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Oberon, Turin’s Quicksand And Other Stories: Sneers and Diversions of the Young Mollino and his Circle

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Oberon, Turin’s Quicksand And Other Stories: Sneers and Diversions of the Young Mollino and his Circle / Rosso, M.. - In: RA. REVISTA DE ARQUITECTURA. - ISSN 1138-5596. - ELETTRONICO. - 27(2025), pp. 44-57.

Availability:
This version is available at: 11583/3005185 since: 2025-11-17T08:19:07Z

Publisher:
Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra

Published
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(Article begins on next page)

16 November 2026

Revista de Arquitectura

Escuela de Arquitectura
Universidad de Navarra
ISSN: 1138-5596
ISSN-e: 2254-6332

RA

Revista de Arquitectura

Escuela de Arquitectura
Universidad de Navarra

Número 27 – 2025
Pamplona, España
Año de inicio / Start year
1998
Periodicidad / Periodicity
Anual / Annual
ISSN
1138-5596
DL
NA 15-1998

RA

Just for Laughs. An Introduction to the Many, Multi-faceted Interactions between Architecture and Humour / Just for Laughs. Breve introducción a las muchas y multifacéticas interacciones entre arquitectura y humor

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Diego Galar: 02, 04, 06, 08
Edita / Edited By
Servicio Publicaciones Universidad de Navarra - 31080 Pamplona
Impresión / Printing
Gráficas Castuera
Distribución / Distribution
Distribution Art Books - T. (34) 881 879 662 / www.distributionartbooks.com

Depósito Legal
NA 15-1998
ISSN
1138-5596
ISSN-e
2254-6332
Precio / Price
40 Euros
Periodicidad / Periodicity
Anual / Yearly

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Escuela de Arquitectura
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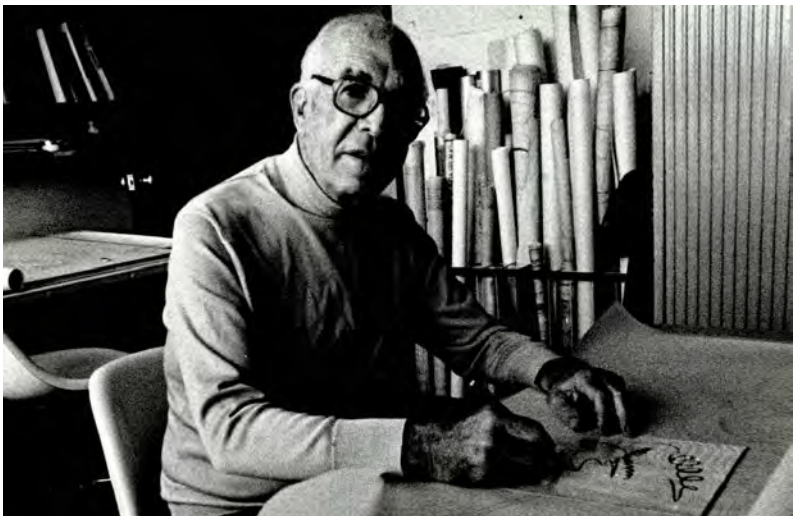

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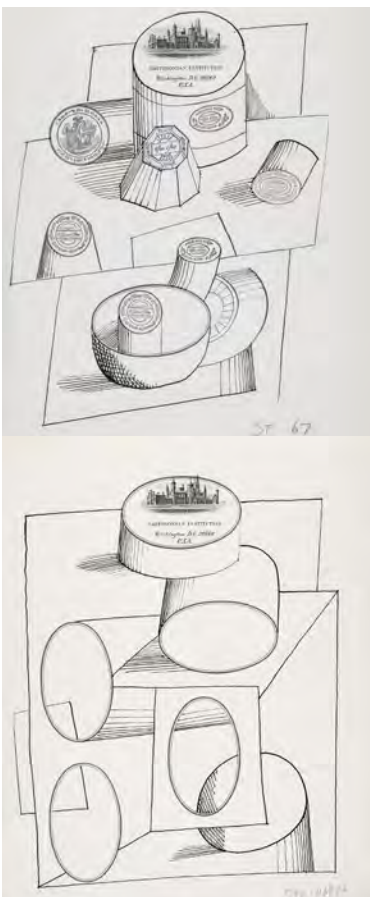

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RA. Revista de Arquitectura
Núm. 27 – 2025
P. 44–57
ISSN: 1138-5596
DOI: 110.15581/014.27.44-57
Received: February 28, 2025
Accepted: April 22, 2025

Oberon, Turin's Quicksand And Other Stories: Sneers and Diversions of the Young Mollino and his Circle

Michela Rosso

Across an unprecedented reading of Mollino's "Vita di Oberon" (1933) and "Architettura di Torino. Le sabbie mobili" (1934), I propose to look into irony, parody and caricature as underexplored dimensions of the Torinese architect. Mollino's early writings are viewed through the prism of his paternal legacy and singular web of collaborations, and against the backdrop of the contemporary architectural polemics, the source material for the architect's biting sense of humour. An interlude separates the dissection of the two writings: the drawings for the Saint-Gobain residential estate competition (1952), with their irreverent depictions of everyday life, are seen as a powerful tool in Mollino's hands for questioning the rigid authoritarianism of modernist formulae. The reiterated image of the architect-artist, all "genius and unruliness", is partly reassessed: Mollino's distinctive ironic gaze is inseparable from Oberon's "practical living poetry", a unique blend of lyricism, self-awareness, and the precise understanding of the cultural climate of his life and work.

KEYWORDS

Architectural humour, Architectural caricatures, Razionalismo, Carlo Molino, Oberon

PALABRAS CLAVE

Humor arquitectónico, Caricaturas arquitectónicas, Racionalismo, Calo Mollino, Oberon

> "MOLLINO. Diabolical character. When he speaks, *Gillette* blades, razors, scimitars, pieces of glass, enchanted gardens, and monstrous flowers of colours never seen, come out of his mouth."[1]

In "Vita di Oberon" [life of Oberon], —Carlo Mollino's published literary debut appeared in *Casabella*, between July and November 1933[2]— fiction and reality merge in the parable of Ettore Lavazza, aka Oberon, the young architect's alter ego. The writing is certainly not new

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to architectural scholarship, yet it deserves further reading. Oscillating between phantasmagory, the disenchanted chronicle of the present, and a fair amount of self-humour, it illuminates the main character primarily, and then the annoying troublemakers that hinder his work. Puzzling and pessimistic, Mollino's autobiographical half-fantasy takes jabs at current conventions of architectural practice and depicts an ironic image of his professional self, occasionally revealing an unabashed sense of superiority. The wild, uncultivated Oberon, for whom the projections of Monge were a late and painful conquest, is constantly forced by contingencies to turn necessities into virtues, a chameleonic figure, a jack-of-all-trades, at once "a mechanic, an accountant, a lawyer [...] a master of good manners, a toad swallower and *charmeur*, a dancer with an old lady, a snake charmer..."[3].

