longer. I was absolutely sure that I wanted a big city experience and so I went to New York. It was like I had this urge that no matter what, I needed to understand what the metropolis meant. Because.. Here in Estonia at that time, we had Alver and Kaasik who talked about density and emphasised urbanity[13]. Of course, this mindset had got to me as well, and I wanted to experience this real density first hand, so that I could understand what they were actually talking about.
New York with its wild energy had everything – be it the kind of Danish-style social perspective or the genius of Louis Kahn. Nobody tutored me that year – except myself – but I took it as a lesson anyway. It was relatively difficult for me psychologically but at the same time I felt that I had to endure this difficult period. At that moment, Estonian architecture seemed to me to be very monotonous and I felt that I could not do anything about it if I did not get a completely different perspective.
If you want to get out of a certain system, one week or one month is not enough, it has to be longer, the change takes place over a longer period of time. Understanding long-term urban processes slowly takes shape within you. In Estonia and other smaller places, there is a danger that some things

are quickly and often superficially taken over one by one, and it is not understood how and for what reasons these principles developed.
Perhaps if you go through a painstaking learning process one time, next time you will understand some things quicker. Like, why some specific things happened in another place and if we wanted to do the same here it would take a different form because of the changes in content.
But talking about the Grand Tour, by the time I got the Young Architect Award in 2008 I had been practising for ten years[14]. Then I thought, well, now I'm going to do the real Grand Tour.
I'd been to all sorts of places, but not to the classical architectural sites. So I went to Rome, then on to Athens, then to Cairo, then on to Damascus, and then I had a free schedule after that.

GT: *Great! How did you prepare for this trip? Did you look up your old art history lecture notes? An acquaintance of mine went to Paris for the first time with a guidebook from the 1930s.*
SV: I could have read memoirs of some of the Grand Tourists of the 19th century beforehand, but I limited myself to just trying to see all these classic sites in a free-form way that I liked. But I did follow some traditions – like sketching. This sketching habit came from the US, where classical education was emphasised. But it really does help a lot if you take the time and go to the place you are studying and try to analyse it by sketching. An architect's sketch is different from an artist's sketch in the sense that you are trying to capture in your drawing the architect's idea and how that object functions in a more general way or how it's expressed in some detail. I tried to do it throughout my tour.
But from Egypt onwards I actually had to stop sketching because as soon as I sat down and took out my sketchbook I was surrounded by a crowd... You can also collect memories with a camera, but for me it's not the same.

GT: *How good of an archivist are you?*
SV: I try to keep the things that are important to me.

GT: *So you still have the drawings from that trip?*
SV: I still have the sketchbook. By the way, when I look at today's students, I'm surprised to see how much they use sketchbooks to do their coursework and collect ideas. Including first year students – someone must have taught them and stressed it to them. Some of them do it very nicely. But when we went to Helsinki with the students and we were there for two days, I saw that this was clearly too short a time. Well, for example, when we were at the Aalto studio and the Aalto home, we were given an hour's tour in each, but in that time you cannot even take your sketchbook out of your bag, let alone start sketching.

GT: *As we came upon the Aaltos, there is an important European architectural sub-narrative, or myth if you like, that comes to the fore. Alvar and Aino were deeply fascinated by the Italian small towns since their first trip to the country. Not wishing to generalise too much, one could say that they took the re-creation of this dense social fabric as their creative credo*[15]*. How about you, did you have time for small towns besides Rome, and did you have a special feeling about them?*
SV: Yes, it could be said that Jan Gehl's teaching is based on Italian cities

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Fig. 3
Siiri Vallner, Sketchbook drawings from Greece.

and the analysis of communal life there, and how to apply it to colder climates and more sparsely populated places like Denmark. I think it is important to bear in mind that if you are born in Viimsi[16] and you are driven to school, to the gym and to the shopping centre for twelve years, you cannot have any idea of what a better urban experience might be. Even if we try to start a broader public debate on urban densification, there is a risk that if city users or officials or even architects have such a limited and car-centric view of city life, they will not be able to want better.

GT: *What influence did non-Western cultures have on you? Did you manage to alienate yourself from a cultural context you are familiar with?*
SV: I think that you can't really get out of your culture, out of your automatisms – or at least not that easily. But maybe you realise that you always have some kind of cultural glasses in front of you – no matter what you're looking at or evaluating or judging. That is an important realisation.

GT: *But here is another paradox. The proverb says that «before you go to Paris, visit Nuustaku»[17]. On the one hand, this saying warns against arrogance, but on the other hand it is just practical advice that you may not understand the bigger places until you are familiar with the small towns at home. Perhaps Paris itself needs Nuustaku more than the other way round?! Going back to the 1990s, do you recall any study trips within Estonia? Perhaps art history trips with professor Mart Kalm?[18]*

SV: We did, yes. I don't know if he still does them, but Kalm's tours were

very legendary at the time. He used to do these kinds of trips for about a week or a little less in the summers.

GT: *Yes, they are still going strong today. Although now, as far as I know, they last a day or two at the most.*
SV: We also had other summer practices.

GT: *Like painting practice?*
SV: We had a measuring practice in the Noarootsi area, but the painting practice we arranged ourselves. Somehow our course missed the official painting practice, so we decided that we would do it ourselves. Siiri Nõva was on our course and through her these opportunities opened up, both in the city and in the countryside. Siiri Nõva's home in Nõmme was actually the first time I experienced an architect's house[19]. Afterwards we also went to paint with Siiri Nõva at Aedla farm in Muuksi village, where we also got to live in the house, which offered many impressions[20].

