

## Pietro Maria Bardi, *Quadrante*, and the Architecture of Fascist Italy

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*dedicated to Roberto Segre*

The short-lived cultural journal *Quadrante* transformed the practice of architecture in fascist Italy. Over the course of three years (1933-36), the magazine agitated for an “architecture of the state” that would represent the values and aspirations of the fascist regime, and in so doing it changed the language with which architects and their clientele addressed the built environment. The journal sponsored the most detailed discussion of what should constitute a suitably “fascist architecture.” *Quadrante* rallied supporters and organized the most prominent practitioners and benefactors of Italian Rationalism into a coherent movement that advanced the cause of specific currents of modern architecture in interwar Italy.<sup>1</sup>

My research investigates the relationship between modern architecture and fascist political practices in Italy during Benito Mussolini’s regime (1922-43). Rationalism, the Italian variant of the modern movement in architecture, was at once pluralistic and authoritarian, cosmopolitan and nationalistic, politically progressive and yet fully committed to the political program of Fascism. An examination of *Quadrante* in its social context helps explain the relationships between the political content of an architecture that promoted itself as the appropriate expression of Fascist policies, the cultural aspirations of an architecture that drew on contemporary developments in literature and the arts, and the international function of a journal that promoted Italian modernism to the rest of Europe while simultaneously exposing Italy to key developments across the Alps.

No group of architects in fascist Italy was more overtly concerned with architecture’s ability to represent the regime than the *Quadrante* circle. More than *Architettura*, *Casabella* or any other journal, *Quadrante* championed modern architecture as an explicitly fascist mode of construction, both endorsing fascism’s project of modernization and supporting the regime’s self-identification with the tradition of imperial and papal Rome. While the review was thoroughly political, its content was not reducible to mere propaganda. Its mission was also explicitly social. The journal endorsed the fascist state’s desire to structure comprehensively every aspect of social life, seeing architecture’s political content as ranging from its engagement of the metropolis and construction of a mass identity on the part of the public to its reflection of traditional rituals and

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<sup>1</sup> On the history of *Quadrante*, see: RIFKIND, David. *The Battle for Modernism: Quadrante and the Politicization of Architectural Discourse in Fascist Italy*. Vicenza and Venice: Centro Internazionale di Architettura di Andrea Palladio and Marsilio Editori, 2012.

patterns of everyday life. *Quadrante* extolled both the revolutionary and the timeless. Its writers, many of whom were practicing architects, embraced the poetic potential of architecture to speak “lyrically” as well as didactically.

The politics of Italian Rationalism was exceptional among the interwar movements in modern architecture, since most were associated with progressive or revolutionary politics on the Left. Rationalism was the only movement of modern architecture that sought to represent the political values of a fascist regime, and Italy, through both the state and the fascist party, provided official patronage for modern architecture at a level not equaled by any other country in the interwar period. Polemicists from all camps saw architecture as part of a broader project of cultural renewal tied to the political program of fascism, and argued that architecture must represent the goals and values of the fascist regime. While exceptional, the case of a modern movement’s outspoken engagement with radical right-wing politics provides excellent insights into the (sometimes) authoritarian tendencies of international modernism and the opportunistic practices of many important modernists.<sup>2</sup>

This overtly political vision of architecture was not always present in Italian modernism, however. The first writer to map out architecture’s explicitly ideological role was art critic and gallery owner Pietro Maria Bardi. In 1930, he began to advocate a “fascist architecture” in his column in the Milanese paper *L’Ambrosiano*, initiating a debate that would preoccupy Italian architects throughout the decade. In 1933, Bardi co-founded the journal *Quadrante* with novelist and playwright Massimo Bontempelli, a key intellectual supporter of the regime and member of the prestigious Reale Accademia d’Italia. For the next three years, *Quadrante* (based in Milan and Rome) would be the nexus for discussions linking the development of modern architecture to that of fascist politics in Italy.

