

Neoliberty & co. The Architectural Review against 1950s Italian historicism

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1. CASABELLA-CONTINUITÀ: *Alcune opere degli architetti torinesi R. Gabetti, A. d'Isola, G. Raineri.* Casabella-Continuità, no. 215, April/May 1957, pp. 62-75.

2. BANHAM, Reyner: *Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture.* AR 125, April 1959, pp. 230-235.

3. NATHAN ROGERS, Ernesto (ed). *Continuità o crisi?*. Cas.-Cont., no. 215, April/May 1957, pp. 3-6.

4. Ernesto Nathan Rogers, editorial, *Continuità*. Cas.-Cont., no. 199, December 1953/January 1954, pp. 2-3.

5. GABETTI, Roberto: *Da Torino a Milano*, La Casa, no. 6 (1959); Roberto Gabetti, *Due opere di Antonelli a Soliva e a Castagnola*, in Atti del Congresso Nazionale di Varallo (1960); Roberto Gabetti, "Problematica Antonelliana", in Atti e Rassegna Tecnica (1962); Roberto Gabetti, *Architettura dell'eclettismo: Un Saggio su G. B. Schellino* (Torino: Einaudi, 1973).

6. For instance: Vittorio Gregotti, and Aldo Rossi, *L'influenza del romanticismo europeo nell'architettura di Alessandro Antonelli*, Cas.-Cont., no. 214 (February/March 1957): 62-81; Guido Canella, "L'epopea borghese della Scuola di Amsterdam," Cas.-Cont., no. 215 (April/May 1957): 77-91; Silvano Tintori, *Neoclassicismo e civiltà europea nella Trieste mercantile*, Cas.-Cont., no. 219, April/May 1958, pp. 36-45; Achille Neri, *Il Barabino e la cultura urbanistica di Genova nell'Ottocento*, Cas.-Cont., no. 228, June 1959, pp. 41-53.

7. ZEVÌ, Bruno: *Un antidoto spuntato dell'astrattismo: Il provincialismo architettonico*, L'Architettura cronache e storia, no. 33, July 1958, p. 149. Reyner Banham, *Sant'Elia*, AR 119, May 1955, pp. 77-78.

8. BANHAM, Reyner: *Futurist Manifesto*. AR 126, August/September 1959, pp. 77-78.

9. VERONESI, Giulia: *Ancora su Sant'Elia*, Cas.-Cont., no. 218, February/March 1958, p. 100.

10. NATHAN ROGERS, Ernesto (ed): *L'evoluzione dell'architettura: Risposta al custode dei frigidaires*, Cas.-Cont., no. 228, June 1959, pp. 2-4.

11. BANHAM, Reyner: *Neoliberty: The Debate*, AR 12, December 1959, p. 343.

12. For instance: BANHAM, Reyner: *Office Buildings in Milan*, AR 119, February 1956, p. 81; BANHAM, Reyner: *Tornare ai Tempi Felici*, AR 124, November 1958, p. 281; BANHAM, Reyner: *Pirelli Building Milan: Architects Ponti, Nervi & Associates*, AR 129, March 1961, pp. 194-200; BANHAM, Reyner: *Psychiatric Institute in Milan*, AR 129, May 1961, pp. 304-307; BANHAM, Reyner, *Duct-Wall*, AR 131, March 1962, p. 153; BANHAM, Reyner: *Machine-Age Churches? I Florence: Michelucci*, AR 136, August 1964, pp. 81-82.

13. BANHAM, Reyner: *Italian Eclectic*, AR 112, October 1952, pp. 213-217.

14. BANHAM, Reyner: *Casa del Girasole: Rationalism and Eclecticism in Italian Architecture*, AR 113, February 1953, pp. 73-77.

15. BANHAM, Reyner: *Guide to Modern Architecture*. Architectural Press: London, 1962, pp. 82.

16. RICHARDS, James Maude; PEVNSNER, Nikolaus; LANCASTER, Osbert Lancaster; CRONIN HASTINGS, Hubert de: *The Second Half Century*, AR 101, January 1947, p. 23.

