

Il Selvaggio 1926-1942: Architectural Polemics and Invective Imagery

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# *Il Selvaggio* 1926–1942: Architectural Polemics and Invective Imagery

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Within the framework of a special collection dedicated to the study of image-word relations in the press and their impact upon the dissemination of architecture within the public realm, the story of *Il Selvaggio*, the magazine published from July 13, 1924, until five weeks before the fall of Mussolini in 1943, assumes a significant relevance. Since its inception, and increasingly from 1926, *Il Selvaggio* hosts, alongside articles and polemic essays, a varied range of graphic materials in different genres and forms of artistic expression. This heterogeneous visual catalogue, an expression of the versatile and eclectic culture of its founder, the artist, writer and illustrator Mino Maccari, includes an equally varied ensemble of literary registers ranging from rhymes and aphorisms to brief polemic writings, ironic manipulation of proverbs, word plays and puns.

The interest of a study about the representations of architecture within *Il Selvaggio* lies in the non-specialist nature of a periodical whose cultural stances were predominantly elaborated outside the professional circles of the architectural work and its well-known authors. This article examines the rhetorical strategies and linguistic devices of the magazine, where caricatures and landscape scenes, still lives and urban views, photographs and mottoes, are intertwined in a set of varying relationships. It also elucidates the historical context in which the contemporary architectural debate unfolds and which constitutes the constant reference for Maccari and his collaborators, providing the source materials for the journal's polemics.

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## Introduction

Among the many interests of Mino Maccari (1898–1989), engraver, painter, journalist, caricaturist, fascist 'squadrista', and main catalyst of the magazine *Il Selvaggio* (The Wild One) were the building works promoted by the fascist government over its nearly twenty-year existence. Together with Leo Longanesi (1905–1957), writing in the pages of the Bolognese bimonthly *L'Italiano* (1926–1942), Maccari's architectural polemic vehemently attacked the centralist government policies of huge building tenders, the historicist projects and 'monuments' mania' of the official architecture, and the 'sventramenti' (disembowelments) that erased some of the country's most celebrated historic thoroughfares to make way for new urban plans.

Through a detailed analysis of a copious group of writings and graphic materials that appeared in *Il Selvaggio*, published from July 13, 1924, until five weeks before the fall of Mussolini in 1943,<sup>1</sup> this essay retraces the journal's relationship to the contemporary discourse on architecture and the city as voiced by the specialist literature and other media during the critical years of fascism. Within the context of a special collection dedicated to the study of image-word relations in the press and their impact

upon the dissemination of the architectural discipline, the story of *Il Selvaggio* assumes a significant relevance: since its inception, and increasingly from 1926, the magazine hosted, alongside articles and polemic essays, a varied range of graphic materials in different genres and forms of artistic expression. This rich visual repertory is complemented by an equally varied ensemble of literary registers including rhymes, aphorisms, brief polemic writings, ironic manipulation of proverbs, word plays and puns.

Born as a political leaflet, the magazine gradually evolved into an art journal. Most of those involved in the architectural polemics published by *Il Selvaggio* were artists and art critics, while architects formed only a small minority. Alongside Maccari and Longanesi, we find Ardengo Soffici, Carlo Carrà and Ottone Rosai, previously associated with the Florentine journal *La Voce*, and the Futurist group of *Lacerba*. Other contributors were the art critic and journalist Mario Tinti, the art collector and critic Manlio Malabotta, the caricaturist and painter Amerigo Bartoli Natinguerra, and the architect Giuseppe Pensabene.

The investigation of the rhetorical strategies and linguistic devices deployed by the magazine, the intertwining of caricatures and editorials, still lives, rural landscape scenes and urban views, will accompany an examination of the contemporary architectural debate, which was constantly an issue of concern for Maccari and his collaborators, and the target of the journal's polemics.

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### Trajectories of *Il Selvaggio*

The artistic and political itinerary of this magazine, born in the small Tuscan town of Colle Val d'Elsa, has already been analyzed (Maccari 1948; Ragghianti 1955; Cavallo 1969; Asor Rosa 1975; Troisio 1975; Briganti and Sani 1977; Cremona 1977; Tonelli 1977; Montanelli and Staglieno 1984; Schnapp and Spackman 1990; Sciascia 1993; Adamson 1995; Braun 1995; Mezio 1998; Busini 2002; Pucci 2012) and will only be briefly summarized. Its origins go back to the initiative of Angiolo Bencini, a wine seller from Poggibonsi, an artillery officer in the First World War and later a *squad* member. In July 1924, Bencini set up what appears to have been little more than a small local journal, appointing as editor the then 26-year-old apprentice lawyer Maccari, who was soon to become the magazine's *factotum*. After the murder of the socialist member of Parliament Giacomo Matteotti, *Il Selvaggio* rallied those early fascists who had participated in the March on Rome and supported the government uncompromisingly, and soon became the standard bearer of fascism's most intransigent faction. Its main function was to defend the fascist faith and resist the marginalisation of the local, agrarian and *petit-bourgeois* component that was increasingly deprived of its traditional role of filter between the regime and the popular masses. Right from its beginnings, *Il Selvaggio* was a magazine of low production values, reporting, from the remote provincial recesses of Italy, the echoes of what was happening in the capital and the reverberations in the provinces of decisions taken elsewhere. Anti-conformism, programmatic dissent and contempt for fascist normalisation alongside exaltation of the most radical and violent aspects of fascist ideology are the dominant registers of the magazine's first two years. After the spring of 1926, with the resignation of the party's general secretary, Roberto Farinacci, *ras* of Cremona and fascist hardliner, the intransigent period was over: the board moved to Florence, while Bencini was finally out of the picture. *Il Selvaggio*, now directed by Mino Maccari, reinvented itself by shifting its program from politics to culture, devoting increasing space to the visual arts and literature (Cavallo 1969: 10–13; Troisio 1975: 11).

Not surprisingly, post-war criticism and historiography often dismissed *Il Selvaggio* as unequivocally retrograde and provincial. In 1955 Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti pointed out the poverty of the magazine's architectural polemics, closer to 'aversion' than serious 'criticism' (Ragghianti 1955: 46–47). Among architectural critics and historians, both Giulia Veronesi (1964: 155) and Luciano Patetta (Danesi and Patetta 1976: 48; Patetta 1972: 42–43, 337) underlined the superficiality of Maccari and Longanesi's boisterous polemics as well as the 'deliberate coarseness' of the magazine's layout, while Carlo Cresti (1989: 228) has explained the magazine's political and artistic agenda as the natural response to early fascism's lack of a clear cultural orientation. According to art critics and historians Cavallo (1969), Sani (1977), Cesarini (1977), and Guerrieri (1977), it was precisely its graphic content and its unconventional use of typography that make *Il Selvaggio* artistically worthwhile. Thus, more recent analyses have seen it as the expression of an original version of modernity that

goes hand in hand with an openness to the most advanced European figurative culture (Cinelli 1998; Del Puppo 1998; Nezzo 1998). As has been said, '*Strapaese* did not condemn modernism and modernity outright but [...] wished to reconcile aspects of modern technology and avantgardism with adherence to tradition' (Aintliff 2002: 158).

Despite episodes of censorship ('L'editore a chi legge', 1977: viii), *Il Selvaggio* was substantially tolerated by the regime, acting as a typical *Fronde*, an internal dissident, soon turning out to be a useful instrument for fascism to neutralize possible centrifugal tendencies within public opinion (Cavallo 1969: 13; Troisio 1975: 32). Maccari and Longanesi, whom Giulia Veronesi was to define derogatively as 'antifascisti in orbace'<sup>2</sup> (Veronesi 1964: 155), continually walked the razor's edge between faithfulness and dissent towards the regime. In its nearly twenty-year existence, the magazine was suspended several times for reasons of finance, transfer, censorship and self-censorship ('L'editore a chi legge', 1977: viii).

Born as a bi-monthly publication, *Il Selvaggio's* format varied from 50 x 35 to 44 x 32 cm, and between four and twelve sheets. Its text, printed in a range of different typefaces, was arranged in two, three or four columns. Articles, aphorisms, mottoes, epigrams and satirical cartoons on architectural and urban topics are published almost uninterruptedly after the editorial board's move to Florence in 1926 until 1942. The attention to these topics is most evident between 1931 and 1935, corresponding to the most intense period of architectural discussion within the specialist press as well as within the most prominent national newspapers. A similar discontinuity seems to echo the magazine's inconsistent format and characterizes the architectural and urban issues, which only in the years 1931 to 1935 were treated within identifiably distinct and special series of articles, such as 'Bandiera gialla' (Yellow Flag, 1931 and 1933) and 'Cemento disarmato' (Concrete Disarmed, 1933 and 1935).

### *Strapaese, Stracittà, and Their Images*

In the autumn of 1926 a new literary magazine appeared on the scene called *Novecento: Cahiers d'Italie et d'Europe*, directed by Massimo Bontempelli. Maccari immediately identified it as the anti-Italian expression of an internationalist, urban and modernist culture, antagonistic to the values that he intended to promote in the pages of *Il Selvaggio*. This was the start of the dispute between *Strapaese* (hyper-country) and *Stracittà* (hyper-city). The dispute was officially announced by an article signed by 'Orco Bisorco', one of the many pseudonyms used by Maccari, where *Strapaese* is proposed as 'the resolute and serene affirmation of the present, essential and indispensable value of traditions and costumes characteristically Italian, of which the country is at the same time revealer, custodian and innovator'<sup>3</sup> (Maccari Orco Bisorco 1927b). All fundamental motifs of the movement are delineated: promotion of small-town rustic life and of the peasantry; restoration of the indigenous elements of the native culture; recourse to the proud agrarian tradition of Italy; dismissal of cultural homogeneity, foreign culture and bourgeois values as decadent and corrupt.

The first architectural polemic, in 1926, surrounded the public competition for a new bridge to be built in Florence ('Sventrami Vigliacco!', 1926). In the subsequent issue a little woodcut picturing a medieval town illustrates an imaginary dialogue between 'the Big Chief' and 'one of the *ras*', by means of which Maccari explains the editors' preference for the 'wild village' versus the 'industrial city' (Maccari 1926). The article is followed by the famous passage by Ruskin, from *The Lamp of Memory*, on the preservation of historic buildings (Ruskin 1926). In an article at the end of the issue, Ardengo Soffici, the recognised mentor of the younger artists and critics of *Il Selvaggio*, warns about the need to protect the ancient squares and the historic districts from the 'building barbarity', 'desecration' and 'worthless contaminations' of unreasonable renewal plans, as well as from the 'innumerable war memorials [...] already ridiculing all the Italian towns' (Soffici 1926a). Soffici urges the regime to bring 'its discipline and its style also to (the field of) art, putting an end once and for ever to the low and bad systems that have since dominated it' (Soffici 1926a). The call for a national aesthetics, and the explicit exhortation addressed to the government to act as the country's artistic guardian, is a recurrent theme in the magazine (Maccari 1929b). It is also at the centre of the architectural debate, finding a clearer formulation in the well-known *Rapporto sull'architettura*, presented in 1931 to Mussolini by the gallerist and art critic Pier Maria Bardi (Bardi 1931).

The need for a 'fascist style' is summed up by Soffici on the occasion of Mussolini's announcement of the new plan for Rome, then still under discussion and finally approved in 1931 (Soffici 1926b). Soffici had participated in Prezzolini's journal *La Voce*, founded the futurist magazine *Lacerba* and volunteered in the First World War, and then became active in the rejection of cubist abstraction, advocating the return to classicizing values, which he claimed to be part of the venerable Italian tradition (Aintliff 2002: 157–158). The heated tones in Soffici's article are tempered in the two woodcuts printed in one of the following pages, picturing figures of peasants and manual workers (Figs. 1 and 2).

In two articles in the September and October issues, Maccari, writing under the pseudonym of 'Punta e taglio' (Point and Cut) (Maccari Punta e Taglio 1926b; Maccari Punta e Taglio 1926c), takes aim at the fascist rhetoric of 'romanità', with its references to the grand Augustean imperial tradition, seen as a dangerous symptom of Mussolini's centralization of power and a threat to regional identity. Maccari's explicit targets are Federico Valerio Ratti, the poet who had just rewritten the text of *Giovinetza* (Youth), the fascist hymn, and the two Roman architects Armando Brasini and Marcello Piacentini, to whom Mussolini had recently awarded the prestigious titles of 'Accademici d'Italia'. Ratti, re-christened as Augusto Valerio, is the imaginary constructor of Rattaglia, a city completely built in reinforced concrete with 'triumphal arches in parchment paper and winged victories' (Maccari 1926d); Brasini is its architect, assisted by Piacentini. In the October issue, accompanying Maccari's manifesto of *Strapaese* are an etching by Giorgio Morandi, picturing the

halcyon landscape of a rural house surrounded with trees (Fig. 3), and a small still life woodcut by Nicola Galante (Fig. 4), a painter whose works frequently appeared in the magazine. However, in these issues of *Il Selvaggio* in 1926, pictures, either etchings or small woodcuts, are sporadic. Printed in small dimensions, they are usually relegated to cramped spaces within the page, and through their delicate subject iconography of Tuscan landscapes, local peasants and unpretentious still lives, act as a visual counterpoint to the vociferous tones of polemical articles and allegorical writings.

As is well known, alongside the political and social satire, *Il Selvaggio* published a number of works of contemporary artists and writers whom it enthusiastically promoted as part of *Strapaese*'s cultural project. Among them was Morandi, an artist whose name was for many years known solely thanks to *Il Selvaggio*.<sup>4</sup> Morandi's etchings and paintings articulated a primitivist aesthetic that greatly appealed to Maccari and Longanesi (Braun 1995; Aguirre 2013). In his first article on the Bolognese artist, published in 1928, Maccari describes Morandi's art as 'italianissima', deeply rooted in 'our most genuine tradition and nourished by the same vital sap that gave us the world and can only return it to us' (Maccari in Aguirre 2013: 120).<sup>5</sup>

It was only in May 1928 that the architectural discussion transcended the Tuscan borders to enter a broader national dimension. Only a few weeks before, Adalberto Libera and Gaetano Minnucci had inaugurated the 'Prima esposizione italiana di architettura razionale' held in the galleries of Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome with the patronage of the Sindacato Nazionale Fascista architetti (National Fascist Union of Architects). Maccari's antimodernist crusade had officially begun: *Il Selvaggio* had no doubts, and immediately pigeonholed the rationalist show as an exhibition of 'lousy, revolting, bolshevic, American and German stuff' ('Spuntature', 1928). While the question of a 'fascist style' was still perceived as an open problem that urgently required a solution ('Gazzettino ufficiale di Strapaese', 1928), complaints about the 'ugly monuments' follow in the subsequent issues and the rhyme 'sventramento sottintende inventramento' ('disembowelment means filling one's belly') ('Varie', 1928) made explicit the equation between public works and huge financial profits.

Alongside these quibbles, the magazine continued to print Maccari's etchings and drawings. In the fourth column of a page featuring a short article on the controversial restoration of the Badia Fiorentina are five *cartoline* (illustrated postcards), or 'Strapaese in wood', showing picturesque woodcut views of Bologna and the four Tuscan towns of Viareggio, San Gimignano, Colle Val d'Elsa and Livorno (Figs. 5, 6 and 7). Between 1926 and 1930, the Tuscan years of *Il Selvaggio*, urban views are rare; they are often presented as picturesque scenes privileging the natural over the built, as in the above-mentioned post cards, or in the frequent views of Livorno, and in the drawing of a Turin scene, published on April 30, 1930 (Fig. 8), a veritable hymn to one of the two rivers crossing the Piedmontese city portrayed against the backdrop of the Alps.