Under the guise of the mythical king of the fairies, the powerful and mischievous figure known for his magical abilities, the young Mollino uncovers frictions and sufferings implicit in the architect's daily routine work. The result is disastrous, comic and irreverent.

The Australian Wall, "the first civil work of Oberon" —a fairground booth— is the novel's architectural core, at once enigmatic and paradoxical: "the terrifying vertical track, where, suspended in midair, horizontally clinging to a motorcycle speeding at great velocity, Ciro Beck surrenders to the most breathtaking stunts under the eager, disaster-hungry eyes of the crowd packed tightly above, at the edge of the fearsome, echoing well"[4].

The enigma is untangled: five years earlier the wall is the subject of a painting of the kaleidoscopic Italo Cremona (Cozzo 1905–Turin 1979), the artist versed in numerous disciplines[5]. In his variant it is entitled "Il muro della morte" [the wall of death]. In the same 1928, Cremona has signed "Chauffeur", an oil of Mollino wearing a helmet, glasses, and pilot gloves. Mollino and Cremona are both born in 1905; they also happen to share roots in the lombard-pavese region: Italo in Cozzo Lomellina, Carlo's progenitors in Voghera. Amongst other things, they are linked by close friendship, a a liking for motorcycles, and an extraordinary propensity to risk. Often, they go to admire the young Radames, who, on the "old Indian"[6], speeds vertically up the Australian wall in a booth on the outskirts of Turin. Cremona captures the exhilarating moment: "The motorcycle plunged into the crowd's chest, then leapt away to slam under the fingernails tightly gripping the edge of the wall. Ton... Ton... Ton... You wanted to have fun... look, look..."[7] **(fig. 1)**.

BEFORE AND AROUND OBERON: FOREBEARS AND AFFINITIES

Carlo Mollino graduates from the School of Architecture of the Regio Politecnico in July 1931. His thesis is a modern commercial building in the very heart of Turin's roman quadrangle: "clear as a well-structured equation, with the air of not seeking to invent a new architecture but rather to follow and refine the path already charted and actively evolving across the world, with a keen and watchful eye" —Giuseppe Pagano would later comment[8]. 1931 is a fateful time for Italian architecture: ongoing controversies often take on explicitly satirical tones. Discussion around the role that architects should play in a fascist state becomes crucial at the beginning of the year. Igniting the debate is the article "Architettura arte di Stato" published by the gallerist and critic Pier Maria Bardi (La Spezia 1900- Sao Paulo 1999) on 31 January

Fig. 01
"Acrobatic performances in Piazza Vittorio Veneto, Turin [early 1930s]".
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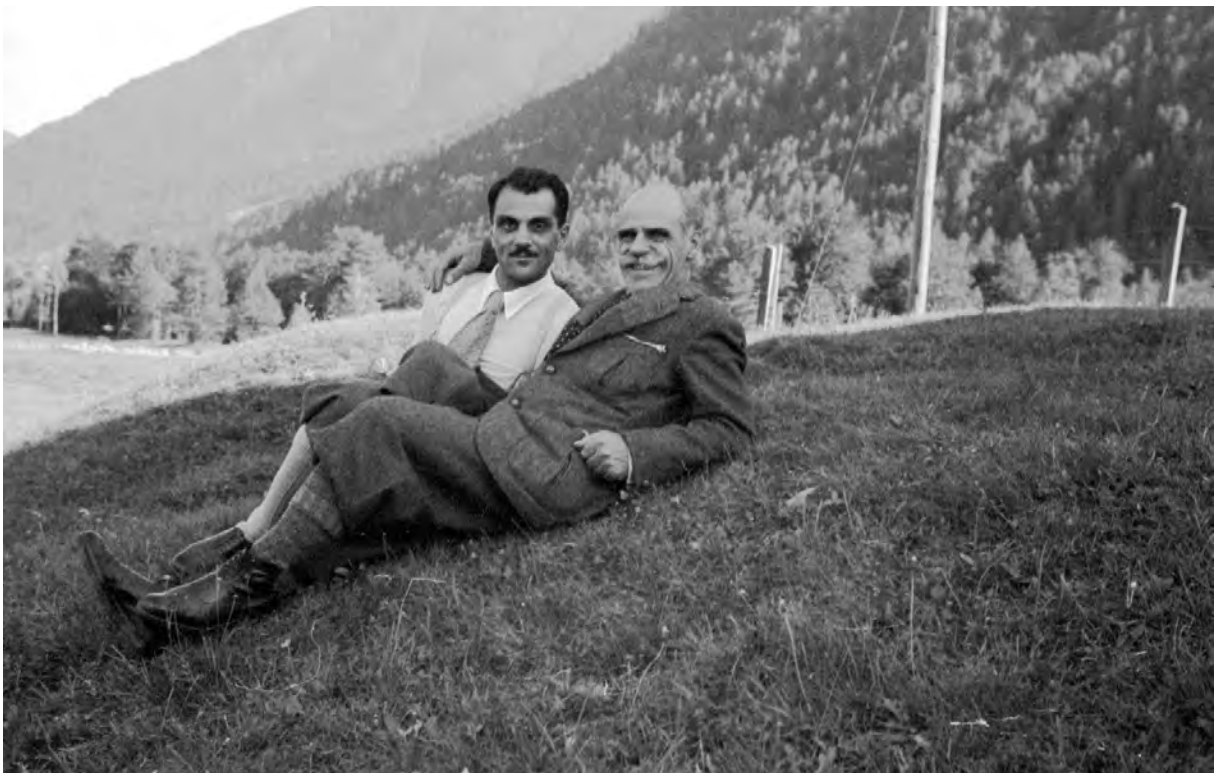

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Fig. 02
"Eugenio and Carlo Mollino [1940s]". Credits: ACM 7.6.11.

in *L'Ambrosiano*. The issue, later at the heart of Bardi's *Rapporto sull'architettura*, is extensively discussed between February and June in all the major newspapers. On 30 March, in the premises of the Galleria di Roma, Bardi inaugurates the Second Exhibition of Rational Architecture. At the centre of the polemics is the outrageous "Tavola degli Orrori" [*Table of Horrors*], a photomontage that sarcastically depicts the "old Italy" by juxtaposing excerpts from novels, newspapers and postcards —the worst examples of the pre-fascist fogeyism— with architectural works of Piacentini, Brasini, Bazzani, and Giovannoni. In Turin, the reconstruction of the first six blocks of via Roma is well underway...

