Leonardo Benevolo and the Storia dell'architettura moderna

Reference and Contemporaneity in an Architectural History

Matteo Cassani Simonetti

Leonardo Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, published by Editori Laterza in 1960, stands as one of the best-known books on modern architectural history to appear in Italy before the 1970s— and likely the most popular both within the country and abroad, thanks to its numerous translations and reprints.[1] Benevolo (1923–2017) was simultaneously an architect, historian, and urban planner. Beyond the *Storia*'s content, it is precisely this multifaceted identity that makes this book distinctive. Unlike many architectural historians, who may have been trained as architects but were not directly engaged in design practice, Benevolo maintained an active design practice throughout his career, convinced that historical study was fundamental to design and, conversely, that design informed historical understanding. By contrast, the elder Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968) or the younger Bruno Zevi (1918–2000) were both historians directly involved in architecture but as cultural organisers; in the same way, Nikolaus Pevsner (1902–1983) and Reyner Banham (1922–1988) were primarily art and architecture historians. Put simply, their work was primarily oriented toward the realm of language—both oral and written—rather than toward drawing and architectural design. Benevolo's characteristics, on the other hand, enable us to examine the relationship

1 This text offers reflections on Leonardo Benevolo's Storia dell'architettura moderna that are explored in greater depth in Matteo Cassani Simonetti, La Storia di Leonardo Benevolo nella cultura architettonica italiana (1945-1960) (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2025), to which I also refer for principal bibliographical details. This text is dedicated to Mattia Ravaioli.

between architectural history and the design process, despite the sometimes condescending treatment of his historiographical work by other historians. This examination brings together two defining traits of the twentieth-century Italian architect as intellectual, at least according to some historians:[2] the use of language and the practice of architecture conceived as a political act (Fig. 41).

Manfredo Tafuri (1935–1994) offered a well-known and unflattering assessment of Benevolo's volume in his *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (1968).[3] Tafuri underlined the failure of Italian operative criticism, linking both Bruno Zevi and Leonardo Benevolo in this research endeavor—and in its failure. He wrote:

> Apparently more objective and without definitive judgments, Benevolo's 'history' inserts critical judgment into the exposition and 'montage' of the facts. Here the deformations are revealed by the 'forced' attitude with which the author chooses or ignores figures, movements and cycles of works. Also, compared to Zevi's work, Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna* is ideologically far more limited. In the end both bend history in order to demonstrate a priori choices for the future of architecture: what changes (and completely) is the quality of such choices.[4]

The word "quality" implies a veiled or explicitly negative judgement by Tafuri; however, even adopting a less trenchant interpretation, Tafuri appears to establish a hierarchy by finding Benevolo's *Storia* to be "ideologically far

2 See Jean-Louis Cohen, La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels, ou les enseignements de l'italophilie (1984; Brussels: Mardaga, 2015); Marco Biraghi, L'architetto come intellettuale (Turin: Einaudi, 2019).

3 About this assessment in Italian debate, see, for instance, Paolo Portoghesi, "Attualità della storia dell'architettura," in Comunità, no. 88, year 15 (March–April 1961), 72–9; Aldo Rossi, "Considerazioni sul concorso per la nuova sacca del Tronchetto," in Casabella-Continuità, no. 293 (November 1964), 2–4.

4 Manfredo Tafuri, Theories and History of Architecture, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 168.

more limited" than Zevi's book on modern architectural history, published a decade earlier in 1950.[5]

Beyond whatever value we might attribute to Benevolo's book, the *Storia*—even without counting its numerous translations—was the most widely circulated text on modern architectural history in Italy until the 1970s and, consequently, may have exerted the greatest influence on the education of generations of architects. It contributed to consolidating the myth of the Modern Movement during its crystallisation into the International Style and helped perpetuate this tradition until the end of the twentieth century. To understand the book's character—and both to refute and confirm some of the critiques leveled against it—it is necessary to trace its genesis and the context in which it was conceived.

History of the Storia

The opportunity that allowed Benevolo to write the *Storia* arose from editorial circumstances. Vito Laterza, head of Editori Laterza, sought in the second half of the 1950s to expand his publishing house's catalog by adding architecture and other topics to its traditional focus on the philosophical works of Benedetto Croce. This choice reflected an expansion of the publishing market driven by the economic boom and mass education—a demand that other publishers were attempting to meet by issuing works, or more rarely series, dedicated to architecture and other fields of study. Regarding architecture, for instance, Giulio Einaudi was pursuing the same strategy after the end of World War II with cultural support from Bruno Zevi for a series titled *Collana Storica di Architettura*.[6] It should also be noted that architectural publications in Italy during the *Ricostruzione* were sporadic and mainly ent-

5 Bruno Zevi, Storia dell'architettura moderna (Turin: Einaudi, 1950). See Panayotis Tournikiotis, The Historiography of Modern Architecture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 85–111; and Roberto Dulio, Introduzione a Bruno Zevi (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 82–94.

6 See Alessandro and Giuseppe Laterza, "Un secolo (e oltre) di libri," in Le edizioni Laterza: Catalogo storico 1901–2020 (Rome: Laterza, 2021), ix–xxxiv; and Elena Formia, "L'editoria in Italia nel Dopoguerra e la Collana storica di architettura di Einaudi," in Biagio Rossetti secondo Bruno Zevi, ed. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Francesco Ceccarelli, and Adachiara Zevi (Rome: Viella, 2021), 93–104.

rusted to minor publishers. While monographs on major contemporary architects were published, historical studies of the architecture of the previous two centuries were almost entirely absent. The 1956 request to Benevolo to write a *Storia dell'architettura moderna* emerged from this context through the intercession of the Roman architect Carlo Chiarini, a mutual friend of Laterza and Benevolo.[7] Chiarini and Benevolo immediately proposed themselves as editors for an architecture book series—never fully realized, though some titles were later published in the Biblioteca di Cultura Moderna[8]—and Benevolo began writing his volume. Meanwhile, before the *Storia*'s publication and demonstrating Vito Laterza's interest in architecture, Laterza published Giuseppe Samonà's *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città* and the Italian translation of Nikolaus Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture*, both appearing in 1959.[9]