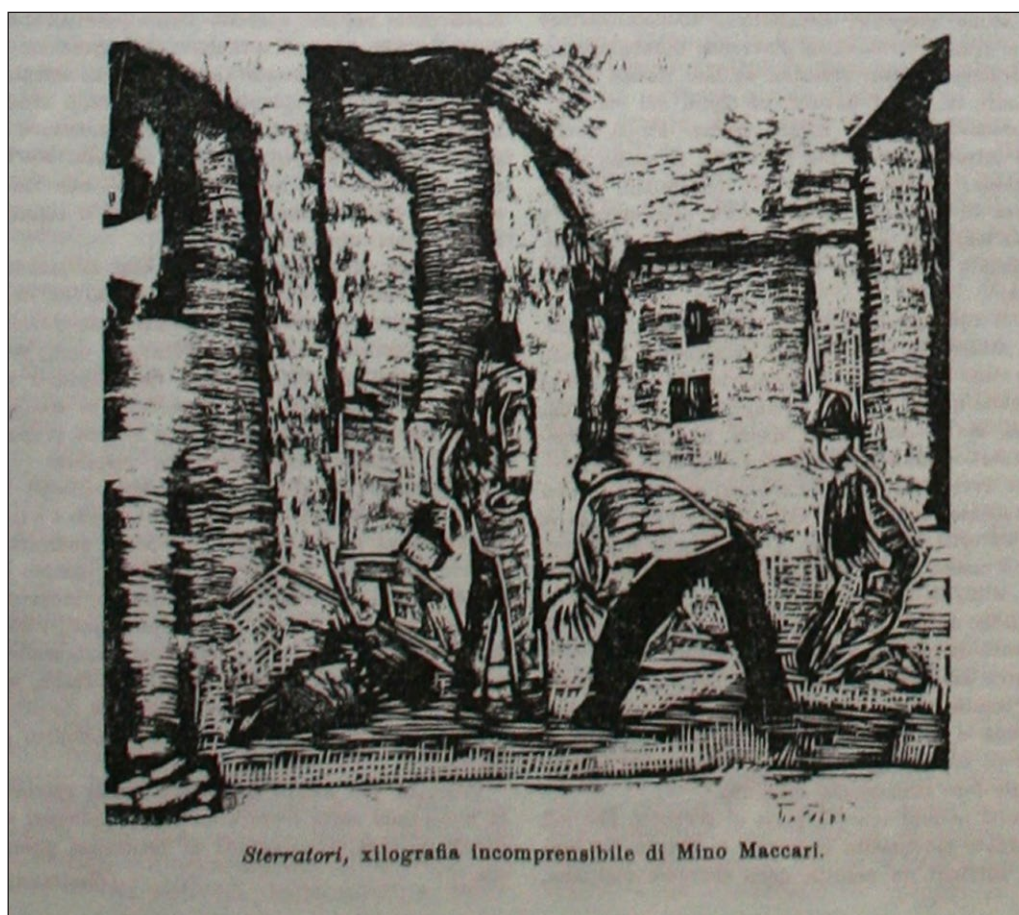


**Figure 1:** 'Il cieco. Xilografia di Adolfo Balduini' (The blind. Woodcut by Adolfo Balduini). April 1926. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 3: 11).

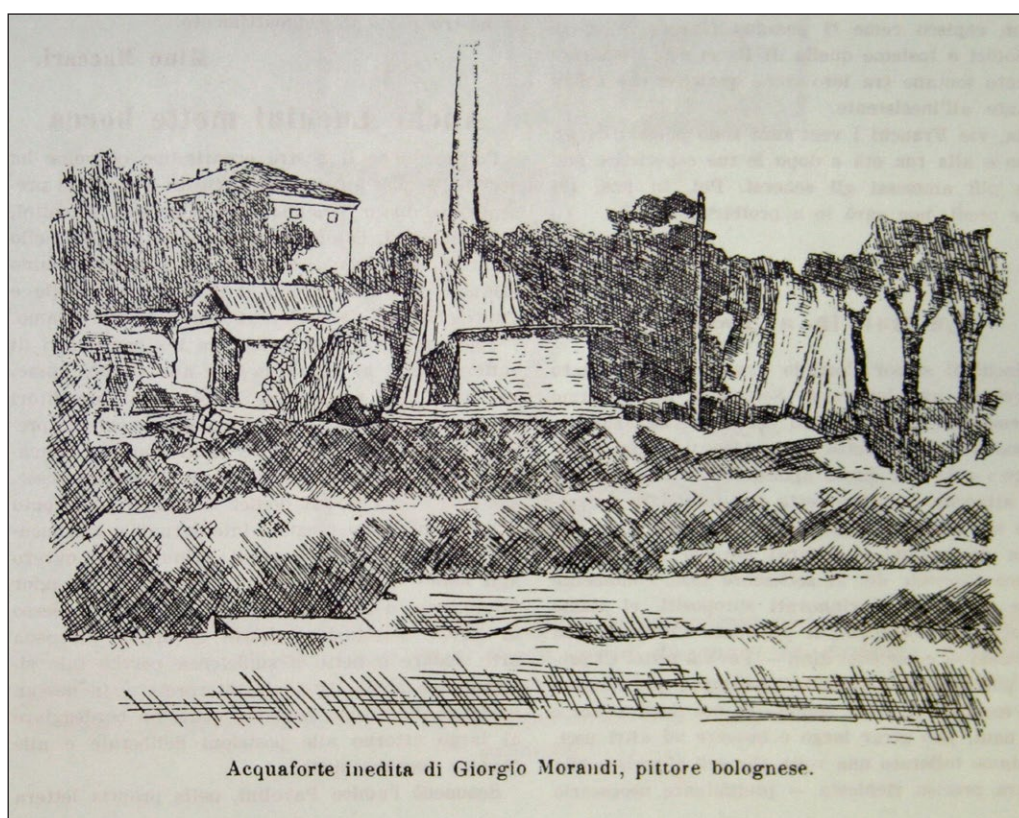
Indeed, images are an integral and fundamental part of the journal's cultural agenda, as Maccari has made clear in 1927: 'For us a drawing, an etching, a woodcut are worth as much as an article, and serve our "wild" campaign as much and

more than prose'<sup>6</sup> (Maccari Orco Bisorco 1927a). Emblematic in this respect is the publication, on February 28, 1929, of a large allegoric cartoon, the representation of a fictional land, a contemporary version of More's *insula* Utopia (**Fig. 9**).



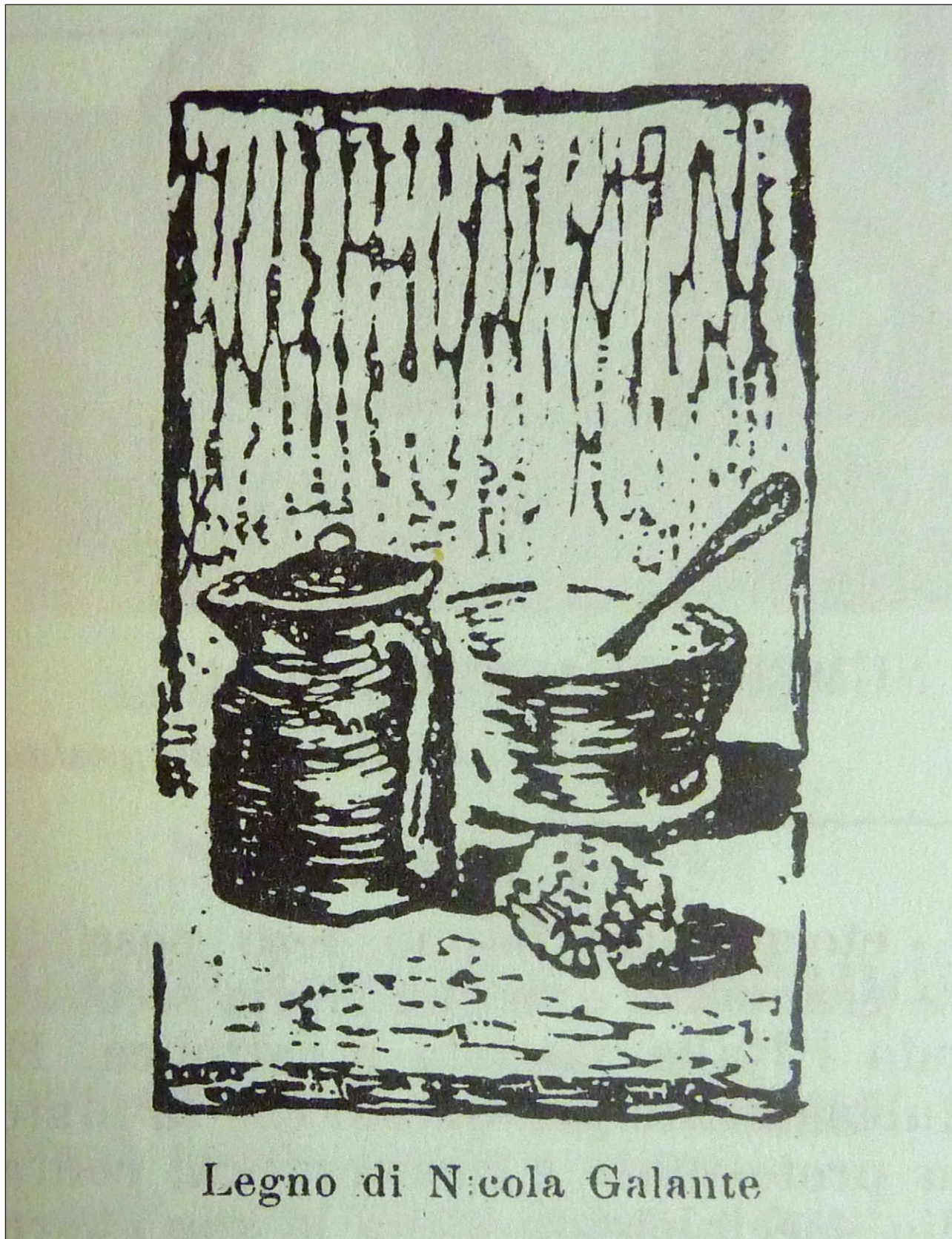


**Figure 2:** 'Sterratori. Xilografia incomprensibile di Mino Maccari' (Navvies. Incomprehensible woodcut by Mino Maccari). April 1926. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 3: 11).



**Figure 3:** 'Acquaforte inedita di Giorgio Morandi, pittore bolognese' (Unpublished etching by Giorgio Morandi, Bolognese painter). October 1926. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 3: 29).



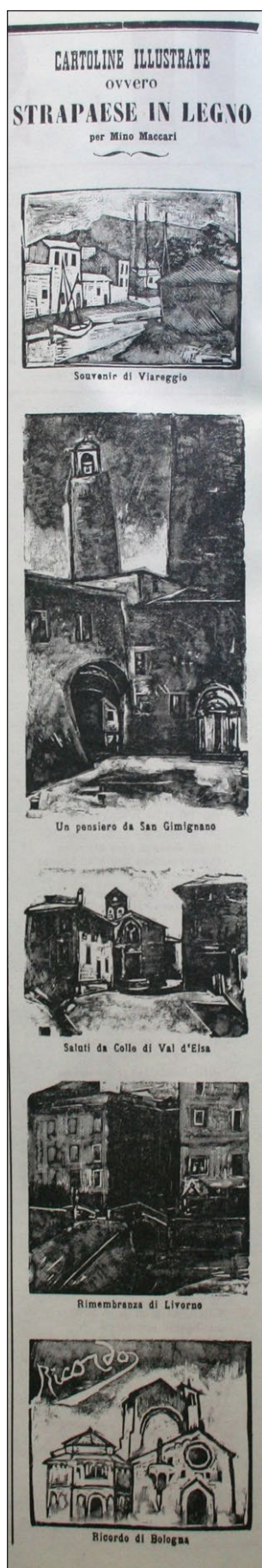


**Figure 4:** 'Legno di Nicola Galante' (Woodcut by Nicola Galante). October 1926. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 3: 30).

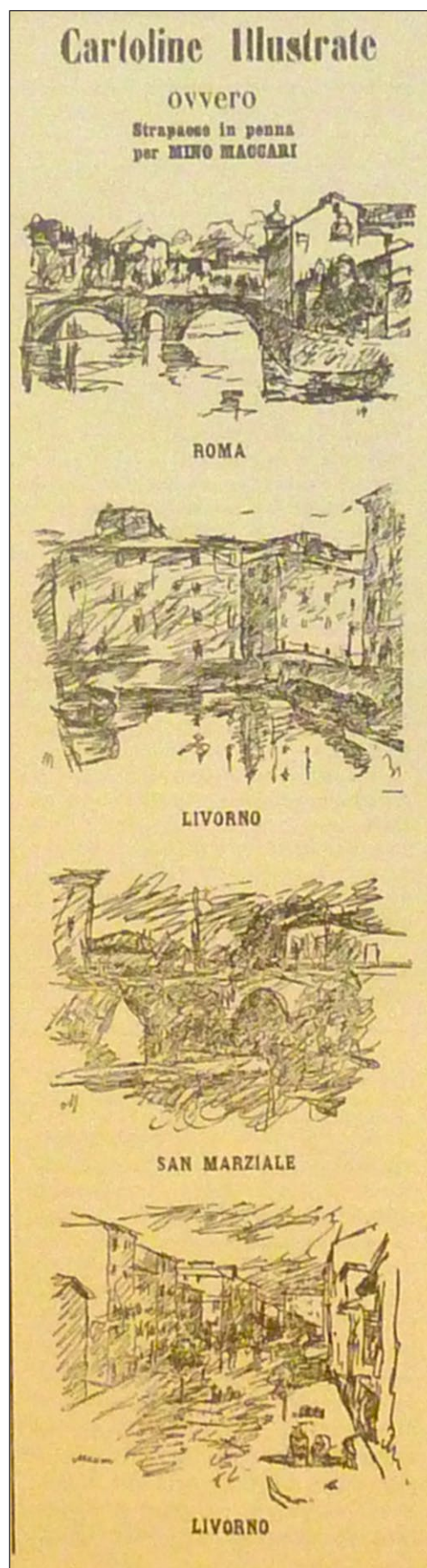
The picture shows *Strapaese* lying at the centre of the 'Isle of Good Faith', surrounded by the 'Forest of True Fascism', the 'Mount of Misery', the 'Slipway of Profiteers', the 'Mine of Illusions' and the 'Bastion of Tradition'. The journey to reach this still unexplored

territory is dangerous and full of obstacles: the island is bordered by the 'Sea of Troubles', the 'Sea of Lethe' and the 'Canal of Ingratitude': 'To reach *Strapaese*', the accompanying caption tells us, 'there is only one way, and it is called Fascism'<sup>7</sup> (Maccari 1929a).