A curious testimony of this very excited climate is the booklet *Veglia degli architetti* " [Soirée of architects] with which on 8 April 1931 the small group of graduands intends to celebrate the beginning of their professional adventure. Introduced by victory hymns to the new "artistic squadrism", the short gallery of portraits playfully characterized by a youthful spirit of dissent, is alternated with photos where Giuseppe Pagano and Gino Levi Montalcini's Palazzo per Uffici (1928-30) and Padiglione Italiano at Liège Exhibition (1930) are arranged in natural continuity with Giuseppe Capponi's interiors, Pierre Legrain's iron and crystal pianoforte, and the Stockholm exhibition stands. While Ippolito Battaglia signs an amusing *vademecum* for architectural beginners in ten arguments, the sculptor Michele Guerrisi sketches a series of thirteen caricatures of the Torinese crowd. Within this witty collective self-portrait, Carlo Mollino appears as follows: "He claims to have been born in Turin, but it is whispered that he is Saracen to the core [...]. He would feel at ease both at the court of King George of England and in a seedy tavern in the slums of

03

Fig. 03
"Eugenio Mollino, self-portrait [1910s]. Credits: AEM F19.

Calcutta—a trait of a man both sound and self-assured, and an invaluable quality for an architect"[9].

"Oberon, rich in his father's businesses [...] could have continued in the untouchable splendor of the crown prince"[10]. Since the early 1930s, Mollino is carrying out architectural practice on the path steadily laid out by his father, the prolific civil engineer Eugenio[11]. In "Vita di Oberon", the tormented association emerges clearly, a relationship of contrasted admiration, lived both in continuity and in antithesis **(fig. 2)**. It is from Eugenio, alongside other things, that Carlo inherits his liking for acrobatic skiing performances, the blend of athleticism and artistry for which he is also renown. A certain familiarity with caricatures and acrobatics, surfaces in Eugenio's archive[12]: here a sequence of three cartoons show Carlo's father boldly, funnily, and disastrously descending the *Colle di Sestriere*. On the background stands the iconic volume of the Albergo Torre (1931-33), designed and built by engineer Vittorio Bonadè Bottino at the request of senator Agnelli[13] **(fig. 3) (fig. 4)**.

Involved with the second-generation futurists, Mollino is also part of the countercultural circles gathered around Mino Maccari (Siena 1898- Rome 1989), painter, illustrator, satirical cartoonist and writer. Cremona, who has known Maccari since 1931, has acted as intermediary between the Torinese architect and the Senese painter[14]. The "communication between two spirits"[15], strengthened by a dense and prolonged epistolary correspondence, leads to Mollino's surrealist novel *L'Amante del Duca* [the duke's mistress], published in four instalments in *Il Selvaggio*, the journal that Maccari directs alongside Leo Longanesi, since 1926 and until 1943. The unmistakable voice of Strapaese, *Il Selvaggio* expresses a satire that strikes from within. Maccari and his clique suffer Fascism in an ambiguous yet dramatic way: by accepting to remain on the margins of the game, they manage to preserve their own enclave of freedom[16]. Cremona, on the other hand, is likely the catalyst for Mollino's awareness of the new experiences emerging from Paris, particularly magazines *Minotaure* and *Verve* —which he, Cremona, and the art critic and painter Albino Galvano eagerly read and discuss in the early 1930s. Finally, to briefly recompose the circle of the architect's close-knit network of acquaintances, it is precisely the surrealist culture, especially that of Breton and Dalí, that leads him to an unorthodox reappreciation of Art Nouveau —one of Cremona's longtime obsessions too[17]— leading him back to his father's early professional work[18].

OBERON, CIRO, AND THE OTHERS

Oberon, who died prematurely in a luxury sanatorium in Davos, "lives on in us and in the directions of our architecture"[19]. *Nemo propheta in patria*, he is settled in the other hemisphere. It is here, under the tropical sky, in the golden days of the circus, that Ciro and Oberon meet. The acrobat has just returned home: his business has fallen into ruin; precisely at this moment Oberon *understands and sees architecture*[20]. Together, they invent the marvel —the wall of danger— a flash of genius and a hope for fame. Under Ciro's tear-filled eyes, the architect draws a first sketch, a masterpiece of modern acrobatics[21].

Ciro, the novel's deuteragonist, is the fearless motorcyclist who caused heart palpitations among the vast audience that followed him in his mortal trap stunts. In Oberon's eyes, he is the perfect architect's

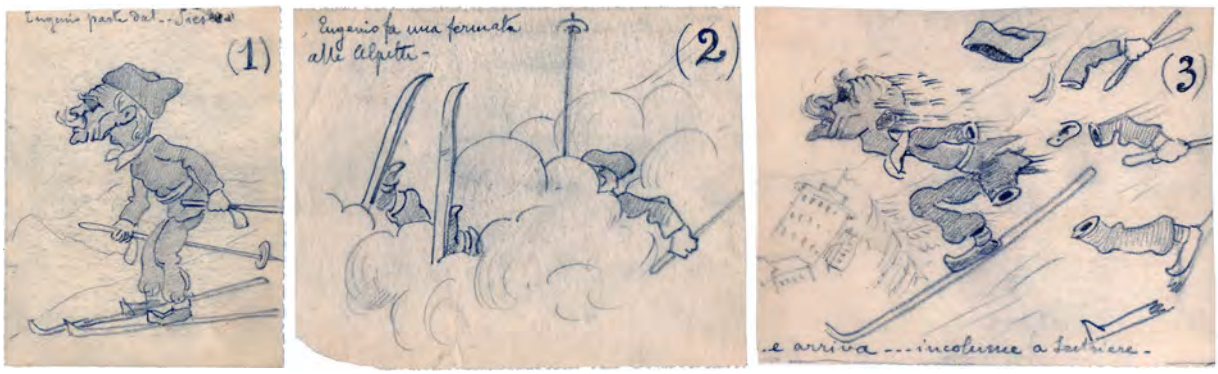

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Fig. 04
"Eugenio departs from Sises; (2) Eugenio makes a stop at Alpette; (3) and... arrives unscathed in Sestriere". Sketches by Eugenio Bonicelli. Pencil on tracing paper [late 1920s]". Credits: AEM F19.

client, rich in intelligence and sensitivity, someone whom you would never be forced "to call a 'filthy Philistine'"[22]. A vast abyss separates Ciro from the multitude of Oberon's ordinary, capricious clients who continue unperturbed to make obscene requests: "'make it all modern, no capitals[23].'" It doesn't go any better on the front of public commissions where "the idiotic municipalities" approve and demand the same architecture that has always been made, the kind that "harmonizes'"[24]. The allusion to the current jargon of competitions' briefs, such as the notorious text of the royal decree emanated three years earlier for the reconstruction of the first six blocks of Turin's via Roma, is visible in watermark. Later on in the text, Mollino would insist on this point by introducing the invention of "a gasoline-powered quadriga"[25], a hybrid creature —half chariot and half car —a parody of the stylistic compromise characterizing the architectural practice of the time.