17. THE EDITORS: *Architecture after 1960, 5: Propositions*, AR 127, June 1960, p. 381.

18. RICHARDS, James Maude: *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1980, pp. 195-196.

19. MUMFORD, Eric: *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*. MIT Press: Cambridge, 2000, pp. 178-179 and p.213.

20. The publishing house of the Review was the Architectural Press, i.e., capital A, capital P. Hugh Casson, *On Architectural Journalism*, in John Summerson (ed.), *Concerning Architecture: Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner*, London, Lane, 1968, p. 258.

21. For instance: Robert Schmutzler, "The English Origins of Art Nouveau," AR 117 (February 1955): 109-116; Nikolaus Pevsner, "Beautiful and If Need Be Useful," AR 122 (November 1957): 297-299; Robert Melville, "The Soft Jewellery of Art Nouveau," AR 131 (May 1962): 320-325.

22. PEVNSNER, Nikolaus: *Modern Architecture and the Historian or the Return of Historicism*. RIBA Journal 68, April 1961, p. 230.

23. BANHAM, Reyner: *Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture*. AR 125, April 1959, p. 232.

24. For instance: Maurizio Calzavara, *L'architetto Gaetano Moretti*, Cas.-Cont., no. 218, February/March 1958, pp. 69-83; Giulia Veronesi, "Gustave Eiffel," Cas.-Cont., no. 221, September/October 1958, pp. 50-55; Italo Insolera, "I grandi magazzini di Parigi," Cas.-Cont., no. 224, December 1959, pp. 43-53.

25. CROCE, Benedetto: *History as the Story of Liberty*. G. Allen and Unwin: London, 1941, p. 19.

26. NATHAN ROGERS, Ernesto (ed.): *Continuità*, Cas.-Cont., no. 199, December 1953/January 1954, p. 2.

27. BANHAM, Reyner: *Conclusion: Functionalism and Technology*, in Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*. The Architectural Press: London, 1960, pp. 329-330.

The revision of the project of modern architecture after the Second World War found in Italy and in the United Kingdom two of its most prolific fora. However, the paths proposed to overcome its exhaustion were in some aspects divergent; the Italian return to history as a legitimate source to operate was intensely rejected by some of the leading figures of the British scene, more concerned with a revision in the light of sociology, new forms of urban aggregation, or the production of technology. Proof of this were two particular episodes: the discussion of Torre Velasca (1957), brought by Ernesto Rogers to CIAM 11 (Otterlo'59), censored by his British and Dutch counterparts; and the so-called Neoliberty debate, arisen from the publication of the issue 215 (April/May 1957) of *Casabella-Continuità*^[1], which presented some works by the young Turinese Gabetti and d'Isola, in collaboration with Giorgio Raineri. This publication received intense responses not only from Italy, but from Britain too, among others that of Reyner Banham, who internationalized the debate through the pages of *The Architectural Review* (AR) with his "Neoliberty. The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture" (April 1959)^[2]. We will centre our study on this event. Our aim is to explore the different approaches present in both national contexts, the extent of their divergences and the reasons of their ultimate clash.

The existing literature that evokes the Neoliberty polemic has focused its attention on the contribution of the Italians, within the broader discussion of the recovery of history and rootedness that was taking place in their country at that time. In contrast, little efforts have been devoted to try and understand the reasons underlying the rejection displayed by British progressive architectural circles, particularly by the group around AR, where Banham collaborated from 1952 as a redactor and from 1959 as assistant executive editor, while Rogers directed *Casabella* between 1953 and 1964. This imbalance makes it relevant to ask why the Italian stance of revision of modern architecture in the light of its historicity was little understood in Britain, as the pages of AR attest.

Italian bourgeois urbanity

Ernesto Rogers's first public prise de position on the architecture of the young Turinese was expressed through the editorial that accompanied the publication of their works in *Casabella-Continuità* no. 215 (May 1957) (Figures 1 and 2). His text, "Continuità o crisi?"^[3] referred through its title to the editorial of the first issue of the resurrected *Casabella* (no. 199, Dec/Jan 1953/54). Rogers called that seminal manifesto "Continuità"^[4], which was the central idea of his intellectual project for an architecture of the post-war era: continuity with the labour of his predecessors at the front of the magazine, the martyrs Pagano and Persico. This meant continuity with the principles of modernity: coherence with the social and cultural conditions of the time, creative freedom and therefore refusal of any a-priori formalism, and finally experimental empiricism as the epistemological core of modern architecture. Nevertheless, beyond this orthodox adscription, his idea of an uninterrupted path had to connect contemporary architecture not only with the most recent heritage of the Modern Movement, but with its deeper roots (the work of the protomoderns), and even with the whole arch of the history of architecture.