The book that Benevolo and Laterza envisioned was intended not only for specialists but also a wide general public: they wanted to create a synthesis, a richly illustrated survey of modern architecture from the mid-eighteenth century onward that could fill a gap in Italian publications. The idea was for a book that would be concise yet sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to document the birth and development of modern architecture. The result was to be, above all, a well-illustrated volume with new photography. The program was ambitious for both the author—who would need to write the text and create the iconographic material—and for the publisher, who was not specialized in illustrated books. The outcome was a colossal work in two volumes totaling a thousand pages, with an equal number of figures.[10]

Benevolo's references for historiographical work on modern architecture were the books by Giedion—in 1953 the translation of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) had just been published in Italy by Hoepli—and those of Pevsner, whose *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936) had already been translated into Italian by the small publishing

7 See Leonardo Benevolo, La fine della città, interview by Francesco Erbani (Rome: Laterza, 2011), 46.

8 Letter from Vito Laterza to Leonardo Benevolo, October 28, 1959, Archivio Giuseppe Laterza Editore, Bari.

9 Nikolaus Pevsner, Storia dell'architettura europea (Rome: Laterza, 1959).

10 Letter from Vito Laterza to Leonardo Benevolo, December 15, 1956, Archivio Giuseppe Laterza Editore, Bari.

house Rosa e Ballo in 1945.[11] Benevolo gathered the bibliographic sources for his book through various means: Zevi's *Storia* provided him with an extremely extensive and useful bibliography for outlining the events of the most recent period; additionally, he made extensive use of magazines and synthetic works in history, economics, and sociology. As for the illustrations, he collected some from existing repertoires, but for those relating to European works, most of them came from several trips he made to major cities and centers with the explicit aim of creating the volume's iconographic apparatus through new photographs taken directly by him.[12]

However, the most relevant reference book for Benevolo (according to his statements) was *Die Neue Architektur* (1939) by Alfred Roth (1903–1998), a work that is far from a history book. It is composed with carefully selected documentation and based on the choice of a few *exempla*.[13] Perhaps the same expression that Stanislaus von Moos used for the title of his volume on Roth, *Architecture of Continuity*, could also describe Benevolo's work, underlining their shared approach in considering the Modern Movement as a continuous and vital experience and, consequently, its history as a part of the contemporary debate. The identification of Roth's book as Benevolo's main reference reveals one of the major qualities of the *Storia*: Although its title explicitly announces its historical interpretative perspective, its contents are more comparable to a book expressly addressed to the problems of contemporary design, such as Roth's or Samonà's. The *Storia* is a book conceived by an author who cannot simply be defined as an architectural historian, and whose genre is suspended between travelogue and encyclopaedia. It is written in the heartfelt, participatory tone of someone who, in writing about history, attempts to speak explicitly about the present from an *operative* perspective—understood not in a historiographical tradition but in the context of design culture. This different perspective was probably the outcome of his training and activities: on the one hand, his work as young professor of architectural history at the Università di Roma, where he dedicated his studies to architec-

11 Sigfried Giedion, Spazio, tempo ed architettura: Lo sviluppo di una nuova tradizione, trans. Enrica and Mario Labò (1941; Milan: Hoepli, 1953); Nikolaus Pevsner, I pionieri del movimento moderno da William Morris a Walter Gropius, trans. Giuliana Baracco (1936; Milan: Rosa e Ballo, 1945).

12 On Benevolo and photography, see Leonardo Benevolo, "Fotografie d'ambiente," in Centro Sociale, no. 5–6, year 2, (1955), 51–5.

13 Leonardo Benevolo, L'architettura nel nuovo millennio (Rome: Laterza, 2006), vi–vii.

ture from the Renaissance to the Baroque; and, on the other, his job as urban planner and architect.

Benevolo before the *Storia*

In 1946 Benevolo graduated in Architecture at the Università di Roma. He lived through the war and Fascism, as he recalls, without forming a precise opinion on these events.[14] He did not support Fascism, but neither did he participate in the *Resistenza*, and during the war he retreated with his mother to the Alps, waiting for the conflict to end while continuing his university studies. His situation at the end of the war was therefore, in a certain sense, one of transition: too young to have had time to participate in Fascism, then repudiate it, and too inexperienced to assume a leading position during the *Ricostruzione*.[15] This was the trajectoryof many architects in those years, and this difficult legacy can be understood by reading texts by Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Giulia Veronesi, for instance.[16] During the first postwar years, Benevolo pursued many parallel paths toward professional practice, academic activity, and professional associations. He participated in the main architecture associations established in Rome: the Associazione per l'Architettura Organica (APAO), organized by Bruno Zevi in 1944; the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (INU), re-founded by Adriano Olivetti after the war; the Istituto Nazionale di Architettura (IN/ARCH), again organized by Bruno Zevi in 1959; and the Società di Architettura e Urbanistica (SAU), founded in the late 1950s. All these associations were characterized by a strong anti-fascist spirit. Simultaneously, he maintained his presence at the Faculty of Architecture in Rome, where some of the leading figures of Fascism, like Marcello Piacentini, continued to teach. Finally, Benevolo also worked at the notorious Società Generale Immobiliare, which was engaged in massive reconstruction and

14 Benevolo, La fine della città, 30.

15 On the Ricostruzione, see Manfredo Tafuri, Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944–1985 (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 5–46.