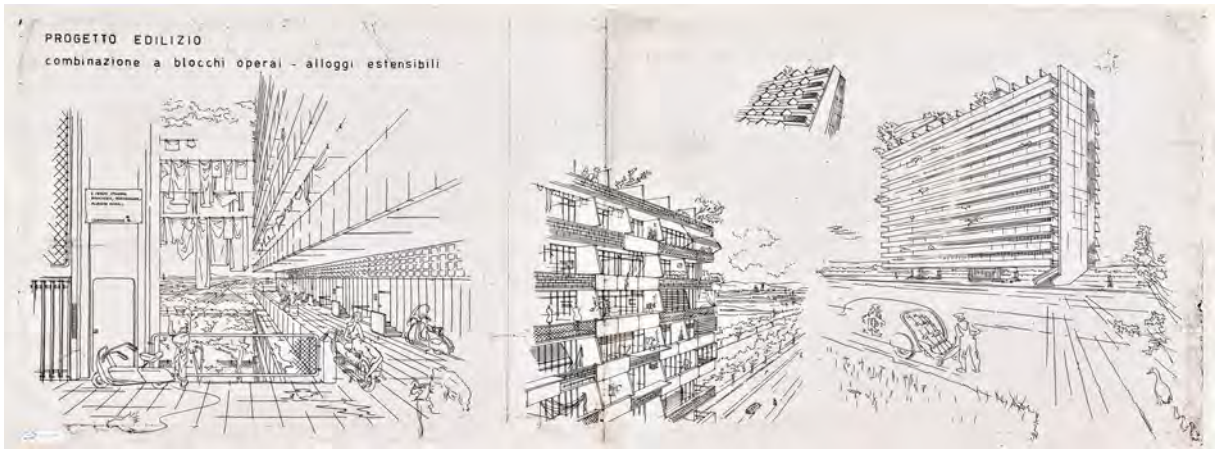
The picture of the client type, master of deceptive rhetoric who poses as an expert in good taste, for whom modern architecture is no more than an elusive will-o'-the-wisp, results into an enjoyable character portrait. That's the case of the logorrheic fellow who wants a villa at the Lido of Venice:

> "He talked about everything and didn't want me to interrupt: Venice, Sem Benelli, Aucassin and Nicolete, Lionello Venturi, Montecatini, Avignon and the Côte d'Azur, rationalists, Giuliano da Sangallo, the crisis. 'Those were the good times of the Renaissance; I should have been born then' [...]. I threw him out the door. He didn't get hurt, but it was a mistake: [...] meanwhile, rumors started circulating that I was unbalanced. It was an unnecessary luxury: he went to have his house made by architect ***"[26].

Yet, the state of the current profession is no less discouraging: the targets of Mollino's barbs are "those architects who think laboriously with the decimeter", those who "in front of the built work, witness the painful novelty of their architecture". He concludes: "In reality, the proportions have torn apart [...] There is no perfect common scale, there is one for each building"[27].

THE CONCRETE EXPERIMENT, ALWAYS NEW AND UNKNOWN": ARCHITECTURE WITH FIGURES

Years later, Mollino's empirical posture, already crystalline in Oberon's words, resurfaces in "La verità non è una sola" [the truth is not one-sided], the *motto* for the unfortunate competition entry of the Saint-Gobain housing project in Pisa (1952)[28]. The aim is to correct the presumptions of rationalist



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enlightenment, to mitigate the abstract *dirigisme* of modern architecture that is believed to be destined to failure[29]. The graphic style of the perspective views immediately captures our attention: Saint-Gobain's yards and balconies are enlivened with a variety of characters, everyday objects, and tools. Mollino's manifold passions are encapsulated in one particular scene: a young girl posing on the seat of what looks a BMW R50, is about to be shot by her boyfriend/photographer[30] **(fig 5)**. In other spots, geese and hens roam freely around; a dog peeks out; sheets and underwear flutter on the racks; a van loaded with gas cylinders is parked nearby; a young couple lazily lean against the railing of the top-floor balcony. And there is more: the sign "Vietato stendere biancheria, parcheggiare, allevare animali" [laundry drying, parking, breeding animals prohibited] is promptly disregarded: scooters, bicycles, and a wheelbarrow take over the communal spaces. Humans and non-humans —and their actions, populate the site, conjuring up a disordered, yet jolly environment. Chaos, the act of breaking rules, and graffiti on walls[31] —are the accepted codes of daily civil co-existence: Oberon's poetic manifesto, "Architecture is not a beautiful corpse with correct proportions, but a work that sings its reasons for life"[32] has become a living reality **(fig 6)**.