GT: *It's a nice coincidence, because we have chosen Erika Nõva as one of the ten Estonian architects to be featured in our Grand Tour project, alongside you. Erika Nõva's home is also one of our case studies.*
SV: Getting to know Erika Nõva's house was a very special experience. In the winter of my first course, Siiri Nõva invited me to visit and the house struck me. In this sense, the Nõva house was like an introduction. The first architect's house I came across. But this house is the first in more ways than one. The first female architect, the first republic. Although I was certainly no national romantic myself. With this house, however, I reassessed for myself national romanticism. Before it seemed like such a silly thing to me, but when you experience it by sitting on those chairs and on that parquet floor and making fire in that fireplace then your view changes on it, completely[21].
A little bit on a different topic – on the way I travel. I decided at some point that I'm basically against cars and I don't want to own a car, a private car ever. Or maybe one day I will, but so far I haven't. In any case, I've tried to hold that line all along. I think it creates a different perspective to go through all the obstacles that come with it and that's why my travelling looks different in that I have to plan a lot more time to get somewhere. I have to plan different kinds of routes that normally people don't go through these days.
A lot of the time I go by bike and by train – first I take the train to wherever I can and then I cycle from there. At least that is how it is in Estonia. It takes a lot of time to get around, but it makes me see the world differently. I think that for people who see the country through the perspective of high roads, it can seem like some places are very far apart, but in fact if you go across one road to the other, things can be quite close.

GT: *Speaking of souvenirs, besides your own drawings, what have you brought back from your travels?*
SV: I think that If we look back on this conversation we can consider all these travel experiences as one big Grand Tour – and what I have taken with me from this journey is the architect that I have become. I don't think I could have become this architect by just studying here. At the same time, I really don't know if I would have become a different kind of architect, or if I wouldn't have become an architect at all. Maybe I would have been

interested in other subjects? Or maybe I would still have discovered these subjects later on? It is hard to imagine it all. In any case, all the topics that have accompanied me are my discoveries from these journeys. In that sense, travelling has been like a highway to the topics which are important for me.

GT: *But on a more trivial note, did you bring any artefacts? Any mementos that remind you of those trips?*
SV: Surely I must have something at home.. But.. At the same time, no, I can't think of any pieces of marble or artefacts of this kind. I don't know, I wonder if I have anything... (*Long pause*)
Wait, if you've interviewed other architects, do they have any particular objects or sculptures that they've brought with them?!

GT: *Well, it's a different kind of story, but when we went to interview Raine Karp at his home and asked him the same question, he also got stuck in the thought, but then he mumbled mischievously and said: whisky![22] As the drinks selection here was poor, and proper whisky tasted like the outside world, it was a perfect gift to share with friends. Afterwards, the empty whisky bottles remained as a souvenir of the trip. But as soon as the borders opened and the same products found their way into Estonian shops, he took them to the landfill because they lost their original meaning.*
SV: I don't know. I might have some books or some small things I had done in school that I took with me as mementos, but I don't remember any specific things.

GT: *I once had an Australian friend who, like many young people from there, took a trip to Europe and other parts of the world over a number of years. Wherever he was, he often visited post offices to send things home to Australia. When he finally got home, his helmet from India and other items were waiting for him. So getting attached to things can develop into hoarding, even at a distance. But changing the subject, and trying to perhaps "institutionalise" the Grand Tour, what do you think should be the locations that should necessarily be part of a Grand Tour? Let's say, for example, that it is a young architect's tour. Some specific buildings, some important names in architectural history?*
SV: The most important thing is that you have to be in a new place for a longer period of time, at least a year, for example. That is for sure. Just going through as many places as possible doesn't teach you that much, in my opinion.
To some extent it is important for students to visit certain important places, because when architects work together they need to speak a common language. But young people today, of course, have a lot more opportunities to travel and I think they choose very different routes, which is also a good thing. They put together their own itineraries from elements that they think they might need in their future.
But I would also add to this the aspect that, speaking as a lecturer, I am absolutely convinced that if we want to pass on the tradition that we have in our school, it is necessary for students to go travelling. It is part of the culture.

GT: *Have you always wanted to be a lecturer?*

SV: I'm not really a lecturer, I'm a visiting lecturer[23]. I didn't really aspire to be a lecturer, and I don't identify myself as an academic person. My identity is that of a practising architect – I am not an academic by inclination. But I look at it more in terms of being old enough to trust my life experience to pass on some knowledge. (*Long pause*)
Now when we went to Helsinki with the students and when they came out of the Aalto house with such thoughtful faces and sat there in the courtyard for a long time, I asked them, well, do you understand now why you weren't told these things before? They said yes – you need to go there and experience it on spot to understand. In short, we can spend a whole semester trying to talk to them about natural light, but if you haven't seen it with your own eyes what an architect can do with light, you're not going to get it. You're not going to understand what the lecturer is talking about. You need to see the space where you can feel infinitely comfortable to know what an architect can do at all.

Notes

[1] On this topic, see Ruudi 2020.
[2] Carl-Dag Lige's monograph (2022) offers a vivid overview of Komendant's career. See also Komendant's memoirs about his time spent working together with Kahn (Komendant 1975).
[3] On this topic, see e.g., Taul 2016.
[4] From the 1950s until the 2000s in Estonia architecture was taught at one institution – the Estonian Academy of Arts (during the Soviet period it was known as the State Art Institute of the Estonian SSR). The fact that architecture students have closely collaborated with the visual artists and have been actively involved in the alternative culture scene has left a strong imprint on the way the architecture community identifies itself.
[5] Estonia restored its independence in August 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to rapid inflation and the extreme transition from socialist to free market economy during which most people lost their savings. In 1992, the average monthly wage in Estonia was 35 € in today's currency. The situation was not made any easier by the fact that Europe as a whole was in recession at the time. It was not until 1994 that the last Soviet troops left Estonia, and it was only at the end of the decade that the government managed to gain control over criminal groups and the shadow economy. On the other hand, the 1990s were a period of social, economic and cultural liberation, and even fantastic euphoria, which makes framing the zeitgeist of the era challenging. As much as there were lucky individuals who succeeded in their business, there were others, such as the tens of thousands of former state-owned factory workers who lost their jobs and found themselves in a serious state of abandonment.
[6] See Fedotov 2024.
[7] Veljo Kaasik (b. 1938) is an Estonian architect and lecturer. Being in dialogue with Robert Venturi and postmodern architectural theory, Kaasik was one of the first in Soviet Estonian to critically rethink the legacy of modernist space. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he headed the Faculty of Architecture at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Under his leadership, the thinking of the previous period was abandoned, many new and young architects took up teaching positions, relations were established with Western universities, and a conceptual approach and an urbanist view of architecture were introduced (Tammis 2014).
[8] Vallner's exchange was part of Denmark's International Study Program DIS. It was conceived in the 1950s to create links across borders for students in post-war Europe. Field studies and study tours became an integral part of programming in the 1980s. In the 1990s DIS started hosting students from Eastern Europe through the Danish Fund for Democratization (Woodfield 2009).
[9] Architect Oliver Alver (b. 1977) studied at the Estonian Academy of Arts from 1997 to 2001.