In November 1933, six months after co-founding *Quadrante*, Bardi made his first trip to South America. He traveled to Buenos Aires, home to a large population of Italian émigrés, to mount an exhibition dedicated to modern architecture in Italy.<sup>3</sup> Bardi’s mission was two-fold: he sought to publicize Italian modernism around the world, and he was interested in engaging Italians who had moved to Latin America as part of the fascist regime’s concern with expanding its global influence through diasporic communities. The exhibition was received enthusiastically by Argentine Italians, who wrote of the pride engendered by seeing works of architecture on par with those produced by other European nations. Bardi remained in South America for four months before returning to Italy, and the exhibition later traveled to Alexandria, Egypt, home to another émigré community.

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2 Excellent sources on Italian Rationalism include: DOORDAN, Dennis. *Building Modern Italy: Italian Architecture 1914-1936*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988; ETLIN, Richard. *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890-1940*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991; and the seminal essay, GHIRARDO, Diane. “Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalists’ Role in Regime Building.” *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians* 39, no. 2 (May 1980): 109-127.

3 TENTORI, Francesco. *P. M. Bardi, con le cronache artistiche de L’Ambrosiano*. Milan: Mazzotta, 1990. Tentori’s intellectual biography of Bardi remains the best source on his years in Italy and as co-founder of *Quadrante*. See also: CONDELLO, Annette. “Pietro Maria Bardi – the vicarious architect: the importation of Italian Futurism to Brazil,” 15th International Planning History Society (IPHS) Conference proceedings, July 15-18, 2012, São Paulo.

Called the *Mostra dell'architettura italiana d'oggi*, the exhibition comprised 36 photomontaged plates assembled by Bardi. The images were reproduced in an accompanying catalog, *Belvedere dell'architettura italiana*, published in Italian and English by the journal's own imprint, *Edizioni di Quadrante*.<sup>4</sup> The projects exhibited included examples of Italian Rationalist architecture designed by members of the *Quadrante* circle, including Giuseppe Terragni's Novocomum building in Como, and Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini's Villa Studio per un Artista, built at the 1933 Triennale di Milano. Pier Luigi Nervi's Florence stadium merited its own panel of photographs, and Guido Fiorini's tensistruttura tower was juxtaposed against Antonio Sant'Elia's seminal città nuova project (1914). Transportation infrastructure projects figured prominently in the exhibition, including the viaduct over the Oglio river between Milan and Brescia by the Damioli brothers,<sup>5</sup> the Gruppo Toscano's Florence train station (1932-34), Luigi Vietti's Andrea Doria maritime terminal in Genoa (1933-34), and even one of Mario Cereghini's gas stations in Lecco. Bardi celebrated the emerging role of steel in Italian construction with photographs of the Savigliano company's large-scale works (such as Milan's Centrale rail terminal), and highlighted the importance of electricity with photographs of power transformers at Marghera (near Venice) and the Casa Elettrica, built by *Quadrante*-circle Rationalists and sponsored by the Edison company in 1930. Other works displayed in the exhibition ranged from the iconic Fiat Lingotto factory (Giacomo Matte-Trucco, 1919-26) to the "Rex" ocean liner to the Savoia Marchetti seaplanes used in Italo Balbo's mass-flights of the early 1930's. Many of these photos would appear in subsequent issues of *Quadrante*, as well as publications by members of the *Quadrante* circle.

The *Mostra dell'Architettura Italiana d'oggi* was inaugurated at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires by Argentine President Augustín Pedro Justo, and the exhibition's official patronage ensured it received ample media coverage.<sup>6</sup> Bardi had intended to send the show to locations in Brazil, Uruguay and Chile before sending it to North America and around the Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup> However, the exhibition appears to have only been reinstalled once, at the Casa del Fascio in Alexandria, Egypt, and it remains unclear why it wasn't exhibited more broadly.