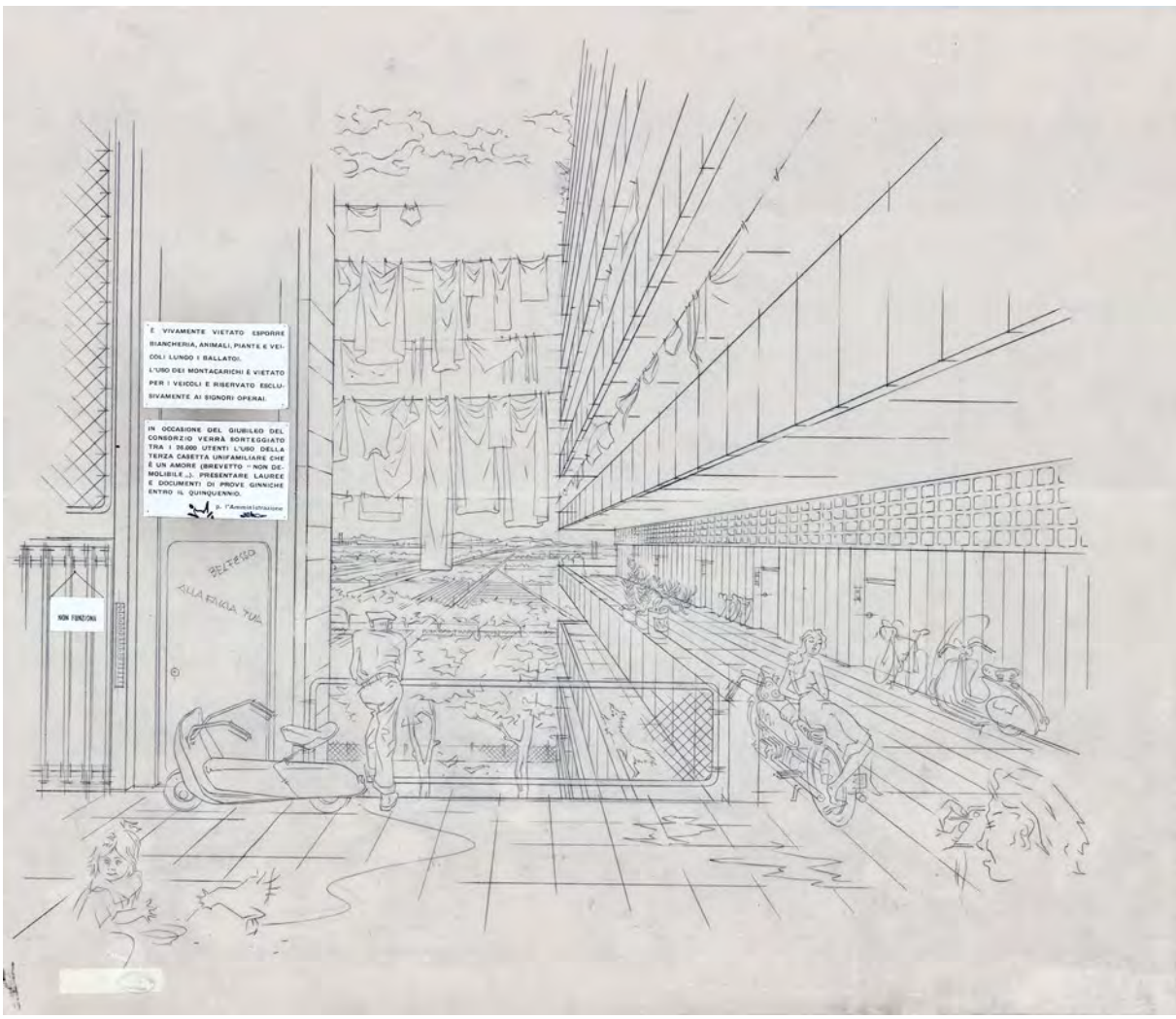
"THE RASCALS OF TURIN" AND "THE TRIBE OF THE MOTIONLESS": MOLLINO'S CARICATURES IN WORDS

"At the opening of the Galleria San Federico on Via Roma, one fine morning in June 1933, a long procession of students, preceded by a group of people in masks with episcopal drapes, mitres, censers, walked back and forth as part of the inaugural ceremony, featuring caricatures and a *Te Deum* hymn suitable for the occasion"[33].

Although there are no records to prove it, Mollino's presence in the *goliardata* evoked by Vittorio Bonadé Bottino, would certainly not be surprising. Always exact in capturing the aura of situations, the not yet thirty Mollino acutely registers the mood of his times: in June 1934, in the column "Picche" [spades] of the weekly *L'Italia Letteraria*, writing under the pseudonym of Oberon, he mocks the amateurishness of the ongoing parliamentary discussion over the competition for the Palazzo del Littorio in Rome, the hot topic of the day[34].

But it is in "Architettura di Torino. Le sabbie mobili"[35] that the literary verve of Mollino, accompanied with some powerful

Fig. 05
"Competition for the St. Gobain housing estate, Pisa. [1951-52]. Overall perspective view. Pen on tracing paper". Credits: ACM P.13 D.246.6.



06

caricatures of his city and its inhabitants, appears in all its radiance. On 10 November 1934, through the fulminating synthesis of a Turin immobilized in quicksand —a city full of enticing promises, yet deceptive— Mollino sums up the condition of architecture at the foot of the Alps: the more one struggles, the deeper they sink. The writing is in many respects a sequel to "Vita di Oberon". Ettore Lavazza reappears in these lines to give voice to the author's corrosive humour. His bold defiance is a punch in the face to the bourgeois respectability of Turin, a tediously immobile city, frozen as a statue of salt. Mollino's mordant passages convey a vivid picture of Turin, and its curious people —sorts of rare beasts. "Emulsified Celts, stone heads"[36], "the tribe of 'the motionless'"[37], Turin's citizens lack warm blood in their veins. A seemingly inescapable destiny has shaped both contemporary architecture and the city's unwritten rules of behaviour. The image is echoed, not surprisingly, in Maccari's earlier words. A phlegmatic city, so it must have appeared Turin to the founders of *Il Selvaggio*, when they decided to settle under the Mole by moving the editorial board to the mezzanine of 12, Via Pietro Micca: "When we got off at

Fig. 06
"Competition for the St. Gobain housing estate, Pisa. [1951-52]. Detail perspective view. Pencil on tracing paper".
Credits: ACM P13 D.246.19.

Porta Nuova, a traffic officer warned us to walk on tiptoe so as not to wake the usual sleepers. It was three in the afternoon, and we found this rather strange. 'How many people in Turin are asleep?' [...] 'The calculation is complicated,' the officer declared. 'One would have to start by counting those who are not asleep. The trouble is, in Turin, everyone is asleep'"[38].

"Architettura di Torino" opens up with a quote from Piacentini in which the Roman architect recognizes the audacity of the Torinese section of MIAR [Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale], the "boldest and most unprejudiced group"[39], "the rascals of Turin," as Mollino soon re-christens the five architects Pagano, Levi Montalcini, Sottsass, Cuzzi, and Aloisio, will turn to be the no more than the fleeting passage of a meteor in the bleak sky of a city trapped in quicksand: "Turin is not fertile Land for such cultures"[40]. The city's enduring and unwavering tradition of discipline and order triumphs over the proposals of the five young rationalist architect. Thus, for the first section of Via Roma, Turin unfolds imperturbable and obstinate, Baroque —or a Piedmontese pseudo-version of it — "the much-cherished *barocchetto*"[41]. While Mollino's stance is substantially tuned with MIAR's polemical counterproject published in *La Casa Bella*[42], at the same time, he collaborates, at least to some extent, with Eugenio's design of the (non-built) frankly neo-baroque façades of the block of San Pietro[43]. The episode epitomizes the legacy of a highly respected and never-denied family tradition, from which, however, emancipation is urgently needed.