16 See Ernesto Nathan Rogers, "Catarsi," in Costruzioni-Casabella, nos. 185–98 (1946), 40–2; and Giulia Veronesi, Difficoltà politiche dell'architettura in Italia, 1920–1940 (Milan: Libreria editrice Politecnica Tamburini, 1953).

speculative operations, and where he was in charge of executive and technological design at the Ufficio Progetti.[17]

This overview of the cultural spheres frequented by Benevolo, and their clear ideological contradictions, reflects the position of a young architect eager to engage in the major debates surrounding the Ricostruzione. Urban planning, however, became Benevolo's primary focus. As a member of the INU, he worked on regional planning in Abruzzo from 1952 and participated in numerous conferences on regional urban planning that emphasized comprehensive territorial studies incorporating the sociological and economic dimensions of communities.[18] His sensitivity to architecture's social dimension likely developed through his work in Abruzzo at the Centro Educazione Professionale per Assistenti Sociali (CEPAS) with Angela Zucconi (1914–2000); Ludovico Quaroni had introduced him to this organization, where he taught statistics rather than architecture or planning. His Abruzzo experience also involved highly technical urban planning work, but this approach to technique was grounded in social needs and aimed at improving community development and coordination among social workers. This philosophy is evident in *Centro Sociale*, a journal crucial for understanding the connections between architecture, social activities, and practical experience that formed the foundation of Benevolo's work[19] (Fig. 42, Fig. 43).

Another area where Benevolo articulated his passion for urban planning and his interpretation of architecture as serving social needs was in debates and projects concerning the preservation of historic centers.[20] He interpreted the ancient city as a place to be safeguarded not so much from a conservation perspective, seeking to preserve its architecture and monuments, but in order to maintain the social and artistic unity that it had achieved over

17 For an overview of Benevolo's life, see Benevolo, La fine della città.

18 On Benevolo and urban planning, see Leonardo Benevolo, Le origini dell'architettura moderna (Rome: Laterza, 1963).

19 See Alice Belotti, La comunità democratica: Partecipazione, educazione e potere nel lavoro di comunità di Saul Alinsky e Angela Zucconi (Rome: Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 2011); on Centro Sociale, see Michela Maguolo, "La comunità e il suo centro: Una rivista, un tema, un dibattito," in Engramma, no. 166 (June 2019), https://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=3638 (accessed April 15, 2024).

20 For a summary of Benevolo's approach, see Leonardo Benevolo, "La conservazione dei centri antichi e del paesaggio come problema urbanistico," in Ulisse, vol. 5, no. 27, year 11 (Autumn–Winter 1957), 1445–53.

time. For him, the historic center was a district of the modern city—a district with specific needs related to its history, but still a district serving its inhabitants. This position, setting aside its polemical aspects, was similar to those of the journalist Antonio Cederna (1921–1966), Benevolo's friend and colleague, and of the Italia Nostra association, where he held leading positions.

For Benevolo, the ethical dimension of conserving historic city centers was grounded in personal beliefs that involved his faith. More generally, his deep knowledge of the doctrine of St. Thomas and his studies of neoscholastic philosophy during the war led him to interpret architecture as a profoundly moral activity—a morality he recognized as foundational in the work of Nikolaus Pevsner, a historiographer whose work strongly influenced Benevolo, and which he also found in the work by William Morris (1834–1896).[21] A well-known definition of architecture by Morris served as a key phrase for interpreting the *Storia* and another book that Benevolo published in 1960, *Una introduzione all'architettura*—and, more broadly, for understanding his entire body of work (Fig. 44):

A great subject truly, for it embraces the consideration of the whole external surroundings of the life of man; we cannot escape from it if we would so long as we are part of civilisation, for it means the moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself, except in the outermost desert. Neither can we hand over our interests in it to a little band of learned men, and bid them seek and discover, and fashion, that we may at last stand by and wonder at the work, and learn a little of how 'twas all done: 'tis we ourselves, each one of us, who must keep watch and ward over the fairness of the earth, and each with his own soul and hand do his due share therein, lest we deliver to our sons a lesser treasure than our fathers left to us.[22]

Benevolo combined the topic of morality—the foundation of his activities—with the dominant presence of technology in the modern world and structured his interpretation of the Modern Movement, its history, and its legacies within this dialectic. For instance, in 1946, while developing one of his earliest theoretical texts, he wrote:

21 On this topic, from a critical perspective, see David Watkin, Morality and Architecture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

22 William Morris, "The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization," lecture at the London Institution, Finsbury Circus, March 10, 1881, in Hopes and Fears for Art (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1882), 181.

> The problem [of technology], then, becomes particularly important today. This is both because technology has achieved a truly extraordinary development on its own, and because architecture for the last thirty years has relied precisely on technology to achieve its artistic results . . . . Technology could be interpreted as the continuation that man is called upon to give to God's creation—and man, through technology, becomes in a certain sense God's collaborator in continuing the work of creation.[23]

This interpretation of the sacred nature of architecture and the design process was not explicitly developed in the *Storia*, but some of these ideas were expressed through a more secular framework that emphasized strong social and moral foundations as decisive for the Modern Movement.

The *Storia* as a Collective Project

As I suggested above, the *Storia* is distinctive in that it exists somewhere between historiography and design. Its second distinctive feature concerns the context in which it was developed—a context that involves not only Benevolo but also a significant portion of Rome's architectural culture, allowing us to interpret the book as a collective project. During the second half of the 1950s, a group of architects founded the SAU to establish a common architectural approach rooted in the Modern Movement and focused on architecture and planning.[24]

---

23 My translation. "Il problema [della tecnica], poi, diventa particolarmente importante oggi. Sia perché la tecnica ha raggiunto, per conto suo, uno sviluppo veramente straordinario, sia perché l'architettura da trent'anni in qua si fonda proprio sulla tecnica per raggiungere i suoi risultati artistici . . . . La tecnica si potrebbe chiamare il proseguimento che l'uomo è chiamato a dare alla creazione di Dio—e l'uomo, attraverso la tecnica, diventa in un certo senso il collaboratore di Dio per continuare l'opera della creazione." Leonardo Benevolo, "Teoria dell'arte, scritti del 1946," manuscript, Archivio Leonardo Benevolo, Cellatica, Italy, "Schedario" series, folder "Teoria dell'arte."