That this broader historicist inclusiveness could threaten the robustness of modern architecture was not very much felt by Rogers. On the contrary, his was a determination to reform it to assure its survival. Yet that the revision he was promoting could become dangerous was fully realized by the time the young Turinese began to play an active role in the debate and Rogers acknowledged this in his "Continuità o crisi?". Indeed they went beyond Rogers's revisionism to the point of denying the operative centrality of modern methodology. Hence the question the director of *Casabella* bluntly posed in the first lines of his text:

"Can architecture develop the premises of the Modern Movement or is it changing its course?". The peril he foresaw was that the necessary revision and recovery of past heritage became a solipsist exercise that cherished the manipulation of nostalgic romantic references and erudite quotations, detached from any social involvement.

Yet it is not surprising that the most non-conformist Turinese and Milanese architects of the 1950s sought answers to their frustration with contemporary architecture in the city of the XIXth and early XXth centuries. The extensive research on the architecture of eclecticism and on such figures as Antonelli or Schellino, carried on by Roberto Gabetti in Turin^[6], was part of a general reappraisal of the period that comprised from the urban reconfigurations of Neoclassicism to Art Nouveau. This was intensely promoted by journals such as Zevi's *L'Architettura cronache e storia*, or Rogers's *Casabella*. In Milan, it was the young circle of collaborators around Rogers that took on the task through several articles published in a short lapse of time^[6]. This choral enquiry had to provide scholarly foundation to a sensitivity otherwise developed by the mere experiencing of the city. Any architect, not blinded by the avant-gardist cries against the historical city, had to be touched by the arcades, the galleries and the profound shadowed entrances open to the *cortile*; that is, by an urbanity conveying an extraordinary civic sense, a deep *espressione di civiltà*.

Though both AR and the Smithson had shown interest for Italian historical centres, it attention did not extend to the cities of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. A possible reason for this might be that Britain lacks the kind of urban bourgeois architecture that unobtrusively but tenaciously makes city. The suburban domestic model was gradually assumed by the middle and upper-middle classes from the second half of the XIXth century onwards; Victorian and Edwardian commercial architectures are rather vociferous and emphatic in the individual work, generally excessive, and their historicism is less subtle than that of Turinese eclecticism. Only the urban domestic works of Shaw, Voysey, or Ashbee could claim a comparable refinement, but they are subsumed in the miasma of the Victorian disordered city.

Yet Britain had its Georgian architecture and it is no coincidence that when trying to construct a genuinely English ascendancy for modern architecture, its promoters, such as J.M. Richards, editor of AR since the 1930s, chose this tradition (along with the Arts and Crafts); or that the militant advocacy for modernism and the study of XVIIIth and early XIXth century architecture were tightly entwined in John Summerson's career. Finally, due to the very different Italian and British histories of national construction, first there is a stronger sense of city distinctiveness in Italy; second, their urban networks are very diverse – the macrocephaly of London versus the polycentrism of the Peninsula –; and third, in Britain the bonds that unite citizens to their localities are less intense. This is why the paradoxically cosmopolitan and cultivated provincialism of Turin or Milan, intensely aware of its historical weight and identity, is to be found nowhere in Britain, except maybe in Glasgow, a city that produced the architecture of Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

The issue of provincialism, a major source of criticism among others from Zevi^[7], is of some importance. For Gabetti, d'Isola, Raineri, Gregotti, and other heterodox, it was at the professional cultures of the XIXth century, with their accumulation of technical knowledge and their foundation of a tradition of good building, with their typological innovations and their opening up to the exigencies of the industrial revolution that architects had to look back. And this culture had flourished in a city like Turin and it was their very presence there that justified this looking inward, this provincialism, paradoxically cosmopolitan and cultivated, with a

vocation to transcend its boundaries. This was so for reasons of identity: "In Italy, the most frankly European city" Persico had written, and also because for these architects looking at the eclecticism or the Liberty meant taking note of European movements that had disseminated a common research with prestigious local masters: Antonelli, Crescentino Caselli, Carlo Ceppi, D'Aronco, etc. Their experience of modernity was local with international roots.