[10] Architects Mihkel Tüür (b. 1976) and Ivan Sergejev (b. 1987) also studied at Virginia Tech. Siiri Vallner invited Tomomi Hayashi (b. 1971) to Estonia where they initially worked together. Years later Hayashi and Grossschmidt (b. 1973) formed their own architecture office in Tallinn. As all of those mentioned have achieved important positions in Estonian architecture - be it as lecturers, chief city architects or practising architects - it can be said that the cooperation initiated by Jaan Holt has played a crucial role in the development of contemporary Estonian architecture.

[11] In Estonian architecture Siiri Vallner is known for her love of sketching. For example, in 2013, when philosopher and architecture lecturer Eik Hermann published an article on scribbling as a conceptual tool in spatial design, it was illustrated with ten pages of sketches by Siiri Vallner and Indrek Peil (Hermann 2013).

[12] Marco Frascari (1945-2013) studied with Carlo Scarpa at Venice IUAV University and received his PhD in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania. He served as a Professor of Architecture at Virginia Tech from 1998 to 2005. See Frascari, Hale and Starkey 2007.

[13] In 1998, they compiled their concepts and projects in a book that gives a good overview of the architectural ideals of the time (Alver et alii 1998).

[14] The Young Architect Award is a prize awarded to an innovative architect up to forty years old working in Estonia whose work has contributed to the promotion of Estonian architecture in the world. The prize has been awarded since 2008 by the Union of Estonian Architects in co-operation with Heldur Meerits and the travel agency Go Travel. The Young Architect Award gives the winner the chance to travel anywhere in the world, giving the opportunity to expand their vision and contribute back to the development of the country. At the time, the prize also included the publication of a monograph on the architect's work (Paulus 2008).

[15] This approach to the Aalto's work, which emphasises the inseparable intertwining of Aino and Alvar's creative output on the one hand, and their shared sympathy for Italy on the other, is underlined in a recent biography by the architects' grandson Heikki Aalto-Alanen, based on previously unpublished letters from the family archive (Aalto-Alanen 2023).

[16] Viimsi is a rural municipality neighbouring Tallinn. In the 1990s and 2000s Viimsi was the place where the newly rich gathered. As one of the wealthiest municipalities in Estonia, it is notorious for its car-centric identity (Drobot and Thakur 2022).

[17] Nuustaku is the historic name of the Southern Estonian town of Otepää.

[18] Mart Kalm (b. 1961) is an Estonian architectural historian, member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences and served as the rector of the Estonian Academy of Arts between 2015 and 2025. His 2001 monograph *Estonian 20th Century Architecture* is the most comprehensive insight into Estonian architecture to date, and has also served as a basis for the next generation of architectural scholars to come up with new interpretations. Kalm has been an acclaimed lecturer for decades, teaching 20th-century Estonian architectural history to architecture students at EKA, including tours of Estonia (Kalm 2001).

[19] Siiri Nõva (b. 1967) is an architect who focuses on historic buildings. Siiri Nõva grew up and still lives in the house designed by her grandmother Erika Nõva (1905-1987) in 1937. Erika Nõva was the first professional female architect in Estonia. In the 1930s she worked at the Settlement Office run by the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture which established new areas for settlement on land owned by the State. This led her to design hundreds of farmhouses – including her own house in Nõmme – that were inspired by traditional farm dwellings housing people on one side and livestock on the other (Parbus and Ruudi 2014).

[20] Erika Nõva grew up in a family of seven in the village of Muuksi. One of her brothers – August Volberg (1896-1982) – also became a highly respected architect (Hallas 1996).

[21] As a context, Estonia in the 1990s was characterised by rather fundamental debates about (national) identity, which inevitably had a cultural-political dimension. While conservatives felt that Estonians should forget the entire Soviet occupation and continue building the nation-state from where they left off before the war (an idealised vision of the golden age of the 1930s – national romanticism), at the other end of the political spectrum such myth-making was viewed ironically. The public debate was full of extreme views, but the truth is that the political, social, cultural and spatial interruption from the pre-war Republic of Estonia was so profound that people had

no idea or experience of it. The Soviets succeeded in transforming Estonian natural and built environment to such an extent that the few glimpses of life in the 1930s that Vallner describes here created then – and still create today – a jarring experience of time travel. Against this background, abstract debates about the evaluation of the past on the political left-right axis become secondary (Taul 2024).

[22] Raine Karp (b. 1939) studied construction at the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute (1957-1959) and architecture at Tallinn State Institute of Applied Art (1959-1964). He created some of the boldest examples of 1960s-1980s modernism in Estonia. As a distinguished architect Karp was able to travel widely. He visited Tokyo soon after the 1964 Olympics and was impressed with the solemn structures he experienced there (Karp and Väljas 2016).

[23] The Estonian Academy of Arts is characterised by a rather small number of full-time lecturers. Across the whole university, about 70% of teaching is done by short-term contract visiting lecturers and only 30% by full-time faculty members. This means that the vast majority of visiting lecturers are practising architects, designers and artists whose relationship with the university is limited to teaching and who do not usually have administrative or research responsibilities.