Nonetheless, Bardi's missionary zeal proved attractive to South American audiences. The Italian critic was received enthusiastically in São Paulo en route to Argentina, and a Spanish translation of his book on Soviet Russia was published in Buenos Aires in 1934.<sup>8</sup> To be fair, South American architects were already

4 *Belvedere dell'architettura italiana*. Rome: Edizioni di Quadrante, 1933. The English edition, translated by Francesco Monotti, was titled *Exhibition of Italian Architecture of Today*. Bardi described the exhibition in the article, "Esposizione di architettura italiana in America", *Quadrante* 7 (November 1933): 23.

5 The viaduct on the Milan-Brescia highway was built by the Soc. Anon. Ingg. Fratelli Damioli as the result of a competition held by the Società Bresciana Autovie. Bardi used photos provided by his *Quadrante* collaborator, Carlo Belli, who was also an editor of *Il Popolo di Brescia*. Bardi had solicited material from Belli for the exhibition, but Belli sent only the photos of the viaduct with the explanation that, while there had been a lot of interesting construction in the Brescia area, "ma purtroppo non è architettura 'nostra'." Belli, letter to Bardi (15 September 1933), Fondo Carlo Belli, Archivio del '900, MART, Rovereto (FCB).

6 The exhibition was sponsored by the Ministero degli Esteri, Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero.

7 BARDI, Pietro Maria. *Belvedere dell'architettura italiana d'oggi*. Rome: Edizioni di Quadrante, 1933. Four panels from the exhibition were reproduced in *Quadrante* 6 (October 1933): 11.

8 BARDI, Pietro Maria. *Un fascista en los Soviets*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Tor, 1934.

interested in Italy before Bardi's visit. The Buenos Aires-based journal *Nuestra Arquitectura* contacted *Quadrante* architects Enrico Griffini, Eugenio Faludi and Piero Bottoni about publishing a house they built at the 1933 Triennale di Milano, and Bardi found during his voyage that Griffini's book, *Costruzione razionale della casa*, was already well-known and respected in the Argentine capital. Yet when Torinese architect Alberto Sartoris returned from an Argentine speaking tour that included eight lectures in 20 days, he credited Bardi with having laid the groundwork for South American interest in Italian modernism.

The importance of studying *Quadrante* stems from its seminal role in the politicization of Italian architecture, and thus my research focuses on the central role played by discourse—the web of discussion, debate, organization and provocation—in the development of Rationalism. Although many of the period's chief theorists saw themselves as waging the same battle on behalf of a revolutionary architecture as late as 1931, critics and practitioners soon began to diverge intellectually, and this conflict manifested itself in the remarkably heterogeneous architectural production of the decade before the World War II. More than any contemporary European publication, *Quadrante* dealt with the vexing question of how modern architecture could meet the regime's ideological need for formal representation. *Quadrante* offers a valuable case study in the complex interdependence of politics and cultural production.

Work designed by architects associated with *Quadrante* presents many clear examples of how Italians adapted international modern architecture to the political context of fascist Italy by emphasizing modernist tendencies which they saw as sympathetic to, or at least consistent with, the fascist regime's rhetoric. Order, hierarchy, the importance of classical precedent, and technological innovation as a sign of industrial progress could all be readily exploited to give concrete form to abstract political values. The modernist conception of design as a process of problem solving at multiple scales became, in the work of Giuseppe Terragni, Piero Bottoni, Enrico Griffini or the BBPR group, a total work of art that reinforced the fascist desire to infiltrate every sector of social life. Their support of "corporatist urbanism," in particular, demonstrated the *Quadrante* circle's belief that the formal concerns of Rationalism reflected the political order of fascism at the scale of the metropolis, the region and the nation.

*Quadrante* did not address the architectural implications of all of the period's political controversies, however. Although deeply committed to improving social welfare, *Quadrante*, like fascism in general, did not advocate the abolition of existing class structures. Nor did it tackle the lingering economic and social antagonisms between city and country which stoked the Strapaese movement, despite publishing elaborate proposals to solve both urban and rural problems. *Quadrante* largely avoided the question of colonialism; if anything, it offered its tacit support with its authors' repeated references to Italy's renewed status as an imperial power.