24 SAU members included Renato Amaturo, Luisa Anversa, Carlo Aymonino, Maurizio Aymonino, Pietro Barucci, Gabriele Belardelli, Leonardo Benevolo, Massimo Boschetti, Arnaldo Bruschi, Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Carlo Chiarini, Fabrizio Cocchia, Adolfo DeCarlo, Baldo de' Rossi, Nico Di Cagno, Beata di Gaddo, Luciano Giovannini, Marcello Girelli, Italo Insolera, Aldo Livadiotti, Mario Manieri Elia, Nino Manzone, Giuseppina

Benevolo's *Storia* was conceived and developed within the SAU. For the association's members, the book served as something of a manifesto—the foundation of a shared tradition based not on formal values but idealistic principles: trust in humanistic technology, collaborative work, and commitment to the Modern Movement, which was undergoing a crisis during these years (as seen, for example, with CIAM).[25] The SAU proposed an alternative to the formal research that dominated Italian architectural culture—research, for istance, that had prompted Rayner Banham to declare that Italy had withdrawn from the Modern Movement.[26] Benevolo's *Storia* thus emerged from a context where historical reference and contemporary relevance converged, creating a truly operative history for design practice, not one merely operative in its theoretical declarations, like Zevi's perspective.

A brief comparison between Zevi's *Storia* and Benevolo's reveals these differences: both addressed primarily architects and students, and both sought to define history's role in design practice. In essence, Zevi reinterpreted past masters and inserted them into contemporary discourse to extract formal principles for developing contemporary architectural expression.[27] Benevolo, by contrast, found in social and collective history the the essential spirit of the Modern Movement—a movement that necessarily had heroes of *method* rather than heroes of *architectural language*. Zevi's is a history of masterpieces, Benevolo's a collective history—admittedly dogmatic and at times moralistic, grounded in a faith that architecture and planning, understood as collaborative efforts toward social improvement (and, for Benevolo, toward the glorification of God), can transform society. This philosophical difference is evident in their books' visual approaches. Benevolo's *Storia* combines old and contemporary photographs to create a complex representation of architec-

---

Marcialis, Carlo Melograni, Cleto Morelli, Piero Moroni, Ugo Sacco, Alberto Samonà, Michele Valori, Eduardo Vittoria, and Marcello Vittorini.

25 Eric Mumford, The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 238–66.

26 See Reyner Banham, "Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture," in Architectural Review, no. 747 (1959), 285. On the debate, see Francesco Cellini, "La polemica sul Neoliberty," in Controspazio, nos. 4–5 (1977): 52–3.

27 On this topic, see Matteo Cassani Simonetti, "Biagio Rossetti come pretesto," in Biagio Rossetti secondo Bruno Zevi, ed. Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Francesco Ceccarelli, and Adachiara Zevi (Rome: Viella, 2021), 61–91.

ture and its transformations while Zevi's book uses photographs of recently completed works to emphasize formal innovation (Fig. 45).

In general, as already noted, Benevolo's *Storia* is essentially a narrative without heroes. If we must identify a central figure, it is not Frank Lloyd Wright (as in Zevi's account) but Walter Gropius, who represents Benevolo's ideal of the Modern Movement master. For Benevolo, Gropius embodied the socially engaged architect, rather than the creator of formal or spatial masterpieces. When writing about Gropius, Benevolo seemed to be drawing a self-portrait—one that also reflected the SAU's position:

> Gropius's lesson was validated precisely by what happened outside the school; with his eye on method, not on style, he discreetly but irresistibly invited the best architects from the various countries to look deeper into the rationale behind their experiments, their heritage. . . . [F]ormal tendencies were manifold—even if certain less distinguished members of the younger generation were beginning to talk of an international style—but with a common character that laid them open to comparison, to integration and to a shared belief in certain principles: respect for the human scale, strict technical propriety, continuity between the various scales of planning . . . . [T]he masters of the modern movement worked and spoke with a completely different tone: reasonable, modulated and concerned with a long-term task.[28]

Benevolo even began the conclusion of his *Storia* with Gropius's words, quoting a 1952 speech to the Association of American architects. For Benevolo, Gropius's emphasis on teamwork offered a methodological model for contemporary practice.[29] Benevolo and his colleagues attempted to implement this approach through the SAU. Even if we consider the *Storia* apart from its historiographical framework, we can sense Benevolo's determination to transform the architectural culture of his time by connecting historical reference with contemporary practice—and by removing history from dusty library shelves to place it directly at the center of the design process.

28 Leonardo Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, vol. 2, The Modern Movement, trans. H. J. Landry (1960; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 471.

29 Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, vol. 2, 783–6.

For Benevolo, the Modern Movement was an inevitable development that remained vital in the 1950s, and architecture had to be grounded in human equality and freedom. This is how his *Storia* concludes: "[I]f the modern movement was to be outgrown, this must be an 'outgrowing' far more radical than any that had hitherto taken place: things would have to begin again from the beginning, with completely different aims. The realization of the gravity of this dilemma certainly does not help modern architects to find peace of mind, but it does project duty and hope on to a specific target."[30]

Some projects around the *Storia*

It is possible to draw parallels between projects that Benevolo developed in the 1950s and 1960s and the *Storia* to show how the book was explicitly oriented toward contemporary design practice and, conversely, how his design work from those same years reflected the same theoretical principles that shaped his historical interpretation.