A brief look at history makes everything clearer: in Mollino's trenchant imagery, Turin's architecture has always been prose. The local court architects couldn't offer her other than prose, orderly and dignified, yet still prose. The only "true architecture" came to Turin from artists of other regions, or even foreigners, and always as an act of authority. Then, "with just a whistle from the Duke, Juvarra arrives from some corner of Europe, riding a dragon, laden with fireworks, ribbons, braids, and mortars, expanding our city with his famous Baroque. Hats off—Turin becomes monumental"[44].

Again, an almost perfect coincidence with Maccari's satirical pen cannot go unnoticed: at the beginning of 1931, the Senese writer has published his *filastrocca* on the reconstruction of via Roma. In the accompanying image, Marcello Piacentini, the coordinator of the whole operation, is dressed in 18th-century attire and rides a bat-winged devil[45]. The fallen angel, Satan —symbol of temptation and rebellion— in Mollino's version turns into a dragon, a sort of common obsession within this small coterie of confidants[46]. Apart from these shared imageries, the association between Piacentini and the architect-scenographer native of Messina, both appointed by their absolute governors to bring new air in the city, is well founded: both were equally authoritative figures, both had received the prestigious award of *accademici* ("d'Italia" Piacentini, of the Accademia di San Luca, Juvarra), and most importantly for Maccari and Mollino, both were foreigners in Turin, urged by an act of authority to settle a problem that indigenous professionals seemed unable even to deal with.

Defined by Tafuri "the *enfant terrible* of modern architecture"[47], Mollino has often been portrayed as the eccentric, isolated architect, the capricious poet. His early writings, even the visionary "Vita di Oberon", convey instead the picture of someone who is firmly rooted in the realities of his era: the local environment and its social

customs, are the objectivity to which Mollino —Ettore Lavazza— Oberon, anchors his every thought, even the seemingly hallucinatory ones. Through the gaze of a pitiless chronicler, the young Carlo fiercely analyzes what he sees: in a few sharp punchlines he unmasks the hypocritical conformism of his homeland and its queer people. His "practical 'living poetry'"[48], always resistant to theoretical speculation, turns out to be the necessary material of his "razor blades", as well as the guarantee of their ultimate success. This special kind of sardonic effervescence, in many ways close to those of his fellow companions, Mino Maccari and Italo Cremona, is comprehensible only within his extraordinary self-awareness—both of his professional role and his social position, his rigorous adherence to operational contexts and the necessary dialogue with the surrounding milieu. **RA**

Notes

***** I thank Agenzia del Demanio, Carlo Mollino Archive (ACM) at the Politecnico di Torino, and Sezione Archivi Biblioteca "Roberto Gabetti" for granting permission to publish fig.1: Acrobatic performances in Piazza Vittorio Veneto, Turin [early 1930s]. ACM 3.4.13, 3.4.13.17; fig.2: Eugenio and Carlo Mollino [1940s]. ACM 7.6.11; fig.5: Competition for St. Gobain housing estate, Pisa. 1951-52. Overall perspective view, pen on tracing paper; ACM P.13D.246.6; fig.6: Competition for the St. Gobain housing estate, Pisa. 1951-52. Detail perspective view, pencil on tracing paper. ACM P.13D.246.19. (Publication Authorization No. 9481 of 2021). I owe a debt of gratitude to the personnel of Politecnico di Torino, Architecture Archives and Library and in particular to Enrica Bodrato, Head of Historic Heritage Management Office, and Rossella Fiorentino, Head of the Architecture Library Hub, for their generous and continuous support, as well as to Napoleone Ferrari (Museo Casa Mollino, Turin).
This work benefitted from conversations and exchanges with colleagues Mario Lupano, Roberto Dulio, and Enrico Moncalvo, and with former students Giacomo L. Beccaria, Fabio L. Marino, and Lorenzo M. Concordia.

01. "Personaggio diabolico, quando parla escono lame Gillette, rasoi, scimitarre, pezzi di vetro, giardini incantati e fiori mostruosi dai colori mai visti". "Mollino," in *Veglia di architetti* (Torino: Fedetto, 1931), p. 29.

02. MOLLINO, Carlo, "Vita di Oberon," *Casabella*, n°. 67 (July 1933), pp. 40-42; "Vita di Oberon II: Prodromi mediterranei," *Casabella*, n° 68-69 (August-September 1933), pp. 44-45; "Vita di Oberon III. Lo studio di Oberon," *Casabella*, n° 70 (October 1933), pp. 44-45; "Vita di Oberon IV. Il mito," *Casabella*, n° 71 (November 1939), pp. 38-39.

03. "[...] meccanico, ragioniere, avvocato, becero, maestro di belle maniere, ingoiatore di rospi e *charmeur,* danzatore con vecchia signora, incantatore di serpenti; pena la morte se rifiuta". MOLLINO 1933(4), p. 39.

04. "La superficie interna di un cilindro di dieci metri di diametro e quindici di altezza costituisce la paurosa pista verticale, dove, sospeso nel vuoto, orizzontale stretto a un motociclo lanciato a grande velocità, Ciro Beck si abbandona alle più travolgenti evoluzioni, sotto gli occhi avidi di disastro della plebe assiepata in alto, al bordo del pozzo pauroso e risonante. Una cosa pura e prodigiosa, capolavoro dell'acrobazia". MOLLINO 1933(1), p. 40.

05. MANTOVANI, Pino "Il pittore Italo Cremona (o della Pittura)," in Archivio Storico Italo Cremona, *Cremona. Catalogo generale dell'opera pittorica* (Torino: Umberto Allemandi, 2010), pp. 9-14: 9.

06. CREMONA, Italo, "Medium. Muro australiano," *Il Selvaggio*, IX, n°. 11 (15 December 1932), p. 70.

07. "Qualcuno s'aggrappava al vicino, le donne chiudevano gli occhi e non avevano il tempo di riaprirli. La motocicletta piombava nel petto della folla poi saltava via per tornare a picchiare sotto le unghie strette all'orlo del muro. Ton ton ...volevate divertirvi, guardate, guardate...". CREMONA 1932, p. 70. See Giorgina Bertolino, "Allo specchio dipinti e racconti nella vita di Cremona," in Giorgina Bertolino, Daniela Ferrari, and Elena Volpato eds., *Italo Cremona. Tutto il resto è profonda notte* (Torino: Umberto Allemandi, 2024), pp. 14-51.