*Quadrante* defined its political engagement in terms of the invention, development and popularization of an architecture of the state and advocacy of specific positions in the debates within fascism. Fascist Italy was, to its editors, a militarized and corporatist state of mobilized masses, one whose new institutions

(such as youth centers and party headquarters) and expanding cities required appropriate architectural expression. The review presented its designers' work as the very mirror of a political creed that stressed unity, abhorred individualism, remained agnostic on questions of religion, appeared apathetic to the subject of racial identity, and professed antipathy to the insular arguments of nationalists in the Fascist Party. The *Quadrante* circle was fiercely intellectual and elitist (both in terms of aesthetics and technocratic innovation) while simultaneously celebrating valor, sacrifice and collective action.

Bardi's 1930 campaign for an architecture that would directly represent fascist politics galvanized contemporary Italian architectural publications, all of which responded to the challenge by realigning their criticism to emphasize the relationship between current architectural practices and the regime's policies. *Quadrante* thus entered a larger arena of architectural debate that included the journals *Casabella* and *Domus* (both published in Milan), and *Architettura e arti decorativi*, the official journal of the state architects' syndicate, published in Rome. Under the direction of Gio Ponti, *Domus* presented an eclectic mix of architecture, design and cultural programming. *Casabella*, which always enjoyed wider circulation than *Quadrante*'s maximum print run of 5,000 copies per issue, shared its younger rival's polemical advocacy of modern architecture, especially after Giuseppe Pagano and Edoardo Persico assumed control of the journal in 1933. *Architettura e arti decorativi* proved supportive of the young Rationalists, some of whom joined the magazine's staff under the direction of the heterodox, if much maligned, architect Marcello Piacentini. What distinguished *Quadrante* from its peers was its insistent political activism and its interdisciplinary presentation of architecture in a broader cultural context of literature and the fine and performing arts. In addition, it had closer links to other European avant-garde figures, most notably Le Corbusier.

Politically, *Quadrante* was allied with the corporatist and internationalist wings of the Fascist Party, whose economic policies sought a third way between American capitalism and Soviet communism, and whose diplomatic stances called for Italy to assume a position of leadership among western nations while avoiding the overtly xenophobic rhetoric of the party's nationalists. Giuseppe Bottai, who was at various times the Minister of Corporations, Minister of Education, and Governor of Rome, was an important early supporter of both *Quadrante* and Bardi. Bottai and industrialist Adriano Olivetti (one of Rationalism's key patrons) argued in *Quadrante*'s pages in favor of the corporatist development of fascist politics, while architects Piero Bottoni and the partners of BBPR (Gianluigi Banfi, Ludovico Barbiano di Belgioioso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers) offered urban plans based on those principles. It was in this context that the journal's contributors pressed the Rationalist argument that modern architecture reflected the regime's pursuit of rapid industrialization and modernization, not just in the construction of infrastructural projects (such as railway stations and post offices) but also in the provision of hygienic housing and modern educational and recreational institutions. In accordance with the fascist project of unifying Italy's famously parochial regions, *Quadrante* published simultaneously in Milan (the industrial capital) and Rome (the political capital).

Bardi and Bontempelli produced the first issue of *Quadrante* in May 1933, with the financial assistance of Giuseppe Terragni—Rationalism’s most significant architect—and the abstract painters Mario Radice and Virginio Ghiringhelli. *Quadrante* combined coverage of architecture with articles on the fine and applied arts, literature, music, theater, dance, technology, engineering and, especially, politics. Contributors to the journal included some of the era’s most innovative critics, architects, artists, engineers, authors, industrialists and historians. “*Quadrante* is born,” Bardi declared in his inaugural editorial, “amidst a passionate debate of ideas in which not only writers and architects have participated but also musicians, painters, scientists, sculptors, engineers and even industrialists: and everyone has contributed to the affirmation of some fundamental points of agreement, deliberated so as to institute a meeting place of unfettered, advanced and original intelligence.”<sup>9</sup>