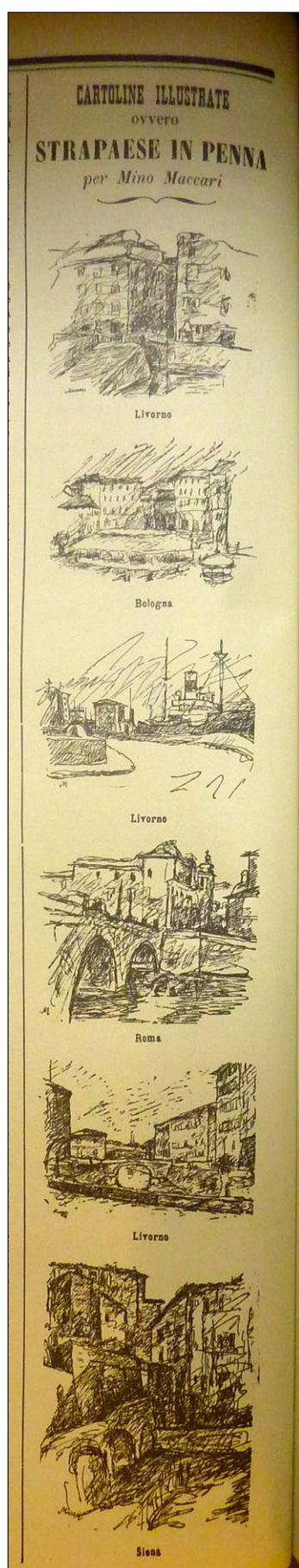




**Figure 5:** Mino Maccari, 'Cartoline illustrate ovvero Strapaese in legno' (Illustrated postcards, or *Strapaese* in wood). October 1928. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924–1943 (1977, vol. 5: 210).



**Figure 6:** Mino Maccari, 'Cartoline illustrate ovvero Strapaese in penna' (Illustrated postcards, or *Strapaese* in pen). March 1929. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924–1943 (1977, vol. 6: 15).



**Figure 7:** Mino Maccari, 'Cartoline illustrate ovvero Strapaese in penna' (Illustrated Postcards or *Strapaese* in pen). March 1929. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 6: 18).

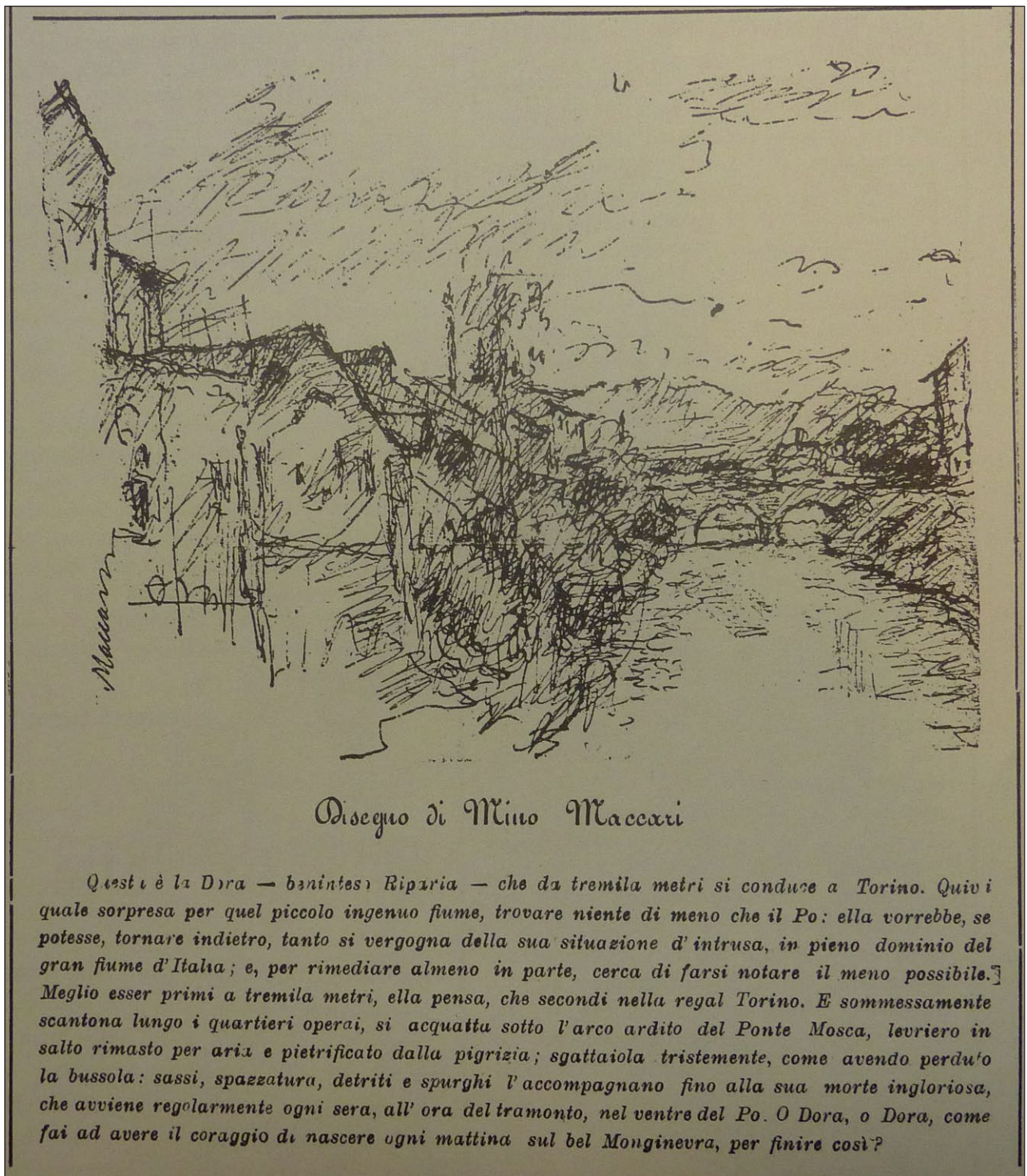
The invention of an imaginary geography rendered through an ensemble of visual representations including narratives told in cartoons as well as idealised rural landscapes dates back to the issue of July 15–30, 1926. A drawing signed by the magazine's director picturing a small lane in the middle of the countryside introduces an article by 'Punta e Taglio' that announces the start of the *Cronaca di Strapaese*, revealing the location of this fictitious centre to be 'just a little below Florence, a little above Siena' (Maccari Punta e Taglio 1926a). To complete the page is a landscape drawing by Rosai explicitly meant as a pictorial translation of the ultra-ruralist ideology promoted by *Il Selvaggio* (Fig. 10).

In December 1929 the opposition between *Strapaese* and *Stracittà* is again the central theme of an emblematic illustration published on the journal's cover (Fig. 11). Like the February issue's geographic chart, this one tells a tale in which all the key arguments of *Strapaese* doctrine are summarized and whose protagonists are Filippo Tomaso Marinetti, Ugo Ojetti, Massimo Bontempelli and other usual adversaries of *Il Selvaggio*. In the picture's background *Stracittà* is neatly distinguishable thanks to its 'rational architecture, hostile to children's smiles, the triumph of the W.C. and of rubber items'. Opposite to it is the land of *Strapaese*, 'whose agreeable hillocks rich of woods are populated with pregnant women and children playing and running'. The two landscapes are separated by a neutral space occupied by a river, 'which sometimes is even a sea', in which the undecided, 'those who have not the courage to make a landfall either here or there', float aimlessly (Maccari 1929c).

In 1931, Maccari was appointed editor in chief of the Turin daily newspaper *La Stampa*, then directed by Curzio Malaparte. He moved the board of *Il Selvaggio* to the Piedmontese city where it would remain from January 30 until the end of the year. In the 'laboratory city' of architectural modernism (Ciucci 1989: 37–53) – the seat of the pioneering Lingotto factory, the city of Riccardo Gualino and of his office building reviewed in the pages of *La Casa Bella* and *Domus* as an early example of Italian rationalist architecture – Maccari did not conceal his different cultural leaning. On the fourth page of the January 30, 1931, issue, a lyric accompanied a satirical illustration whose main protagonist is the industrialist from Biella whom the regime has just sent to exile. Gualino is attacked not only as an entrepreneur but also as a patron of art, architecture and theatre, soon to be identified by Maccari as the representative of a culture strenuously opposed by *Il Selvaggio* ('Ecco Gualino', 1931).

The discussion around the role that modern architecture should play in a fascist state became crucial at the beginning of 1931. Igniting the debate was the article 'Architettura arte di Stato' published by Pier Maria Bardi on January 31 in *L'Ambrosiano* (Cennamo 1976: 37–43). The issue, later at the heart of Bardi's *Rapporto sull'architettura*, was extensively discussed between February and June in all the major newspapers. Within the general reorganization of the State apparatus carried out by fascism, Bardi saw the revision of building legislation as a compelling necessity: the State must surveil and intervene to make way for the 'Italian new artistic conscience'.





**Figure 8:** Mino Maccari, sketch of the Dora Riparia river in Turin. April 1930. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 7: 69).

Bardi's exhortation fitted perfectly within the fascist policy for official culture and the management of social consensus (Ciucci 1989: 108–109; Cennamo 1976: 11).

Maccari's architectural polemics went to the heart of this discussion and became explicit on February 15, 1931, with the cartoon of Marcello Piacentini dressed in 18th-century attire riding a winged devil. The picture (Fig. 12) is accompanied by a humorous epigram whose main theme is the reconstruction, sanctioned by the royal decree of July 1930, of Turin's via Roma. For the enlargement of the street's first part, the law has prescribed the

adoption of an unlikely 18th-century architectural style identified with that of the buildings of Piazza San Carlo, which actually dates back to the 1630s–1640s. Divergences between the official architecture and the internationalist stances of the young rationalist architects are made evident at the end of March when the counter-project's perspective drawings signed by the members of the MIAR (Movimento per l'architettura razionale) were shown at the Second Exhibition of Rational Architecture in Rome. The expert advice sought from Piacentini by the city's public administration for the second phase of reconstruction,





**Figure 9:** Mino Maccari, 'Cenni di geografia' (Hints on geography). February 1929. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924-1943 (1977, vol. 6: 9).



**Figure 10:** 'Disegno inedito di Ottone Rosai che potrebbe servire a dare un'idea di come i selvaggi sentono, intendono e vogliono italiana e paesana l'Italia' (Unpublished drawing by Ottone Rosai which could bring to mind how the savages feel, intend and want Italy to be Italian and homely). July 1926. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924-1943 (1977, vol. 3: 21).





**Figure 11:** Mino Maccari, 'Spiegazione dell'incisione' (Explanation of the etching). December 1929. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924–1943 (1977, vol. 6: 61).

and his subsequent appointment as the project's general coordinator, is a well-known story, and the rhyme does not spare explicit allusions to the difficult layout of the square behind the two churches, the most critical point of the second section's whole operation. At the same time, at least two meanings are implied by Piacentini's baroque garb: an allusion to the street's historicist architectural language, and to the Messinese Filippo Juvarra who in 1714 had been recruited as the chief court architect by the Savoy king Vittorio Amedeo II. The article of February 1931 is the first of a series of harsh attacks on Piacentini,

who, since 1929, had been at the centre of a sequence of exceptionally important public commissions, confirming him as the interpreter as well as the arbiter of any official enterprise (Lupano 1990: 81).

The historian Walter Adamson has rightly called attention to *Il Selvaggio's* tendency 'to focus on a personalized enemy, often one with stereotyped attributes suitable for scapegoating' (Adamson 1995: 562). Probably the most prominent and most publicly exposed figure of the architectural profession under fascism, Piacentini offers himself to *Il Selvaggio* as the ideal butt of such a personification.





**Piacentini, il gran flagello  
Sta ponzando un macchiavello**

**Sì che fremon nella bara  
I relitti di Juvara**

**Ma il famelico architetto  
A Torin vuol dare assetto**

**E già volge su Via Roma  
L'aspra brama e l'ugna indoma**

**Ei vuol prender – qual disdoro!  
Per le corna il vecchio Toro**

**E sciupar, col sol toccarlo,  
Il di dietro del San Carlo.**

**Deh ritorna sui tuoi passi  
Gran Maestro dei compassi**

**Che già basta a far del mal  
L'architetto razional.**

**Figure 12:** 'Piacentini il gran flagello' (Piacentini, the great plague). February 1931. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924-1943 (1977, vol. 8: 86).



In March 1931 the architectural polemic gathered momentum, and a long article signed by Soffici presented a first critical articulation. In twenty-two points, Soffici appeals to the constituent values of Italian civilization: it is necessary to expel all that 'does not feel Italian and is an intrusion of alien spirits and forms' and restore the faith in 'italianità'. Soffici labels reinforced concrete as an 'architecture of non-civilization' and an unequivocal sign of 'imbecility and vulgarity'. By contrast, he advocates the use of marble and stone, which he commends as genuinely local and traditional materials capable of resisting the destructive power of time. For the Tuscan painter and art critic, modernity is the expression of a 'transitory', 'materialist', 'mechanical' and 'imported' civilization. Hyperbolic in tone, Soffici's words sound more an invective than serious criticism, blending together common sense statements and latitudinarian arguments in which modernists are associated with a variety of alien enemies, such as Bolshevics, Jews, Masons and Protestants (Soffici 1931). The two-page text is distributed over four columns and has a pictorial counterpoint in a woodcut and in a satirical cartoon. The first one is a drawing of Piazza Cavour in Livorno, signed by Maccari and occupying the two central columns. The second, entitled 'La Cometa infausta ovvero il Marcello Piacentini incombente'

(The inauspicious comet, or the looming Marcello Piacentini) (Fig. 13), shows a crowd of men and women standing in an Italian historic square and staring in fear at a comet suddenly appearing in a sky full of stars; some of them escape in all directions while the surrounding buildings begin to sway and the top of a tower is about to fall. The equation between contemporary architecture and calamity is explicit. The graphic style of this picture, like that of others that will follow in subsequent issues, recalls the late 19th-century tradition of popular almanacs and woodcuts produced by anonymous self-taught artisans. Maccari saw this language — as the art historian Roberto Longhi would soon notice — as the product of a venerable technique steeped in the Italian tradition, from which he profusely borrowed 'to illustrate the popular moods of a political action in which he was personally engaged' (Longhi in Maccari 1948: 12).

Crucial to Soffici's article are the contrast between the national tradition and a foreign and imported culture, the defence of 'italianità' as an antidote to the perils of an 'intellectual and artistic German, French or American colonization' (Soffici 1931). Since the early 1920s the dialectic between tradition and modernity, national ideals, internationalism and the search for Italian-ness, which



**Figure 13:** 'La cometa infausta ovvero il Marcello Piacentini incombente' (The inauspicious comet, or the looming Marcello Piacentini). March 1931. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 8: 96).



was to be at the heart of cultural debates during fascism, had already triggered a vast discussion in which the most distinguished voices of the architectural profession were involved (Sabatino 2012). In 1921, in an article published in *Architettura e arti decorative*, Piacentini had himself admitted the inferiority of Italy's modern architecture compared to foreign examples. As it is well known, the Gruppo 7, which, in the first of its four statements published in *Rassegna Italiana*, had overtly allied itself with the internationalist cause, would not hesitate subsequently to correct this stance by recognising its attachment to a deeply rooted Italian tradition as well as the necessity for the new architecture 'to maintain a character which is typically ours' (Ciucci 1989: 108).