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Merilin Tee is an interior architect based in Tallinn. She has worked as a project coordinator and lecturer at the Interior Architecture Department of the Estonian Academy of Arts. Merilin studied international business management at Tallinn University of Technology Business College (BA in 2001) and interior architecture and furniture design at the Estonian Academy of Arts (BA in interior architecture and furniture design, 2014; MA in interior architecture – "Vanishing Interior Architecture. Dwelling of Vello Asi", 2021; exchange studies at Hogeschool voor Wettenschap & Kunst, Sint-Lucas Architectuur Brussel-Gent in 2012; internship within the LLP/ERASMUS programme in Robbrecht en Daem architecten (BE), 2013). Previously she worked at the Permanent Representation of Estonia to the EU in Belgium (2004-2009; 2012) and at Robbrecht en Daem architecten (2013-2014).

Gregor Taul is a critic and curator based in Tallinn working as a lecturer in the Department of Interior Architecture at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Taul studied semiotics at Tartu University (BA in 2009) and art history in the Estonian Academy of Arts (MA in 2012; exchange studies in St Petersburg's Institute of Technology of Design in 2011). Taul was a PhD candidate in the Lisbon Consortium between 2016–2020 and defended his thesis in 2024 on late Soviet monumental-decorative art in the doctoral school of the Estonian Academy of Arts.
Since 2010 Taul has been active as a critic writing on visual art and architecture. In 2012 he co-authored a book on Estonian murals published by Lugemik. In 2016 Estonian National Museum published his book on the architecture of the museum's new building by DGT / Architects. He has been teaching in various secondary and higher education institutions in Estonia and presented conference papers across Europe.

Alessandro Mauro

Amann, Cánovas, and Maruri's Eclectic Realism

Author: *Fabio Guarrera*
Title: *Amann Cánovas Maruri*
Subtitle: *Architecture as eclectic pragmatism*
Language: *Italian and English*
Publisher: *Libria*
Characteristics: *17 x 21 cm, 196 pages, paperback, color*
ISBN: *9788867642830*
Year: *2023*

The studio led by Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas, and Nicolás Maruri (*Temperaturas extremas*) is a peculiar "office of architectural services" in its own way. Just compare the wooden shrine that makes up the Arab Wall Museum in Murcia, the perforated corten steel defining the complex volume of the visitor center in Monteagudo, and the intricate geometry of the roof of the Roman ruins in Cartagena, composed of a structure of steel, perforated metal sheet, and polycarbonate. Alternatively, consider the galvanized iron and expanded mesh structure of the footbridge thrown over archaeological remains in Murcia, the metal cage in the Roman Curia Museum, the exposed concrete enclosing the underground spaces, both in Cartagena, and, finally, the fabric covering of the pavilion of the Dubai 2020 Expo. Comparing these projects may suffice to realize the extraordinary versatility of this Madrilenian studio. But this is not just about technical expertise, something clearly has to do with the "genetics" of contemporary Spanish architecture: on this topic, «Spanish architects have always approached every architectural theme», as Fabio Guarrera writes in his clear-eyed introductory essay, «with eclectic realism, turning specific opportunities into starting points of contemporary design». For A.C.M. studio, this means giving design responses – even with stylistic differences – to address the various issues posed by functions and sites without bias. As Fabio Guarrera points out, this entangles being «independent from a preset stylistic idea». Leafing through the projects illustrated in these pages indeed suggests something elusive, refractory to our taxonomic mania of labeling authors according to their stylistic witticisms.

The works of the A.C.M. studio, Fabio Guarrera's essay, Emilio Tuñon's introduction, and Maria Argenti's beautiful afterword also suggested to me other things related to teaching architectural design today. Amann, Cánovas, and Maruri are professors at ETSAM in Madrid. Furthermore, all three were born in the early 1960s, with a firmly twentieth-century background. Yet, the academic world's theoretical research does not imprison them in granitic certainties atrophying their design versatility, unlike it is often the case. On the contrary, their extraordinary openness to contemporary architectural experimentation seems surprising. Moreover, they work in a group: few things prevent pursuing stylistic consistency as much as working in a group.

fig. 1 - *El Abrazo*
© Juan Genovés, 1976

fig. 2 - *Gravedad Cero*
© Daniel Canogar, 2002

In the wake of a renewed Madrilenian eclecticism

The work of Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas, and Nicolás Maruri (ACM) can be better framed in contemporary Spanish architectural culture through two artistic works: a painting and a photograph.
The first one, *El abrazo* by Juan Genovés (fig.1), is often mentioned by Andrés Cánovas in his academic lectures and was realized in 1976, one year after general Franco's death. It portrays a group of men and women (a metaphor for the Spanish people) who are hugging as if to pursue a cultural and post-dictatorial unification, which has never been indeed achieved. The painting displays an 'eclectic balance' between tensioned bodies, describing a possible 'unity' through the juxtaposition of multiple subjects.
The second work is a digital photographic elaboration by Daniel Canogar[1] from 2002, titled *Gravedad Cero* (fig. 2). Unlike the previous one, here, a group of people floats in a vast sideral void until a condition of apparent balance is reached – through multiplicity, again.
To understand the representativity of these two pictures for the condition of 'balance in the variety of multiplicity' achieved by Spanish contemporary design culture – and hence by ACM's architecture - it is necessary to take a small step behind to clarify the meaning of the noun 'eclecticism' as used in the title of this first chapter. Eclecticism derives from the Greek *eklekticos*, composed in turn of the root *ek*, meaning 'out', and the word *legein*, meaning 'choose'.
An 'eclectic' is someone who 'chooses' between multiple different things, systems, or directions. By extension, an eclectic is also someone who chooses