This relationship appears, for instance, in the competition project for the Torre Spagnola suburb in Matera, designed by Benevolo with Giampaolo Rotondi in 1955 (Fig. 46). The competition was part of the broader redevelopment of Matera's Sassi districts, which had produced one of neorealist culture's best-known achievements: the La Martella settlement sponsored by Olivetti and realized by Ludovico Quaroni. Quaroni had served on the Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia e sui mezzi per combatterla (1951–53; the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Poverty in Italy) and had studied the community of the small village of Grassano. Through CEPAS, he introduced Benevolo to issues concerning the "southern question" (*questione meridionale*) and poverty.[31]

In the Torre Spagnola project, Benevolo and Rotondi sought to represent a community by establishing a civic center as a heart of the village. Their focus on creating a focal point for the new rural neighborhood—a place of identity where a single building would house all public spaces (church, school, social centre, etc.)—proved particularly significant. The project was develo-

30 Benevolo, History of Modern Architecture, vol. 2, 837.

31 See Gianluca Fiocco, L'Italia prima del miracolo economico: L'inchiesta parlamentare sulla miseria, 1951–1954 (Manduria: Lacaita Editore, 2004).

ped more for its planning logic, program, and urban structure than for its architectural language: the façades employed a fairly conventional neorealist vocabulary aligned with contemporary debates on ruralism.[32]

Other positions developed in the *Storia* appear in Benevolo's Bologna projects. The competition project for Bologna's new trade fair—won in 1960 and realized by the firm Benevolo, Tomaso Giura Longo, and Carlo Melograni—explicitly followed International Style principles and the tradition of major exhibitions, such as the 1957 *Interbau – Internationale Bauausstellung* in Berlin, which Benevolo had visited during his European travels to take photographs for his *Storia* (Fig. 47). While the Bologna trade fair project represented this modern architectural tradition, the urban planning studies for the city's historic center—seemingly distant from typical Modern Movement concerns—reflected the same interpretation of the city. Commissioned by Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Bologna's town planning councillor, in 1962, the study was guided by the principle that, despite the differences distinguishing each part of the city, it nevertheless formed a unified whole at the regional scale.[33] Technically, Benevolo categorized buildings and established conservation guidelines based on a simple concept: everything predating the industrial revolution should be preserved; everything built later could be replaced. This reflected both Benevolo's observation of poor-quality nineteenth-century construction and, more importantly, his interpretation of the historic city not as a problem of pure preservation but as an urban planning challenge based on the social structure of the city and its historic center (Fig. 48).

The Cavedone district in Bologna represents a project that combined lessons from the historic city with modern architectural experience. Working within a team coordinated by Federico Gorio (1915–2007), Benevolo participated in a project that employed courtyard forms for both settlement and social organization while carefully studying every construction detail to achieve maximum economic efficiency and operational quality (Fig. 49).

32 See Michelangelo Sabatino, Pride in Modesty: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

33 See Matteo Cassani Simonetti, "The Conservative Restoration of the Historic City as Social Practice: The Study for the Historic Centre of Bologna by Leonardo Benevolo (1962–65)," in The Historical City: A Critical Reference and Role Model for Innovative Urban and Metropolitan Development, ed. Ilaria Cattabriga et al. (Cham: Springer, 2024), 195–205.

In the Matera and Bologna projects, we can see how Benevolo understood design as grounded in architecture's social dimension and extending beyond any specific disciplinary field. While this approach was strongly linked to the tradition of the Modern Movement, it also expressed the theoretical position elaborated in the *Storia*—serving simultaneously as historical reference and catalyst for contemporary design practice.

Unlike the majority of historiography devoted to modern architecture, Benevolo's *Storia* is based on the tension between the expression of what appears to be a conventional historical approach—as its title would suggest—and methodological directives that punctuate its pages. The relationship between *references* and *contemporaneity* centers on the problem of connecting history and design practice, avoiding rigid separations between the two while constructing an approach that treats the Modern Movement tradition as a living element of design—and understanding recent projects as the last link in a genealogy rooted in the recent past.

Benevolo's continuous updating of his volume, even through the early 2000s, allowed the work to cover an ever-expanding chronology, enabling the *Storia* to document developments through to the end of the twentieth century—up to the chronological boundary established by his subsequent volume, *L'architettura nel nuovo millennio* (2006), written to continue his interpretation of contemporary architecture. However, architecture's changing framework during the twentieth century weakened the close connection between history and design that Benevolo had established as the foundation of his book in 1960. The latest editions of the volume might be interpreted not primarily as architectural history, but as a testimony to a method and to the figure of the architect as intellectual—a role that defined the profession during the twentieth century.

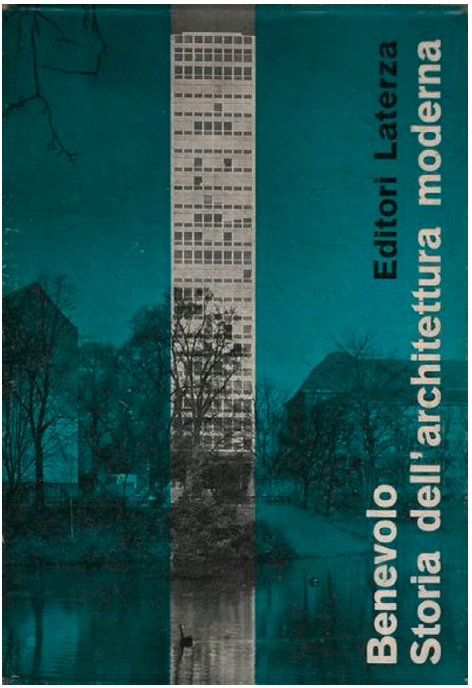


Fig. 41.
The slipcase of Leonardo Benevolo's Storia dell'architettura moderna, 1960.

ORGANIZZATO DAL CENTRO EDUCAZIONE PROFESSIONALE

Concluso con successo a Pescocostanzo il "seminario„ per assistenti sociali

CASTEL DI SANGRO, 8

Si è tenuto a Pescocostanzo dal 28 maggio al 4 giugno un seminario residenziale organizzato dal Centro educazione professionale per assistenti sociali di Roma (CEPAS), presieduto dall'on. Maria Jervolino.