In the meantime, on March 31, 1931, only a few days after the opening of the Second Exhibition of Rational Architecture inside Bardi's Galleria d'arte, the modernist catastrophe previously evoked by the 'Cometa infausta' reappears in 'Sogno di un giovane architetto' (Dream of a young architect) (Fig. 14). Among a group of buildings in ruins, people run about, throwing open their arms or putting their hands on their heads; everyone looks terrified. In the same issue a cartoon picturing a dressing screen, entitled 'Da P. M. Bardi ognun si guardi' (Beware of Bardi) inveighs against the author of the outrageous photomontage 'Tavolo degli orrori' (Table of horrors)<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 15). Recently unveiled at the Second

Exhibition of Rational Architecture alongside postcards picturing the worst examples of the pre-fascist fogeyism, the photomontage includes Bergamo's civic tower and Brescia's Piazza della Vittoria, both works by Marcello Piacentini (Cennamo 1976: 105–106; Ciucci 1989: 99; Rifkind 35–39, 44–47).

### Bandiera Gialla: *Razionale* on Board

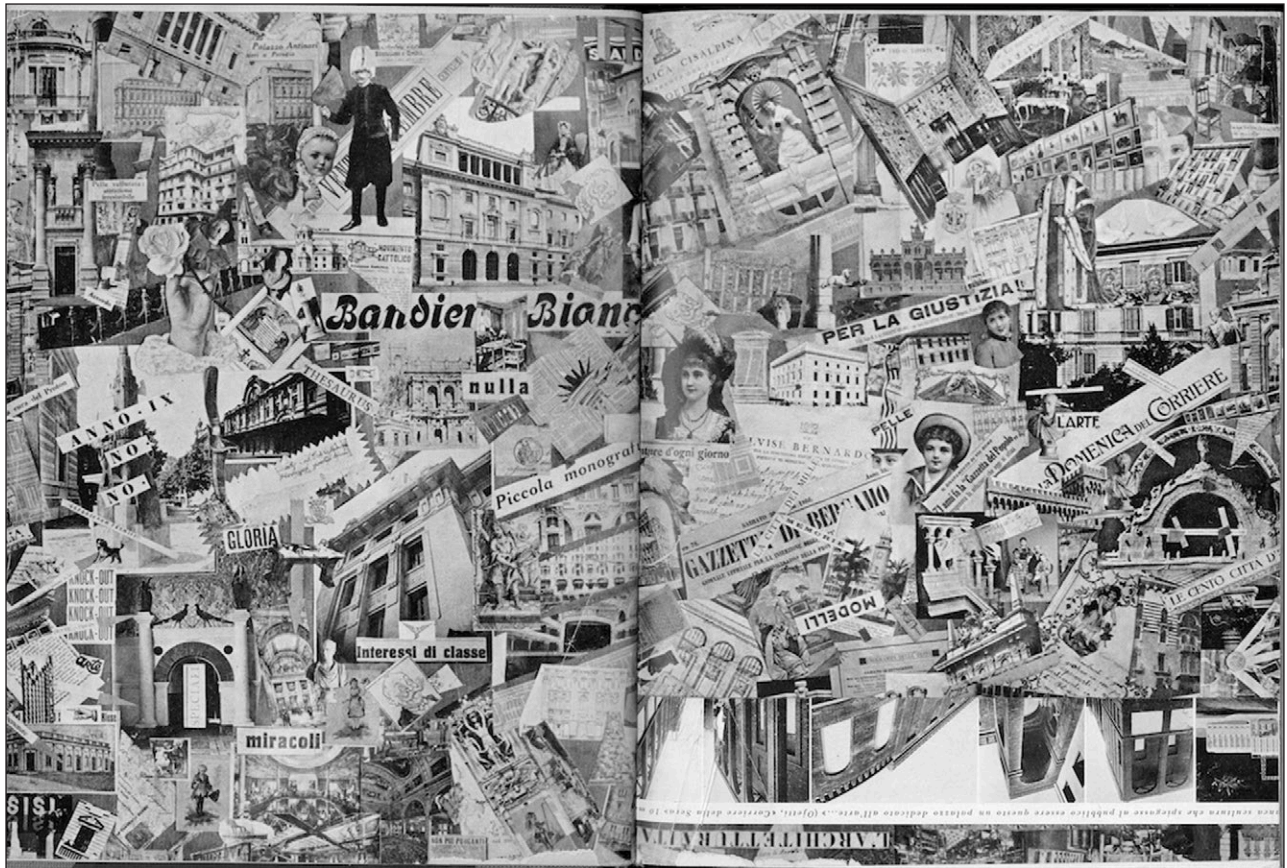
*Il Selvaggio* attacked all those diverse components of the Italian architectural culture that its editors and contributors hastily gathered under the generic umbrella of 'il razionale'. The personification of the polemic as well as the use of all-comprehensive terms to address often different sets of problems gave the enemies a false concreteness. It is difficult to isolate precisely what such categories as 'razionale' really meant to Maccari and his comrades. Among the most direct targets of *Il Selvaggio* was certainly the polemical and political action of Bardi, but the journal's tirades did not spare architects whose works are less easy to fit within the category of rationalism.

A case in point is Piacentini, the obsessive focus of *Il Selvaggio*'s fulminations. Since the First Exhibition of Rational Architecture in 1928, Piacentini's relationship with 'razionalisti' was intertwined with reciprocal admonishments and attacks, such as the ones directed at him by Bardi in 'Tavolo degli orrori' as well as in the *Rapporto sull'architettura*, where Piacentini is epitomized as the



**Figure 14:** 'Sogno di un giovane architetto' (Dream of a young architect). March 1931. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924–1943 (1977, vol. 8: 98).





**Figure 15:** Pier Maria Bardi, 'Tavolo degli orrori' (Table of horrors). June 1933. Reprinted from *Quadrante*, 1(2).

greatest obstacle to the affirmation of the rationalist tendency in Italy (Cennamo 1976: 146, 155). Throughout the 1930s, after achieving a sober neo-traditionalist language, of which Bergamo's civic centre, the Palace of Justice of Messina and the Casa Madre dei Mutilati are emblematic, Piacentini adopted a new pragmatic approach that combined a deep anti-dogmatism with an inclusive architectural language in which modernism and traditionalism coexisted. A clear testimony to this orientation is *Architettura d'oggi*, published in 1930, where the complexity and variety of the contemporary international experiences are reordered in a coherent system, thus prefiguring a true programme for Italy's new architecture (Patetta 1972: 45–52; Lupano 1990: 77–81). It is exactly this role of mediator between opposing tendencies played by Piacentini from the early 1930s that Longanesi attacked when he criticized the architect's opportunist shift towards the most recent strands of international architecture.

A further criticism to the 'Accademico d'Italia' is contained in an article published on April 15, 1931, entitled 'Bandiera Gialla', a reference to the flag flown to announce a ship's arrival from a foreign country requesting customs clearance, a truly appropriate image for what the editors thought of modern architecture (Longanesi 1931a). The text reads: 'Starting from a rhetorical notion of the Roman and the Baroque, the *Piacentinian* style has gradually updated itself to the recent tendencies of rational architecture, German and Dutch, adopting a false character of

tradition and modernity'.<sup>9</sup> At the bottom of the page, a cartoon called 'La pialla dei tre' (The threesome's plane), drawn by Amerigo Bartoli Natinguerra, accompanied by a long rhyme and caption (**Fig. 16**), shows a bust with three necks. It is the reinvention of a monstrous Cerberus and at the same time a gloomy recollection of the Triple Alliance, hinting at the three Italian *accademici*, Armando Brasini, Cesare Bazzani and Marcello Piacentini, wearing the typical fascist 'feluche', in the act of planing down Rome's monumental historic fabric. Various Roman buildings, including the Colosseum, are placed alongside the plane.

On 15 May Longanesi resumed the arguments already aired in April and published a second article (Longanesi 1931b), this time dedicated to Rome's new master plan. As has been amply shown (Ciucci 1989: 81–84), it is in the transformation of the Italian capital since the 1920s that the different cultural components of fascism found a concrete terrain of confrontation. In this scenario, the mediating role of Piacentini was pivotal. Longanesi's attention thus went to the new layout of Piazza Venezia, which he defined as 'the square where the modern city has left its saddest imprints [...] a square typical of a South American republic, of those that are planned after plebiscites and realized thanks to public subscriptions' (Longanesi 1931b: 109). The word-image relation is unequivocal: the writing, evoking emblematic episodes of the city's dramatic past, from the Sack of Rome, which gives the title to the article, to the breach of Porta Pia, is echoed in Longanesi's satirical cartoon picturing the architectural solution for the



**Figure 16:** Amerigo Bartoli Natinguerra, 'La pialla dei tre' (The threesome's plane). April 1931. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924-1943 (1977, vol. 8: 102).



square, where ‘two rows of columns [. . .] are placed alongside Sacconi’s monument, and two dreary seemingly fake fountains hamper the circulation’ (Longanesi 1931b: 109). Thus, in the cartoon (**Fig. 17**), an obelisk surmounted by the head of Piacentini wearing the typical fascist cocked hat is placed at the centre of the gate leading to the square, and on the top of a pompous colonnade awkwardly mimicking Bernini’s St Peter’s square, a series of ‘fasci littori’ replace statues. Longanesi’s hasty analyses of other contemporary Piacentini projects is complemented by the comparison between these solutions and some of the architect’s early designs for Piazza Navona and Campidoglio, whose pictures and reviews had been published in 1916 by the magazine *Emporium* (Angelini 1916). Longanesi concludes, ‘the architecture of Rome does not allow disembowelments: Piacentini instead divides it in lots and in squares, slices it as if it were cheese’ (Longanesi 1931b: 109).

In June 1931 the reconstruction of Turin’s Via Roma is again at the centre of the journal’s attention with an etching introduced as the ‘work of an anonymous engraver to illustrate a popular song of twenty years ago’ (**Fig. 18**). The indication of a third route to be followed in the reconstruction of Turin’s most central thoroughfare, an alternative to the counter project put forward by the young MIAR rationalists and to Piacentini’s solution, dictates the choice of an appropriate artistic genre, rooted in the anonymous works of self-taught Italian artisans.

Various expressive opportunities find place in the magazine. The political and cultural satire, translated into

verses, prose and vignettes, is accompanied by woodcuts and drawings, art criticism, aphorisms and ‘gazzettini’ (chronicles) ironically gossiping on the most recent anecdotes. Especially since 1932, following the magazine’s transfer to Rome, the preference for the rural landscape that had dominated the Tuscan years is complemented by the increasing presence of urban views. With the drawing of ‘Torino, stazione di Porta Susa’, homage to the new journal’s location (Maccari 1932) but published when *Il Selvaggio* had already moved to Rome’s Via del Gambero, the magazine devotes for the first time half a page to an urban landscape. Besides this drawing of Turin, a subject dear to Maccari who will portray this city several other times (**Fig. 19**), especially after 1932, the journal hosts an increasing number of urban views, such as those drawn by Amerigo Bartoli Natinguerra and Orfeo Tamburi (**Fig. 20**).

‘Bandiera Gialla’, inaugurated in April 1931 and soon after interrupted, recommenced on April 1, 1933. An article by Longanesi and Maccari, introduced by a black title on a yellow setting reading ‘Bandiera Gialla: Razionale a bordo’ (Yellow flag: rational on board) (**Fig. 21**), marks a shift in the way the journal responds, by means of a more incisive layout, to the suggestions offered by the national architectural polemics (Longanesi 1933a; Maccari 1933a). The first page is divided into three columns corresponding to three distinct topics: ‘Macchine’, ‘1910=1930’, and ‘Italklinker’. A visually composed argument weaves together the polemic writings and three photographs, respectively picturing models of locomotives, a small



**Figure 17:** Leo Longanesi, ‘La definitiva sistemazione di Roma secondo l’architetto Piacentini’ (The definitive layout of Rome in the idea of architect Marcello Piacentini). May 1931. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 8: 109).



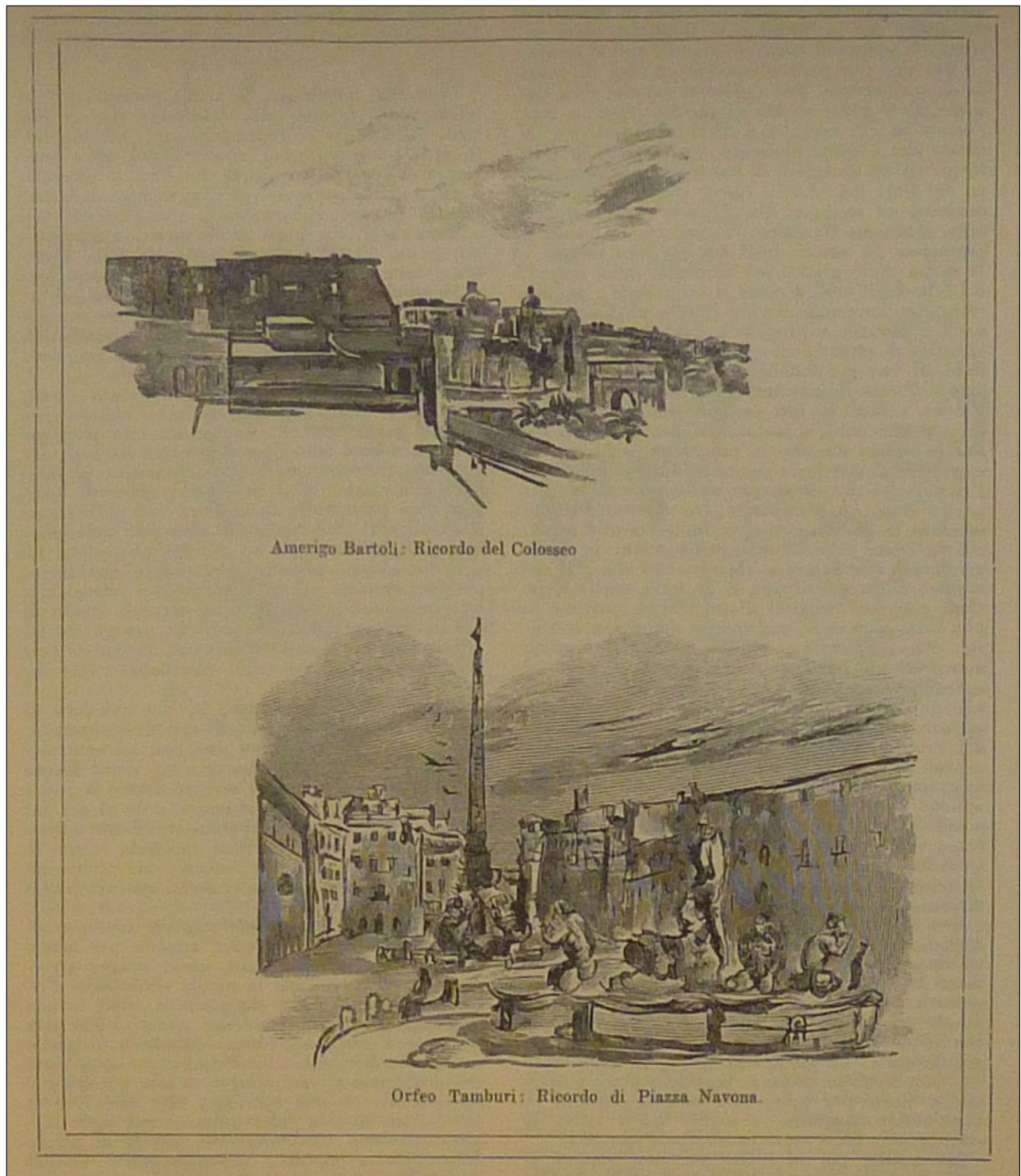


**Figure 18:** 'Come sarà la nuova via Roma a Torino?' (What will the new Via Roma in Turin be like?). June 1931. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 8: 118).