08. "Il palazzo per uffici del Mollino, chiaro come una equazione bene impostata, con la sua aria di non voler inventare la nuova architettura ma di voler battere e proseguire con occhio vigile la strada già segnata e in pieno sviluppo in tutto il mondo, esprime più di ogni discorso il temperamento di questo nuovo archi tetto razionalista". PAGANO POGATSCHNIG, Giuseppe, "Professori 1932 Laureandi 1932," *La Casa Bella*, n°. 50 (February 1932), pp. 16-19: 19.

09. Ippolito Battaglia, "Del modo di godere delle architetture. Prolegomeni ad una nuova didattica ad uso dei non iniziati", *Veglia di architetti*, pp. 3-8. "Dice di esser nato a Torino, ma si sussurra che sia saraceno fino al midollo. Prima di darsi alla vita di terraferma e all'architettura si sospetta abbia fatto il filibustiere piratando le coste dell'Arabia e dell'India dove il suo nome è ancora tristemente famoso e usato come *bau bau* per i bambini cattivi starebbe a suo agio sia alla corte di Re Giorgio d'Inghilterra, come in una taverna dei bassi fondi di Calcutta, dote questa di uomo sano e sicuro di se stesso e preziosissima per un architetto", *Ibidem*, p. 29. See IRACE, Fulvio, "Incanto e volontà di Carlo Mollino", in *Carlo Mollino 1905-1973*, (Milano: Electa, 1989), pp. 13-55: 14-15.

10. "Ricco dei paterni commerci Oberon avrebbe potuto continuare nel fasto intoccabile del principe ereditario". MOLLINO 1933(2), p. 44.

11. Eugenio Mollino (Genoa 1873- Turin 1953). See *Eugenio Mollino. Ingegnere professionista a Torino tra 1899 e 1952*, Master Thesis (Torino: Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Torino, 2001), supervisors: Carlo Olmo, Michela Rosso.

12. Archivio Eugenio Mollino, F19. The three cartoons are likely the work of Enrico Bonicelli (Cesena 1872- Turin 1939), Eugenio's peer at the Regia Scuola di Applicazione per gli Ingegneri in Turin.

13. BONADÈ BOTTINO, Vittorio, "A sciare con gli Agnelli," in *Memorie di un borghese del Novecento. L'avventura di un pioniere dell'industria*, ed. Laura Lepri (Milano: Bompiani, 2001), pp. 281-305.

14. COMBA, Michela, "Carlo Mollino's Enchanted Rooms: Face-to-Face with Art in a Company Town, 1930-1960," in Michela Rosso ed., *Investigating and Writing Achitectural History: Subjects, Methodologies and Frontiers* (Turin: Politecnico di Torino - EAHN, 2014), pp. 296-306: 301-302.

15. "Se l'Amante del Duca potrà come mi dici costituire una comunicazione tra due spiriti, il vantaggio potrà essere di tutti e due come indubbiamente sarà mio". Maccari to Mollino, 15 November 1939. ACM, C1.5.1939.

16. ROSSO, Michela, "Il Selvaggio 1926-1942: Architectural Polemics and Invective Imagery," *Architectural Histories*, n°. 10 (2016), pp. 1-42.

17. CREMONA, Italo, *Il tempo dell'art nouveau: Modern style, Sezession, Jugendstil, Arts and Crafts, Floreale, Liberty*, (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1964).

18. MONCALVO, Enrico, "Note per una lettura di alcuni riferimenti della cultura di Carlo Mollino, *Bollettino Società Piemontese di Archeologia e Belle Arti*, n.s. (1988), pp. 341-373; ROVATI, Federica, "La camera incantata. Carlo Mollino e la cultura artistica torinese", in Sergio Pace ed., *Carlo Mollino architetto. Costruire la modernità* (Milano: Electa, 2006), pp. 64-77.

19. "Vive in noi e negli orientamenti della nostra architettura". MOLLINO 1933(1), p. 40.

20. "[...] Oberon capì e 'vide' architettura". MOLLINO 1933(1), p. 40.

21. "Libero, la notte stessa in cabina, prima che l'idea marcisse, fece il primo schizzo del Muro Australiano sotto gli occhi lucidi di Ciro Beck; uno di quegli orridi e celebri 'schizzi del pazzo' che tanto lo fecero compatire dai professori, uno di quegli

schizzi accessibili solo ai selvaggi e ai bambini". MOLLINO 1933(1), p. 40.

22. "Oberon ci parlò sempre di lui con grande ammirazione e mai, co me sovente a noi accade, fu costretto a dargli del «porco filisteo» alle spalle". MOLLINO 1933(1), p. 40.

23. "[...] 'faccia tutto moderno, capitelli niente'. MOLLINO 1933(2), p. 45.

24. "Intanto i municipi idioti continuano ad approvare e 'volere' l'architettura che si è sempre fatta, quella che si 'armonizza'". MOLLINO 1933(2), p. 45.

25. "[...] una quadriga a benzina". MOLLINO 1933(3), p. 44.

26. "Voleva che dicessi il suo desiderio 'nei bei tempi del rinascimento fiorentino' (?) Ha parlato di tutto e non voleva che l'interrompessi: Venezia, Sem Benelli, Alcassino e Nicoletta, Lionello Venturi, Montecatini, Avignone e la costa azzurra, i razionalisti, Giuliano da Sangallo, la crisi. 'Bei tempi quelli del rinascimento; io avrei dovuto nascere allora, sarebbe stata la mia vita! Adesso è una porcheria' [...] Non valeva la pena di interromperlo: l'ho sbattuto fuori dalla porta. Non si è fatto male però è stato uno sbaglio: anche se più ricco di lui non avevo diritto di fare questo; intanto comincia a girare la diceria che sono squilibrato. È stato un lusso inutile: è andato a farsi fare la casa dall'architetto xxx". MOLLINO 1933(3), p. 44.

27. "Sono quelli che pensano laboriosamente col decimetro: 10, 50,85: è troppo... Facciamo 70". Davanti all'opera costruita assistono alla dolorosa novità della loro architettura; trovano la casa della bambola e l'enorme calamaio di bronzo. [...] Non esiste una scala comune perfetta, ne esiste una per ogni fabbrica". MOLLINO 1933(3), p. 44.

28. Quartiere di abitazione per il personale della fabbrica pisana "Saint Gobain". Carlo Mollino con Franco Campo and Carlo Graffi (Pisa 1952). *Relazione del progetto urbanistico e del progetto edilizio. Concorso. Motto: La verità non è una sola*, (Torino: Vincenzo Bona, n.d.), p. 1. ACM Pdv.7.1

29. "La differenza, già in partenza, delle esigenze di ciascun individuo, per cui un concetto di ordinamento unico, informato a un dirigismo astratto, anche se perfetto in tutto il suo meccanismo a priori, si ritiene destinato al fallimento". *Relazione del progetto urbanistico*..., p. 1. ACM Pdv.7.1.