The role of Reyner Banham I. Banham's modernity

In his seminal article on Neoliberty, Banham used that phrase, until then limited to the works of Gabetti and d'Isola, to launch a general attack on any Italian architecture that intended to go beyond the avant-gardes in search of suggestions for contemporary action (Fig. 3). This antihistoricist discourse stemmed from Banham's conception of what modern architecture was. And this was very much rooted in his weakness for the postulates of Italian Futurism. It is generally acknowledged that one of Banham's main contributions to the historiography of modern architecture was the re-evaluation of Futurism as one of its principal sources. But beyond this academic labour, Futurism had to influence contemporary architecture if this intended to call itself modern.

Before his thesis was published as *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960), Banham used the invaluable loudspeaker of the AR to make known his almost archaeological trawling through the remnants of that avant-garde movement. Thus in 1955 his first article on Sant'Elia appeared. To defend the Italian architect's visionary status, Banham translated for the first time into English some parts of the *Manifesto of Futurist Architecture* (1914). Among these, eight propositions which, read today, strikingly reflect many aspects of the thinking the British historian would develop throughout his career:

"(5) that just as the ancients drew the inspiration for their arts from the world of nature... so we should draw ours from the mechanized environment we have created

'(7) that architecture must also be understood as the power to harmonize man and his environment

'(8) that an architecture such as this breeds no permanence, no structural habits."^[8]

The seeds of the promotion of Archigram, of the praise of Buckminster Fuller, or of the discourse on the artificial environment are to be found here. In his last article on Futurism he included the first English translation of Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*. In the introductory note he said: "as alive now as they ever were, more alive than ten years ago. [...] Sant'Elia laid down the programme of the architecture of the Twenties (and the Fifties)" and further below: "we see the Foundation Manifesto standing up, the farthest familiar landmark in the fog of history, the first point in which we recognize an image of our own Machine Age attitudes"^[9].

His enthusiasm for Sant'Elia was also present in Italy during these years. It was a time when knowledge of the matter was increasing and primary sources discovered. Rogers himself agreed with Banham in saluting the value of Sant'Elia's architectural proposals. But while for the British scholar the avant-gardist curse on tradition constituted the core of architectural modernity, for Rogers it was historically determined and consequently no longer valid.

Apart from this critical discrepancy, there were others, in the realm of historical interpretation, which kept Banham away from some of the researchers working in Italy. The discrepancies revolved around Sant'Elia's bonds with fascism and even around the legitimacy of ascribing him to the Futurist movement^[10]. Along

with these, there was the issue of the Art Nouveau origins of his aesthetics. Banham complained about the inaccuracy of the historical research carried on by the young Italians, who tended to stress that connection. Nonetheless, he had himself pointed at the influence of "International Art Nouveau", that is, precisely the architecture of that Belle Époque bourgeoisie against which the Futurists rebelled and that was regaining favour in 1950s Italy. Moreover, in the article "Sant'Elia" he unequivocally recognized the relevance of civil engineering, of the architecture of infrastructures, and of local Art Nouveau in line with the Piedmontese and Lombard traditions of good building. Given that he knew all this, his position during the Neoliberty debate becomes more difficult to understand; either he was driven by a provocative attitude, or there had been some evolution in his thinking.

That evolution might be illustrated by the following statement, part of his later rejoinder to Ernesto Rogers's "L'evoluzione dell'architettura. Risposta al custode dei frigidaires"^[11], in its turn a response to Banham's famous "Neoliberty. The Italian retreat...": "working on the problem of Sant'Elia" –Banham says– "I was forcibly struck by the way in which the Italians, more than any other nation except the Americans, have appreciated the possibilities of the small, domesticated and personalized machinery that came in around 1910"^[12]. Therefore it was this liking of gadgets and their historical implications upon domestic life that Banham discovered and it was their denial that he perceived in the Italian architectures of his time. His vision of Italy was strongly mediated by his beloved Futurism. Italy (even more Turin) had to be Fiat, Lingotto and Matté-Trucco, the frenzy of the automobile.