Nel solco di un rinnovato eclettismo madrileno

Due opere, una pittorica e l'altra fotografica, ci aiutano a inquadrare il lavoro di Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas e Nicolás Maruri (ACM) nel contesto della cultura architettonica spagnola contemporanea.
La prima opera, *El abrazo* di Juan Genovés (fig.1), spesso citata da Andrés Cánovas nell'ambito delle sue lezioni universitarie, è stata eseguita nel 1976, un anno dopo la morte del generale Franco. Essa rappresenta un gruppo di uomini e donne nell'intento di abbracciarsi, quasi a ricercare un'unificazione culturale e post-dittatoriale - metaforica allusione del popolo spagnolo - in realtà mai del tutto conquistata. Un 'equilibrio ecletticо' tra corpi in tensione, quello rappresentato da Genoves, che può dirsi descrittivo di una possibile 'unità' ottenuta dall'accostamento di figure molteplici.
La seconda opera è un'elaborazione fotografica digitale di Daniel Canogar[1], realizzata nel 2002 e intitolata *Gravedad Cero* (fig.2). A differenza della precedente, un gruppo di persone libra in questo caso all'interno di un grande vuoto siderale fino a raggiungere una condizione di 'equilibrio apparente', ancora una volta composto da unità molteplici.
Per comprendere in che misura queste due immagini possono dirsi metaforicamente rappresentative della condizione di 'equilibrio nella varietà del molteplice' raggiunto dalla cultura progettuale spagnola contemporanea - e per implicito riferimento dall'architettura di ACM - è necessario fare un piccolo passo indietro per chiarire il senso del sostantivo 'eclettismo' usato nel titolo di questo primo capitolo. Eclettismo deriva dal greco eklekticos ed è composto dalla radice *ek*, che vuol dire 'fuori', e da *legein* che significa 'scegliere'. 'Eclettico' è dunque chi 'sceglie' fra più cose, sistemi o indirizzi differenti.

Fig 1
Book index.

Fig 2
In the wake of a renewed Madrilenian eclecticism.

In conclusion, in light of these considerations – and especially in light of A.C.M.'s works, so broadly described in Guarrera's monographic essay – it almost seems evident that they would approve this sentence by Spain's leading twentieth-century philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset – and indeed, he is cited by the author as one of the most influent on the Madrilenian trio's design philosophy: «If an architect's project shows admirable personal style, he is not, strictly speaking, a good architect».

Claudia Angarano

Design of Places

Author: *Federica Visconti, Renato Capozzi*
Edited by: *Ermelinda Di Chiara*
Title: *Not only blocks*
Subtitle: *3+1 progetti per un'idea di città*
Language: *Italian and English*
Publisher: *Aión*
Characteristics: *12x17 cm, 128 pages, paperback, color*
ISBN: *9791280723314*
Year: *2024*

The construction of the city is a topic of great interest within the current debate, and this is true not only in words but also in deeds – if we think of the numerous opportunities that our cities have offered in recent years – but it is also true that the topic appears to be increasingly distant from Composition, which not by chance is followed by two adjectives, Architectural and Urban. The field is left free to sociological, environmental, urban planning and economic issues, which are also important, but often marginalising the quality and architectural identity of the city's places, which are becoming less and less considered. The authors, Federica Visconti and Renato Capozzi, attentive observers of the reality that surrounds us, are well aware of this, and, with this book, try to navigate the rough waters of the discipline while keeping the rudder straight; to restore the urban project to the realm of form.

Not only blocks. 3+1 progetti per un'idea di città is a small book, yet condensing long studies carried out through research and projects, and which, precisely because of its vast knowledge and mastery of the subject, hides "big" issues between the lines of its simplicity.

It can be read the commitment to knowledge, of the themes and form of the city. It can be found the history, of architecture and of the city, selectively declined in a design key through analogical thinking, moving through the time and space of architecture. It can be seen the method: from analysis, to the project, starting from the so-called "exercise of measure", namely the collage of exemplary architectures, at the scale of the place to specify the settlement principle, and at the scale of architecture through the choice of works taken as references – as quotations or subjected to variation, coherently operated with respect to the principle underlying the project. It can be recognised a theoretical position, an *idea of the city* that can be found by looking at the projects together, recognisable despite the diversity of the conditions, times and specific themes of the individual occasions: an idea of an «[…] open city, discontinuous, not homologating and diffusive, polycentric and multipolar […]» (Visconti 2024, p. 32).

The book has an agile structure. Two concise essays, *City of Blocks* vs *City of Places* by Visconti and *Ideas and Elements for the Open City Construction* by Capozzi, specify the posture that supports the arguments and interpretations that follow.

Fig 1
Collage of the projects developed in the 4 editions of the Frühjahrsakademie.

Reading them, it became clear how the authors' attention is pointed not so much to architecture per se as, and above all, to the quality of the places they define through their composition and the relationships, of proximity or at a distance, that they establish with each other and with the context. The projects to follow, the real protagonists of the book. A short page written to state what is strictly necessary to highlight the idea of the project anticipates the real "tale" told through the drawings, according to a progression of discourse, from the analytical plan to the synthetic outcome, from the scale of the city to that of the place, up to that of the architecture, which make the forms eloquent with respect to the initial objective.
The illustrated projects – elaborated in the four editions of the *Internationale Frühjahrsakademie* – are made for the same city, Dortmund, and rethink the shape of some areas with very different morphological and urban conditions: a new university campus in a disused industrial area outside the city walls; a large "zolla" composed of living places and collective places on the suburbs of the city; a project for the central area of the river port; more punctual interventions close to the monumental complexes located along the main axis of the old city.