**Figure 19:** 'Il mercato di Porta Palazzo a Torino. Disegno di Mino Maccari' (The market of Porta Palazzo in Turin. Drawing by Mino Maccari). February 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 10: 5).





**Figure 20:** Amedeo Bartoli Natinguerra, 'Ricordo del Colosseo' (Recollection the Colosseum); Orfeo Tamburi, 'Ricordo di Piazza Navona' (Recollection of Piazza Navona). August 1937. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 14: 27).

art-nouveau villa and an anonymous rationalist house. The equivalence '1910=1930' finds an immediate reflection in the text, where we read that 'the *Liberty* and the *razionale* are two enemies worthy of each other and fighting each other in order to keep themselves alive'. In 'Macchine', the analogy between machine and architecture, a recurrent *topos* of the avantgarde discourse and a source of poetic suggestions for artists and architects alike, is the pretext to push the anti-modernist argument

even further. A sequence of paroxysms culminate with the affirmation that 'the rationalist aesthetics takes advantage of machine forms, such as ships, locomotives – but also – cranes, canons, radiators, and insulating antennas' (Longanesi: 1933a). On the second page, again structured on three columns, texts and images define an asymmetrical composition in which two horizontal photographs, positioned in the page's left upper section and showing a school designed by Willem M. Dudok at Hilversum, are



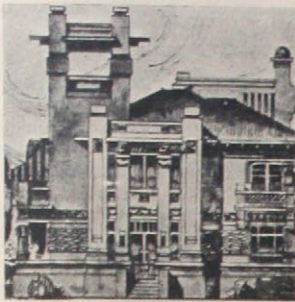
# IL SELVAGGIO

ANNO X, N. 2, 1 APRILE 1933, XI, CENT. 40,

ABBONAMENTO DIECI LIRE.

ROMA VIA FR. CRISPI 10, C. C. P.

## BANDIERA GIALLA: RAZIONALE A BORDO



### MACCHINE

L'estetica razionale tende a valersi delle forme delle macchine, come navi, locomotive, gru, schiacciassoci, cannoni, termosifoni e antenne isolanti. La macchina — e con essa le sue forme — subisce un continuo processo di trasformazione, in relazione ai progressi della tecnica. Accade così, come si può vedere dalle figure che pubblichiamo, che una locomotiva del 1840 ha un aspetto ben diverso da una locomotiva 1930 o 1933, benché la ragione che ha prodotto la macchina sia sempre la stessa.

Far dipendere dunque un'estetica unicamente dalle vicende di una tecnica in progresso, significa legare una stile alla sorte di una utilità che muta. Come una locomotiva 1912 diventa ridicola di fronte a una locomotiva 1930, così una casa razionale 1920 è già ridicola in confronto a una casa razionale 1930. E' una vera corsa al ridicolo. L'errore del razionale è di ispirarsi a certe forme, invece di servire a una società.

E' un fenomeno intellettualistico e null'altro. Quando l'arte evade dall'assoluto e si aggrappa a concetti relativi, ha tradito la sua natura, ha mancato alla sua funzione.

### 1910 = 1930

L'architettura razionale è un'architettura polemica: per trovare una giustificazione a sé stessa ha dovuto cercarsi un avversario nello stile liberty.

Liberty e Razionale sono due nemici, uno degno dell'altro, che si combattono per tenersi in vita. Senza il primo non ha ragioni di vita il secondo.

Il razionalismo è una condotta polemica; il liberty un atteggiamento lirico. Ambedue hanno un vizio di origine: proporsi la ricerca di uno stile attraverso l'applicazione di un luogo comune. Il luogo comune ieri si chiamava *decoro estetico*, oggi *semplicità di linee o comodità*. Si tratta sempre di criteri borghesi che non hanno nulla a che vedere con l'arte, o meglio con l'architettura.

Non è mutata l'architettura, ma un luogo comune; all'orchidea si è sostituito il fico d'india. I nuovi eroi bevono il cocktail, non più menta.

Il razionalismo è lo stile di un'epoca scettica, in crisi, che cerca un'estetica nel *bidet*, solo perché il *bidet* è comodo.

LEO LONGANESI



### ITALKLINKER

E' facile accorgersi che in Italia, in questi tempi, non c'è questione, anche attinente al gusto e all'ordine artistico, che non si trasformi immediatamente in una questione di carattere e di costume. E' il nostro passaggio obbligato. Niente di più naturale. Il nostro organismo, ricostituito, cerca ora e chiede imperiosamente quel che la decadenza aveva esiliato dai suoi bisogni. La salute ha i suoi appetiti. Ora noi abbiamo necessità di carattere e di costume come del pane e dell'aria. E' questo il tema dominante, e non c'è argomento che se ne possa sottrarre; anzi — giacché noi parliamo del nostro punto di vista di fascisti e in sede di Selvaggio, cioè di uno strumento al servizio della Rivoluzione — l'importanza attuale e l'urgenza di ogni argomento va appunto riconosciuta in quanto vi si riferisca e ne presenti un aspetto particolare.

Chiedere un'arte fascista prima ancora che sia formato e definito il gusto dell'epoca, che l'azione politica, sociale ed economica del Fascismo ha iniziato, è come mettere il carro innanzi ai buoi. Volerla vedere, poi, nelle opere che fanno capo a estetiche straniere, connesse intimamente con tradizioni, fatti, mentalità e costumi stranieri, significa rinunciare a priori ai risultati che dalla nostra rivoluzione sono da attendersi e sostituirli con surrogati d'importazione, servendosi di questi come per colmare un vuoto o riparare alla meglio, senza troppa fatica, a chi sa quali gravi lacune.

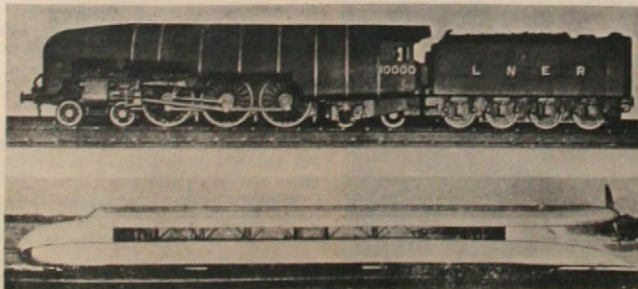


Figure 21: 'Bandiera Gialla. Razionale a bordo' (Yellow flag: rational on board). April 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924-1943 (1977, vol. 10: 9).



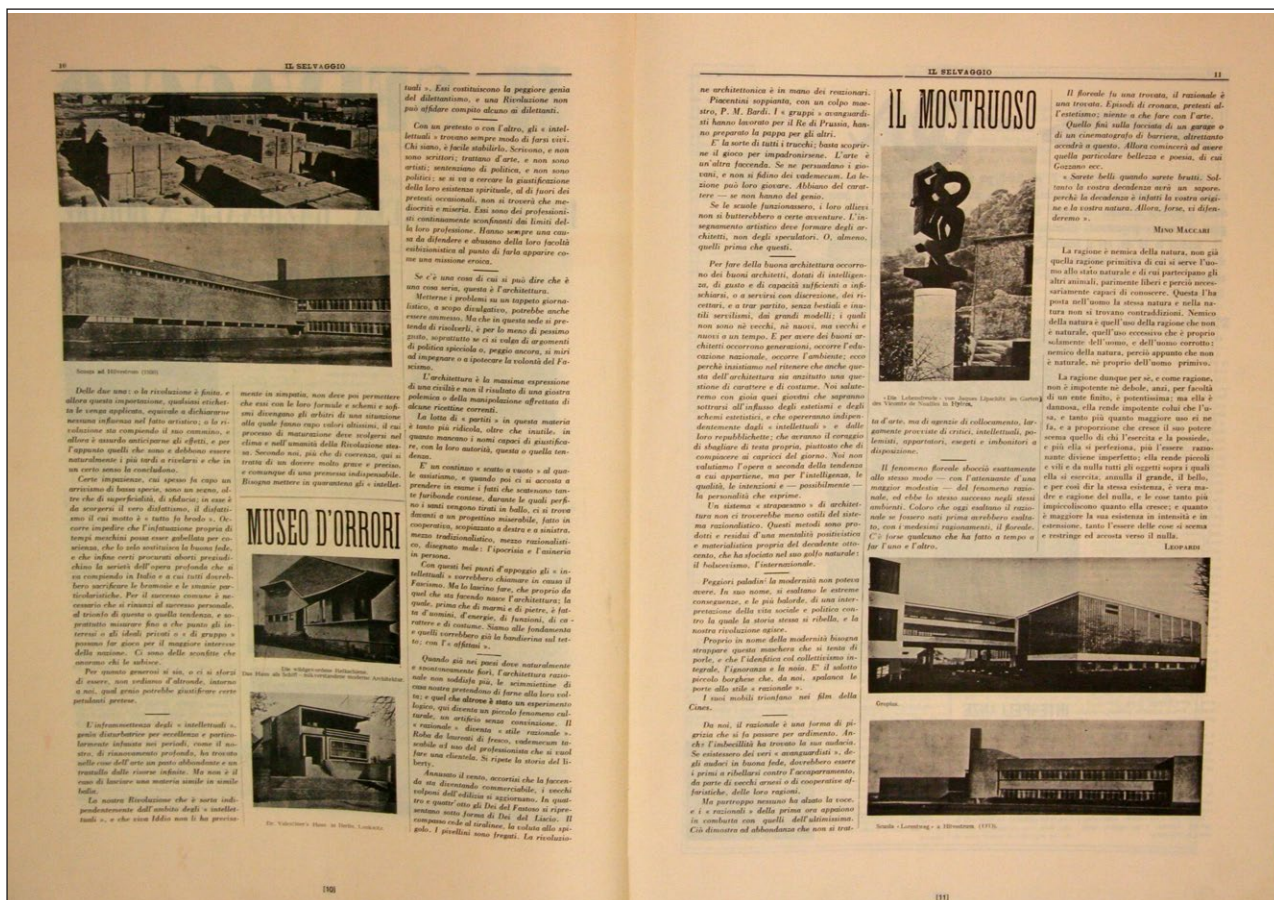
counterpointed by two smaller pictures introduced by the title 'Museo d'orrori' (Museum of horrors). One of these illustrates a modernist villa with a caption in German whose translation reads, 'The T-square gone wild. The house as a boat — modern architecture, misunderstood' (Maccari 1933a: 9) (**Fig. 22**). In the third page a sculpture by the Lithuanian artist Jacques Lipchitz, exhibited outside the Villa de Noailles designed by Robert Mallet Stevens at Hyères, is designated as 'Il mostroso' (The monstrous) (Maccari 1933a: 10); in the page's lower section two horizontal pictures portray Gropius's Bauhaus building and Dudok's school (**Fig. 22**). A passage taken from Giacomo Leopardi's *Della natura degli uomini e delle cose* completes the page.

The fourth and last page deploys three different registers. In the upper part is an invitation calling on the co-founder and director of the magazine *Quadrante*, Pier Maria Bardi, 'to repent of the campaign he has been conducting in favour of rational architecture' ('Diamo tempo 48 ore', 1933). The special characters in which it is printed and the frieze framing it, defined by the stylized images of a fish and a snake, are typographic clichés of the popular illustrated press that Maccari and Longanesi discovered while rummaging in the drawers of old typography workshops (**Fig. 23**). In the centre of the page, the photograph of Emil Fahrenkamp's Shell Haus, rotated 90 degrees and re-christened 'Treppen-Haus'

(The stair-house), is accompanied by an ironic caption written in German (**Fig. 23**). On its left, the editors dedicate one column to reviewing the competition entry for the new Florence railway station by the Tuscan group led by Giovanni Michelucci, summed up as 'a masterpiece in laziness' ('Storia pubblica e storia privata', 1933). On the back page, the antimodernist tension is attenuated by a rural landscape with houses and haystacks, drawn by Achille Lega (**Fig. 24**).

The results of the Florence station competition were to mark the emergence of a new alliance between the older members of the jury and the younger winning candidates, a connection that was to appear soon as a new 'modernist front' of the Italian interwar architectural culture (Ciucci 1989: 136–138). Mussolini's support, proclaimed on June 10, 1934, for the projects of the Tuscan Group as well as for the design of the new town of Sabaudia was to further sanction this relationship, thus reinforcing the assumption that modern architecture was the only appropriate choice for the 'modern fascist state' (Ciucci 1989: 130–131).

Bardi and Persico's reactions to 'Bandiera Gialla' followed promptly in April 1933.<sup>10</sup> For Persico, who, in direct response to Maccari and Longanesi's extensive deployment of images, limited himself to two contrasting pictures of 14th- and 20th-century toilets (**Fig. 25**), both Maccari and Longanesi were 'mediocre figures' sharing the 'hatred for



**Figure 22:** 'Bandiera Gialla. Razionale a bordo: Museo d'orrori - Il mostroso' (Yellow flag: rational on board. Museum of horrors. The monstrous). April 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 10: 10–11).





Diamo tempo 48 ore al signor P. M. Bardi per pentirsi della campagna da lui condotta a favore dell'architettura razionale e della pittura dei supporters, e di farne ampia e pubblica ammenda coi mezzi che riterrà più opportuni, purché siano adeguati allo scopo e proporzionati all'entità del male commesso.

Scadute le 48 ore, ove il nominato Bardi non avesse ottemperato all'ingiunzione di cui sopra, egli verrà trasportato, a sua scelta, a Stoccarda o a Dusseldorf, per trascorrervi gli anni necessari a restituire chiarezza alle sue idee e discrezione alla di lui condotta.

## STORIA PUBBLICA e storia privata

A parer nostro l'unica cosa che valga la pena di essere rilevata a proposito del noto concorso per la stazione di Firenze, è la facilità con cui si è fatta passare per una questione d'arte una semplice faccenda di pratica utilità. Come artisti, noi non possiamo prendere in considerazione il povero progetto fatto in sei, che si è tentato di gabellare per una manifestazione geniale e che rientra in pieno nel regno della mediocrità e dell'impotenza del tardo ottocento. Ma quel che ci ha molto interessato è stata piuttosto la tecnica usata per la « campagna pubblicitaria ». L'abbiamo seguita con una certa attenzione, non senza divertirci. Solite cose del solito mondo degli impresari. Affari che non ci riguardano, salvo la pretesa di compromettere l'arte nuova, e l'abuso dell'aggettivo « fascista ». Su questo punto soltanto non intendiamo rimanere assenti, perché non si tratta più di affari, ma di cose che noi amiamo anteporre agli affari. Facciamo o non facciamo quella stazione, per noi è la stessa cosa, purché non ci vengano a dire che quella roba è espressione d'arte nuova e fascista, prodotto di artisti giovani. Essendo anche noi giovani abbiamo il dovere di respingere questa specie di offesa, formulata in malafede, per ragioni evidentemente tattiche. In quel progetto non c'è infatti un briciolo di audacia né di giovinezza: è un capolavoro di pigrizia.

A nessuno piace, compresi gli intellettuali che l'hanno difeso contro il furor popolare. Mai come in questo caso essi hanno scritto il contrario di quel che pensavano.

Hanno fatto della politica.