Politics, collaboration, interdisciplinarity and militant advocacy defined *Quadrante*. No other Italian architectural journal devoted itself so completely to developing a theory of an architecture of the state. Other architects (and artists in all media) frequently used Mussolini’s declaration of the need for, “a new art, an art of our time, a fascist art,” to justify modernism as a viable practice in a time of violently reactionary politics. However, no publication argued so passionately that modern architecture was thoroughly fascist in its forms, materiality and patrimony. Nor did any contemporary Italian journal situate architecture in such a broadly defined field of cultural production. This interdisciplinary orientation paralleled the *Quadrante* circle’s use of multiple vehicles to engage contemporary cultural debates; the group staged exhibitions at Bardi’s Galleria d’Arte di Roma and the Galleria del Milione in Milan, attended international congresses, organized Italian lectures by such figures as Le Corbusier, built temporary installations at national expositions and participated in official and professional boards to press their case for a modern, fascist architecture as the legitimate expression of Mussolini’s “continuing revolution.” *Quadrante* was not launched to report on contemporary architecture; it aimed to create it.

The *Quadrante* circle conceived the journal’s mission in bold terms: to define the characteristics of modern architecture, to defend modernism against the criticism of reactionaries and conservatives, to situate modern architecture within a broader interdisciplinary project of cultural palingenesis, and, ultimately, to campaign for Rationalism’s adoption throughout the nation as the official architecture of the fascist state. For the Rationalists, and especially for the polytechnic-trained members of the *Quadrante* circle, the term “anti-culturalist” combined Mussolini’s self-proclaimed “anti-elitism” with Le Corbusier’s frequent exhortations against the “academic” practice of architecture. While the former connoted a suspicion of economic and political institutions and elites (leading the journal’s editors to favor coverage of public housing and fascist party commissions over bourgeois villas and government ministries), the latter demanded a careful re-evaluation of the legacy of the classical language of architecture, one that separated the “classical spirit” of antiquity from its codification in Renaissance treatises. This position, however, carried its own set of contradictions. The *Quadrante*

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9 BARDI, Pietro Maria. “Principii,” *Quadrante* 1 (May 1933): 2.

architects saw themselves as an elite defined by skill, intent and action, much like the *arditi* of the World War I or the *squadristi* whose organized violence helped bring Mussolini to power. The *Quadrante* architects happily appropriated Bontempelli's prestige as a member of the Accademia d'Italia and eagerly sought to infiltrate the institutional and professional mechanisms of power. Their goal was to assume the role of fashioning an architecture of the state.

The *Quadrante* circle included members of the seminal Gruppo 7 (the first group of Italian Rationalists, founded in 1927), Bottoni, Enrico Agostino Griffini and BBPR, as well as the abstract painters of the Gruppo di Como (including Ghiringhelli, Radice and Manlio Rho). These architects and artists often exhibited at Milan's Galleria del Milione—previously the Galleria Bardi—under the direction of Ghiringhelli and, later, Persico. The *Quadrante* circle frequented the Bar Craja (designed by *Quadrante* contributors Luciano Baldessari, Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini), whose other patrons included industrialists like Carlo Frua de Angeli (an important Milanese patron of modern art and architecture) and the painter Mario Sironi (perhaps the most significant artist of the Novecento movement, and who would later collaborate on some of Terragni's most poetic projects). *Quadrante*'s circle extended from Milan to Rome and embraced the figurative artists of the Scuola Romana (especially the painter Corrado Cagli, who was Bontempelli's nephew). The Roman painters exhibited at Bardi's Galleria di Roma, which co-produced exhibitions with the Galleria del Milione. The prominence given to the fine arts in *Quadrante* reflects the extent to which the journal advocated a set of common principles in the development of appropriately fascist forms of art and cultural production.