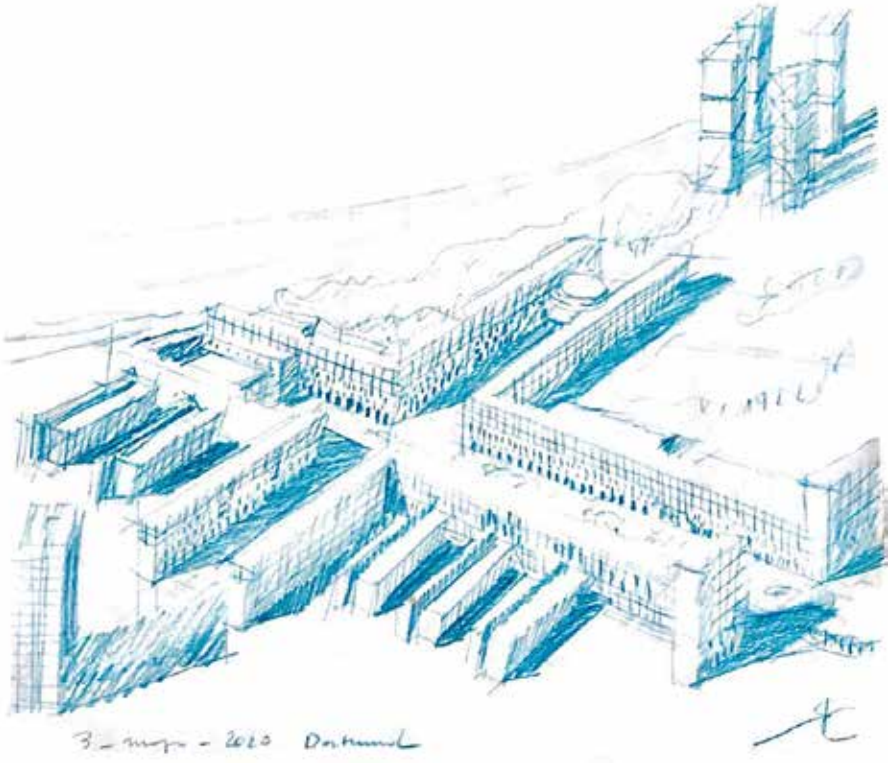

Fig 2
The Campus. Sketch by Renato Capozzi.

From the periphery to the consolidated city, in each project it is evident the aspiration for an urban order, to re-establish where it has been lost and to define where it is lacking, with the tension towards the definition of the quality of places rather than of individual architectures. Thus the idea of the city that each project represents is never dogmatically applied but is always critically declined according to an idea of space and an appropriate dimension starting from the form of the city and its rules, and then reinterpreting its meaning. This gives shape to open spaces where it requires the introduction of "discontinuity" to define places that act as a counterpoint to a rarefied urban condition but lacking of urban centrality – as in the case of the first three projects – or more bounded, when, on the contrary, the form of the city, dilating without measure, has lost its formal clarity, as in the case of the last one. In this sense, the projects illustrated insist on marginal areas, not necessarily in terms of location but in terms of urban value, with the idea that the city considered as a whole must be built from precise parts, each with its own identity, and endowed with significant places.
Places in which the dialectic between architecture, nature and culture corresponds to a tension to search for a quality that is first and foremost formal, adequate and recognisable, with the aspiration to represent an idea of *civitas*. It is a position common to those who, like the authors, believe that architecture is a "civil art" par excellence. It is a question that requires a commitment to knowledge and a great sense of responsibility because it concerns the world we live in, and therefore concerns our life.
The (unstated) conclusion of the book is actually anticipated, in the writer's opinion, in the opening of the authors' two introductory essays, in the collage of the 3+1 projects on a single plan of the city. A drawn and unwrit-

ten conclusion, but eloquent more than words in synthetically representing the general idea about the city that underlies the projects and which the projects support; that settlement hypothesis which, in the recognition of the history of the slow stratifications of the city and its territory, of the monuments and the value of collective places, in the rediscovery of its traces and its founding elements, can be put at the foundation of the urban project as a necessity to determine, according to long and not instantaneous ideal perspectives, the project of its modification.
A way of understanding, in a broader sense, theory and project as complementary issues, *the centina and the arc* according to the interpretation given by Carlos Martí Arís, which always intertwine in a relationship that is neither consequential nor linear, but of mutual necessity and continuous verification.
The themes in the field and the way of dealing with them, then, are part of a long tradition of urban studies, both Italian and international, but according to methods and tools that, with a posture that belongs to those committed to research, constantly undergo updating – as demonstrated by the urban morphological analyses that precede the projects, enriched by the spatial analysis method introduced and developed more recently by Uwe Schröder (Schröder 2015), thus affirming a continuity between theory, research and design, and between urban design and architecture, which characterises a way of "making school" that the authors, together with a few others, continue to pursue, starting from its heritage, keeping it alive and trying to update it, one step at a time. But how?
Then perhaps it is no coincidence that within a series entitled *lezioni e saggi sull'architettura e la città*, this book focuses a great attention on projects experimentations and the design of the city, as indispensable moments of research in composition. The collage of projects for Dortmund in fact also says something else, no less important, with respect to the discipline and the problem of urban design: that drawing should be the word of those who deal with form and the only true instrument of control, affirming to some extent that, in a condition in which "the ideologism of rules" – in Gregotti's words (Gregotti 2016) – is prevailing, the architecture of the city and for the city is to be defined with forms.

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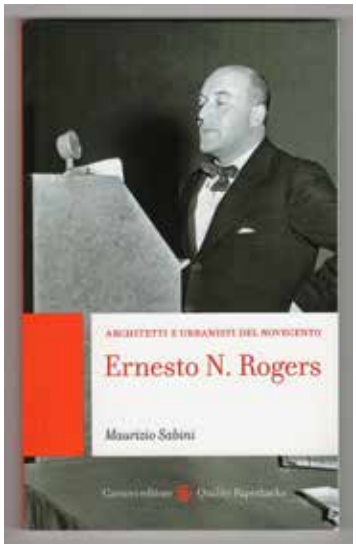
Carlo Quintelli

The Required Knowledge by and about Ernesto Nathan Rogers

Author: *Maurizio Sabini*
Title: *Ernesto N. Rogers*
Language: *Italian*
Publisher: *Carocci Editore*
Characteristics: *152 pages*
ISBN: *9788829027248*
Year: *2024*