30. Concorso per il Centro Residenziale St. Gobain. Overall perspective view, pen on tracing paper. ACM P.13D.246.6.

31. Concorso per Centro Residenziale St. Gobain. Detail of perspective view, pencil on tracing paper. ACM P13D.246.19.

32. "[...] non hanno mai pensato che l'architettura non è un bel cadavere con proporzioni a posto, ma opera che canta le sue ragioni di vita". MOLLINO 1933(1), p. 42.

33. "[...] al momento dell'apertura della Galleria San Federico in via Roma, un bel mattino di giugno 1933, una lunga processione di studenti, preceduta da un gruppetto di mascherati con drappi vescovili, mitra, incensieri, la percorse e ripercorse per cerimonia inaugurale di caricature e canto di *Te Deum* adatto all'occasione. "Una testimonianza di Vittorio Bonadé Bottino", in Cristina Marchiaro ed., *Via Roma cinquant'anni di storia, immagini e vita di Torino* (Milano: Mondadori, 1987), pp. 59-64: 61.

34. OBERON [Carlo Mollino], "Elevati dibattiti," *L'Italia Letteraria*, X, n°. 23 (9 June 1934), p. 1.

35. MOLLINO, Carlo, "Architettura di Torino. Le sabbie mobili," *L'Italia Letteraria*, X, n°. 45, (10 November 1934), p. 4.

36. "Celti emulsionati, teste di pietra". MOLLINO 1934, p. 4.

37. "Fiumi, monti e colline, in luogo voluto dagli Iddii dei conquistatori, la tribù dei 'Non si muovono' ebbe da Roma già stampata sul prato (avevano i moduli) e sapientemente orientata, la pianta della loro futura città [...]". *Ibidem*.

38. "Quando scendemmo a Porta Nuova, un vigile urbano ci avvertì di camminare in punta di piedi, per non svegliare i soliti che dormivano. Erano le tre del pomeriggio e la cosa ci sembrava piuttosto strana. 'Quanti sono i torinesi che dormono? Domandammo al vigile [...] Il calcolo è complicato, ci dichiarò il vigile urbano; bisognerebbe cominciare a contare quelli che non dormano. Il guaio è che a Torino dormono tutti'. MACCARI, Mino, "'Il Selvaggio' a Torino," *Il Selvaggio*, VIII, n°. 1 (30 January 1931), p. 1.

39. PIACENTINI, Marcello, *Architettura oggi* (Roma: Paolo Cremonese Editore, 1930), pp. 57, 59.

40. "Ma i discoli di Torino, infischiandosi di correnti e di gruppi nemmeno riuscirono a tenere in vita una banda armata e nel breve volgere di quattro andarono dispersi. Cause vaghe: malocchio, la loro tenera età, le sabbie mobili e forse appunto il clima speciale: Torino non è Terra per simili culture. MOLLINO 1934, p. 4.

41. "Quando s'ha da costruire qualche fabbrica importante e significativa non transige e sfodera imperturbabile ostinata il barocco [...] Ridotto in scala piemontese ecco che il barocco divenne il tanto caro barocchetto piemontese; si inaugura così la peste endemica della sempre 'Vecchia Torino'". MOLLINO 1934, p. 4.

42. CASA BELLA, "Via Roma Via Nuova," *La Casa Bella*, IV, n°. 43, (July 1931), pp. 9-17; *La via Roma di Torino: progetto M.I.A.R. degli architetti G.Pagano Pogatschnig, U. Cuzzi, G. Levi Montalcini, O. Aloisio, E. Sottsass*, (Torino: SELP, 1931).

43. See Eugenio Mollino, Progetto di ricostruzione dell'Isolato di San Pietro Via Roma (1930-32). AEM 6D; 20F7; 21A. Reproductions of technical and perspectives drawings and the technical description of the built project can be seen in *La ricostruzione dell'isolato San Pietro in Torino. Via Roma progetto dell'edificio: Comm. Dott. Prof. Ing. Enrico Bonicelli. Progetti ambientazione: Dott. Ing. Dado Bonicelli*, edito a cura di Giuseppe Ratti (Torino: 1934). See MANGONE, Fabio, "Prima della Cavallerizza, l'insegnamento scolastico, la tradizione familiare, il milieu torinese," in PACE, Sergio (ed.), *Carlo Mollino architetto. Costruire la modernità* (Milan: Electa 2006), pp. 1-63: 55-57.

44. "Vittorio Amedeo II [...] scopre in fondo alla Penisola il Juvara e non lo molla più. Basta un fischio del Duca perché Juvara 'venga sul drago' da qualunque punto d'Europa, carico di girandole e nastri, alamari composti e mortaretti ad allargarci col suo famoso barocco. Cappello: Torino diviene monumentale". MOLLINO 1934, p. 4.

45. MACCARI, Mino, "Piacentini il gran flagello," *Il Selvaggio*, VIII, n°. 2, (15 February 1931), p. 86. For a fuller picture of the reconstruction of Via Roma's second section, see MELIS, Armando, "Concorso per il secondo tratto di via Roma in Torino," *L'Architettura Italiana*, n°. 2 (February 1934), pp. 39-47; MELIS DE VILLA, Armando, "La ricostruzione del secondo tratto di via Roma a Torino," *L'Architettura Italiana*, n°. 12 (December 1938), pp. 347-420, and LUPANO, Mario, *Marcello Piacentini*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991).

46. Whereas a plethora of winged figures —dragons and devils— populate the

universe of the painter Cremona (for instance, "Metamorfosi, o Intermezzo, o Gli angeli", 1936-1937; "Inverno" 1939-1940; "Il drago I" and "Il drago blu II" 1947; "Interno con figura alata" 1956), in 1964 the figure would reappear, under more playful guises, in the "drago da passeggio" [strolling dragon] presented as a Christmas gift to a few friends, including the artist Carlo Rama. LEVI, Corrado, "Spazio tempo e garçonnière," *Westuff*, n°. 1 (September-October 1987), pp. 21-28: 26.

47. TAFURI, Manfredo, *Storia dell'architettura italiana, 1944–1985* (Torino: Einaudi, 1986), p. 29.

48. "Oberon vive in noi e negli orientamenti della nostra architettura. L'omaggio che facciamo alla sua memoria è quello di esaltare —come egli ci diceva— il suo pratico 'vivere poesia'". MOLLINO 1932(1), p. 40.

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