Contributors to the journal included Carlo Belli, Giuseppe Bottai, Piero Bottoni, Anton Giulio Bragaglia, Corrado Cagli, Alfredo Casella, Gaetano Ciocca, Luigi Figini, Guido Fiorini, Marcello Gallian, Virginio Ghiringhelli, Sigfried Giedion, Enrico Griffini, Guido Modiano, Francesco Monotti, Pier Luigi Nervi, Adriano Olivetti, Vinicio Paladini, Gino Pollini, Ezra Pound, Enrico Prampolini, Ernesto Rogers, Alberto Sartoris and Giuseppe Terragni. Over the course of three years, *Quadrante* printed critical appraisals of bellwether architectural and urban design projects, such as the 1934 competition for the Palazzo del Littorio, the 1933 Triennale di Milano, the planning of the Pontine marsh towns and Terragni's work in Como (from the Novocomum to the Casa del Fascio). Many issues of *Quadrante* printed statements on cultural production by Mussolini in a heroic typography reserved solely for the dictator's words. Terragni juxtaposed his Casa del Fascio in Como against the Duce's apocryphal proclamation that "fascism must be a glass house into which everyone can see." *Quadrante* published (and commented on positively) works by international figures like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and Fernand Léger.

The exhibition in Buenos Aires reflected *Quadrante*'s primary mission: to construct an environment in which modern architecture could flourish in Italy and the world. To do this, the journal sought to cultivate circles of patrons (state, corporate, institutional and private) and stoke enthusiasm among the general public, in order to create a demand for Rationalist architecture. Extensive technical discussions were aimed at encouraging research among manufacturers



and familiarizing builders with the materials and methods of modern construction. Architects, the journal's primary constituency, used *Quadrante* to refine their aesthetic and conceptual concerns in an atmosphere of collegial discourse and debate. Thus, the *Quadrante* circle sought to expand its audience by installing exhibitions at the Galleria del Milione and the Galleria d'Arte di Roma directed by Bardi, curating sections of the Triennale di Milano, and sponsoring public lectures in Milan and Rome. Bardi's voyage to South America expanded these efforts globally. The goal was to create a broad culture of modern architecture in Italy and the world.

The editors were committed to collaboration in both the content and production of the journal. They frequently published major projects by large teams of prominent architects, and responsibility for editing the magazine rotated with each issue among the large circle of contributors. Bontempelli believed collectivity was a primary value of modern cultural production, and argued that the innate anonymity of architecture (in terms of the finished work's distance from its author) should be a model for the other arts. Collaboration among architects reflected the fascist ideal of consensus, which had influenced the Gruppo 7's rejection of individualism. Many of the period's most fertile collaborations, including designs submitted to the 1934 Palazzo del Littorio competition by two teams of *Quadrante* contributors, began with friendships forged through mutual association with the journal; one of the teams, in fact, called itself the Gruppo Quadrante.

Consonant with its intensely polemical tone, the journal looked more like a hastily prepared manifesto than an elegantly designed architectural publication. While *Casabella*, *Domus* and other monthlies invested considerable resources on graphic design and glossy paper stock, *Quadrante* used cheaper newsprint for pages of densely packed text (photographic plates employed coated stock). Defending the journal's slight stature at 32 pages per issue, Bardi argued that its condensed design presented three times as much content as a typical magazine. The first eighteen issues appeared behind simple cardstock covers which prominently displayed the issue number, in homage to Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant's *L'Esprit nouveau* (1920-25).