I 31 partecipanti erano tutti diplomandi del CEPAS, tranne quattro che appartenevano ad altre scuole di servizio sociale. Il seminario che ha avuto lo scopo di preparare assistenti sociali per il lavoro nelle zone di economia agricola del Mezzogiorno, rientra nel normale programma triennale del CEPAS, scuola che insieme all'UNRRA Casas ha promosso il progetto abruzzese, operante sotto gli auspici dell'UNESCO.

Il seminario ha dedicato tre giornate ai principi generali dello sviluppo di comunità; la quarta giornata al tema « Poteri locali e sviluppo di comunità », la quinta è stata dedicata allo studio dell'ambiente. Il tema è stato trattato dall'architetto professor Leonardo Benevolo noto urbanista, che insieme al prof. Rossi Doria segue in qualità di esperto il lavoro che svolge il progetto. Nella sesta giornata si è trattato il tema « Sviluppo economico e sviluppo di comunità »; docente il prof. Benedetto de Cesaris che è stato fondatore e direttore della scuola per sindacalisti della CISL e che attualmente ricopre la carica di segretario generale dell'Associazione sindacale dell'ENI.

Il tema della settima giornata « La assistenza tecnica agricola », è stato trattato dal dott. Piero Sergi dirigente del nucleo di Assistenza tecnica che la Cassa per il Mezzogiorno ha recentemente assegnato al Consorzio di bonifica Alto Sangro. Nucleo che collabora strettamente col progetto.

L'ultima giornata è stata dedicata alla illustrazione del lavoro nei 14 Comuni che compongono il comprensorio del progetto, e alle conclusioni.

Questa parte teorica è stata accompagnata ogni giorno da lezioni sulla metodologia del lavoro sociale di comunità (queste lezioni sono state tenute dagli assistenti sociali che compongono l'« équipe » del progetto) nonché da una serie di illustrazioni dei vari progetti di sviluppo di comunità in Italia e all'estero; hanno svolto questa parte il professor R. Lanzworthy della Università di Minnesota; la prof.ssa Ada Sereni, segretaria generale dell'Associazione Italia-Israele; il dott. Strobia per il Movimento Comunità.

Il seminario è stato allietato dalla presenza di vari visitatori illustri tra i quali ricordiamo il prof. Guido Calogero dell'Università di Roma e fondatore del CEPAS, il prof. Felice Balbo

Il prof. Benevolo, autore del piano Territoriale di coordinamento per l'Abruzzo, illustra a un gruppo di diplomandi del CEPAS i problemi della Valle dell'Aventino

"IL TEMPO"
9/6/1961

Fig. 42.
An article about CEPAS work in Abruzzo. The man standing is probably Leonardo Benevolo. From Il Tempo, June 9, 1961.

Fig. 43.
A poster edited by Leonardo Benevolo, with layout by Albe Steiner, dedicated to urban plans and included in the magazine Centro Sociale, 1955.

Fig. 44.
The cover of Leonardo Benevolo's Una introduzione all'architettura, 1960.

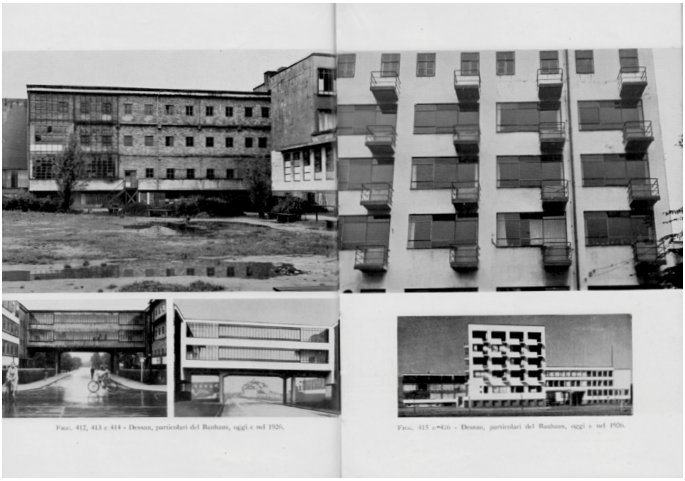


Fig. 45.
Two pages of Storia dell'architettura moderna about the Bauhaus building in Dessau, comparing Benevolo's photographs with others of the newly completed building. From Leonardo Benevolo, Storia dell'architettura moderna (Rome: Laterza, 1960).

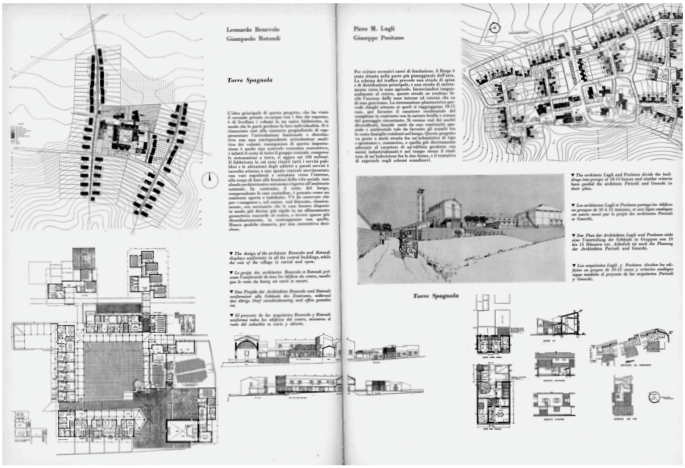
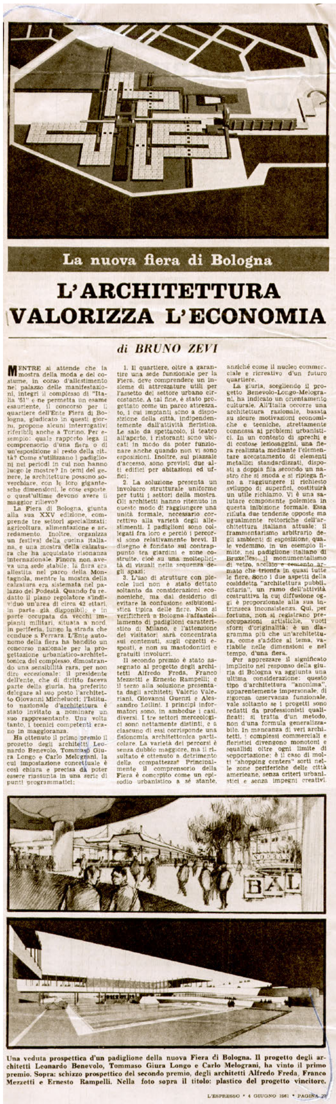