Interpellati privatamente, le loro ragioni e giustificazioni fanno cascare le braccia. Non si potrebbe pensare maggior cinismo.

La polemica trionfa sulla buona fede, il partito preso sull'amore di patria. Ma per fortuna, anzi per principio, e per principio fascista, esplicito e perentorio se altri ve ne fu mai, andiamo verso il popolo, non verso gli intellettuali.

Lasciamo dunque fuori causa l'arte in generale, e l'arte fascista in particolare, la quale matura nel tempo fascista, che non dipende dagli orologi frettolosi delle cooperative professionistico-edilizie.

Questo non è un capitolo della storia dell'arte italiana, è un capitolo della storia di Piacentini.



Das «Treppen» haus. — Um den Fensterputzern die Arbeit zu erleichtern, kam ein Architekt auf den Einfall, ein Haus terrassenförmig zu bauen, so dass der Fensterputzer jedes Stockwerk bequem erreichen kann.

## INTERPELLANZE

L'appunto che il « Doganiere » di Critica Fascista fa a una nostra interpellanza relativa all'ottimo libro di Mussolini sul fratello, ed a certe presunte incongruenze letterarie ed artistiche, è un esempio tipico del modo leggero, per non dir altro, di trattare le questioni importanti, proprio della nostra stampa, anche della buona.

In quella interpellanza si faceva osservare in sostanza, che ogni vera civiltà deve aver un'unità di stile, e che era stupefacente notare come da

noi si trascurasse questa verità, e anzi si negasse col fatto; e ciò in nome del Fascismo, che vuol essere invece una vera forma di civiltà.

Il Doganiere, dopo aver messo in dubbio che le manifestazioni cui l'interpellanza alludera siano sconcezze e di pura derivazione straniera (stranierissima, rincalziamo noi, e del peggiore « stupido » e « decadente » ottocentismo, per giunta) esce in una curiosa proposta, e cioè di domandarci « se la nostra civiltà italiana e fascista sia capace di dare espressioni nuove e genuine, conformi al suo spirito e alla sua tradizione ».

Ma, perbacco! Ne dubita forse il Doganiere? Noi, dal momento che si tratta di civiltà, e di civiltà fascista, ne siamo sicuri; fedeli alla nostra verità. E nel libro di Mussolini vedremo appunto un esempio di espressione nuova e genuina conforme allo spirito e alla tradizione italiana e fascista.

Come nella Vita di Arnaldo vediamo, del resto, esempi uguali negli scritti del Duce in genere, ed anche di molti altri scrittori ed artisti italiani. Per fortuna!

Senonché lo stesso Doganiere, dicendo più avanti che « non rinnegare una grande tradizione di civiltà, non vuol dire affatto essere tradizionalisti; avere un senso classico della realtà non significa fare del neoclassicismo » fa davvero vedere che facciamo a non intenderci.

Dare mai, nell'interpellanza in parola, si propone, infatti, di sostituire alle pagliacciate pseudomoderne il « tradizionalismo » o il « neoclassicismo » (altre pagliacciate), o si confondono comunque questi dueismi con la tradizione e la classicità, intesa, la prima, come fedeltà allo spirito profondo della stirpe, e, la seconda, come spontanea e perfetta espressione del reale?

E chi di noi si è mai illuso di poter ripercorrere le strade abbandonate? Ripercorre strade abbandonate Mussolini nell'ultimo suo libro, ragione dell'inchiesta?

Legga bene, con seria attenzione, il Selvaggio, il nostro amico Doganiere: è sta al fatto.

L'INTERPELLANTE

## Malintesi del corsivista

Evoluzione. Politica morale e civile.

Una moltitudine di artisti, ingegneri, architetti, rimane negli studi a fabbricare opere e progetti a chilometri, per esultare concetti e forme che in tempi di madonna Massoneria erano accettate come autentici capolavori. E l'evoluzione? Si fa presto a condannare, chi in arte, sa onore. Fascismo = arditismo e chi osa, riuscirà a trovare un'espressione artistica migliore e il vero volto del Fascismo.

(Dalla « Voce di Bergamo »).

## L'ITALIANO

ha dedicato al cinematografo un numero doppio con interessantissime fotografie e articoli. Vi si legge una chiara e precisa storia della produzione italiana, americana, russa e tedesca. E' la prima pubblicazione che da noi smuova le acque stagnanti di questo genere di arte e di tecnica.



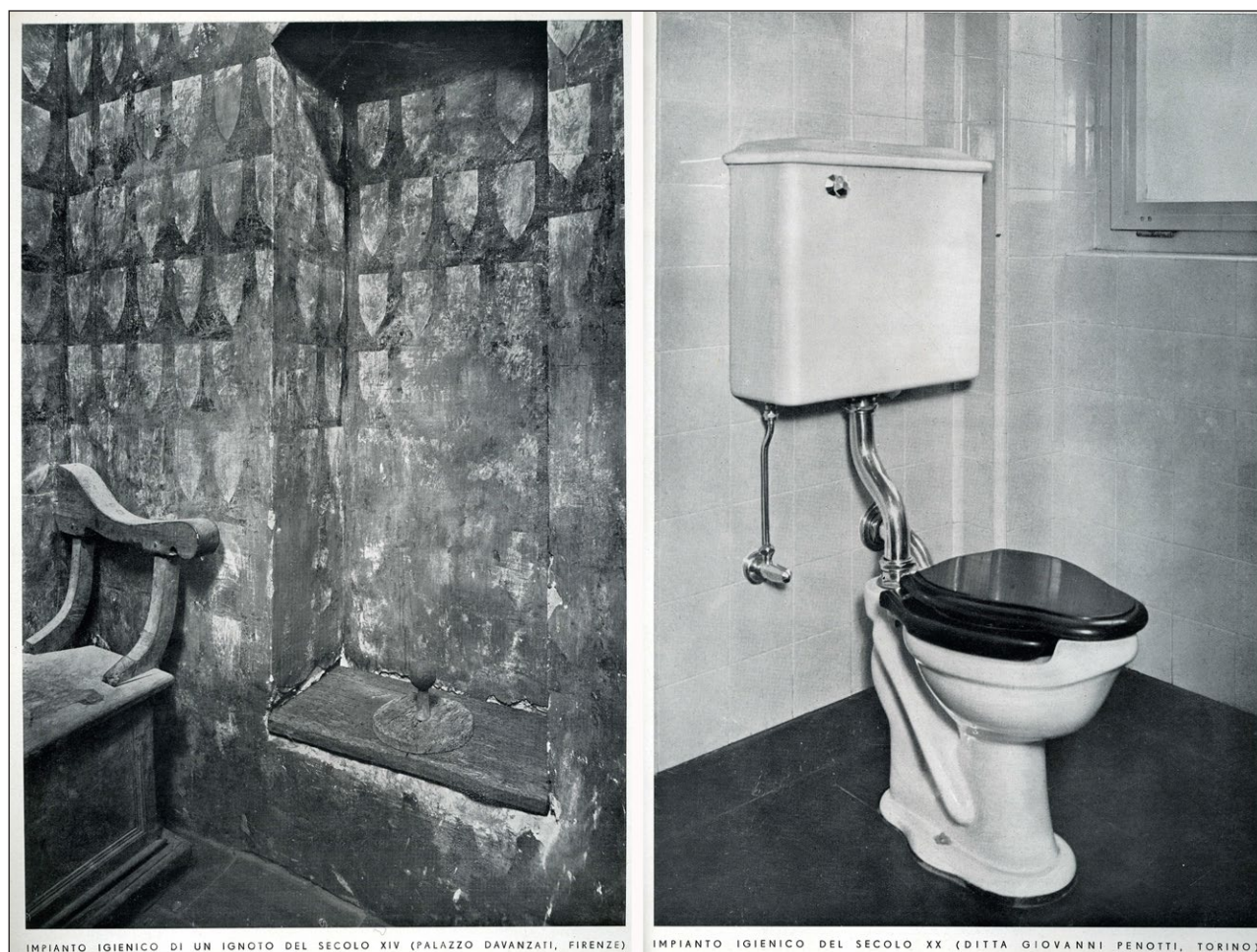
**Figure 23:** 'Das 'Treppen' Haus — Um den Fensterputzern die Arbeit zu erleichtern, kam ein Architekt auf den Einfall, ein Haus terrassenförmig zu bauen, so dass der Fensterputzer jedes Stockwerk bequem erreichen kann' (The 'stair' house. To facilitate the window cleaner's job, the architect had the idea to build the house as a stair so that the window cleaner can easily reach each floor). April 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924-1943 (1977, vol. 10: 12).





**Figure 24:** 'Disegno di Achille Lega' (Drawing by Achille Lega). April 1931. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 8: 104).





**Figure 25:** Illustrations to Edoardo Persico's article 'Per Maccari e Longanesi', showing two contrasting toilets. April 1933. Reprinted from *Casabella* 6(4): 24–25.

intelligence and the reactionary passion', and were not to be taken seriously (Persico 1933a).

### Concrete Disarmed: *Architettura e buoi dei paesi tuoi*

The polemic unfolds in the subsequent issue of May 15, 1933, in a new series entitled 'Il cemento disarmato' (Longanesi 1933b), a witty montage of jokes, rhymes and photos mocking the 'new architecture' epitomized by the use of reinforced concrete, the Italian *cemento armato*.

The series' title, 'Cemento disarmato' (concrete disarmed), is accompanied by two subtitles that adapt popular Italian rhymes to concurrent architectural themes: 'Architettura e buoi dei paesi tuoi' ([Choose] buildings and cattle from your own town), which is a reworked version of 'Moglie e buoi dei paesi tuoi' ([Choose] wife and cattle from your own town), and 'Di razionale ogni scherzo vale' (With *razionale* any trick goes), from the popular 'A carnevale ogni scherzo vale' (With carnival any trick goes). The article on the fifth page (Fig. 26), as was already customary for the journal, is printed in various typographic styles, structured in four columns and furnished by four black and white images. In the upper left, a vertical photo occupying two columns portrays the backyard of a run-down working class condominium, captioned as 'Houses in Rome: aspects of unintentional *razionale*'. On the right, a cartoon showing two modern buildings,

from which spring a human bust and head, is entitled 'Specchio dell'architettura' (Mirror of architecture). In the page's lower section is an engraving captioned 'Il senso dell'architettura nelle stampe popolari' (The meaning of architecture in the popular prints), whose style programmatically echoes that of late 19th-century illustrated journals. In the last column, a picture taken from an old issue of *Emporium* illustrates Bergamo's Banca d'Italia, an earlier work of Piacentini. Two photos of 'urinoirs publiques' (public urinals) and 'acqui' (water sinks) published in the following page provide further samples of 'razionale involontario' (unintentional rational) and are followed by pictures of Dudok's buildings at Hilversum.

In the following issue, a couple of rhymes accompany the series 'Il cemento disarmato' (Longanesi 1933c). The first one reads, 'Facil successo/Porta al decesso' (Easy success/Leads to decease), once again referring to Piacentini. In the first column, a picture taken by Longanesi portrays an anonymous house in Rome and is followed by a sentence taken from Leopardi's *Zibaldone*. In the second column, a brief text entitled 'Specchio dell'architettura' introduces a review of earlier works by Piacentini. Alongside the text, in the following page, a drawing of a bridge and small houses by Pietro Bugiani and a landscape by Mino Maccari bring the polemic back to the already familiar language of rural scenes and still lives frequently featured by the journal.



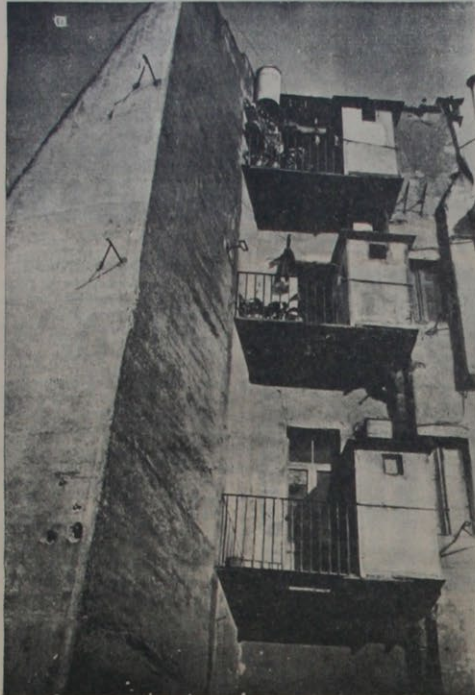
IL SELVAGGIO

21

# IL CEMENTO DISARMATO

Architettura e buoi - Dei paesi tuoi

Di Razionale - Ogni scherzo vale



Case a Roma. Aspetti di «razionale» involontario

## PREMESSE

Bisognerà dunque preoccuparsi di difendere la modernità da quanti ne vogliono far sinonimo d'imbecillità e di ciarlataneria.

Risaliamo alle origini, cioè all'atteggiamento spirituale da cui provengono certe correnti estetiche, e troveremo come la loro diversità non sia che un'apparenza, e come l'una, negando l'altra, riesca a negare se stessa. Così le ragioni del «razionale», mentre sembra che siano rivolte a distruggere quelle che giustificano il «liberty», se le valutiamo come espressione di un atteggiamento spirituale, si scopre che provengono da una stessa origine, e da un comune errore, che consiste nel pretendere di togliere all'arte il suo carattere assoluto. Il «grazioso» e il «pratico» sono infatti concetti relativi, elementi da cui l'arte non dipende affatto.

Né l'uno né l'altro possono costituire il fondamento di un'estetica. L'uno e l'altro dipendono da una stessa retorica d'ordine inferiore.

L'errore comune al liberty e al razionale consiste nella pretesa di trasformare alcuni concetti relativi, i

quali come tali non sono affatto spregevoli, in concetti assoluti. Una fra le tante prove che si possono dare della loro fallacia è questa: che chiunque, senz'essere artista, può creare un capolavoro dell'una o dell'altra specie.

Il valore del «razionalismo» architettonico non esiste, se si astragga dalla sua portata sociale e politica. Il concetto di «casa» è sostituito, per esempio, dall'altro concetto «macchina per abitare».



Il senso dell'architettura nelle stampe popolari

A questi due concetti fanno capo due modi ben diversi di intendere la vita sociale.

Accettandosi l'estetica razionalista, bisogna accettare necessariamente lo spirito che la giustifica, e ammetterne il primato civile. Noi, per conto nostro, non siamo affatto disposti a una simile, gravissima capitolazione, né a condividere la responsabilità di chi la favorisce. Essendo noi italiani.

Quel che più ripugna nel tardivo dilagare di queste formulette da noi, non è la facilità con cui chiunque se ne è impossessato, ma il compromesso col quale «si è tentato di conciliarle con le stesse nostre tradizioni, e la timidezza con cui se ne fa uso. Ci fosse almeno il coraggio di portarle fino alle loro ultime conseguenze, la loro portata apparirebbe chiara. Ma qui il «razionale» è usato nella maniera più meschina, e cioè come concessione alla moda, tanto «per essere al corrente». Interpretazione provinciale e cafonesca. E' l'eterno fenomeno piccolo borghese. Tutto passa attraverso il salotto, e ne riceve l'impronta.

«Bisogna far luogo a ogni esperimento», affermano i difensori del razionale, con l'aria di tagliar la testa al toro. Principio squisitamente liberale. E perché allora non facemmo luogo all'esperimento bolscevico?