The role of Reyner Banham II. Banham's Italy

The study of the corpus of articles Banham published in AR though the 1950s on Italian architecture evidences two facts: first, the number of critical reviews of Italian buildings increased gradually as did his own familiarity with the country, a result of his dedication to the study of its avant-garde; second, a severe change in his critical appraisal of contemporary architecture ran parallel to his research on Futurism. He evolved from an attitude sympathetic towards what he called "Italian Eclecticism" in the early years of the decade to the fury of his attack on Neoliberty towards its end.

Banham published three articles on Futurism during his time at the Review, and around fifteen on the Italian architecture of those years^[13]. As regards the second group, his first two writings, one on the multipurpose civic building at Leghorn by Luigi Vagnetti (Fig. 4)^[14], the other on Luigi Moretti's palazzina Casa del Girasole in Rome (Fig. 5)^[14], displayed some sympathy. In the first one, he described the varied sources from which Vagnetti had borrowed his design solutions, from Gothic to Mannerism. In his analysis he identified the "Italian attitude towards eclecticism in general" as the background that explained it. Surprisingly, Banham not only did not censure this, but seemed to some extent supportive.

A year later, his review of Moretti's Casa del Girasole went deeper into the explanation of such eclecticism, which he attributed to the conditions under which architecture was produced, both technological –the availability of materials and the permanence of craftsmanship–, and social –either popular or bourgeois taste–. Moretti's design had to comply with the established planning rules for upper-class dwellings. Thus he was working in a very unstable terrain, and the belonging of his building to modern architecture was only guaranteed, according to Banham, by two apparently contradictory facts: first by the liberalism of his expressive language; second, by the availability of a functional justification for every formal or material decision.

In the essay on Vagnetti's building Banham posed this clear question: "To what extent does contemporary Italian architecture proceed from the supposed tenets of the Modern Movement?" And it was an attempt to answer this question that underlay all his articles on Italy for the following decade. We could claim here, as the Italians did, that Banham set himself up as guardian of a given orthodoxy. But it might be that it was for him rather a matter of remaining attentive to a focus of architectural production whose vitality was evidenced in "the *Triennale*, in *QT8*, in the *Compasso d'Oro*, in *Comunità*, in *Domus* and, even more, in *Casabella*", along with the development of domestic consumerism and industrial design; thus making of 1950s Italy a qualified viewpoint to foresee the development of the Modern Movement after the war.

Afterwards, his moderate attitude changed. By means of the large number of reviews and comments devoted to Gio Ponti's Pirelli Tower (first article in 1956), he fixed a very neat position about the right way for Italian architects to follow (Fig. 6). This path was quite different from the one insinuated by Vagnetti and Moretti, and certainly confronted to those deviations he would soon denounce fiercely. The series on Pirelli thus marked a point of inflection, followed by a text on Viganò's Istituto Marchiondi (1959), and a mention to Albini and Helg's Rinascente (1962), a work that would engross his rising interest on the artificial environment.

There is a last reference worth mentioning for its ambiguity. In his *Guide to Modern Architecture* (1962), among the Italian works selected, he included the Girasole and Gardella's Zattere (1957), which he presented next to each other in a shared double-page spread-out. He recalled Moretti's role in bringing modernism in Italy to a crisis, much before Neoliberalism, but without betraying it, its modernity not being just "skin-deep". As for the Venetian building beside the Giudecca, he acknowledged: "It is fancy-dress architecture, certainly, but the very manner of its disappearance is proof that the dressing-up has not been done for the usual reasons of historical cowardice. Very tricky..."^[16].

May it be that by that time Banham was reconsidering his position? Or may it be that his advocacy for the machine and his revulsion of historicism was more nuanced than the usual interpretations of his thought have established?