Fig. 46.
The presentation of the competition project for the Torre Spagnola suburb by Leonardo Benevolo and Giampaolo Rotondi. From L'architettura: Cronache e storia, year 1, no. 2 (June–July 1955).

Fig. 47.
An article by Bruno Zevi about the competition project for the new trade fair in Bologna by Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo and Carlo Melograni, 1960. From L'Espresso, June 4, 1961.



La nuova fiera di Bologna

L'ARCHITETTURA VALORIZZA L'ECONOMIA

di BRUNO ZEVI

MENTRE si attende che la mostra della moda e del costume, in corso d'allestimento nel palazzo delle manifestazioni, integri il complesso di "Italia '61" e ne permetta un esame esauriente, il concorso per il quartiere dell'Ente Fiera di Bologna, giudicato in questi giorni, propone alcuni interrogativi riferibili anche a Torino. Per esempio: quale rapporto lega il comprensorio d'una fiera o di un'esposizione al resto della città? Come s'utilizzano i padiglioni nei periodi in cui non hanno luogo le mostre? In temi del genere, le architetture possono soverchiare, con le loro gigantesche dimensioni, le cose esposte o quest'ultime devono avere il maggior rilievo?

La Fiera di Bologna, giunta alla sua XXV edizione, comprende tre settori specializzati: agricoltura, alimentazione e arredamento. Inoltre, organizza un festival della cucina italiana, e una mostra della calzatura che ha acquistato risonanza internazionale. Finora non aveva una sede stabile: la fiera era allestita nel parco della Montagnola, mentre la mostra della calzatura era sistemata nel palazzo del Podestà. Quando fu redatto il piano regolatore s'individuò un'area di circa 42 ettari, in parte già disponibile e in parte occupata da vecchi impianti militari, situata a nord in periferia, lungo la strada che conduce a Ferrara. L'Ente autonomo della fiera ha bandito un concorso nazionale per la progettazione urbanistico-architettonica del complesso, dimostrando una sensibilità rara, per non dire eccezionale: il presidente dell'ente, che di diritto faceva parte della giuria, ha preferito delegare al suo posto l'architetto Giovanni Michelucci; l'Istituto nazionale d'architettura è stato invitato a nominare un suo rappresentante. Una volta tanto, i tecnici competenti erano in maggioranza.

Ha ottenuto il primo premio il progetto degli architetti Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo e Carlo Melograni, la cui impostazione concettuale è così chiara e precisa da poter essere riassunta in una serie di punti programmatici:

1. Il quartiere, oltre a garantire una sede funzionale per la Fiera, deve comprendere un insieme di attrezzature utili per l'assetto del settore urbano circostante. A tal fine, è stato progettato come un parco attrezzato, i cui impianti sono a disposizione della città, indipendentemente dall'attività fieristica. Le sale da spettacolo, il teatro all'aperto, i ristoranti sono ubicati in modo da poter funzionare anche quando non vi sono esposizioni. Inoltre, sul piazzale d'accesso, sono previsti due alti edifici per abitazioni ed uffici;

2. La soluzione presenta un involucro strutturale uniforme per tutti i settori della mostra. Gli architetti hanno ritenuto in questo modo di raggiungere una unità formale, necessario correttivo alla varietà degli allestimenti. I padiglioni sono collegati fra loro e perciò i percorsi sono relativamente brevi. Il disegno è fondato sul contrappunto tra giardini e zone costruite, cioè su una molteplicità di visuali nella sequenza degli spazi;

3. L'uso di strutture con piccole luci non è stato dettato soltanto da considerazioni economiche, ma dal desiderio di evitare la confusione esibizionistica tipica delle fiere. Non si verificherà a Bologna l'affastellamento di padiglioni caratteristico di Milano, e l'attenzione dei visitatori sarà concentrata sui contenuti, sugli oggetti esposti, e non su mastodontici e gratuiti involucri.

Il secondo premio è stato assegnato al progetto degli architetti Alfredo Freda, Franco Mezzetti e Ernesto Rampelli; e il terzo alla soluzione presentata dagli architetti Valerio Valeriani, Giovanni Guenzi e Alessandro Lollini. I principi informatori sono, in ambedue i casi, diversi. I tre settori merceologici sono nettamente distinti, e a ciascuno di essi corrisponde una fisionomia architettonica particolare. La varietà dei percorsi è senza dubbio maggiore, ma il risultato è ottenuto a detrimento della compattezza. Principalmente il comprensorio della Fiera è concepito come un episodio urbanistico a sé stante, anziché come il nucleo commerciale e ricreativo d'un futuro quartiere.