Often, especially in the university context of northern Italy but not only, when even today we talk about the roots of our culture of architectural design in the twentieth century, the figures of Giuseppe Samonà and Ernesto Nathan Rogers are evoked. The first for having founded an innovative and anti-academic school, the IUAV, of international scope but capable of investing in a laboratory key both on the expressive and material palimpsest of Venice and its territory and on the research of the most poetic modernity, in this case that of Le Corbusier, not entirely distant from Mediterranean classicism. The second for having culturally refounded a magazine like «Casabella», which in the post-war period could be said to be as fundamental in terms of cultural weight as a school, and for having cultivated the relationship with the Northern European modernity of the CIAM through a critical review carried out on the reasons of the context, of the city, of history, paradoxically the only way to preserve an idea of modernity that was not that of the internationalist mannerism of the Modern Movement.
It would therefore seem difficult to rely on the short text, the biographical summary but above all on the cultural, theoretical, professional exegesis capable of restoring such complex personalities and bearers of extraordinary contents as in the intentions of the series of *Architects and Urban Planners of the Twentieth Century* published by Carocci Editore. In reality, this small-format 130-page book dedicated to Rogers, written by Maurizio Sabini, a teaching architect whose critical training derives not by chance from the IUAV and from his participation in the first Italian Doctorate in Architectural Composition (1983), seems to dispel any doubts in how it develops an effective critical-narrative path according to an interesting but not easy double register of interlocution: one aimed at the young student, therefore of first approach, and one for those who already have greater cognitive experience but love to compare it with new keys of interpretation. In fact, if we were to adopt the reference of the double historical movement according to Marc Bloch for whom the present is illuminated by the past as much as the past can be by the present, Sabini's work goes well beyond a renewed recognition of the figure of Rogers through his writings, projects, works and in general his rich and articulated experience of cultural and ethical significance, as it attempts to arouse his theoretical potential – never fully realized by that master through a unitary outcome whose reasons are

explained in the introduction – according to a hypothetical framework of first scientific systematicity, which could be titled *Architecture according to Ernesto N. Rogers*. With a certain amount of courage that comes from his familiarity with this phase of Italian architecture (moreover, Sabini is at his second publication dedicated to the architect from Trieste), but also from the freedom and critical distance that academic exile sometimes allows, in this case through teaching at various universities in the American context, today at Drury University, Sabini prefigures the structure of an impossible Rogerian treatise that evidently must not follow, in his words, «a chronological thread, but a logical one». In short, more as an architect than as a historian, and therefore with all that interpretative intentionality «that wants to contribute to better defining Rogers' message for an architecture as a critical artistic practice, a synthesis of utility and beauty, all the more necessary in its social value the more it is founded on ethical principles».
The index of the volume, as is right in every work that is the result of a serious editorial project, already says a lot about this intention to organize the vast and heterogeneous material available according to a critical and meta-theoretical systematics. In succession: starting from a concept of twentieth-century modernity, for those like Rogers who have experienced it in terms of evolution and articulated historical reality; then crossing the

dimension of a humanism that invests the question of the human subject as a reaction to the phase of productivist alienation and the tragedies of war and the holocaust; then following the game of an interpretative instrumentation that manages to combine the geographical, cultural, historical peculiarities with the most advanced principles of modernist modeling, in particular that of the Masters of the Modern Movement; no less, it faces the difficult path of a contextualism that tries to define its epistemological significance within the architectural project; here is a further chapter where the revision of the relationship between utility and beauty is addressed, aimed at decanting the functionalist ideology; up to the dimension of a reciprocity between ethical and aesthetic dimensions as an indispensable prerequisite for an architecture of meaning as well as of civil function. A path dotted with narrative *deus ex machina*, featuring a significant amount of architecture conceived, described, designed, and created, can be entirely described in disciplinary terms. However, behind this lies a broader critical and philosophical interest, which, especially concerning the notion of environment cultivated by Rogers, involves the value of experience in aesthetic data according to Dewey – and Focillon – leading up to that phenomenological conception of environment associated with Husserl and, more specifically, with the Milanese School of Antonio Banfi and Enzo Paci. On the other hand, the development of the book's thematic nuclei certainly does not fail to involve numerous other personalities of the cultural context crossed and in many ways conditioned by the figure of Rogers, with the many references on the one hand to the architects of the Modern Movement and on the other to the critical peculiarity of Italian architecture through the contributions of Pagano, of Persico, and in other ways in the post-war period of Olivetti, all however united by a questioning of the ethical meaning of architecture. Not only that, the author inserts between the pages some affinities of thought of the contemporary age that in some way put the reader to the analogical test on Rogerian thought, as in the case of Pope Francis' of *Laudato si'*, on the care of our common home in relation to the environmental theme, so central to Rogerian thought, with respect to which Sabini comments with a «Rogers would have signed».

This argumentative montage, which, despite the rigor of references and sources, may not please the historian of reconstructive orthodoxy but certainly captivates the architect reader and stimulates a comparison on current events, lacks only one thematic area that perhaps deserves a further chapter. That of Rogers the teacher, that is, a role certainly always interpreted through the exemplary nature of his works, writings, magazines, but in the last years of his life also directly experienced within the university, in that Polytechnic of Milan where the young collaborators of the «Casabella» laboratory, including Rossi, Canella, Gregotti, Semerani, Tentori and others, achieved their first maturity and perhaps also cultural emancipation with respect to the Master. It is no coincidence that Francesco Tentori, the first coordinator of the Composition Doctorate at IUAV, recommended that «the starting point for a doctorate should be the knowledge [...] of those who taught composition in Italy from 1930 to 1960», as was then done through the long seminar in the spring of 1984 dedicated to *ten masters of Italian architecture* which became the subtitle of the volume *Lezioni di progettazione* which collects the proceedings (Electa 1988). A teaching where Rogers resumed and applied many aspects of his critical and dialectical thinking without which, moreover, he would never have been able to distinguish himself for his renowned maieutic ability as recal-

led by Guido Canella, one of his closest assistants in the 60s, who judged him «among the few teachers who never discouraged the ambition of his students».