The role of James M. Richards. Internationalism and cultural commitment of the Editorial agendas

As stated on the editorial inaugurating the second half century of its existence, AR's declared goal after the war was "visual re-education"^[17]. This limited conception of architecture explains the low cultural level of most of its editorial campaigns over the following twenty years ("Functional Tradition", "Townscape", etc.). This might have diverse causes. First, its owner, Hubert de Cronin Hastings, conceived it as a cultural magazine for a large audience, its sibling *The Architect's Journal* being a more strictly professional publication. Second, it might be a consequence of that "English cultural tradition [of] the practice of dilettante journalism by experts who are also amateurs" that the Review favoured, or, put otherwise, "the median level of informed but sociable conversation"^[18]. In contrast, *Casabella's* editorial policy placed the journal at the level of committed high architectural debate.

That being true, it cannot be denied that *Casabella* published principally Italian buildings, particularly those its editors favoured. Yet it embodied some internationalism, that of Rogers and his involvement with CIAM, that of the discourse of his circle of collaborators on the European tradition of early modernity, and that of the particular attention paid to the production of foreign countries and to the mature work of the Masters. As for AR, before the war the

focus had necessarily been cosmopolitan, given that it militated in favour of the mainly foreign phenomenon of avant-garde architecture. During the 1950s the magazine resolutely turned towards an English-centred agenda. This was so first because modern architecture was still in need of national legitimacy; second, because its post-war success had to be consolidated; third maybe because, given the roar of the fight before the war, the victors could not help themselves devoting many pages to the celebration.

The debate around Englishness and the Picturesque revival the review promoted, together with the Festival of Britain (1951), evidence the parochialism of a part of British intelligentsia. The internationalism of the Milan *Triennale*, an event, as was the Festival of Britain, favoured by progressive architectural circles, clearly contrasts with the latter's celebration of national pride (Fig. 7). To understand these differences, we should not forget that modernism in Italy and Britain had gone through very different historical circumstances. On the one hand, it had been practiced in the Peninsula since the 1920s, so that its roots were more solid than in the Isles. On the other hand, it had flourished under Fascism, so that the turn towards the international scene after the war was expiatory, whereas in Britain modernism was associated with the splendour of the Welfare State.

We could mention other possible causes, such as the fact that none of the main Italian figures, Zevi and Rogers for instance, nor another great intellectual connected to *Casabella*, Giancarlo de Carlo, had parallel in Britain. It might be as well that AR's approach to architectural thinking was journalistic, and that nobody at the Review was practising architect, whereas the Italians were. Finally, as a corollary, within AR history was conceived and displayed as erudition rather than as holding any operative value. This necessarily limited its resonance.

When reflecting about this striking difference between one journal and the other, the fact that the man in charge at the British magazine was J. M. Richards, makes it even harder to understand. He too had cultivated significant international connexions since the 1930s and was involved with CIAM since before the war. Moreover, "British intellectual isolation had ended", and British architecture, whose diffusion abroad was very much the responsibility of the Review, was among those that attracted more attention^[19]. In addition, CIAM meetings witnessed a convergence of positions between Richards and Giedion, Enrico Peresutti of BBPR, and Rogers himself, in relation to the "Common Man" and "Architectural Expression" (CIAM 6), and to the "Core of the City" (CIAM 8)^[20].

The question remains unanswered of why Richards let AR sustain such an aggressive campaign against those who in Italy were attempting to respond to many of these issues. May it be, as Hugh Casson –another strong man at the review– stated, that: "It must be remembered that the main object of the architectural press –small a, small p– is the same as that of any other human organization or individual, whether it be a steel plant or a poet. It is to stay in business?"^[21]

The status of history for *Casabella* and *Architectural Review* and the role of Nikolaus Pevsner

With the mobilization of J. M. Richards, Pevsner assumed the editorial responsibilities. This increased the number and extent of historical articles. Indeed the English journal published several essays on Art Nouveau during these years^[22]. This is one of the reasons why in his allegation against 1950s historicism he acknowledged: "Could you not say that the *Return of Historicism* is all our fault, and I mean myself in this case, personally, in two ways: (a) *qua Architectural Review* and (b) *qua historian*?"^[23] (Fig. 8). But in any case neither the journal's articles nor Pevsner's books were comparable to these other works "over the remaining monuments

of Art Nouveau [...] that were far less expository or explanatory, than they were eulogistic or rhetorical"^[24] that Banham attributed both to Milanese (i.e. *Casabella*) and Roman (i.e. *L'Architettura*) journals.