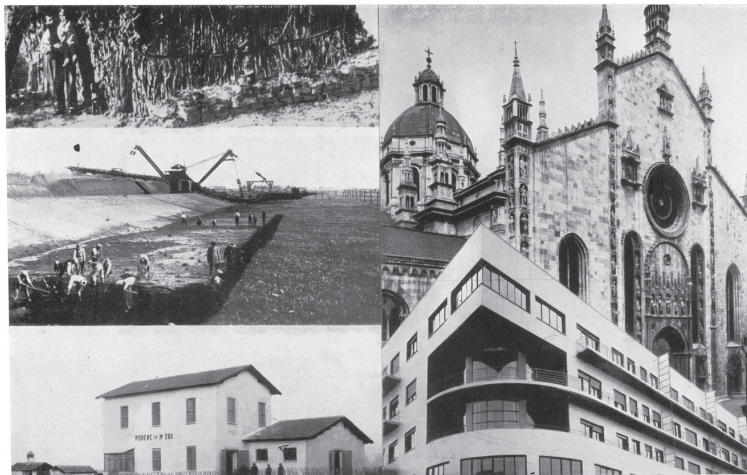
*Quadrante* amplified the great importance Bardi had long ascribed to the roles of engineering and urbanism. The journal published a large number of visionary projects by engineers Gaetano Ciocca, Guido Fiorini and Pier Luigi Nervi. Bardi also maintained a personal correspondence with other engineers, including Luigi Kambo, designer of the famous dam on the Tirso River. Ciocca, Fiorini and Nervi used the journal to press the case for their technocratic responses to societal needs. Ciocca, in particular, was involved in the journal's early planning, and *Quadrante* provided a medium for him to explain numerous projects ranging from the Theater of Masses (which was also the subject of important articles by Bontempelli) to his Taylorized pig farm. *Quadrante* published Fiorini's tensistruttura proposal, one of several significant points of contact between Le Corbusier and the *Quadrante* circle. The journal established contacts between these engineers and Rationalist architects, resulting in a series of important (though unrealized) collaborative projects for E'42, the partially-completed universal exposition and administrative city south of Rome, as well as the 1934 master plan competition entry for Pavia.



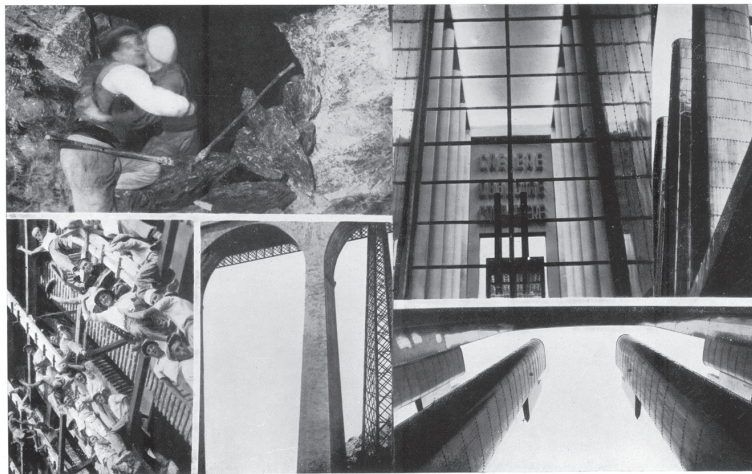
Through the advocacy of Olivetti, Bottoni and Rogers, *Quadrante* served as one of the leading vehicles for the discussion of modern town planning in Italy. Olivetti was both an advocate and patron of modern urban design, and *Quadrante* published the regional plans of Valle d'Aosta he commissioned from Figini, Pollini, Bottoni and BBPR. Every Italian delegate to CIAM was a central figure in the *Quadrante* circle, and they all published articles in the journal, many of them synthesizing the international organization's positions with Bottai's corporatist economic policies. Bardi covered the 1933 CIAM conference aboard the SS *Patris II*, building on the earlier CIAM participation of Sartoris, Rava, Bottoni, Pollini and Figini. *Quadrante* also provided a forum for critically evaluating other developments in Italian town planning, and in particular the design of the Pontine marsh towns.

Interwar Italian architecture represents an example of architecture's transformation from a reflection of social values and interpretation of social aspiration to an active participation in political processes, in a way anticipated by the political writings of Antonio Gramsci and the philosophy of Benedetto Croce. Emblematic of this position was Gaetano Ciocca's article, "Contro l'intelligenza sedentaria," published in the first issue of *Quadrante*. In it the engineer set the tone for the journal's activist stance by calling for productive labor from intellectuals to replace the "sedentary intelligence" of the cloistered academic. A close reading of architectural literature in fascist Italy further reveals a moment when architecture itself became discursive, that is, architecture served as a medium for political and cultural discourses.

