

Front to Rear: Architecture and Planning during World War II

Conference co-organized by the Institute of Fine Arts, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal, and Princeton University's School of Architecture

Saturday, March 7 and Sunday, March 8, 2009

Institute of Fine Arts, New York University
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Italy 1942: Visions of the Future Dwelling

This paper wishes to examine why and how of what was termed in 1942 "uno strano momento d'ozio" ("an odd period of idleness") became for an elite of Italian architects, who grew up under the banner of modernism, a fertile condition to reassess the future dwelling as the new ideal for all human beings. One year earlier Alberto Lattuada, architect, photographer, and renowned film director captured that suspended atmosphere in his *L'occhio quadrato*, 26 black and white pictures of strong realism.

The call for reviewing "la casa e l'ideale" ("the home: an ideal vision") launched by *Domus* in August 1942, offered these architects the model ground to express their dreams and hopes. *Domus* program eventually allowed them to free the creation of a kind of "esperanto" that helped to transfer the iconic rationalism in the cultivated modern vernacular of postwar reconstruction. It was all but an escape from reality; rather it showed how these architects used that call for adjusting their know-how to the elaboration of some radical, alternative design inventions, that displayed a rich repertoire of materials and technologies, a visionary high-tech *avant la lettre*.

The year 1942 may well serve as synecdoche of the period between autarchy and post-WWII reconstruction. The comparison between *Domus* and the special issue of *Edilizia Moderna*, April-December 1942, entitled "Costruzioni del Tempo di Guerra" ("Building during War Time") exemplifies the ambiguities that the profession was confronting. Here the agony of the regime is in the background, while the buildings show how technical skill may be turned into dull functionality. I'm planning as well to read this condition looking backward to a series of booklets, issued by the Ministry of War in 1938, to instruct architects and planners, among others, on how to build in order to prevent damages caused by air attacks.

War also meant imprisonment. Ludovico Quaroni, one of the key figures of twentieth-century Italian architecture and a protagonist of postwar reconstruction remained in a camp in India for about five years. His carnets of sketches contained a plenitude of drawings for the ideal home next to vivid images of village dwellings and domestic vernacular. Would the Indian trope become a source of his village like the Tiburtino neighborhood of early '50s? It is worth exploring further this more distant resonance.

No doubt that the pendulum between desire of the new and nostalgia justified the permanence of the contradictions this paper aims to illustrate. By the end, Fascism caused death, fear, emigration... as well as being pivotal in forcing architects to envision the "rinascita".

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Archived September 2011