There is a second aspect to point out when analyzing Pevsner's historiography in relation to the Italian scene, which is that his account of the dawn of modern architecture clearly diverged from the one Rogers and his circle were elaborating, much more indebted to Sigfried Giedion's investigations. This fact conditioned the positive reception in Britain that Pevsner, given his position, might have eased.

Rogers had left for Switzerland as an exile in 1943. There he tightened his bonds with Giedion, which assured him a leading role in post-war CIAM and must have eased the convergence of their historical projects. One of the relevant phenomena of the post-war was the reflection around the Modern Movement as a tradition of its own. In that sense, *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), with its meaningful subtitle *The Growth of a New Tradition* was very influential in defining modern architecture as a continuous project originated in the Renaissance. In addition, Giedion attributed a central role in the definition of the modern in architecture to XIXth-C technical developments and to architects and engineers such as Labrousse, Baltard, or Eiffel, and to the emergence of types for the new industrial society.

A critical question to understand the distance between Pevsner and the Italian research is that it was mainly the aesthetics of the works of engineering –not their professionalism, not their civic status, not their *Pan-European condition*, not their romanticism– that he valued in his *Pioneers*. Along with this, and again in contrast with Giedion, he made minor references to the emergence of the city and buildings of bourgeois culture before Art Nouveau, and in any case his analysis was always limited to a narration of technical innovations followed by a formalist depiction. It could be argued that *Pioneers...* was an early work (first published in 1936) and therefore necessarily incomplete, but Giedion's *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* of 1928, to some extent already paid more attention to several aspects that Pevsner neglected.

The Italians' enquiry into XIXth-C architecture was actively carried through *Casabella*, by means of several articles^[25]; a historical excavation to be put in the service of the operative recovery of those "valenze laiciate libere" that were at the center of Roger's project of historical continuity. This intellectual endeavour was a Crocean operation of understanding the values and conditions of past times in their relation to contemporary culture and society so as to detect those aspects that were meaningful within an enlarged tradition of modern architecture. Indeed it was Croce who had defended that "however remote in time events thus recounted may seem to be, history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate"^[26]. The German tradition of academic historical rigour that Pevsner subscribed could hardly tolerate any of these liberalities.

Final note

To conclude, it might be illuminating to contrast two well-known passages from two of the figures in our story. Rogers, in the first editorial of *Casabella-Continuità*, claimed: "We believe in the fecund cycle 'man-architecture-man' and want to represent its dramatic deployment: the crises; the few, indispensable certainties and the numerous doubts, even more necessary; since we believe that being alive means, overall, accepting the fatigue of the daily renewal, with the refutation of the acquired positions, through anxiety up to anguish, by the perpetuating of agony, towards the extension of the field of human 'sympathy'", and concluded: "this is the ethical content of our aesthetics, which brings back trade and art to their original synthesis: the *techné*."^[27]

Banham, in the last chapter of *Theory and Design...* said: "It may well be that what we have hitherto understood as architecture and what we are beginning to understand of technology are incompatible disciplines. The architect who proposes to run with technology knows now that he will be in fast company, and that, in order to keep up, he may have to emulate the Futurists and discard his whole cultural load."^[28]

For Banham modern architecture was not the cultural convention –always under revision, never fixed–, that Rogers conceived, but the result of deterministic technological and scientific changes. When Banham embraced the messianism of Buckminster Fuller, or when he spoke of topology instead of form, and particularly when he praised Archigram for providing an image for the world to come, he denied the belonging of architecture to the realm of the cultural expressions: of technical culture (as distinct from the cult of technology), of urban culture, of collective memory; all this was lost amidst technological utopianism. Yet this was precisely what was at stake in the Neoliberty debate, these values were those that Gabetti, d'Isola, Rogers, Gregotti, or Rossi were determined to preserve.

That the consequences of this debate would be far-reaching is evident today, when British architecture has not fully recovered from having succumbed to these technology-driven and antiformalist chants of gratuitous avant-gardism instead of having followed those who, from the other side of the Alps, called for the enduring elaboration of the *mestiere*.



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