Quanto più un popolo è ricco di storia, di gloria e di vita propria, tanto meno si presterà alle avventure e agli esperimenti politici, militari, sociali, estetici ecc. Al contrario, i popoli senza storia o in decadenza li accettano incondizionatamente ed entusiasticamente, non avendo nulla da perdere.

La nazione che ha delle proprie ragioni storiche una salda e profonda coscienza, che ha insomma una verità a cui credere e da cui trarre i motivi della propria esistenza civile e i principi da trasmettere di generazione in generazione, non cerca affannosamente altre verità, perché non ne ha bisogno. Attraverso le sue rivoluzioni, essa non chiede l'aiuto, ma esprime la propria verità.



## Specchio dell'Architettura

L'architettura del 1890 ad oggi non ha fatto altro che proseguire la retorica, il gusto, gli affari e le macchine pretese della terza Italia.

Si concepi l'Italia come un vergognoso paese da rifare da capo a fondo; si ripudiarono alcuni secoli della sua storia per accettare solo quelli che meglio potevano ispirare una politica massonica; invasati di riforme e di boria nazionale, avversari allo spirito cattolico, i maestri del secondo rinascimento procedono solo con la forza dei principi, delle polemiche giornalistiche, dei duelli, delle richieste parlamentari e delle riforme scolastiche e penali. Perduto il senso di una storia antica si perde



naturalmente anche quello della realtà. L'architettura diventò una questione di edilizia; i consigli di amministrazione, le giunte comunali, il ministero dei Lavori pubblici, le casse di risparmio, gli enti e cooperative inaugurarono il glorioso stile del tiralline, dell'inchiostro di china, dei concorsi a premio e dei manuali Vallardi.

Da quel giorno si cominciò a discorrere di «necessità», di «utilità» di «esigenze» e l'arte passò in seconda linea.

Per scrivere la storia della nostra architettura moderna, occorre ritornare a quei giorni e seguire i nuovi architetti fin dal loro primo apparire.

Marcello Piacentini nel 1916 costruiva il Palazzo della Banca d'Italia che qui riproduciamo; sono trascorsi appena 17 anni: quanta strada ha fatto da allora e dopo così brillanti esordi l'illustre uomo?

La rivista *Emporium* (N. 253, Volume XLIII), a proposito del nuovo palazzo, scriveva: «E' sorto recentemente a Bergamo ed è opera della dell'architetto Marcello Piacentini. Do-

**Figure 26:** Leo Longanesi, 'Il cemento disarmato' (Concrete disarmed). May 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio*: 1924-1943 (1977, vol. 10: 21). Case a Roma. Aspetti di 'razionale' involontario' (Houses in Rome. Aspects of unintentional rational); 'Il senso dell'architettura nelle stampe popolari' (The meaning of architecture in the popular prints); 'Specchio dell'architettura' (Mirror of architecture); the Banca d'Italia in Bergamo by Marcello Piacentini.



*Il Selvaggio* was nurtured by heterogeneous visual repertoires. For the August 15, 1933 cover, as an introduction to a passage taken from Francesco Algarotti's architectural treatise, Longanesi imagines an architectural *capriccio* in which real objects and fictitious elements are placed alongside each other to give shape to a surreal composition: an architect with raised arms is standing in front of the Spanish Steps at Trinità dei Monti. But instead of the church with its towers, the scene is pictured against the backdrop of two smoking chimneystacks, emblems of a much-despised industrialist aesthetics (**Fig. 27**). The invective of 'concrete disarmed' continues in the second

August issue with an article lampooning the names of new synthetic materials and inveighing against the modernist propaganda and its recurrent figures (Maccari 1933b). The editors publish a detail of a rationalist building whose location and author are not made explicit: the picture is actually borrowed from the March 1933 issue of *Domus* ('La villa dello scultore Tedesco-Rocca', 1933) and shows the western loggia of a villa designed by the architect Arrigo Tedesco Rocca in Alassio, which the editors indicate as a symptomatic example of rationalism's constructive irrationality that 'transforms stone into *papier maché*'. On the same page, Longanesi's pictures add further entries



**Figure 27:** 'Progetto per una sistemazione razionale della Trinità Dei Monti. Disegno di Longanesi, linoleum di Maccari' (Design for a rational layout of Trinità Dei Monti. Drawing by Longanesi, linocut by Maccari). August 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 10: 33).



to a possible catalogue, this time virtuous, of rationalism *avant la lettre* that includes Genoa's Lantern and Venice's iron bridges. At the bottom of the page, a photo of an old rubbish cart with a long caption entitled 'Immondizie' (Garbage) (**Fig. 28**) brings the man on the street's attention back to simple questions of public decorum and decency, a preoccupation that around the same years Longanesi addressed in the pages of *L'Italiano*, as well as in the bi-weekly *Omnibus* (Bolzoni 1996; Andreoli and De Leo 2006).

Persico's immediate reaction to these repeated affronts appears on the August–September issue of *Casabella*, where the architectural critic nicknames Maccari as 'Maccarone', in homage to those Italians 'without alphabet and without trade that seek fortune beyond the Alps'. He labels *Il Selvaggio* 'an intolerable document of ill faith'; while the magazine had been initially inspired by such illustrious satirical models as *Simplicissimus* or *Il Mondo Illustrato*, it had fallen, Persico thought, into banal rhetoric (Persico 1933b).

The idea that the *razionale* already existed long before it was codified by Bardi, Persico and Pagano, in the 19th-century patrimony of textile workshops, warehouses, iron bridges and slaughterhouses, is made explicit by an etching published on September 30 and entitled 'I parenti poveri' (The poor relatives) (**Fig. 29**). The image, featuring an anonymous unostentatious 19th-century warehouse crowned by a smoking chimneystack, is proposed as evidence that 'the *razionale* has always existed and never bothered anyone until it pretended to become an aesthetics' ('I parenti poveri', 1933). The anti-modernist polemic finds further expression in a passage taken from Francesco Algarotti's *Saggio sopra l'architettura*, introduced by a drawing of Leo Longanesi translated into a linocut by Maccari (**Fig. 30**), where, alongside the portrait of the celebrated Venetian writer, a bizarre landscape of skyscrapers and modern bathroom fixtures is completed by classical architectural fragments and ruins. A few pages later, a new episode of 'Il cemento disarmato' generically equates the 'awkward piacentinian henhouses' to the 'bonnets, cages and tubes that the building cooperatives of rationalism spread here and there in Italy' (Maccari 1933c). As a comment to this umpteenth invective, the journal published the cartoon 'Tempesta barocca sul razionale' (Baroque storm on the *razionale*) (**Fig. 31**), where a stormy sky looming above a modern cityscape is populated by a congregation of different characters. An angel plays a trumpet, another holds a burning heart in his hands and throws thunderbolts at the city below, while a third blows wind onto the buildings. As an effect of this action the city's structures begin to sway or fall, while a group of tiny people runs across an open space toward a car.

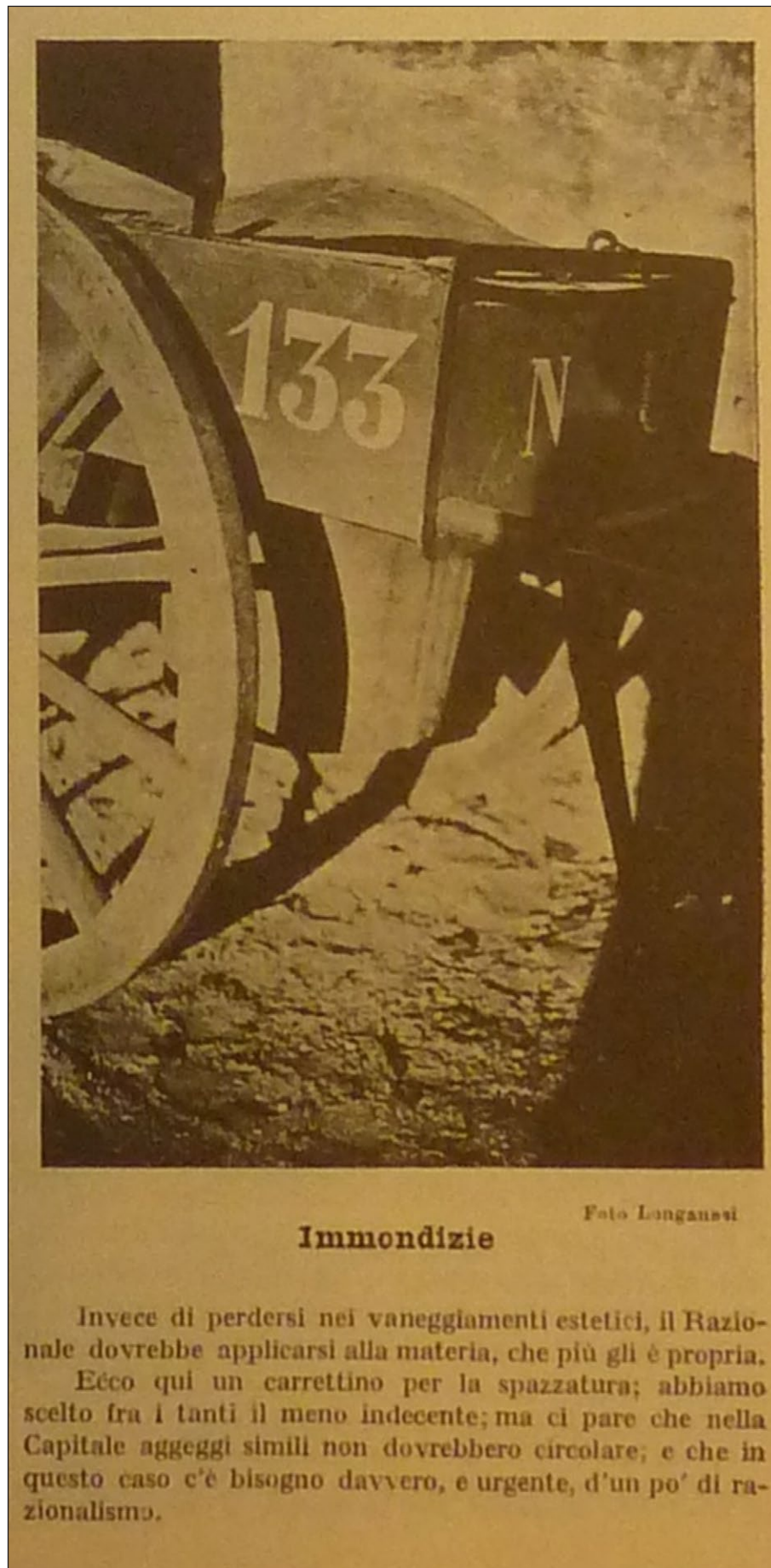
After 1933, cartoons in colour and in increasingly larger dimensions begin to prevail over other expressive registers of the architectural polemic. This tendency is confirmed by the cover of the issue for February 15, 1934. The upper half is occupied by Maccari's 'Pare che il razionale non ti abbia portato bene, o Carlo Marx!' (It seems that *razionale* did not bring you luck, oh Karl Marx!) (**Fig. 32**). In the midst of the Austrian Civil War between socialist and conservative forces, *Il Selvaggio* published a cartoon where a man reproaches

the German philosopher, who is lying exhausted on the ground, the famous modernist Viennese building bearing his name falling onto him. The September 30, 1934, issue, published while the discussion on the Palazzo del Littorio competition (Cresti 1989 176–88; Etlin 1991: 426–36) was still ongoing, is particularly worthy of notice. The competition jury, formed by Piacentini, Bazzani, Brasini and others, was regarded with suspicion by Bardi. In a well-known article (Bardi 1934) and three satirical photo-montages published in *Quadrante* (**Figs. 33, 34 and 35**), Bardi harshly criticizes the majority of the entrants and warns about damage to the archaeological zone at the hands of the state (Rifkind 2012: 163–66). In an article entitled 'Dal vecchio al nuovo testamento' (From the old to the new testament) (1934), *Il Selvaggio* traces the descent of architectural competitions from Sacconi's monument to Vittorio Emanuele II (1885–1911) to Piacentini's public commissions, and denounces the inevitable ageing of the 'rationalist formulas'. The article is illustrated by Maccari's etching of a condensed visual inventory of architectural modernism: a transatlantic oceanliner, a tower, and the spiral volume of a long modern building, an exaggerated version of Mario Ridolfi, Vittorio Cafiero and Ernesto La Padula's entry to the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio (**Fig. 36**). On the same page the editors resurrect some of the nation's forgotten memories and publish what the authors describe as a further, neglected 19th-century ancestor of *razionale*. The image (**Fig. 36**, top right) of a cubic stepped tower, articulated into regular geometric grids of vertical pillars and horizontal beams, is one of the 293 entries for the Vittoriano, which an old book by Carlo Dossi, cited by Maccari, included among the many architectural follies generated by the competition (Dossi 1884).

On June 10, 1934, on the occasion of the public reception given to the architects of Sabaudia and of the Florence railway station at Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini also expressed his admiration for the 'beautiful church' of Cristo Re in Rome, a work by Piacentini, describing it as 'perfectly respondent to the spirit and to the scope' (Nicoloso 2008: 108). In the November issue, *Il Selvaggio* published a cartoon in which five architects dressed as priests and wielding rifles similar to church candles are lined up as an armed guard in front of the church (**Fig. 37**). The project can be seen as a true test case of Piacentini's inclusivist attitude, marking his shift from a neo-traditional language towards a modern and more updated idiom, and the cartoon alludes to the many variants before the definitive version was reached; the same church was the focus of another humorous note published four years later (Gazzettino 1938).

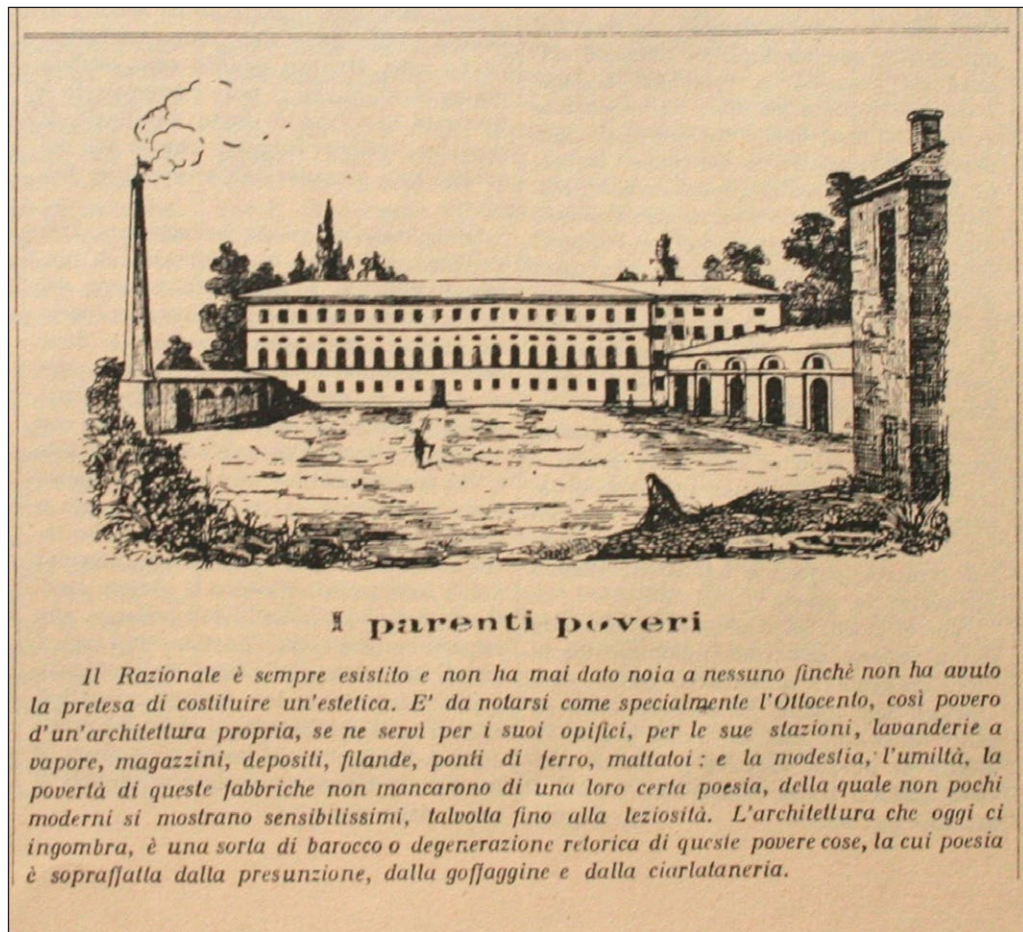
The last episode of 'Il cemento disarmato' sanctioning the inexorable failure of *razionale*, which has 'turned itself into a manual for speculative and master builders', is entrusted to Manlio Malabotta. His article warns of the imminent demolition of Trieste's Piazza Oberdan and calls attention to the urgent need to include the despised 19th-century architectural patrimony in the national catalogue of buildings worthy of preservation (Malabotta 1935). Longanesi's picture of an unfinished and shabby wall of a Roman block of flats, the last example of 'unintentional' rationalist architecture, closes the page.