Like their contemporaries at *Casabella*, Bardi and Bontempelli typified the activist intellectual described by Gramsci, whose critique of Marx recognized the potentially critical and political role of intellectual activity. Gramsci established the importance of ideas as a locus of power and a structure of societal power relations, thus ascribing a new level of importance to intellectual activity, which Marx had treated as a superstructural reflection of more important base power relations. I am not suggesting that Bardi, et al., took Gramsci's writings as a point of departure for their own practices. Yet clearly the editors of *Quadrante* recognized that, just as ephemeral practices (such as publications, exhibitions and competitions) were invaluable elements of architectural practice, architecture itself could be an instrument of political expression. As Italian intellectuals considered the proper manner in which artistic production could meet the fascist regime's need for cultural representation, architecture—as competition project, as exhibition pavilion and as built work—became a powerful medium for arguing the ideological efficacy of modernism. *Quadrante* exemplifies how architects used architecture to participate in Italy's political debates.

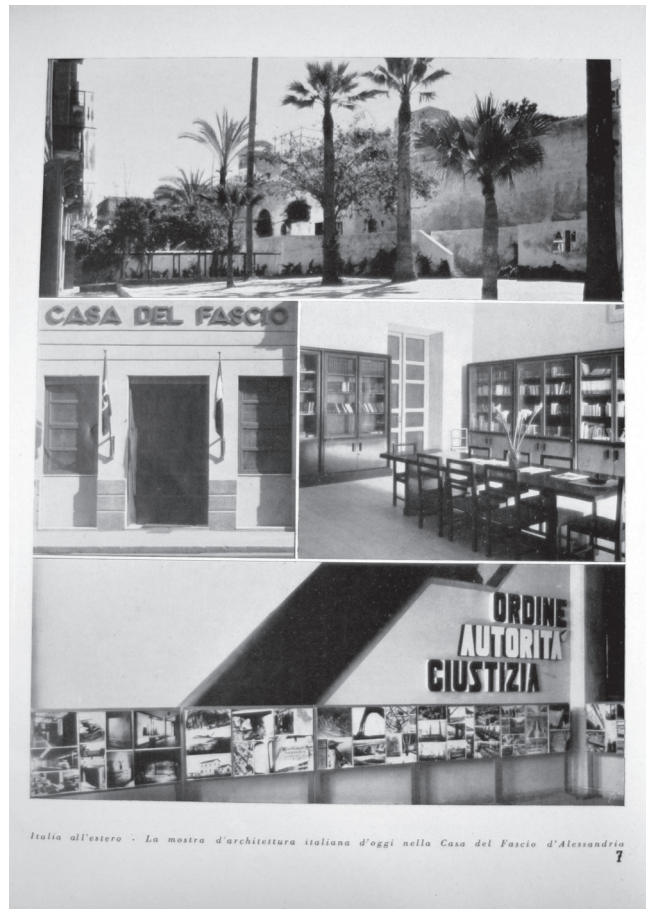


*Littoria, capanna prima, durante, dopo la bonifica pontina. Como: veduta del Duomo e della casa dell'arch. Terragni.*



*La Firenze-Bologna — Cade l'ultimo diaframma - Cantieri fascisti. Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista - L'ingresso e i fasci della facciata.*

**Fig. 1 e Fig. 2**  
Panels from the Mostra  
dell'architettura italiana  
d'oggi exhibited in Buenos  
Aires. Published in  
Quadrante 6 (October 1933).



**Fig. 3** Installation of the Mostra dell'architettura italiana d'oggi at the Casa del Fascio in Alexandria, Egypt. Published in *Quadrante* 7 (November 1933).



**Fig. 4** Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, pictured during a mass rally on 5 May 1936. Published in *Quadrante* 35/36 (September-October 1936).