But among the many reflections that the book also raises in relation to our future, the one that could contain them all is perhaps the quote by Rogers taken from his *Esperienza dell'architettura* (1958) that Sabini appropriately places at the beginning of the introduction: «I am not a philosopher, I am not a man of letters, I am an architect who reads texts (and poets), writes but essentially designs and verifies himself on the building site». So, in conclusion, to a student who asks me what this book can be useful for today, I would answer that in the near future in which artificial intelligence technology will be pervasive and bearer of unpredictable risks even in the field of architectural and urban design, the search for a renewed humanism for the figure of the architect that distinguishes Rogers' research constitutes an alternative model of indispensable relevance. Moreover, an antidote at least necessary, if not sufficient, against the disappearance of architecture (and of the architect).

Federica Visconti

Still on Architecture and the City

Author: *Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani*
Title: *Contro la città usa e getta*
Subtitle: *Per una cultura del costruire sostenibile*
Language: *Italian*
Publisher: Bollati Boringhieri
Characteristics: *173 pages, black and white*
ISBN: *9788833943534*
Year: *2024*

Contro la città usa e getta is the title of the recent book by Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, published in Italian by Bollati Boringhieri as translation from German of *Gegen Wegwerfarchitektur*. The subtitle, in the two editions, is different: *Dichter, Dauerhafter, Weniger Bauen* – more dense, more durable, less built – that becomes *Per una cultura del costruire sostenibile*. The same thing is stated in two different ways or, perhaps better, complementary: following the author, "sustainable building" today must primarily mean building less, using less soil, and therefore concentrating on density. It also involves constructing buildings that can withstand the test of time because they are "well built". The emblematic title of Lampugnani's book appears to aim at establishing a dialogue, after more than fifteen years, with Vittorio Gregotti's 2008 book *Contro la fine dell'architettura*. If in that little book, Vittorio Gregotti questioned the need for a rethinking of the disciplinary status of our discipline in the age of the image, under penalty of its liquefaction, here Vittorio Lampugnani discusses the topic related to *The Architecture of the City* – to quote Aldo Rossi – or, in other words, with Camillo Sitte, on the Art of Building Cities, against the prevailing consumerism, also become "architectural". This book offers many arguments for reflection. I will focus here, in this small text, on two issues that I consider fundamental: that of the non-constative attitude regarding the state of our discipline and our work and that of the possible and necessary role, today, of the urban project.

On the first topic, Lampugnani takes a firm stand against the aggressive consumerism that, form the market field, arrived to cast its shadow and its negative influence also on the architecture and the city that, as point of accumulation, in the physical space, of the long time of history, had been answering to different laws for more than two-thousand years, starting with that of *longue durée*.

Far from a widespread 'aesthetics of observation' – *estetica della constatazione* to use Gregotti's words again – the entire book is concerned with defining the "countermeasures" to this condition, reaffirming that Architecture has to be an optimistic discipline in its *pro-jacere*, modifying reality by looking at the construction of the future. Moreover, the book is courageous in its invasion of a field that, in the age of specialism, seems to be exclusive prerogative of technology. The book did it with depth, dispelling some

recurring misunderstandings. The instruments deployed by Lampugnani are interesting in their dual nature. On one hand, there are data that come from reality and from all the fields of knowledge that observe it. These data, correctly analysed, demonstrate how much the construction sector consume resources and energy, how much waste the cities produce but reveal also how much banal – and misleading – is to talk of "easy" solutions as, for instance, that of pervasively replacing the construction in concrete or steel with the wooden. The data analysis reveals that operations that are called "sustainable" are often supported by an idea of architecture, against its millenary history, as a mere market product – one among others – to be sold thorough cynical marketing actions. On the other hand, it is more interesting that Lampugnani uses his deep knowledge of history of architecture to demonstrate that the aura of novelty, with which some postures would like to qualify themselves, doesn't represent at all a real innovation if it is true that the term sustainability appeared for the first time more than three hundred years ago, coined by Hans Carl von Carlowitz. In the same way, "common sense" rules, related to disposition of the buildings on the ground and orientation of the cities, were well-known – and largely applied – at least at time of Vitruvius and of his *De Architectura*. It is to say: before the advent of dominance of technique on thought and of the closure of specialism in the *narrow boundaries* described in the book: limits that divide rather than 'compose' disciplines that are today often unable of a capability of a synthetic thinking that is that of which architecture and city need.

A second topic in the book, very relevant, is that of the need of the Urban Project, again questioning a "commonplace". Certainly, there was a season in which the urban project has been related to an intermediate scale between architecture and urbanism, fixing some formal elements of the city construction or of its parts at a typo-morphological level. This is not the place to discuss this interpretation and what it has produced, even in this case, in the balance of power between the disciplines. I believe that today a good definition of Urban Project is that outlined in Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani's book. The urban project is *in* the city – nothing more needs to be built – and it is *for* the city in the sense that has to care of it: as the philosopher Nicola Emery reminded us in his *Progettare, costruire, curare. Per una deontologia dell'architettura*, quoting Plato's *La Repubblica*.

From Theory to practice, Lampugnani defines the fundamental "pillars" of this "culture of sustainable building" announced in its book's subtitle. Conversion, Adaption, Enlargement, Densification are the possible new categories of Modification that cannot however renounce, as an indispensable prerequisite, to express a critical judgement on reality: and, thus, Knowing, Respecting, Rediscovering, Appreciating are the indispensable categories of Knowledge because, as Lampugnani well argues, not everything is reusable if without through a recognition of value.

In the end, I would like to refer to what Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani states to end his book. It is an appeal to beauty because, he says «if it is true that today we cannot more realize buildings that are only beautiful […] without beauty, also of architecture, we cannot live».