**Figure 28:** 'Immondizie. Foto Longanesi' (Garbage). August 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924-1943* (1977, vol. 10: 35).





**Figure 29:** 'I parenti poveri' (The poor relatives). September 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 10: 43).



**Figure 30:** 'Saggio sopra l'architettura di Francesco Algarotti. Disegno di Longanesi. Linoleum di Maccari' (Essay on architecture by Francesco Algarotti. Drawing by Longanesi, linocut by Maccari). September 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924–1943* (1977, vol. 10: 45).



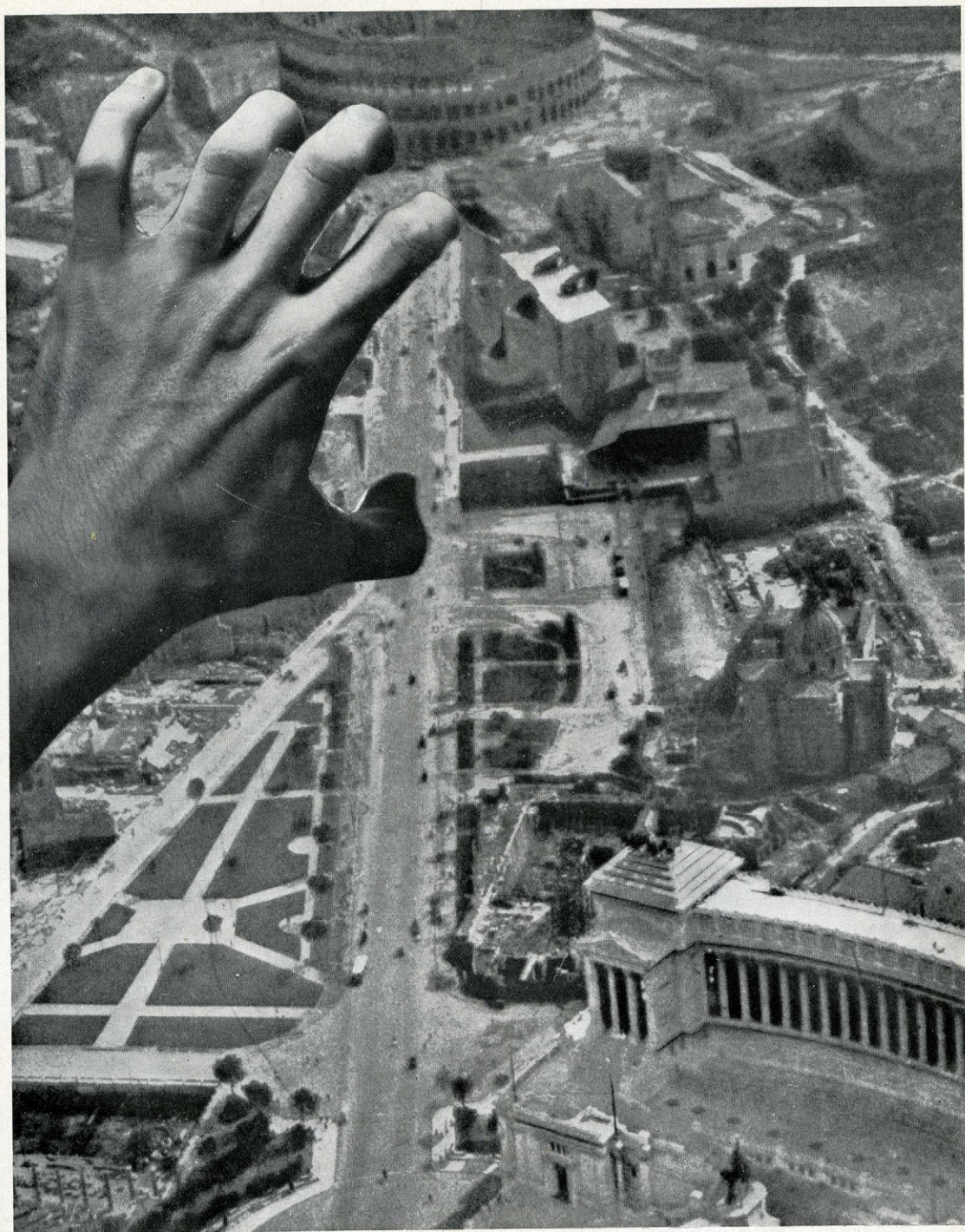


**Figure 31:** 'Tempesta barocca sul razionale. Disegno di Longanesi. Linoleum di Maccari' (Baroque storm on the rational. Drawing by Longanesi, linocut by Maccari). October 1933. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924-1943* (1977, vol. 10: 51).



**Figure 32:** 'Pare che il razionale non ti abbia portato bene, o Carlo Marx!' (It seems that the rational did not bring you luck, oh Karl Marx!). February 1934. Reprinted from *Il Selvaggio: 1924-1943* (1977, vol. 11: 81).



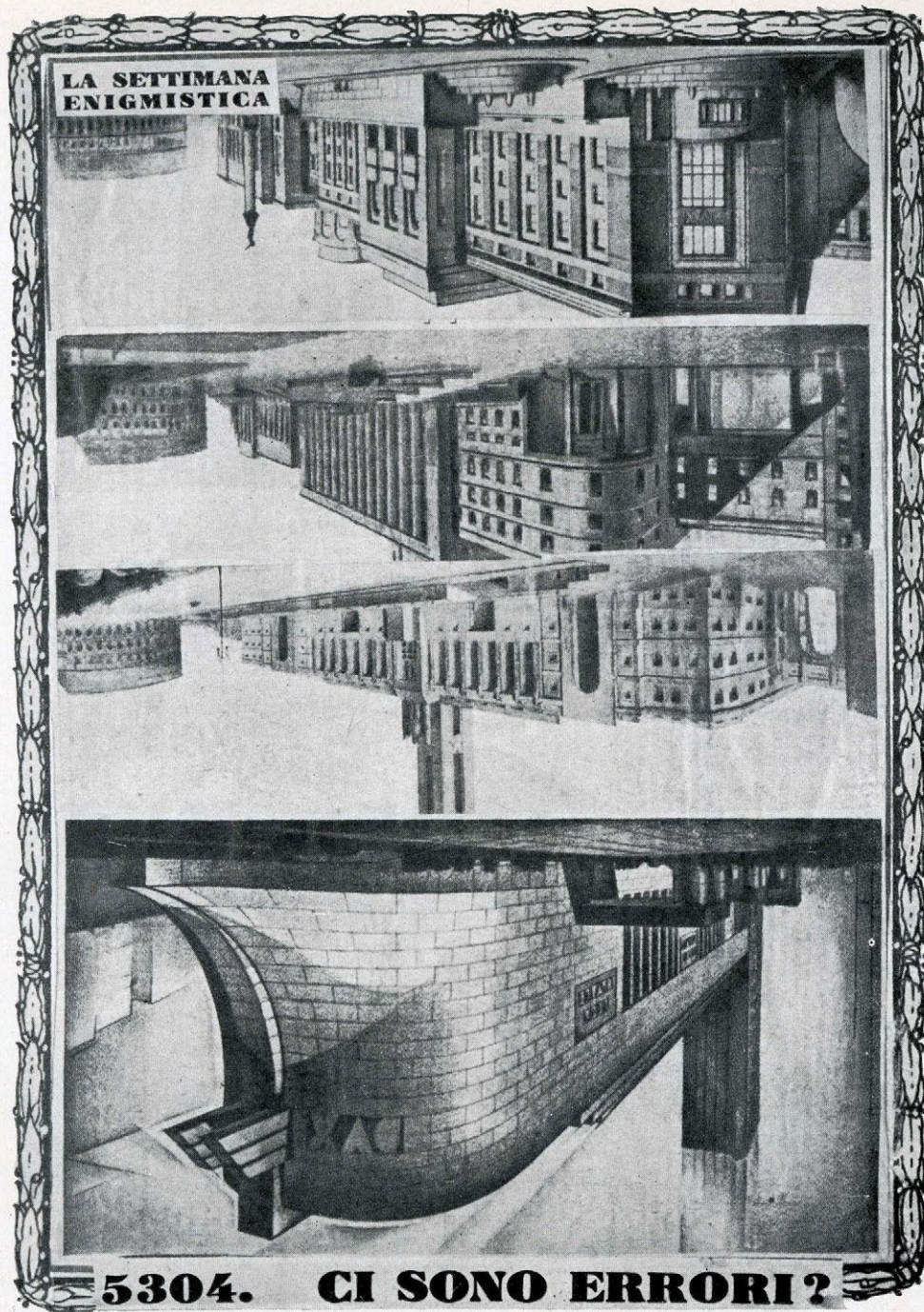


*Q u e s t o   n o n   l o   p e r m e t t e r e m o   ( C o m p o s i z i o n e   d i   P . M . B . )*

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**Figure 33:** Pier Maria Bardi, 'Questo non lo permetteremo' (This we will not allow). Photomontage. October 1934. Reprinted from *Quadrante*, 2(18): 7.

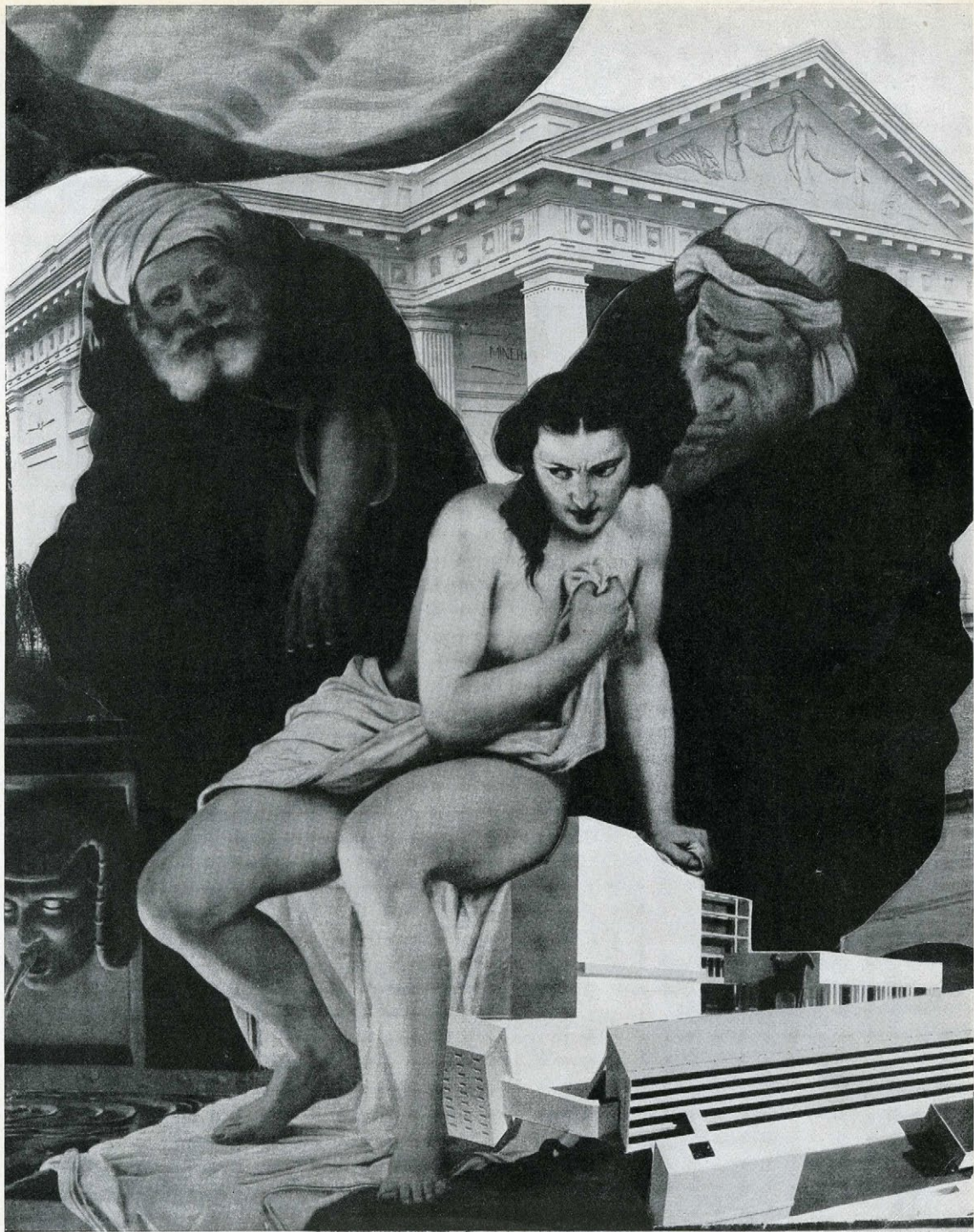




*Un forte numero di concorrenti ha presentato al Concorso per il Palazzo del Littorio, progetti dalle più strane sagome. Sembra che molti abbiano lavorato per fornire materiale ai volontari che si dedicano alla scoperta degli errori nelle tavole dei settimanali (Composizione di P. M. B.)*

**Figure 34:** Pier Maria Bardi, 'La settimana enigmistica. Ci sono errori?' (Weekly Italian puzzle magazine. Is there any error?). Photomontage. October 1934. Reprinted from *Quadrante*, 2(18): 11.





*Susanna (la nuova architettura) ed i Vecchioni (Composizione di P. M. B.)*

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**Figure 35:** Pier Maria Bardi, 'Susanna (la nuova architettura) ed i Vecchioni'. (Susanna (the new architecture) and the Elders). Photomontage. October 1934. Reprinted from *Quadrante*, 2(18): 15.