La giuria, scegliendo il progetto Benevolo-Longo-Melograni, ha indicato un orientamento culturale. All'Italia occorre una architettura razionale, basata su sicure motivazioni economiche e tecniche, strettamente connessa ai problemi urbanistici. In un contesto di sprechi e di costose leziosaggini, una fiera realizzata mediante l'elementare accostamento di elementi metallici standardizzati, disposti a doppia fila secondo un nastro che si snoda e si ripiega fino a raggiungere il richiesto sviluppo di superfici, costituirà un utile richiamo. Vi è una salutare componente polemica in questa inibizione formale. Essa rifiuta due tendenze opposte ma ugualmente rettoriche dell'architettura italiana attuale: il frammentarismo arbitrario degli ambienti di esposizione, quale vedemmo, in un esempio limite, nel padiglione italiano di Bruxelles; il monumentalismo di vetro, acciaio e cemento armato che trionfa in quasi tutte le fiere. Sono i due aspetti della cosiddetta "architettura pubblicitaria", un ramo dell'attività costruttiva la cui diffusione oggi è proporzionale alla sua intrinseca inconsistenza. Qui, per fortuna, non si registrano preoccupazioni artistiche, vuoti sforzi d'originalità: è un diagramma più che un'architettura, come s'addice al tema, variabile nelle dimensioni e nel tempo, d'una fiera.

Per apprezzare il significato implicito nel responso della giuria di Bologna va aggiunta una ultima considerazione: questo tipo d'architettura "anonima", apparentemente impersonale, di rigorosa osservanza funzionale, vale soltanto se i progetti sono redatti da professionisti qualificati: si tratta d'un metodo, non d'una formula generalizzabile. In mancanza di veri architetti, i complessi commerciali e fieristici divengono monotoni e squallidi oltre ogni limite di sopportazione: è il caso di molti "shopping centers" sorti nelle zone periferiche delle città americane, senza criteri urbanistici e senza impegni creativi.

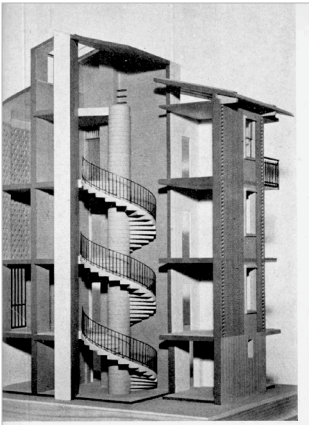
Una veduta prospettica d'un padiglione della nuova Fiera di Bologna. Il progetto degli architetti Leonardo Benevolo, Tommaso Giura Longo e Carlo Melograni, ha vinto il primo premio. Sopra: schizzo prospettico del secondo premio, degli architetti Alfredo Freda, Franco Mezzetti e Ernesto Rampelli. Nella foto sopra il titolo: plastico del progetto vincitore.

L'ESPRESSO • 4 GIUGNO 1961 • PAGINA 2[illegible]

COMUNE DI BOLOGNA
INDAGINE SETTORIALE
SUL
CENTRO STORICO
Istituto di Urbanistica ed Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura dell'Università di Firenze

gruppo di lavoro: Paolo Andina
Leonardo Benevolo · Silvano Casini
Pier Luigi Cervellati · PierGiorgio Felcaro
Vittorio Franchetti · Sandro Gandolfi
Eros Parmeggiani · Paola Tamanti
segretaria: Francesca Bassi
consulenza: Antonio Cederna

Fig. 48.
The cover of the book about studies on the historic center of Bologna (1965).



Bologna: quartiere di via Cavedone

capogruppo: **Federico Gorio**

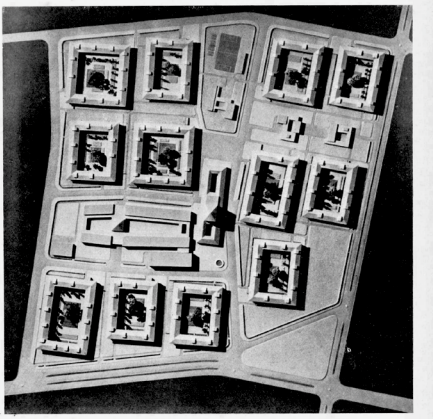
progettazione urbanistica:
L. Benevolo, V. Calzolari, S. Danielli, M. Vittorini

progettazione edilizia:
L. Benevolo, V. Calzolari, S. Danielli, A. Esposito, M. Vittorini

direzione lavori: **M. Carini**

stazione appaltante: **Consorzio Emiliano-Romagnolo**

Il lavoro di impostazione della unità residenziale di Via Cavedone in Bologna è stato svolto seguendo queste linee:
a) lo studio della continuità della struttura organizzativa dalla casa al quartiere;
b) la definizione del carattere urbano del quartiere attraverso la sua continuità edilizia;
c) il controllo del suolo non edificato, interno ed esterno e sua precisa classificazione funzionale e destinazione;
d) l'articolazione dei servizi connessa con lo schema di piano particolareggiato per la intera zona.
Lo svolgimento di questi concetti ha condotto ad impostare l'intero quartiere su una edilizia chiamata «corte attrezzata».
Lo schema tipico della corte, è il seguente: la corte è definita volumetricamente da quattro fabbricati lineari, a tre piani, contenenti gli appartamenti d'abitazione; i quattro fabbricati non si toccano sugli angoli, ma sono opportunamente scostati in modo da realizzare passaggi (pedonali o carrabili). Per alcune corti del quartiere l'elemento di



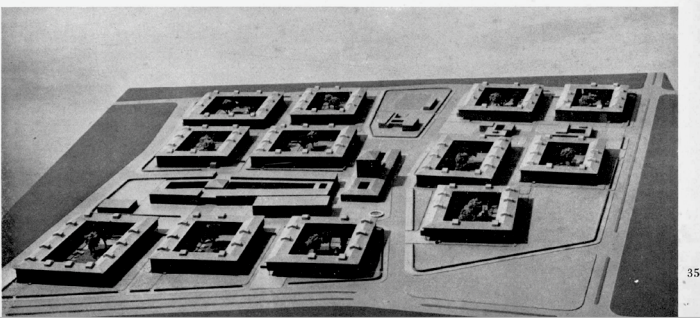


Fig. 49.
The presentation of the Cavedone district in Bologna under the guidance of Federico Gorio. From Architettura cantiere, no. 15 (1957).